

## **A Christian Critique of the Antimodern Quest: Challenge and Opportunity**

John Wesley Taylor V  
Department of Education  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Since the mid-twentieth century, a remarkable paradigm shift has led to an increasingly pervasive worldview. For lack of a better term, and because the paradigm continues to evolve, we describe it simply as antimodernism. With the term *antimodernism*, we encompass both the early stages, which have frequently been identified as “postmodernism,” as well as more recent developments, which some have labeled “post-postmodernism.” The latter, however, are in many ways but an extension of the fundamental reaction against modernism.

Antimodernism was anticipated in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Martin Heidegger, among others. Leading the way into postmodernist philosophical thought were individuals such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty, as well as other philosophers, such as Michel Foucault, Hilary Putnam, Jürgen Habermas, and Willard Quine, who did not necessarily see themselves as postmodernists. It was Lyotard, in his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*,<sup>1</sup> who first popularized the term “postmodernism” in the domain of social theory.

By the turn of the century, however, there was an ongoing debate among self-labeled postmodernists as to what actually qualified as postmodernism and how a true postmodernist should approach life and inquiry.<sup>2</sup> There were progressive and conservative postmodernists,<sup>3</sup> as

---

<sup>1</sup> J. F. Lyotard (translated by G. Bennington and B. Massumi), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> F. L. Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001).  
C. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-modernism* (New York:

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

well as postmodernists of “resistance” and those of “reaction.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, a gamut of postmodern views had emerged.

In the first decade of the new millennium, antimodernism has continued to evolve into what some analysts label as “post-postmodernism” (PPM), “ultra-postmodernism” (UPM), or the “Integral worldview.”<sup>5</sup> While retaining many features of postmodernism, this development has emphasized the unpredictability of history, the destruction of the self, the reconstruction of society, the valuation of performance over facts, a fascination with the mythical and mystical, and a particular antagonism toward Christianity.

Antimodernism is, of course, not just a philosophical movement or an intellectual mood. It has branched out from the realm of academia to find cultural expression in architecture, art, theatre, film, and literature, where it embodies such attributes as the challenging of convention, the mixing of styles, emphasis on diversity, tolerance of ambiguity, a celebration of innovation and change, and emphasis on the constructedness of reality.<sup>6</sup> Stanley Grenz,<sup>7</sup> for example, notes that the shift from the popular TV series “Star Trek” to “Star Trek: The Next Generation” was symptomatic of the shift from modernism to an anti-modern worldview. Similarly, works such as Rowling’s *Harry Potter*

---

Cambridge University Press, 2011). E. Nicholson, “Postmodernism, Feminism, and Education: The Need for Solidarity,” *Educational Theory*, 39, 3 (1990): 197-205.

<sup>3</sup> S. Aronowitz y H. A. Girous, *Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture, and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson, “Postmodernism, Feminism, and Education.”

<sup>5</sup> D. Fusco, *Ahead of the Curve: Preparing the Church for Post-Postmodernism* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2011). G. Iggers, “A Search for a Post-Postmodern Theory of History,” *History and Theory*, 48 (2009): 122-128. M. Kaplan, “Post-Postmodern Science and Religion,” *International Journal on World Peace*, 18, 1 (2001). T. Tuner, *City as Landscape: A Post-Postmodern View of Design and Planning* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> C. Allan, *Playing with Picturebooks: Postmodernism and the Postmodernesque* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

C. Beck, “Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Philosophy of Education”, *Philosophy of Education Society Yearbook* (1993). Retrieved from [http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/93\\_docs/beck.htm](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/93_docs/beck.htm) on January 17, 2012. C. Jencks, *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011). L. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989). T. McEvelley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> S. J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

series and Cameroon's *Avatar* depict post-postmodernism's increasing enchantment with the mythical and supernatural. This transcendence beyond mere philosophical debate has provided contemporary antimodernism with poignant cultural intensity.

### **Features of Antimodernism**

In antimodernism, a number of constructs have emerged to take the place of the deposed philosophical foundations of modernism. These include the rejection of meta-narratives; the affirmation of pluralism, contextualization, and constructivism; and the celebration of diversity.

### **Renunciation of Meta-Narratives**

In antimodernism, there is skepticism of meta-narratives,<sup>8</sup> overarching stories that seek to provide comprehensive explanations for reality. Sample "grand narratives" include the Christian perspective on the Great Controversy between good and evil; the secular explanation of human origins via evolutionary theory; the Enlightenment view that rational thought, linked to scientific and technological progress, will lead to social advance; and the Marxist account of social emancipation.

Antimodernism rejects meta-narratives because they are seen to overextend themselves. It also holds that meta-narratives promote exclusivity, which can lead to violence. It is, after all, belief in a meta-narrative that led to the horrors of the medieval Crusades and that fuels the extremism of al Qaeda.

In place of the meta-narratives of modernism, antimodernism proposes a whole range of competing "small stories," narrated by special interest groups (such as environmentalists, feminists, advocates of Intelligent Design, homosexuals, and a whole array of ethnic and religious communities). These groups formulate collections of conflicting and at times mutually exclusive beliefs and goals, which are then paraphrased in terms of micro-narratives and political agendas.

With an embargo on meta-narratives and the Enlightenment quest for rational universal knowledge abandoned, Allen<sup>9</sup> notes that there is an inevitable conclusion that every understanding of reality is but a function of history and culture. Consequently, reality is not only formulated

---

<sup>8</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

<sup>9</sup> D. Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

differently in different eras and societies, but ultimately each individual must construct reality in his or her own unique way.

**Pluralism**

Pluralism, in part, is a result of the demise of meta-narratives. Derrida,<sup>10</sup> an early advocate of antimodernism, postulated that there was no fixed metaphysical center (as in the case, for example, of realism or essentialism), but rather, an infinite number of alternatives come into play. This multi-centrism, coupled with Heidegger's existentialism, yields pluralism.

In a pluralistic approach, for example, there is no central tradition of scholarship, but rather multiple viable traditions. Eurocentric historical interpretations (with their white, middle-class, male bias) thus give way to a plurality of views—African, Islamic, feminist, and indigenous, among others.

Each of these perspectives should be considered as equal, with a scholar from any tradition expecting to learn from other interpretations, as much as to contribute. “Uni-versities” become “multiversities”—supporting multiple agendas and perspectives, rather than seeking to formulate a single “approved” interpretation of reality.

**Significance of Context**

Contextualization resulted from an epistemological shift in antimodernism. Based on the linguistic work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, a new perspective on language emerged. This posited a shift from “meaning as reference” to “meaning as use.” Rather than a statement having an objective meaning based on the declared definition of its words, the statement might have a variety of meanings, depending on the contexts in which it was used. Meaning in language thus became contextual, and understanding occurred only when context was taken into account.

Similarly, developments in quantum theory bolstered the significance of context. Science found itself no longer able to support the Newtonian physics of particles as entities with fixed essences, but rather as quantum entanglements in which an object can only be described in reference to other objects.

---

<sup>10</sup> J. Derrida (translated by G. C. Spivak), *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

Culture is perhaps the best representation of the influence of context. In antimodernism, the self is not autonomous, but varies with the surrounding culture.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, it is not we who think, speak, and act, but culture who expresses itself through us. Under antimodernity's contextual thesis, all human knowledge is mediated through the lens of culture, and is thus contextual.

A corollary of contextualization is the role of community. Antimodernity is post-individualistic. Relationships, in fact, become more important than knowledge, at least in terms of knowledge at the level of the individual. It is through relationships that we build the holistic web of experience and understanding. Thus, antimoderns have a strong need for community, and building community becomes a prime goal.

### **Constructivism**

In classical, pre-modern views, such as in Idealism and many world religions, knowledge of truth and reality was received. In modernism, truth was discovered and reality confirmed through the scientific process. In antimodernism, truth and reality are constructed.<sup>12</sup> In this anti-realist metaphysics, we do not encounter a world that is simply "out there," but one that is dependent on our experience and thought, one that we actively construct by the concepts that we bring to it.<sup>13</sup>

This stance requires realignment in our conception of inquiry. No longer are we passive recipients or mere discoverers of preexisting knowledge. Rather, we are actively engaged in the interactive and iterative process of knowledge creation. In essence, truth is not found primarily in science, logic, or doctrine; but in relationships and the telling of stories.

This construction of truth and reality leads to tentative and autobiographical knowledge. As individuals interact with their environment and with one another, and as they reflect upon these episodes, they begin to develop "working understandings" of life and reality. Intuition, feeling, and metaphor are key elements in this process.

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

### TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST

The result is a personal narrative, a description of view from one's particular site in the world.

There are several implications of this constructivist view. First, qualitative, ethnographic, and narrative modes of inquiry are to be preferred over quantitative, analytic, or deductive modalities. Second, understanding is best communicated illustratively, rather than propositionally. Third, expertise and "top-down" forms of interaction must be questioned.<sup>14</sup> While some individuals clearly have understandings that others do not have, the latter may have insights that the former have not perceived. Thus, in place of expert to novice transmissions, exchange of knowledge is best seen as a dialogue, a conversation among individuals of difference in which there is mutual exchange.

#### Celebration of Diversity

Antimodernism does not simply tolerate or affirm differences. It celebrates diversity. Foucault, in his classic work *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*,<sup>15</sup> argues that modernism and its attendant rationalism brutally excluded whole segments of society—the insane, the socially deviant, the challenged, the illiterate, even the devoutly religious—anyone who was viewed as "unreasonable." To be truly human was to be rational, and those who were irrational were in some way subhuman (not so identified perhaps, for the sake of political correctness, but treated thus in the way they were marginalized). These had no societal value except as a warning to those tempted not to conform.

Society, in the antimodern view, must not only accept but give voice to the downtrodden, the exploited, and the neglected. The community is inclusive and each member must be treated with respect and as of inherent value. Scholarship must be open to divergent views and the exploration of non-rational topics, including emotion and spirituality. Minority communities must be provided with latitude to seek out and sustain their particular conceptions. Individuals must be offered

---

<sup>14</sup> For example, D. Boyle, *The Age to Come: Authenticity, Post-Modernism and How to Survive What Comes Next* (Cranbrook, UK: Endeavour Press Ltd., 2013).

<sup>15</sup> M. Foucault (translated by R. Howard), *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001).

differentiated approaches and multiple pathways to reach personally relevant goals within the community.

### **A Christian Commentary**

Just as rationalism has been critiqued by antimodernism, so antimodernism must itself be thoughtfully reviewed. One must be careful, however, not to simply endorse or reject the package as a whole, but to reflect on areas of opportunity and aspects of concern, particularly from the vantage of a Christian worldview.

Clearly, there are certain tenets of antimodernism that are inimical with basic Christian assumptions. These include its strident skepticism, the abolition of meta-narratives, and the rejection of objective, universal truth. On the other hand, antimodernism is also post-individualist, post-dualist, and post-rationalist, rejecting reason as supreme. How then does a Christian relate to a paradigm that brings welcome relief from many of the vexing problems of modernism, while at the same time undercutting core premises of the Christian worldview?

Early on, Beck<sup>16</sup> had suggested that postmodernism might best be viewed as a rich quarry in which one can search for gems of insight, while not feeling obliged to take home the rubble. It is with this spirit of discernment and respect that we seek to assess antimodernism from a Christian framework.

### **The Rejection of Meta-narratives and Objective Truth**

Understanding the Great Controversy between good and evil (Genesis 3; Revelation 12) is central to a Christian worldview. As a meta-narrative, it seeks to provide a coherent explanation of reality for all aspects of life. While antimodernism may not subscribe to overarching explanations, the fact remains that meta-narratives, such as organic evolution, remain pervasive in contemporary society. In the antimodernist view, a variety of alternative perspectives are needed—one of which can be the Christian narrative.<sup>17</sup>

While the Christian meta-narrative centers on a cosmic conflict between good and evil, we must beware of searching for conspiracy and

---

<sup>16</sup> Beck, "Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Philosophy of Education."

<sup>17</sup> A cogent presentation of the Christian worldview in the context of the postmodern attack on meta-narratives can be found in K. McRoberts, *A Letter from Christ: Apologetics in Cultural Transition* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011).

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

intrigue in every event and intent. Such suspicion can quickly degenerate into “witch hunts,” in which we imagine an extremist behind every beard, a communist under every placard. We must also beware of exclusivity, which can easily morph into religious intolerance and oppression. While Christians have truth, they do not, in the Christian worldview, have a monopoly on truth. Rather, because God causes the sun to shine on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45) and would have all come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), non-believers also discover truth. Thus a Christian cannot be exclusive in the claim of truth.

There is a related aspect, however, which must be considered. Antimodernism has announced the death of objective truth. For decentered antimodernists, truth has become elusive, a personal commodity at best. They prefer to think of “many truths,” a “diversity of truths,” or “truth for me.” By contrast, the biblical view holds that God is trustworthy (1 Corinthians 1:9), and that His revelation of Truth is objective and reliable (John 17:17; 2 Peter 1:19). Christians, however, must still interpret and apply truth to the contexts of their lives. In this process, it is indeed possible to arrive at false conclusions (2 Corinthians 4:4). Consequently, cross-checks with fellow searchers (Proverbs 11:14) and guidance from the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) are vital in arriving at correct understandings of truth.

**Pluralism and Moral Relativism**

Antimodernism maintains that there is no center. Christianity holds that God is the core from which all things derive meaning (Acts 17:28). Antimodernism asserts that all views be considered equal. Christianity affirms that God’s perspective and His revelation of reality, truth, and value must supersede all others (1 Chronicles 29:11; John 3:31; Ephesians 1:21).

Antimodernism further proposes that morality is relative, that each person weaves his own ethic from the web of his mind. Richard Rorty, for example, describes the moral self as “a network of beliefs, desires, and emotions with nothing behind it.... Constantly reweaving itself... not by reference to general criteria... but in the hit-or-miss way in which cells readjust themselves to meet the pressures of the environment.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> R. Rorty, “Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism” in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. R. Hollinger (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 217.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

This relativism finds common expression in phrases such as “It may be wrong for you, but it’s OK for me” or “Who are we to judge others?” In contrast, Christianity observes that moral relativism results in ethical anarchy and societal decline. The cause of the corruption and senseless violence rampant in the historical period of the judges, for example, is highlighted in observation that “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).<sup>19</sup>

How does a Christian relate to the pluralistic stance and attendant relativism of antimodernism? First, we must recognize that pluralism, while freeing society from the potential tyranny of one voice, has also resulted in the fragmentation of knowledge and the fracturing of values. Furthermore, we must beware that one runs the risk that pluralism may plunge into anarchism, rejecting any form of order. On the other hand, Christianity cannot be arrogant or elitist. We can learn from each other, perhaps especially from those who see things quite differently from the way we do. Each of us has limited perspectives and cultural “blindness.” It is thus imperative that we hear and seek to understand the views of other religious and cultural traditions.

There is, however, an added dimension. While all human perspectives may, in a sense, be considered equal—each with significant insights as well as “blind spots,” God has proactively shared His own divine perspective through His Word—and this revelation supersedes all others. Consequently, while we as Christians endeavor to understand viewpoints different from our own, we seek above all to see life from God’s point of view (Matthew 6:33).

Another concept emerging from the discussion of relativism is an understanding of the difference between principles and rules. Principles convey universal values, such as respect, compassion, and integrity. Micah 6:8, for example, highlights several of these principled values—“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (see also Philippians 4:8).

Rules, by contrast, are explicit applications of underlying principles (and this should always be the case!). As such, however, they are context

---

<sup>19</sup> All Scripture passages, unless indicated otherwise, are from the *New King James Version* (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations credited to NIV are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

bound. Respect, for example, may find varying expression in diverse cultures—such as whether one looks another in the eye or takes off one’s shoes in a sacred place. The problem is that we sometimes impute the universality of moral principles to specific rules. This leap can cause us to fall into insensitive legalism.

Finally, we should perhaps note that absolute relativism is untenable—it is an inherent contradiction of terms. Furthermore, in praxis, individuals seem to need a certain degree of structure and continuity. Across the age spectrum, we search for a sense of identity, stability, and belonging. Unfortunately, plurality and relativism have resulted in a world with few secure intellectual or psychological markers. Precisely because we do live in a changing and fragmented world, we need sources of stability. In the Christian worldview, Jesus Christ can provide that universal rallying point, that secure frame of reference (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ summed up His teaching with a reference to a wise man and a foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). He noted that the difference between wisdom and folly was in the foundation—anchored in bedrock or situated in shifting sand. One might note that rock and sand are, in fact, similar elements. Sand, however, has been broken into fragments; rock is unified and intact.

**Community, Culture, and Context**

In the Christian perspective, community is essential (Psalm 133:1; Acts 2:1, 46; Romans 15:1; Galatians 6:2). Forging relationships and building community are key activities, both within the body of believers (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) and in fulfilling the gospel commission through outreach and friendship evangelism (Matthew 25:31-46; 28:18-20). Service to others is, in fact, a God-given responsibility (Acts 20:35; Galatians 5:13).

While community is vital, we stand, nonetheless, as individuals before God (Ezekiel 18:17-20; 2 Corinthians 5:10). We each have individual responsibilities, which we cannot simply leave for others in the community. In essence, while individuals may not be more important than the community, neither are they less so. We must not emphasize community to the neglect of those who make up the community.

Furthermore, the importance of relationship does not preclude the role of knowledge, as antimodernism would have us to believe.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Relationships are, in fact, often predicated upon knowledge. Trust, for example, is based upon evidence of trustworthiness (2 Timothy 1:12).

Antimodernism reminds us of the role of culture, and that culture may vary from one community to another. In highlighting cultural differences, however, antimodernists may have inadvertently minimized the importance of common ground. Even though certain aspects differ from culture to culture and among subcultures, we are more alike than we are different. We are a web of humanity, and there are values, such as life, well-being, and the pursuit of happiness, which are prized across cultures. Human societies thus have a certain degree of commonality and continuity. Antimodernists correctly prompt us, however, that we must be careful of hasty generalizations. It is altogether too easy to create stereotypes and labels, and deceive ourselves regarding the complexity and variety of human culture.

As a corollary of community and culture, antimodernism emphasizes context. When interpreting biblical passages or historical events, it is necessary that we consider context. The Jerusalem Council in apostolic times (Acts 15), for example, illustrates the importance of understanding culture, and of taking context and background into account. On a personal level, the Christian also recognizes the influence of environment (Psalm 1:1; John 1:46). Man, however, is not simply a pawn of circumstance. While not autonomous, he does possess freewill, and has been granted the power of choice (Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 3:31; Isaiah 7:15-16), which rises above the grip of context.

**Constructivism and Authenticity**

In the antimodern view, knowledge is a human construction. In the Christian perspective, God is the source of all knowledge (Proverbs 2:6; Daniel 1:17). There are multiple avenues, however, for attaining this knowledge. While knowledge may be *received* through divine revelation, other knowledge is *discovered* through scientific research, *confirmed* by logic, or *constructed* through experience and reflection (Job 29:16; Psalm 77:6; Ecclesiastes 1:13; Revelation 1:1). Similarly, Christianity proposes both external and internal dimensions of reality.

Antimodernism, however, reminds us that we cannot be mere spectators in the process of knowing. Rather, we learn best when we are actively engaged in sense-making. The antimodern view aptly emphasizes the importance of intuition, reflection, feelings, interactions,

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

metaphors, and narratives. While not minimizing propositional expressions of knowledge, such as theory and doctrinal systems, as antimodernists tend to do, Christians can learn much from the antimodern emphasis on illustrative presentations, story telling, and autobiographical knowledge. A master communicator and teacher, Jesus Christ frequently utilized narratives (Matthew 13:34), and asked His hearers for the take from their “site” in the world (Matthew 16:13-17).

In the antimodern view, all knowledge is tentative and there is a profound skepticism of expertise. The Christian, however, holds that universal Truth does exist (Psalm 100:5; Isaiah 43:9), and that God takes the initiative to communicate truth to humanity (Daniel 2:47). In a sense, though, Scripture resonates with the tentative nature of knowledge—“we see in a mirror, dimly” and we know only in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our understanding of truth is, in fact, a work in progress (Psalm 86:11; Ephesians 4:15; 3 John 4). Not even the greatest scientist or the most erudite theologian can thus claim to have arrived at a full understanding of truth or to have a definitive grasp on knowledge. Each of us has but a subset of the larger picture, with ample room for learning and growth.

Antimodernism’s disbelief toward expertise then is a reminder not to blindly follow or too readily acquiesce to “authorities,” but as the first-century Bereans, to study things out for ourselves in order to ascertain “whether these things were so” (Acts 17:10-11). A Christian should continually ask questions and probe beneath the surface (Ecclesiastes 1:13; Isaiah 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). This view further suggests that it is a personal responsibility to share with others the insights of truth that we each have gained (Matthew 28:19-20).

Moreover, it behooves those who may have gained advanced training or experience in a particular field of knowledge to speak with humility, acknowledging that the frontiers of knowledge are also the horizons of one’s ignorance. This implies that while one may speak with measured confidence within his or her area of expertise, one should not presume to pontificate as an “authority” on all topics. Humility, honesty, and authenticity are Christian virtues (Isaiah 57:17; Matthew 18:1-4; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5), and should be widely promoted within the Christian community.

**Diversity and Creativity**

Antimodernism celebrates diversity and promotes inclusiveness. It maintains that minority communities have rights and merit respect. It holds that each individual should be able to attain personally meaningful goals. It sustains that the community must function as a support network for the individual members of society.

These concepts find resonance within the Christian worldview. Christ's mission was to break down barriers of exclusivity, to set the oppressed free (Isaiah 58:6; Luke 4:16-21). In His ministry, He reached out to the marginalized, to those rejected by mainstream society (Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:16). He is our example (1 Peter 2:21).

As Christians, we must become a voice for the exploited and oppressed. We must treat each person with respect, irrespective of ethnic, cultural, or religious affiliation. We must recognize that each individual, regardless of talent, ability, or social status, is of inherent worth, both by creation and by redemption (Isaiah 43:1; Jeremiah 1:5; John 3:16). We must treat others as we would wish to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

How does diversity fit with the Christian view? Christianity's focus is on unity (John 17:21), not uniformity. It centers on transformation, not conformity (Romans 12:2). It also recognizes that God has "made from one blood every nation of men" (Acts 17:26), despite their diversity. Paul's description of the body and its various members (1 Corinthians 12:12-28) is, in fact, an apt metaphor for this concept of unity in diversity. Such a perspective suggests that while there are fundamental beliefs, the Christian paradigm must be open to consideration of multiple, divergent views. In these dialogues of faith, however, the Word of God serves as the ultimate criterion (Isaiah 8:20).

While recognizing specific groups (ethnic, religious, socio-economic, etc.) within the larger culture, we must be careful not to emphasize these categories to the neglect of individuals. It is possible, in fact, for two individuals from separate groups to share greater commonalities than two individuals from the same ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. Individuals are only in part identifiable in terms of the social categories to which they belong.<sup>20</sup>

Closely connected to diversity and the construction of knowledge is antimodernism's openness to imagination, innovation, and creativity. A focus on creativity is biblical. Jesus indicated that a Christian is to bring

---

<sup>20</sup> Beck, "Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Philosophy of Education."

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

“out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52). Such freshness of ideas implies creative thought.

An intriguing characteristic of creativity is the tolerance of opposites, the embracing of polar truths. Here again, there is biblical precedent. Whereas Greek-based modern logic saw the opposite of a truth to be false, Judaic thinking could see truth as a tension between contrasting ideas: “There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches” (Proverbs 13:7). “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). “Whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). Thus, Christ was not either human or divine, but both human and divine (Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5); and we are saved entirely through faith (Ephesians 2:8), yet instructed to “work out your own salvation” (Philippians 2:12). Paulien<sup>21</sup> notes that this rejection of the “either/or” categories of Greek philosophy may make it easier for antimodernists to understand the Bible, compared with previous generations.

**Emotion and Spirituality**

In the age of Reason, modernists tended to suppress feelings. In rejecting rationalism, antimodernism has chosen to highlight emotion—thus the emphasis on attitudes and self-esteem, and the ubiquity of comments such as “How can it be wrong when it feels so right?” or “Just go with your gut feeling.” The result is the antimodern tendency to elevate feelings above rationality and objective truth.

In the Christian perspective, the emotions are of importance (Nehemiah 8:10; John 11:35). Too often, we have denigrated emotion into a sign of intellectual weakness, and have reduced the gospel to a sterile set of postulates and proof texts. As Christians, we should affirm feeling as well as reason. The emotional and the rational must work together. We must make the gospel not only logically compelling, but also emotionally attractive—particularly for antimoderns.

In the antimodern world, there is a new openness to spiritual themes and dialogue. Spirituality is no longer banished to the fringes of society, but has become a social commodity. This surge in spiritual consciousness, however, should not be confused with a renewed interest

---

<sup>21</sup> J. Paulien, “The Post-Modern Acts of God” (2004), paper presented at the Adventist Society for Religious Study. Retrieved from <http://www.secularpostmodern.org/resart9.php4> on November 25, 2007.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

in religion. Antimoderns are spiritual, but not necessarily religious. Many, in fact, are suspicious or openly antagonistic toward religion, seeing institutionalized religiosity (i.e., traditional denominations, particularly those Christian) as exclusive and intolerant. To complicate matters, antimodernists also view the Bible as oppressive—filled with violence, the subjection of women and minorities, and an ever-burning hell.

This perspective poses a monumental challenge to the Christian church. It suggests that Christians must be ambassadors of generosity, benevolence, and tolerance. It implies that witnessing may best be formulated as relational—developing conversations about God, sharing one’s personal experience with God, and seeking a deeper understanding of spirituality. Finally, antimoderns must see that Christianity is a vibrant community of faith, experiencing the joy and peace of a Spirit-filled life.

**In Conclusion**

As we have noted, there are certain tenets of antimodern thought that clash with basic Christian assumptions. Consequently, as Christians, we cannot agree with the full scope of the antimodern position—such as its relativism, fragmentation of knowledge, and rejection of religious doctrine. Such premises can ultimately lead to conclusions far removed from those of a biblical worldview. While we cannot surrender the non-negotiable truths of our faith, we must seek to truly understand antimodernism and its endeavor to address crucial issues in society.

The antimodern paradigm has indeed raised valid concerns—the role of community, the importance of personal experience and reflection, the need for authenticity, the value of emotion and creativity, the call for inclusion, the openness to spirituality. These matters, among others, can provide points of contact with antimoderns, presenting fresh opportunities for sharing Christian understandings.

Such conversations respond to the Christian mandate given by Christ Himself when He declared, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8, NIV). As Christians living in an antimodern world, we must think systematically and deeply regarding our beliefs and convictions. We must be able to speak clearly, coherently, and persuasively regarding our Christian worldview (1 Peter 3:5). Ultimately, we must share a Hope for the future.

*TAYLOR: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE ANTIMODERN QUEST*

**John Wesley Taylor V**, Ph.D., Ed.D., is an associate director of education at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Previously, he served as professor and Reynolds Endowed Chair for Philosophy of Christian Education at Southern Adventist University. He may be reached at: [taylorjw@gc.adventist.org](mailto:taylorjw@gc.adventist.org).