

The Playing Field has Changed!

Navigating a changing world and culture for Jesus followers/Disciples

The Specifics of the Changed Landscape and Playing Field

Opening Questions – How has the culture changed in your lifetime? What do you “lament” or miss (in culture) about your past life experience? What do you wish would be “real” now that is no longer part of our 21st century world? Does a changing world scare or intimidate or confuse you? How would you categorize or communicate your personal response to what you are experiencing in life?

Main Issues in Summary

- “Christianity” (and “Christian” specifically) are culturally seen as “bad words,” words that are loaded and subsequently lost to prevailing cultural pressures. We find ourselves increasingly separated from culture, we’ve lost our voice and we’ve lost our ability to communicate the world.
- The Culture does not care about the Gospel. In fact, culture is getting increasingly hostile toward Christian (or orthodox, historical Biblical teaching/values). Faith embracing people are being ridiculed in culture. Here is an article from the Washington Post on how “Catholics” are being “attacked” in the Senate https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anti-catholic-bigotry-is-alive-in-the-us-senate/2019/01/17/eoadoa14-1a8f-11e9-8813-cb9dec761e73_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5dca2d434bcd. Here is also a link to the Second Lady, Vice President Pence’s wife who teaches at a Christian school being “attacked” for her allegiance to Biblical, traditional values (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46898143>).
- The culture “knows” Jesus – knows about God but has absorbed Kingdom of God teaching and realities into the cultural story (where both pluralism and syncretism reigns).
- For many of us who trust in Jesus, we appreciate the significance of church history especially how the Reformation “launched” a movement that led to many of our denominations. In culture, people don’t care about what happened in the 16th century – for much of the public they don’t even know who the Vice President is, who won the Civil War or who the USA battled in World War II. Pop culture sets the agenda of people’s knowledge and revisionist history is redirecting our children’s exposure to broad and sweeping issues like worldview, values, etc. This also has an impact on the reality that people’s “denominational loyalty” has diminished (if not disappeared).
- Culture has redefined family and transitioned the roles of gender identification.
- “Community” has been built not upon shared values but entertainment and social media.
- Ancient Roman (Era of Emperors and Pax Romana) values of “Bread and circus and choice” reigns – John Cavanagh in his excellent book, *Following Christ in a Consumeristic Culture* entitles these realities as providing us with a “carnavalesque” milieu.

Discussion Question – How does culture attempt to “distract” the average person from viewing, engaging and acting on significant issues in our lives?

- The language of culture is narcissistic, consumeristic, secularistic, and leaning toward relativistic truth-telling – everyone sees himself or herself as the center of the universe
- Popularity reigns as a leading value – Culture has fallen into Idolatry as we have “idolized” talented individuals and contributed to the deification of their popularity
- WE are ruled by brands – whether it is the brand of Political parties or ideologies, Corporations, NFL, Google, among others.
- Globalization and Pluralism as well as the rubric of acceptance without judgment or polarization reigns.
- Multiculturalism as an emerging worldview has “leveled the playing field” of the prevailing stories or narratives of history. Goodness and Evil are no longer stand-alone values (the decline of an adherence or even acknowledgment of universal truths) but are now interpreted in the context of people groups (relativistic)
- Spirituality has been individualistically redefined. Below is more on the phenomenon of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is a faith system in which:

- Religion operates in the background of daily life.
- There is no specific alienation from the church. Religious faith and living just operates as a part of the “wallpaper of life.”
- Religious living operates in a substantially socially weak position, meaning that other life priorities (e.g. sports programs, educational endeavors, social relationships, even church activities) are more important than one’s spiritual development.
- MTD has a very pragmatic view of spirituality. In other words, “if it makes me a better person” than religion is acceptable.
- MTD spirituality is individualistic, instinctively autonomous and self-directed.
- Morality is seen through the lens of specified rules and boundaries that deem a person religiously acceptable. Even so, the reality of MTD demonstrates that adherents still view moral/ethical living standards minimalistically. In the study done by author Christian Smith (who coined the phrase, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and also led a national study of youth and religion that became of the foundation of these conclusions) most people remarked that one of their main goals in life was “just not be a jerk”.
- MTDs believe it is good enough to be moderately religious as long as a person is not a fanatic.
- MTD significantly buy into something called, “life postponement.” One student in the study remarked, “I’ll get serious about religion before I die...now I’m just trying to get laid.”
- Most individuals who partook in this study were inarticulate about faith and are very “compartmentalized” in practicing their faith if they practice it at all. Some followed the mantra, “God doesn’t require much of you...if you want to follow him, that’s OK...if you blow it, and he’ll forgive you.”
- The Moralistic Therapeutic Deists Creed - *“God exists and watches over the world; he wants people to be good, nice and fair; the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself; God doesn’t need to be involved in your life unless you need him to solve a problem; good people go to heaven when they die”.*
- Moralists believe that the goal of life is to be a good person, nice, kind, respectful, responsible, successful, to fulfill your potential, and be a person others like.
- A Therapeutic God is one that makes a person feel good, happy, and at peace. This “god” is very subjective will not concentrate on sin or anything bad in life.
- A theological Deist believes that God is distant and not involved in daily life. This “god” designs life and leaves us alone...is more of a Cosmic Butler where the worst thing God can do is not provide his blessings to us. The reason things are going bad in the world is that god is on vacation.
- The end result is a sort of “smoothie spirituality”...spirituality defined not Biblically, religiously, institutionally, or from the foundation of orthodoxy but rather as a blend of divergent spiritual systems that underscore radical individualism, subjective morality, a non-biblical theistic worldview and autonomy.
- The Imperative Antidote to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is Biblical Theism and Discipleship. The Christian faith professes that God’s presence soaks the world and that God calls us to love Him with everything we are and have AND to love people. “Morals” or “Values” don’t appear in the Bible, but Jesus does. God calls us to incarnate Jesus (the be living presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit). Nowhere does God promise that we will have a “feel good” life nor does God promote any type of consumeristically-driven dream. God’s dream is community - oneness with Him and with each other which is the reality of the Kingdom of God as Biblically defined.
- There is a REAL need for theological sophistication in the Body of Christ. Disciples not only are recipients of the grace of God but the edict to “follow” Jesus and to grow to maturity in our knowledge of what we believe.

Discussion Question – Do you see Moralistic Therapeutic Deism “alive” in your circle of relationships? Do you see it in those professing Christianity and/or a belief in God? What would be an “antidote” to “MTD?”

- The importance of Knowledge, fact, absolute truth, even the scientific method has been replaced by personal experience and individualistic perception.
- Truth has been replaced by pluralism (because you can't believe something that offends anyone).
- The stories of our bible are NOT known by anyone.
- Christianity has lost battle for cultural attention and is rapidly losing its place in public discourse.
- Culture has convinced Christians that talking about faith is abusive or bigoted or not sensitive.
- Privatizing of faith has become even more prevalent of a problem than we even suspect.

***Looking at the "Playing Field" - A Necessary Clarification
Post-Modernity, Post-Christendom and Post-Church/Institutional Culture,
Post-Truth and Secularism***

1. Postmodernity

"I want you to invest your lives not in keeping the old ship afloat but in designing and building and sailing the new ship for new adventures in a new time in history, as intrepid followers of Jesus Christ."

The word "postmodernism" has been bantered about in many contexts.

What the term indicates is that a previous cultural and philosophic synthesis, 'modernism', is coming to an end, and something else is budding to take its place.

Because none of us can know exactly what will shape the future, it is convenient to speak of postmodernism: the philosophical system, which follows modernism. For some, the words 'postmodernism' and 'emerging culture' are substantially interchangeable.

For the most part, the postmodern philosophy resists a unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanation.

It is true that it is not a monolithic movement...post-modernity is notoriously nebulous.

A. Post-modernity is a move toward a new understanding of reality.

1. A respect for diversity and a celebration of the specific or narrow at the expense of the universal. There is a specific upholding of the individual over against the community.
2. A rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method, which provided the intellectual foundation for the modern attempt to construct a better world.
3. Whereas modernism tried to elevate human beings into God's place, postmodern theory seeks to destroy or deconstruct the very place and attributes of God.
4. At its heart, postmodernism is negative. It is the critique of, and the quest to move beyond modernism.
5. Postmodernity embraces all traditions. There is no sense of orthodoxy because every philosophical and/or religious system seems to have some validity. Pluralism is the mantra of our time.
6. There is incredulity toward metanarratives. In contrast to modernity, postmodernism repudiates any appeal to Reality or Truth. Any attempt to adhere to metanarratives that define and legitimate Reality are denounced as oppressive.
7. Meta-narratives are considered as human constructs – fictive devices through which we impose order on history and make it subjective to us.
8. The postmodern individual faces life and society with suspicion rather than trust. There has been a movement from a basic optimism about the capacities of human reason, governmental or social strategies and scientific achievement, to shape the world for the general advancement of human society.
9. Both modernism and postmodernism are largely nontheistic; both either reject theism overtly or affirm agnosticism. Modernists and postmodernists are united in their philosophical naturalism. They deny the objective existence of God and the supernatural, and take the material universe to be all there is.
10. Postmodernism represents a questioning of the Enlightenment project and the foundational assumptions upon which it was built, namely, that knowledge is certain, objective and inherently good.

It argues that there is no single worldview.

11. Postmodernity is deliberately post-rational. It proposes that culture is now a “carnival of worldview options and consumer-directed faiths”. Everything is out there for tasting and consuming.
12. Postmodern thinking is promoting a culture of incoherent posturing. In this sense, humans play with the truth of the day, shake them about, and try them on like funny hats.
13. It is a culture of multiphrenia where the individual is split into a multiplicity of self-investments. This mindset finds itself unable to enter into relationships of intimacy and commitment. The postmodern self loves to move on – to the next game, to the next show, to the next relationship. It also leads to moral paralysis as everyone tries to keep all options open. Moral discourse is seen as a game.

B. Much of the Church as we know it took shape in the age of Modernity.

- Modernity was born out of the fertile ground of the Enlightenment.
- The Enlightenment followed on the heels of the institutionalism and structure of Aristotelian philosophy, which upheld the supremacy of the created order.
- The Enlightenment reacted to that order and argued that truth and reality moves outside of the structured order and resided primarily in the individual mind of humanity.
- Modernity moved truth deeper into the mind by proposing that reason based upon empirical observation was the only way to understand reality.

C. Modernity was built upon the following assumptions:

1. Conquest and control – modern people dedicated themselves to controlling people, results, risks, economics, experiments, profit margins, variables, nature, even the weather.
2. The age of the machine – mechanization brought with it a reduction of the human spirit and the feeling that human beings were only “cogs in the machine” of the world.
3. The age of analysis – thinking and analyzation led to marginalization of other forms of thoughts – imaginations, intuition, systems thinking, etc. The power of the mind to understand reality reigned supreme.
4. The age of secular science at the expense of mystery. Modernity was no longer preoccupied with the supernatural...it was delighted with the natural, material, secular. Mystery was set aside for objectivity. Empirical observation emerged as the only proof of truth.
5. The age of absolute objectivity and the assumption that what is still unknown is ultimately knowable. The highest faith one could have was faith in the unlimited potential of human reason.
6. The age of organization. Modernity was built upon Aristotelean philosophy which placed truth within structures, orders and institutions.
7. The age of individualism. Humans are free from social constraint and connection. It is a period of the ultimate authority of One.
8. The age of Protestantism and institutional religion.
9. The age of consumerism.
10. Modernity was sold out to a belief in progress.
11. Modernity banked on the self-assuredness of man – homo autonomous
12. Modernity was founded on the emergence of science, scientific method,
Modernity believed in scientism (science if ultimate form of revelation and knowledge), technicism (control and knowledge is dependent upon technological omnipotence of humanity), economism (raising our standard of living is the ultimate human goal). Faith is set aside for rational explanation of the universe.
13. Modernity survived on hype (even better than the real thing) and simulated reality (cool whip society, Disneyland culture).

Discussion Question – Ok, what do you think? How do you see post-modern philosophy impacting culture? The church? Your understanding of life?

Premodern Era *gradually* → **Modern Era** *gradually* → **“Postmodern” (Ultramodern) Era**

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| Truth is knowable | Truth is knowable | Truth is relative or created by an individual or community. |
| History follows a pattern and is divinely ordained, and linear | History follows a pattern with no outside purpose, and linear | Creation of new histories based on the interpreter's choices and background (same with theology). |
| Community Values | Individual Rights | Individual Rights, including deciding religion, reality, identity, and truth for one's self. |
| Causes with Purposes | Causes, no Purposes | Causes and Purposes whatever one wants them to be. |
| Language and Writing Referential | Language and Writing Referential (as long as it is naturalistic) | Language and Writing subjective and meaning found in the reader, not author's intent |
| Man is dependent | Man is autonomous (or nature dependent) | Man is autonomous |
| Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Nobility | Rat-Race, “American Dream,” social mobility | Hedonism, Nihilism, “if it feels good do it.” |
| Social Hierarchy | Egalitarian Democracy | Egalitarian Democracy |
| Everything Emanates from God | Search for complete materialist system | Materialist system or whatever system makes sense to you. |
| Not all knowledge positive | Knowledge inherently positive | Can we really know anything? |
| Social Conformity | Social “progress” through social engineering, technology etc... | “Diversity” and “Pluralism” |
| Religion part of government | Secular (separation of church and state) | Generally secular, or syncretistic (mix and match) “spirituality.” |
| Universe is Rational apart from humanity | Universe is Rational apart from Humanity | Universe is whatever we perceive it to be. Is reality real? |
| Tradition, Continuity, Gradual change. | “Progress,” Rapid Change, Modern Chauvinism. | Apathy, disillusionment, meaninglessness. |

2. Post-Christendom

“In a London school a teenager with no church connections hears the Christmas story for the first time. His teacher tells it well and he is fascinated by this amazing story. Risking his friends’ mockery, after the lessons he thanks her for the story. One thing had disturbed him, so he asks: ‘Why did they give the baby a swear-word for his name?’”

When I was growing up in Detroit, Michigan in the 1950’s and 60’s, there were a few cultural realities on which we base the rhythm of our lives. One of which was that everything was closed on Sundays except local churches. You could not buy groceries, shop at department stores, look for a new car, or even go to the movies.

Everyone assumed that it was the Sabbath day...one to keep “holy” by clearing it of the mundane. In my neighborhood, everyone made his or her way to one of two local churches. You were either Roman Catholic or Lutheran. If you did not make your way to church, you hid out in your home as to not be regarded as overtly “irreligious”. Other realities included the unchallenged habits revolving around issues of faith – the recitation of the Ten Commandments in my third-grade class at Von Steuben Elementary School and the unapologetic celebration of distinctively Christian holidays. Most people that I knew could articulate a good portion of the Christian story. The meta-narrative of Christendom had been fully integrated into daily life.

Over the decades of my life, times have been changing. Christianity, though still influential in a cross-section of Western culture, is not as prevalent as it once was. The Christian story is not central in life. Christians no longer dominate the majority of people in local neighborhoods. Many people who trust and follow Jesus Christ no longer feel like they are at home in culture but now experience daily existence as more of an “exile” or aliens in a foreign land. For the first time in many centuries, Christ-followers in western culture are able to tell the story of the faith to people who have no idea of its prime content. Ignorance of Christianity is increasing and church buildings are becoming as alien as mosques or gurudwaras. This is the phenomenon that some have labeled “Post-Christendom”.

In order to understand Post-Christendom, one must have a grasp of Church history:

- Most church historians would agree that the foundation of Christendom began with the Emperor Constantine in the 4th century C.E.
- Whether Constantine’s conversion to Christianity was sincere or politically motivated will be debated for centuries to come.
- Undoubtedly, his insistence that Christianity be adopted as the imperially favored religion of the Roman Empire made a huge impact on the Church.
- His reign as Emperor was long enough to establish a history sweeping solidification of Christianity’s preferred status.
- Even with Constantine’s influential edict thrusting Christianity to the forefront, it was not until a theologian and bishop by the name of Augustine brought theological clarity and innovation that Christendom actually took shape.
- Augustine wrote prolifically and defended the Church against its earliest, substantial foes. In addition to his monumental contribution to the theology of Christendom, during the time of Augustine, the western and growing eastern expression of Christianity began to institutionalize what has become known as the “Christendom shift.”

Some of the factors in this shift included:

1. The movement of the Church from the margins of society to the center.
2. The assumption that all citizens were Christian by birth.
3. The development of a society where there was no freedom of religion.
4. The development of a society where political power was divinely authenticated.
5. Where orthodoxy was not only protected by Church leaders but by the state.
6. Where morality was legislated.
7. Infant baptism became the norm for most of the population as an obligatory incorporation into society.

8. Where clergy became separate and not equal from their counter-parts, the laity. Clergy were distinguished as “more faithful” and enjoyed the “highest calling”.
9. No distinction between the “world” and the Church.
10. No need for the world “pluralism”. Everything was united in the institution of the Church.
11. “Conversion” was a term exclusive to those individuals taking monastic orders.
12. “Evangelism” became that movement by which foreign cultures were coerced into the Church by whatever means necessary including “holy” war.
13. The Church’s role moved quickly toward maintenance and not mission.
14. Loving the enemy was replaced by the “just war” or “holy war” justification for battling the enemy.

Lesslie Newbigin, foremost theologian and Missiologist, commented about the breakdown of Christendom when he stated, “*in this phrase, I mean Christendom’s dissolution by which Christianity had become almost the folk-religion of Western Europe.*”

His clarification of the influence of Christendom is helpful,

That (Christendom) synthesis was the work of the thousand-year period during which the peoples of Western Europe, hemmed in by the power of Islam to east and south, had the Gospel wrought into the very stuff of their social and personal life, so that the whole population could be conceived of as the corpus Christianum. That conception is the background of all the Reformation theologies. They take it for granted. They are set not in a missionary situation but in this situation in which Christendom is taken for granted. This means that in their doctrines of the Church they are defining their position over against one another within the context of the corpus Christianum. They are not defusing the Church as over against a pagan world. It is not necessary to point out how profoundly this affects the structure of their thinking.

Post-Christendom is the culture that is emerging as the Christian story loses its primacy as that which shapes lives and institutions. In societies where the Christian worldview dominated for centuries, the demise of Christendom involves dramatic changes. Power structures and mindsets are changing. Cultural shifts occur as new stories are adopted and/or as skepticism rises about any or all-explanatory or culture-shaping meta-narratives. Post-Christendom is a reality that includes the following transitions:

- From center to the margins – the Christian story no longer holds a preferred place in culture.
- From majority to minority – Christian population is no longer the undisputed majority of population.
- From settlers to sojourners – Post-Christendom creates a community of people who feel that they are exiles and aliens.
- From privilege to plurality – Post-Christendom sees the inclusion of other stories and faith systems as equally valid.
- From control to witness – no longer able to coerce society, Christians now influence via witness and lifestyle.
- From maintenance to mission – with the demise of the status quo, post-Christendom wrestles with a new understanding of mission.
- From institution to movement – there is a new understanding of the power of movement and the fluidity of a non-reliance on institutionalism.

Post-Christendom has led to the deconstruction of traditional institutionalism. Not only are institutions (clubs, marriage, family, etc.) taking huge “hits” in culture, but institutions are being reconstructed within a relativism and personal preference framework.

- Marriage has been redefined from commitment to feeling/emotion
- Gender has been redefined from biology to self-perception
- Clubs have been replaced by individual acts of altruistic kindness
- Family has been redefined to mean those whom “I feel close to”
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Discussion Questions – Ok, what is your opinion about these comments regarding Post-Christendom? Is this something that you agree with or disagree with? If these realities are true, what do you suspect is the short term/long term impact on culture? The Church? Individual Jesus followers?



3. Post-Truth World

Discussion Questions – What is truth? How do we discover truth? How do Jesus followers define truth? How important is knowing truth in life? Is it vital to have a foundation of truth in one's life to live-in present-day culture? How does a person stand for truth? Is it something to be protected? Fought over?

In a post-modern world, what was once “true” is now “untrue.” Objective and observable reality can be called into question by a person's self-perception. Probably the MOST pressing example of this is the contemporary discussion of gender identity. What a person OBSERVES is not how all people will SELF-IDENTIFY. Gender identity is no longer a “binary” paradigm (in other words, one of two genders – male and female). Observable gender identity (biological) is seen in contemporary circles as that given by birth with “identity” being self-imposed and directed. Currently, as of last count, there are over 35 ways of determining gender identity. Traditional gender identity is labeled, “cisgender” which is tied to one's birth sex.

Let's not get caught up in the gender identity issue – the issue in this example is “observable and absolute” truth that has historical roots as well as spiritual overtones. What one can observe as a perceived truth is now being run through “personalized” filters and emerging as subjective, relative to the moment and individual “post-truth” (momentary but viable).

As you can imagine, the devaluing of truth and truthfulness is systemically unlivable. Oxford Dictionary compilers gave “post-truth” the honor of being the new word of the year. It is interesting that the media, which flirts with untruths, and the academy, which never hesitates to replace absolutes by postmodern relativism, have come together to give our culture a new word. Their explanation was not so much that they were coining a new word as that they were affirming a reality—a truth about the way we coddle the lie, the ultimate self-defeating statement. It's a little bit like the famous baseball player who gave conflicting statements about his drug use and defended himself with another new phrase, “I misremembered.”

We have personally witnessed the birth of a “post-truth” culture where misremembering is normal. It is not surprising that within hours of the American elections, a French television network reporting on it baptized our culture as “post logic.” Coming from the French, that is quite ironic as it was their philosophers that birthed the postmodern mindset that has jeopardized truth, meaning, and certainty and proceeded to deconstruct literature and give the reader the authority of interpretation rather than allowing the author the privilege of intent.

These two bastions of values, the academy and the media have emerged as the primary carriers of manipulation with words and repeating distortions often enough to make them into truths. They are the origin of this reality of caring not for truth but for impact and for the manipulation of all thinking. Their victory is *pyrrhic* (*a victory won at too high of a cost*).

Definition of Post-truth - Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than are appeals to emotion and personal belief. Culture willfully and justifiably conveys something false because it accomplishes a personal or end goal. The end justifies the means and the means, in effect, do not need to justify themselves.

1. Post-truth as a phenomenon is not new.
2. Post-truth is actually rebellion right from the beginning – “Can God be trusted” (see Genesis 3)
3. Truth is primarily a property of propositions where words present reality as it really is
4. Truth as an objective assertion assumed when one is the victim of a lie
5. Truth is only subjective when one has victimized others in the process and needs a fabrication.
6. Once we remove God and decide instead to play God, truth gives way to fiction

Truth is dead. We have killed it. Nietzsche thought God was dead and went with a lantern looking for Him. But he got it wrong. God was not dead, Truth was dead. We have extinguished the lantern in our halls of learning so that it is possible for a Harvard student to say, *"I can believe anything I want, so long as I don't claim it to be true."*

Think of this irony and a series of ironies. The motto of Harvard is "Veritas," meaning truth. The trustees of Harvard might want to meet and put a "post" before it. With the death of truth, the unique capability of Homo sapiens for abstract reasoning and language is now dead and all language is meaningless, reflective of one lie after another.

This day was envisioned by the ones who gave the news half a century ago. It was a media star, Malcolm Muggeridge, who became a cynic by seeing how the news was awash with lies and ultimately made his own journey to the truth in his *Jesus Rediscovered*. The first volume of his autobiography was well subtitled *A Chronicle of Wasted Years*. Having lived through political lie after lie and writing to cater to the masses, he said it powerfully:

"Yet even so, truth is very beautiful: more so I consider than justice—today's pursuit—which easily puts on a false face...wherever two or more are gathered to exercise authority, it is truth that has died, not God."

Churchill said it well:

"Truth is the most valuable thing in the world, so valuable it is often protected by a bodyguard of lies."

Andrei Sakharov, who gave the Soviets the atomic bomb, said before he died:

"I always thought the most powerful weapon in the world was the bomb. I have changed my mind. The most powerful weapon in the world is not the bomb. It is the truth."

Consider this - who are the heroes of our time? Mainly our entertainers. They who play parts and act out roles. Their lives become so bifurcated that art no longer imitates life; life now imitates art. Art is the one discipline that claims to have no boundaries.

Nietzsche himself conceded that his unwilling piety would withstand his strident philosophy. Here's what he said:

"The real truth about 'objective truth' is that the latter is a fiction. Every candidate for truth must first be expressed in language, and language is notoriously unable to get us to reality."

"Words, like a hall of mirrors, reflect only each other and in the end point to the condition of their users, without having established anything about the way things really are. Truth is the name we give to that which agrees with our own instinctive preferences. It is what we call our interpretation of the world, especially when we want to foist it upon others."

The long arm of truth has a reach beyond our will to outrun it. There is an ultimate cry for justice in every heart when wronged. Justice counts on the truth. Without those two realities, civilization will die. It is fascinating what the Bible says: "The law came through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Both were needed; the law, and therefore grace and truth. But for the follower of Jesus, there is also hope; it is that hope expressed in the verse known by more people than any other verse but not believed by all: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

True freedom is not the liberty to do as we please; rather, it is to do as we ought. For that we need the truth. The grace of God is our only hope to invite us and enable us to live by the truth. No new leader can take us there unless he or she recognizes this. No culture can survive without this. "Thy word is truth and abides forever."

Discussion Question - How do you live in a Post-Truth Era?

As Christians, we believe in objective truth, not subjective post-truth. We appeal to the character and nature of God – God is truth – in fact, we believe that truth is not just a concept but a LIVING BEING (Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth...”). In addition, the Bible is a revelation of God’s truth and our source for knowledge.

Truth is the antithesis to SUBJECTIVISM.

"The philosophical tenet that 'our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience'. In other words, subjectivism is the doctrine that knowledge is merely subjective and that there is no external or objective truth."

As noted above, subjectivity and post-truth are the doctrines of our 21st century culture. Humanity is allowing feelings -- the way “I” wish things were – or overriding personal/group think issues to override God's objective truth.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” – John 8:32

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” – John 18:37

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” – John 4:24

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. – John 16:13 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. – John 8:44

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. – John 1:8

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me.” – John 15:26

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. – John 4:23

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. – John 14: 16,17

It gave me great joy to have some believers come and testify to your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. – 3 John 1:3,4

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. – John 1:17

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. – 2 John 1:4

If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 1 John 1:6

4. Secularism and Secularization

Discussion Questions – When you hear the word, “secular” what does that mean to you? In your opinion, how has the “secular” impacted the world? How does it impact the Church? How does it impact Christian people?

Secularization is the transformation of society/culture from close identification with religious values and institutions toward non-religious/irreligious values and secular institutions. It is a belief that human progress (dependent upon modernization, evolution, and rationalization) leads to a deliberate choice to lose religious moorings in life.

There is a distinctive definition of Secularization from a sociological perspective that has to do more with a differentiation between that which is secular and that which is sacred in society (societal dualism, i.e. “separation of church and state). That is called, “partial” secularization. “Complete” secularization is the removal of all “religious” (i.e. moral, human) values from the public and private spheres.

- Ethics based upon Biblical Theism ties reality to God.
- Ethics based upon Secularization ties reality to materialism, science, the Providence of humanity, and humanity’s choice to “do good” (issue of definition of good).

TODAY – our religious lives are defined by a search – search to find the right church, the right expression of faith that delivers the right lifestyle

Secularism has reduced Christianity to a “life stage” – it is one of many offerings that an individual samples during their life in the quest for a good life.

Sociologist Wade Clark Roof – *“the real story of American religious life in this ½ century is the rise of the new sovereign self that defines and sets limits on the very meaning of the divine”*

- Church no longer a discovery of God but a discovery of self
- Church has been replaced by a new power – Secularism
- Lives described purely in the language of science and reason

Secularism views life as a “cosmic joke” – there is no greater meaning in the world. The only hope for transcendence is offered in a new pair of sneakers, an iPhone, or the thrill that comes from shameless and depersonalized sexuality.

“Shift from overwhelmingly religious culture in the 1500’s where it was almost impossible to NOT believe in God, to our current day in which even the religious feel the pressure against belief from our secular society” – A Secular Age by Charles Taylor

If “medieval Joe” decided no longer to pray, to worship, or even to believe, he would not be seen as simply exercising his individual religious rights. Instead, he would be seen as putting himself, his family, his community, his people and the whole of Christendom in danger. The overwhelming social pressure was to believe. Disbelief was viewed at best as treasonous and at worst cosmically deadly.

Worldview in past – God’s hand was everywhere and behind everything. The cosmos was a purposeful and ordered place where every decision held moral significance and morality itself carried cosmic weight.

Secularism:

- Born out of a revulsion with the religious wars that ravaged Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries
- After the result of the Reformation, key thinkers began to believe that if religious could be removed from the public sphere, then the religious motives for war would disappear, and society could enjoy peace. Christianity became a danger to the modern moral order.

- Shoved religious life into the realm of the private where it could be freely practiced as long as it did not challenge secular authority, science or reason.
- The authority of religious to shape private and public life thus was replaced by a notion of private belief and “PERSONAL” values

Secularism has turned Christians into private people where they can believe in their minds but act for large parts of their lives as if God doesn't exist – practical atheists

- Secularism's partner is naturalism – materialism/naturalism perceives reality as only matter. The ultimate authority in this worldview is scientific measurement...if we can't see it, it ain't there
- Secularism leads humanity to actions that attempt to “fill the vacuum” of meaning and purpose in life – for some that is Scientism. Science and Scientism are not the same. You can deeply value the former while rejecting the latter. Scientism is the view that science is the only objective means by which to determine what is true or is an unwarranted application of science in situations that are not amenable to scientific inquiry. Science is a method for asking questions about the world. Scientism is just one philosophy among many about the relationship between human beings and their experiences.
- The other apparent “contender” that is attempting to fill the vacuum in the heart of the secularist is that of Politics. Political structures, philosophies, theories, and activism are now being passionately embraced as the foundational meaning to a person's life.
- Separate God from nature...separate God from daily life – belief is now a countercultural act of rebellion
- Faith no longer is a social compass, something with informs the whole life, explains the cosmos and offers meaning. NOW, personal preference and choice, something to be adopted and or discarded privately as each of us sees fit. Faith morphs into something personal, sentimental and therapeutic
- Immanent worldview vs. transcendent worldview:
- Immanent – life is only atoms – life a cosmic fluke – humans are simply bipeds – the death of people is population control – the love a parent has for a child only a genetic impulse to continue the species – love for a spouse is nothing more than pheromones and oxytocin. Everything you feel, everything you hold passionately, is simply neurons and sparks of electricity in the brain of a naked ape – all of our activity is ultimately meaningless, the scratching around of a virulent species of animals in their denial of their eventual cold and lonely deaths – Within the immanent worldview life doesn't matter – in immanent world only the strong survive – everything is desacralized – no one or no thing is of worth – everything is disposal – everything is a commodity to be exploited
- The only thing enjoyed are superficial things – escapism into hobbies and obsessions, interest that bear no consequence, giving attention to things that really don't deserve tons of our time...some say that the 21st century will be marked by conspicuous consumption but also a flagrant misuse of time
- Instead of god we have a new shalom that will be delivered by good organization, effective government, sound economic policy and effective medicine and scientific advancement – the only thing that we must rid ourselves of is that which delays us from having instant gratification and satisfaction of our desires

“So, I like to say to those who ask me when I am coming back to my former religion that I will be glad to do that on only a few conditions: If they throw out going to church, the clergy, original sin and their doubt of self, then I will be glad to join them in talking about Jesus.” The Secular Spirit

"Secularism" is not about beliefs. It is about churches. And, according to secularism, churches are more about anxiety than about thinking. Thus, the conclusion is that secularism is not a bad thing but a good thing. This is because secularism is a declaration of independence, independence from the authority of churches. People now feel confident enough to figure out the ultimate conditions of their existence for themselves. And this is deemed as spiritual progress.

Secularists posit that churches were invented to help societies recover from the early stages of traumatization that was prevalent from primitive times: for example, harsh child-rearing practices for survival in harsh ecological niches. Developmentally, they believe that the institution of religion was a necessary human move. Secularists believe that the main ritual of Roman Christianity and mainline Protestantism -- the Eucharist -- was fully formed by the fourth century with cathedrals popping up in the seventh century. They are considered the “Prozac” of their time. And of course, one of the key features of this arrangement was a punitive and

paternalistic authority system.

So, the secularists believe, once a lot of people started to feel better, they started to quit “religious” therapy. These were the “heretics”. Some heretics LIKE Martin Luther. They believe that Luther made heresy viable (previously they had all been burned at the stake or the like) because he brought innovation into spiritual inquiry.

So, here we are in the twenty-first century, and the completion of our spiritual destiny requires us to wake up, quit church, and experience the ultimate ground of our existence, which of course “cannot become an object of propositional knowledge”. That is, what is going on, messily of course, secularism.

Closing Comments

The Challenges we are Facing require NEW ways of thinking and action

Technical and Adaptive Challenges

Technical Challenges are those we know how to solve, they are mechanical for most of us because we have the skills, experience or education to solve the issue.

- What you do to solve a Technical Challenge is to apply your current knowledge or the accumulative knowledge of experts/authorities to solve the challenge.
- *What are some examples of Technical Challenges that you have faced or are facing in life?*

Adaptive challenges on the other hand require change...they are challenges that test people’s minds and hearts.

- When you face a challenge, you are never faced before, you have to learn new ways and even sometimes choose between what appear to be contradictory values.
- Truth is, if you throw all the technical fixes you can at the problem and the problem persists, it’s a pretty clear signal that an underlying adaptive challenge still needs to be met.
- Adaptive Challenges require us to learn new ways and usually are solved, not by experts or authorities but by the very people who face the challenge.
- *What are some examples of Adaptive Challenges that you have faced or are facing in life?*

Here’s some example for your consideration – most problems that you have with your home are technical challenges – if an air conditioner stops working, you can call or repairman. If you need to install a door, you can follow someone else’s directions or hire an expert. Now, societal problems are adaptive challenges...there may be theories on how to address society’s ills but no one has a set direction to instantaneously solve the crisis.

Followers of Jesus are facing an Adaptive Challenge in terms of how to live life as a faithful disciple in the midst of a rapidly changing and complex world. We don’t live in a world that is the same as the one our parents faced...without using too many “buzz” words, we live in world/culture steeped in a weird blend of modern and postmodern thought along with a post-Christendom, secularistic worldview. The “Church” is in a new world facing new challenges. It isn’t the Reformation any more...people don’t refer to themselves spiritually with denominational labels...there are no more “blue laws”...Sunday is just like any other day and it takes TONS of money to be able to run a typical congregational ministry with rising costs of personnel and facilities. Attendance and participation in “church-based” activities dropping...congregations are closing their doors never to reopen again...we might even be witnesses of the termination of one or more major denominations in our lifetime. Syncretism, pluralism, political correctness, materialism, consumerism, and secularism are the growing “religions” of our time. The Body of Christ is facing HUGE challenges. Faithful followers of Jesus as well as wise ministry leaders understand that we are facing issues that don’t have easy “technical” answers. There is no expert who knows how to navigate these new and ever-changing waters. Instead of posing as an expert or looking in the historical “rear-view mirror” and yearning for the good ole days, we need each other and the wisdom/power of God to be able to address these new challenges.

For example, consider the situation – churches are closing around the country – what may need to be changed? Can’t do the same thing over and over again expecting different

results...that's the definition of insanity. What leadership skills would we need to employ to meet this challenge?

Adaptive challenges impact churches HOW?

- Many churches have a history of seeing their problems as technical challenges requiring a technical fix
- Many churches have values that need to be challenged and re-articulated
- Many churches have a history of failed expert advice
- Many churches ignore the “elephants in the room” or hope they will go away
- Many churches and leaders actually embrace work avoidance
- When clarification is considered, many in church leadership refuse to consider some realistic options – they make a habit of taking potential solutions off the table
- Many churches believe that the presenting problem is not really THE problem – for example, low attendance from church that says it “welcomes all”

In working with Adaptive challenges, local faith communities must:

- Spend significant time reflecting on the real issues/problem
- Map the problem – get small stuff out of the way in order to get to the real problem
- Create emotional space for working on the problem
- Be ready for the plethora of “technical fixes” being proposed
- Be ready for an attack on leadership
- Have Courage
- Embrace an ability to reframe problem
- Have a sense of urgency
- Be willing to face conflict issues

An Adaptive Community is one where:

- There are no elephants in the room – people talk about real issues with transparency
- Everyone shares a vision for the future
- Every person's viewpoint is valued
- An appreciation for strength that comes from diversity of opinion
- Everyone values continuous learning
- Leadership is building into a community that capacity for change not dependence

For a follower of Jesus, we need to adopt and apply ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES into our lives. Read over the following list and see what you think:

- Followers of Jesus must learn to identify adaptive challenges.
- We then identify what learning, new skills, behaviors need to be acquired to address these issues.
- Adaptive Challenges face you when – Technical challenges fail repeatedly, when your increasing dependency upon authority fails, when you try a quick fix and it fails
- We must learn to look at these challenges with “new eyes” and be willing to explore new “wineskins” (see Luke 5:35-39).
- We must learn to identify and accept what loss will occur when change is embraced in order to address these challenges.
- We must understand that Community and Relationships are no longer luxuries in God's Kingdom but necessities – we need to be able to involve others and hold them responsible for their piece of the solution to the challenge (a new embracing of the theology of the “priesthood of all believers”)
- We must be able to embrace a desire to hold steady, not give in to a sense of defeat or retreat or backing down – in many instances, adaptive challenges are spiritual battles (see Ephesians 6:10ff).
- As we address these challenges, we must get on the “Balcony” – in other words, step back and see the big picture. We need to see that in the midst of action, each person plays a part in God's economy –

each has gifts, abilities, passions and a unique perspective that is cherished and necessary in the development of a new praxis (action based upon principles and values). We not only need to see what every person can offer but also, we must remove the constraints that are holding them back from acting in the situation to their full God-given potential.

- One critical, practical necessity in the midst of facing these challenges is = communication, communication, etc.
- We must also, as one person put it, “listen to the song beneath the words”, in other word, listen to what’s not being said.

According to Ron Heifetz (a man who studies and writes on the reality of facing adaptive challenges),

“to lead and live in today’s world is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear-their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking- with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.2).



