

Article

Dealing with the Trustworthy Gospel in a Post-Christian Australia

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Abstract: What is truth? We have entered another period fraught with Gospel confusion—beyond postmodernism to what can be called “post-Christianity”. This is not unusual—so we should not be overwhelmed. This happens periodically, as early as Gal 1:9: “If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned”. It is all a question of the Gospel, or put another way, *evangelism* (the communication or announcing “the good news of God”). Evangelism is proclaiming and living a distinct message of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Himself the embodiment of the “good news”. The Gospel has been challenged, eroded and corrupted over the centuries—yet rediscovered by those who practice exegesis of the Biblical record of the New Testament. This article moves on to look at how secular philosophy—rather than Christian philosophy—and other “forms of the truth” have influenced the current situation we find ourselves in.

Keywords: gospel; church; modernism; postmodernism; evangelism

1. Introduction

Times have changed! Our activities have changed and have gradually shifted focus over time. Much of what used to happen “face-to-face” is now happening via email, text, and Zoom meetings, to name but a few new ways of communication.

It is true to say that we live in an age of advertising and are indeed constantly persuaded to buy things. And buy we will, once we decide that what is on offer is something that we want. And that is the essence of advertising, presenting something such that we realise that we want it.

This sort of thing is an all too common part of modern life; we are just inundated by messages and promises that we just cannot accept at face value. It is, then, hardly a matter for surprise that although we are in the business of presenting good news, an “evangel”, the response of so many is just the same, namely, disbelief, tinged by a suspicion that the Christian who presents it has some form of ulterior motive. “The world spirit of our age rolls on and on claiming to be autonomous and crushing all that we cherish in its path. We are locked in a battle of cosmic proportions. It is a life and death struggle over the minds and souls of men for all eternity, but it is equally a life and death struggle over life on this earth” (Schaeffer 1984, p. 23).

As society continues to evolve, new cultural trends emerge, impacting the way people live and think. One of these trends is the rise of post-Christian culture. Understanding what post-Christian culture is and its implications is essential for Christians who seek to navigate a rapidly changing world. In this article, we explore the key characteristics of post-Christian culture, its impact on society, and how Christians can respond with love and grace.

It is important to define what we mean by post-Christian culture. It refers to a cultural shift away from Christianity as the dominant worldview, resulting in a society where Christianity no longer plays a central role in shaping values and beliefs. This shift has been happening gradually over the past few decades, particularly in Western societies.



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Why does post-Christian culture matter? Understanding this trend is crucial for Christians as they seek to engage with their communities and make a positive impact on society. By understanding the key characteristics of post-Christian culture and its impact on society, Christians can effectively navigate this cultural shift and share their faith with others.

When asking the question “What is truth?” we can have a variety of different answers. “Truth is the question which stirs every human conscience; for it is in finding the truth that a person arrives at a reason for living and sets out on a way of life worthy to be followed . . . The Church’s task is to continue Christ’s mission as witnesses to the truth. The world-wide challenge for the church is to tell his truth by preaching his Good News so that it can be heard anew, calling the world, in these days” (*Lineamenta* 1997, p. 37).

That is the challenge for Christians, presenting the Gospel in such a way that we realise it is something that we want and not in a way that generates scepticism and suspicion. Buhlmann made a profound observation: “At the close of the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome on evangelization in the modern world, Pope Paul VI handed a copy of the Acts of the Apostles to each of the participants as they left. His meaning was that this account of the church still retains its importance today and the same Holy Spirit still guides the church” (*Buhlmann* 2001, p. 3).

Mark 16:19–20 defines this in his writing: “And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven; there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it”. The apostle Paul says in Rom 1:16, “For I see no reason to be ashamed of the gospel; it is God’s power for the salvation of everyone who has faith . . .”. Paul proceeds to expand on his understanding by saying, “It was not from any human being that I received it (the Gospel), and I was not taught it, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). It was received from Jesus—about Jesus Christ! Paul’s distinct slant is how Jesus should be preached among the disenfranchised Gentiles.

When we may know *immediately* what is wrong, we can move on to diagnose it, explore it, and remedy it. “If true decentralization takes concrete shape in the world church, its natural consequence would be the emergence of a broad pluriformity. We would then have in the church a divinely willed reflection of creation, where we are met by an almost unending multiplicity of types, shapes, and colours in one sublime unity” (*Buhlmann* 2001, p. 147).

Over the past few decades, there has been a notable shift in the religious landscape of the Western world. Many countries that were once predominantly Christian are now experiencing what is known as post-Christianity. Post-Christianity is a term used to describe a culture that has moved beyond the traditional beliefs and practices of Christianity.

The rise of post-Christianity can be attributed to several factors, including the growing influence of science and technology, the rise of individualism and changing attitudes towards sexuality and morality. As a result, many people are now identifying as “spiritual” but not “religious” and are exploring alternative spiritual practices. “Twenty centuries later, this is what we would call ‘radical social consciousness’, that is, an analysis in terms of the cosmology of the times that defines how the minuscule community of disciples participates already in Christ’s victory by its refusal to honour the fallen powers’ idolatrous claims” (*Neville and Matthews* 2003, p. 168).

While the rise of post-Christianity has led to a decline in traditional Christian beliefs and practices, it has also created new opportunities for dialogue and understanding between different religious and spiritual communities. In the following sections, we explore the key characteristics of post-Christian culture, its impact on society, and how Christians can navigate this changing landscape with grace and love.

Post-Christian attitudes and beliefs have emerged as a result of a cultural shift away from traditional Christian values. Secularisation has played a significant role in this transformation. People are turning away from organised religion and finding other sources

of meaning and purpose. “If we as church are truly following our risen Lord, making his historical concerns our own and committing our lives to the coming victory of the reign of God, then we are compelled to be involved in critical peacemaking and economic issues where the *shalom* and well-being of all peoples, and indeed of the whole earth, are at stake” (Johnson 1990, p. 78).

Post-Christian beliefs often include a rejection of traditional Christian teachings, such as the belief in a personal God or the value of the Scriptures. Scepticism towards religious institutions and leaders is also common. Instead, many people are embracing a more relativistic worldview, where individual experience and personal truth are valued above objective truth.

I have been interested to see how the Catholic Church in Australia has begun to contend with the influence of postmodernism on the Gospel. We first had modernism, tried understanding it, and dealt with it accordingly. We then had postmodernism and tried understanding and dealing with it also. It seems like we know what postmodernism is and that it succeeds modernism, but how do we deal with it in what seems to be a post-Christian era?

With this in mind, a number of sources were drawn upon—especially Australian ones—to investigate this topic. A number of different views were consulted in order to provide clarity on issues such as post-Christianity, secularisation, and any other contemporary issues—these terms and concepts have been written about across many different disciplines (sociology of religion, theology, religious studies, and philosophy). Much work has been performed by many important authors, including Veith, Habermas, Derrida, Zizek, Newheiser, and the Vatican, on secularisation and post-Christianity, and so these authors that have written in this regard were consulted and interacted with. These were critiqued in order to show their input and relevance to the matter being addressed in this article. Each of these authors has much value to add in the interaction on this topic—in their own way. As you will see below, some have a great command to restore stability to this process, while others have been able to contribute in their own profound ways. The observations of these authors were considered and collaborated with as a way to find a way forward in understanding the context we find ourselves in in Australia and a way for presenting the Gospel in this “season”.

For this topic to be addressed appropriately, a definition of the Gospel is proposed as a way of dealing with this focus. An investigation was inevitable in yearning to define “good philosophy” and “bad philosophy” in order to find a plausible working understanding of correct attitudes toward conducting this study. A major section of this study was contributed to through interacting with distinguished authors that were mentioned in the above paragraph to find a way of relating and blending their thoughts to find a proposed solution to our theme. Finally, a few suggestions as a way forward are made after interaction with the thoughts and wisdom of others.

2. The Unique Message in an Ever-Changing World

The word *gospel* literally means “good news” and occurs 93 times in the Bible, exclusively in the New Testament. In Greek, it is the word *euaggelion*, from which we obtain our English words *evangelist*, *evangel*, and *evangelical*. The Gospel is, broadly speaking, the whole of Scripture; more narrowly, the Gospel is the good news concerning Christ and the way of salvation.

The key to understanding the Gospel is to know why it is good news. To do that, we must start with the bad news. The Old Testament Law was given to Israel during the time of Moses (Deut 5:1). The Law can be thought of as a measuring stick, and sin is anything that falls short of “perfect” according to that standard. The righteous requirement of the Law is so stringent that no human being could possibly follow it perfectly, in letter or in spirit. Despite our “goodness” or “badness” relative to each other, we are all in the same spiritual boat—we have sinned, and the punishment for sin is death, i.e., separation from God, the source of life (Rom 3:23). Simply put, for us to go to heaven, God’s dwelling

place and the realm of life and light, sin must be somehow removed or paid for. The Law established the fact that cleansing from sin can only happen through the bloody sacrifice of an innocent life (Heb 9:22).

The Gospel involves Jesus' death on the cross as the sin offering to fulfill the Law's righteous requirement (Rom 8:3–4; Heb 10:5–10). Under the Law, animal sacrifices were offered year after year as a reminder of sin and a symbol of the coming sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:3–4). When Christ offered Himself at Calvary, that symbol became a reality for all who would believe (Heb 10:11–18). The work of atonement is finished now, and that is good news.

The Gospel also involves Jesus' resurrection on the third day: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). The fact that Jesus conquered sin and death (sin's penalty) is good news indeed. The fact that He offers to share that victory with us is the greatest news of all (John 14:19).

The elements of the Gospel are clearly stated in 1 Cor 15:3–6, a key passage concerning the good news of God: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living". Notice, first, that Paul "received" the Gospel and then "passed it on"; this is a divine message, not a manmade invention. Second, the Gospel is "of first importance". Everywhere the apostles went, they preached the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Third, the message of the Gospel is accompanied by proofs: Christ died for our sins (proved by His burial), and He rose again on the third day (proved by the eyewitnesses). Fourth, all this was performed "according to the Scriptures"; the theme of the whole Bible is the salvation of mankind through Christ.

"This being the nature of Jesus' message and his achievement, the story can by definition not stop there. If Jesus' primary intent and accomplishment had been to create a specific ecclesiastical institution, or to command a specific set of ritual practices or to impart a precise body of insights about the nature of things, his job could have been done and no more history would have been needed. But if what Jesus came to do was to light a fire on earth, to imitate an authentically historical process of reconciliation and community-formation, then the only way for that to proceed would have to be under the conditions of historicity, including the effects of ignorance, confusion, finitude and fallibility" (Neville and Matthews 2003, pp. 168–69).

Looking at postmodernism and the Church in a post-Christian Australia, what are we to think? Most of the time when Christians feel unnecessarily confused (not to be associated with the word "challenged"), they are experiencing the "wind and waves" created by skilful minds bringing influences to bear on the Gospel, and the Gospel needs to stand up to all these things and rather "grow up into the Head—into Christ". How do we do this?

Post-Christian attitudes and beliefs have emerged as a result of a cultural shift away from traditional Christian values. Secularisation has played a significant role in this transformation. People are turning away from organised religion and finding other sources of meaning and purpose. Despite this, Johnson says,

"In Christian perception Jews and infidels were thought to be beyond the pale of god's saving mercy in Christ, mercy which was not abundantly available even to Christians who lived in fear of their own damnation. In our own day, however, such a view has faded both in popular imagination and in official teaching. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the scriptural affirmation that salvation is a possibility for every person. In ways known only to God's own self, the offer of salvation is made to all" (Johnson 1990, p. 130).

As post-Christian attitudes and beliefs become more mainstream, they are influencing many areas of society, including politics, education, and media. Secular humanism is becoming increasingly popular as a way of life that emphasises reason, ethics, and social justice without the need for religious or supernatural beliefs. Moyes emphasises this sadly wrong thought by writing that "The old liberalism is dead. Today, as never before in this century, there is a hunger in the hearts of people to hear what Jesus Christ can do for them"

(Moyes 1986, p. 28). He went on to say that “For too long the pulpit has been the voice of politics, sociology, psychology, and for the private views of some ministers. People want to hear a word of truth as it applies to us today, from the Lord” (Moyes 1986, p. 28).

3. Issues and Influences—Good Philosophy and Bad Philosophy

It is important to differentiate between “secular philosophy” and “Christian philosophy”—or else there will be confusion, and all philosophy can result in a generalisation that could be incorrect. Maybe it would be important to chart the issues for easy identification under the headings of theology (or theologians), philosophical influence (secular theories) and epistemology (how do we know?). Most theologians or theologies are not neutral but *tainted* to one degree or another by philosophical dependence, life experiences, temperament, and historical context, with the text of Scripture and following main traditions being the source. The issue at stake is the *degree* to which these “*other elements*” are present and their level of influence. In the case, for example, of Bultmann, the dependence on existentialism and modernism is enough to destroy the essence of the Gospel, which in fact he ironically tried to preserve!

Within the context of “holding on to the faith”, Paul does make mention of the following: “Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith” (1 Tim 1:19). *Some philosophical constructs* have blinded some from the true nature of the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*.

“Without peace with God there will be no peace with one’s fellows. Conversation of heart always remains a requirement for a better world. Otherwise the stage and the actors in the human drama will be endlessly changed but individuals will remain, as ever, hard, selfish, and grasping. ‘There is no new humanity if there are not first new persons’ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). So there will always be the need to speak of faith and prayer, church and sacraments, death and eternal life, as has always been the case”. (Buhlmann 2001, p. 80).

Perhaps the biggest challenge in our presentation of the good news is exactly that, that times have changed! This means that we must relate the unchanging offer of God in an everchanging situation. An appeal that could be effective in Biblical times, or even a century ago, is unlikely to still be effective today.

Of course, and very emphatically, the message of the Gospel has not changed, but because the world has changed, different aspects of it need to be emphasised if it is to relate to the people of today. This need not be a problem to Christians as such, aware of the progressive nature of revelation, and especially of the move from the Old to the New Testaments. At different times in the history of the Church, different aspects of truth were emphasised.

This means that the modern evangelist needs to be very aware of the situation of the group that they feel God is sending them to. That is not an incidental point, for evangelism is God’s work, and people are only his agents. Unless he sends, and he works, evangelism is futile, and doomed to failure.

“If there is much that is alive in theology today, it only shows that after a period of static scholastic philosophy and theology we have again found access to the best periods of theological history. Not only theology was always in flux, but revelation too was experienced in historical, dynamic, self-unfolding progress. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the preaching of Jesus, from the Epistles to Acts, it was a question of not only handing on the message but actualizing it at all times. There was a desire to proclaim Jesus Christ reigning now”. (Buhlmann 2001, p. 153).

We naturally resonate with that observation because it is Biblical, but regrettably, we have to realise that the acceptance of the authority of God is not part of the common human worldview of today. With such an attitude, an explosion of scientific enquiry naturally also followed, and its application resulted in the rapid growth of technology, and the world that we know emerged. “But in another sense the changes which have come flow out of the

intellectual and religious history of our culture and the Western world” (Schaeffer 1984, p. 32).

But this meant that Christian teaching, which had been presented with the authority of the Church, now was also subjected to reason. Christian ideas could only be accepted if they had reasonable evidence, and for this, the authority of the Bible was no longer felt to be adequate, for even this was questioned, and Biblical criticism emerged, it was no longer acceptable to present the Gospel with the authority of God, for ultimately that too had to be proved! Christian proclamation, while maintaining the authority of God, could only be listened to if it presented evidence for its assertions. Apologetics became vital. Quite significantly, the Gospel could no longer be presented as the way to eternal life, for where was the evidence that there was such a thing? And if there was, what was this sin that could prevent it? It was, after all, a breaking of the authority of God, and it was not Him but humanity and its power of reason which was now supreme. Good was now what was reasonable, not obedience to the unprovable demands of a God who might not exist. Christians could be mocked as stupid to believe idle myths, as unenlightened. Ironically, of course, as is often pointed out (e.g., Allen 1989, p. 23), the scientific method was stimulated by Christianity.

It was naturally difficult to present the needs of faith where rationality ruled, but even in premodernism, emphasising the sovereignty of God was far from problem-free; if this is stressed excessively, evangelism logically becomes superfluous, as the destinies of people are foreordained. Packer’s little classic (Packer 1961) is a good example of this issue, but, as in other areas, he is forced into accepting a paradox: evangelism is undertaken, even if its results are fixed, only because God commands it. He refers to this as an “antinomy”, because it seems inexplicable that people are responsible, which presumes freedom, and yet God is sovereign (Packer 1961, p. 23). But accepting this state of affairs is incompatible with a modernist worldview. It must be commented here that the acceptance of different, even incompatible, beliefs at the same time is no longer a problem for many people. Moyes emphatically states under the heading “God has no Grandchildren”, “Every Christian is expected to know what being a child of God is and to live a full Christian life. That involves an education program from the time they make their decision to commit their life to Christ—on” (Moyes 1986, p. 40).

This is so because there has been a further shift in worldview. The inadequacies and consequences of the modern view have become all too evident in political turmoil, in environmental problems, and in many other ways (cf. Erickson 1998b, p. 121, etc.). Reason has been shown to be inadequate, not surprisingly, as Christians have appreciated the devastating effect that sin has on the whole human being. In particular, attempts to find a rationale for morals in reason failed (Allen 1989, p. 4). Even the Bible can point out that human wisdom is bankrupt (1 Cor 1:20), and Paul can urge the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). Veith (2020, p. 68) points out here that Christianity has always accepted the limitations of reason. As Grenz (see Erickson 1998b, p. 91) reminds us, reason has been shared in the fall.

The shift has been to what can well be labelled “post-modernism”. In many ways, this can be seen as a logical development of trends already present in modernism (Erickson 1998b, p. 59), especially in that the individualism implicit in this is accentuated further. While a modern view accepts the reality of individual free choice, this is now stressed. An opposite view is that it is a reaction to the dominance of reason in modernism. Probably both are true, an attitude quite postmodern!

What is now denied emphatically is the validity of reason and so the idea of a coherent universe. The “correspondence view of reality”, that a person’s thought really reflects what is (Erickson 1998b, p. 106), is queried in postmodern thought. There are no universal criteria (Erickson 1998b, p. 106). The postmodern person is engulfed in a “fog of uncertainty”, naturally resulting in anxiety and apathy (Allen et al. 1997, p. 32). The experience and values of any one person are then only valid for that person, which includes morals (Veith 2020, p. 37). All ideas are valid, what matters is whether they are helpful to the person

who accepts the ideas. It is felt that there is no absolute truth as was believed in previous worldviews; the truth is only valid in a specific community (Erickson 1998a, p. 88). Packer's problem just falls away; there is no sovereignty, and free will is absolute. All religions are then acceptable, not because they are true but because people find them helpful. Religious pluralism follows naturally (Ammerman 1998, p. 12). Erickson (1998a, p. 33) cites Wells' comment here that the New Testament world was also pluralistic but also that the first Christians knew that their belief was true. Allen (1989, p. 1) points out that if religion is just something helpful, then none is preferable; however, he argues emphatically that Christianity is not just an opinion but is true. It might be commented here that this pluralism does engender respect for the other, which is most compatible with Christian love. It might also be observed that a reaction to excessive rationalism can well be seen as one root of Charismatic theology, and that part of the attraction of the latter is its compatibility with postmodernism. Johnson makes a very profound observation:

"It seems that the church in our time is crossing the Rubicon from a land of privatized piety accompanied by deeds of charity to individuals, at times outstandingly splendid deeds, to a frontier imbued with a spirituality of justice. In the new envisionment of discipleship, individual persons are certainly not neglected but cared for within the larger structured complexities of an interdependent, suffering world". (Johnson 1990, p. 79).

It must of course not be assumed that the shift to postmodernism does not engender its own reaction. Smart (1993, p. 89) points to the revivals of fundamentalism in the three monotheistic religions in this regard. They of course stress authority, so what is seen is an attempted return to a premodern attitude. Allen (1989, p. 7) notes that it has been felt that the only alternative to modernism, which implied discarding doctrine, was to revert to a premodern attitude. From an evangelistic perspective, the shifts in worldview can cause hassles if they are not appreciated. One of the problems that missionaries had was that they often went with what was effectively a modern worldview, while the people they were ministering to had a premodern one. The missionaries thus tended to produce evidence and arguments, but these were just not appropriate; success was more likely from a demonstration of power and, so, authority. Likewise, today, an evangelist reasoning with the same modern worldview just will have no impact on a postmodernist. Significantly, Grenz, cited by Erickson (1998b, p. 89), points out that most evangelicals remain Enlightenment thinkers. Certainly, the methods of evangelism have to change. It is no longer effective to present the rational arguments that could be effective in the modern world. "The central ideas of the Enlightenment stand in complete antithesis to Christian truth. More than this, they are an attack on God himself and his character" (Schaeffer 1984, pp. 33–34).

The problem of evangelism is exacerbated as, especially today, worldviews are in a state of flux. This immediately presents quite a problem, for even if the world is changing, it has not all changed. The rural population naturally tends to be premodern, and the urbanised tend to be at least shifting into a modernist viewpoint, but the more educated of all races, such as in the media or government, are more likely to be at least influenced by postmodern thinking. How can the Gospel be presented in a way relevant to the increasing number of postmodern people and hopefully in a way adequate to all three?

4. Defining Post-Christian—As Much as We Can

It is certainly ineffective to present the Gospel in a traditional way to postmodern and non-Christian people. Even if the Gospel is more acceptable, it cannot be presented as the solution to sin. What is the use of proclaiming forgiveness of sin to a person for whom the only sin is living in a way that is "inauthentic"? (The term is taken from existentialism, which was a precursor to the more developed postmodernism.) In postmodernism, moral absolutes are naturally denied. Veith (2020, p. 17) describes the growing sexual freedom as a result of a loss of moral criteria. Sin is meaningless when "the absence of the ethical [as]

the guiding value has been identified as a consistent and problematic feature of modern society by a number of critics" (Smart 1993, p. 80).

"Evangelisation is the activity of spreading the Gospel to the whole world, just as the disciples were commanded by our Risen Lord (cf. Mk 16:15). It is essentially telling the truth of Jesus Christ as the way of salvation for humanity. The Gospel is proclaimed in its simplest everyday form by the witness of life of individual Christians. In other words, when the life of a believer accords with the Gospel, when it rings true and is genuine, those who have never met Christ are made to question themselves about the ultimate meaning of life, of their final destiny and why Christ makes such a difference in the lives of his followers". (Lineamenta 1997, p. 39).

What is the use of announcing the Gospel as the way to heaven? This was ineffective in a modern milieu, for there was no evidence that such a place existed. And if that approach was questionable even in the modern world, it is much more so today. The appeal is equally worthless when presented to those for whom the future is unreal and who very much live only for the present.

Most importantly, in a postmodern situation, a person is immediately biased against what is the essential demand of the Gospel, which is acceptance of the authority of God, for the existence of any external authority is rejected. The claims of Christianity may still be rejected but now because they claim to be true (Veith 2020, p. 18); tolerance is the supreme postmodern virtue. Erickson (1998b, p. 30) comments here that beliefs have been reduced to a minimum. Certainly, in such a situation, it is just no use to appeal to the authority of the Bible. This bias against authority is then added to the bias due to sin that traditional evangelism is well aware of. It is this attitude to the Bible that causes most problems for Christians; it is no longer seen as true, and language is in any case inadequate to communicate to another mind (McQuilkin and Mullen 1977, p. 71). Indeed, in postmodernism, there is a loss of reliance on words (Lyon 1999, p. 10). This latter is very obvious when looking at recent advertising techniques, a comparison of course very pertinent to evangelism.

The traditional demand for decision must then also be queried; it depends on rational evaluation. In any case, it has even been condemned as often mere "emotional rape"; the postmodern stress, in any case, falls not on an event but on a journey, not on instantaneous change but on the process. "Whenever people's lives are touched by the gospel and the grace of Jesus Christ, they are transformed. This effect is not limited only to persons. The more people accept Christianity and live in it in their lives, the more society and culture are transformed" (Lineamenta 1997, p. 29).

Nevertheless, in contrast to previous worldviews, evangelism becomes much more viable in a postmodern milieu. In fact, as is often said (e.g., Jones 2001, p. 114), the postmodern person is actually much more open than his or her predecessor to the Gospel, as it is not automatically seen as a myth. Allen (1989, p. 2) points out that in some respects, recent philosophy and science now point towards belief in God: "In a postmodern world Christianity is intellectually relevant" (Allen 1989, p. 5). Postmodernism is open to the possibility of the transcendent (Allen et al. 1997, p. 114). Rationality is no longer a preoccupation (Ammerman 1998, p. 14), hence the attraction of drugs (Lyon 1999, p. 9). And moreover, Christianity may well be presented as giving benefits to the believer in the here and now, which is exactly what the postmodern person is interested in. Indeed, that approach is also valuable to the other worldviews; indeed, a stress on present benefits is most attractive to the viewpoint that has emerged from modernism and results in free-market capitalism. The mind can only be won through the evidence of results in life.

4.1. *The Struggle of Evangelism in A Secular Context and the Reality of What It Means to Be Post-Christian*

A postsecular society is often one with a renewed interest in the spiritual life. Dalferth very profoundly argues for the contrary view: postsecular societies are neither religious

nor secular; they do not prescribe or privilege a religion but neither do they actively and intentionally refrain from doing so. He would argue that they are neither for nor against religion(s) but rather take no stand on this matter because it is irrelevant for their self-understanding and without import for the way in which they define themselves. For them, religion has ceased to be something to which a society or a state has to relate in embracing, rejecting, prescribing, negating, or allowing it. People may or may not be religious, but states and societies are not, and hence, there is no need for them to be secular anymore (Dalferth 2010, pp. 317–45). Although this seems to be a view that leads to apathy, it is nonetheless quite true. By virtue of its context and the points that Dalferth raises, it seems to be an issue that would not lead to concern when it comes to evangelisation and “good news”—as difficult as this may be for ones of faith to accept.

Veith (2020) in his timely book demonstrates how the Christian worldview stands firm in a world dedicated to constructing its own knowledge, morality, and truth. He points out the problems with how today’s culture views humanity, God, and even reality itself. He offers hope-filled, practical ways believers can live out their faith in a secularist society as a way to recover reality, rebuild culture, and revive faith. According to Veith, “post-Christian” is not the evolution of the postmodern but the blending of both modernism and postmodernism into a new anti-Christian posture.

“Post-Christian” is a “combination” of all forms of present-day alternative worldviews with the Christian one. In the post-Christian worldview, one can find the coexistence of both modernist traits and postmodern trends. We are dealing with how post-Christianity manifests itself in deconstructing reality, repudiating the body, debunking society, and marginalizing religion. In this somewhat complex context, Christianity attempts to take on the opportunities our age brings for the Christian community to be “salt and light”.

4.1.1. Historical Antecedents and Current Contexts

Particularly helpful is the sustained attention Veith gives Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), a counter-Enlightenment German philosopher and contemporary of Immanuel Kant (e.g., 77–93, 160–162, 211–213). From a confessional Lutheran standpoint, Hamann was such a seminal Christian thinker that he not only dealt with challenges coming from the modernism of his age but also anticipated (and refuted in advance) developments of postmodernity.

Some have observed that in terms of its post-Christianity, the West is patchy. In some Northern European countries, as Veith highlights, the post-Christianising process takes the form of the aggressive secularisation of society. The basic moral public discourse that took Christian values for granted is undergoing a drastic revision by competing, and at times antagonistic, moral frameworks. An important point that Veith makes is that there is no single post-Christian condition, just several versions and combinations.

The fundamental societal institutions (e.g., family, school, church) that took their meaning and place from a basic Christian worldview shaped by Protestantism are going through a rewriting of their status, which undermines their traditional outlook. Christians need to learn (or relearn) how to be creative and faithful minorities. The transition may be painful and difficult, but nostalgic attitudes toward a status quo somewhat marked by Christianity will not serve the cause of the Gospel.

4.1.2. Post-Christianity Killing Christendom

In the Southern European context, most post-Christian moves are welcomed due to the form of institutional Christianity that prevailed here. It tended to be a straitjacket for religious minorities of any kind and an obstacle for the flourishing of a plural society.

Indeed, not all that is identified as a “Christian” heritage in a nation or culture was actually a virtuous realisation of Christianity. What is normally assumed as belonging to a Christian heritage was actually a sub-Christian version of it—something seemingly close but fundamentally distant. In many cases, it was a deformed “Christianity” based on a long Constantinian trajectory, marked by the heresy of confusing and conflating state and

church, religion and politics, canon law and common law, Christian identity and national identity. Moving beyond this so-called Christian settlement is a positive contribution to defining true Christianity and what Christian witness means in a pluralistic world.

4.1.3. (Continually) Reforming in a Post-Christian World

The cost of living in a post-Christian century is that things will no longer be as easy or friendly as they used to be. The assumption is that in a post-Christian age, following Christ will be tougher than it has been in the past. The church will need to learn to live on the fringes as a politically incorrect outsider rather than being a stakeholder of the sacred alliance between the altar (pulpit) and the throne (power).

Veith's *Post-Christian* is an invitation to engage the world with courage and humility. This post-Christian phase is yet another opportunity to practice the semper reformanda call of the church, away from idolatrous compromises and toward an ever-growing Biblical fidelity. "Christianity" will not save us, nor will post-Christianity undermine the Gospel. While being grateful for the Christian legacy and critical of its shortcomings, our task is not merely conservation but construction.

Habermas's recent writings on theology and social theory and their relevance to a new sociology of religion in the "post-secular society" have been consulted in order to address his views on the topic. Beginning with Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Habermas revisits his earlier thesis of the "linguistification of the sacred", arguing for a "rescuing translation" of the traditional contents of religious language through the pursuit of media between an overconfident project of modernising secularisation, on the one hand, and a fundamentalism of religious orthodoxies on the other. Several questions, however, must be raised about this current project. How far can Habermas engage adequately with religious ideas of the absolute while still retaining certain broadly functionalist theoretical premises? Is the notion of an ongoing secularisation process in the "post-secular society" a contradiction in terms? What appropriate "limits and boundaries" are to be accepted between the domains of knowledge and faith, and how strictly can they be drawn? How coherent is the notion of "methodological atheism", and how consistently can Habermas pursue the project of a "religious genealogy of reason"?

Habermas's adaptation of the Weberian thesis of rationalization and the Durkheimian theory of cognitive evolution plays no essential role in the kinds of conclusions Habermas ought to be able to draw about the validity of religious belief under contemporary social conditions. A theory of the relativization and multiplication of worldviews, Adams argues, does not ground a theory of the decline of religion, and, in any case, a theory of the institutional decline of religion does not ground a theory of the diminution of the validity of faith. From the fact "that there are rival world-views and that no single one commands universal assent", it does not follow that "religious worldviews *as such* are devalued. They may well be, but it is not obvious why it follows from a public awareness that there are multiple narratives." A "strong developmental narrative of the waxing of reason and the waning of religion" is not necessary to show that ethical argumentation in the public sphere cannot proceed on the basis of one dominant worldview but must find some other process. This still leaves room for Habermas's assignment. There may be good reasons for rejecting this view though. But whether one applauds or critiques it, it does not require a strong thesis about the decline of religion (Adams 2006, pp. 176–77).

As a Christian theologian, Adams proposes that closer attentiveness on Habermas's part to the philosophical structure of the doctrine of the Trinity—notably in its reappearance in the philosophy of Hegel—might have aided him in conceptualizing ways in which human existence and its development through history might be said to realise the presence of God in the world. This, like many of the responses to Habermas's work from the side of theologians, is a thesis that expresses a prior commitment to theism. One must already have accepted a significant part of Habermas's premises in order to follow him in his thesis, including his defence of some "post-liberal" theologians such as John Milbank who shrug off any responsibility to engage with social-scientific arguments about preconditions

for rationality in religious belief and who claim simply a right to tell a “narrative” about their own situations of faith. It is a pity that the author was not able to address by far the most substantial of Habermas’s contributions to an engagement with theology to date in *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, published in 2005, which tries to imagine ways in which theological propositions might be compatible with postmetaphysical thinking.

In a crucial passage from one of his books, Žižek states that “the solution to looming ecological disaster and the threat of world war is to become fully aware of the explosive set of interconnections that makes the entire situation dangerous. Once we do this . . . we embrace the courage that comes with hopelessness” (Žižek 2018, p. 298). Žižek explains the desolate conjuncture of corporate globalisation, environmental devastation, and preparations for world war. There follows a scathing analysis of the Left’s timid tinkering based on its underlying acceptance of the world capitalist system, which stands in stark contrast to the Right’s bold, reactionary vision of identitarian neofascism based on its complete rejection of the international legal order. Žižek closes with what seems like a statement of bleak pessimism—that “the light at the end of the tunnel is probably an approaching train”—that is linked to the call to the Left to, at last, abandon the logics of protest and postponement and to act “without guarantees”. Žižek’s call to “abandon hope” and embrace the “courage of hopelessness”—in confronting the linked problems of social inequality, looming war, and ecological crisis—is a provocation to articulate a new kind of utopia rather than an endorsement of despair.

The hope that Žižek discusses relates to the fact that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, everything remains the same. The same multinational corporate capitalism, the same global state system, the same neoliberal economic policies, the same worldwide social inequalities. The complex of problems that Žižek investigates remains, therefore, the same. On Žižek’s analysis, progressive hopes are currently directed towards fixing the existing situation rather than accepting that the things that we hope will not happen are, in fact, about to happen—unless individuals, at last, summon the political resolution to act decisively. The problem is that “we *know* the (ecological, etc.) catastrophe is possible, probable even, and yet we do not *believe* it will really happen” (Žižek 2018, p. 296), so we retain the hope that it can all be resolved without fundamental social change. For Žižek, this characteristic attitude of “perverse disavowal” raises the fundamental problem to do with hope and belief, namely, that they are not rationally grounded. Žižek’s addressee is, of course, a progressive readership whose hopes are, he thinks, irrationally misdirected towards improvement. But the dark hopes of the alt-Right, directed towards apocalyptic visions of political violence and the restoration of social hierarchies, are no more rational. Nor are the hopes of the world’s current neoconservative leadership, directed as they are to trading lives for money, in the context of exchanging pandemic for recession.

Hope and belief, in other words, belong to the field of ideology—provided that we understand *that* term as a neutral, descriptive category, designating the lived experience of a form of social existence combined with a relation to the natural world (including the human body). Just as there is no such thing as an opposition between ideological false consciousness and scientific true consciousness, only false or verified scientific hypotheses, there is no such thing as “false hope” or “delusional belief”. Hope is always positive, just as belief always speculates. There are, however, hopes for things that are worthless. That is what is generally meant by saying that a hope is deceptive or illusory. And there are beliefs whose speculations are based not on ideas but on myths. These beliefs are mythological, that is, they consist in enigmatic symbol complexes yet to be actually deciphered.

By contrast, in Žižek’s explorations of political theology, he provides a very clear answer to the question of whether it is possible to have a religious reformation rather than simply the replacement of one supernatural belief by another one that is structurally identical. In *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Žižek proposes that conventional Christianity is based on the supernatural belief in an omnipotent and benevolent God that involves an economy of sacrifice (human sinfulness, Christ’s redemption) (Žižek 2003, pp. 106–9). This is linked to the fantasy of paradise, whose “perverse enactment” in fundamentalist Christianity

involves the punishment of excluded groups. But Žižek also indicates a “death of God” interpretation of Christian theology in which supernatural belief is replaced by faith in the community through the process of the “sacrifice of sacrifice,” the relinquishment of hope based on a guarantee of salvation, and investment in hope grounded in the solidarity of the all too human (Žižek 2003, p. 91). The political translation of these theological propositions is provided by Žižek’s argument that Marxism was structured like a religion, with belief in history as the analogue of belief in God. According to Žižek, then, the alternative to belief in history and hope for utopia is confidence in the political community based on acceptance of contingency rather than reliance on necessity, which leads to an embrace of provisional experimentation rather than longing for a metaphysical guarantee (Žižek 2003, pp. 130–31).

Newheiser’s *Hope in a Secular Age* makes the case for an ethical discipline characterised by self-critical hope as a source for unpredictable transformation in secular politics. Against the view that hope, and especially religious hope, is false and unsustainable, Newheiser argues that a hope that acknowledges its uncertainty bears within it a promise for future transformation and sustains the urgent work of addressing present political injustices—a profound suggestion. To the long list of scholars on deconstruction and negative theology, we must now add the name of David Newheiser, whose rich, judicious, and insightful *Hope in a Secular Age* offers the first sustained comparative reading of Derrida and Pseudo-Dionysius as two thinkers of hope. It may well seem implausible at first look to read the ancient negative theologian together with the modern philosopher, but Newheiser argues that both perform an immanent critique of a certain metaphysical or ontotheological tradition of the thinking being, essence, and the divine and seek to expose or reopen that tradition to an ethical thinking of the absolute other beyond all anthropomorphic projections. For Newheiser, Dionysius and Derrida may well end up hoping for very different things from this encounter with the other—which is to say, the kingdom of God and the democracy to come, respectively—but both are, nonetheless, practitioners of what he calls a “hope that acknowledges its uncertainty” (Newheiser 2019, p. 9). In this difficult hope—which persists in the absence of any firm ontotheological ground or claim whatsoever—we encounter the “hope in a secular age” of which the book’s title speaks: a fragile, modest, nondogmatic, and antiutopian but residually ethical candle in the darkness of an (apparently hopeless) era.

For Newheiser, this defence for hope is positively open to self-critique and self-transformation. It is possible to find a similarly self-critical, indeed ethical, negativity in Pseudo-Dionysius’s apophatic theology, because the apophaticism refuses every attempt to name or know God. Newheiser insists on the provisionality (Newheiser 2019, p. 57) of such manmade conceptual structures in the fake work. Newheiser takes a careful approach to a view that has “particular hopes while holding them open to revision” (Newheiser 2019, p. 106).

5. A Wholistic Approach

Perhaps, as in many other cases, these developments may well be beneficial to the Gospel, prompting a needful correction of emphasis. The offer of forgiveness of sins and a place in heaven, which has characterised much traditional evangelical preaching, is actually one-sided. It has, and very rightly, been caricatured as the promise of “pie in the sky when you die”. Christianity, particularly under the influence of Greek dualism, has then been accused of neglecting this present life, a trend that occurred very early in asceticism. This has resulted in the neglect of social issues and caused a reaction in such ideas as in the “social gospel” or liberation theology, which, however much both probably overreacted, threw out the baby with the bathwater.

Rather, although forgiveness of sins is an absolute requirement for heaven, it enables not only life after death but also the fullness of life in the present. The death of Christ which enabled forgiveness was followed by the resurrection through which a Christian can receive eternal life. And this life is not only for the future but also for the present. Three

times in the fourth Gospel, it is stated that a believer has, not just will have, eternal life (John 3:36, 5:24, 6:47).

Indeed, it can well be suggested that it is close to heretical to preach justification without the other side as if it were all that Christianity had to offer. Rather, the scriptural offer of justification always comes with a view to its continuing into sanctification, but in any case, the offer of justification implies a change in life. It is the resultant life that can be presented as so beneficial and therefore attractive as an evangelistic plea. The focus is not so much on decision but on discipleship. The priority for the Church will then not be exclusively on direct outreach but, in conformity with Eph 4:12, on building up the body of Christ (the Church) in the present.

The truth that needs to be stressed is that Christian belief has both present and future benefits. Whereas in the gloom of the “Dark Ages”, where life was so arduous it made sense to stress the latter, even if again this was an overemphasis, in the modern era of affluence, the former must be emphasised. It would be wise to observe Buhlmann: “The average Christian takes it for granted, of course, that the church of the future will go on being the church of today and yesterday, with the same social structures, ‘indestructible by divine right’, as is commonly assumed. But nevertheless in the year 2200 the church must and will look very different in its outward appearance from what we are accustomed to today”.

5.1. Christianity Is Relational

The Gospel has often been presented as obtaining something, namely, eternal life. This has often been an attractive appeal in a modern worldview which has exacerbated materialism. Even if eternal life is intangible, it is an acquisition, to be received also in material terms by losing something, sins. Indeed, sin has often been seen in quasi-material terms, as a “thing” which had to be eradicated, like Christian’s burden in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

The postmodern person is hungry for what is at the heart of the Christian message, that the nature of God not only is inherently relational in the Trinity but also manifests in relationship, in love (1 John 4:8, 10). That the Christian lifestyle is of love is then also very meaningful, because postmodernism cannot tolerate commands; Jesus “hit the nail on the head” in his summary of the law (Matt 22:37). And more than this, the Gospel includes the promise of the Spirit, whose fruit includes love (Gal 5:22); God enables what he commands!

It is commonly said that the reason that the early Church grew so rapidly was the love that was so evident in it. Here is, then, a challenge to the modern Church, particularly in the light of that promise, to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Or are we included in Stephen’s accusation that you always resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51)?

The Gospel offer goes to the heart of the modern desire for harmony. But deep relationships without need to be matched and produced by those within. Again, this is a fruit of the Spirit, who gives peace (Gal 5:22). Such peace is not attainable by any other means, it is that which the world cannot give (John 14:27). This presents a real challenge to the churches, for there can only be one reaction from a postmodern person, desperate for peace, who comes into one of our conflict-ridden gatherings. Where is the reality of the Gospel? Tragically, it is available but so often not accessed. The postmodern person will not respect the Church for its own sake, because of its tradition, but only if it is seen to be effective and helpful; its authority comes from its vision for the community and evidence of its love (Allen et al. 1997, pp. 25, 37). Anyone who seeks to present the Gospel must exhibit honesty, humility, and openness if he or she expects to be heard because postmodern communication is not just the presentation of facts but of “feeling” (Allen et al. 1997, pp. 70, 92). The first step is always to build a level of trust. The emphasis can no longer be cognitive, but on the transformation of the whole person; evangelism is first performed experientially, and only afterward comes teaching (Jones 2001, p. 111). This is not to throw out the cognitive completely but to observe that the postmodern person is attracted by the balance between this and the emotive.

5.2. Meddling in the Wrong Pot

Many people think that it is only people on the *left* of the theological spectrum who succumb to philosophical dependence and corruption. In the case of Colossians, it is convincing that there were two groups, one on the right (Jewish legalism) and one on the left (incipient Gnosticism). The same is rather true of us today. Fundamentalists would find it difficult to accept that *they* of all people, with all their *zeal* to be true to the Scriptures, could have succumbed to something as worldly and secular as rationalistic philosophy. This is evident in their approach to the Spirit especially, their epistemology, and their sense of “experience”. This is recognised by Buhlmann in his writing, “. . . to live the faith in a secularised and unjust world. The sole credible response is orthopraxis, the self-evident actions of persons who encountered Christ and now go through the world as his disciples, bearing witness to his lifestyle: performing good works everywhere and freeing persons from every ill (Acts 10:38)” (Buhlmann 2001, p. 183).

While there is concern about our “meddling” with postmodern philosophy as we see demonstrated in the Emergent Church, it is equally concerning about the rationalism evident in fundamentalism. Once again, there is a point that needs to be emphasised, namely, that there is a *difference between secular philosophy and Christian philosophy*. This level of intellectual Christianity with its “bibliolatry” and harsh attitude towards the wider body of Christ is equally dangerous. It is interesting that the conservative “right” finds it much more difficult to acknowledge its error than the errant left! The Pharisees in the time of Jesus just could not see the error of their ways, because they were so “self-justified” as in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. There was the exception of a few, like Nicodemus in John 3 who stole away to see Jesus at night: “There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him’”.

The same “rigid right” view can be seen in the pivotal Acts 15 Jerusalem Council. Some converts, previously from this “religious right”, tried to prevent the Gentile converts from being accepted as members of the Church until they were “circumcised”! It was there that the Gospel was put to the test within the early Christian community. While we are checking on the doors of the house, let us ensure that we check the front and the back doors! “Certain signs today indicate that the secular is often a wasteland, a spiritual vacuum. Even where Christians are present, the world seems to be waiting and longing for a more evident sharing in the life that God offers in his Spirit. This desire finds expression in a search for spirituality” (Lineamenta 1997, p. 74).

5.3. Abundant Life in Community

It is in this context of community and relationship that Jesus’s affirmation of abundant life makes sense, especially to a postmodern person, for whom experience and pleasure constitute the good life (Lyon 2000, p. 82) but for whom the loss of purpose and lack of optimism produce deep misery (Long 1997, p. 74).

It is interesting that Erickson (1998b, p. 63f) includes Francis Schaeffer in his discussion of postmodernism. He indeed anticipated many of the trends that would emerge, and, significantly, proposed a valid approach to a person in the emerging new world. He was cited by Erickson as having said, “press a person to the despair that is the consequence of his or her worldview, and only when that person sinks into inevitable despair, hold out the answer in Christ” (Erickson 1998b, pp. 69, 78).

It is this that can be so wonderful to a postmodern person, for such a one, in his or her individuality, is painfully lonely. A person has no identity outside social roles (Veith 2020, p. 84). Long (1997, p. 61) suggests that the catchphrase of the postmodern generation is “I belong therefore I am”, contrasting with Anselm’s belief in order to understand, and Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” of the two previous worldviews.

It is really no accident that divorce has mushroomed in a postmodern world. But in the wonder of the relationship with God through the Spirit comes the possibility of a deep

relationship with others, which is, unsurprisingly, the only real foundation for successful marriage.

Middleton and Walsh, according to Erickson (1998b, p. 116), suggest that the postmodern person has a profound sense of homelessness in the world; it is our own construction, damaged by us and damaging others. The world has lost the Enlightenment dream of ongoing progress to a goal, leaving just change (Erickson 1998b, p. 48). This results in pessimism, and in such a situation, the hope of a real future becomes very attractive; this is not the escape to a nirvana but to a utopia far better than modernism hoped for, the provision of a real home. Moloney (1997) makes a profound observation and suggestion by quoting from *Encyclical Letter "Ecclesiam Suam" with a Discussion Aid Outline*.

The Christian church, which lays claim to be the community of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, is called to a patient reflection upon the Christian tradition in order to gain new insights into its responsibilities and challenges in an ever-changing world. An authoritative spokesman of the Catholic Christian tradition, Pope Paul VI, once wrote down his understanding of the process of making the Christian church conform more closely to its original design and yet present a relevant face to the world:

"We should always wish to lead her [the church] back to her perfect form corresponding, on the one hand to her original design and, on the other, fully consistent with the necessary development which, like a seed grown into a tree, has given to the church her legitimate and concrete form of history" (*Ecclesiam Suam* 83).

And with it comes a real identity. While the postmodern longing is to belong, the desired harmony is not that of submergence into the crowd but goes with a deep need for significance. Here, Lyon (2000, p. 77) defines postmodernism by consumerism but immediately observes that this is not just blatant materialism but is performed "to make a unique personal statement" and is about "constructing an expressive lifestyle" (Lyon 2000, p. 82). This is an inevitable reaction to a worldview that unmakes the self (Wyschogrod 1997, p. 341). The stress on the ego, so fundamental to modernism, has gone (Erickson 1998b, p. 109). It is here that the declaration of the significance of the person as created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), and then as having the potential of being an adopted child of God (Rom 8:15), can be very attractive.

5.4. Peace at Home

It can be so wonderful to meet a Saviour who has gone to prepare a real home (John 14:2). In the absence of anything reliable, it can be a joy to meet the one who is described as a solid foundation (1 Cor 3:11, 1 Pet 2:6). Life is then not something that belongs to a person by nature, as in the Greek view, but is only possible by relating to the only one who lives eternally by nature.

The essence of the Church perhaps needs to be presented not so much as *ekklesia*, as separation, valid though this is, but as *kuriakon*, belonging to the Lord, a term which in any case gives us the word "church" (Peters 1992, p. 260). We are saved by relating to Christ, enabled through his sacrificial love. Maybe it is more than just an accident that the first postmodern generation is often called "generation X" (Long 1997, p. 12). And Generation "X" is not optimistic (Erickson 1998b, p. 87). It is appropriate that in such circumstances that "X" is not just the common symbol for the unknown, seeing that "X" is also the sign of Christ, and not just the first letter of his name in Greek but also a symbol of his atoning sufferings, which is a response of love. Interestingly enough, X is not understood, and so we have moved to Generation Y, then Generation Z, and are now up to Generation a (small alpha)!

While the postmodern rejection of rational communication inevitably causes discomfort to Christians, who have rejoiced in the description of Jesus as the "Word" of God, this description of Jesus as the *logos* does include other aspects. One of these is the idea of rationality, problematic in postmodernism, but the idea most applicable and important in the early Church to declare that Jesus was the expression, or revelation, of God, particularly His image (Heb 1:3). In contrast to the Old Testament, the fundamental revelation of God

was not in mere words but in a person. This is very postmodern! If a person is presented with Jesus, rather than a “dead” book or even with its message (despite Erickson 1998a, p. 174), there is more likely to be a response. The message of God was incarnate, the entry to interactive relationships with people; there was no sermonic monologue (Allen et al. 1997, p. 48)! Here, Erickson does point out that Jesus presented his truth in a parable; this is such a postmodern method and contrasts vividly with the more dogmatic approach of Paul, which was so attractive in previous worldviews. Even in modernism, it is probably true that most people come to Christ by personal invitation and not through mass rallies (Peters 1992, p. 300).

Compassion is a key element in responding to post-Christian culture. We need to understand the reasons behind people’s rejection of Christianity and approach them with empathy.

Another important aspect is humility. We must recognise that we do not have all the answers and that we can learn from others. This requires us to be open to different perspectives and willing to engage in respectful dialogue.

Finally, we need to respond with grace. This means extending love and forgiveness to those who may have hurt us or rejected our faith. We must also be willing to extend hospitality and create space for people to explore their beliefs without fear of judgment or condemnation.

5.5. Promoting Humility and Empathy

In responding to a post-Christian culture with love and grace, it is crucial for Christians to cultivate humility and empathy. Humility enables us to acknowledge our own weaknesses and limitations, while empathy helps us understand and relate to those who hold different beliefs.

To cultivate humility, we must recognise that we are not the ultimate arbiters of truth but rather that we are all on a journey of discovery. This requires a willingness to listen and learn from others, even when we disagree with them.

Empathy, on the other hand, involves putting ourselves in another person’s shoes and seeking to understand their perspective. This means recognising the unique experiences and challenges that shape their worldview and being willing to show compassion and care, even when we do not see eye to eye.

6. Conclusions

So the issue at stake is our relationship with Scripture on the one hand and philosophy on the other. *Scripture, taken as a whole, presents us with a distinctive worldview.* God is at the centre of that worldview, and God tells us within His Word how He communicates with us and what the content of that communication is. If, for example, the Emergent Church finds that the Biblical doctrine of hell is unpalatable to the emerging postmodern, Post-Christian community, that does not change the reality of the doctrine of hell! All philosophical worldviews find the doctrine of hell unpalatable! Hell is not a poor advert for the message of the cross as muted by postmodernists but rather one *motivating* message to accept the doctrine of the cross.

We do not have any right to alter God’s message or the Church’s teachings—including the worldview of the Scriptures! The Scriptures have an established, all-incorporating worldview, established for all ages—past, present, and future. Our task is to accurately communicate God’s message in an understandable and palatable way, given that worldview, in every age. The message of the cross will always be a tough message. Our role is to be careful exegetes of the text and then systematisers of the message of the text, and finally, we need to be students of the world community in which we live. Our task is then given with love, reason, and power. There is a significant reason why Paul says in Rom 1:16, “It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .”.

In Acts 17, Paul demonstrates how the Gospel can be communicated within any context. He demonstrates how there are certain “non-negotiables” like the incarnation

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet there is an ability to engage with and persuade philosophical religious constructs. Paul also reveals how to measure truth within these constructs, for example, “in Him we move and have our being”. All truth is God’s truth, but we cannot construct truth in a systematic way except from the perspective of revelation and the church. Our distinctive task is to be witnesses to Jesus Christ—who is the Gospel.

What has been said above means that the postmodern appeal is not so much to those outside the Church but to those inside! The need for the Church in a postmodern/post-Christian milieu is not so much of what they should do but what they should be. If the Church is to touch this generation, it must primarily exhibit abundant, “authentic” life. The text so often used in personal evangelism, Revelation 3:20, perhaps should be interpreted as Jesus knocking not at the door of our heart but of the Church. For if we live as the Gospel demands, and use the power that the Spirit provides to do this, there will in fact be no need to go out to appeal to a generation that, in its postmodernism, will not listen if all we do is speak. The appeal is to follow Christ who was and is the living word.

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