P O S T M O D E R N I S M

PM is

* + A mood
  + A movement
  + A methodology > philosophy
* Never heard of it?
  + Until the early 1980s, no one had never heard of AIDS – but people were already dying all the same.
  + Ideas and ideologies are powerful, and affect us all.
* A curious blend of relativism with strong, often strident, truth claims of its own.
* It is the dominant philosophy of our age, in:
  + The academy
  + Film
  + Music
  + Literature
  + Government
  + Advertising
  + Television
  + Theological
  + Seminaries
  + … churches
* Reaction to modernism of 19th C
  + Evolutionary progress
    - Science as savior
    - Technology improving our lives, saving time and effort so we can *live*
    - Promising quality of life – failed to deliver.
  + War – dehumanizing as always, but at a much deeper level.
    - Gassing
    - Concentration camps
    - Civilians targeted
    - Atomic bombs
    - 38 m war 169 gen state per ,
  + Confident proclamations of communism turned out to be a nightmare. Utopia – nowhere!
  + Sexual liberation 🡪 disintegration of family
  + Disillusionment – 20th C!
  + Suspicion of:
    - Authorities
    - Governments
    - Teachers
    - Politics and political discourse
    - Hollywood and Wall Street and Madison Avenue
    - Educational system (favoring the well-off)
    - Organized religion. Christians are bigots.
    - Religious texts—especially the Bible, the OT even more than the NT.
    - *Suspicion of PM?*
  + Individualism
    - We should champion the underprivileged, give a voice to those without one—and of course do what we need to do to be happy. Pursuit of happiness > pursuit of holiness.
    - The ‘me’ generation. Narcissistic.
    - Less willing to sacrifice for the common good.
* In my presentation we will become familiar with four facets of PM, and learn five strategies for appropriate Christian response.
* What’s the big deal? Well, PM thinking has already affected your church youth group, campus ministry, younger singles and families—and even many of the previous generation!

Fake news

* Pieces on CNN (March 10 CNN § on Fake News fooling kid), in Scientific American, and in the Smithsonian (flight to Houston)
* We should all be careful – skeptical within reason and wisdom – but how skeptical?

Facet I: TRUTHS, NOT TRUTH

Doubt about truth claims

* History: Winners write the history books. = Privileged white males – that would be people like me….
  + US history—Didn't bother thinking it through from the viewpoint of the Indians, or the African slaves, or women or the disenfranchised.
  + The Canaanites didn’t write the book of Joshua.
  + Imagine how different 1 Samuel would read if it had been published by the Philistines!
  + Or if the events of Acts of the Apostles were recounted by the High Priest in Jerusalem.
  + Intertextuality
* Christianity:
  + Even in seminary: Many truths, many Christianities (!)
  + "That's your interpretation."
    - I heard that a lot in the 70s. I took this to mean they disagreed with my premises, or my reasoning.
    - Now I see that often it was a different sort of disagreement: a disagreement about the legitimacy of truth claims!
* World religions: Transformation of tolerance...
  + “There are those who hate Christianity and call their hatred an all-embracing love for all religions."
  + "These are the days when the Christian is expected to praise every creed except his own." (both quotes from G. K. Chesterton)
  + Sadly, few people have made the effort to understand the various world religions.
* Multiple truths?
  + Think of a math problem. There may be one correct solution, and thousands of incorrect ones. The correct answers is “in the minority” – but that hardly means there is no answer, or no one can know; that’s just the nature of truth.
  + Illustration: *The Life of Pi* (the book and the movie)– MORE THAN ONE TRUTH
* Truth is fluid, flexible, plastic.
  + Data, facts, info
  + www: So many different takes, easier to pick one you like than to evaluate all.
  + We can’t get at the truth directly (it’s inaccessible), but least we can peel away the layers of the onion. (Of course, once that’s done, nothing is left!)
* Of course the pretense that contradictory truths are equally true is nonsensical.
  + Falsely egalitarianism of ideas
  + So no universally binding truths? Hopeless incoherence.

Facet II: MORALS, NOT VALUES

* Moral relativism is the engine that drives postmodernism
* Moral relativism is an absolute truth. That is, each person decides his or own moral course
* Values > morals
  + One PM told me she had come to the insight that good and evil do not exist. So it’s be okay for me to force my religion on you?....
  + Nietzsche—only moral interpretations.
* Confusion: Sexual confusion / Criminals are only “sick”
* Reduces morality and ethics to the level of favorite flavors…
* CREED poem (Turner) – could almost be the creed of of PM, the creed of those who reject creeds. No one is without a creed. Everyone has a point of view, holding some things true and others false.

… We believe everything is OK as long as you don’t hurt anyone, to the best of your definition of hurt…

We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage… adultery is fun… sodomy’s OK. We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe that everything is getting better despite evidence to the contrary. The evidence must be investigated – and you can prove anything with evidence…

Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Mohammed, and ourselves. He was a good moral teacher although we think his good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same… They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation…

We believe that humans are essentially good. It’s only their behavior that lets them down.
This is the fault of society. Society is the fault of conditions. Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that everyone must find the truth that is right for them. Reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust. History will alter.

We believe that there is no absolute truth—excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds.

Facet III: INCLUSION, NOT EXCLUSION

Marginalization & Exclusivism are bad. Inclusion is good. Christianity is exclusive.

* The Powerful / the weak
  + Racism
  + Homophobia
  + Ageism
  + Patriarchy
  + Sexuality—M/F distinction is so men can control women.
  + There are multiple genders, not just two.
* Strong sense of justice. No fair! Everyone should go to heaven. (Even those who don’t want to?)
  + 1 Tim 2:4; Ezek 18:32.

[3] God our Savior, 4who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

32… I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!

* “Those who have never heard” lost? : Luke 12:47-48 and John 12:47-48.

47“The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

* *Yet ironically, those who refuse to swallow PM rhetoric, toe the line, and be politically correct—they are to be excluded.*

Facet IV: J O U R N E Y, NOT D E S T I N A T I O N

* Don’t want to think about ultimate things, like judgment day…. Maybe heaven, but only if everyone gets there!
* We can’t be sure of our destination, so let’s focus on the journey
* Analogy: We upgrade ourselves to first class and help ourselves to the beverage cart (although the plane is going to crash).
* Tell me if the following sketch is familiar:

[HS valedictorian, newspaper interview:]

* Intended major: “I don’t know.”
* Career goals: “I’m not certain.., I’m not even certain I want a set career. Maybe I’ll skip from job to job, but I don’t want to commit myself.”
* When pressed: interest in writing and music… but in no way wants to be pinned down.
* “I look at a lot of people tied down to the job,” he says, “and I wonder if they’re really happy. But it’s probably too late for them to change. I don’t want to get like that.”
* … He admits, “I waste a lot of time, watching TV, or driving around, visiting friends.”
* Almost exactly 40 years ago.
* It doesn’t seem like this guy is going anywhere does it? Spending all his time on journey, not so much on the destination.
* BTW, it was me.
* Christian story—Christians know all about journey,
  + All humans shares a common story (from Eden to the New Heavens & Earth).
  + Rooted in truth, and Jesus’ words apply to both our journey and our destination.
* This is the PM mind-set.

H O W C H R I S T I A N S C A N E N G A G E

* I have 5 practicals, but first we need to talk about evangelism.
* Much “evangelism” is *not* just reminding people of message they heard before, plus an emphasis on discipleship or baptism.
  + World mainly *not* Christian.
  + More than half Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. Plus 100s of ms of atheists and agnostics. PLUS all the postmoderns!
* Study series assumes lazy or lukewarm or lapsed church member
  + Word – actually proved B true? What about when they have questions / doubts?
  + Discipleship (esp. when done early on) assumes and asks too much!
  + Sin – when someone has been conditioned to believe morality is a private or relative matter, may not connect. And so on...
  + Yet missing fundamental studies on God, creation, the story of the Bible, and (often) even on Jesus.
* Our words often fall uselessly to the ground, like a proverb in the mouth of a fool – or worse, a thornbush.
* Pre-evangelism needed not just for just outsiders, but also insiders—especially the younger generation.
  + According to a recent Barna poll, 3 of the top 6 reasons young people are rejecting the faith of their parents:
* Reason 3: “Churches come across as antagonistic to science.”
* Reason 5: “They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity.”
* Reason 6: “The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.”
  + Yet many X'ns are *oblivious* of the intellectual and spiritual climate in which they live.
    - Like speaking English when everyone else is speaking Japanese.
    - The majority will not hear the message.
* So what should we do? I have 5 [strong] suggestions.

Five practicals

1. Intentional Interaction
   1. Reach out to members of other worldviews, not just to those you feel comfortable around.
   2. Foster friendship and trust
      1. Share your family
      2. Throw parties
      3. Do interesting things together—not just Bible studies!
   3. Once again, don’t jump into evangelism proper without doing some pre-evangelism. This may take time!
2. Be Culture Critics.
   1. Movies, TV shows, song lyrics
   2. What messages, including criticism, do we receive from the younger generation?
   3. Be a good student of other worldviews.
   4. Remember, Paul didn't quote the Bible to pagans (Acts 14; Acts 17). Paul had invested time to learn how people think, what stories they have been told, their culture….
   5. Stop ignoring culture in sermons and teaching. Speakers, engage critically, and theologically, about society.
3. Be Church Critics. What is off-putting for PMs?
   1. HYPOCRISY. If we imagine PM are blind to our faults, let’s think again!
   2. Materialism. – True, not many are willing to work hard to get a job where salaries can be harnessed to maximize generosity. American Dream
   3. Neglect of the needy
   4. Legalism – the result when we change faith into a system with lots of rules.
   5. Corny, insipid, or shallow religion
      1. Health & Wealth teaching (Prosperity Theology) -- postmodern generation can see through that (if they want to).
      2. Signs & Wonders teaching. The religion of many is mere fantasy!
      3. Singing shallow choruses, esp. those downplaying suffering. Authentic, biblical faith must come to terms with the real world.
      4. The Myth of Christian America. And when we defend it, our story loses credibility, and we are little different from all the other people.
      5. Fundamentalist anti-science sentiment. Quite a few fundamentalists reject the findings of geology, physics, biology, and cosmology.
      6. Have I bought into any of these variations on authentic, historical Christianity?
   6. Like the prophets of old, all God’s people should be involved in some degree of reflection and feedback.
4. Emphasize commonality
   1. So much in common
      1. Suspicion of system. “Go tell that fox…” (Luke 13). Jesus’ hardest challenges: to religious leaders.
      2. Ecology (Gen 1).
      3. Affirmation of marginalized (Luke 10:25-37; 38-42).
      4. Respect for the physically challenged (Lev 19:14).
      5. Diversity (apostles, Gentiles, Rev 7:9).
      6. We too are fellow seekers—we have not arrived (Ps 27:28; Matt 6:33; Phil 3:12; Heb 11:14-16)
   2. Respect. 1 Pet 3:14-16. Many are highly perceptive re: society and religion. No room for patronizing comments. Or whining about the younger generation – which every older generation, going back millennia, seems to have done!
   3. Studies *before* the study series. Japanese Christians in our church pushed to use series (!).
5. Handle Scripture with Sensitivity.
   1. General
      1. The insight of Ambrose (340-397 AD) captures nicely the connection between God and Scripture. “As in Paradise, God walks in Scripture, seeking man.”
      2. Acknowledge that in the Bible we find black & white, but also *gray*!
      3. Acknowledge that not all biblical truths are equally important. Some commands are more important than others. The Bible isn’t “flat,” everything being on the same level, but varied. It has a topography, an interesting terrain.
      4. Emphasize that the biblical story is a *true* story: Fact > fiction.
   2. Avoid proof-texting (turning to single verses to prove a point). Like changing TV channel every 2 minutes. Used to drive my wife crazy—back when we watched TV.
      1. This plays into the eclectic postmodern agenda. Creative ways of combining scriptures to say what we want them to say! It also panders to the short attention span of many in our day.
      2. Wherever possible, stick with one passage. Trust the Word. Have faith that God’s will is best revealed when we read it as it was written.
   3. PMs like stories. Emphasize the biblical *story*, from Gen to Rev, from Abraham who wandered out of Ur to all the pilgrims who make it to the Celestial City. We must help them to locate themselves in that narrative.
   4. Learn to unpack the passage.
      1. Example: John 14:6: *Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
      2. Seems offensive. How should we package this truth?
      3. WAY: Person > System.
         1. Preach Christ, not church—people less suspicious of him (2 Cor 4:5).
         2. “The Way” was a term used for the early Christians (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 24:14,22). Refers to people. The Bible is relational.
         3. Journey: John 10:10. Destination: also John 14:6.
      4. TRUTH: Not doctrinal truth, as important as that is. Spirit and truth: genuineness. Jesus wasn't telling Samaritan woman she couldn't worship on Mt Gerizim. She could worship God anywhere!
      5. LIFE: Not autonomous, but shared, selfless, sacrificial.
         1. Our lives need to be different from the world’s. Too often they are not. Life isn't H&W.
         2. Not self-improvement, but sharing in the life of Christ.
         3. PM spend a lot of time in virtual worlds. Invite them to the real world…
         4. This really works. They care more about whether something works then whether it’s true. Invite them to taste and see that the Lord is good, and their confidence can be rooted in Christ—in truth.

Conclusion

* Never underestimate the power of ideas! PM is powerful, attractive, and prevalent.
* It’s time for the church to wake up.
* Don’t let yourself be cowed or made to feel stupid. Christianity makes sense, and even if you can’t answer every criticism, it is still more reasonable, elegant, and satisfying than anything the PM world could offer.
  + Christians do not claim exhaustive knowledge, only adequate knowledge.
  + "It is not bigotry to be certain we are right, but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong" (Chesterton again).
  + PM, on the other hand, *disrespects* all other views of reality, once they claim anything of substance, or imply that the PM may be wrong.
* Let us approach the PM generation with the humility of Christ (Matt 11:29; Eph 4:2; Phil 2:3; 4:8; Col 3:12; Jas 3:13), with insight, preparation, and love.

The complete notes for this talk may be found at my website, [www.douglasjacoby.com](http://www.douglasjacoby.com). Search phrase: UNBOXED.

Original version of Creed:

We believe in Marxfreudanddarwin.

We believe everything is OK as long as you don’t hurt anyone,

to the best of your definition of hurt, and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage.

We believe in the therapy of sin. We believe that adultery is fun. We believe sodomy’s OK.

We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe that everything is getting better despite evidence to the contrary.

The evidence must be investigated – and you can prove anything with evidence.

We believe there’s something in horoscopes, UFOs, and bent spoons;

Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Mohammed, and ourselves.

He was a good moral teacher although we think his good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same – at least the one that we read was.

They all believe in love and goodness.

They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

We believe that after death comes the Nothing

Because when you ask the dead what happens they say nothing.

If death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then it’s compulsory heaven for all—excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan.

We believe in Masters and Johnson.

What’s selected is average. What’s average is normal. What’s normal is good.

We believe in total disarmament. We believe there are direct links between warfare and bloodshed.

Americans should beat their guns into tractors and the Soviets would be sure to follow.

We believe that man is essentially good. It’s only his behavior that lets him down.

This is the fault of society. Society is the fault of conditions. Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him.

Reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust. History will alter.

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