

SCHLEIERMACHER AND ROMANTICISM IGNORED ANTECEDENT OF POSTMODERNISM?

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INTRODUCTION

MANY have written on postmodernism, assessing its relationship to biblical Christianity, touching on the historical developments that have converged, creating this pervasive system of thought. Any thorough understanding of how the world thinks today requires that one grasp the seminal ideas underlying postmodernism's conceptual framework. The observation that understanding the present necessitates that one first have a grasp on the past is a primary reason for the study of history. Whether political tensions, trends in art, or ideas in theology and philosophy, being conversant with what has preceded the present necessitates that people understand the world in which they live; otherwise, how might they avoid their predecessors' errors?¹ Whether heeding the oft-cited phrase of G. Santayana that, "Those who do not learn from history, are doomed to repeat it;"² or the Apostle Paul's admonition that, "these things happened to them as an example,"³ it remains inescapable that events in the past have influenced the present.

Not infrequently, commentators reference Romanticism as an antecedent to postmodernism.⁴ F. Schaeffer prophetically anticipated postmodernism's advent via existentialism's contribution to the late twentieth century's sense of meaninglessness.⁵ Others have correctly identified pivotal thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as shapers of what we now label postmodern thought. Many note Kierkegaard's emphasis upon subjectified experience as a

new basis for epistemology.⁶ Similarly, Nietzsche's jettisoning of any objective sense of meaning, truth, or value prepared the way for postmodernists such as Rorty, Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault.⁷ Others have recognized an ongoing interplay between parallel developments in European theology and philosophy during the nineteenth century, much of this coming in a backlash against the excesses that occurred in Enlightenment rationalism. M. Erickson and D. Groothuis have both made observations of this dynamic.⁸ Perhaps the most succinct articulation of this phenomenon comes from K. Jones, who observes that in light of the influence of the Enlightenment, much of the nineteenth century's liberal theology attempted to correlate faith and reason in a new epistemological paradigm leading to an ". . . ascendance of subjectivism and secularism in Western thought and culture, and has culminated in the recent fragmentation of modernity."⁹

The preceding ideas are significant tributaries of thought that have converged to form the fluidity known as postmodernism. However, this work advances the proposal that much of the thought currently associated with postmodernism finds its first cogent expression in the writings of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Widely hailed as the *Father of Modern Theology*, his influences in the areas of thought that would eventually combine to produce postmodernism have been ignored by both Christian and non-Christian scholars.¹⁰ Consider the

1. Not dissimilar to the observation of first century BC Roman philosopher, author, and politician, Marcus Tullius Cicero that "To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain ever a child. . . . If no use is made of the labors of past ages, the world must remain always in the infancy of knowledge;" available at <http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Cicero/31>, accessed 12 December 2001.

2. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Scribners, 1905), p. 284.

3. 1 Cor 10:11; unless noted, scriptural references are from the NASB (La Habra, CA: Lockman, 1995).

4. Representative treatments include Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway 1994), pp. 35–38; and Roger Lundin, "The Pragmatics of Postmodernity," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1995), pp. 26–30.

5. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1968), p. 22.

6. Arthur F. Holmes, *Christianity and Philosophy* (Chicago: Inter Varsity, 1963), p. 19. John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), p. 45. Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), p. 27, 132.

7. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against The Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2000) pp. 29, 37–38. Also, see his *Nietzsche and Postmodernist Nihilism*, accessed 4 December 2000, available at <http://www.gospelcom.net/ivpress/groothuis/nietzsch.html>; William E. Brown, "Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), p. 315f.

8. Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: the Promise and Perils of Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter Varsity, 2001), pp. 75–109; Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, pp. 39–42.

9. Kelvin Jones, "The Formal Foundation: Toward an Evangelical Epistemology in the Postmodern Context," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p. 344.

10. Schleiermacher shows more points of affinity with postmodernism, and predates both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, though, curi-

following characteristics of postmodernism that emerge in Schleiermacher's work:

- The rejection of the possibility of objective truth
- A subjective "feeling" as the determinant of "truth"
- A hermeneutics that foreshadowed postmodernism's "word play"
- The concept of "truth" only being valid within a community
- The rejection of exclusivism/metanarratives in favour of a fluid view of truth as ever changing within communities

This paper shall examine Schleiermacher's teachings in each of the above areas, showing how his views might form an antecedent paradigm for postmodernism. Many see Christianity needing massive reformulation in order to make it palatable for postmoderns.¹¹ Typical is the suggestion to scuttle any notion of objective truth. Consider P. Kenneson's passionate plea: "I am asking you to . . . try on a different model of truth . . . truth claims are inseparably bound up with human language and are, therefore, inextricably linked to matters of discernment and judgment . . . they are irreducibly social or communal affairs."¹² While all instances of calls to re-conceptualise do not necessarily begin with, or even focus on epistemological concerns, Kenneson's remarks are certainly within the pale of those calling for radical change. Commonly, those sympathetic believe such efforts are the most urgent task for mainline Churches in a postmodern revision of theology; they are driven by the conviction that all claims for the universality of Christian belief are archaic.¹³ Thus, Christianity "must either give up a pretension of universality, or theological statements must be translated into statements about ourselves and our world."¹⁴ Nonetheless, attempts to contextualise Christianity within a postmodern paradigm will no more succeed than did their ideological antecedent: Schleiermacher's attempt to contextualise Christianity within the framework of Romanticism. C. Brown offers a concise, yet thorough demon-

ously, few see a connection between Schleiermacher and postmodernism. I am greatly indebted to Andrew Hofferger of Reformed Theological Seminary as it was from my reading of a Schleiermacher anthology for his "Church and the World" course that I concluded one might consider him a "Father" figure for postmodernism. Dr. Hofferger concurred that this observation had merit, noting that he had also seen Schleiermacher in this role, subsequently providing me with the impetus for this present work.

11. Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 11–15; George R. Hunsberger, "Cultivating Ways of Christ for People in the Postmodern Transition," Scott Holland, "Theology is a Kind of Writing: the Emergence of Theopoetics," *Cross Currents* 47:3 (Fall 1997), pp. 317–341; Burke O. Long, "Ambitions of Dissent: Biblical Theology in a Postmodern Future," *JR* 76:2 (April 1996), pp. 276–289; Richard Eslinger, "Imagination in Postmodern Homiletics," *Homiletic* 19:1 (1994), pp. 7–10; Stanley Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?" *Christian Scholars' Review* 30 (2000), pp. 57–66; Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), especially pp. 11–33; Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelicalism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2002), especially pp. 15–30; Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), especially pp. 3–54.

12. Philip Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and it's a Good Thing Too," in *Christian Apologetics*, p. 159.

13. Marcus Borg, "Postmodern Revisioning," *ChristCen* 114:31 (Nov 1997), p. 1011.

14. Jens Glebe-Moeller, "The Possibility of Theology in a Postmodern World," *ST* 46:1 (1992), p. 33.

stration of Schleiermacher's influence on the nineteenth century's paradigm shift in thought, elucidating that this period ushered in a shift away from modernism's commitments to objective truth constructed upon a foundational underpinning, the belief that truth was the same for everyone, and that reality rested upon a structure that was rational.¹⁵

The Historical Background

Schleiermacher entered history during the latter part of the Enlightenment, a time typified by an unqualified trust in mankind's reason as an autonomous source for truth. It largely discredited the supernatural, and those who held onto the existence of a supreme being cloaked him in the transcendent terminology of deism. It was this movement that firmly established modernity. The scholasticism of the late Middle Ages and the humanism of the Renaissance had laid its foundation as each placed increased emphasis on the importance of humans and their cognitive abilities. One might see the Enlightenment as a further progression of these earlier ideologies. It was a shift in worldview for the average person as the new era was, ". . . largely secular, scientific, and optimistic in outlook, confronted Christian faith with a challenge of major proportions."¹⁶ Enlightenment rationalists eschewed the Christian doctrine of original sin, asserting its antithesis: the perfectibility of man. What society had previously called "sin" they now labeled (at worst) as socially deviant behavior, which they optimistically believed themselves capable of overcoming by such "cures" as the creation of a better human environment, or new scientific advancements that would remove any possible physiological causes.¹⁷ This milieu produced the belief that humanity was progressing toward a utopian society. Present-minded practicality over against the promise of future reward was its guiding principle. "Progress proved the ultimate Enlightenment gospel . . . God had become a distant cause of causes; what counted was man acting in Nature."¹⁸ However, by the 1790s the reactionary movement of Romanticism had risen to challenge its assumptions.¹⁹

One may view Schleiermacher as a central figure in the clash between these worldviews. Born in 1768 in the latter half of the Enlightenment, he reached adulthood as Roman-

15. Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London: Tyndale, 1973), p. 107f.

16. C. W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Waco: Word Books, 1979), p. 19f.

17. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1939), p. 16f.

18. Roy Porter, "Matrix of Modernity," *History Today* 51:4 (Spring 2001), p. 31–32.

19. Richard V. Pierard, "Romanticism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 1040. The dating of Romanticism is somewhat problematic. As with the Enlightenment, there were German, French and English variants. Some see Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the disillusioned French Enlightenment thinker, as a Romanticist, while others view him as a significant precursor to the movement. For a view of Rousseau as a transitional figure, see C. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–84. For Rousseau as a father figure to the movement see Bernard Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 2; Karl Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl: The Library of Philosophy and Theology*, eds. Alasdair MacIntyre and John McIntyre (London: SCM, 1959), p. 58; and J.M. Garland, "The Source of Our Misfortunes," *ExpTim* 111:2 (Nov 1999), p. 49.

ticism erupted upon Europe's intellectual horizon. He became the nexus of a complete reworking of Christianity's central doctrines amidst this shift in worldviews.²⁰ The period represents the first in a series of shifts in intellectual topography leading to the marginalisation of Christianity. How should it respond to the Enlightenment's harsh denunciations of biblical faith? The Enlightenment did not rule all religious belief out of bounds; it accepted naturalistic and deistic views as valid for they tended to elevate the import of humanity while rejecting any significant concept of supernatural immanence. Furthermore, it posited revealed truth as contrary to the supremacy of human reason.²¹ Gone were presuppositions about the nature of man, God, and the universe that had dominated European thought during the preceding centuries. Christianity faced a crossroads: how was it to make itself relevant in this "world turned upside-down?" Could Christians communicate the message of the gospel in the same manner as previously, or would these changes force Christianity to adopt a new paradigm? It was amidst this setting that Schleiermacher reached his adult years. These shifting tides would have a profound influence on the construction of his thought. Ironically, one finds many of the aforementioned factors cited by those who have by-passed Schleiermacher's role in their tracing of postmodernism's lineage.²²

The Influence of Romanticism

Discussion of the forces shaping Schleiermacher cannot overlook Romanticism's influence. Seeing confidence in human reason as an obstacle to effectively communicating the gospel, he contrastingly saw Romanticism as an ally; it emphasised passion over reason—imagination and inspiration over logic. Enshrining autonomous human reason as the sole source of truth, the Enlightenment had advanced naturalistic rationalism. Its ascendancy brought depreciation of other avenues of knowledge. This produced a climate that "starved the soul . . . minimized and derided feeling . . . suppressed emotion . . . [and] had made men oblivious of the element of the divine."²³ Those who valued the creative spirit could not endure such conditions;²⁴ the period was "absolutely uncreative."²⁵ Reacting to extreme rationalism, Romanticism stressed mystery, imagination, feeling, and freedom, seeking a "complete and deep-seated reorientation, not to say revolution, in the manners of thought, perception and consequently of expression too."²⁶

In the Romantics Schleiermacher found others who shared his vision of the value of inward feeling and the

importance of the growth of the individual.²⁷ His emphasis on inner feeling emerged in his view on the doctrine of grace—for even this concept was subjectified, for he held that the individual essentially defined grace by virtue of the fact that he had to existentially awaken to their consciousness of it.²⁸ Consequently, grace was experiential as opposed to some externally existing quality extended by God to the regenerate.²⁹ Romanticism embraced a subjectivism, depreciating "fixed universal moral laws or rules in favour of the free development of the self in accordance with values rooted in and corresponding to the individual personality,"³⁰ reviving the notion of *the ideal*. This made room for the non-physical properties of humanness that enlightened thought had dismissed for lack of empirical verification. Romantics employed the language of religion to convey a renewed commitment to emotion. As a reactionary movement it "saw morals and religion, language and society, along with art . . . as the free and unconscious product . . . of the vitality of the human spirit."³¹

The Inward Turn to "Feeling"

The Romanticist tenet most notable in Schleiermacher (and an essential postmodern attribute) was to deny any objective basis for truth and embrace experience as ultimate metaphysical validator.³² Postmodernists such as Rorty claim that everyone's reality is nothing more than a perceptual interpretation of the world, which does not exist outside of them in any real sense, but only subjectively as they interact with the "out there" that is not ultimately "there" for anyone but themselves.³³ Schleiermacher asserted that the intellect was incapable of a connection with the divine; it would always fall short, for "men imagine they have actually grasped the Deity, a thing they never can do."³⁴ He proffered that the manner in which one encounters the infinite was via an unmediated awareness of the divine, observing that one should "become conscious of our immediate relations to the Infinite and Eternal."³⁵ He saw attempts to teach doctrine as objectively existing facts as efforts to grasp the unattainable, for "instruction in religion . . . is absurd and unmeaning . . . only shadows of our religious emotions."³⁶ His reaction to the Enlightenment's dependence on human reason was to contextualise Christianity within the emerging Romanticist movement of the late eighteenth century, a worldview that would achieve ideological dominance in the early nineteenth century. To make Christianity more appealing to his

20. Karl Barth gives a succinct elucidation of Schleiermacher as a product of his time; see *Rousseau to Ritschl*, p. 307ff.

21. Gerhard E. Spiegel, "On Defining Movements: Shifting Patterns of Religious Authority," *TMC* 29 (Winter 1995), p. 63.

22. Representative examples include: Glenn Ward, *Postmodernism* (Chicago, Contemporary Books, 1997), pp. 3–15; Christian Quendler, *From Romantic Irony to Postmodernist Metafiction* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 103–118.

23. Edward Caldwell Moore, *An Outline of the History of Christian Thought Since Kant* (London: Duckworth, 1912), 34.

24. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964), Vol. 7, *Fichte to Nietzsche*, p. 13.

25. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 34, wherein he lists Rousseau, Shelley, and Keats as critics of the Enlightenment.

26. Lillian Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective* (New York: Humanities, 1970), p. 27.

27. Keith Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 19; C. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

28. George N. Boyd, "The Medium is the Message: A Revisionist Reading of Augustine's Experience of Grace According to Schleiermacher and McLuhan," *ATR* 45:2 (1974), p. 192.

29. Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

30. Copleston, *op. cit.*, Vol. 7, p. 14.

31. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 34f.

32. Mary Ann Glendon, "Rousseau and the Revolt Against Reason," *First Things* (October 1999), p. 42.

33. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii–10.

34. Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1957; trans. Horace L. Friess), p. 24.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

36. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Torchbooks, 1958; trans. John Oman), p. 122; hereafter referenced as *Speeches*, 1958 ed. to distinguish it from the 1994 edition.

contemporaries, Schleiermacher revised the Christian faith such that it was no longer defined by, nor dependent upon, propositional doctrines, but rather by more subjective parameters.³⁷ Doctrines would not be the arbiter of true faith, but rather the inverse: true faith would discern the proper content of doctrine, which existed to give expression to Christian self-consciousness.³⁸ He asserted that, “true religion is sense and taste for the Infinite.”³⁹ Evidencing further affinities for Romanticism, he emphasised an almost mystical experience of the “Infinite.” Reardon suggests that for Schleiermacher, religion’s essence was an “inexpugnable feeling that the finite is not self-explanatory and self-justifying, but that behind it and within it—shinning, as it were, through it—there is always an infinite ‘beyond.’”⁴⁰

Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* undermined confidence in the truthfulness of the Christian faith by questioning of the validity of the traditional proofs for God’s existence. He argued that such proofs were insufficient to support the argument for God as a necessary being, stating: “I cannot even make the assumption—as the practical interests of morality require—of God, freedom, and immortality, if I do not deprive speculative reason of its pretensions to transcendent insight. For to arrive at these, it must make use of principles which, in fact, extend only to the objects of possible experience, and which cannot be applied to objects beyond this sphere without converting them into phenomena, and thus rendering the practical extension of pure reason impossible.”⁴¹ To summarize, Kant centered his criticism of Christianity on its dependence upon both reason and natural evidences. In as much as Kant claimed that one could not sense the thing in itself, Christian faith would have fared better had it rather rested upon revelation alone. In support of his rejection of natural theology, Kant declared that God was, “an object . . . which never can be an object of intuition to us.”⁴²

The Enlightenment undermined any basis for Christianity’s belief that it possessed actual knowledge about God. This followed from the Enlightenment’s presuppositions, particularly its commitment to empiricism.⁴³ This left no room for a faith that owed its authority to the self-revelation of the infinite God. Schleiermacher understood Enlightenment humanism as a formidable barrier to the communication of the redemptive message of Christianity. By emphasizing introspection, intuition, feelings, and imagination, Romanticism negated any need for cognitively seeking reality through any type of rational investigation, or from the application of technical science. Reality was accessible only through an apprehension of wonder; this resonated with

Schleiermacher who placed great value on inward feeling and the importance of the growth of the individual.⁴⁴ Religious self-consciousness could not secure any “metaphysical knowledge of God as God knows himself through himself” though it could enable one to “acknowledge the givenness of God as he discloses himself in his relation to human beings in the world.”⁴⁵ By employing religious consciousness, humanity could not know anything “of God except his preserving activity (in which creation has been absorbed).”⁴⁶ In consequence, what a person knows derives from an epistemological dialectic that distinguishes between a thought and that to which the thought refers. This follows in that the construction of one’s thought is more than simply one’s consciousness of it, for also present in that thought is that which is not the thought itself.⁴⁷

Schleiermacher confidently contextualised Christianity within Romanticism, believing he had saved it from the Enlightenment critique while making it acceptable to Romantics. However, at what costs did he succeed, and what might one learn from his efforts at contextualisation? Additionally, what lessons might be gleaned from this experiment that might benefit in guiding present day believers as they respond to the postmodern challenge to a faith anchored in the grandest of all metanarratives—the Bible? As a whole, were his efforts at contextualisation useful, or should they serve as warnings for those seeking to subsume Christianity within the paradigm of postmodernism in order to make it appealing to the cultural sensibilities of the twenty-first century? Influenced by Romanticism, Schleiermacher declared as tertiary to religion the age-old arguments about God’s existence, miracles, the inspiration, and the inerrancy of Scripture, etc.; he sought refuge in his claim that the centre of religion had forever been located in feeling, as opposed to human reason.⁴⁸ Similarly, postmoderns assert that all reality is nothing more than a social construct and that this equally applies in the realm of religion. If one were to assert reason as part of the mental furniture of religion, postmodernists would judge him guilty of attempting to impose Enlightenment rationalism. One might argue that as Kant had claimed to embark upon a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy, Schleiermacher set out to establish a “Copernican revolution” in theology. As Kant had shifted the “orbit” of thought and perception from the objects themselves to the mind in which they were subjectively perceived, so too Schleiermacher moved theological thought from the notion of external and eternally existing propositional

37. In this regard, one might see Stanley Grenz’ views on revising Christianity as parallel to Schleiermacher’s; see in particular Grenz’ *Revising Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993), especially pp. 61–85.

38. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964; trans. Terrence N. Tice), pp. 67f., 78f.

39. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 39.

40. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

41. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, online version available at http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/academic/digitexts/kant/pure_reason/pure_reason.txt, accessed 28 March 2003.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Representative examples include: Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Black, 1956), pp. 51–56; Voltaire’s comments on the soul in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Theodore Besterman (New York: Penguin, 1984), pp. 22, 28.

44. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, rev. ed., trans. John Oman (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), pp. 151f., 189; hereafter referenced as *Speeches*, 1994 ed.

45. Bennie Dale Craver, “The Divine Government of the World: The Function of Providence in the Theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), p. 54.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 59. It is via this nexus that Schleiermacher seems to connect the infinite and the finite, though as stated, the finite would be contained in the infinite; however, at other times Schleiermacher seems to construct his reality in the inverse of this proposition, for, he states that religion is, “in itself . . . an affection, a revelation of the Infinite in the finite.” *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 36.

47. Schleiermacher, *Dialectic, or The Art of Doing Philosophy: A Study Edition of the 1811 Notes*, trans. by Terrence N. Tice (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 67–72.

48. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Torchbooks, 1963; trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart), Vol. 1, p. 11f.; hereafter referenced as *CF*.

truths about God grounded in God's objective existence, to internalised criteria for determining religious truth.

Insisting that there was a feeling of utter dependence that all humanity experienced, Schleiermacher asserted that this was a constituted feature of humanity. However, in making this observation he was not echoing the text of Rom. 1:18ff.—that humanity knows of God's existence because God has made his existence obvious through his creation (though man's fallenness causes him to repress such knowledge). Rather, he asserted that this compelling sense of absolute dependence was an emergent quality in humans, positing that everyone has this tendency—an innate disposition, toward *God-consciousness*.⁴⁹ However, this perspective collides with the aforementioned dynamic of Romans chapter one.⁵⁰

Schleiermacher's motivations for contextualising Christianity within Romanticism emerge in *Speeches*. His defence of religious belief employed language reflecting Romantic sensibilities: "Considered from the centre outwards, that is according to its inner quality, it is an expression of human nature, based in one of its necessary modes of acting or impulses or whatever else you like to call it."⁵¹ He further pleads, "Why do you not regard the religious life itself, and first those pious exaltations of the mind in which all other known activities are set aside . . . the whole soul is dissolved in the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal."⁵² In this reflection of the Romantic values of feeling over facts, inward passion over outward restraint and freedom over obedience⁵³ one also senses an appeal to a sublime quality in religion—a concept permeating Romantic thought.⁵⁴ These views from *Speeches* are not anomalies, but consistent with the pervasively Romantic perspective found throughout Schleiermacher's work; even in his dogmatic work he opined in Romantic fashion that "the self-identical essence of piety is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."⁵⁵ God relationally reveals himself via God-consciousness, which is inseparable from the self-consciousness universally given to everyone; he asserted that to feel absolutely dependent and "to be conscious of being in relation with God are one and the same thing . . . absolute dependence is the fundamental relation which must include all others in itself. This last expression includes the God-consciousness in the self-consciousness . . . the two cannot be separated from each other."⁵⁶

This locates piety in feeling versus activity, or acquisition of knowledge. A corollary concept to his view of God-consciousness within self-consciousness is his reference of

God as "the Infinite."⁵⁷ Thinking the term indescribable nevertheless he asserted the infinite was "that which is in contrast to the finite, i.e., to that which is co-determined by other things."⁵⁸ The idea of an indescribable God parallels Romanticism's emphasis on the "mystery of the universe."⁵⁹

Schleiermacher denied that Christian doctrines were propositional. Hence, they did not correspond to truths external of them; they were verbal expressions of inner feelings born of relationship to God, lying at the intersection of God-consciousness and self-consciousness.⁶⁰ He asserted that one lies "directly on the bosom of the infinite world. In that moment, you are its soul. Through one part of your nature you feel, as your own, all its powers and its endless life."⁶¹ This "sound-bite" captures the essence of Romanticism, leaving Schleiermacher vulnerable to the charge of pantheism, for, "the pantheistic tendency of all romanticism is undeniable."⁶²

Schleiermacher confronted two dominant views that stood as alternatives to his own. The first view was the idea that religion was based upon thinking or knowing; the second saw religion as "doing." He asserted that religion was neither knowing nor doing, but could only truly be found in "feeling."⁶³ Here we find a parallel between his ideas and those expressed in postmodernism, since postmodernism rejects any notion of propositional truth, asserting that religious "truth" is found within, not without; that is, it repudiates any notion of objectively existing religious truth.⁶⁴ In subjectifying Christian faith Schleiermacher unwittingly played to the strength of the skeptic, who could now dismiss Christianity as an individual choice, nothing more than a private matter without any actually existent referent independent of the mind that entertained its thought.⁶⁵ One might posit that the Enlightenment forced this response as it asserted knowledge had some point of reference existing external to it, whereas feelings did not. However, a subjectivist does have facts about a feeling, but the feeling itself cannot be adequately expressed since its only existence is an internal and subjective one.⁶⁶ Consider Schleiermacher's observation that "All attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to him."⁶⁷ His intent emerges even more clearly in his *Autobiography and Letters*, wherein he stated, ". . . this is my vocation, to represent more clearly that which dwells in all true human beings, and to

49. Robert Williams, *Schleiermacher The Theologian* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, n.d.), p. 44. See *CF*, Vol. 1, pp. 12–18.

50. Schleiermacher's problematic view of human nature vis-à-vis the fall is recognized by both critics and supporters, the latter offering various defences to extract Schleiermacher from such tension. For sympathetic views see David Nelson Duke, "Schleiermacher: Theology Without a Fall," *PRS* 9:1 (Spring 1982), pp. 21–37; Robert V. Vance, "Sin and Consciousness of Sin in Schleiermacher," *PRS* 13:3 (Fall 1986), pp. 241–262.

51. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 13.

52. Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 15f.

53. Robert M. Wernae, *The Romantic School in Germany* (New York: Appleton, 1910), pp. 1–7.

54. William Vaughan, "From Sublimity to Indeterminacy," in *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: UK, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

55. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 12.

56. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 17.

57. For examples see *Soliloquies*, p. 12; *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 39; *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 15f.

59. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

61. *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 43.

63. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., pp. 77–80.

64. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, pp. 127–131, wherein he demonstrates how religion emerged in Derrida's thought; though Derrida claimed he was an atheist, he held that religion is fully subjective. Derrida noted that "I call myself God . . . God is in me, he is the absolute 'me' or 'self,' he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity." See Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 17. See also, Ian Almond, "How *Not* to Deconstruct a Dominican: Derrida on God and 'Hypertruth,'" *JAAR* 68:2 (June 2000), pp. 329–344, wherein Derrida's subjectivity and religion are discussed within the context of his interaction with the thought of Meister Eckhart.

65. C. E. M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1952), p. 96f.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 97f.

67. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 194.

58. *CF* Vol. 1, p. 230f.

60. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 76ff.

62. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

bring it home to their consciences.”⁶⁸ Note that the “truth” he seeks to represent more clearly to the individual is already present inside them prior to it arising in their conscious thought; they are simply awakened to conscious knowledge of what they already possessed unwittingly.⁶⁹ “Truth,” in Schleiermacher becomes something that is subjective and mind-dependent. Elsewhere, speaking of the nature of these subjective feelings, Schleiermacher observed that, “Each expression of feeling bears on it immediately this peculiar impress. It cannot show itself without it, nor be comprehended without it. Everything is to be found immediately, and not proved from something else.”⁷⁰ In this statement, Schleiermacher ties the concept of “feeling” to comprehension; further asserting that knowledge is gained immediately through such feeling, and that one cannot know it with certainty, nor apart from such subjectivism.

Postmodernism mirrors Schleiermacher for it too asserts that “truth” is mind dependent. It denies any truth “out there,” reducing it to no more than the creation of the individual as he interacts with the various “texts” of life. Postmodernism has elevated the “true for you, but not for me” mantra to new levels of respectability. Grenz (whose work evidenced great affinities for postmodernism⁷¹) observed that postmodern minds view truth as, “. . . relative, indeterminate and participatory.”⁷² He also claimed only postmodern-friendly theological methodologies that valued becoming over being⁷³ could equip Christians to function Christianly. In his view (one common among postmodernists), language shapes reality; thus, language is central to (what Grenz terms) the “world constructing” essential to effecting becoming over being. It is this process that produces knowledge and identity within the Christian community.⁷⁴

Not dissimilarly, Schleiermacher equivocated feeling

68. Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in his Autobiography and Letters* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1860; trans. Fredrica Rowan), Vol. 1, p. 125.

69. This evidences Romanticism’s influence on the development of Schleiermacher’s ideas, paralleling Rousseau’s concept of knowledge and its acquisition. Rousseau held that in educating children, one had only to awaken in them their already existing knowledge—knowledge that was simply latent. In this model the role of the teacher was nothing more than that of a facilitator. This is an idea that is widely popular in education presently, as it empowers the students and removes the threat of a power authority external to them; consequently we find a postmodern influence alive and well in the classroom. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (New York: Basic Books, 1979; trans. Alan Bloom).

70. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 54.

71. For the most fully developed expression of this, see Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001).

72. Grenz, “Star Trek and the Next Generation,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p. 94.

73. This line of thought—emphasising becoming over being evidences more affinity for Heidegger’s existentialism than for a biblically informed view of metaphysics and anthropology. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996; trans. Joan Stambaugh), pp. 260–268.

74. Grenz, “Toward A Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 35:1 (Winter 2000), p. 100; cf. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, second ed., 1999), pp. 210–213. As many see existentialism as one of the antecedents of postmodern thought, it is significant that this emphasis on becoming over being has affinities for a central theme in existential thought, particularly in the work of both Sartre and Heidegger, wherein one’s existence precedes their essence. Or, to employ different terminology,

and intellect, seeing the latter as “intuitive piety, and reflective belief,”⁷⁵ positing that in the realm of religious truth experience has supremacy over words, as “communication of religion is not like the communication of ideas and perceptions to be sought in books. In this medium, too much of the pure impression of the original production is lost.”⁷⁶ This undermines his own position, for if so much is lost in an attempt to recount religious experience via language, it follows that his attempts to do so would be inadequate to their task too. This position is ultimately self-referentially absurd. Schleiermacher proposed the elevation of mind-dependent, subjective truth over against mind-independent, objective truth. Thus, his system does not allow for the existence of true/false propositions outside the internal conceptual capacities of individuals. If it did, then a proposition would be true whether or not anyone experienced it. Similarly, postmoderns assert that words lack the ability to communicate substantive messages that contain ultimate meaning for everyone; they are simply symbols people manipulate according to their unique experiences to construct their own realities.⁷⁷ Foucault postmodernly asserts, “words are as deliberately absent as things themselves.”⁷⁸ M. Kallenberg evidences sympathy for Foucault’s assertion, decrying the inherently faulty notion of language as corresponding to, or descriptive of, the world as it is.⁷⁹ He posits that language is an inherently social enterprise that functions to construct new realities that previously did not exist.⁸⁰

J. Franke discusses the role of language in theology, noting that a theology that takes seriously the situatedness and interpretive nature of knowledge must also consider “. . . the socially constructed nature of reality, [and] the limitations of language.”⁸¹ He also notes that in the effort to participate as co-labourers with God in the present construction of a world reflective of God’s eschatological will for Creation, that Christians should recognise that such efforts entail a “. . . strongly linguistic dimension, due to the role of language in the task of world construction. Through the constructive power of language, the Christian community anticipates the divine eschatological world that stands at the climax of the biblical narrative.”⁸²

there is no essential nature to what it means to be human that humans possess at birth—the essence of one’s humanness is shaped by one’s experiences.

75. Clements, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

76. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 150.

77. See “Linguistics and Grammatology,” chapter 2 of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida.htm>, accessed 12 December 2000.

78. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/foucault.htm>, accessed 15 December 2000. Emphasis in original.

79. Kallenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 23ff.

80. *Ibid.*, 24.

81. John R. Franke, “The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), p. 211.

82. *Ibid.*, 213. This echoes Grenz’ Moltmannesque “theology of hope.” While it might seem that postmodernism’s rejection of metanarratives would place it at odds with eschatological concepts, Grenz posited that the on-going process, and gradual unfolding associated with the eschaton resonates with central postmodern themes. Grenz viewed Moltmann’s non-foundationalist theology as readily adaptable to postmodernism, for he claimed that foundationalism simply yields a generically oriented universal human reality that

Language and Community

Schleiermacher's hermeneutic methodology necessitated elucidating meaning within the context of community, ultimately making the subjective views of individuals the final arbiter of interpretive meaning. Positing language as incapable of communicating transcendent truth, he limited it to communicating only the intentions of the human who formulated the words. He asserted that words had no meaning apart from their relationship to a sentence, which in turn had no meaning apart from other sentences.⁸³ Prefiguring postmodernism's view that words only refer to other words,⁸⁴ he claimed language was incapable of completely communicating an individual's thought, as some part of the intentionality of the writer/speaker was always lost in the act of communication.⁸⁵ In his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Schleiermacher succinctly delineated the dynamic existing between the individual and the community of believers regarding the formulation of doctrine.⁸⁶ Elsewhere he reinforced this dynamic; from the context of the development of dogmatics, he stated that, "... if we look at individual cases, the proving of a proposition by exhibiting its relation to the other propositions already proved in another way is a merely subordinate matter."⁸⁷

Schleiermacher insisted that one could not separate language and knowledge—that language was the vehicle by which a community of faith constructed doctrine as people interacted with the text of Scripture and their ever-changing experiences.⁸⁸ He further proffered that outside of a particular community language was essentially without meaning.⁸⁹ If this were true, how could there ever be an objective meaning for any written passage from the past? Scripture is not exempt from this critique, as the person seeking meaning by engaging in hermeneutics is not a member of the same community as the author. This would hold even if the author and the interpreter were both Christians, since for Schleiermacher the community was ever changing.⁹⁰ If this

cannot offer genuine hope for individuals. See Grenz, "Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope," *RevExp* 97:3 (Summer 2000), pp. 339–354.

83. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998; trans. Andrew Bowie), p. 98f.

84. Hermeneutic affinities in Schleiermacher for postmodernism notwithstanding, in his "The Father of Modern Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Philosophy Today* 40:2 (1996), p. 251, Yong Huang chooses to ignore them. He seeks the "rescue" of Schleiermacher from postmodernist rejection as a "modernist." Huang's goal is the redemption of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in order to employ elements he finds useful free from postmodern critique. With great care he shows affinity between Hans-George Gadamer and Schleiermacher (despite Gadamer's sometimes harsh criticism of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic in his "The Problem of Language in Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics," in *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert W. Funk [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970], pp. 68–84). Huang stresses that Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" finds fuller expression in Schleiermacher's system than Gadamer's since the latter ignores the message of the original text and is left with one horizon; but by giving consideration of the author, Schleiermacher allows for a genuine fusion more consistent with postmodern concerns.

85. *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, pp. 274–275.

86. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, pp. 71–82.

87. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 113.

88. Kenneth Hamilton, "Schleiermacher and Relational Theology," *JR* 44 (Jan 1964), pp. 36–39.

89. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 205, Vol. 2, p. 594.

90. John Murphy, "Modernism and the Teaching of Schleiermacher," *AER* 145 (June 1961), p. 25f.

is the case, the Christian community of the author is not the same as the one to which the reader belongs, but belongs to a different time and place than the interpreter.⁹¹ Thus, he saw language as incapable of communicating across points of cultural origin; similarly, postmodernism views language as incapable of bridging the cultural divide.⁹²

Representative of this view, S. Fish sees language as culturally bound; meaning emerges only within interpretive communities, which are made of those who share interpretive strategies.⁹³ Fish takes his theories further, deducing that if language does not correspond to truth "out there" and objectively does not exist outside communities of interpretation, then the things the words refer to have no actual reality either. This leads him to conclude that even such things as morality are culturally constructed.⁹⁴ However, for postmoderns the term "text" goes beyond the written word. Anything that communicates is a text; thus all of life becomes a text. Schleiermacher likewise did not limit his hermeneutical model to written texts, applying it to oral means as well, noting that he often made "... use of hermeneutics in personal conversation."⁹⁵ Speaking with postmodern sensibilities before anyone had "constructed" the existence of such things, he extended the tools of hermeneutics to include non-verbal aspects of communication.⁹⁶

Postmodernism's views on the nature of truth ensure that it will embrace some form of religious pluralism. This follows from its distrust of metanarratives due to their inherently oppressive nature. This necessitates that religious metanarratives suffer the same consequence; as they exclude other religious perspectives they must be rejected as oppressive to, and marginalising of, the faith commitments of other religions. Hence, Christianity cannot claim religious monopoly regarding access to knowledge of God, or how persons might obtain eternal life (this assumes that such things are possible—however, the assertion that they are would itself be a totalising metanarrative). Schleiermacher

91. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 70; Schleiermacher, *On the Different Methods of Translation*, trans. Andre Lefevere, *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 10.

92. Michael Devitt, "Incommensurability and the Priority of Metaphysics," *Incommensurability and Related Matters*, eds. P. Hoyningen-Huene and H. Sankey (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), p. 147f. Other examples include: Neil Levy, *Being Up-To-Date: Foucault, Sartre, and Postmodernity* (New York: Lang, 2001), pp. 1–15; Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 22–29; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 15–19; and Frederick Jameson, *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), a defining work in the development of postmodern literary theory, which has as its unifying theme the obstacle of language to communication. Two journal articles appeared in 1999 that linked Schleiermacher's hermeneutics with the shift towards post-liberal, post-foundational, and irrational elements in theology. See Gregory Thornbury, "A Revelation of the Inward: Schleiermacher's Theology and the Hermeneutics of Interiority," *SBYT* 3:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 4–26; and Paul Fisher, "The Triumph of the Irrational in Postenlightenment Theology," *AUSS* 37:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 5–22.

93. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 49.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–100, 174.

95. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 181.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

rejected the prevailing religious views of his time, going so far as to question Christianity's exclusive truth claims, which led to continual redefining of the theological terms he employed in his writings and public discourses.⁹⁷ This was due to his conviction that the status quo of Christian belief (and its buttressing theology) was insufficient to the challenges raised by the Enlightenment. This revisioning motif parallels the language games of postmodernism.

Community and Religious Belief

While emphasising the individual's religious experience, Schleiermacher insisted on the import of relationship within communities, asserting the cultivation of Christianity outside the context of community was a misnomer.⁹⁸ Though postmodernism empowers individuals with great freedoms, it subsumes them within the group. Ultimately, individuals have no real meaning except that which their community gives them. The irony is that as the "category of the individual person fades from view, consciousness of social construction becomes focal. We realize increasingly that who and what we are, is not so much the result of our 'personal essence' (real feelings, deep beliefs, and the like), but how we are constructed in various social groups."⁹⁹ When Schleiermacher wrote, "If there is religion at all, it must be social, for that is the nature of man, and it is quite peculiarly the nature of religion,"¹⁰⁰ it was not simply the cultivation of Christianity within the context of the community he had in view; he was implying one could not even be a Christian apart from the context of the community. Consequently, there emerges a communal subjectification of truth, and though the community might be in agreement about what constituted a "Christian experience" that experience still would not possess any objectively true, mind-independent referent, and thus would only be true within that particular community. Resonating with postmodernism's view of identity as emergent from community, he posited that the "Christian experience" could only be grasped within a community.¹⁰¹ The importance of community as the vehicle by which people might construct (what are for them) valid beliefs, is an idea central to Schleiermacher's teaching. Postmodernism echoes Schleiermacher by removing the possibility of knowledge of any real meaning beyond the boundaries of one's own community. Similarly, for postmodernists, "truth" is nothing more than a social construct that is only meaningful to individuals within the context of some particular cultural paradigm.

Combining Schleiermacher's claim that at their most basic level of existence, individuals are essentially constituted to feel an absolute dependency on God with his idea of the community as the loci of man's essential elements, it seems difficult to escape the conclusion that the form of Christian belief espoused by Schleiermacher is not possible

apart from its functioning within a community of believers. As individuals come to understand religious truth, they do so as members of a community that is circumscribed by the use of a common language.¹⁰² One can therefore conclude that since cognitive thought occurs using language, but language only has meaning within a community, that one could not arrive at the belief of the "truthfulness" of any proposition about Christianity outside of the setting of one's faith community. This would appear a serious obstacle to one outside the community coming to faith in Christ, for it would seem to follow that one could not communicate Christian truth to those outside of the community. Schleiermacher's views become problematic in the light of Scripture as well, for Psalm 19 and Romans 1 are but two of the more prominent passages that speak about God's physical Creation testifying of his objective, mind independent existence and the nature of his character. Yet, despite the truths contained in these two passages, Schleiermacher denied that the universe provided evidence for belief in God.¹⁰³

Schleiermacher's position faces the following challenge: if the only knowledge we may have of God is dependent upon our God-consciousness, it would seem that we then have no objective standard by which to evaluate one religious belief over against our feeling of absolute dependence. It seems to follow that anyone belonging to any number of diverse religious groups could sense a feeling of absolute dependence and claim that it was from God.¹⁰⁴ Having ruled out cognitive knowledge about God, Schleiermacher and his followers would be left with no ultimate authoritative platform from which to argue against the legitimacy of any non-Christian's claim of a valid, and salvific (in terms of God-consciousness) religious experience. He never claimed that truth developed within the context of the Christian community was truth for those in other religious communities, allowing for redemption to come ultimately to all human souls.¹⁰⁵ The truths espoused about Christ were only true for the Christian community; it was the Christians' narrative—the story that gave their faith meaning. Postmodernism echoes this in its embrace of unmitigated pluralism. One can only assert one's religious story is true within the tradition of one's own faith community; anything more would create an overarching view, which would become totalising, legitimizing some but marginalising and excluding others.¹⁰⁶

In this same pluralist vein, Schleiermacher insisted that the communities in which truth emerged were those that were in process, re-examining doctrinal formulations and restating them in innovatively new ways to resonate with the ever-changing experiences of the community; thus, even Scripture becomes an evolving source of truth.¹⁰⁷ Taken to its logical conclusion, no doctrines are sacrosanct. What a community asserts as doctrinally true from its interaction with the text of Scripture will be fluid—today's truth can be

97. J. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 25f.

98. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., pp. 147–180; see especially pp. 148–152. The elusiveness/fluidity of meaning typifies postmodernism, at times seemingly annoying its own proponents' attempts to elucidate its particular features; see David Shumway, "Jameson / Hermeneutics / Postmodernism," in *Postmodern Jameson Critique* ed. Douglas Kellner (Washington: Mazonneuve, 1989), pp. 172–181.

99. Jim Fideblibus, "Postmodernism and You: Psychology," available at <http://www.crossrds.org/dotpsy.htm>, accessed 9 November 2000.

100. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 148. 101. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 56f.

102. Winfried Corduan, "Schleiermacher's Test for Truth: Dialogue in the Church," *JETS* 26:3 (1983), p. 326.

103. Norman Hook, "God and the World," *ExpTim* 79:2 (1967), p. 50.

104. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 16f.

105. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 502; see also Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Westminster/John Knox, 1989), pp. 185–189.

106. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, "Facing the Postmodern Scalpel," in *Christian Apologetics*, p. 138f.

107. *Hermeneutics: the Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 70.

set aside tomorrow. If doctrines are bound to particular times and places, claims about their continued validity are suspect. This is even true of Scripture, as Schleiermacher saw it as the first in a series “. . . of presentations of the Christian Faith.”¹⁰⁸ But, if in the historical development of the Christian Church redemption is being ever more completely realised in time, and the Holy Spirit is thus pervading the whole ever more perfectly, it follows that the first of this, or any other series cannot be the norm for succeeding members.¹⁰⁹

Postmodernism reacts against the Enlightenment’s arrogance of certainty in attaining all knowledge, rejecting its presuppositions and, with a broad sweep of its deconstructivist brush, all metanarratives. This is most clearly articulated in Lyotard’s oft-quoted remark that postmodernism is an “incredulity towards metanarratives.”¹¹⁰ This applies to all metanarratives, for postmodernism does not distinguish between the “modern progress myth or the Christian account of redemptive history in Jesus Christ.”¹¹¹ Similarly, Schleiermacher rejected objective, mind-independent truth as necessary to sustain Christian belief and doctrines. Whether Christ is co-eternal with the Father was of no import to his Christology; Christ was equal to God in that he was the only one other than God who had achieved perfect God-consciousness.¹¹² Prefiguring the deconstructionist perspective employed by postmodernists such as Derrida, Schleiermacher deconstructed the fall, removing it from the realm of metanarrative and placing it in the category of a local narrative *a la* postmodernism. He posited that “original sin” was ultimately a guilt that must be borne by the whole, as it was a social corruption.¹¹³ Over against his obvious focus on the individual, he placed great emphasis on the community of faith. That he superimposed over the whole community the responsibility for original sin should not be surprising, for as has previously been demonstrated, Schleiermacher asserted that the community was the only place in which one might effectively live out Christianity. Speaking about this corporate view, he postulated that “in each the work of all, and in all the work of each.”¹¹⁴ Postmodernism similarly holds individuals guilty for the wrongs committed by their community as well as condemning the community for the wrongs of its individuals.¹¹⁵

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This essay has examined Schleiermacher’s efforts to gain a hearing among his contemporaries by contextualising the Christian faith within the paradigm of Romanticism, bringing about the emergence of a movement to embrace a subjectified view of truth. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how that shift in turn yielded an anthropocentric (over against a theocentric) focus in theology leading to the demise

of traditional doctrinal formulations, and laid a foundation for variant expressions of postmodern theology. However, is it the case that the traditional formulations were found wanting in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, or rather is it that believers allowed the prevailing thought patterns of culture to influence their thoughts and values, such influences then being manifested in their lives? When believers do not live in faithful accord with the truth of God’s revealed word the effects are devastating. In 1 Cor 6:1–11, Paul chastises the litigious attitude of the Corinthian church. The thrust of his message is that in hauling fellow believers before the government’s judges over frivolous matters they portray a negative example of Christianity to the unbelieving culture. When Christians do not live before the world as Christians, they bring disrepute upon the name of Christ and his gospel. In Mt. 5:13–16, Jesus asserts that believers are to be the salt of the earth, however, if salt becomes “tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown . . . You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Consequently, one should ask if the rejection of the gospel within a particular historical and cultural setting is necessarily due to the inability of the gospel to transcend the prevailing cultural setting; or, are there other factors offering equally valid explanations for rejection, not the least of which is the faithlessness of the Christian witness to that culture? Culpability, however, does not rest solely with those believers whose witness lacks integrity, but also must be shared by the receptors of the message. Behind legitimate difficulties that might arise due to cultural differences¹¹⁶ lies a universal commonality among all the particular humans comprising any culture, namely their fallenness. Sin has created an inescapable flaw in all humans. This is the ultimate source of conflict between the message of the gospel and any culture. Rom. 1:21–23 indicates that all cultures have been (and still are) populated by people who, despite the fact that they knew God “they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible

116. For example, historically, Christians have viewed the heart as the seat of the will and emotive decision-making. This view is grounded in various scriptural passages, e.g., Ps 119:9–11; 2 Chr. 15:15; Is. 29:13; Mt. 5:28, 6:21, 15:19; Jn 14:1, and Rom. 10:10. Consequently, many evangelically oriented Christians describe the moment of one’s coming to faith in Christ as asking Jesus into one’s heart. However, imagine a culture that sees the seat of will and emotive decision making as residing in the liver. How effective might missionaries be in proclaiming that the people of this culture need to receive Christ into their “heart” as Lord and saviour? However, if the missionaries engaged in a soft form of contextualisation and understood some of the cultural traits of the people in question, they would discover that the association of the heart with receiving Christ as Lord and savior was nonsensical within that culture. In contrast, receiving Christ as Lord and saviour into one’s liver would make sense to this theoretical people. It is important to note that in this example, it was not the message of the gospel that changed. The contextualisation that occurred was minimal, for it simply substituted the locale of the will and emotive decision-making processes to the internal organ that paralleled the Hebraic (and thus biblical) association of the same with the heart (over against the liver).

108. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 594f.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p. xxiv.

111. Middleton and Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

112. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 385f.

113. *CF*, Vol. 1, pp. 285–288; Rousseau similarly posited that society was the causation of humanity’s problems.

114. Hoeffcker, course lecture, “Church and the World” (Charlotte, NC, 21 June 2000).

115. Veith, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 76ff.

God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

The claim that one must contextualise the gospel message for each generation and culture is problematic. Various models of this view all make an assumption that ultimately undermines their claims. Each assumes that the revelation of God contained in the Old and New Testaments is the benchmark from which contextualisation should occur. Nonetheless, if all people are culturally bound by language and time, then the message of God’s self-revelation in Scripture is also bound by language and time, for it was spoken to particular people within the flow of actual time and space. Consequently, one should not presume that the biblical revelation is the starting point for all contextual efforts. Proponents of such models must address how they might discover the revelatory word of God that has not been “spoiled” by cultural context. If the inscripturated revelation is such a message and yet has been understood by the people of other cultures, times, and places as recorded in the gospel’s proclamation in the New Testament (particularly in Acts¹¹⁷), then it cannot be that the message of God’s special revelation must be contextualised in order for people of other cultures, times, and places to understand and embrace its message.

Nonetheless, over the past few decades theology has taken a contextual turn positing “all of human inquiry occurs within contexts . . . that each of us thinks and moves within certain social, linguistic, and epistemic contexts.”¹¹⁸ However, how far should one press this claim? Those insisting on a disconnection between communities bracket off the possibility of meaningful communication between them, if not making such communication impossible. In the present discussion, the term *hard contextualisation* will designate this model. The more extreme proponents of this perspective seemingly eschew claims of exclusive truth.¹¹⁹ Donald Bosch, a more moderate voice speaking of the need for contextualisation notes, “In one sense, the gospel is foreign to every culture.”¹²⁰

Contrastingly, *soft contextualisation* describes those models acknowledging the existence of time, place, history and

culture as inevitable settings for communicating truth, yet also assert the communication of objective truth between communities is nonetheless still possible.¹²¹ This assertion is grounded in the text of scripture which contains a “plot line from universal curse to an abiding hope” that is trans-cultural in its scope. J. Kennington further notes that the “writers of the New Testament had an understanding of the gospel that came directly from Jesus. Jesus saw himself in the Old Testament. He made a point of relating his person, his mission and the Kingdom of God to the Old Testament . . . God chose to form the culture of the Old Testament so that we can correctly understand the message of Jesus.”¹²² Discussing contextualisation and the proclamation of the gospel within the setting of colonial Latin America, he notes that despite large numbers of conversions reported by the various missionaries, by the early sixteenth century “the Catholicism that resulted [was] a syncretism” wherein all the symbols of the indigenous peoples’ mother goddess were “hidden in the ‘miracle’ painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe . . . Effective contextualisation was not done.”¹²³ He observes that in the rush to be culturally relevant, evangelical Christians might also be engaging in an improperly conceived and executed model of contextualisation. He issues this caution in light of the observation that though the Spanish missionaries had “millions of converts . . . few knew Christ.”¹²⁴

Acts 17 locates Paul in the agora atop the acropolis of Athens; observing the myriad of idols present in the city, Paul’s spirit is provoked (v. 1). He proclaims Christ to the Athenian philosophers who oft engaged in open-air discourse and debate in the Areopagus.¹²⁵ Paul’s proclamation of “strange deities” (v. 18) puzzled the Epicureans and Stoics with whom he interacted. Subsequently, they brought him before the highest tribunal of Athens—the Areopagus (v. 19). In this setting Paul employs elements of soft contextualisation. First, he notes their religious activity, that they even have a statue to “an unknown God” (v. 23); Paul employs this as a point of contact between their culture and the truth he was about to proclaim—that the God they worship in ignorance is known by Paul and can be known to them (vv. 23–27). Paul shows cultural insight in an appeal to two Stoic writers,¹²⁶ offering that, “in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children’” (v. 27). He then uses this appeal to claim that if humans are the children of the divine, how could it be the case that the divine image could be expressed in “an image formed by the art and thought of man” (v. 29)?

117. For example, consider the case of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25–40), who was a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. In this instance, the issues of race and gender identity are at play, yet no contextualization is evident within the text concerning Philip’s presentation of the Gospel via his interpretation of the suffering servant passage from Isaiah 53.

118. William A. Dembski, “The Fallacy of Contextualism,” *PTP* (Oct. 1994), online version available at http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_contextism.htm, accessed 15 Dec 2000. From a favourable view see David J. Hesselgraves, “Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant,” *IJFM* 12:3 (July–Sept. 1995), p. 115.

119. Representative of this view is Sri Lankan S. W. Ariarajah who attempts to contextualise the gospel into Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In his view, the best one can say of any Scripture is that it is simply material for the faith of the one who composed it, asserting that, “Scriptures should not become the walls that limit theological reflection and divide one community from another . . . No one Scripture is more valid or true than another. . . There is no reason why the Hindu Scriptures should not be meaningful and provide the context of faith in Jesus Christ for the Indian Christian.” “Towards a Theology of Dialogue,” *Ecumenical Review* 29 (Jan 1977), p. 9.

120. Donald Bosch, “Toward a New Paradigm Of Mission,” *Mission In The 1990’s*, G. H. Anderson et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 61. I suggest that this derives from a commonality among all the particular humans comprising any culture: the fact of their fallenness. Sin has created an inescapable flaw in all humans; this is the ultimate source of conflict between the message of the Gospel and any culture.

121. Dembski, “Fallacy.” Dembski employs the comparable terminology of “hard-core” contextualism and “moderate” contextualism; my indebtedness to him in the coining and use of my terminology, I herein freely acknowledge.

122. John C. Kennington, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Ethnography: Methodologies Bringing Cross-Cultural Ministry Closer to Scripture and to People” (D.Miss. diss. Western Seminary, 2001), p. 8f.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

125. The use of the word *Areopagus*, or Mars Hill in the passage at this point designates a physical location on the acropolis, later Luke will employ it in its other sense, to describe the council before which Paul appeared. See Lea, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

126. Nash, *Gospel and the Greeks*, (Richardson, TX: Probe Books, 1992), p. 74. Nash identifies the sources as a hymn by Cleanthes, and a poem by Aratus, both Stoic thinkers: the subject of their observations was Zeus. Paul employs their praise of Zeus to demonstrate that if the claims of these Stoic thinkers are true, then those on Mars Hill face a dilemma concerning their views of the gods.

At this point in the narrative Paul digresses from any position one might validly consider as hard contextualisation. Having engaged the Athenians culturally (evidencing his knowledge of, and sensitivity to their culture), he makes proclamation of what he knew would be culturally offensive to the sensibilities of the various schools of Greek thought. Standing in the midst of the intellectual capital of the ancient world, Paul states that God in his mercy overlooks “times of ignorance” (v. 30); if this were not cause enough for offence, he declares a future resurrection from the dead and a definite end to the time space dimension of physical existence (v. 31). This is highly confrontational and lacking the cultural sensitivity valued by hard contextualisation. The Stoics denied the existence of the spiritual realm; consequently, they would reject out of hand the resurrection from the dead spoken of by Paul. Secondly, the majority of Greek philosophies embraced a cyclical pattern to history, a never-ending loop where the world recreated itself in the aftermath of a great conflagration. In the “new” universe, the same people and events would repeat themselves in exactly the same manner. The cycle was thought to have always existed, and so would continue on in an infinite pattern of repetition (the participants being ignorant thereof). The Stoics thought an impersonal force drove the universe towards this inevitable future.¹²⁷ Yet, Paul proclaimed God as personal—another point of cultural conflict.¹²⁸

Any attempt to force Paul’s efforts into hard contextualisation requires one to ignore all the points of sharp disagreement his presentation had with the prevailing cultural sensibilities of first century Athenians. If Paul were attempting a proto-hard contextualisation, he would have continued on in the same vein as he had in his use of Stoic sources, completely fleshing out an explanation of the gospel within that context.¹²⁹ That Paul does not continue in this vein evidences that he is aware of the incompatibility of a full contextualisation of the gospel that would subsume it to the worldview of the Greek philosophers. At the points where he sees truth, Paul does not hesitate to use them as points of traction for his proclamation of truth but, at the points of contradiction, he insists upon the universality of his message to speak truth across cultural divides.

In the end, does it matter whether it is Schleiermacher or some other antecedent figure such as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche whom people envision as the origin of the spiral

towards a postmodern crisis of faith? If the arguments presented in this work concerning Schleiermacher are valid, there is much for Christians to learn regarding how to respond to the problematic aspects of postmodernism. Schleiermacher’s example reveals the dangers inherent in losing Christian distinctives within the framework of any prevailing cultural paradigm. Yet, this is the very strategy that many have employed in attempting to reach present-day cultures for Christ. In the area of religious belief, many have embraced Schleiermacher’s idea that everyone in any religion can have a sense of absolute dependence—that they experience God. Religious pluralism is the politically correct view.¹³⁰ Among Americans, 53 percent have indicated that they believe all religions are really praying to the same God, and are simply using different Bible names for him.¹³¹ Similarly, 44 percent believe that the Bible and the Koran are different expressions of the same spiritual truths.¹³² Perhaps an even more alarming trend for biblical Christians is the ever-increasing number of people who believe that Jesus committed sins (just as they do) while living on earth in human form. Polls reveal that 42 percent of Americans hold this view.¹³³ They have redefined Jesus according to their community’s sensate perspective.

The “re-inventing” of Jesus to make him palatable to the prevailing views of society has been an on-going process since Schleiermacher. It is but symptomatic of a larger problem within Christianity: the willingness to capitulate doctrine to current views. Schleiermacher himself spoke out against those within the Church who were willing to give in to the attacks of the Enlightenment rationalists, and yet his attempt at reworking Christianity within a model that embraced Romanticism was far from successful. Attempting to free Christianity from what he perceived as a negative influence, Schleiermacher only succeeded in entangling it in another worldview, creating a situation that proved problematic. One could argue that Schleiermacher’s actions were the first step in a long process of deconstructing Christianity that continues today as Christians seek to make the message of the gospel relevant to their surrounding postmodern culture. The challenge is this: how might one communicate Christianity to a world dominated by postmodern word games? Can one communicate the truths

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–72.

128. One might claim that, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer,” shows Paul failed *because* he did not engage in HCM. However to sustain this argument requires one to “cut and paste” verses since the second half of the verse notes the willingness of some to give Paul another hearing at some future time, and that there were both men and women who came to faith at that time.

129. This statement presupposes that Paul’s *modus operandi* was compatible with hard contextualisation. Any attempt at thoughtful reflection would likely lead the inquirer to conclude that Paul was, from the outset, operating from a model consistent with soft contextualization. The proclamation that he knows the identity of the unknown God early on in the exchange would have been a point of cultural offence. Nonetheless, D. Flemming says, “The concern for contextualising the Christian gospel is, of course, nothing new. Many precedents for contextualisation can be found within the Bible itself.” He then offers Acts 17 as supporting hard contextualisation. However, as demonstrated above, this passage models soft contextualisation as opposed to the hard model favored by Flemming. See his “The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualisation Debate,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31:1 (Spring, 1996), p. 139.

130. John Hick has led the charge in popularising this view over the last thirty-plus years. In this regard one may view him as a modern day ideological heir of Schleiermacher’s views. In a Schleiermacherian manner he has advanced the view that Jesus’ divinity lay not in his essential nature but rather in the intensity of his encounter with the divine—that he was so attuned to the divine and its moral nature that he was able to manifest attribution of the same, empowering him with the ability to heal the sick and evoke other miraculous signs. Hick posits that this is the divine encounter in Christianity, and that this encounter with the divine might be manifest in innumerable expressions within other religions. For representative expressions of these ideas see his *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 120–132; *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 172–178.

131. George Barna, *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators* (Dallas: Word, 1996), p. 63. See also, the *Newsweek/Beliefnet* Poll on religious belief in *Newsweek*, 5 September 2005, which reported that 80% of Americans, and 68% of evangelicals, believe there is more than one faith that leads to salvation.

132. Barna, “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs from Diverse Points of View,” *Barna Research Online*, available at <http://www.barna.org/cgibin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=122&Reference=E&Key=Jesus%20sin>, accessed 30 March 2003.

133. *Ibid.*

of Christianity without collapsing them into a local narrative in which believers invite others to participate? If such efforts result in an individual coming to faith in Christ, what is the next step for the believing community? Having invited postmoderns to participate in the Christian community of faith, do Christians then decide that it is time to let them in

on the “little secret”—that they actually believe their local narrative transcends all cultures and eras—that is, that they believe the gospel is in fact the elusive grand metanarrative? Such deception seems incompatible with the truth entrusted to believers—a truth that is *the truth* that sets the captives free. *C&S*