

The Crisis of Faith Today

Will He Find Faith on the Earth?

Paper #3

The Challenge of Postmodern Christianity

by

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Introduction

The Concept of Religion In This Paper

As I shall use the term in this paper, a “religion” is a worldview—including a set of values, beliefs, and perceptions—that provides the basis upon which, and the criteria with respect to which, an individual can judge himself to be “good.” The primary function of a religion—as I am using the term—is to make it possible for the adherent of that religion to think of himself as righteous and worthy. The religious believer is given a set of beliefs, values, and/or practices that allow him to count himself among those who are good, enlightened, and righteous, and not among those who are ignorant sinners. In the language of a recent quote, it is by being faithful to the right religion that you can ensure yourself that you are not included in the “basket of deplorables.”

Note that this definition of religion—the one I am employing in this paper—says nothing about belief in God. It is entirely possible for atheism to function as a religion as surely as any form of theism. So long as a belief system enables the one who adheres to it to think of himself as more righteous, more enlightened, and more intellectually responsible, then it is a religion in the sense that I am employing the concept. The atheist who believes that his willingness to embrace atheism makes him more intellectually honest and courageous and, therefore, a better person than those poor benighted God-believers is using his atheism as a religion.

It is also important to note that—in the way that I am using the concept—“religion” is *never* a good thing. It is always a false alternative to genuine belief in the Truth and genuine obedience to the Creator. The truth is that each and every human being is an unworthy creature, deserving of condemnation and destruction. Every human being, in his natural-born humanity, is inherently sinful and depraved. A human being can respond to this truth about himself in one of two ways: (i) he can come to accept and acknowledge this unflattering truth about himself, or (ii) refusing to accept it, he can seek to avoid it. Religion is a virtually universal strategy that mankind has devised for the latter response—for avoiding the truth about oneself. If, with the help of my religion, I can convince myself that I am righteous, good, enlightened, and wise, then I can more easily reject the claim that I am unworthy and unrighteous. All of us who embrace a religion—no matter which religion it is—do so precisely because it “works.” It keeps me from having to accept the uncomfortable truth that I am an unrighteous sinner deserving of condemnation and destruction. If and when our religion stops working, we stop believing it.

Notice, therefore, that self-righteousness is endemic to every religion. Christian fundamentalists and Pharisees do not have a monopoly on self-righteous hypocrisy.¹ Any religion that “works”

1. So, for example, some atheists would have to be included among the most self-righteous people who exist. It is easy to feel smugly superior if you think that you are more rational, more “scientific,” more informed, more intellectually courageous, more intellectually honest, etc. Self-righteousness is certainly not the exclusive possession

for its adherents does so precisely because it provides a basis for self-righteousness. By definition, a religion "works" if it succeeds as a basis for my viewing myself as righteous. Self-righteousness will have a different look under different religions. But, in the final analysis, self-righteousness is nevertheless self-righteousness. And all self-righteousness is contrary to the Truth.

Finally, it is very important to note what the role of religion is not. The purpose of religion is *not* to put me in touch with what is true. Its purpose is to allow me to feel righteous; to allow me to convince myself that I am a good guy. It functions as it should when it brings me to a place where I can feel that I am one of the righteous, enlightened ones. It is of secondary importance, at best, whether the beliefs, perceptions, practices, and values that I embrace are true. It doesn't ultimately matter whether they put me in touch with objective reality. That is not their role. Their role is to allow me to have a good opinion of myself. So long as they permit me to do that, it is of little concern to me whether they are actually true.

This has a very important practical ramification. No human being can be argued out of his religious convictions. No facts, no evidence, no argument, and no reasoning whatsoever will be able to dislodge a person from his religious values and beliefs. Why not? Because reason has nothing to do with it. And reason has nothing to do with it because *truth* has nothing to do with it. It is not a question of what is true, it is a question of what—in *my own eyes*—makes me righteous. I am not going to discard what allows me to feel righteous in my own self-assessment just because somebody makes an argument for why my beliefs or values are likely not true. The religious person does not believe what he does because he wants to believe the truth. He believes what he does because he wants to think of himself as righteous.

This is why religions have developed the concept of "faith." A religious commitment is a commitment to believe whatever one's religion requires of him, no matter what. Even if my religion requires me to believe something that is obviously false and defies all reason, I will believe it anyway. Why? Because I accept it on the basis of "faith," not on the basis of reason. In other words, I do not accept it because I have reason to know it is true. Rather, I accept it because I am religiously committed to believing it anyway. This "faith"—commitment to believing it anyway—is precisely what makes me righteous!²

Modern America: A Two-Religion Culture

In this paper, I will be writing about the state of things in America. I suspect that what I have to say about America will be roughly true of virtually every culture within Western Civilization, but my analysis is focused on modern American culture exclusively.

In America today, the vast majority of its inhabitants divide between two competing religious perspectives: (1) the Christian religion, and (2) the Postmodern Secular Progressive religion. (I

of people who believe in God.

2. This, of course, is fundamentally and essentially at odds with the concept of belief (faith) found in the Bible. In the Bible, belief is a commitment one makes to a claim because he has every reason to think it is true. Truth is of utmost importance to biblical belief. Its being true is why one should believe it. To believe something that one suspected was not true would *never* be righteous, it would be unrighteous; it would be intellectually irresponsible.

will often use the notation "PSP" to substitute for the clumsier phrase, "Postmodern Secular Progressive.") Certainly there are other religions in America, but their impact and influence is not as pervasive as these two. Arguably, the 2016 presidential elections that we just witnessed were the latest skirmish in a religious war that has been broiling in America for several decades now. The recent elections showed our nation to be divided quite evenly between two competing religions. The elite class that controls the major institutions of our culture (that is, the establishment) adheres to the PSP religion. Most of the ordinary citizens *who do not identify with the establishment* (the "non-elites") adhere to the Christian religion.

Now it is important to note that, from the standpoint of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles, *both* of these religions are false alternatives. Jesus is not on the side of the Christian religion and against the PSP religion.³ He stands against both of them. Jesus calls us to worship God "in spirit and in truth," not in and through religious commitment—no matter what religion it is.

Some will object to this analysis on the grounds that it is preposterous to claim that the mass of ordinary citizens who do not identify with the establishment (i.e., Trump-voters) are adherents of the Christian religion. Most of them are immoral, indecent, wicked, godless people. And many of them explicitly reject the Christian religion. So, how can one plausibly call such people adherents of the Christian religion?

The point of this analysis is not to suggest that the mass of "non-elites" are good and consistent Christians. Obviously most are not. But what religious perspective and worldview do they employ when they evaluate themselves and others? Arguably, they employ the perspectives and worldview of the Christian religion—and *NOT the perspectives and worldview of the PSP religion*. Many of them know that they come up woefully short when evaluated by the standards of Christian righteousness (and they think of themselves in that way). Others think of themselves as perfectly righteous by the standards of Christian righteousness (and they think of themselves that way). But whichever conclusion they reach about themselves, it is by the standards and criteria of the Christian religion that they form their judgment. Even if they are self-deceived about their own righteousness, they deceive themselves with respect to the application of Christian standards and criteria. They have no desire or inclination to evaluate themselves according to the standards and criteria of the PSP religion.

The only individuals who adhere to no religion at all are authentic followers of Jesus the Messiah. Genuine Jesus-followers are committed to Truth over any religion and any religious commitments. Consequently, they adhere to no religion. Everyone else adheres to one religion or another. So, unless an American has been trained up in the ways of the PSP religion, or unless he adheres to some minor religion, or unless he is a genuine follower of Jesus, he will, by default, be an adherent to the Christian religion.

3. However, anyone who understands the respective worldviews of the Bible, the Christian religion, and the PSP religion cannot help but notice that the teaching and worldview of the Bible has very little in common with the PSP religion and has much more in common with the Christian religion.

Postmodern Secular Progressivism As the Civil Religion of America

Arguably, the PSP religion is the civil religion of modern America. What do I mean by that? The PSP religion is the religious perspective that is taught, proclaimed, propagated, and enforced in all the major institutions of modern American culture. It prevails in all of the state-sponsored educational institutions and in most of the private ones. It prevails within all the institutions of mainstream journalism and broadcasting. (Arguably, the Christian religion may predominate in the institutions of the alternative media.) It prevails within all the bureaucracies of the government. It predominates in almost all segments of the entertainment industry. It tends to prevail in the upper echelons of most major industry and business. And, arguably, it tends to prevail in most mainstream religious institutions within America. As a consequence, if one wants to participate in any aspect of American culture today, he must at least pretend to adhere to the worldview, values, and perceptions of PSP. Not to do so inevitably causes a person to be marginalized or shut out of American life altogether.⁴

However, there remain many adherents to the Christian religion today. They exist in various subcultures that render adherence to Christian values and beliefs plausible. Such subcultures, arguably, constitute about half of America's population today. As the latest election demonstrated, adherents to the Christian religion remain a very powerful and influential voting block. They have very little power apart from the power of the vote. But, at least for now, Christians still have the power of the vote and remain a social and political force to be reckoned with.

Nevertheless, all the momentum is with the PSP civil religion. As the prevailing viewpoint that is advanced and enforced in every major segment of American society, over time, the PSP civil religion can be expected to gain increasing dominance over the Christian religion. Unless something unforeseen should change the current social landscape, the trajectory is for the PSP civil religion to increase and the Christian religion to decrease.⁵

The Power of Culture and The Advantage to PSP

In the second paper in this series—in our historical survey of the various challenges to biblical Truth—we noted, in various different circumstances throughout history, the power that culture has over the minds and thinking of human individuals. The values, beliefs, perceptions, and practices that predominate in any given culture appear so obviously true and right to the person immersed in that culture that he will tend to embrace them uncritically. He will simply take it for

4. The story of Tim Tebow is instructive in this regard. Because he was outspokenly Christian in his worldview, values, and perceptions (rather than being a vocal adherent to the worldview, values, and perceptions of the PSP civil religion), he was quite dramatically scorned and marginalized by powerful voices within American culture. I do not have the knowledge and expertise to evaluate his abilities as a football player. But one thing was clear to me. The contempt showed toward him had nothing to do with his football ability! The lesson: even if you are just a football player, don't you dare challenge the American civil religion—Postmodern Secular Progressivism.

5. Recent polls have shown that belief in God among the younger generation has decreased dramatically within the last few decades.

granted that they are good, right, and true. As a consequence, our culture tends to shape us and define us. It instills in us, as individuals, those same beliefs, perceptions, and values that characterize the culture at large.

This is why the biblical authors always represent culture (what they call "the world") as the enemy of Truth. Coming to embrace the Truth is always a significant victory over my particular culture.⁶ Why? Because my culture was not shaped and created by Truth-seekers, it was shaped and formed by people who are in rebellion against the Truth.⁷ Therefore, its values, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes will inevitably be ones that stand in opposition to the Truth. Because human beings are what they are, the cultures that they inevitably create will be ones that stand against the things of God, not ones that respect the things of God. Therefore, if a person wants to find his way to the Truth that comes from God, he will have to swim upstream against the current of his own culture—no matter what world culture he lives in.

I would submit that the values, beliefs, and perceptions of PSP civil religion are those that predominate in contemporary American culture.⁸ It is those values, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes that must be overcome if one is to come to embrace the Truth from God. The winds of PSP religious culture are blowing with such force today that it takes a miracle for any individual not to be blown along in their current. To be an authentic Jesus-believer, one must overcome PSP religious culture. But to do so is impossible apart from a God-given miracle in the mind and heart of that individual. The bottom line is this: with regard to the power of contemporary American culture, it has become virtually impossible to become and remain a true follower of Jesus. Granted, what is impossible with man is possible with God. But, so far as man is concerned, contemporary PSP religion has made authentic belief in Jesus virtually impossible.

Due to the power of culture, it is also the case that the PSP civil religion has a clear advantage in the ongoing religious (cold) war that is being waged. The Christian religion is fighting a losing battle. All of the major cultural institutions are arrayed against the Christian religion and mobilized in support of the PSP civil religion. Time will tell. But, unless something drastically changes, it would appear that the PSP civil religion must inevitably prevail over the Christian religion in the future of American culture.

6. Cf. 1 John 5:3-6. "Indeed, this is the love of God: that we keep his instruction. Now his instructions are not too difficult to keep, because every *child* who is fathered by God has **victory over the world**. And this is **the victory that is victorious over the world: our belief**. Who is the one **who is victorious over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God**? It is this *Jesus*: the one who came for the purpose of the water and for the purpose of the blood. Jesus is the Messiah—not because of the water only, but because of both the water and the blood." (My translation and my emphasis in bold.) Cf. also Romans 12:2.

7. Because, from a biblical perspective, rebels against the Truth will always vastly outnumber Truth-seekers in any given culture.

8. They dominate even more than those of the Christian religion. American culture will readily allow a person to abandon his upbringing in the Christian religion in order to join the more enlightened crowd who embrace the PSP civil religion. Going the other direction is not so readily accepted. To become an adherent to some stream of the Christian religion is to fall away from enlightenment and to join the unenlightened. To become an authentic follower of Jesus would be even worse.

The Upcoming Religious War in America

Many have observed the cultural divide that has existed in America for a number of decades between two incompatible belief and value systems. For a number of years, members of these two different cultures have been engaged in a struggle, attempting to gain the ascendancy for their respective sets of values. This struggle has typically been dubbed the "culture war." I would submit that this so-called "culture war" is actually a religious war. It is nothing other than the collision of the Christian religion and the PSP religion—the two major religious worldviews that I identified above. The collision of these two incompatible religious viewpoints has created a significant degree of instability in modern American culture. It is not at all clear whether America will be able to avoid an escalation in this religious civil war that has been raging for several years. As each of the warring factions becomes increasingly entrenched in its respective religious commitments, the greater the tension between them becomes. It is difficult to see how—without a significant change in the American landscape—the seismic tension created by their opposition will not ultimately resolve itself into a civil war.

Postmodern Secular Progressivism: What Is It?

The Postmodern Secular Progressive religion is (amazingly enough) secular, progressive, and postmodern. To understand the mindset, values, and perceptions of the PSP religion, we need to understand what each of these respective descriptions means.

Secular

To say that the Postmodern Secular Progressive religion is *secular* is to say that it is committed to seeing reality as utterly and completely explicable apart from any reference to God or anything else that transcends the physical reality we inhabit.⁹ Reality just is material stuff and the physical, chemical, and biological laws that govern it. There ain't no more. Everything, therefore, must and will be explicable in terms of material reality.

The concept of God, if it is granted any relevance at all, is a concept that mankind has invented to give him aid as he attempts to navigate the physical, material reality he inhabits. In other words, it is not as if there actually is a transcendent being who created the material, physical brains of human beings. Rather, the physical, material brains of human beings evolved in such a way that their brains created the notion of God. God did not create the human being. The human being created God. Indeed, the concept of God has no actual, existing referent. Or, if it does, it refers to a vague, unknowable being who is largely uninvolved and essentially irrelevant to

9. It will seem odd to many that I am calling a thoroughly secular worldview a religion. Through many centuries of Christian culture, we have grown accustomed to thinking that the essence of religion is a belief in God or some such transcendent being. Hopefully it is clear that I am not defining religion in that way. A religion is a set of beliefs (and practices) that I hold on the basis of a certain kind of commitment (namely, a "religious" commitment) and that provides the basis upon which I can view myself as "righteous" in some sense. Hence, there is nothing in the nature of a "religion" (by this definition) that entails nor requires a belief in anything that transcends the physical, material universe.

human life. The only things that actually do exist are things constituted of physical matter and energy.¹⁰

Progressive

To say that the Postmodern Secular Progressive religion is *progressive* is to say that PSP religion embraces the values, goals, emphases, and perceptions of Progressivism. By "Progressivism" I mean the social-political belief system (arising out of the Enlightenment) that has the following characteristics:

- (1) It holds the (secular) belief that every evil and injustice, every obstacle to human flourishing, and every source of suffering arises from evil elements that are built into the very fabric of society. Therefore, the only way to promote human flourishing is to transform society. Only by creating a truly good and just society can one promote human flourishing.
- (2) It holds the (fully secular) belief that the greatest good that any individual can achieve (the greatest good an individual can hope for) is to live in a truly good and just society during the course of his physical existence. Correspondingly, the best thing I can accomplish in the world is to serve to promote a better and more just society during my lifetime.
- (3) It holds the general belief that—because humanity has left its superstitious, religious past behind—humanity has entered upon a path toward what is true and right. Mankind's understanding, therefore, can be expected to grow ever truer and better as time marches on. Therefore, all change in cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes will be a change for the better. The more we learn, the better we understand. Furthermore, the more we learn and the better we understand, the less inclined we will be to believe in God and the transcendent.
- (4) It holds the corresponding belief that experts and professionals (those who have a real mastery of the truer and better knowledge at which mankind is arriving) are those who know best how each and every individual ought to conduct his life.
- (5) It holds the more specific belief that the governance of any given society ought to be placed in the hands of experts and professionals. The common man cannot be trusted to act in such a way that he will act in his own true best interests. Certainly he cannot be trusted to act in such a way that he will act in the society's best interests.

Belief in the existence of a cultural "elite" is endemic to Progressivist social theory. There is a class of people who are smart enough, moral enough, and enlightened enough that they are com-

10. It is true that many people who are markedly "secular" in their mindset and perspectives do, in fact, claim to believe that there is a God. However, their belief in God is not proof that they are not secular. Rather, their belief in God is a leftover relic of traditional beliefs and attitudes in which they were raised or educated. Typically, it is incoherently embraced alongside the working understanding of reality that actually informs their everyday beliefs, perceptions, and values. This point becomes critical in understanding the impact of PSP religious beliefs on the beliefs of Postmodern Christians. Secularism is utterly and completely incompatible with the worldview of Jesus and the apostles (and, therefore, with the worldview of Christianity), but the tolerance for incoherence that characterizes modern secular postmodernism generally allows for Postmodern Christianity to believe in God without having to actually believe in God.

petent to engineer a truly good and just society. The new "elite" class envisioned by Progressivism is not defined by birth or wealth. Therefore, it is not a fixed class. It is defined by being "enlightened" enough to be in the "inner circle" of those who know how to promote a better and more just society. Someone can become a member of this elite, inner circle simply by becoming sufficiently "enlightened."

In older, more traditional times, there were always people who would imitate the style, dress, manners, speech, etc. of the nobility, because they desired that other people perceive them as belonging to the elite inner circle of the nobility. Similarly, progressivism creates a new inner circle to which many aspire to belong. By adopting the "fashionable" beliefs, values, and attitudes of the elite class, one can believe of himself that others perceive him as belonging to the inner circle of the enlightened. In other words, one need not actually have position, power, and influence to belong to the elite enlightened class of the progressivist's imagination. One need only conform his values and beliefs to the fashionable standards of progressivist orthodoxy.

Postmodern

To say that the Postmodern Secular Progressive religion is postmodern is to say that PSP religion embraces the analysis of truth and rationality advanced by postmodernism. In postmodernism, truth is not that set of beliefs that puts me in touch with reality—that is, that puts me in touch with the way things actually are. Rather, truth is simply my particular "take" on reality. Postmodernism begins from the assumption that "the way things actually are" is unknowable. It is beyond the reach of any human being. Hence, if we were to define "truth" as beliefs that describe things the way they really are, then truth would not and could not exist. Clearly, then, we must think of "truth" differently. Truth is the way that I happen to think about reality. However, to be worthy of being called "truth" it must be shared by everyone else within my culture or subculture. Hence, to call some belief "true" means that my peers will allow me to hold it without objection. In other words, "truth" is near unanimous acceptance.

Furthermore, "truth" is what allows the dominant class in any society to preserve its power, status, importance, and dominance. There are many different possible "takes" on reality that a human being might have. In any given culture or society, the class of individuals who control and dominate the other classes will inevitably impose their "take" on reality on all the other classes. The "take" on reality of the dominant class is the "truth." Any other "take" on reality is false; it is not allowed. In this way, the dominant class gets to define the rules that a society will follow. And those rules will always work to its social and economic advantage.

Another important element of postmodern thought is its belief that language governs thought and perception. The language you use to describe your reality dictates how you will think about and perceive your reality. Therefore, if you control how another person talks, you can control how that other person thinks. This is the basis for "political correctness." If we are going to transform society into a more just and better society, then we must get people to think better than they currently do. And the way to get people to think better is to get them to speak better (that is, to speak in a way that is "truer" and more just). Therefore, if we are going to transform society into

a more just and better society, we must control the language people use to speak about their world.

The Postmodern Secular Positivist Religion Today

What, then, is the Postmodern Secular Progressivist religion? PSP religion is the religious commitment that an individual makes to a set of values, beliefs, and practices that provide the basis upon which he believes himself to be a good (righteous) and enlightened person.

His religious beliefs include, but are not exhausted by, the following:

- (1) There is no such thing as a value or belief being objectively right or wrong, or being objectively true or false. Some values and beliefs are desirable for promoting a truly good and just society. Others are not desirable with respect to promoting a truly good and just society. But no belief can be said to be actually objectively true; and no value can be said to be actually objectively right.
- (2) Theism in general and Christianity in particular is a tremendous source of evil in the history of the world.
- (3) The Bible is nothing more than an artifact of human history and culture and has nothing distinctive to offer toward the promotion of a just society. In fact, the Bible—when taken too seriously—tends to promote many evils and injustices.
- (4) My death will be the end of any conscious experience. The only thing that exists for me—and the only thing that has any relevance for me—is my conscious experience during the course of my physical existence.
- (5) The only valid goal for human existence is to work to make material, physical reality a better place for human beings to inhabit. And the most significant improvement I can work to bring about is an advance toward social justice.

His religious values include the following:

- (1) Equality, where equality is defined as a societal state where each and every human individual has an equally positive experience. That is, where each and every human individual is equally happy in his existence.
- (2) Tolerance, where tolerance is defined as the positive affirmation of the variety of lifestyles, values, and beliefs that are contrary to my own way of life.
- (3) Freedom from discomfort and danger.
- (4) Any and all values that are sanctioned and supported by the PSP elite class; and the repudiation of all values that are scorned by the PSP elite class.¹¹

11. The unmistakable tendency of the elite PSP class is to reject and oppose any value that is taught by and promoted in the Bible. That is why, in earlier writings, I have labelled the PSP religion "Contra-biblicism." The only real coherence to PSP values and beliefs is the principle that, if the Bible is for it, PSP religion is against it. Otherwise, there is no discernible coherence to the set of values and beliefs embraced by the PSP religion. The

His religious practices include, but are not exhausted by, the following:

- (1) Doing, saying, and feeling things that signal the fact that I am committed to the enlightened values and beliefs of the PSP elite—which, in turn, signals the fact that I am a good and enlightened human being.¹²
- (2) Various activities that are supportive of the “elite” class having the necessary power, control, and influence in our society to shape it in accord with PSP values.¹³
- (3) Various efforts to oppose whomever they perceive to be promoting values that are incompatible with PSP values.¹⁴

Relationship Between PSP Religion and Postmodern Christianity

The thesis of this series of papers is that a new and different version of Christianity is emerging. More and more contemporary Christians are building upon the foundational belief that Jesus is the Messiah with values, attitudes, perceptions, and perspectives that are taken straight out of the modern PSP religious perspective. When they do so, they transform Christianity into something very different from what it has always been. Just as the Judaizers transformed the gospel into a religious perspective very different from what Jesus and the apostles taught, just as the early Christians transformed the gospel into a religious perspective very different from what Jesus and the apostles taught, just as the Gnostics transformed Christianity into something that was not even remotely Christian, just as the liberal Christians, the social gospel, and Pentecostal spirituality transformed the gospel of Jesus into something fundamentally different, the remaking of

particular alternatives to biblical values and beliefs that the PSP culture embraces at any given time seems to be a function of fashion. The value, belief, or practice that rises to prominence within the PSP culture at any given time is whatever happens to be morally fashionable at the time.

12. The PSP religion of today is very much like the Phariseism in the time of the New Testament. It shares a common tendency. Namely, that it is far more interesting to “look” good and righteous than it is to actually accomplish something out of one’s goodness and righteousness. Hence, it is a rather odd feature of the PSP religion of today that one’s self-concept is not based on what he actually accomplishes with respect to promoting the well-being of other human beings. Within today’s PSP religion, one’s self-concept is based on how clearly and forcefully he has signaled the values he is committed to. It is of less concern to him whether he has actually brought about some good for others on the basis of those values. In other words, it is much more important that I signal the fact that I am committed to tolerance than that I actually BE tolerant.

13. So, in America, for example, it is a “religious” act to vote for the candidate who is most clearly accepted and supported by the PSP elite class because he or she is most likely to promote PSP values. Interestingly, voting becomes a religious act in PSP religion. And what is significant about it is what your vote “says” about you as a person. From the PSP perspective, then, voting is not a rational act whereby one seeks to produce the optimal outcome. Rather, it is a moral “fashion” statement whereby the voter signals his status as an enlightened individual. (Interestingly, then, from the PSP perspective, it is not important whether an individual actually does cast a vote. What is important is the declaration of who he would have voted for if he had got around to voting.)

14. By such efforts, one is doing his part to promote a more just society. The most common religious practice is to seek to publicly vilify any opponent of PSP values and religion. To accuse the opponent of PSP religion of being a vile person of some stripe is the most common tactic. Hence, in the PSP religion, slanderous name-calling is a religious act.

Jesus into a champion and prophet of the PSP agenda creates a new and different version of Christianity that no one has ever believed before. And, in the terms that we have been employing throughout this series of papers, to build upon the foundation that Jesus is the Messiah with the values and perspectives of PSP civil religion results in building on that foundation with wood, hay, and straw. It is to create a new, dangerous alternative to the saving belief proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles. The title I am assigning to this new, dangerous alternative is "Postmodern Christianity."

I realize that it is a little confusing to speak of both PSP civil religion and Postmodern Christianity. The former (PSP civil religion) is the dominant set of values and beliefs in the general culture of America today. It is the religion of the cultural elite generally. The latter (Postmodern Christianity) is that set of attitudes, values, and beliefs that are typically held by Christians who have been significantly shaped by the value system of PSP religion. In the discussion that follows, sometimes I will focus on the larger cultural reality of PSP religion. Other times I will focus on the narrower cultural reality of Christians who, while fully identifying themselves as Christians, have embraced many of the contemporary attitudes and values promoted by PSP religion. Clearly, Postmodern Christianity is a different religion and a different cultural phenomenon from PSP religion,¹⁵ but the discussion below will primarily focus on those elements they share in common.¹⁶

The Christian and the PSP Religion

It is important to distinguish four different kinds of "Christian"—particularly as it regards their response to the PSP civil religion:

- (1) The *fully Postmodern Christian* is someone whose religious belief system has so thoroughly incorporated the essential elements of PSP civil religion that he has embraced a new syncretistic religion formed from the syncretism of the Christian religion and the PSP religion.
- (2) The *conflicted Postmodern Christian* is someone whose religious belief system has been significantly influenced by the values, beliefs, and attitudes of PSP religion. He began from the standpoint of adherence to the Christian religion, but his beliefs and values have been significantly impacted by the beliefs and values of the PSP civil religion. Since the two religious belief systems are incompatible, he is forced to live with and navigate through a variety of contradictions within his belief and value system. The conflicted Postmodern Christian will span a wide range of different perspectives, depending upon the degree to which the person has been influenced by PSP values and beliefs. He may have incorporated many PSP values and beliefs or he may have incorporated only a few of them. The more elements of PSP val-

15. Most adherents to the PSP civil religion are not even sympathetic with Christianity. And most would never claim to be Christians themselves.

16. My contention, in effect, is that Postmodern Christianity is a syncretistic religion. It incorporates a number of elements from the PSP religion within its overall Christian religious framework. As a consequence, a new religion is invented.

ues and beliefs a person has adopted the more "Postmodern" his Christianity is (and the more he has introduced internal contradictions into his belief system).

- (3) The *traditional Christian* is someone who has altogether rejected PSP religion and has successfully resisted its influence such that he has not incorporated any elements of PSP religion in his belief system.
- (4) The *authentic Jesus-believer* is someone who has altogether rejected both the PSP religion and the Christian religion and has, instead, committed himself to knowing, understanding, and living in accordance with the Truth that Jesus came into the world to reveal.

It is important to be clear that these are philosophical categories, not "spiritual" categories. That is to say, which of the above categories one finds himself classed in does not, in and of itself, determine whether he is a *bona fide* child of God—that is, it does not determine whether he will inherit eternal Life. Individuals falling in each and every one of these categories could, in principle, be *bona fide* children of God. Being a *bona fide* child of God is a function of the state of his heart. It is not a function of the state of his mind. An individual could have a heart that is *genuinely* committed to the Truth that was taught by Jesus but who, in the state of his mind, has become very confused about what that Truth is. So, the above categories do not and cannot foreclose on a person's ultimate standing before God. But they do describe the degree to which one's intellectual and personal grasp of the Truth is accurate. Only the last category represents a person who is truly embracing what Jesus actually taught.

Postmodern Christianity: The New Challenge to Authentic Apostolic Truth

In this part of the paper, I will attempt to do three things at once: (i) I will examine some of the more important characteristics of the Postmodern Secular Progressive civil religion, (ii) I will note how each of these distinctive elements of PSP civil religion has left its mark on or been incorporated into Postmodern Christianity, and (iii) I will contrast the values, beliefs, and mindset of Postmodern Christianity with the Truth taught by Jesus and the apostles. Unfortunately, I will be doing all three of these things at once. To avoid confusion, it will be important that the reader take care to note which of the three things I am doing.

Truth and Reason

The PSP religion has a radically different perspective on truth and rationality from the biblical worldview. The understanding of truth and reason that predominates within the PSP religion is unnatural as well as unbiblical. There are several distinctive ways in which the PSP perspective on truth and reason departs from sound common sense and from the biblical perspective:

The Role of a Belief

Perhaps what is most distinctive about the PSP perspective is the role that a belief plays in the life of the individual. With respect to common sense—and the biblical worldview—the role of a belief is to make contact with objective reality. I believe what I believe in order to have an accurate grasp of the way reality actually is. If a belief does not accurately represent reality to me, then it is no good. It has lost its value. False beliefs are worthless beliefs. But to PSP—and hence, to Postmodern Christianity—the role of a belief is, rather, to make a statement about me.

Fundamentally, its role is to reflect the level of my enlightenment and my righteousness. If I embrace the right set of beliefs (as that set of beliefs is prescribed by PSP orthodoxy), then I signal to others (as well as to myself) that I am an enlightened and good individual. Comparatively speaking, it makes little difference, within Postmodern Christianity, whether the belief I embrace is true. It serves its purposes whether it is true or false. Namely, I can know that I am among the enlightened and righteous elite because I espouse those beliefs that qualify me as such. So long as others support me in my thinking that a particular belief makes me righteous, it is of no further consequence whether that particular belief is actually true.

The two most dramatic examples of this are Darwinian evolution (that is, evolution through RANDOM events) and MAN-MADE global warming. Darwinian evolution¹⁷ is both scientifically unprovable and philosophically incoherent. And, yet, it is the banner belief of the enlightened class. To reject Darwinian evolution is to classify yourself as certifiably uneducated, ignorant, dangerous, and unenlightened. People have been ostracized and punished for not believing in Darwinian evolution. The modern Inquisition is in full operation.

The myth of "MAN-MADE global warming" has become the latest orthodox belief that separates the enlightened sheep from the ignorant goats.¹⁸ And yet—so far as I have been able to determine—it has no definitive scientific evidence to support it. There is as much counter evidence as there is alleged evidence. The state of the evidence ought to result in doubt or hesitancy with respect to the truthfulness of the theory. But the inconclusive state of the evidence does not prevent PSP from incorporating it into its secular fundamentalist orthodoxy. Handwringing over the destruction of the planet by MAN-MADE global warming is one of the most important ways the PSP devotee (and his Postmodern Christian counterpart) can manifest his righteousness and enlightenment.

17. I speak specifically of Darwinian evolution in contradistinction to evolution *per se*. Darwinian evolution espouses RANDOMNESS as the cause and source of change. Evolution *per se* need not rely on randomness as the "cause" of change. Randomness—and hence Darwinian evolution—is fundamentally incompatible with biblical teaching. God governs and determines everything in accordance with his will and purpose. From a biblical perspective, NOTHING in the cosmos is or can be random. Hence, Darwinian evolution is not reconcilable with the biblical worldview. However, it is not necessarily the case that evolution *per se* cannot be reconciled with the biblical worldview.

18. The theory in view here is man-made global warming, not global warming *per se*. That the climate changes over time is a matter of undeniable fact. That man-made activity is the cause of the most recent changes in global climate is the controversial issue. But this very claim has become a matter of orthodox dogma for the PSP civil religion and for the Postmodern Christianity that is built upon it. The issue here is not whether the PSP civil religion is correct in its belief that man-made activity (that is, burning fossil fuels) is the cause of the current changes in the climate. Perhaps that belief is correct. Perhaps the current changes in the climate are largely due to human activity. (I am not persuaded that this is true. It seems to me that the more objective and the more truly scientific, fact-driven assessment of the data seems to rest on the side of the critics of the man-made climate change hypothesis.) But my point here is not that PSP religion is wrong about man-made climate change. My point, rather, concerns the WAY in which man-made climate change is believed within the PSP civil religion, not the fact that it is believed. It is embraced as a *religious commitment to a dogma*, not as a rational conclusion to an argument. And its value as a belief is to put the believer on the side of the "enlightened," not to put him in touch with the truth about the climate.

Because the “truth” of a belief is of lesser significance to the PSP adherent and his Postmodern Christian cousin, critical thinking is of relatively little value. I do not need to be on my guard against lies, fraud, deception, faulty factual claims, etc.—for the basis for what I believe does not matter all that much. The purpose of my beliefs is not to represent to me what is actually the case. The purpose of my beliefs is to represent to others (and to myself) what sort of person I am. And my public image (and self-assessment) is not determined by the accuracy and truthfulness of my beliefs, it is determined by the acceptance of my beliefs among the right set of people, the enlightened class.¹⁹ But if truth is not of paramount importance, then neither is the veracity of my sources. For this reason, PSP devotees (and Postmodern Christians) become suckers for propaganda, lies, myths, and disinformation. They see no reason to think critically. They know the right thing to believe just by virtue of its having been endorsed by the right set of people.²⁰

One of the important implications of all of the above is that PSP and Postmodern Christianity do not put a premium on independence of thought. Postmodern Christianity is heavily reliant on the endorsement of the relevant mass of people. Conformity to the right, orthodox belief system, not independent assessment of the truthfulness of a belief system, is the critical factor in what one is to believe.²¹

Another important implication of the above is that the rational coherence of one’s beliefs is of little consequence. An objective appraisal of the values and beliefs of the PSP religion would—I submit—assess them to be a rationally incoherent hodgepodge of various values and beliefs.

19. And, in Postmodern perspective, that just is the “truth” of my beliefs. Acceptance by the dominant (“elite”) class is what it means to call a belief “true.”

20. Notice that this mindset has been true for quite some time within the Christian Religion. Christians have often been immune to inconvenient facts and evidence because they respond to it with a “faith” that believes what they are required to believe anyway—no matter what contrary facts and evidence might exist. Hence, this mindset is not new. What is new within the context of PSP religion is the particular set of sanctioned and orthodox beliefs that the believer is to accept by “faith.” Certainly believers in the apostolic Truth can also fail to think critically about some belief that is proposed to them. They are not immune from the problem of failing to think critically. But there is a significant difference between them and the religious believer (whether traditional Christian or Postmodern Christian). If the belief of an authentic Jesus-believer is challenged and it is shown to him that he has too hastily embraced it without careful, critical consideration, he will consider himself to have been justly and rightly rebuked and he will withdraw his commitment to that belief. Such is not the case with a fully committed PSP devotee or a Postmodern Christian. If a PSPer is challenged about his belief in some claim X by contrary facts or evidence, he will dig in his heels, plug his ears, cover his eyes, and repeat over and over and over again to himself, “I believe X. I believe X. You are an ignorant fool. You don’t know what you are talking about.” For him, it is a matter of “faith.” The facts and evidence do not matter to him, because it is not truth that matters to him.

21. It is extremely ironic that adherents to PSP are constantly praising one another for the “courage” of their beliefs and convictions. There is seldom any real courage involved. When the very purpose of your belief is to put you in good stead in the eyes of those you assess to be the wise, good, and enlightened crowd, how much courage does it take to hold that belief? However, part of the mythology of PSP religion is that holding the belief that the elite class tells you to hold makes you courageous. It qualifies you to be among that class of people who—besides being wise, good, and enlightened—are truly courageous for believing what you do. It makes no difference that it is not actually an act of courage. What is important is that you can tell yourself you have been courageous, not that you actually have been courageous.

There is no real unity to its prescribed beliefs that derives from a rationally coherent worldview. But this fact poses no significant threat to the proponent of the PSP religion. To Postmodernism, generally, the demand and expectation for rational coherence is arbitrary and a tool of oppression. The Postmodernist rejects the idea that rational coherence is anything that should recommend a belief to someone. Hence, exposing the rational incoherence of a PSPer's or Postmodern Christian's beliefs will not likely result in their reconsideration of their beliefs. They will typically just shrug it off. They are more likely to insult you—the one who attempted to point out the incoherence of their beliefs—as being unloving, hateful, racist, bigoted, or phobic with respect to one thing or another, than they are to stop and reconsider their beliefs.

It will always take the Truth-seeker off guard when his appeal to reason and evidence is met with an insult to his integrity and morality. But it has become almost second nature among PSPers. What is the right and appropriate mode of persuasion? Ridicule, sarcasm, contempt, insult, shaming, moral indignation (real or feigned), name-calling. These—and any other such devices that send the message, “You will not be accepted by us, the enlightened elite, unless you change your tune!”—these are the modes of persuasion that have become second-nature to the PSPer.

As a consequence, it is virtually impossible to dialogue with a PSPer or Postmodern Christian. When reason ceases to be an arbiter of what is true, then what is the point and purpose of dialogue. No rational argument is going to have any influence on the PSPer or Postmodern Christian. They do not believe what they believe because it is rational. They believe what they believe because it is fashionable, because it rewards them with inclusion in the enlightened elite. The only way they can be dislodged from their beliefs is by removing the reward. But the authentic believer in Truth would never consider employing the same modes of “persuasion” that PSPers practice on one another. To seek to shame, bully, or seduce someone into believing something is sophistic and immoral. As a follower of Jesus, I cannot in good conscience seek to move someone away from a belief by shaming him or bullying him. Nor can I attempt to dissuade him from a belief by convincing him that it is unfashionable—for being fashionable has nothing to do with truth. So, the Jesus-believer is in an impossible position. The only modes of “persuasion” that are likely to be effective on the PSPer or the Postmodern Christian are modes of persuasion that the authentic Jesus-believer would consider immoral. And the one mode of persuasion that the authentic Jesus-believer deems to be moral (that is, rational argument) is a mode of persuasion that has little or no effect on the PSPer or Postmodern Christian.

Facts

Given the concept of “truth” that he holds, facts are of relatively little import to the PSPer and his Postmodern Christian counterpart. In the 1990's, the Nobel Peace Prize was given to Rigoberta Menchu for her autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*. When a Stanford graduate student in anthropology, David Stoll, exposed her work as containing numerous fabrications, the response of the PSP civil religious establishment was to defend the work (and the granting of the Nobel prize) on the grounds that, while it may not have been factual, it was most certainly “true.”

There couldn't be a greater departure from both common sense and a biblical perspective. Jesus invites his hearers to believe in him because of various facts they have seen:

If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do them, though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10:37-38)

If I have not, as a matter of fact, performed miraculous signs—he submits—then you should not believe in me. But if I have, as a matter of fact, performed miraculous signs, then it is only rational that you would believe in me. Truth and factuality are inextricably bound together in both the commonsensical and biblical worldview. It is not possible for something to be counterfactual and yet serve to indicate some truth. And it is not possible for something to be factual and, at the same time, to have no bearing on truth.

But, in keeping with the role of belief in the PSP religion, the important thing about an alleged "fact" is not whether it is true, the important thing is the opportunity it affords to manifest one's righteousness and enlightenment. It is my response to the alleged fact that counts, not whether the fact is actually a fact. The important thing is what I would think about it and how I would respond to it *if it were, in fact, a fact*. It is of lesser consequence whether it actually is a fact.

Skepticism

One of the important implications of the biblical worldview is this: God created the mind of the human creature such that he has the ability to discover the truth about created reality and the ability to understand the truth about God, insofar as God has revealed himself to mankind. Postmodernism summarily rejects this. The PSP religion and Postmodern Christianity, therefore, tend toward a deep skepticism about objective truth. No human being—they tend to say—can ever claim that what he believes is the objective truth about reality or God.

This fits hand-in-glove with the PSPer's perspective that his beliefs should conform to those of the enlightened class. No one knows the objective truth about anything. All anyone can ever do is have a set of beliefs that help him navigate through this world. Therefore, what is recommended to me by the dominant elite class of society is—in all likelihood—as good, if not better, than any other. It is the "truth" so far as any of us will and can ever know for now.²² To expect the "truth" to actually be the objective truth is both arrogant and naive. So, to be responsible and good people, we must conform our beliefs to the "truth" that is being given to us by the "smart" people. Now, do these smart people have the objective truth about reality? No, of course not. Because nobody does. Nobody can have the objective truth. But the smart people have the closest thing to it that we can hope to have right now.

Such skepticism is radically incompatible with the biblical worldview. Jesus and the apostles embrace the commonsensical perspective that human intelligence is a God-given ability to come

22. The American philosopher Richard Rorty once defined 'truth' something like this: "Truth is whatever my colleagues will allow me to get away with." Truth is not that which represents reality as it actually is (the traditional definition of truth). It is whatever my relevant contemporaries are willing to support me in believing.

to know truly and accurately what my experience has given me to know. Granted, our knowledge of truth is limited by the bounds of our experience. I am confined to know only what the horizons of my experience permit me to know. But, within the horizons of my experience and the limits of the data available to me, my rational faculties are fully competent to put me in contact with the truth about objective reality.

The biggest impact PSP skepticism has on Postmodern Christianity is to eviscerate the Postmodern Christian's existential commitment to the gospel. Why would I define my whole existence and stake my whole being on a "truth" that might not be true?

Postmodern Christians see their religious beliefs as the beliefs of their particular community. Their Christianity is "true" insofar as it is what the members of their Christian community take as true. The "truth" I embrace as a Christian is what my Christian community embraces. Other communities will not accept my Christian truths as truth. Other communities will have their own, different "truths." But, we Christians hold our Christian truths to be our "truth." Note how psychologically and intellectually impossible it is to make a true existential commitment to a truth that is nothing more than the preference of a specific community. Why should I stake my whole life and being on what a specific community prefers to see as "truth"? Why should I prefer the judgment of that community over that of some other community? Surely one is as good as another. All choices must be equally valid. There is no right choice. So, why would I ever choose to define my whole life and existence by the "truth" of the Christian community over the "truth" of some other community? I can do so, certainly. Or, at least, I can claim that I am doing so. But how can I ever satisfy myself that it makes any sense to do so?

The biblical believer, on the other hand, has a perfectly sound basis for making such a total existential commitment to Jesus and the truth that he taught. He is convinced that what Jesus proclaimed is the objective truth about created reality. Consequently, it would be folly not to make Jesus' teaching the ground of one's life and existence. Not to make an existential commitment to Jesus and his teachings would be to bet foolishly against the objective truth of how things actually are. No other teaching or worldview—no other understanding of reality—is worth staking one's whole life and existence on. Only Jesus and his teaching is worthy of such a commitment. It is perfectly understandable, therefore, why a biblical believer would make a robust existential commitment to the truth taught by Jesus and the apostles.²³

Finally, because skepticism is so deeply ingrained in the PSP religion, confidence that one has come to grasp the truth is seen as a moral weakness and a character flaw. Confidence is viewed as some sort of immoral dogmatism. The Bible, on the other hand, encourages confidence. From the Bible's perspective, we have a firm and solid basis for knowing that we know the truth. Confidence is well-founded. It is not a sign of moral failing, it is a sign of mature belief.²⁴ It is not a

23. Now if the biblical believer is wrong—if Jesus is *not* the Messiah of God and his teaching is *not* true—then he is, of course, a fool to have made the total existential commitment that he does. But because he is confident that he is *not* wrong about Jesus, he has a firm basis for committing his whole life and being to Jesus and to the truth that he taught.

24. Cf. Colossians 2:2 and Hebrews 3:14, 6:11, and 10:22.

case of arrogance and insensitivity to others. It is the result of careful thought and thorough examination.²⁵

The Negative Effect

What obstacle does the unnatural and unbiblical view of truth and reason that characterizes Postmodern Christianity present to authentic belief? James argues that belief without works is dead. That is, a person who claims that he believes the truth of the gospel but who does not act in a manner consistent with believing it, is a person who does not, in fact, believe the truth of the gospel. Saving belief in the gospel is not a casual intellectual assent to its claims. It is an all-consuming personal investment in the truth and reality of its claims. A belief in the gospel that counts toward one's salvation is a belief that totally transforms one's life and being. Anything that encourages a person to hold back from making such a complete existential commitment is an obstacle to his coming to a belief that saves.

As we discussed above, this is exactly the effect that Postmodern Christian beliefs and attitudes have on the "Christian" who adopts its perspectives. Postmodern Christianity encourages a belief in Christianity that does not take the "truths" of Christianity all that seriously. It invites the "believer" to be a part of the community of belief. It invites him to identify with Jesus and his teaching. But to what end? In order to be a part of a community and to forge a way of life together with other like-minded believers in Jesus. If one does not want to be a part of that community, that's fine also. There are many different choices human beings make. Christianity is just one of them.

But this is not an invitation to an unqualified existential commitment to what one is convinced is the Truth about objective reality. It is not a confident and unswerving belief that in Jesus and his teaching—and only in Jesus and his teaching—one has the objective truth about God and his purposes for mankind. Is this Postmodern version of belief, then, a belief that saves? Does it qualify a person for eternal Life? Or does it rather serve as a substitute for the belief that saves? Does it perhaps deceive him into thinking that he believes in Jesus when, in fact, he does not?

The demons believe in Jesus, but they are not saved.²⁶ They are terrified of him. Their belief is not an inward passionate desire to know, honor, love, and serve the *objectively* real and true Messiah of God. Rather, it is a belief that the *objectively* real and true Messiah of God is destined to destroy them for their unrelenting opposition to him. So whose belief is closer to the belief that qualifies a person for salvation? The demons, who believe that Jesus is the *objectively* real and true Messiah? Or the Postmodern Christian, who believes that his confession that Jesus is the Messiah is a distinctive element of the community of which he has chosen to be a part?²⁷ I fear

25. It is for this reason that the postmodern Christian will always and inevitably accuse the mature biblical believer of being arrogant, dogmatic, or probably both.

26. Cf. James 2:18–20.

27. It does not substantially change things if we rephrase this. Even if the confession of his community is that Jesus is the *objectively real and true* Messiah, if it is only the "confession of his community" and not the objective and *universally relevant* truth about reality itself, it is still just the distinctive belief of the community of which he has

that the demons—condemned as they are—are closer to the kingdom of God than the Postmodern Christian (if he actually believes what he says he does).

For this reason, Postmodern Christianity is a dangerous substitute for authentic belief in Jesus and his Truth. Postmodern Christianity does not invite the person to make a personal commitment to follow the Jesus who really objectively is the Messiah he claimed to be—a personal commitment that will be rewarded with eternal Life. Rather, it invites him to identify with a community of individuals who, as it happens, confess Jesus to be the Messiah as their distinctive way of presenting themselves to the world. Unfortunately, eternal Life is not granted to those who adopt Jesus as their fashion of choice. Eternal life is granted to those who forsake everything in order to be in right relation to the Lord of all creation. Postmodern Christianity does not, and cannot (while being true to its own perspectives), encourage the latter.²⁸ Hence, it is a dangerous alternative to the belief that actually saves.

Happiness

One of the distinctive elements of Postmodern Christianity is the dual insistence that (i) every human being has the right to be happy, and that (ii) happiness is the absence of discomfort.²⁹ Many other distinctive attitudes, judgments, and perspectives of Postmodern Christianity stem from this particular conception of human happiness. Here are a sample of some of them:

- (1) Life should not be hard. If it is hard, it ought to be remedied. *A society is unjust to the extent that anyone suffers any discomfort in that society.*
- (2) The way to make the world a better place is to eliminate any and all discomfort in any way we can. A truly just and good world would be a world where no one ever has to experience discomfort.
- (3) To make someone feel uncomfortable is evil. It is to act hatefully toward them. No one who loves others would ever act in a way that would make them uncomfortable in any way.
- (4) Deprivation is a form of suffering, and no one should ever have to suffer. Therefore, no one should ever have to experience deprivation of any sort. It is evil to ask someone to go without.
- (5) It is righteous and good to feel moral outrage at all the suffering in the world.

chosen to be a part.

28. I am not suggesting here that no Postmodern Christians ever come to saving belief. It is entirely possible that, by the grace of God, some do. But it will be in spite of their Postmodern Christianity, not because of it. Postmodern Christianity is an obstacle to true belief that must be overcome. It is not a straightforward promoter of true saving belief.

29. It is difficult to trace the origin of this distinctive feature of Postmodern Christianity. Is it Postmodernism, secularism, progressivism, or something else entirely? I do not know. But while I cannot say from whence it comes, it is, nonetheless, a distinctive feature of PSP religion and of Postmodern Christianity as well.

(6) Any God worth worshipping cannot possibly be responsible for the pain and suffering in the world. A truly good God would never intentionally cause any human being to endure any suffering at all.

The biblical perspective is radically different from the above. Jesus' teaching would not imply nor endorse any of the six sample assertions above.

From a biblical perspective, suffering is an integral part of life in this world. God uses suffering to teach us and to sanctify us. Suffering *per se* is not evil. It is the most important tool that God uses to lovingly make us into the creatures he wants us to be. It is not something to be avoided at all costs. Rather, it is something to be endured with gratitude. I suffer because my creator is manifesting his love toward me. He is either inviting me to repent, or he is sanctifying me and incorporating me into the class of those who will belong to him forever.

True happiness (*eudaimonia* = human flourishing) in the here and now does not stem from the absence of suffering or discomfort. It stems from the knowledge that one's eternal well-being is secure. From a biblical perspective, suffering that confirms the fact of and authenticity of one's belief is valuable and precious. (It is more precious than refined gold.) Through suffering, one can come to know that he is chosen of God, loved by God, and significant, because he can come to know that he is destined for Life in the eternal age to come.

The biblical believer does not make eliminating suffering in the world his highest priority. In the first place, he knows that it is out of his reach to do so. But even if it were within his reach, to eliminate all suffering would be to eliminate something that produces much good in people's lives. To a biblical believer, the increase of righteousness is far more important than the decrease of suffering.

The biblical believer (unlike the PSPer) does not manifest anger and moral outrage toward God because he has produced or allowed suffering. He has, of course, created and caused the suffering—all of it. But suffering is the creation of a profoundly loving God who creates it to be meaningful and purposive, with the potential to have eternally beneficial effects. It is not something that the creature should be arrogantly outraged over. It is something that one should endure humbly and gratefully.

In order to avoid thinking of God as evil and cruel, Postmodern Christians refuse to make God responsible for the suffering and evil in the world. Therefore, they form a conception of God that is very much different from the God of the Bible. The God of Postmodern Christianity does not have ultimate control over reality. He is a smaller God, with less power and sovereignty. They insulate him from the evil in the world at the cost of robbing him of his identity as the God of all creation. By way of contrast, the God of the Bible is truly God. He is the author and cause of literally every jot and tittle of created reality—the good, the bad, and the ugly. From a biblical perspective, God is the author and cause of the evil in the world.

An Obstacle to True Faith

As we can see, then, Postmodern Christianity constructs a significant obstacle to genuine belief in Jesus and his teaching. Jesus taught his disciples to know and honor God. Which God? The God who is the sovereign ruler and determiner of all that occurs in created reality. Postmodern

Christianity denies the existence of this God, the God of Jesus. It reinvents God—in an attempt to turn him into a not-so-bad guy, in order to deny to him the role of bringing suffering and discomfort into people's lives. Is it possible to have saving belief in Jesus when I do not even acknowledge the existence and reality of the God whom Jesus served? Perhaps. But clearly it presents a real obstacle to an authentic belief in Jesus.

Furthermore, if I am committed to the goodness of having a comfortable life, free of suffering, then am I willingly embracing the goodness that the gospel actually offers me? The gospel offers me the reward of being added to the set of God's people who are destined for existence beyond death. It makes no promises with respect to the quality of my existence this side of eternity. Is that okay with me? Do I believe in the hope of a reward that will remain unrealized and unfulfilled until after my death? Postmodern Christianity tempts me to reject such a hope. If Jesus does not give me hope *for this existence*, what good is he? Such a dismissive attitude—very compatible with the teaching of Postmodern Christianity—is inimical to authentic belief in the actual gospel of Jesus. In this sense, Postmodern Christianity presents a false alternative to biblical belief that must be rejected and overcome.

Love

A peculiarly modern perspective on love is that to love someone requires me *to affirm* him or her. The idea that love could be correcting, rebuking, or edifying rather than affirming is neglected, if not outright rejected, by Postmodern Christianity. Therefore, Jesus' instruction to "love" is construed as an instruction to affirm each and every individual in whatever condition he is in. Is a human being experiencing gender confusion? Love demands that you affirm him in whatever choice he makes in his attempt to resolve his confusion. Does he consider himself constitutionally homosexual? Love demands that you affirm and support him in his choice to fulfill his sexual desires in whatever way seems right and natural to him. It would be utterly unloving to impose some arbitrary moral boundary on him that would require him to leave his sexual desires unfulfilled.

To the Postmodern Christian, love trumps all. No action, word, or attitude should ever be accepted as valid that is inconsistent with love. And any action, word, or attitude that is consistent with love can never be wrong. And what is this love that constitutes the supreme moral principle? It is the principle of complete, unconditional, unqualified, and unhesitating affirmation. Therefore, any action, word, or attitude that unconditionally accepts and supports another human being can never be wrong. And any action, word, or attitude that does not unconditionally accept and support another human being can never be right.

It is out of this conception of love that Postmodern Christians support homosexuality as a valid expression of human sexuality and celebrate gay marriage. It is out of this conception of love that Postmodern Christians support transgenderism in all its various forms, permutations, and relations. It is out of this conception of love that Postmodern Christians seek to understand Islamic jihadists who want to destroy infidels. It is out of this conception of love that Postmodern Christians affirm racist murderers who justify their murder as vigilante justice—at least, whenever they are encouraged to do so by the elite enlightened class which serves as the arbiter of such

things. It is out of this conception of love that Postmodern Christianity affirms thugs, looters, and rioters who are outraged by the injustices they have endured.

However, as a direct result of the Postmodern theory that has tutored Postmodern Christianity, the all-affirming, unconditional love that it preaches is rather *selective*. It is not universal. The hateful murderous Ku Klux Klan racist is not to be loved as Jesus instructed. The exploitative, greedy rich guy is not to be extended love.³⁰ And, for that matter, the Amish dairyman is not extended the same kind of love. If *he* meets injustice at the hands of the authorities, his injustices are not sufficiently institutional and systematic to justify any moral outrage. He should just shut up and obey the law.

There is, however, a select group of unfortunates who *have* encountered systematic and institutional injustice and are utterly justified if they respond in violence. We must show them love—which is to say, we dare not criticize or scold them for their violence. We must understand and affirm them in it. And if one has any question about which groups are justified in their violent response, just ask the smart enlightened members of the elite class. They know.

There are two important ways in which this Postmodern Christian conception of love deviates from the biblical concept of love:

- (1) In the biblical concept of love—while love is *very* important—it cannot be practiced rightly and wisely in isolation from the whole of objective moral truth. Righteousness consists of other things in addition to love. Love is a commitment to foster and promote the well-being of another human being. But his well-being must be determined by the whole of objective Truth. A person's well-being can never be defined by what the person himself wants and desires. There is an objective truth about what constitutes the flourishing of a human life. Love is acting toward a person in such a way that I contribute to his flourishing, *as that is defined by objective Truth*. Other moral values help define what is good for the other person. Part of what it means to flourish as a human being is to be a human being in pursuit of objective goodness and righteousness. Hence, a human being is not flourishing if he is given over to anger and revenge. And I am not loving him if I support and affirm him in being given over to it. A human being is not flourishing if he is living a dissolute life of drugs, drunkenness, and casual sex. And I am not loving him if I affirm and support him in a choice to live such a life. Love would invite him to repent, not counsel him that he has chosen one of many valid lifestyle choices. A human being is not flourishing if he has chosen to thumb his nose at the creator and God's created order. I do not do such a person any favors by supporting him in his rebellion. That is not love. It is quite the opposite. For my own selfish religious reasons

30. The Postmodern Christian will undoubtedly reject this claim. Of course he believes that he is required to love the exploitative greedy rich guy. But, so he will argue, while he is called upon to love him, he is not called upon to affirm, support, and sanction his greed and exploitation. But notice the sudden shift to an old and traditional concept of love and an abandonment of the Postmodern conception. Why does the Postmodern Christian not apply the same Postmodern conception of love to any and every situation. Why does he not—with respect to anyone and everyone—reason that he can not love a person unless he affirms and supports him in everything he thinks and chooses.

(namely, so that I can feel wise and enlightened), I am willing to sacrifice his actual well-being. That is not love. That is hate.³¹ Hence, to affirm the homosexual in his rebellion against God and the created order, I am hating him. I am supporting his self-destruction³² in order that I might feel particularly enlightened, loving, and moral. But God will not judge me for how loving I *felt*. He will judge me for how loving I actually was.

- (2) In the biblical concept of love, love will sometimes hurt or wound. Love does not always tenderly console and comfort. This is exactly the opposite mindset from that promoted by Postmodern Christianity. The Postmodern Christian sees anything that makes another person feel bad as unloving. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked him what he must do to inherit eternal Life, Jesus instructed him to go and sell all that he possessed and give it to the poor. The text says that, "at these words, he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property." Earlier, the same text had said, "Looking at him, Jesus *loved* him and said to him, ...go and sell all you possess...."³³ According to the text, *the very thing that grieved the man* was the thing that Jesus said to him *in an act of love*. In this instance, Jesus' love did not seek to console, comfort, and reassure the man. Rather, Jesus, in an act of love, grieved him. That is, he leveled a stinging rebuke, making him exceedingly uncomfortable by exposing him as having an unrighteous relationship to his possessions. If he were consistent, the Postmodern Christian would have to accuse Jesus of being unloving to this man. But the text itself says that "Jesus loved him."

Clearly Postmodern Christianity is building on the foundation of Jesus the Messiah with wood, hay, and straw when it re-envisioned "love" in the way that it does. Many will be drawn to this all-inclusive, non-judgmental love for all the wrong reasons. Specifically, they will be drawn to it because it allows them to avoid a meaningful confrontation with their own evil and depravity. But the person who is unwilling to confront the reality of his sin and evil is not an authentic disciple of Jesus, and he will not be granted Life. So, the individual who follows the Jesus of Postmodern "love" may very well not be an authentic Jesus-follower at all.

Tolerance

The act of loving another through complete, unconditional, unqualified, and unhesitating affirmation is usually identified by the PSP civil religion as the virtue of *tolerance*. The virtue of tol-

31. To "spoil" a child by over-indulging him, giving in to his every whim, is to hate one's child, not to love him. It would seem that traditional Judaeo-Christian culture has understood this for centuries. Only in contemporary Postmodern culture has the logic of this been completely turned on its head. According to the Postmodern concept of love, if I deny that another person is morally justified in pursuing something he wants, my denial is necessarily viewed as hateful. It is unthinkable that it could be loving, for it denies him what he wants.

32. According to the biblical perspective, a person who—through an unrepentant rejection of God and his will—consigns himself to an ultimate destiny of death and destruction is pursuing self-destructive behavior. Even if his life and existence in the here and now is prosperous, happy, and successful, he is nonetheless engaged in self-destruction, for his vastly more important eternal destiny is death, not eternal Life.

33. Cf. Mark 10:21–22.

erance has a vastly different character and logic in the biblical teaching from what it has in the PSP religion.

In the biblical worldview, to show tolerance is to show mercy. Every human being is a sinner. Everyone manifests unrighteous behavior in many different ways. The one who will be met with mercy, the Bible teaches, is—among other things—the one who is willing to grant mercy to others.

By its very nature, mercy is the willingness to allow sin and unrighteousness (notably, sin and unrighteousness *that has victimized me*) to go unpunished. Justice demands punishment. Mercy says, "Yes, such behavior directed against me deserves to be punished. But I am willing to let it go. I do not require the demands of justice to be met." But note what is implicit in the biblical concept of mercy (aka tolerance): the one who shows mercy (tolerance) does so *in the face of a clear recognition* that the deed being "tolerated" is sinful, unrighteous, and wrong.

In the PSP religion it is intolerant, by definition, to judge another's actions to be sinful, unrighteous, or wrong. The person who exhibits the virtue of tolerance, according to PSP religion, is the one who accepts, affirms, and (preferably) celebrates values and actions that are jarringly different (and even offensive) to his own personal standards. In other words, *tolerance is the ability to accept and affirm as valid actions and values in others what I would consider evil and unrighteous if I were to see them in myself*. PSP tolerance, in contrast to biblical tolerance, does not forgive and respond in mercy to the evil of others, it reframes and redefines their actions or values so that it does not even judge them to be evil. This is a radically different conception of "tolerance."

The Danger of This Reframe

Once again, this redefinition of "tolerance" undermines the very essence of the gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles. The good news of the gospel is that—for those who seek divine mercy through their submission to the authority of Jesus—God will grant mercy and eternal Life. However, an important *condition* placed on one's reception of God's mercy is his willingness to acknowledge his need for mercy. But, of course, a willingness to acknowledge one's need for mercy is predicated on a willingness to acknowledge that his sin and unrighteousness is sin. Anyone who refuses to acknowledge that his sin is sin will not have his sins forgiven.³⁴ PSP religion, therefore, is an important obstacle to this. If the enlightened response to sin is to reframe it as "an alternative lifestyle choice" (thereby perceiving it as valid), then the "enlightened" response to sin is, in reality, nothing more than a sophisticated way of refusing to acknowledge that it is sin.³⁵ According to the Bible, such a refusal condemns a person.

34. Cf. 1 John 1:8–10.

35. This may not be a problem to the person himself. A person may truly acknowledge his own sinfulness while feeling compelled to be "tolerant" (in the PSP sense) toward the sinfulness of others. While such "tolerance" may not create a problem for the person himself, it is clearly a problem with regard to how he influences others. How can he invite another person to repent, seek forgiveness, and be saved when he has recast that other person's behavior as a perfectly legitimate lifestyle choice?

Righteousness

Postmodern Christianity has a false and misleading concept of righteousness. On the one hand, it is fallacious in ways that repeat past fallacies (e.g., the mistaken concept of righteousness held by the Pharisees). On the other hand, it is fallacious in ways that are new and different.

Misconceptions That It Shares With Past Misconceptions

Postmodern Christianity fosters the same sort of hypocritical righteousness that ancient Pharisaism did in the time of Jesus. Pharisaism encouraged its members to follow a script that had been created for them. The Pharisaical movement defined a certain set of behaviors—a certain set of pious practices—that marked an individual as a particularly “righteous” man. The milieu of Postmodern Christianity does exactly the same thing. It defines a set of values, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and performances that mark the Postmodern Christian as a “righteous” man.³⁶

In both cases, the behaviors one adopts are focused on outward appearance, not on the secret, hidden reality of what is *inside* a person. The preoccupation of the Pharisees was with doing things that made their extraordinary obedience—their righteousness—evident to others.³⁷ One of Jesus’ major criticisms of the Pharisees with whom he interacted was the sparse attention they paid to “inward” righteousness in contrast to the great deal of attention they paid to making sure they appeared righteous through their outward actions and practices. In Matthew 23:25–28, Jesus warns,

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (NASV)

From Jesus’ perspective, authentic righteousness is a state of the inner core of a person. Righteousness does not consist of the actions or practices that one adopts. It consists of the actual loves, desires, passions, motives, and commitments that reside in the inner depths of who the

36. There is, however, this subtle difference between Pharisaical righteousness and Postmodern righteousness. Pharisaical righteousness centers on “obedience.” The Pharisee does what he does in order to be especially obedient to what God has required in his Law. Postmodern Christian righteousness centers on “love”—by which the Postmodern means “tolerance.” The Postmodern Christian does what he does in order to manifest a particularly impressive degree of love, compassion, and sensitivity, which is born of an especially high level of insight, understanding, and discernment. Hence, while Pharisaical righteousness is worthiness-producing obedience, Postmodern Christian righteousness is *worthiness-producing “enlightenment.”*

37. This is what lies behind Jesus’ exhortations in Matthew 6:1–6. He begins there, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

person is. Granted, these inner commitments and dynamics will manifest themselves in outward behavior. But the "righteousness" of the behavior stems from *what the outward behavior reflects*, not from the behavior itself. So, it is entirely possible for a human being to act like a righteous person would act without actually being a righteous human being. By simply following a script that instructs me to act as a righteous person would act, I can give the appearance of being a righteous person when there is no righteousness within my inner being at all. Jesus frequently warned the Pharisees that they must repent of their mere play-acting³⁸ and, rather, choose to become authentically righteous in their inward passions and commitments. Outward, hypocritical righteousness can always look good to others, but it is not the least bit pleasing to God.

There is an important corollary to this. If my main preoccupation is with looking righteous in the eyes of other people, then the sorts of behavior I will major on are those that other people count as righteous. Hence, the script the Pharisees followed was not a script written by God, it was a script written by other men. Now following a script of righteous behavior dictated by other men's conception of righteousness will, of course, result in my appearing righteous to those other men, but I will not be taking my cues from God. I will be taking my cues from other human beings.³⁹

Postmodern Christians no longer blow a trumpet in the street before they give alms,⁴⁰ make sure others can see from their appearance that they have been fasting,⁴¹ and outwardly display their righteousness through meticulous observance of dietary regulations, Sabbath-keeping, and other requirements of the Mosaic Law. But they are every bit as prone to exactly the same sort of hypocrisy. The Postmodern Christian, taking his cues from the tenets of the PSP civil religion, will display his "righteousness" to others in any of the following popular ways.⁴²

38. This is what the Greek word typically translated "hypocrisy" means. Hypocrisy is nothing other than "play-acting."

39. Mark 7:1–23 is a significant passage in this regard. In that passage Jesus criticizes the Pharisees because they "neglect the commandment of God" while they hold to the "tradition of men." Postmodern Christianity is developing its own "tradition" that it expects its adherents to "hold to." And, like ancient Pharisaism, it is often *at the expense of* the commandment of God.

40. But they might make a dramatic show of giving money to a panhandler at a stoplight. Cf. Matthew 6:2–4.

41. Cf. Matthew 6:16–18.

42. It is critical that the reader understand what I am doing in this section. I am describing the beliefs and attitudes that distinctively characterize an adherent to the PSP civil religion and/or to Postmodern Christianity. It cannot necessarily be inferred what the authentic follower of Jesus and the Truth will believe in each case respectively. The reader might falsely assume that the dichotomy between the social-political left and the social-political right can be mapped on to the dichotomy between the adherent of PSP religion (or Postmodern Christianity) and the true Jesus-believer. This is NOT the case. The PSP religion makes many things into a moral issue that the authentic Jesus-believer would not view as a moral issue at all. For example, man-made global warming is a moral issue for the adherent to PSP religion. (It is immoral to reject the doctrine of man-made global warming.) For the authentic Jesus-believer, this is not a moral issue. (It is a simple matter of fact. If global warming is caused by man, then it is being caused by man. If it is not caused by man, then it is not caused by man. Nothing is at stake, morally speaking.) Just because PSP religion makes the extension of citizen rights to illegal aliens a righteous cause does not mean that an authentic follower of Jesus will make the *denial* of citizen rights to illegal aliens the righteous cause. The biblical

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- Making evident *to others* his moral outrage at one or more of the injustices that are on the PSP canon of injustices.

Notice that the list does not include all actual social evils and injustices. It only includes those that PSP orthodoxy, for whatever reason, considers evil and unjust. So, it does NOT typically include drug taking, alcohol abuse, adultery, pornography, gambling, sex trafficking, sex slavery, modern slavery by Muslims, the Islamic subjugation of women, and many other real evils and socially destructive behaviors. But it does include corporate greed, income inequality, rape, perceived racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, hate speech, placing legal limits on abortion, not caring for the environment, and many other popular targets of PSP ire—as all of these are understood and interpreted within the PSP perspective. Some of these targets of PSP outrage are real evils that are actually destructive. Others are the newly minted “traditions of men” that have replaced the commandment of God.

- Making evident *to others* his willingness to affirm and support the values, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals that PSP orthodoxy has defined as victims of oppression.

There is a discernible list of behaviors and/or identifications that PSP religion classifies as groups that are being oppressed. Accordingly, it is particularly enlightened—and, therefore, righteous—to affirm and support them. The currently most popular “righteous causes” in support of the oppressed are the support for gay marriage, the support for transgenderism, the opposition to “hate speech,” and the support for “citizenship rights” for immigrants who are not legally citizens. There are undoubtedly other “causes” whereby the Postmodern Christian can declare his “righteousness.” The ones listed above are simply some of the more popular at present. However, any enlightened tolerance for an officially acknowledged oppressed class⁴³ demonstrates Postmodern Christian “righteousness.”

- Experiencing and/or expressing fright at any perceived threat to the safety of one or more of the recognized oppressed victim classes.

believer is not “anti-immigrant” in the way that the PSPer might be “anti-cop” (that is, as a matter of religious principle). The biblical believer is not married to the right to bear arms in the same way that a PSPer is married to environmentalism (namely, as a core, essential, defining value of his belief in Jesus). Neither is a biblical believer anti-environmentalist in the way that a PSPer is intrinsically anti-corporation (namely, necessarily and absolutely). As accustomed as we may be to view every social-political controversy through the lenses of left-wing and right-wing, it is important that the reader not view what I am saying through those lenses. This paper is NOT a defense of the right-wing position on social-political matters *vis à vis* the left-wing position. Rather, it is a defense of the biblical view of what it means to follow Jesus *vis à vis* the Postmodern Christian’s view of what it means to follow Jesus. The thesis of my paper has one and only one implication for the right-wing / left-wing dichotomy: The Postmodern Christian—due to the very nature of his religious commitments—cannot help but line up with the left-wing viewpoint on all the relevant social-political issues. (As a matter of historical fact.) The authentic Jesus-believer, on the other hand, is at liberty—and indeed feels a moral obligation—to determine which viewpoint is more likely to be right, good, and true on its own merits (the right-wing’s viewpoint, the left-wing’s viewpoint, or neither?).

43. As acknowledged and recognized by a PSP consensus.

A person's escaping to a "safe space" or claiming to be "triggered" by something that was asserted in a lecture or classroom discussion—when he himself is not personally threatened by what was said—is a demonstration of his deep empathy with all those victims of unjust oppression. Accordingly, he is publicly declaring the depth of his PSP righteousness.

- Being outraged at anyone who challenges any of the most important orthodox beliefs of the PSP religion.⁴⁴

I list here a few of these orthodox beliefs: Man-made global warming is the most serious threat to mankind. Darwinian evolution is a fact. Regulating guns would prevent mass killings. America is an intrinsically racist society. All white people are racists. Diversity (of all kinds) makes for a stronger and more durable society. Etc.

- Confessing one's sins according to PSP beliefs, values, and judgments.

So, for example, it is the height of PSP righteousness to understand, acknowledge, and confess one's "white privilege" if he is a white person, especially if he is a white male. Therefore, to publicly acknowledge one's privileged status is a display of righteousness.⁴⁵

All of these involve the public signaling of one's righteousness.⁴⁶ None of them involves actually accomplishing anything to alleviate the injustice done to individuals or groups who have been treated unjustly.⁴⁷ While an action to alleviate the effects of injustice would not be rejected, nei-

44. It would be a *huge* mistake to interpret me to be saying that because belief in the efficacy of gun-control is a manifestation of righteousness within the false religion of PSP, it follows that the right of unrestricted gun ownership is a manifestation of righteousness for the authentic Jesus-believer. Gun ownership is not an intrinsically moral issue for the authentic Jesus-follower. It *is* such for the adherent of PSP religion; but it is *not* such for the authentic Jesus-believer.

45. Notably, forgoing the advantages that one's privileged position affords him and making way for a less privileged person to benefit in his place does not seem to be required by PSP righteousness. It is sufficiently righteous for the CEO of a large company to publicly decry the glass ceiling in his industry or business. It is not at all necessary that he step aside and let a woman replace him.

46. From the perspective of biblical truth, "righteousness" is a private, individual reality that defines one's own personal orientation before God. In no way does it depend upon the approval or affirmation of other people. From a biblical perspective, it would be entirely possible for a person to be the one and only righteous person on earth and to meet with disapproval from every other human being on the planet, with only God acknowledging him as righteous (Noah mayhaps?). Such is not the case with Postmodern Christianity. Righteousness is—virtually by definition—the signaling of one's tolerance, compassion, insistence on justice, etc. to others. As a consequence, it is entirely dependent upon those others being able to receive my signals.

47. According to the *Daily Mail*, a British publication, following the recent presidential election where Donald Trump was elected President and Mike Pence was elected Vice President, the cast of the Broadway musical *Hamilton* took the occasion of Mike Pence's presence in the audience to publicly express their fear that a Donald Trump presidency was about to bring grave evil and injustice upon certain groups within American society. After that occasion, journalistic research showed that a number of the more outspoken members of the cast of *Hamilton* had not bothered to vote in recent elections. If this is true, this is fully consistent with the concept of righteousness in PSP civil religion. Righteousness is to declare your feelings and to publicly announce your empathy with the plight of certain people. However, righteousness does not require that you act on those feelings or sympathies in such a

ther is it required or expected. That leads us to the way in which the PSP misconception of righteousness is rather new and unprecedented.

A Misconception That Derives from Distinctly Postmodern Sentiments

A largely unprecedented aspect of Postmodern Christianity's concept of righteousness is its redefinition of righteousness as an emotional state rather than a moral state. Obviously, Postmodern Christians would assume that righteousness is a moral state. However, it is not directly, primarily, and only a moral state. It is a moral state precisely because it is the right sort of *emotional* state. Hence, its status as a moral state is completely dependent upon its status as an emotional state.

How does this work? In the PSP worldview, the *essence* of righteousness is a feeling. It is the *feeling* of empathy and compassion toward the right sort of people. If I have such a feeling, I am righteous. If I don't have such a feeling, I am not righteous (I am a "hater"). It is having the requisite feeling that is the all-important element of the moral state. I may act to alleviate the suffering of an individual or class with respect to whom I feel compassion and empathy. But doing so does not make me any more righteous. It is the bare fact that I have felt "loving"—rather than "hateful"—toward some unfortunate individual or class that constitutes me as righteous. Furthermore, if I take concrete action to alleviate the suffering of an individual or class, but I do so without feeling compassion or empathy toward them, then I have failed to manifest righteousness. If I have not felt "loving" toward a person, then my promoting their well-being is not an act of love. And if it is not an act of love, it is not a righteous act.

The biblical perspective on righteousness is exactly the opposite of the Postmodern Christian perspective: I can truly love another person without "feeling loving" toward him; and it is not truly love for someone when I feel compassion and empathy, but do not concretely act to bring about some good.

In *1 John*, John exhorts, "Do not love in word and tongue, but in deed and truth."⁴⁸ In other words, don't just say you love a person, demonstrate that you love him by doing something concrete that makes his life and situation better.

James could have been directly addressing Postmodern Christians when he writes,

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.⁴⁹

way that you actually seek to prevent or alleviate the injustice that you bemoan.

48. Cf. 1 John 3:18.

49. Cf. James 2:14–17.

James and John are both maintaining that it is an inauthentic love and a phony righteousness that says "I care" but fails to concretely act as if one cares. Love and righteousness are, first and foremost, concrete moral actions, not feelings. The "feeling" without the concrete action is morally vacuous. It is just a feeling. Any creature with hormones can have a "feeling." Only a truly moral being can choose to act concretely to do good to another.

Furthermore, to act concretely to make another person's life better is not somehow lacking as an act of love and righteousness if it is not accompanied by a "loving feeling." This is clearly implied by Jesus' teaching that we are to "love" our enemies. If I love my *enemy*, then—almost by definition—I am loving someone that I do not "feel loving" toward. I am acting to promote the well-being of a person I "feel" disinclined to love.

Jesus' teaching that we are to love our enemies is exactly the opposite of the Postmodern Christian sentiment. The Postmodern Christian sentiment is that *we should not have any enemies*. We should so adjust our emotional life and attitudes that we do not feel any animosity toward anyone. We should not be a "hater." Failing to feel kindly (that is, to "hate"⁵⁰) is the worst of all possible sins. Jesus, on the other hand, assumes that there will inevitably be those who oppose me, who oppose everything I am, and who oppose everything I stand for. That is, there will be those who have made themselves my enemy. I will not usually be inclined to *feel* kindly toward such people. They are my enemy. Does Jesus say that I *should* feel kindly toward them? I don't think so. Rather, his injunction is that I act concretely in such a way that I work toward their well-being and benefit, and not toward their harm. He is not insisting that I feel kindly toward them; rather, he is insisting that I do good with respect to them even though I do not feel kindly toward them. Jesus' teaching here is diametrically opposed to the sentiments of the Postmodern Christian religion. For Jesus, love and righteousness are acts that promote goodness. They are not a certain identifiable emotional state.

A Dangerous Alternative

This misconception of righteousness that characterizes Postmodern Christian religion is not trivial. It is dangerous. The same sort of person who might be attracted to the hypocrisy of ancient Pharisaism will be attracted to the hypocrisy of Postmodern Christian religion. It is challenging and damning to have to measure myself by whether I am committed to righteousness in the inner core of who I am. It is much more agreeable to be able to measure myself by whether, outwardly, I have performed the script that a certain subculture has authored for me. If Jesus feared that certain of the Pharisees were "whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness,"⁵¹ then surely it is reasonable to fear that certain Postmodern Christians are covering up their unrighteousness as well. They may (by the standards of PSP righteousness) look "righteous" on the outside, but where is the evidence that they are interested in pursuing authentic righteousness on the inside? And if

50. As the PSP religion defines "hate."

51. Cf. Matthew 23:27.

they are not, then they are not children of God and they are not destined for eternal Life. They are wood, hay, and straw erected on the foundation of Jesus the Messiah.

Confession of Sin

One of the most distinctive aspects of belief in the Truth of the gospel is the willingness to acknowledge the truth with regard to individual sin. Essentially, the one who will be granted eternal Life is the one who willingly acknowledges that he is an unworthy sinner, deserving of condemnation. And why does he say so? Because he has "eyes to see" the wickedness of the things he does, says, thinks, and feels. His own personal experience demonstrates to him that he is not, and cannot be, good in any way that God would consider good.

The emphases of Postmodern Christianity distract from individual, personal acknowledgement of sin. There are two noteworthy emphases in Postmodern Christianity:

- (1) an emphasis on the evil that is embedded in the structures of American society (systematic evil), and
- (2) an emphasis on the guilt that I, as an individual, must acknowledge, if and when I am a member of the dominant, oppressive class in America (e.g., a "straight white male").

For the majority of human beings, neither of these emphases requires the individual to confront and acknowledge his or her own personal wickedness. Why is the world such an unjust place? Because straight white males have created a system that is infused with injustice and evil. It is not my fault. I am a victim like everyone else. The culprits are those anonymous (and abstract) straight white males who created evil institutions that victimized and oppressed people. In order to make the world a better place, we need to create new institutions. I do not need to be a morally different person. I merely need to change the society I live in. Notice, therefore, how the perspective of Postmodern Christianity takes the focus off of me and my sin and turns my focus elsewhere—in a much less damning direction.

The apparent exception to this is the straight white male. The straight white male, in order to demonstrate his enlightenment, is supposed to fess up and admit that he is a part of the problem. He is the benefactor of all the privileges that are afforded him by the corrupt system that promotes and supports straight white male privilege. His only recourse is to explicitly acknowledge this fact. Interestingly, the *mea culpa* of the straight white male need not be followed by some kind of abstention from the benefits of his privilege. He is expected only to acknowledge that he is the benefactor of social privilege and to object strongly to the system that gave it to him. To actually step down from his place of privilege and to offer its benefits to someone less fortunate than he is is rarely (if ever) what Postmodern Christianity requires or expects of him.

Furthermore, confession of straight white male privilege is a very odd sort of confession. By definition, confession ought to be an acknowledgement of unrighteousness. But, ironically, to confess the "guilt" of being a straight white male is a manifestation of just the sort of enlightened perspective that PSP religion (and Postmodern Christianity) counts as righteousness. Hence, the confession of straight white male privilege is a display of righteousness more than it is an actual acknowledgement of unrighteousness. This latter point is made all the more clear by the fact that

“repentance” is not expected or required. The straight white male is expected to be enlightened enough to admit that he is the *evil* benefactor of social privilege. But he is not expected to “repent” of that evil by divesting himself of his privileges.

When all is said and done, Postmodern Christianity does an end run around one of the key features of the apostolic gospel. In 1 John 1:5–10, John writes,

Now this is the message that we heard from JESUS and disclose to you: God is the light. Now, in him, there is no darkness. If we say that we hold an understanding of reality in common with God, and yet we are walking in darkness, we are lying. And indeed, we are not following the truth. But if we are walking in the light as JESUS is in the light, we do hold an understanding of reality in common with one another—that is, we with God—and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves. Indeed, the truth is not with us. If we own up to our sins, he is trustworthy and righteous such that he will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all our unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make JESUS a liar and his account is not with us. (my translation)

Confession of personal sin and unrighteousness is an essential condition for an individual’s receiving mercy. Postmodern Christianity changes that. Postmodern Christianity does not require a sincere confession of actual personal unrighteousness. Rather, it requires a merely abstract, inauthentic contrition for being born, a “confession” that the individual knows will mark him as a righteous, enlightened individual. Such a confession is hardly a confession of personal sin and unrighteousness—not in any sense that the apostles would recognize—and certainly not the kind of confession that distinguishes the one who will receive eternal Life.

Discipleship

What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? What pursuits distinguish a disciple of Jesus from other human beings? The answers given to these questions by Postmodern Christianity differ significantly from the answers given by the Bible.

The Postmodern Christian religion, showing its roots in Progressivism, puts a premium on social justice. What does an earnest follower of Jesus do? He does what he can to fight against the structural evils within his society and to promote social justice in the world. God’s purpose is to establish the kingdom of God. God wants his will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” Discipleship, therefore, consists of the disciple of Jesus doing what he can to bring about God’s kingdom on this earth. Specifically, he will strive to make God’s desire for perfect social justice a reality on earth (as it is in heaven).

The biblical perspective is significantly different. The Bible does not teach that God’s purpose for this present age is the elimination of its characteristic evil and injustice. The present evil age will remain an evil age until literally all things are made new, until a new and different age comes into existence. Fixing this world is not God’s purpose. Therefore, this side of eternity,

there will be no success in purging our society (and the world itself) of evil. It will not and cannot be done.

God's purpose, rather, is to draw to himself a people who will exist as the people of God for all eternity. In the here and now, God's purpose is to gather to himself those whom he has destined for eternal Life. The primary role of the Jesus-follower, therefore, is to persuade others to repent of their neglect of God and his purposes and to follow Jesus, thereby making themselves members of the eternal people of God.

If one embraces and puts his hope in what God has actually purposed to do—namely, the creation of a whole new reality unmarred by evil, death, and futility—he finds that he must wait for it. That for which his heart longs is not something that will be soon in coming. Hence, he will have to exhibit patience. But only the authentic child of God—the one who had been chosen for eternal Life before the foundation of created reality—will be willing and able to display that kind of patience. Others—those who are not authentic children of God and Truth—will gravitate toward some counterfeit vision of God's purpose. They will reject the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. They will be readily drawn to the Postmodern Christian vision—where God's desire is to fix this world and make it a good and just place. Once again, when Postmodern Christianity promotes this kind of "discipleship," it builds on the foundation of Jesus the Messiah with wood, hay, and straw.

The State

It has long been the belief of godless men and cultures that the state is God. For long ages, mankind has looked to the state to provide for him, to protect him, and to serve as his benefactor in any number of ways. While, in truth, our only *real* benefactor is God, the fact of the matter is that we frequently view our government in that role. Jesus makes a very revealing comment in the midst of instructing his disciples on the greatness of serving:

And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves."⁵²

Now Jesus' primary point is to highlight the greatness of service. But as he does so, he comments that, among the Gentiles, their "kings" are understood to be "Benefactors." In other words, the Gentiles view their kings as the source of every good thing that comes to them. That is, their kings are "God" to them.

52. Cf., Luke 22:24–27.

To the extent that Postmodern Christians instinctively look to the state to control and shape their life and experience—that is, to the extent that Postmodern Christians want the state to be their Benefactor—to that extent, Postmodern Christianity is more like ancient, Gentile heathenism than it is like the Truth that was taught by Jesus. The genuine Jesus-follower knows that God, and God alone, ultimately controls his life and experience. He knows that there is no real Benefactor but God himself. He must trust God, and God alone, for provision and protection. He does not put his trust in the state to care and provide for him. He looks to God. And, by extension, he does not look to the state to solve the various ills that inflict society. He looks to God. He knows that God, and God alone, can heal whatever ills might afflict his society. Therefore, he does not trust in politics. He does not see his vote or political allegiance as the most important component of his faith and obedience to God.

It is very difficult to resist those social pressures that encourage us to view government (and politics) as our savior. Everything and everyone around us encourage us to take exactly this perspective. But this perspective is clearly at odds with the perspective that Jesus instructed us to have.⁵³ Therefore, to the extent that Postmodern Christianity is inextricably bound to the Progressivist political agenda and its causes, beliefs, and values, to that extent it is incompatible with authentic belief in the Truth proclaimed by Jesus.⁵⁴

The PSP civil religion has taken the idea that the state is God to a whole new level. From the standpoint of PSP civil religion, not only is the state our benefactor, it is our *creator*. According to postmodern theory, you can shape and form who a human being will be by controlling how he speaks and thinks. Accordingly, if the state controls the speech of its citizens, it will ultimately control the character of its citizens, as individuals. That is, by controlling speech, the state can *create* the citizenry that it wants to create. In other words, the state can function as God, the creator of its citizenry.

Again, this is totally incompatible with what Jesus taught. Contrary to what Postmodernism assumes, the state does not create individual human beings. God does. But, to the extent that Postmodern Christianity embraces the value of allowing the government to regulate what we say and

53. In Matthew 6:25–34 Jesus instructs his followers to look to God for food, clothing, etc. He *never* instructs them to petition the king (or the state) for what they need. He always instructs them to look to God for what they need. Most importantly, he never seeks to galvanize his followers into a political machine. Never does he instruct them to become political activists. It would be wrong to dismiss such an omission as a matter of his times. The Zealots of Jesus' day were very much a political insurrectionist movement. Jesus neither joined nor supported their cause. Jesus, it would seem, had no interest in looking to the state to find the solutions to mankind's problems. Jesus wanted his followers to proclaim the gospel of mercy and freedom from condemnation to whomever would listen. He did not want them to fix the world through political action.

54. There are some adherents to the Christian Religion whose beliefs, attitudes, and practices are inextricably bound to the Conservative political agenda in much the same way that adherents to Postmodern Christianity have embraced the Progressivist political agenda. Where this is true, it is incompatible with authentic belief in the Truth proclaimed by Jesus. For both historical and philosophical reasons, the Conservative political agenda typically incorporates causes, beliefs, and values that are more in keeping with the Truth taught by Jesus than does the Progressivist political agenda. However, misplaced trust in the state and politics is nonetheless misplaced trust, even if it is placed in Conservative policies rather than Progressivist policies.

how we say it,⁵⁵ to that extent Postmodern Christianity is ceding to government the power to pretend to be God. This is completely incompatible with the Truth.

Culture

Since the height of the Enlightenment, the predominant perspective in Western thought has been one of optimism about the future. As knowledge, technology, and information grows, human existence can be expected to get better and better. Each new generation will experience an ever better life. Each new generation will know more, understand more, and, as a consequence, have better-informed and more humane values.

In keeping with this prevailing positivism in Western Civilization since the Enlightenment, Postmodern Christians tend to see all change as positive. As society "evolves," it is being transformed into a better, a more enlightened, a more humane, a more lasting, and a morally superior society. As a consequence, it is only right and proper that Postmodern Christians "evolve" with it. It is important that they not get stuck in traditional ways of thinking. It is important that they not embrace outmoded, less-enlightened values; that they not fixate on past beliefs and practices. The Postmodern Christian must fully engage with American culture, contributing what he can from his faith and beliefs, while learning what he can from the fresh enlightenment that contemporary culture is offering him.

This mindset is diametrically opposed to the mindset that the Bible instructs the Jesus-follower to adopt. John teaches that belief in the real, authentic Jesus proclaimed by the apostles is a "victory over the world." He writes:

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?⁵⁶

By "world," John means what we mean by the term "culture." The "world" is the ordered set of beliefs, values, practices, perceptions, and attitudes that constitute the culture that surrounds us and within which we are immersed. To come to embrace the truth that Jesus is the Messiah requires that a person successfully resist and reject all the cultural beliefs, values, practices, perceptions, and attitudes that stand in opposition to that truth. It requires that he "overcome" his culture and all that it stands for.

John—along with Jesus and the other apostles—seems to have the perspective that every human culture will, necessarily, stand in opposition to the Truth that they proclaim. No human

55. Long before they were foundational American values, freedom of thought and freedom of speech were fundamentally biblical values. (Arguably, that is why they became foundational American values.) Any attempt to coerce the thought and speech of another human being is utterly incompatible with the humanity and dignity of that human being (as the Bible understands him). While "freedom of speech" and "freedom of thought" do not get spelled out and articulated in so many words, they are nonetheless values that are already implicit in the biblical view of man.

56. Cf. 1John 5:4–5

culture moves toward God and Truth. It is always moving away from God and Truth. As a consequence, the Jesus-follower must never look to his culture—no matter what culture he finds himself in—to help him know and follow the Truth. Rather, the Jesus-follower must always view his culture as an enemy of Truth, as an obstacle to his coming to know it. It is something to be resisted and overcome, not something to be trusted and used as a guide.

The Postmodern Christian will tend to view the authentic Jesus-follower, who is on his guard against the influence of culture, as an old traditionalist with a character flaw—specifically, with an irrational and inappropriate fear of change. The authentic Jesus-follower will appear to be unwilling to “flex” with the times. But, in truth, the Postmodern Christian has no real understanding of what drives and motivates the true Jesus-follower. The authentic disciple is not afraid of change. He is not unwilling to adapt. Rather, he is unshakably committed to taking his cues from Jesus and the Bible, not from his culture. He does not trust his culture. Hence, he has no desire to conform his perspectives to those of his culture. His sole interest and desire is to know the Truth and to conform his life and beliefs to that Truth. And he does not trust that his culture can help him in that regard. Hence, he is continually on his guard against his culture. With such an attitude, he is not a person who is ready and eager to “fit in” with the times. But it is not fear of change that motivates him. Rather, it is courage—the courage to be at odds with everyone else around him.⁵⁷

Diversity

Following the lead of PSP civil religion, Postmodern Christianity has a tendency to consider “diversity” as a social virtue. In cultural discourse today, one often hears diversity touted as a fine and wonderful boon to civilization. It is, after all, the secret to a healthy, vital, and long-lived society.

This is not a well-considered viewpoint. Like the religious dogma that it is, it is never defended by argument; it is simply asserted. In truth, it is a philosophical prejudice that has been elevated to the level of a religious dogma within the PSP religion. But nothing in the worldview of the Bible⁵⁸—and nothing in the history of mankind—supports such a viewpoint. It is unity, not diver-

57. Ironically, the Postmodern Christian who scoffs at the true Jesus-believer for being “too afraid” to change with the times is the one who, more likely than not, is driven by fear. It takes courage to stand apart from one’s culture and to march to the beat of a radically different drum. It is typically fear that motivates the Postmodern Christian to want to “fit in” with one’s culture and to bend his values and beliefs in order to do so.

58. It is true that Paul believes there is diversity within the *pleroma*, the people of God. The people of God is constituted of Gentiles as well as Jews. (And Paul assumes that Jews and Gentiles have fundamentally diverse cultures and ways of life.) But four things need to be noted about Paul’s perspective: (1) what makes the people of God one people is the *unity* they all have through their common belief in the Messiah; (2) what is remarkable and exciting to Paul is that fundamentally diverse groups of people have been made *one*, not that one people has been made diverse (the exact opposite perspective from PSP dogma); (3) while Paul could be said to appreciate the diversity, he does *not* celebrate it (he does not find it particularly striking or remarkable; it is something he takes for granted); and (4) Paul clearly does celebrate the unity and oneness that is created by a common commitment to Jesus the Messiah. Hence, while Paul does have a concept of unity-within-diversity within his working understanding of God’s purposes, it is the unity he emphasizes and celebrates, not the diversity.

sity, that provides the basis for a healthy, thriving society. Enduring societies are not fragmented, Balkanized societies; they are unified societies.

It would be difficult to find a basis in world history for the claims that PSP religion makes about diversity. Where in world history is there any example of a society or civilization that was made stronger by becoming groups of people with irreconcilably different and incompatible world-views, values, or attitudes? The Balkans? The Middle East? Northern Ireland? The Sudan? Uganda? The story of mankind is the story of irreconcilably incompatible beliefs and attitudes coming into conflict. They have always resulted in war, genocide, apartheid, segregation, or some other manifestation of inhumanity. On the other hand, when you look at the societies and civilizations that have thrived and endured, do they not all show evidence of some unifying force that kept them together and promoted internal harmony? The United States is one of the greatest examples. To be an American is not to belong to a particular ethnic group. It is not to belong to a particular race. Nor is it to share a particular language culture. However—at least historically—it has always involved having a shared commitment to a common set of social-political ideas and ideals.⁵⁹ Certainly, the ethnic and racial diversity of American culture has made it an interesting and rich society. But America did not thrive *as a result of its* diversity.⁶⁰ It thrived *in spite of its* diversity. To the extent that it can be said to have thrived at all, it has done so as a result of its *unity*—a unity grounded in a common commitment to a certain set of ideas and ideals.

At this point the PSPer will assert, “Certainly there must be something to unify a society. But, so long as the force that unifies us is greater than the forces that push us apart, then the existence of a variety of different worldviews and value systems makes us all the richer and greater.”

At first blush, this sounds so very plausible. For, understood at one level, it describes the American experiment. Different foods, different music, different customs, different dress—all living peacefully and in harmony together. How could that be harmful? It only enriches us, does it not? It poses no threat. It does not diminish us.

However, the preachers of “diversity” from within the PSP civil religion are not thinking of diversity at the level of food, dress, music, and customs. They are thinking of it at the level of moral and religious beliefs. Therein lies the problem. Nothing about two persons having different diet, dress, and musical taste makes their ways of life incompatible with one another. But, there clearly is something about two persons having irreconcilable moral judgments that makes their ways of life incompatible. The person who believes that “terminating a pregnancy” is a valid moral choice will be in irreconcilable conflict with the person who believes that “murdering a baby in the womb” is a fundamentally evil act. The PSP civil religion and the Postmodern Chris-

59. Today, this shared commitment may very well no longer exist. Arguably, that is why American culture today is experiencing the fragmentation and cultural Balkanization that it is.

60. Indeed, ethnic, racial, and worldview differences have led to many sharp tensions that have marked the history of American culture. One cannot get much “sharper” than the tension between North and South that led to the Civil War.

tianity that follows from it choose to call such a fundamental difference “diversity” and invite us to celebrate it. Such diversity is what makes America great—they want us to believe.

Such talk is nothing but subterfuge. The appeal to “diversity” is intended to cloak the real agenda of the PSP civil religion. There exist a set of practices that any adherent of the Christian religion and any disciple of Jesus would have to call immoral. The PSP religion, on the other hand, does not want to call any such practices immoral. And, in fact, it wants to eliminate all opposition to such practices within American society (for example, opposition by Christians and Jesus-followers). That is the *real* agenda of the PSP civil religion.

How do they expect to do that? Answer: they will, in the name of “diversity,” encourage Christian religionists and Jesus-followers to accept as morally valid the practices and value systems of others who do not embrace Christianity or the Bible. In other words, in the name of “diversity,” they will encourage American society to accept as morally allowable that which Christian religionists and Jesus-followers are morally obligated to consider sin. That is the real agenda of the PSP religion. Diversity is not the real agenda at all. The real agenda is to coerce (or seduce) Christians and Jesus-followers into ignoring their own beliefs and value systems. Or, at the very least, to cause them to keep silent about their beliefs and values and not bother others with them.⁶¹

Inclusion (“Us” versus “Them”)

To Postmodern Christianity, the division of mankind into an “us” and a “them” is one of the primary evils in the world. The assumption is that, anytime there exists an “us” and a “them,” the “us”-es will want to harm, exclude, or neglect the “them”-s. The us/them distinction places a whole group of people outside the boundaries of whom I should love. Or, so they reason.

The biblical worldview is fundamentally at odds with this perspective. The whole storyline of the Bible is predicated on an important distinction between an “us” and a “them.” First, there is the us/them distinction incorporated in the Jew/Gentile distinction. Then, ultimately, there is the us/them distinction incorporated in the child-of-God/child-of-the-devil distinction. The whole story of salvation is completely dependent upon understanding and coming to terms with this latter distinction.

However, the biblical teaching does not share the PSP-ers false assumption that the scope of an individual’s love will and must be limited by any us/them distinction that he makes. On the contrary, Jesus clearly and unmistakably taught that love is to be extended to any and every human being. Even if some human being is a “them,” and not an “us”—in my view of things—I never-

61. It is quite clear that this is the case. If the real issue were “diversity,” then the values, beliefs, practices, and attitudes of Christians and Jesus-believers would be welcomed into the rich, diverse, vibrant soup of American culture as readily as those values, beliefs, and attitudes that conflict with Christian and biblical values. But they are not. If one espouses Christian and biblical values, he is not invited in. Rather, he is shut down completely through accusations of “hate speech” and bigotry. It turns out that the “diversity” championed by PSP religion is rather limited, selective, and non-inclusive. To the PSPer, diversity is great, so long as the adherents to PSP civil religion get to determine which diverse groups to include.

theless owe it to him to love him. His failure to belong to my group of "us"-es can never serve as an excuse for my not extending love to him.

One would think that the Postmodern Christian would be satisfied with this clarification of the biblical teaching. But, typically, he is not. The very fact that I believe there *is* a distinction between the child of God and the child of the devil is already a grave evil in his way of thinking. In my view of the world—as a believer in the apostolic Truth—I have embraced a hateful, harmful, exclusionary idea. I should be ashamed of myself for being so unenlightened.

As a matter of fact, there are two possible responses to Jesus. One can acknowledge him, follow him, and seek to obey him; or one can reject him. The mere presence of Jesus in history poses to each and every human being this very question: Which kind of person will you be? Will you be the kind of person who humbly and obediently acknowledges him and follows him? Or will you be the kind of person who arrogantly dismisses and neglects him?

Postmodern Christianity would encourage us to remove this question and to abolish the choice it entails altogether. Or, at least, to pretend that there is no such question and choice. But to remove this question and its accompanying choice is nothing less than a complete negation of everything that Jesus' life and teaching is. The ineradicable fact is this: Jesus' life, teaching, and existence do call me to question. They present me with a choice that I will and must make: Who will I be? Specifically, what will I do with Jesus?⁶²

It is a tragic and terrible reality that some human beings (indeed some of those we love) will choose to reject Jesus and go to their ultimate destruction. It is only right and proper that I am horrified by this reality. It ought to grieve me. But there is no virtue in pretending that it is not a reality. Authentic belief in the apostolic Truth is not a matter of believing what we want to be true. It is a matter of believing what, in fact, is true. To believe anything else is an attempt to escape reality. Who is it that will be saved into eternal Life? Not the one who has escaped reality into an imaginary universe more to his liking. Rather, the one who has seen the truth about reality and has submitted to it.

The Postmodern Christian alternative to authentic belief in the apostolic Truth would encourage me to live in a world of make-believe. In the Postmodern Christian's make-believe world, I don't need to confront my neighbor and ask him to choose. He will be okay. And all those I love will be okay. Jesus will save them, every one! So, I need not bother my neighbor with the difficult decision of what he will do with Jesus. I need not challenge him to repent. There is no difficult existential decision that needs to be made. Jesus will see to it that everyone comes out fine in the end.

62. And the answer that human beings give to this question divides mankind into an "us" and a "them." There are those of us who believe and there are those who do not believe. It is this very division of mankind into two fundamentally different groups and the animosity that will exist between them that lies behind Jesus' comment in Matthew 10:34–36: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be members of his household."

Furthermore, in the Postmodern Christian's make-believe world, there are no irreconcilable systems of values and beliefs. We are all basically the same. We all want basically the same things. We all believe basically the same things. Hence, there is no actual us-and-them that divides us. And certainly there is no "them" that holds "us" in contempt. There is only an "us." There is no reason we cannot all live in harmony as an "us."

This is a wonderful and beautiful vision of the world. Unfortunately, it has nothing to do with reality as it actually is.⁶³ The world of the Postmodern Christian is a fiction.

Materialism

Being influenced as it is by the secularism of the PSP civil religion, Postmodern Christianity is somewhat gullible when it comes to a materialistic explanation for one's experience. The authentic Truth-believing Jesus-follower, on the other hand, will be inclined to see materialistic explanations as always too simplistic and reductionistic. Human beings are more than organic machines. We are persons. Accordingly, much that we experience, feel, and do is a function of our being persons. Not everything about us is a function of our being animals. We make free-will choices that define the nature of our existence and the nature of our being.

A Postmodern Christian will be open to seeing the cause of his emotions, actions, thoughts, and responses in something material: diet, environment, chemicals, genes, etc. The Truth-seeking Jesus-follower, on the other hand, will not be as open to explanations based on physical causes. He will not be inclined to be satisfied with such explanations. To the Truth-believer, human beings are first and foremost persons. They are, primarily, free moral agents. Only after that are they biological organisms subject to the effects of physics and chemistry on the body. To the secular materialist, exactly the opposite is the case. Human beings are first and foremost biological organisms, subject to the effects of physics and chemistry on the body. And only after that are they, by derivation, personal beings.

In its most extreme form, Postmodern Christianity will explicitly assert that a dietary regimen and/or physical training are Christian disciplines that are absolutely indispensable to a Christian's sanctification. We become more holy by what we eat and how we exercise. An authentic follower of Jesus will utterly reject such a claim. So far as the Bible is concerned, sanctification of the believer results from the direct, secret, inward working of the Spirit of God on the inner desires and commitments of each individual child of God (who is a person). It does not result from physical, material causes shaped and directed by the believer himself.

63. Jesus was perfectly clear that those who reject him will have animosity toward those who choose to follow him. In John 15:18–21, John describes what Jesus said to the men whom he selected to be his apostles—his authoritative spokesmen, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for my name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent me." While these words were spoken specifically with reference to his apostles, they nonetheless describe a more general truth about how unbelief will relate to belief. Cf. 1 John 3:10–15.

Biblical Authority

For well over a century now, the authority of the Bible has been under attack. Not to take the bible seriously—not to view it as the inspired and authoritative word of God—has become the default attitude of the culture in which we live. The PSP religion rejects the Bible and its teaching altogether. Postmodern Christianity does not *overtly* reject the Bible and its authority. Out of respect for tradition—or, out of some kind of cultural inertia—Postmodern Christianity ostensibly embraces biblical authority. It expects to read and be instructed by the Bible. However, in practice, the Bible does not have much influence on the Postmodern Christian.⁶⁴ Taking his cues from modern sentiment, the Postmodern Christian expects the Bible to be in error, outdated, out of touch, and misguided in various ways and in various respects. “Sure, the Bible is good and true and all that. But we can’t expect it to be absolutely right and accurate in *everything* that it asserts.” It is this latter, less-than-absolute commitment to the teaching of the Bible that passes for granting it authority among Postmodern Christians.⁶⁵

The Postmodern Christian attitude toward the Bible involves a significantly reduced respect for the Scriptures when compared to the one found in Jesus and the apostles. Jesus once parenthetically remarked, “and the Scripture cannot be broken.”⁶⁶ And he modeled such an attitude in everything he said and did. The apostles, likewise, modeled this exact same disposition toward the Bible in what they wrote and in how they employed the Scriptures. Ultimately, the Spirit-imparted insight that is granted to the authentic child of God will lead him to acknowledge the uniquely divine quality of the Scriptures. Hence, the authentic Jesus-follower will ultimately find himself committed to the absolute authority of the Bible. Anyone who suggests that such a com-

64. Not nearly so much influence as it has on the authentic apostolic Jesus-follower. By comparison, it is as if the Postmodern Christian does not believe in biblical authority at all.

65. Some Postmodern Christians explicitly espouse the same respect for biblical inerrancy that you will find among authentic Jesus-followers. And these Postmodern Christians will imitate authentic believers in the way they approach the Scriptures. However, by employing the right sort of interpretive methods (that is, ones which do not reflect a respect for and understanding of the true nature of verbal communication and valid interpretive method), they are able to avoid facing squarely into the meaning and implications of a biblical text while, at the same time, claiming that their only desire is to do and believe exactly how the biblical text instructs them. Through such an approach, they can create the appearance of granting authority to the Bible without actually doing so. The one who genuinely embraces the absolute authority of the Scriptures is the one who conforms his thoughts, beliefs, and actions to what he understands the Bible to teach—*after he has sought to understand the meaning of the Biblical text through procedures and methods that are grounded in and derived from commonsense rationality and an accurate grasp of the nature of language and of verbal communication.*

66. Cf. John 10:35. To demonstrate that this comment reflects an unqualified belief in total biblical inerrancy on the part of Jesus is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I submit that such a case could be made. Hence, when Jesus says, “the Scriptures cannot be broken,” his intent is to suggest that absolutely nothing that the Scriptures actually assert can be gainsaid. Why? Because they are absolutely infallible in all that they assert. One does not see this same perspective manifest among Postmodern Christians. Even when they explicitly claim to hold this perspective in theory, it does not seem to inform their practice. Jesus did much more than espouse biblical authority as a doctrine and theory. He embraced the implications of that doctrine in practice. Not to do likewise is to fail to be a true disciple of Jesus.

mitment to biblical authority is not necessary for the Jesus-believer will ultimately be building on the foundation of Jesus the Messiah with hay, wood, and straw.

Concluding Remarks

I have been carefully studying the Bible for several decades now, seeking to clearly and accurately understand the biblical message and worldview. I have been carefully observing American culture now for a couple of decades, seeking to make sense out of what I see. The analysis of both biblical truth and American culture that is contained in these papers is not especially new to me. I have been saying and teaching most of what is contained within these papers for some time now. But what is new—and what provoked me to write this series of papers—is a fresh realization that *many* Christians today have been *significantly* impacted by the values and beliefs of Postmodern Secular Progressivist religion.

If you had asked me just a few years ago, I think I would have been inclined to say that *some* Christians have been significantly impacted by PSP religion, but I would not have said that *many* had. And I might have said that many Christians have been *impacted* by PSP religion, but I would not have said that many have been *significantly impacted* by PSP religion. I believe now that I was naive. I had underestimated the power of American culture; and I had over-estimated the strength and clarity of most Christians' understanding.

The reach of the PSP civil religion has been far and wide, drawing many Christians and Jesus-believers (who ought to know better) under its thrall. I have been surprised by the total lack of discernment manifest in so many Christians and Jesus-followers in recent days. Where I have just assumed that PSP values and beliefs were surely being rebuffed by Christians, Christians were wholeheartedly embracing them. It was unwitting, no doubt, but they were embracing them just the same.

It was this realization that provoked me to write this series of papers. I have written these papers to persuade anyone who was willing and able to hear *to guard his mind against the powerful deceits of this present time and culture and to keep it focused on the true and accurate message of the Bible*. That is not a new exhortation for me. But it is one that I offer with a new and fresh sense of urgency.

What, then, are the exhortations that follow from the analysis I have offered in this series of papers? I believe they can be summarized in six specific exhortations:

- (1) Given the danger of being shaped by and conformed to modern PSP culture today, each and every one of us needs to ask himself a very important set of questions: Why am I a believer in Jesus? What is it about Jesus and his teaching that makes me choose to follow him? Why are the answers to these questions important? Because I need to determine this about myself: Am I attracted to following Jesus because I am attracted to the Truth—or for some other reason? Perhaps I am not attracted to the real Jesus at all. Perhaps, instead, I am attracted to some counterfeit version of who Jesus was and what he taught. If so, then I need to realize that perhaps I have been deceiving myself. Perhaps I have been assuring myself all along that I belong to Jesus when, in truth, I do not belong to him at all. (I will be met with, "I never knew you.") If after a bit of soul-searching I determine that I have not been following the

True Jesus and the Truth that he taught, then I must repent of my unbelief and make that all-important existential decision to submit to the true Jesus and the real Truth and to invest my life in the pursuit of it. This is not a trivial matter. One's eternal destiny hinges on it.

- (2) Each and every one of us needs to take stock of what it is he espouses and proclaims to others. Does each and every one of my theological doctrines, philosophical beliefs, and social-political values derive logically and consistently from the teaching and worldview of the Bible? Or, have I allowed myself to be shaped and molded by modern PSP culture in many of the values and beliefs that I espouse? We have seen how easy it is for an authentic Jesus-believer to unthinkingly adopt beliefs, values, and attitudes from the unbelieving, godless culture around him. While he himself remains an authentic believer, the things he subsequently espouses are significantly different from what Jesus and the apostles would espouse. Is that the case with me? If after a bit of careful consideration I determine that such is the case—that the things I espouse are not consistent with and derived from the teaching and worldview of the Bible—then I must invest the time, energy, and thought necessary to remedy the situation. I must carefully critique my various beliefs, values, and attitudes and determine whether they are consistent with the Truth of the Bible. If not, I need to alter my belief system and bring it into conformity with that which actually follows consistently from the biblical message and teaching.
- (3) Closely related to the above exhortation, each and every one of us needs to give consideration to the impact we are having on others—not only upon the ones we love, but upon our neighbors in general. What “gospel” are we recommending to them? Is it the one proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles? Or is it a confused and distorted gospel that has resulted from my corrupting it with various alien elements taken from contemporary PSP culture? If the latter, then, again, I need to take care to fix my understanding of the gospel. I need to be sure that it conforms to what actually follows consistently from the biblical message and teaching. God's primary purpose in this present phase of created reality is to form a people who will know and serve him eternally. In all likelihood, I am contributing to the fulfillment of this divine purpose only to the extent that the gospel I am inviting others to believe is the gospel actually proclaimed by Jesus himself.
- (4) Given that each and every one of us needs to take steps to ensure that he has a true and accurate grasp of the Truth, each of us needs to (i) strive to acquire a thorough and competent understanding of the message and teaching of the Bible, and (ii) strive to construct a coherent worldview that is derived from and is logically consistent with the Bible's message and teaching. It will not be possible to discern the falsity of PSP cultural values and beliefs if I do not have a firm and confident grasp of what are true, biblical beliefs and values to begin with. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to construct a belief and value system that is rooted in and developed out of a sound understanding of the Bible.
- (5) Closely connected with the exhortation just above, each and every one of us needs to acquire a working appreciation for what constitutes a sound interpretation of the biblical text and what constitutes a sound and coherent worldview. Not every follower of Jesus is tasked by God with doing original exegesis and translation of the Bible. Not every follower of Jesus

is being asked to do the philosophical work of creating a biblical worldview. Nonetheless, it is critical that every follower of Jesus be able to discern when an interpretation of the Bible is sound, reasonable, and valid and when it is not. Likewise, it is critical that every follower of Jesus be able to appreciate when a worldview is rational, coherent, and sound and when it is not.

- (6) Finally, it is important that each and every Jesus-believer in America today come to understand and appreciate the power of that which stands against his belief in the gospel of Jesus. The false PSP civil religion pervades every inch of contemporary American culture. One cannot live in America today without having the beliefs and values of the PSP civil religion crammed down his throat every place he turns. School, work, television, movies, music, newspapers, news, radio, the internet and social media, the library, the museum—there is virtually no place one can go where PSP values and beliefs are not being vigorously propagated and enforced.⁶⁷ Consequently, when I have appreciated the all-pervasive nature of PSP influence in American culture, it is important that I carefully assess the nature and extent of my involvement with any and all of the institutions of American culture.⁶⁸ *I may find that it is necessary to remove myself or distance myself from one or more of its institutions at one time or another.* The purity and accuracy of my grasp of the Truth is at stake.

67. It is naive of Christian parents to think that schools are the only—or the most powerful—engines of the PSP civil religion. Granted, they are a very powerful enforcer of PSP civil religion. But, in my experience, children who have been homeschooled for the very purpose of removing them from those institutions most responsible for turning them into followers of the PSP religion have nonetheless become adherents to the PSP religion. Removing them from the educational institutions has not succeeded in removing them from the power and influence of American culture. American culture is so all-pervasive that it can enforce their adherence to the PSP civil religion nonetheless.

68. Given what colleges and universities in America have become—namely, given that they have become little more than propaganda factories devoted to social transformation through the conversion of each new generation to the PSP religion—I can no longer in good conscience recommend a college “education” to most individuals. In these times, an individual can get a better, *actual* education through guided self-learning or some other similar alternative. (And he can do so at significantly less financial cost.) Self-learning allows the authentic Jesus-believer to pursue his journey toward the Truth without all the same pressures that he would have to face in most colleges or universities. He will, however, face a different problem. In the way that he approaches his education through self-learning, he must make sure to put himself and his beliefs to the test. He must seek a real education. A simple, uncritical reinforcement of his prior commitments is not an education. To pursue a real education, the self-taught student must discipline himself to direct critical questions and doubts toward his own belief system and put it to the test. He must subject all the doctrines and beliefs to which he is already committed to close scrutiny and critical assessment.