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Richardson offers us a three part typology: (1) integration, typified by the work of Lionel Thornton, William Temple, Austin Farrar, Arthur Peacocke, and John Polkinghorne; (2) romantic, typified by poets Whitman or Wordsworth and by contemporary New Age figures such as Briane Swimme, Thomas Berry, and Matthew Fox; and (3) scientific constraint, wherein one speaks univocally about the natural and transcendent worlds, typified by Paul Davies, Freeman Dyson, Stephen Hawking, and Frank Tipler. See: Mark Richardson, 'Research Fellows Report', *CTNS Bulletin*, 14:3 (Summer 1994) pp. 24–25.

Philip Hefner cuts the pie six ways: (1) modern option of translating religious wisdom into scientific concepts; (2) post-modern/new age option of constructing new science based myths; (3) critical post-Enlightenment option of expressing truth at the obscure margin of science; (4) post-modern constructivist option of fashioning a new metaphysics for scientific knowledge; (5) constructivist traditional option of interpreting science in dynamic traditional concepts; and (6) Christian evangelical option of reaffirming the rationality of traditional belief. (Unpublished to date)

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From Modernity to Post-Modernity: Taking Stock at the Turn of the Century

Rolf Hille

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THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY AS PROPHETIC GIFT AND WORK

'The task of philosophy is to understand what exists, for that which exists is reason. Concerning the individual, just as each is, as it were, a child of his own times, so also philosophy grasps its time in thoughts.' This is how Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Law* defines the task of philosophy. Philosophy in the Hegelian sense thereby claims that through this analysis reality is taken into consciousness as comprehended reality. In this article, though, we would like to ask whether it is possible or desirable on the part of the theology of history, to carry out the kind of analysis which Hegel attempted in his entire philosophy, viz, to comprehend time in thought and thereby to define it philosophically. This is an incredibly audacious claim to make.

Jesus Christ calls his church to 'understand the signs of the times', and so to interpret time prophetically. But this competency has nothing to do with human ability because 'the discernment of spirits' is a charismatic gift given by God over which we have no control. The philosophical interpretation of the present is an intellectual act which we perceive by our own power. But seeing reality clearly in a prophetic way from the standpoint of the knowledge of faith is not only a gift of grace which God alone can grant, but it must also be used with reservation. Ultimately, Hegel presumes that complete knowledge of the absolute mind is present within him, and that he, therefore, can also speak a final word about reality.

However, as theologians gifted with prophetic understanding in the New Testament sense, we never speak from our own knowledge by reason, but, rather we stay bound to the word of revelation. In our interpretation of the theology of history, we will never be allowed to or will be able to go as far as Hegel claims for himself as a philosopher of history, simply because our judgment is done with an eschatological reservation. We are not able to take stock of the ultimate end result, but can at best make a provisional assessment.

The phrase 'from Modernity to Post-modernity' first of all signifies an historical-chronological change. First comes Modernism, and then Post-modernism follows. But when we speak of Modernism, it is thereby implied that there also must have been something which preceded it; with some caution, we would like to call this 'Pre-modernism', i.e., that development of the history of thought which was supplanted by Modernism. Therefore, I could structure this article to show the chronological succession presented as a historical whole. However, I do not wish to do this, but rather to attempt to show in a systematic and phenomenological way some of the main characteristics in the succession of Pre-modernism, Modernism, and Post-modernism. This article will briefly interpret each of them from a theological viewpoint in order to reach some conclusions for our situation today. Though there are many phenomena to evaluate, I would like in this article to sketch briefly and assess the anthropocentric change.

Of course, in keeping with our topic, I am placing the emphasis upon Modernism and Post-modernism. The so-called Pre-modernism will be referred to only briefly in order to demonstrate the transition which occurred with the arrival of Modernism. A discussion of Modernism within the context of Post-modernism is indispensable because the latter presents itself in part as the decisive contradiction of the former; nevertheless, it also in part accepts the former and continues it in a radical way.

THEOCENTRICITY, EGOISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

We now turn to an examination of the anthropocentric change from Pre-modern theocentricity through Modern egoism to Post-modern individualism.

A) The Theocentricity of the Early Church and of the Middle Ages

Pre-modernism here means, in short, the ages of the Early Church and the Medieval period. These epochs placed God in the centre of thought, culture, and society. This is quite evident architecturally in the rising Gothic cathedrals in the centres of cities. At the centre of all human areas of life and all artistic creativity was the encounter with God. Humanity is in this sense not autonomous, and constitutes no independent theme of philosophical or theological discussion. Closely interwoven with the question of God is certainly a view of human life in which earthly things are only a very temporal, provisional intermediary station on the way towards real human existence in God's eternity. And with this, there is also always the possibility of ultimate failure, that is, of eternal lostness.

B) Modern Egoism

Modernism began with the Renaissance and Humanism which introduced a radical change. From then on, no longer God but humanity, time and the material condition of each individual are the centre of interest. The Renaissance means the rebirth of the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome and the orientation to their pre-Christian ideals. The character of the Italian Renaissance can be shown in the basic anthropocentric attitude of Francesco Petrarca, who, while climbing a mountain, becomes aware of his own ego or identity, and experiences himself as an individual over against the world. Furthermore, he also understands himself as standing over against God. A kind of humanity develops which from now on finds its own vital best interest in itself.

In Germany this change is characterized especially by the movement of Humanism which takes *Humanum*, that is, humanity's possibilities, as its starting point. Humanistic anthropology essentially says that a person is capable of learning and can be educated. Education is, therefore, the essential task we are to undertake. Because a person can be developed into a better character, the worldview of Humanism is basically optimistic. The conflict during the Reformation with the anthropology of Humanism is very clearly documented in the dispute between Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam in, for example, Luther's writing, *De servo arbitrio*. Luther's awareness of humanity's lost condition and our exclusive dependence upon God's salvation stands in contrast to Erasmus' pride, who thinks that it is possible, in the end, to reform an individual into someone who is good.

Philosophically, the ego-centric philosophy of Modernism was decisively developed by Rene Descartes, who sought an ultimate certainty in a methodical process of doubt. Descartes was not a doubter out of principle, one who criticizes out of enjoyment of scepticism, or who was interested in the destruction of every bit of truth. Rather, he was a serious seeker of truth who, with his scientific method of doubt, wished first to do away with every kind of certainty which was based only on tradition or on empirical observation, or just on rational deduction. In contesting all knowledge which seemed questionable to him, he hoped to reach a clearer and more definite certainty. The certainty which Descartes then discovered in his critical process was that, for him, only the 'I' of the thinking person as *res cogitans* was the final, most basic, and indubitable truth: *Cogito, ergo sum*—I think, therefore, I am.

Even before Kant's discussions on the matter, this basic conviction describes a transcendental 'I' as a reality concentrated on the pure act of thought. The *res cogitans* in which the thinking individual exists for himself, is the Archimedean point from which Descartes can then come to a certainty about God through an ontological process. Finally, God's attributes of goodness and truthfulness guarantee not only the trustworthiness of divine thought, but also knowledge of the world in the sense of the *res extensa*, that is, the extended being. Because he is good, God does not deceive people, his intelligent creation, with unreal or misleading sensory reality.

Descartes' line of reasoning is quite characteristic of the way Modern thought becomes anthropocentric. On the one hand, medieval traditional science, which had until then been broadly accepted, was questioned critically. The simple proposition that facts had always been believed by everyone everywhere in the sense of the classical Catholic principle of tradition, was, for Descartes, not enough for clear and definite certainty. Yet, on the other hand, the apparent evidence of empirical perception also did not suffice as such because there is the phenomenon of dreams and sensory deception. Even the results of logical conclusions have proved themselves to be mistakes time and again. So at the end of the thinking process neither tradition, nor the objective world, nor the certainty of the contents of thought remain, but simply the fact of the thinking being himself, the *res*

cogitans. He is, as we have shown earlier, the Archimedean point from which God and the world are brought with great effort into thought and thereby, finally, also into reality. But, epistemologically speaking, the thinking 'I' remains the principle and centre of the universe.

In the wake of the Enlightenment and of German Idealism, the Modern approach with the autonomous 'I' of humanity was further developed. Immanuel Kant founded the Enlightenment essentially as a moral undertaking to 'depart from self-made mental immaturity'. His critical struggle is not simply or even primarily considered as the emancipation of thought from the bonds of traditional prejudices, but rather as the moral self-determination of the individual. In the name of freedom, all heteronomous influence upon moral decision is to be opposed. By virtue of his own practical reason, the 'I' determines himself in autonomously setting the norms of his actions. A person is obligated solely to command which appear reasonable, corresponding to Kant's categorical imperative. Descartes' epistemological anthropocentrism becomes moral anthropocentrism with Kant. In this context, divine commandments have, at best, only a propaedeutic and pedagogical function.

Kant's student, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, takes this a crucial step further in radicalizing the 'I' philosophy of Modernism to the extreme. Human existence establishes the 'I' over against the 'Non-I'. The 'I' has thereby become the absolute, the creator of all existent reality. God, nature, history, society—all reality is derived from the free productivity of the 'I'. With this universalization of the 'I', modern anthropocentrism reached an unsurpassable highpoint in a quasi-apotheosis. All further intellectual and cultural developments of modern anthropocentrism are only small distinctions and developments of this Modern-age claim for self. The ideal of the strong, self-confident individual turns out to be normative for all areas of life, whether in politics, business, art, or culture.

C) Post-Modern Individualism

The transition from the modern 'I' philosophy to the Post-modern 'I' culture is very characteristic of the present intellectual situation. Post-modernism radicalizes the Modernist subject to the atomized individual and dissolves it thus into oblivion. Humanity in its loneliness becomes overburdened by the task of self-establishment and self-design, and enters the crisis of meaning found in nihilism and existentialism.

The atomization of the individual in Post-modernism is an expression of ego-centrism in terms of the saying: 'every man for himself, against everybody else'. The dance around the golden calf of self causes the cohesion of especially large institutions to dissolve, affecting political parties as well as trade unions and churches. The central question with respect to social structures is: 'What does being a member of an institution, or cooperating in a certain organization do for me personally?' The willingness to be socially involved becomes dependent upon individual and temporary calculated usefulness. Communal experiences become fragmented; closely related to this is the unique explosion of the possibilities from which to choose. For the first time in history, these possibilities set the individual free to put the abstract concept of subjective self-realization into actual practice in society.

A person's destiny in life is determined neither by social status nor by an anonymous fate, but chosen by free-will. This lifting of barriers for the 'I', of course, leads also to an overabundance of possibilities which, for its part, makes the ambivalence of Post-modern existence conspicuously evident. Post-modern individuals not only can choose their own destiny, but they are obliged to do so. They are, as Jean Paul Sartre put it, condemned to freedom. Thus they bear the full risk of failure and carry the whole burden of responsibility themselves. And so the fear arises of missing life, which is understood as a

last opportunity in an almost secular-eschatological way. Because of this existential uncertainty, one tries to keep open as many options for as long as possible. In addition, the atomisation of the individual is closely connected to the dissolution of pre-existing norms, whose only criterion is: 'What is clear to me?'

Sociologically, the ethical disorientation of our Post-modern contemporaries is seen most clearly in the area of sexual ethics, especially in respect of individual relationships and the crises that occur in these relationships. This begins with the model of the so-called 'life-phase' partnerships, including the decision to be single, the deliberate choice to be single parents, and finally, 'patchwork families', in which children of different ex-partnerships live together.

In fact, the urbanization of the modern world has done much to promote such socio-cultural forms of behaviour in the Post-modern Age. For example, the anonymity of the big city provides a homosexual youth, who still perhaps feels like an outsider in his small hometown, all the freedoms to submerge into this kind of subculture.

D) A Theological Evaluation and Criticism of Post-Modern Individualism

How should one take theological responsibility in dealing with the phenomenon of individualism? First of all, we can realize that society has no problem with the fact that the subculture of the church still exists. Even church worship, with its relatively small attendance, is, in this context, just one of many subcultures in the whole society. This point was made quite clear to me in discussion with vicars of the Württemberg Lutheran Church. These young pastors argued, 'Why should we really invest so much time and energy in the worship service which perhaps only three to five percent of the membership attends? All the other church members have the same right to us as pastors. Why, then, should we place the special event of the worship service so strongly at the centre of our church work?' There is some truth in this assessment, sociologically speaking, as long as we are moving only within the small milieu of church attenders. Because we are reaching only a fraction of the population, mainline church services can be considered in this case as *de facto* free-church worship services.

As long as the churches move in this uncontested terrain which has been granted them, they present no problem for the pluralistic society. The challenge for Post-modernism arises at the moment when the church crosses the boundaries to penetrate into other subcultures with missionary intent. This is clear in the discussion about the American model of the Willow Creek Community Church. One may question the potential of this model of church growth which developed in an urban metropolitan situation in North America by asking whether it would also be applicable to a rural area. But for the missiological context being discussed here, it is important to note that Willow Creek is characterized by an attempt to leave the Christian ghetto and to speak to people in their own contemporary world. This is no short term impulse but, as their so-called 'seeker services' indicate, it is an on-going programme. Thus, secularized people in the greater Metropolitan Chicago area are being reached today. This clearly shows that the effort to reach people today through a worship service can lead to a breakthrough of the existing ecclesiological sound barriers.

Also, Willow Creek is trying very hard to make inroads into an unchurched environment in differing sociological subcultures through special contextualised programmes. In making such advances, one must, of course, always examine theologically whether or not different or altered contents are being conveyed by the new forms of preaching. As far as I can tell from available materials and sermons, this is not the case with Willow Creek. One positive fact is that Christians are advancing out beyond their own subculture into various areas of our diverse and multi-faceted society. In this way, people

are able to find a spiritual home in the Christian churches which is well suited to their present situation. At Willow Creek this occurs especially through intensive work in smaller target groups. This demonstrates how important it is to do proper missionary work among the diverse subcultures in a completely pluralistic and individualistic society by means of group-specific programmes.

Post-modern Individualism issues a double challenge at a fundamental level to the Christian church. Firstly, the church members themselves come from different social contexts which, in part, produce contrasting individual needs and interests. Enormous integration problems arise here. Secondly, mass evangelism is becoming more difficult and challenging. I would like to refer here back to the New Testament metaphor of 'fishers of men' and describe our situation at the end of the 20th century. It was still possible in earlier societies to evangelize on the basis of the common cultural characteristics moulded by Christian influence, which can be compared with the use of a large dragnet; today however, the comparison would be with the use of the fishing rod. This explains, I believe, the major difference between current evangelistic work and the great revival movements of the 19th century. In the 19th century, there was still a dominant Christian culture which, today, has been replaced by ideological and ethical pluralism.

On the whole, one should never forget that, in spite of all justifiable complaints about Post-modern ego-centric individualism, it is the gospel of the love of God and his free grace, combined with the call to personal discipleship to Christ which has been such a strong influence on the value placed upon individual personality in modern times. In addition to this, the demand for individual freedom to be able to live out one's faith according to the convictions of conscience shows an historical effect of the Reformation. The latter gave a strong impetus to the movement for political freedom, a topic which we can now examine.

E) Post-Modern Individualism and Political Freedom

It is commonly understood that no person is an island, but that everyone is tied to larger social structures and lives in certain political conditions. Therefore, the development of the history of thought sketched briefly in the preceding sections can also be illustrated and clarified in the history of political freedom.

In Pre-modern times, that is, up until the end of the Middle Ages, a kind of heavenly hierarchy corresponded to earthly society. God, with the powerful angels, stood at the top of the pyramid. People had their given social realm in which they could develop themselves individually only to a very limited extent. The question of individual self-actualisation was not even raised because, based on one's birth, everyone was already defined into a very special social role by God's predetermination. In the Modern Age, this was reversed. In the historical process, political freedom became increasingly relevant in the struggle for individual self-realization. Thus, in the wake of the French Revolution, the third class, the rising middle-class (bourgeois), prevailed against the two upper classes, namely, the nobility and the clergy. The bourgeois finally gained power and were able to realize freedoms for the citizenry.

It is noteworthy here that the revolutions of the Modern age each had their own specific range of hopes, to which they were linked by ideologically-developed promises. For the French Revolution this was articulated in the triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The freedom of the individual which, historically and ideologically speaking, had long since been prepared by the Enlightenment, was now brought about politically in a concrete way. Of course, later thinkers on the threshold of Post-modernism have understood the true character of the dialectic of the Enlightenment with its dangers and pitfalls. Theodor Adorno and Juergen Habermas make this fact clear in their assertion that

the claim of Modernism to emancipate people through a pursuit of the truth can also quite easily lead to a new absolutism. This becomes evident in the historical influence of Hegel's philosophy who, as we saw at the beginning, wanted to gain a complete picture of reality in its inner logic and lead the universe to freedom.

With Hegel, as in all of the German Idealist philosophy of consciousness, it was just abstract theory. But when Karl Marx's dialectic principle was accepted and transferred to concrete politics, the whole thing ended tragically. The real absolute universal claim accepted by Hegel within a closed logic of its own inevitably led to catastrophe in its practical outworking in Soviet style socialism; history does not conform to philosophical premises. The Marxist system could no longer be corrected because of the dialectical historical principles on which it was based. For if dialectics has to move history with scientific precision into a certain direction, then its teleological development can no longer be revised. In the Leninist system, only the elite of the Communist cadre understood the real meaning of the process of history, which they still claimed to direct with infallible certainty. Habermas' and Adorno's dialectic of the Enlightenment must be considered with this background in mind.

Meanwhile, what we are experiencing now at the turn of the century is the victory of the American model, that is to say, the bourgeois revolution. Viewed historically, the French Revolution and the intensive settlement of North America both took place at approximately the same time. The American Declaration of Independence together with the Bill of Rights made possible in the New World the first realized democracy. In Alexis Tocqueville's book *Democracy in America* (1835), we have a classic work, characteristic of the enthusiasm of this epoch. It depicts the early 19th century and describes the great possibilities for the free development of the individual. In a nation in which church and state are strictly separated, in contrast to Europe, and in which, therefore, everyone may live in the freedom of his faith, the most diverse forms of religious community can exist side by side. In spite of strong individualism a strong community of solidarity developed in the United States, at least at the local level. The optimism described by Tocqueville is even today still characteristic of how Americans feel about life. The inaugural speeches, for example, of US presidents John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton are quite typical of the new mood of progress. Both are distinguished by strong enthusiasm. They live in the awareness of having a mission in this world, namely, to ensure democracy, freedom, and human rights everywhere with the promising motto: 'Make this world a better place to live in!'

Europeans' feelings at the end of the millennium are different from those of Americans, which also has drastic effects on the respective expressions of Post-modernism. Europe has experienced the storm clouds of the apocalypse in the past century in varied forms. The historical TV documentaries televised on the occasion of the turn of the century show with frightening power how terrible the first half of this century especially turned out to be for Europe, with the huge massacres, wars, exterminations, and expulsions. If we include in this evaluation the catastrophic history of the Third World, then there is little remaining in European Post-modernism of glad hopeful feeling about life and of the promise that the world will only get better which is characteristic of Modernism.

Still, from a biblical-theological perspective, it would be rash simply to reject the history of political freedom in its very diverse expressions and courses. First of all, it must be realized that Post-modern Individualism has modern political emancipation as one of its essential presuppositions. While ego-centric individualism must be deplored theologically, Modernism's support for human rights and thereby also for religious freedom and freedom of conscience must be welcomed theologically as being

indispensable. This is the case because the essence of religious freedom is deeply anchored in New Testament thought.

The early church, as a small diaspora church in a world critical of Christianity and increasingly hostile to it, carried out evangelism and fought for its future. In this way, its message proved itself to be a dynamic power, even with respect to the social history of antiquity, as seen, for example, in the triumph over slavery. The motivation of many of our spiritual forefathers, who emigrated to the United States for reasons of conscience and certainly not just because of economic motives, was characterized by the desire for freedom. They simply wanted to be allowed to practise their faith freely in the New World. They thought about their courageous step of emigrating in the context of the New Testament ideal of freedom, which was not without political consequences.

Just how important the question of religious freedom becomes is obvious in Wolhart Pannenberg's analysis of modern secularism. Pannenberg proves that secularism in Europe received its first major impetus as a result of the religious wars, that is, especially the Thirty-Years' War. Through the experience of political-military intolerance, the first great estrangement of broad segments of the European population from the Christian faith came about. Freedom of religion is a valuable possession that Evangelicals should defend, even politically. They should stand on the side of those who demand civil tolerance and in doing so, at the same time support the biblical message in carrying out its missionary proclamation. The Great Commission does not deny religious freedom but confirms it, for according to the New Testament, it is indispensable to the preaching of the gospel.

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General Revelation Makes Cross-Cultural Communication Possible

Gordon R. Lewis

Keywords: General revelation, natural theology, salvation, cross-cultural communication, language, relativism, justice, world view, truth, redemptive analogy;

Christian missions in the Orient had diminished effectiveness, observed Lit-sen Chang, when dependent upon either general or special revelation exclusively. On the one hand, liberals failed because they so identified with the natural theology of the people that they did not adequately present the distinctive gospel of Christ. On the other hand, pietistic fundamentalists failed because they so emphasized the gospel that they ignored the cross-