

## **Nature, the Biblical World View, and Postmodernism**

*George W. Reid*

We begin our thinking together with Marshall Sahlins' comment on human self-understanding under the Darwinist regime. "We are the only people who think themselves risen from savages; everyone else believes they are descended from gods. Culture and Practical Reason, p. 17. Cited in Huston Smith, Beyond the Post-Modern Mind, p. 167. Here he has caught the essence of how wide is the gap between the prevailing contemporary mind and the biblical world view. The frightening part comes in recognizing how feebly the typical Seventh-day Adventist-and I speak largely of the first world-grasps the difference.

This subject is of such proportions that we wrestle with fundamental questions that lead to a pragmatic inquiry: How can a few minutes be spent to the best profit? We could review biblical evidence, then conclude with a few free-lance generalities about the way we think. But we deserve better than that. Inescapably, we must visit biblical foundations, for to do otherwise would deprive us of substance. But beyond there we need something more than traditional observations varnished over with pietisms.

If we hope to speak to a generation now far afield of traditional language and virtues, we will return to the theological drawing boards where we learn to call people to eternal truths in new settings that draw clear lines between authentic service to Christ and what is merely faddish. The brooding hazard over this is that in our eagerness to please we emerge with H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ With Culture," where the lion displays only false teeth and the dragon's fire is reduced to a fashionable pilot light. The prospects are daunting, but we still believe in the victorious Christ, His salvation, His eternal kingdom, and a remnant people both wholly committed and wisely perceptive enough to distinguish between reality and

plastic imitation. First to the biblical world view, followed by insights about how these issues have played out among Christians.

A world view seeks to assemble the strands of both what we observe around us and the meaning that like ligaments binds all together in one cohesive overview. It succeeds to the degree that as it progresses ever fewer fibers linger about as orphans. By nature it is both centripetal and expansive. Contemporary writers identify perhaps a dozen or so viable world view candidates, but significant overlapping is to be found among them.

How can we fairly describe the biblical world view? Many enter part way into such a discussion, but more is available. The Bible describes interchange between the Creator and that created in a way that is encompassing, at root integrated, but unsystematized. This follows a characteristic of Semitic thinking, in which individual components may be accepted as true without conforming to the Hellenistic demand for classification. We can describe that message as theologically undeveloped but by no means illogical. A biblical world view rests on the full corpus of biblical revelation, not alone Genesis and the Gospels. Theologically it is centered in Christ.

We look at its claims:

1. In the beginning all things were created by God who is both personal and infinite—who has always existed. What is, therefore, participates in the personal, but not infinity, for things created are subject to time. There was a time before they existed.
2. He created all things outside of Himself. We say this not in a spatial sense, but rather to deny that Creation is in any way an extension of His essence. A clear line stands between Creator and created.
3. Because the universe begins with a personal Being, love and communication,

both dear to twentieth century hearts, are in harmony with what is.

4. The world is a real world because God created it outside Himself. Because it is objectively real, there is true cause and effect.

5. God made man in a special way-in His image, so the basic relationship is upward.(Incidentally, I am using the term man in the sense of humanity). If I choose to reject this upward orientation, I must look for it downward. As relating to animals downward is humiliating, so today man tries to relate to mechanism-but man is not a machine.

6. Reality is linear, moving toward a God-established end.

When laid out before us in this rather dry form, we miss richness, but life comes as we begin to look at the implications. At the center of all things is God, sole source of existence. So all life and nature stand overseen by a personal God. Even when the dynamics of nature are poorly understood, we perceive the work of a trustworthy Creator. The direction of movement is from central to the specific application. Everything moves toward an objective: to order man's purposes to God's. Final reality is a person, and the ultimate human goal is to mirror that person. Most remarkable of all, God came among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father.

From the beginning, God intended man to participate in nature. While created of the dust of the ground, yet he is superior to it. He is given stewardship over it, and placed in the midst of it. As a first act man is led to review all nature as inauguration to responsibility. He names the animals and is directed to the plant kingdom as his source of food. It is striking how often the passage of Genesis 1-3 refers to human connection with the environment. In this setting God introduces Himself to the newly-created Adam and Eve. He visits and explains. He sets them to tasks involving the natural world, both assigning self-sustaining activity as the norm

and establishing a symbiotic relationship between man and nature. At every point of contact nature is benevolent. Today we have difficulty conceiving of a natural economy built around cooperation rather than competition, but this original state is promised to be restored in the earth made new.

Daily life for the first couple was governed by natural cycles: darkness and light, years, months, and days. However, man is no subset of nature. He shares certain qualities that relate him especially to God: unique intelligence capable of memory, analysis, extrapolation, conjecture, imagination, a sense of oughtness, appreciation, sense of form and beauty, self-understanding, capacity for improvement, creativity, anticipation, mutual love, heightened sense of relationship to others, and recognition of sameness. And the list continues. As with no others, man is capable of relating with higher orders such as angels, and even God. Yet he relates also to lower orders of creation around him. Adam and Eve, and hence their descendants, share a unique relationship with one another: a spiritual unity of man and woman Christ tells us is permanent-one flesh. Humans are made social creatures intended to relate to one another within ordered parameters. They have power to make choices, both respecting one another and as relating to all nature, and even beyond with respect to God. Paul describes in some detail a divinely-ordered social order, both preceding and subsequent to the Fall, that assigns particular duties to husbands and wives to the mutual benefit of the family. Sharing with others in social ways is unselfish, both giving and caring, placing first the good of all ahead of personal satisfaction alone. Similar qualities appeared in the original order of nature, and the overriding focus was harmony in unity.

As we have observed, while participating in nature, man was granted a unique independence. He alone is given a special access to God, who conveys to him a unique seven-day cycle not dependent upon any repeating function in nature. And uniquely, the seventh day of the cycle God makes holy. Only the human mind relates to the meaning of that holiness as token of a special closeness with the Creator. In brief, while a participant in nature, humans

are in special ways apart from it, and in fact participate in its governance.

The Scriptures never discuss what we call nature in the abstract. Always it serves as a medium or backdrop before and within which the panorama of God and man plays out. When sin was introduced, it plunged the natural world into brokenness in which Satan assumed a new role: re-ordering the processes of cause and effect to inflict death. As man is alienated from God all nature suffers with him. Paul tells us that nature groans in its suffering, awaiting its release (Rom 8:22, 23). While we would not assert that Christ came to die for nature, in saving man He also transmutes man's environment. Interestingly, at Calvary we find nature in recoil as its Creator passes into death. Without vesting nature as a whole with intelligence, which is a pagan error recently approached in Darwinian ideas of inevitable progress, we recognize that the particular intimacy between man and environment is important for theological reasons as well as pragmatics.

In the Scriptures the basic relationship between man and nature became an uneasy one. They are either in alliance or conflict. Sowing leads to harvest and man's needs are met. He cuts trees and plants vines. Nature is erratic, famine follows feast. Man sweats to extract at least a bare existence from stony fields choked with weeds. All too often starvation is but one harvest away. Part way into the human experience storms rage, rain and natural violence remove all but eight persons from the earth under God's command. Tornadoes sweep away Job's sons, earthquakes level human projects, winds wreck ships on rocks, in one instance depositing Paul and Luke on Malta. Fire falls on Sodom, and we are told explicitly that at the end it will destroy every vestige of sin.

But there is the echo of nature as it once was and will be. "For lo, the winter is past, sings the wise man, flowers appear on the earth . . . the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land" (Song of Solomon 2:11, 12). Come, by beloved, and revel in the gifts of God. The vine hangs its heavy clusters over the wall.

Nature also becomes our instructor. "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament

shows His handiwork" (Ps 19:1). Although far distant from man's once pristine walk with God, the psalmist gazes, awestruck by the sweeping panorama of the heavens, unmistakable evidence of the handiwork of God. Even today the April visitor to Palestine is treated to hillsides washed with seas of fiery red anemones-the lilies of the field that neither spin nor toil. Yet their heavenly Father provides. The Bible treats us to a joyous unity with nature without ever diminishing the differences or in the slightest way suggesting Deity in it.

Although the parable was a popular Jewish teaching technique, Jesus lifted it to new heights, often citing nature in witness to eternal truths about the heavenly Father and His concern for His creatures.

We note with interest that descriptions of the New Earth abound with references to the environment there. Most of what we know about Christ's coming kingdom is set in natural terms, but never simply of themselves, always in reference to God's people who inherit a peaceable kingdom where the redeemed at last are at home with their Creator and Saviour.

We have reviewed a pastoral picture of man, related however roughly, to nature. But we must concur with those who remind us that the Bible is intended to record the interchange between God and man, nature serving as companion and vehicle. In fact, the Scriptures tell us almost nothing of specific mechanics about either Creation or continuing natural function. This seems intentional, something the person steeped in Greek curiosity may think of as a shortcoming. The Bible is properly described as salvation history, but we hold it to be reliable where it touches on supportive historical and functional information.

When Christian evangelists pressed into the Hellenistic world they encountered a growing disillusionment with the Greek and Roman gods. At the same time they found developing philosophical parties such as the Stoics and Epicurians, whose pantheistic teachings all but erased lines between Deity and nature. Rather than debate in this arena Paul determined to teach Christ, which of course meant also the biblical world view of which Christ is the center. We know this is the case, for we find the components of the Christian world view distributed

abundantly through his epistles.

Hellenistic philosophy was badly at odds with itself regarding nature. Were the gods part of or apart from nature? The Platonic school stressed the idea of perfect unity with respect to the universe but assigned that unity to eternal forms that they identified with true reality. Doing this downplayed the physical world which, despite its apparent physical nature, was condemned to a shadowy and transient subquality. The result was virtual disregard for natural studies.

Already by the second century many Christians were accepting these Platonic categories, for to them they seemed compatible with the biblical teaching of a great God at the heart of all reality: almighty, incorruptible, invisible, intractable, and impassive. At the same time the idea of sharp separation between soul and body offered certain comfort in the idea that even if all was not going well with things bodily and natural, they could be different with the soul. In addition, Platonism's concept of an immortal soul seemed to roll back death's claim on every person. Of course partitioning soul and body represented a major departure from the teaching of the Scriptures, but its triumph among second century Christians well illustrates what happens when unwary Christians encounter attractive ideas powerfully endorsed by surrounding society. In a short time Platonic overlay led to the monastic rejection of the body (and with it all things worldly) accompanied by inordinate attention to the soul. As would be expected, nature was negative, something to be subdued, and its study lost all standing in the marketplace of virtues.

The other major branch of Greek philosophy followed Aristotle, whose softened version of dualism allowed for interest in physical things, including nature. In fact Aristotle exhibited such curiosity about natural functions that he wrote a book-length treatise about nature and has been called the father of science. His actual motive seems to have been inspired by pantheistic ideas connecting nature with Deity.

So Aristotle the observer speculated about the heartbeat, the cause of the tides, and why

trees produced rings. But he never seems to have thought of experimentation or the attempt to control natural functions to make them useful. However, wherever Aristotle has been influential, an interest in nature has developed.

While Christianity for more than a thousand years occupied itself with a neo-Platonic custody of immortal souls, the study of nature vegetated. Theologically, God was so distanced from His creation, so enclosed by an impenetrable envelope of sanctity that even the talented artists of Byzantine culture portrayed religious figures such as Jesus, the virgin, saints, and angels in stiff, unreal styles far removed from the natural, reducing them virtually to symbols.

While for centuries the study of nature lay dormant across Europe, both east and west, the appearance of Aristotle in Arabic translation led to revival of interest in Ommayad Islam from the seventh to thirteenth centuries. Arabic mathematics, natural science, medicine, astronomical studies, and even a primitive chemistry blossomed, reaching its golden age in Moorish Spain. The Crusaders who in 1099 subdued Jerusalem were shocked and embarrassed by the high standard of life they encountered, in contrast to their own primitive conditions.

Two developments laden with significance for today's age of science stem from the Middle Ages. They demand our attention. The first is theological. It must be recognized that the Middle Ages held firmly to a variant of the biblical world view. But it was a variant. At the center was the Creator God, but an exaggerated sense of His distance underwrote an elaborate system of meritorious works designed to span the gap. The Platonic curtain laid down by Augustin muted interest in matters of this world while at the same time promoting a sense of the soul's importance. In addition, a profound sense of fallenness, drawn from the original sin doctrine with its genetically acquired guilt, led earnest Christians into heroic programs of personal rigor in piety with little confidence of success. The result: a stifling of hope.

It was release from captivity to this system that fired such enthusiasm in Luther and

optimistic confidence in Calvin. Notice how rediscovery of the gospel in the Reformation and the accompanying high view of the Bible reinforced the biblical world view. God was not only at the center of understanding, but now He was intimately involved in human need and active in His universe. A new sense of intimacy developed. Luther recognized that Platonic dualism was incompatible with the biblical teachings, and vacillated on this subject in his teaching. He toyed with a break but the consequences seemed too unsettling for a movement already seriously at odds with tradition. By halting before this threshold he quietened forces that threatened to produce religious revolution at a time when he wanted only reform. Return to man as a unified creature would have bridged the dichotomy between soul and body, restoring legitimacy to bodily concerns, and by extension to the whole of nature as a God-ordained sphere of exploration.

Augustin's neo-Platonic spirit held even greater power over Calvin. As a result the early Reformation showed no more friendly face to nature than among Catholics. Luther, for example, firmly criticized Copernicus. Ironically, it often fell to sceptics to begin serious exploration of the natural world. Michael Servetus fled as a refugee to Calvin's Geneva from Catholic authorities pursuing him for the unitarian heresy, but even more for his banned autopsies on human bodies. Geneva's Protestants burned him for the same offense. Today Servetus is recognized as predecessor to Harvey in discovery of blood circulation in the body. Neither Luther nor Calvin gave serious attention to the study of nature.

However, the more open spirit of the Protestant mind eventually opened doors to legitimize exploration of nature as honorable before God. As is common knowledge, the early development of modern science took place in the hands of believing Christians.

In addressing the reformers at this point we violate the sense of chronology. Three centuries prior to Luther, western Christianity passed through a philosophical paradigm change that released the Renaissance, through it creating much of the modern mentality. One of few men to bring real change to the course of world events was Thomas Aquinas (1225-

1274). A prodigious genius, he is reported to have dictated four books concurrently to stenographers, rotating among them, one following another. His first concern was to build a successful bridge to Islam. The Crusades had been a failure and Arabs continued their rule of Sicily. A Turkish threat was gathering. Discussions about Islam and Christianity ended uniformly in impasse, but if common ground could be found, perhaps it could lead to better results. The process ended in an anointing of reason.

Drawing from Aristotle, Aquinas constructed a bi-level thesis resting on natural theology. It worked this way. Although man fell morally in Eden, his intellect remained intact. The evidence, unbelievers, even the infidel Muslim, can reason as skillfully as the Christian; hence the intellect remains a working faculty in all men, drawn from the image of God. Aristotle's doctrine of reason as evidence of divinity resident in man is apparent.

In effect, the triumph of Aquinas' teaching overcame the previous thousand years of Augustinian theocentricity, and reason became elevated to a fully legitimate means of exploring both nature and meaning.

His method proved a dismal failure with the Islamic enterprise, but provided for the first time a mechanism for pursuing truth that was within the control of man. Revealed truth, while honored in certain ways, became subsidiary. While the new approach helped to give nature a more honored place, it paved the way for much that is destructive. As Francis Schaeffer observed years ago, from this incomplete doctrine of the Fall man's intellect emerged autonomous. Truth and understanding now could be pursued apart from the Scriptures, operating in a new anonymous zone.

We can trace the impact. In art, Giotto (1267-1337) breaks the Byzantine mold by painting natural backgrounds for his paintings as nature actually appears. Dante (1265-1321) begins to write in a natural communicative style. By 1450 the central figures in paintings have shed symbolic stylizing to reproduce real human persons set in real landscapes. The trickle of naturalism was becoming a flood. Raphael's The School of Athens, now on a wall in the

Vatican, presents pagan classical thought, balancing a compensating painting on the opposite wall that portrays the Catholic Church. In the midst of his School of Athens stand two men that represent the shifting center of gravity: Plato stands with hand pointing upward, Aristotle points to the earth. A pluralism has found entry that will not be denied.

Suddenly theologians, artists, architects, writers, and new scientists find themselves confronted with an old problem: How is unity reconciled with diversity set free? Already some three and a half centuries earlier medieval scholastics had wrestled with the problem of universals versus particulars. The biblical world view rests upon unity. One God brings into existence one world. All things flow from Him, the central Source. The structure of truth is an ordered one. There are no competitors. Genuine knowledge comes from understanding Him, identifying His truths, and applying them to life. Man's wholeness as a person reflects the essence of the Creator who brought him into existence. What counts as real occurs at the center. Therefore the flow of learning is deductive, not only in intellectual terms but relationally. "In him we live and breathe and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This kind of thinking fills life and events with meaning and vests existence with a sense of destiny.

In contrast, the opposite begins with particulars. One by one man encounters the specific elements of his environment and begins to assemble and assign them places. The classification of particulars continues until certain laws can be drawn up that describe the patterns observed. Amassing elements and experiences leads to postulation of general statements which can then be tested for verification. Nothing can be regarded as certain, for the possibility always exists that a new discovery will alter any currently accepted position. Eventually, however, such a process leads to generalizations that explain, or even maneuver the components to make them useful. An intoxicating sense of power rewards the diligent practitioner. Here we readily recognize the prime elements of Lord Bacon's scientific method. And we see all too easily how it can cut itself free from anything transcendent to gain certification from its successes in controlling nature.

What scholastics used as fodder for debate has today become a watershed issue between biblical religion and science as now practiced. Nature is broken free from faith to practice its skills on an autonomous basis.

So what is the plight of the believer immersed in an all-pervasive system based on such premises? It is exactly this question that forces us to face reality. Our search for resolution must in fact acknowledge both deductive and inductive elements as well as the contribution of reason. But these are no mere intellectual exercises: they are the controlling issues of life. Ambivalence here already is plunging our church into cognitive conflict that challenges every element of the faith that through God's grace brought us together as a people.

A crisis of major proportions is confronting us. Already it is painfully present. Our youth are growing up in a world oriented to currents very different from the Bible-centered ones of our childhood. In many cases we no longer understand them nor do we communicate successfully to the world of values many of them inhabit. And we are paying a frightful price as some of them leave our doors, first in head and heart, then in body. And we see them no more.

We shall extend this discussion to incorporate issues of a scientifically-oriented world in passage to the Postmodern mode.

### **Postmodernism, Science, and Faith**

Each year brings another annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, a nationwide American Theological group, only a few of whom are Adventists. As in the past several years, a major subject will be the rapid development of Postmodernism and its impact on religion. This is clearly a prime coming subject, for already Postmodernism is exerting major influence on many elements of life, including religion, law, medicine, government, and social activities, where often it functions under different rubrics. Postmodernism is a direct reaction against much of the foundation on which modern science rests and promises to offer

a major challenge to both science and faith.

At present, science is the prevailing force in modern life. Its public standing, while challenged in part by conservative religious groups, is clearly little damaged, the winner in a struggle over the past two centuries since the Enlightenment. Modernity, with science its most viable agent, almost universally controls the universities, the media, both electronic and print, and a large block of mainstream religion, both Catholic and Protestant. Postmodernism directly challenges both secular science and biblically based Christianity.

It will profit us to spend a few minutes reviewing the emergence of rationalistic science from earlier religion and how its impact on modernity developed. One of Christian faith's foremost principles maintains that although the physical world is real and to be approached rationally, its elements are of uneven value. Unchallenged above all stands God, the Creator, who became our Redeemer as well, and is the infinite ruler for eternity. In lesser place are His creatures, angels and humans, who both are vested with unique powers, followed by the natural world. The first task of the Scriptures is to sustain the connection between God and man, which includes implications for nature as well. Although the Creator became incarnate and forfeited His life in a redeeming act for us, in no sense does He abandon His superior standing. The Christian view of reality is guided by these principles.

At present, hierarchies are distinctly in disfavor, but any serious reading of the Scriptures confirms what we have observed. Furthermore, like it or not, we live in fact in a hierarchal world where distinctions of quality, size, strength, relative skills, complexity, and other elements are shaping everyday life.

The reason that hierarchies are unappreciated is that at certain points they have been destructive and oppressive.

The revolt that rocked Europe in the late 1700s began with release of pent-up tensions, of resentment against class and privilege that began in France, but spread widely throughout much of the world. Its wrath lay against political monarchy and privilege and churchly

replication of that pattern in ecclesiastical circles. Kings, noblemen, and bishops were marched to the guillotine while all Europe trembled.

Such violent rejection of privilege in political and religious circles coincided with a rapid rise in the standing of science, which was lauded as the wave of the future that would confer upon all the good life. Furthermore, science's benefits could be assigned to all mankind without reference to standing, power, or privilege. Science became identified as a deliverer, an agent that would level the playing field among us all. In short, it was a part of the great revolution that brought down the Old Regime.

Scientists were advanced to preferred status as apostles of liberty and heroes to banish the superstitious, formerly called religion. A dozen significant scientists rose to fame and influence in the revolutionary period and Napoleonic era that followed. Serious efforts followed to break the influence of the Bible and all things of faith. Man now had within his power the ability to control nature, banish superstition, and triumph in the process of rationality. This represented a change in perspective from earlier scientists, most of whom thought of themselves at work exploring God's great universe.

From 1800 onward science has enjoyed political and social support in its attempt to drive irrationality (read the supernatural), subjectivity, and piety from its realm. The impact of this determination is readily apparent in our modern world, but the power of political anti-religious feelings that gave modern secularity birth is little appreciated even among Adventists. It is no accident that LaPlace's quip to Napoleon about not needing the divine factor, the prevailing deism among those who founded most of the world's republics, and the decision to make sure that government does not support religion, all these reflect the displacement of religion around 1800 with rational scientific investigation.

The reaction of many Christians has been to demonize science. It had taken Christian insights; for example, reality as cohesive and orderly, confidence in the human capacity to explore nature rationally, a sense of overall optimism regarding final conclusions, and beliefs

the world is at the service of man, hence it is legitimate to make it serve, and used these to war against basic Christian convictions, i.e. responsibility before a sovereign Creator God, acknowledgment of His will in every human exercise, and the legitimacy of His right to judgment over every human decision. Essentially God was excluded.

The impact not only was felt in Europe, but even in the wilderness that was then America. The U.S. census of 1810 polled the citizens about church membership. Only 7% reported belonging to any church. Although the Adventist movement arose somewhat later, it is to our credit that from earliest days we have refused to demonize science, despite our dedicated opposition to its secularized, rationalized elements. Adventists scarcely participated in the great fundamentalist debates of the 1920s, although we concur with four of the five fundamentals under debate. As an exception we must here note the zealous work of George McCready Price, who pioneered popular opposition to the evolutionary promise.

We have noted the fall from grace of hierarchies in public opinion. We must acknowledge that in many cases hierarchies were inhumane, oppressive, and by today's standards, grossly unfair. But to condemn hierarchies per se, no matter how accepted it is in contemporary life, is to go too far. Benevolent hierarchies in fact provide us with some of our finest benefits, as for instance a loving family with children, or even the setting of a hospital, where clearly-defined levels of skill and authority, in the presence of mutual responsibility, combine to fulfill even desperate needs.

By implementing Christian foundational concepts while jettisoning those parts that most directly involved God, modern science excelled in certain areas while leaving vacuums elsewhere. The apparent success and building optimism that characterized the enterprise drew such public acclaim that challenges from biblically-oriented Christians could be successfully dismissed. To cite an expression from Huston Smith, MIT's sterling contributor to study of the philosophy of science, by using science as its most powerful implement, modernity "collapsed hierarchy to its this-worldly base" (JAAR 58:4, p. 655). Science's ability both to anticipate

coming occurrences and induce cause and effect to serve to human advantage won the day. In general, God was seldom wholly denied, but was excluded from any role in the organized exploration of nature, pressing Him ever further into the periphery. The Catholic Church's clumsy handling of Copernicus and Galileo, both men later affirmed by science, along with Protestant passivity toward nature and the Orthodox church's mystifying of nature, coalesced to stultify effective Christian witness and open a clear field where rationalistic modernity took command. The result: the modern world in which we live. Today matters of highest concern are horizontal rather than vertical, reversing the case of previous ages.

But science is singularly ill-fitted by method to deal with verticals such as values, meanings, purposes, qualities, and relationships between persons, all of which are undeniably essential components of successful living. Inadequacies in these areas prevent the construction of a really viable scientific world view. Riding the crest of spectacular success in many areas has to this point enabled science to disregard such matters, although the beginning of a soft-science branch in the 1850s bears witness to recognition of vulnerability in these areas. Thinkers like Emile Durkheim, pioneer in sociology, and Anton Mesmer, whose explorations laid foundations for psychology, sought to close a void in understanding the human plight. In methodology both Durkheim and Mesmer adhered to rationalistic principles already dominant in other fields, in effect reducing man to an object to be examined, analyzed, and made the theme of hypothesis and testing. Such soft-science has not succeeded, however, in dealing with the inner needs that drive humans to the ultimate questions of origins, self-identity, purpose, destiny, and personal relationship, both with God and one another. Instead, science and technology, hardly controlled by moral barriers, have become servants to the most unworthy demagogues and their opponents, providing ever-more-deadly and sophisticated arsenals designed to extinguish human life quickly and efficiently. This role, especially as exercised in World War II, but also in succeeding conflicts, has significantly damaged science's early image as man's benefactor and deliverer.

It may be purely coincidental, but simultaneously with the decline of public confidence in the salvific nature of science we have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of the biblical world view expressed in the evangelical revival and the related Pentecostal movements. We should note that these movements, although diverse in important ways, are led by strong supernaturalists who represent the Bible in absolute terms. In the last 50 years they have grown to hundreds of millions. Although many attempt compromise between Darwinist theory and the biblical account of origins, they, along with Adventists, represent a formidable challenge to secular science from the Godward side.

As a matter of interest, following the 1920s mainline, largely liberal, churches, since Teilhard de Chardin joined by Catholics, came to terms with secular science, quieting to what Moltmann has described as "peaceful coexistence [of theology and science] on the basis of mutual irrelevance." (Cited by H. H. Oliver, Relatedness: Essays in Metaphysics and Theology. Macon: Mercer U. P., 1984, p. 33).

This brief sketch has attempted to outline the events that enabled secular, rationalistic forms of scientific inquiry to assume almost universal standing in modernity-the world of the last two centuries. Careful surveys suggest that this form of science now enjoys the firm support of some 40 percent of the population in developed western cultures. Another 35-40 percent seems ambivalent or takes a syncretic position. Approximately 20-25 percent of North Americans report themselves to be knowledgeable, committed adherents to conservative Christian faith with a high view of the Scriptures and a thoroughgoing belief in God's supernatural activities in our universe.

As now largely constructed, modernism holds that science should be practiced following certain presuppositions such as these: reality is an organized system that can be explored and properly understood through reason and a secular scientific methodology. The world-indeed the universe-is to be interpreted in purely physical terms accessible by empirical examination, analysis, and testing. As part of the universe, humans, although self-determining units, can be

studied by similar methods. The course of human history is one of progress built on science and reason.

What we are missing, of course, is not only reference to God, but to any quality beyond the limits of the scientific method. Reductionist method prevails. For Newton the heavenly bodies became machines. For Descartes animals were machines. For Hobbes society is a machine. For Pavlov and B. F. Skinner human behavior is mechanical.

We must recognize, however, that not every scientist functioning by the accepted rules is persuaded that the scientific method can successfully deal with all that is important. Substantial numbers of scientists are committed Christians.

As currently practiced, the scientific enterprise robs the world of transcendence, leaving a gap that humanity will not indefinitely endure. Life is rendered comfortable but faceless-no certain past or future, only an existential present. Naturalism's promise that nothing lacks a material component exists, evolution's idea that the higher is derived from the lower, and the concept of progress that lowers hope to a this-world future, all contribute to the current aridity and purposelessness that characterizes contemporary thought. The fact that each of these premises directly contradicts a specific biblical teaching guarantees enduring hostility between Bible-oriented Christians and certain elements of the present scientific corpus of beliefs.

To compound the difficulty, failure to address intrinsic and normative values, purpose, final meanings, and similar qualities, when coupled with claims to an exclusive privilege now perceived as arrogant, are building backlash against science.

After reviewing elements in the impact of contemporary science on modern life, we turn to Postmodernism. By consciously coming to contemporary science from the direction of religious faith and social factors I have overstressed the idea of science as monolith. Such clearly is not the case. Although the overall direction of movement is outlined, sharp adjustments, often accompanied by heated differences, are not uncommon within the

scientific community. Striking examples come to mind, such as the new physics of Einstein and Heisenberg. Others are the telling critiques by Michael Polanyi and especially Thomas S. Kuhn's book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. These critiques assume the qualities of internal attacks on science's claim to objectivity. In taking this tack Kuhn especially echoes a theme long promoted by British philosophers, that actual objectivity is unattainable. The reason: any project must be conceived, planned, executed, and its results interpreted through the mind of the investigator, which denies him the objectivity he seeks.

We must raise the question of why an abstract theoretical movement such as Postmodernism deserves attention. Creative thinking seems remote to the typical person, something postulated and debated by impractical academics. Although this may carry a particle of truth, it is a gross stereotype we hold at our own peril. The biblical observation, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," is tellingly true in this case. Careful tracing of past events reveals an unchanging pattern that can be summarized, "Thinking drives action."

Romantic theorizing by Rousseau and Voltaire lay in the beginning of the French Revolution. Marx's ponderous books outlined a vision of class warfare that precipitated the Bolshevik revolution and even today provides patterns followed in several countries. Nietzsche's talk about the Death of God and arrival of superhumanity inspired Hitler: the results are well known. John Dewey led America's public schools to value-free education: Dr. Timothy Leary's presentations on the virtues of a psychedelic drug-induced state gave substance to a major social movement that remains one of our most serious problems. The order is correct: idea first, followed by action.

At certain points changes lead to a massive shift in the ideas that drive people. The early Christian message was one of these, leading to the end of the classical world. The rise of modern science is another of what Thomas Kuhn describes as a paradigm change. Kuhn's term now has leaped the verbal fence and is used widely for any change of major proportions.

Paradigm changes normally occur when a previous civilization has run its course. For the

past 200 years modernism has prevailed, although its early roots run 300 years further back to the Renaissance. Being modern is today preeminently desirable. Has its time come to be replaced? Many are persuaded yes. In fact the process of change is well under way.

Nothing is gained by alarmist talk, but we must become aware that change of major proportions is under way, change that will confront both science and religion with serious problems. Its center lies in epistemology.

While modernity rejected the biblical world view with its God above and creation below, postmodernism rejects all world views. Its source is traced to Nietzsche's argument that any knowledge of things as they actually exist is impossible. Gary Land's description catches the essence, "What we think of as knowledge is a human creation, an illusion, or artistic construct. The language through which we express our knowledge is a self-contained world entirely separate from external reality and purely arbitrary in its formation. What we call truth, therefore, is a human invention." (Gary Land, "The Challenge of Post-modernism," Dialogue 8:1 (1996), p. 5).

Such an understanding of reality stands in shocking conflict with both the biblical and modernist approaches. It is saying that what we describe as real actually is something created in our mind, fully apart from the external. Reality, then is subjective-something wholly within the self.

Steeped as we are by centuries of belief in real external objects, which through the senses we detect, we find Nietzsche's idea absurd. However, he marshals a series of arguments as evidence supporting his position.

Added to this is Heidegger's argument that because humans can think only as we reduce impressions to words, true reality resides in the language we use to think. Therefore we are limited to understanding only those things we can correlate with words. Since words are the sole medium of reality, we become captives to language. This idea was promoted for decades by a nineteenth century group called the Vienna Circle and among British thinkers as well.

Most of us find this kind of thinking contrary to experience, but Postmodernism is built firmly on these premises. Notice that it transfers discussion of what is real to the realm of language. Two contemporary French theorists have become foremost proponents of this system, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

Postmodernism is more often described as an attitude tied to a few foundational principles than a philosophical system or world view. In fact it rejects all world views, for a world view is taken to be an objective report of the way the world is, but as all knowledge is internal, molded into language, no true account of anything outside these parameters can be.

We see that Postmodernism rejects modern science with its insistence on material reality, but it rejects also the biblical epistemology.

Postmodernism's foundational thesis is that each person creates reality within his or her own mind, that any idea of an outward reality is false. Note that each individual is busily creating reality for himself. For this reason there can never be a common reality in which all can participate. Huston Smith's comparison with a kaleidoscope is helpful. He writes, "It offers us reality as kaleidoscopic. With every turn of the wheel of time and place, the kaleidoscope revolves and its pieces gestalt anew. Beyond these endlessly shifting gestalts there is no appeal, and as far as we can tell, nothing." (Huston Smith, "Postmodernism and the Study of Religion" (JAAR 58:4, p. 660).

A bit of thought demonstrates a certain affinity between Postmodern concepts and Thomas Kuhn's argument that all knowledge is colored by subjective mental factors, therefore true objectivity lies beyond our reach. Postmodernism has carried the idea beyond Kuhn to deny all objective reality, but claims Kuhn as a contributor.

With the premise that objective truth is impossible, that reality is an internal construct, we come to the ultimate subjectivity. The only possible end is that absolutes cannot exist. This appears as part of the ever-floating menu of personalized reality creations. Since no absolute can exist, there is no ground on which any person can judge any other person's personal

reality to be at fault. This thesis has led Postmodernism to latch firmly to the non-judgmentalism which for almost a century has been the prime virtue espoused by western society, but to defend it on different grounds-not because personal dignity requires that we respect opinions and acts that differ from ours, but now because no norm can exist to evaluate the rightness of a reality being created in another's mind. The key to understanding Postmodernism is in grasping the fact that it represents total subjectivity. The idea of scientific objectivity, the reality of external things is rejected. So too is any idea of right or wrong in a theological or moral sense.

A third area is Postmodernism's concept of cultural bias. Any effort toward logical consistency is rejected as bias produced by western culture, generally designated European. The fact that scientific methodology seeks to find consistency is cited as prima facie evidence of an oppressive western imperialism. Postmodern thought's violent opposition to European culture rises from its claim that because the European culture has imposed itself on all other ethnic and non-European groups, so Postmodernism must come to their rescue.

Following this premise, Postmodernists have moved rapidly to the front of aggressive efforts for social change to oppose what they describe as oppressive power exerted by the majority to the detriment of minorities. The program assumes political leadership in an effort to counter every element of European culture. Singled out are white males, who are universally denounced for abuse of women and brutish aggression. Many of the leaders of radical feminist groups come from Postmodernist circles. European culture is accused of destroying the environment, which leads to Postmodernist involvement in ecology-sensitive movements. "Act Up" and the "Gay and Lesbian Alliance" are under direct leadership of Postmodernists who appear in political settings to demand recognition of their alternate lifestyle. Postmodernist gay/lesbian leaders make presentations at the American Academy of Religion meetings as well as other forums of public thought and policy.

Postmodernist projects now are effective in a wide range of social activities, from

opposition to achievement tests in schools (a low score can be seen as critical of the person), defense of political correctness codes in education, government, and industry (critical observations must be prohibited), revision of school curricula to endorse Postmodernist concepts, and almost all areas of social life. Many times legitimate efforts for reform are captured to become vehicles of Postmodernist perspective.

A major effort is under way to transfer Postmodernist theory from academic circles where its principal proponents are found to the general public by way of the media, particularly entertainment. Other special interests include promotion of Asian pantheistic concepts, alternative medicine, homeopathy, psychedelic experimentation, and the concept of reality as dualism in suspense, such as yin/yang, good and evil as two sides of one united whole, and the inseparable character of the investigator and that being investigated, which is marketed as New Age holism.

The Postmodernist impact will fall upon Christian ministry as the public increasingly accepts subjectivity as the valid approach to truth. The locus of Christianity will migrate from biblical teachings to personal experience with social overtones. Biblical teachings remaining will become politicized, as illustrated in theologian Elaine Pagel's best-selling book, The Gnostic Gospels, where she writes, "We can see, paradoxically, that the doctrine of the bodily resurrection also serves an essential political function: it legitimizes the authority of certain men [the apostles] who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches" (p. 6). Other challenges may be anticipated, such as an increase of oriental mystical influences in the West, and a diminished willingness by believers to witness due to negative social pressure identified with multicultural acceptance. As this example illustrates, "It is morally not possible to go out into the world and say to devout human beings, we believe we know God and we are right; you believe you know God and you are wrong" (Wm. Cantwell Smith, Religious Diversity, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p. 13).

Any testable truth gauged by evidence and reason is rejected under the Postmodernist

rubric. Objective truth-based religion is to be replaced by subjective "spirituality."

Long ago the Christian church was threatened by radical subjectivism, second and third century gnosticism. Through intense struggle Christ's church survived by affirming the literal nature of the world, and the truths of the Bible literally understood as written, rejecting mystical interpretations. This witness must be borne again if our message is to remain loyal to Christ, His salvation, and His coming kingdom, even as we minister in a world whose very understanding of reality becomes distorted, creating higher barriers to the gospel.