

# Truth Decay

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Synopsis and [Comments](#) by William H. Gross - Colorado Springs CO 2005

David Wells in *No Place for Truth* lays out the sociological causes of modern American paganism. In *God in the Wasteland* he describes America's postmodern conception of God and Evangelicalism. Here, Douglas Groothuis describes the philosophical foundations of postmodernism and the challenges it presents to Evangelicalism.

Truth decay is a cultural condition in which the very idea of absolute, objective and universal truth is considered implausible, held in open contempt, or not even seriously considered. The reasons for truth decay are both philosophical and sociological, rooted in the intellectual world of ideas as well as the cultural world of everyday experience. These two worlds reinforce one another. Postmodern culture – with its increasing pluralism, relativism, information overload, heightened mobility, identity confusion, consumerism, and so forth – makes postmodernist philosophy seem more plausible. However, *merely living in this cultural context does not mean that one must become a postmodernist on matters of truth*, however tempting that may be to some. P. 22

The primary issue in postmodernism is the nature of truth. Is truth connected to a fixed objective reality, or is it something more circumstantial and subjective, a matter of perception? Do we receive an external truth, or do we make our own internal truth? Can language adequately capture realities outside itself and convey them to others universally? Or can it only refer to its own truth within a community of those who share that language and its cultural context?<sup>2</sup> Must we fully grasp the whole extent of a truth before we may speak of it, or would speaking suppositionally somehow belie our integrity on the matter? In other words, is what is true only true for me? Or is it universally true, and absolutely certain?

The postmodern world rejects the rationality and certainty of knowledge that the Enlightenment embraced, and which created the modern world of science and technology. Postmodernists claim that we are held fast by nothing certain, nothing objective, nothing absolute, nothing universal. Postmodernism, as a philosophy and a cluster of philosophies, has dispensed with Truth and replaced it with many truths. It seeks to radically reconceptualize traditional notions of truth and rationality. Pp. 10-12

Postmodern ideas have found their way into Christian colleges and seminaries and into our churches. A Christian philosophy professor rejects the idea that gravity would exist if there were no people on earth. He says, "Truth is limited to our language." Philip Kenneson rejects the idea of objective truth. William Willamon wrote in *Christianity Today* that "Christians who argue for the 'objective' truth of Jesus are making a tactical error," because "Jesus did not arrive among us enunciating a set of propositions that we are to affirm." Church growth advocates like George Barna advise that churches tone down any emphasis on the objective truth of Christian doctrine because postmoderns have short attention spans and are only interested in their own felt needs. We are told that Gen-Xers can only be reached by a relational, non-cognitive approach. "The linear method is no longer the primary method of study," thus, Bible studies must abandon the inductive method of progressive observation, interpretation, and application. P. 21

High percentages of evangelicals do not believe in absolute truth; they think the purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment. In the *Screwtape Letters*, by C. S. Lewis, Wormwood is advised not to use logical arguments to keep someone from following Christ. Instead, keep the Christian's mind off

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<sup>1</sup> Groothuis, Douglas, *Truth Decay* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill, 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Thus, men cannot understand women; whites cannot understand blacks; Europeans cannot understand native Americas; rich cannot understand poor; the powerful cannot understand the weak; the old cannot understand the young. Society becomes a collection of ghettos, necessarily at odds with each another. Each subculture is correct in its assessment of everyone else and of its own "reality," exempt from challenge or refutation. What this view logically but inconsistently advocates, is that no one owns or controls truth; at least not universal truth. P. 214

the very idea of sound reasoning leading to true conclusions. After all, the Christian has been taught from an early age to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about in his head – he doesn't think of them as true or false, but as academic or practical, outworn or contemporary, conventional or ruthless. Therefore, use jargon, not argument. P. 25

An irrational and unreasoning mind allows truth to decay. The philosophical beliefs which eat away at truth like an acid are several, and they are profound:

1. The ongoing progress that the Enlightenment promised never reached fruition. With every advance has come corruption and detrimental side-effects. If the Enlightenment promise was based on reason, intellect, and rationality, then these things must be false as well. There can be no coherent meaning to reality if reality cannot be fully mastered and controlled. Therefore, if control of reality is an illusion, then truth (and the reality it purports to describe) is an illusion.
2. Media saturation demonstrates that increased information does not lead to increased wisdom, conformity of perception, or shared purposes. Information is indiscriminate. It is not tied to truth. It is disconnected from theory, meaning, or purpose. Thus, there can be no over-arching meaning, no consistent metanarrative, that weaves together all the disparate and contradictory information that overwhelms us daily. It simply cannot be entirely digested. Therefore truth is a matter of selecting and personally experiencing portions of it, which may then be personally interpreted to suit our needs.<sup>3</sup>
3. The diversity of beliefs makes the notion of one absolutely true religion or philosophy unacceptable. There are many ways of knowing, and many perspectives to embrace. Therefore dogmatic and exclusive beliefs are inherently wrong. Pluralism is the only truth, and synthesizing one's own religion may be the only way to reconcile the diversity. Inconsistencies in our beliefs do not indicate they may be wrong. Therefore faith is a matter of perception, choice, and toleration. We need to minimize rules and absolutes.
4. Urbanization with its cosmopolitan environment does not allow for a fixed sense of personal identity. Identity should be fluid and flexible. There is no final truth as to how humans ought to be. Therefore we are free to experiment, adapt, and adjust. Our persona is self-constructed and perpetually changing. There are no structures of meaning that transcend personal preference. It's all a matter of marketing our image to others.
5. Language is a contingent creation of human beings. It cannot represent any objectively knowable reality because it is itself a construct, a fiction. Words are not signs and symbols of an external reality that somehow exists apart from the words used to describe it. If language cannot adequately describe reality without referencing itself, then there is no reality. Therefore, reality is a linguistic construct, a language-game. The signifier (language) may be divorced from the thing signified (reality), because the one defines the other.
6. Written texts do not have a determinate, singular, knowable meaning or truth-value. They resist definitive interpretation and have no objectivity about them. The author's intended meaning is not controlling, nor does it limit the meanings that may be derived. "There is nothing outside of the text." Each reader determines the meaning for him or herself.

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of a Renaissance man who has a grasp of the whole of human knowledge, and has synthesized it all in his mind, is a fantasy in the Information Age. The most we can hope for is an expert in a given field. This specialization of knowledge leads to a fragmented and analytical view of life in which all we see are differences, instead of a coherent and synthesized view of life in which we find relationships and meaning.

7. What is defined as truth is a function not of verifiable evidence or sound logic, but of power-relationships that masquerade as neutral means of enforcing order. Impartiality and objectivity are impossible in science, politics, or any other human endeavor. All claims to knowledge mask a hidden agenda, an exercise in power and manipulation. Therefore, those of oppressed cultures must not be judged by the standards of “truth” of dominant cultures. What they say is “their” truth, and it is incontrovertible. Pp. 26-31

### **Liberalism’s Concept of God**

Evangelicalism arose in reaction to Liberalism’s claim that the bible is not authoritative or inerrant, that Jesus was merely a teacher and not God, that the resurrection never happened, and that Christianity is simply an interesting mythology. J. Gresham Machen wrote a treatise to rebut the ideas of Liberalism, not as heretical, but as non-Christian.<sup>4</sup> Liberalism and postmodernism both attack the Christian faith on the grounds of truth. Liberalism champions empirical truth as “proof” that Christianity is false; meanwhile postmodernism challenges the very existence of absolute truth as proof that Christianity cannot be true. The tactic used by both is to attack biblical authority.

If Christianity loses the authority of the Word of God because the signifier (Scripture) can be divorced from the thing signified (Christ), then Christianity becomes weightless and detached. God becomes a god of the imagination, whose reality is consigned to myths, signs, and metaphors. Ironically, modernism’s obsession with scientific method and empirical proof as judges of objective reality, led in the end to a denial of the reality of the divine mind, and a denial that the human mind could be immaterial (a metaphysical entity that exists apart from the physical brain). The brain and its ideas, science teaches, is merely a set of biochemical processes. Nature is mindless and purposeless. The notion that our minds can transcend these forces, and discover the truth about a reality that exists apart from our perception of it, is said to be nonsense. P.42

Os Guinness in *American Hour* writes,

Under postmodern conditions, words lose their authority and become accessory to images. The past is no longer a heritage, but a debris-strewn ruin to be ransacked for a bric-a-brac of beliefs that is as incoherent as it is inconsequential... The grand flirtation with the meaninglessness of modernity goes on, but in a party mood. Religion is no longer transcendent, but a recreational pursuit for the connoisseurs of “spirituality.” Art, homes, life-styles, ideas, character, self-renewal, and even belief in God all become auxiliary to sales and the ceaseless consumption of styles. P. 57

### **The Biblical View of Truth**

1. *Truth is revealed by God.* It is not constructed or invented by individuals or communities. Various *beliefs* may be the result of human invention and group construction, but *truth* comes from the disclosure of a personal and moral God who makes himself known. He has generally revealed himself in creation and conscience, but he has revealed the particular truth of salvation through historical deeds, the incarnation, and the sixty-six books of the bible. P. 65. Language is God’s vehicle for conveying truth (Jn. 1:1-2). God’s disclosure of himself is not an existential experience devoid of rational, knowable content. God reveals objective truth about himself. P. 66
2. *Objective truth exists and is knowable.* God is the source of objective truth about himself and his creation. It is not a Platonic view in which truth is abstract and independent of God’s being and revelation. The biblical view is that truth is personal because it issues from a personal God. But truth

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<sup>4</sup> Machen, J. Gresham, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1923.

is also objective because God is the final court of appeal by virtue of his nature and his will. Objective truth is not dependent on any creature's subjective feelings, desires, or beliefs (Rom 3:3-4). But that does not minimize the importance of making that truth one's own. Objective truth does not make us neutral or detached in our response to it. Biblical faith demands our trust and commitment to the truths to which we assent. The church does not define or qualify that truth for those in its community. Instead, it is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1Tim 3:15), its witness, [steward, and instructor](#) (Jn 18:36). Pp. 67-68

3. *Christian Truth is absolute in nature.* God's truth doesn't vary. It is true without exception or exemption. It is not relative, shifting, or revisable, much like the speed of light in physics. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6); this is an absolute statement of truth. There is no exception or exemption from this claim. It is not subject to anyone's veto or democratic vote of approval. In a Barna survey in 1994, 62% of Christians rejected absolute truth. There are several things this statement does *not* mean:
  - First*, the existence of absolute truth does not imply perfect knowledge of it on the part of Christians or anyone else.
  - Second*, it does not require that we be able to prove it absolutely and on demand. But neither does it remove the need for the give-and-take of logical argument and the presentation of evidence.
  - Third*, it does not make the claim that Christians are inerrant in understanding every aspect of their faith. They should be open to learning and correction through "prolonged intellectual engagement with fellow believers and non-Christians alike." Pp. 69-71
4. *Truth is universal.* It applies everywhere, engages everything, and excludes nothing. The gospel message and the moral law of God are not circumscribed or restricted by cultural conditions (Ac 4:12). The scope of Christ's authority is unlimited (Eph 1:22-23; Php 2:6, 9-10). "Christianity contends that revelational truth is intelligible, expressible in valid propositions, and universally communicable," Carl F. Henry. Otherwise there could be no Great Commission. "God's truth is not provincial, parochial, or partial." Pp. 72-73
5. *God's truth is eternally engaging and momentous.* It is not trendy or superficial. His word endures and is reliable from age to age (Jms 1:17). [Because God doesn't change, his truth doesn't change, and thus his word which reveals that truth cannot change.](#) It has no expiration date, and needs no image makeover. It is a living, personal, and dynamic truth that transcends the transient trivialities of our age, transforming us at the deepest levels of our being ([Heb 4:12](#)). The truth of God made known to a rebellious planet is perennially engaging and continually controversial. The followers of Jesus are enlisted in the great debate for the hearts and minds of eternal beings. And the stakes are infinite. Pp. 73-75.
6. *Truth is exclusive, specific, and antithetical.* What is true excludes all that opposes it. "You shall have no other gods before me" Ex 20:3. "Truth is exact and precise, and the slightest departure from the truth is the substitution of falsity for truth," R. J. Rushdoony. Not all that claims to be true fits together logically and factually. Reincarnation and the one resurrection are contradictory truths. Only one can be true, to the exclusion of the other. The logic of truth is the logic of the law of noncontradiction. Nothing can both be and not be at the same time in the same respect (Aristotle). Jesus cannot be both sinless and sinful. If there is only one God, there cannot be more than one God. Truth for the Christian is inherently confrontational in the world. Matt 10:34-35. pp. 75-79
7. *Christian truth is systematic and unified.* Truth is one, and God is one. All truths cohere with one another as expressions of God's harmonious and objective reality. They are united; hence, we live in a uni-verse, not a multi-verse. [This is the whole foundation of scientific inquiry.](#) "If a god creates a world in which certain propositions are true, he creates thereby also a world in which all propositions

consequent to them are true,” Ludwig Wittgenstein. Christians do not have a fragmented knowledge of God and the world; it is a well-integrated perspective on life that rings true wherever it is articulated, and however it is applied. “I am false or confused if I sing about Christ’s lordship and contrive to retain areas of my own life that are autonomous.” F. Schaeffer. Pp. 79-80

8. *Christian truth is an end in itself.* It is not a means to any other end. It should be desired and obtained for its own value, not because it is useful to our own ends. We are not pragmatists who twist and adapt truth to our perceived needs and style. Truth is not what works for us; it is what God declares. Skepticism (asking “what is truth?”) is better than pragmatism (saying “truth is whatever works”). [Pragmatism tends to look at short-term solutions rather than long-term consequences.](#) Pp. 80-81

## Two Views About Truth

Truth is either what corresponds to reality (correspondence theory), or what corresponds to our feelings about an outcome (subjective interpretation). Language may or may not be used to express this correspondence. Some language expressions make no truth claims, even though they may be propositional. “Do not murder” is an imperative, but it is not a propositional statement, and it isn’t a truth claim. “Murder is wrong,” on the other hand, makes a truth claim about the nature of moral reality. It is also a true proposition because it reflects a command of God which is based on his eternal and objectively good character.

Propositions are true or false because they make truth claims, stipulations about what is and what is not. Historically, a statement is true only if it corresponds to or agrees with factual reality. If I say there is a brown desk in my study, it is either there or it is not. If it is, then the statement is true, otherwise it must be false. If I am delusional, I may believe there is a desk in my study when *in fact* there isn’t any. I may even “see” such a desk in my mind when *in fact* it isn’t there. Thus, my *belief* about something does not constitute truth, nor does it establish the fact of it. Minds may be knowing or unknowing. Propositions may be true or false. Objects may be real or imaginary. Beliefs depend on the mind for their existence, but factual reality does not. The object of our belief is either real, or it is not. Pp. 87-90

Facts don’t need statements in order to exist, but statements need facts in order to be true. Even subjective statements require facts. I can say that I feel pain in my knee. If I actually feel pain, then my statement is true; but if I don’t actually feel it, then it is false. I can be in pain without saying it (“facts don’t need statements to exist”), but just saying it doesn’t make it true (“statements need facts in order to be true”). Pp. 90-91

## Theological Implications

“Jesus Christ is Lord” is a propositional statement, and it is a statement of belief about the person of Jesus Christ. It is also a statement of *fact*, because the *object* of my belief, Jesus Christ, is actually and really Lord according to the Word of God. Because the statement conforms to the Word of God, it is a *true* propositional statement – but is it true only if I accept that God is indeed the author of his Word, and the source of all truth. “Your Word is truth” (Jn 17:17).

Here we find the necessity not only of God’s revelation *in* his Word, but God’s revelation *about* his Word. How do we come to acknowledge the bible as God’s truth? Is it rationally determined, or spiritually revealed? If it is an act of faith on our part, what reason is there to proclaim its truth to others who lack the faith to accept it as God’s Word? And where would such faith come from? “And this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” Eph 2:9.

Yet, if the object of our belief is a fact that exists regardless of our belief in it, then whether others believe God's Word or not, it remains true and effectual. God's word will not return to him without fulfilling his purposes for it (Isa 55:11). In other words, our proclamation of the gospel is not dependent on our audience, or their faith, or their acceptance of the bible as the Word of God. Truth is truth regardless of our belief about it, or their belief about it. "Lord, lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?" And I will say to them, "Away from me you evil-doers. I never knew you." Matt 7:22-23. The belief or unbelief of these unbelievers did not establish or refute the truth of God's Word, nor did it contribute to its effect. And so God's Truth as contained in his Word exists independently of our belief concerning it.

### **Logical Consistency and Truth**

Logical consistency does not define truth, despite what postmodernists may insist about that. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is logically consistent, but it is not an actual landscape with actual characters. It is a logically consistent fantasy with images that imitate but do not correspond to reality. This is called the *coherence* theory of truth; it is being advocated by the same group that rejects the *correspondence* theory of truth. We are told that although words and statements do not correspond to an external reality, there is still truth; but it must be a coherent truth, and it is restricted to the linguistic and cultural community that proposes it. Pp. 97-98, 134

Philip Kenneson, a postmodernist, makes an interesting point however. He suggests that this community-dependent view of truth makes the church the touchstone of truth; for when we abandon objective truth, we must *demonstrate* a way of that is attractive to outsiders. It's true. The Christian must emphasize the convictions and practices that embody what they believe is good and true. John Stott, who is not a postmodernist, also thinks this idea of demonstrable truth is crucial to our witness. He points to Eph 4:15 which says that we should be "speaking the truth in love." Stott points out that this involves more than simply uttering true statements. The Greek verb actually makes no reference to speech. The verb literally means "truthing in love" (*aletheuontes*). It includes the notions of maintaining, living, and doing the truth. Christians must be true to (i.e. consistent with) God's truth. They must conform their thoughts and lives through the power of the Spirit to the realities of God (Rom 12:2). Pp. 150-151

As for consistency being an adequate standard of truth, compare Lewis's *Narnia* with Tolkien's *Middle Earth*. They are each internally consistent worlds (i.e. coherently true), but they are not consistent with each other. Logically, both cannot be true at the same time, in the same way. One or the other, or perhaps both, must be false (or imaginary). Such logical criticisms compel postmodernists to reject logic as a standard of truth-finding. It also causes them to insist that truth be culture-bound. It is entirely possible, they say, for two contradictory truths to co-exist because each truth is restricted to its cultural context. *Narnia* and *Middle-Earth* are contradictory but independent truths. They are each true for those who create, believe, or live in them, but they are not universally true, nor should they be. Pp. 121-122

Moreover, postmodernists say, logic cannot be correctly exercised by human beings because of their fallen nature. It distorts and biases their reason (Grenz, Linbeck, McGrath). Postmodernists are correct to believe that our moral weakness may cause us not attend to matters logically, or to do so slothfully, or employ logical fallacies without realizing it, or draw unwarranted conclusions from a limited or slanted stock of facts. *But the validity of logic itself remains*. That's because logic flows from the being of God. It is intrinsic to our nature and to our cognitive functions (Carl F. Henry). Pp. 120, 124

## Postmodern Apologetics

Christian faith involves both intellectual assent to propositional truths (*fides*) and personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord (*fiducia*). Faith is logically dependent on assent for its rationale. It is never blind faith, because faith requires an object in which to place our trust. P. 142 The result of postmodernist approaches is to profoundly enfeeble Christian apologetics. The church loses its intellectual witness to the objective truth of the gospel; truth ceases to be compelling and meekly recedes into the background, becoming just another voice in a cacophony of voices. Pascal set an apologetic agenda in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that honors both truth and sensitivity to the spirit of the time. It should be ours as well:

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid that it may be true. The cure of this is first to *show that religion is not contrary to reason*, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next, *make it attractive*; make good men wish it were true, and then *show that it is*. It is worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature, and it is attractive because it promises true good. P. 160

F. F. Bruce's book, *The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids Mich, Eerdmans, 1977), thoroughly demonstrates the early church's passionate apologetic. The church defended the gospel against opposition of many kinds – religious, cultural, and political. Peter commanded the church to “be prepared to make a defense [*apologia*] to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you,” 1Pet 3:15. Bruce tells us that for writers such as Justin Martyr and others, Christianity is the final and true religion, by contrast to the imperfections of Judaism and the error of paganism. It fulfills the earlier revelation of God through the prophets, and it supplies the answer to the quests and aspirations in the philosophies and cults of the other nations. It was divinely intended from the beginning to be a universal religion. Pp. 162-163

We claim that it is rational to hold Christian claims – more rational, in fact, than believing any other worldview. To make this kind of case with respect to postmodernism, we appeal to several areas:

1. The postmodernist worldview is logically inconsistent, morally inadequate, and unable to identify and meet the deepest human needs (see 2Co 10:3-5). It is a house of cards.
2. The universe as a contingent and designed system is best explained by a noncontingent Creator who depends on nothing outside himself (Ac 17:25), and who created the universe to operate in various *goal-related* ways. Living systems presuppose intelligent design, and cannot be explained by mere chance and natural laws.
3. The only basis for an objective moral law is the existence of an objective moral lawgiver who is the source, standard, and stipulator of what is good for his creation, and what brings honor to the Creator. Morality is more than a social construct or personal preference; it demands a transcendent and personal source and judge.
4. The Christian worldview best explains the human condition as “deposed royalty” (Pascal). We are not mere animals, nor are we gods. The evidence of history and psychology shows us to be unique in the universe, but also fatally flawed apart from the redeeming grace of God in Christ. We are great, and we are deprived.
5. The various spiritual experiences of a personal and moral God, as recorded in the bible (Rev 1:12-17; Isa 6:1-8) cannot be explained as delusions or myths. God has directly revealed himself to certain people and has provided a moral direction and inner experience that cannot be explained in nontheistic ways.

6. Christianity makes a host of historical claims, culminating in the report that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The study of history is not arbitrary or reducible to political or power-based methods as postmodernists claim. These claims are credible and cogent. An anti-supernatural prejudice against miracles should be ruled out given the arguments for theism that make miracles possible, and given the authenticity of Scripture.
7. Given his incomparable claims and credentials, Jesus' identity is best explained by the historic Christian claim that he is God incarnate. Other explanations – that he was a guru, a social reformer, or an impostor – do not fit the facts. Apologists should not only defend the rationality of Jesus as Lord, but also encourage unbelievers to read the Gospel narratives for themselves, directly exposing them to its truth and power (Jer 23:29).
8. Apologists should make clear that Christianity is a high stakes affair: a matter of heaven or hell. If the gospel is true and one rejects it, there are deleterious consequences in this life and beyond. If the gospel is true and one accepts it, there are beneficial consequences in this life and beyond: unending fellowship with God and his people.
9. The Christian life is centered on Jesus Christ – involving prayer, worship, biblical knowledge and meditation, service, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship. This provides the most compelling and engaging meaning for life available. Given the realism and hope that Scripture supplies, a biblical way of life also promotes both personal and social integrity, avoiding both utopianism and pessimism. Pp. 180-182

### **Objective Truth and Subjective Engagement**

Apologetics should not be understood as an attempt to develop a perfect system of assertion and argument that will prove faith once and for all. Rather, it is a strategy for presenting, in the course of a unique discussion with a particular audience, the sort of case that makes sense to those persons. In other words, apologetics is the reasoned defense of the Christian faith in the context of personal dialogue (David Clark).

The key error of the Enlightenment approach in this regard was not (as postmodernists claim) a desire to discover objective truth, but the assumption that subjectivity could be neutralized by one perfect method of rational knowing, which could then be appropriated clinically by anyone so inclined. Contrary to the postmodern portrayal of Enlightenment thinking, “objective” does not mean neutral. No one is neutral since we have a set of subjective dispositions and unique experiences. However, one may come to know objective truth if one sincerely applies to the proper procedures of knowing. Human knowing is a complex affair, involving the entire person over a lifetime. “Nonetheless, the aim of knowing should be objective truth, subjectively interiorized and existentially engaged.” Pp. 184-185

I can passionately believe in a certain objective reality without at all violating either my intellectual integrity or the universality of truth. I can believe in God, I can love my neighbor as myself, and I can accept a Christian worldview with all the subjective intensity of my being without compromising in the least the universal truth of theism, of Christian ethics, and of a Christian worldview. I believe all truth is God's truth,<sup>5</sup> passionately, but that does not make it any less objectively real (Arthur Holmes). P.185

### **Christian Ethics and Reality**

The Christian world view is incorrigibly a metanarrative of God's story about creation, the Fall, redemption, and glorification. However, followers of Christ are never called to annihilate or silence their opposition. The Great Commission is premised on persuasion, not coercion; on argument, not

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<sup>5</sup> This is sometimes corrupted into the belief that whatever man discovers in the physical sciences or invents in the social sciences is godly truth.

propaganda; on evidence, not intimidation (Mt 28:18-20). We are commissioned to teach the nations and make “disciples” [pupils], not to make slaves. Peter calls believers to give unbelievers solid reasons for their faith, and to do so with gentleness and respect (1Pet 3:15-17). Paul engaged unbelievers in dialogue and debate throughout the book of Acts. He did not denounce them through diatribes or threaten them with recriminations.

Disciples of Jesus play leading roles in a great cosmic drama, narrated by the Creator himself. Their roles, however, are not scripted for destroying dissent, enforcing conversion through the sword, or turning deaf ears to objections to their beliefs. Christian faith, at its best and truest, has always tackled the great intellectual, moral, and social issues of the day with humility, passion, intelligence, and grace. This ethic was personified in William Wilberforce. He graciously, but forcefully, led England to abolish slavery through principled argument. He believed there is a single, permanent reality to be found behind temporary appearances, a universal truth to which we must conform. Pp. 194-197

Steven Connor believes that the postmodernist abandonment of a metanarrative and universal values entails either a might-makes-right ethic, or the complacency of pragmatism. Terry Eagleton says that the postmodernist argument against a universal value implicitly depends on the assumption of a universal right of all not to be treated unjustly and oppressively – otherwise, who would care whether metanarratives were false or not, oppressive or not, and what reason would we have to abandon them if this universal right no longer compelled assent to their view?

Paul Ramsey spells out the problem when he writes of the digression from the notion of inalienable rights endowed by our Creator (as expressed in the Declaration of Independence) to the U.N. Charter of Human Rights. That charter is content to affirm that such rights “have simply been endowed upon many – presumably by nothing and no one at all!” Merely asserting a moral horizon does establish it intellectually. P. 206-207

If we do not insist on the transcendent Word concerning the right and good, then all our words will ring hollow. They are emptied by the rejoinder, “Says who?” That’s because our own words are created by finite and fickle beings. Every ethical evaluation can be refuted by some other evaluation if the evaluators have no warrant beyond themselves (i.e. [might makes right](#)). But our sense of the natural law is that it is binding on the conscience, that it stipulates behavior, that it reveals normative realities, and that it is not optional or constructed. What makes the Constitution the proper glue for our society is that God and God alone certifies and establishes an objective moral order. This is necessary for orienting ourselves ethically in ways that transcend matters of mere legality, opinion, and culture. Pp. 208-209

### **A Fixed Point**

Those who lead disorderly lives tell those who are normal that is they who deviate from nature, and think they are following nature themselves; just as those who are on board ship think that the people on shore are moving away. Language is the same everywhere. We need a fixed point to judge it. The harbor is the judge of those aboard ship, but where are we going to find a harbor in morals? When everyone is moving towards depravity, no one seems to be moving; but if someone stops, he shows up the others who are rushing on by, acting as a fixed point. (Pascal)

### **Be Seekers of Truth**

*Christians should be truth-seekers.* Those who follow Christ must never take truth for granted, be satisfied with a meager helping of it, refuse to test their truth claims against objective reality, or fail to work out the implications of their beliefs in all of life. “The Christian religion flourishes not in the darkness but in the light. Intellectual slothfulness is but a quack remedy for unbelief; the true remedy is

consecration of intellectual power to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Machen). Although Nietzsche was an atheist and hated Christianity, his life can in some ways challenge or even shame intellectually slothful Christians. P. 266

What is the devil’s due Evangelicals can glean from Nietzsche? It is the willingness to be driven... It is the willingness to spare no pains in the search for truth. It is the willingness... to work into the late hours of the night or to start in the earliest hours of the day; to pick up a new project as soon as we have finished an older one; to grow weary and exhausted in our quest for truth; to have... our eyes watery from too much reading, and our bodies bent over from long, weary hours at the study desk (Bernard Ramm). P. 267

### **Truth means Loving Confrontation**

In a culture where tolerance is considered by some the only remaining virtue, we must be willing to take a stand that will be labeled as intolerant, although we strive to remain humble before God. As Francis Schaeffer put it, “Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation, but confrontation nonetheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation regardless of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something wrong.” As Jesus warned, “Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets,” Lk 6:26. P. 268

### **Be Advocates for Truth**

Pascal in his *Penses*, exhorted this: “Is it not obvious that, just as it is a crime to disturb the peace when truth reigns, it is also a crime to remain at peace when the truth is being destroyed? ... Weaklings are those who know the truth, but maintain it only as far as it is in their interest to do so, and apart from that forsake it.” It is not unusual in the American church to divorce law and gospel, forgiveness and obedience. When we do so, diversity or tolerance is used to justify sin in the name of Jesus (Douglas Webster). To counter this kind of aberration, preaching should be word-oriented as opposed to image-oriented, rational as opposed to merely emotional, transformational as opposed to trivial, and intellectually stimulating as opposed to merely entertaining. In other words, it should be counter-cultural and not bow to postmodernist trends.

### **Worship in Spirit and in Truth**

In worship, there is a distinct difference between “reformed or classic spirituality” and the postmodern perversion of self-centeredness and vulgar emotionality. Most postmodernist spirituality expressed in music never addresses God as God at all, let alone reveling in his attributes and praising his person. It simply recites feelings and asks God to bestow certain psychological or social benefits to meet the felt need of the singer. This must change if truth decay is to be reversed in our churches and in our souls. “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God” (A.W. Tozer). Worship must lift one out of oneself into the objective and eternal realities of God. P. 273

It is all too easy, especially in churches that emphasize personal experience, for our worship of God to degenerate into an idolizing of our mental state during the “worship service.” When a person constructs a god out of his own imagination, his god *is* his imagination, and he is guilty of self-worship, which is idolatry. The worshipping Christian must remember that God is an objective reality, not a subjective mental state. God exists independently of anyone’s imagination, and to worship him necessarily requires that one turn one’s attention away from contemplation of his own subjective experience and toward the God who is objectively “there.” (Rebecca Merrill Groothuis). P. 274

Postmodernists may be willing to “accept Jesus into their heart” with little or no understanding of the meaning or implications of the gospel of Christ. To them “accepting Jesus” may be taken to mean trying

out a new spiritual exercise, or experimenting with a new lifestyle, or even simply buying a new product!  
P. 274

We are to hallow the name of God, not market it (Mt 6:9). God is not a consumer item but rather a “consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). Audience-driven marketing will not cause people to “start thinking about God”; it will simply erect bigger and better golden calves. It will also give them but another mindless chuckle, this time with a religious reference. The laugh track is always running in postmodern America, where nothing has any weight beyond its fluctuating market value. P. 275

We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the restless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root. (Machen, Education, Christianity, and the State, p. 51) P. 276

The root of the obstacle today is the postmodernist redefinition and degradation of truth. Without exposing and destroying this prevalent and fashionable falsehood about truth itself, evangelism is nothing but a vain religious exercise, a pointless flailing against the chilling winds of untruth.

### **Christian Calling**

As their primary calling, all Christians are enjoined to love God with all of their beings (Mt 22:37-39), to exemplify virtue in the Holy Spirit (Mt 5:1-12; Gal 5:22-26), and to obey God’s commands (Ex 20:1-17; Jn 14:15). But followers of Christ are also called to find their unique life purpose in order to use their particular gifts and abilities to their utmost for God’s glory. Christian calling makes no separation between the secular and the sacred. All of life is to be lived under the lordship of Christ.

But the discovery of an individual’s *particular* calling involves aligning three key elements: (1) what he or she is good at doing; (2) what needs to be done for the common good; (3) what gives the person deep satisfaction and meaning. As followers of Jesus refuse the false seductions of style, hype, and spiritual consumerism, they regain and retain a resonating sense of what it means to hear and heed the call of God, come what may. While postmodernists perpetually and frantically “reinvent” themselves, the Christian can rest in his or her identity in Christ, his kingdom, and his calling. As we “seek first his kingdom, and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33), our lives are brought into greater harmony with God’s truth, and therefore greater disharmony with all untruth. In so doing, we serve as signs, clues and rumors of God’s objective reality in a world moving toward depravity in nearly every direction. [We can each become that fixed point Pascal spoke of, an anchor that stands against the tide.](#) P. 277-279

## *Appendix – Television, Agent of Truth Decay*

How does television promote truth decay and the postmodern mindset?

“Television acts less by the creation of clear notions and precise opinions and more by enveloping us in a haze.” (Neil Postman). It isn’t the content as much as the medium itself. We become what we behold (Ps 115; Ps 1). When we become habituated to a particular form of communication, our mentalities and sensibilities bear its mark. Americans consume vast quantities of TV, 4-5 hours per day, with many watching much more. TV is also everywhere, in restaurants, bars, classrooms, daycare centers, hospitals, airplanes... What’s wrong with that? What is it about TV that shapes its message, and modifies our perceptions of the world around us?

**First, TV emphasizes the moving image over written and spoken language.** When image dominates the word, rational discourse ebbs. The visionary reality of connected images cannot tolerate critical discourse, explanation, duplication, or the reflection necessary to separate truth from error. Cognitive functions require a certain distance from the action, while images require that we be continually involved in the action. Images must keep the word in check, keep it humiliated, since the word breaks the enchantment of the image, stripping it of its hypnotic and “magical” power. Words can expose an image as false or misleading. When the image overwhelms and subjugates the word, the ability to think, write, and communicate in a linear and logical fashion is undermined. TV images have an immediate effect on us, but that seldom causes us to pursue their truth or falsity. Pp. 282-284

TV images may be arresting, alluring, and entrancing, but they are prefabricated presentations that shrink events into factoids or outright falsehoods. “One must never forget that every television minute has been edited. The viewer does not see the event. He sees... an edited symbol or an edited image of that event. An aura and illusion of objectivity and truth is built up, which could not totally be the case even if the people shooting the film were completely neutral” (F. Schaeffer), p. 285

Malcolm Muggeridge commented that when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf instead of waiting for the Word from Moses, they attempted to televise (or make visible) God. Biblically speaking, God commands that we not make graven images nor attempt to televise the invisible. In the beginning was the Word, not the Image (Jn 1:1). God gave us a book, not a video. When in any culture written language is marginalized by television, biblical truth begins to lose its vibrancy. Christians must restore the primacy and power of the Word as an antidote to truth decay by television. P. 286

**Second, through TV we lose our authentic and moral selfhood.** The self is a moral agent enmeshed in a moral and spiritual universe. But TV fills the self with a welter of images, factoids, and sound bites that are lacking moral and intellectual adhesion. The self becomes ungrounded and fragmented by its experience of television [with its stuttering story lines broken by commercial interruptions. The self is set into a receptive meditative state, and then fed images for consumption, images without moral judgment, images without conscience.](#)

People whose sensibilities and worldviews are adjusted through serious reading tend to live by what they have read. They live in conversation with great minds, even when they are not reading. TV watchers, on the other hand, simply engage in the imitation of proliferating images and multiple personae [vicariously played out in the mind.](#) With the disappearance of the book, we lose the internalized text on which is inscribed conscience, remorse, and the self.<sup>6</sup> We live our lives as a series of TV characters. Changing channels becomes a model for the self’s manner of experience and being. Moral and spiritual anchorage is

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Sanders, *A is for Ox: The Collapse of Literacy and the Rise of Violence in an Electronic Age* (NYC, Vintage Press, 1995)

lost. The self is left to try on a pastiche of designer personae in no particular order, and for no particular reason. P. 287

You cannot muse over a TV program the way you can ponder a character in Shakespeare. *There's no time as the next commercial, the next image, the next jingle, the next weather update intrude on our concentration, breaking it, side-tracking it, stringing together a series of unrelated distractions that defy analysis, coherence, meaning, and musing. In fact, it is a-musing – which literally means “thoughtless.”* Inwardness and self-reflection are replaced by an outward compulsion for increasingly more mediated experiences that draw us increasingly further from the essence of our soul and its ultimate, eternal fulfillment. *Into the vacuum between, we pour materialism – every 8-10 minutes for 2-3 minutes.*

**Third,** *TV relentlessly displays a pseudo-world of discontinuity and fragmentation.* It is a peek-a-boo world in which sobering news about slavery in the Sudan, or a typhoon in Malaysia, is followed by an ad for Disneyland, and then an appeal to buy lingerie from Victoria's Secret. This is a visual environment for the mind that lacks coherence, consisting of ever-shifting, artificially linked images. *We settle into an alpha-state where the upper levels of the mind are turned off – our judgment is intentionally impaired by the imagery.* We cannot detect a logical contradiction, because that requires a coherent context and there isn't any. Intellectual and moral coherence, therefore, becomes unsustainable. Pp. 288-289

Since postmodernism proposes that the world is fragmented, incoherent, and meaningless, with no God, no objective reality, and no universal rationality, TV not only serves to perpetuate this view, *but it may well be the cause of it.*

**Fourth,** *TV's increasingly rapid pace of images makes careful evaluation impossible.* It is the visual equivalent of caffeine or amphetamines. The images come at us too quickly to assess against reality, and so we passively accept them without considering what they mean. The pace of the visual assault is imposed on us, forcing us to follow its orchestrated rhythm. This is the exact opposite of what happens in reading. The pace of TV disallows edification, understanding, and reflection. *It is a monologue in which we are a sedated audience being programmed by the images selected for us.* P. 290

TV promotes truth decay by its incessant entertainment imperative. Amusement trumps all other values and takes captive every topic. Every subject from war to education must be presented in a lively, amusing, or action-based manner. P. 291. *This indoctrination process with its inculcated expectations is brought into the church by an addicted congregation that wants its addiction fed by the same quality of entertainment, the same ability to channel-surf, the same passive observation, the same consumption, that mindlessly enslaves and pacifies them in the world. The church must not enter into a co-dependent relationship with those entrusted to its care.* TV is not simply an appliance or a business; it is a way of life, and a mentality for assimilating reality. The way of television, and the mentality it produces, are unbiblical. *We need to turn it off, and break our addiction to the Sirens' song.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For an extended treatment, read *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* by Jerry Mander (NYC, Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977)