

Toetrede

Liturgie van die Lig

Woorddiens

Lesing 1: Hooglied 2:8-13 (1953)

⁸ Hoor, my beminde, kyk, daar kom hy! Hy spring oor die berge, hy huppel oor die heuwels.

⁹ My beminde lyk soos 'n gemsbok of soos 'n jong takbok. Daar staan hy agter ons muur! Hy kyk deur die vensters in, hy speur deur die tralies heen.

¹⁰ My beminde begin toe en sê vir my: Staan op, my vriendin, my skone, kom dan tog!

¹¹ Want kyk, die winter is verby, die reëntyd is oor, dit het verbygegaan.

¹² Die bloeisels word gesien in die land, die sangtyd het aangebreek, en die tortelduif laat sy stem hoor in ons land.

¹³ Die vyeboom laat sy voorvye uitswel, en die wingerdstokke wat bloei, versprei geur. Staan op, my vriendin, my skone, kom dan tog!

Broodjies vir die Pad

Given the dicey path not to be or to be included in the canon, the Song of Solomon and the Letter of James raise the questions: What makes words 'religious'; What makes behavior 'religious'?

Words are in and of themselves neutral. What gives them power, sometimes devastating and other times wonderful power, rely on three responsible people: the emotions, intentions, expected outcome of the person who spoke/wrote them; the motives and intentions of the person(s) who interpret them; the reactions/actions that result by the person who hears/reads them. Therefore, any language can be religious, including the most secular novel, movie or poetry (as is the case with the Song of Solomon). Conversely, language purporting to be religious can be too easily perverted. (Consider just the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, 9/11.) If the author/speaker (preacher) reads/hears the canonical words and interprets them in a spirit of fairness, respect, justice, carefulness and humility at the task of reading/interpreting God's Word she also bears some responsibility for the understanding and the actions/reactions her words produce. Those who hear, interpret and react bear responsibility for their decisions, too. Likewise, those who promulgate/incite hatred, fear, confusion also bear responsibility. The words "that come [out of the mouth] are what defile," Jesus said.

<http://sacraconversazione.blogspot.com/2009/08/proper-17-year-b.html>



POSTMODERN CHURCHES

by Paul Smith

Christians and their communities of faith exist in rich diversity today. Why are there so many different kinds of Christians and churches? There are historical aspects, political factors, matter of taste, and personality types. However, from an integral perspective of evolutionary stages we can see a quite remarkable tendency for churches to fall into one of perhaps six different altitudes of understanding. I and others often call these six stages tribal, warrior, traditional, modern, postmodern, and integral. In this series I want to outline how understanding stages of faith and church can help us understand one another and act in more loving ways toward each other in the midst of all of our differences.

The Postmodern Church

The postmodern stage of human evolution began roughly 150 years ago and became most noticeable in this country during the 1960's. Postmodernism is a general, much debated term that is applied to many fields such as literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism. It is a reaction to the modern idea that objective science can explain reality. Postmodernism understands that reality is not just something objective but that our minds also play a part in constructing what we think of as reality. It is skeptical of any universal claims or ultimate principles that claim to be true for everything. It makes the rather universal truth claim that there are no universal truth claims!

Coming into being with the Enlightenment, modern consciousness focused on questioning the foundations of past knowledge. Postmodern viewpoints question whether we can really know much of anything at all. The modernist bumper sticker advises, "Question Authority." The postmodern bumper sticker says, "Question Reality."

Modernism says there is absolute truth. Postmodernism says we construct our own truth. Modernism says that what is important are observable facts and logic. Postmodernism says that what is important are feelings and experience. Modernism limits itself to scientific exploration while postmodernism encourages spiritual exploration. Modernism says there are absolute values while postmodernism says that it's all relative.

Traditional consciousness allows for us to "Love your neighbor, hate your enemy, especially if your enemy is attacking you, or even just different from you." The modern level tells us to "Love your neighbor, tolerate your enemy." Postmodernism goes further to "Love your neighbor and love your enemy." In Jesus' terms, this is progress.

Postmodernism is the world of the sensitive self, the pluralistic worldview, and the belief that there are many ways of looking at reality. It has given birth to the green earth movement, feminism, civil rights, and gay rights. Those at this altitude can see things from many perspectives and embrace a more inclusive compassion that thinks, feels, and acts globally. It moves beyond the mere tolerance of the modern level to embracing and honoring other religious traditions.

Postmodernists often actively seek out other spiritual paths for their own enrichment. One begins to see commonalities among the religions of the world, not just differences. All ways are seen as equally valid. Because of this, there is a tendency to despise any kind of hierarchy that says anything is better than something else. Religious hierarchies are seen as especially oppressive. In the name of equality, all hierarchies tend to be rejected, including natural hierarchies.

Natural hierarchy is seeing that there is a natural development such as from atoms to molecules, cells to plants, and animals to humans. A natural hierarchy would be one that sees the traditional stage as better able to love others than the warrior stage. However, postmodernism often rejects the premise of integralism that there really are identifiable stages of development, considering it elitism.

Postmodern philosophy says that absolute truth cannot be discovered at all, neither through reason nor tradition. There is no objective meaning, only subjective meaning, the meaning one brings to anything. History is seen as merely various fictional interpretations. The postmodern worldview was cleverly summed up in an editorial cartoon that showed a boy sitting on Santa's lap. Santa is saying to him, "And have you been a good boy this year?" The boy replies, "It depends on what good means." In back of him a girl is thinking, "Sixty-five percent of my peers say I'm good." Another girl in the Santa line says, "That's a private matter between me and my family." The last boy says, "It's time to move on to the real issue: what I want."

Postmoderns say such things as, "There are no facts, only interpretations." "Nobody tells me what to do," "Your truth is as good as my truth," "I have no limits," and the foundation of them all - "We create our own reality." Sometimes there is a deep agony over the way things seem. Postmoderns see so much diversity that they can't see any unity. Postmoderns value community, consensus, and diversity. The rights of minorities are upheld so that a majority does not crush the minority.

Looking through the postmodern lens, one sees that there is more to life than thinking clearly and being rational. It again embraces the mystical and numinous which was lost in the modern rational stage. Networks and connections are often developed between others who share a similar interest in spirituality. Talks, workshops, and seminars on various aspects of human potential and spirituality are

popular. Meditation, prayer, and the inner life are explored with new fascination.

However, in its rush to embrace mystery, it does not always distinguish mystical from magical. The mystical is an authentic connection to what is real, the magical is a fantasy. This new appreciation of the mystical sometimes moves into the fantastical. Enchantment returns, including nonsense and nobility.

Postmodern religious thought was originally a reaction against mainstream Protestant liberalism. The idea of a religion that just "thinks" finally gave way to opening the door to dimensions that were deeper and higher than reason alone. Reason was not discarded, but it no longer reigned as the only way to "know." Rationalism alone does not work anymore in the postmodern church. Spiritual experiences are valued.

While the modern level is filled with scientific exploration, the postmodern one is filled with spiritual exploration. Science says that seeing is believing. Postmodernism comes along and says that believing is seeing. There is a move from facts and logic to feelings and personal experience. This move is not always navigated well and some postmodern religion, under the previous rubric of "New Age," includes elements of prerational magic along with postrational mysticism. There is a move from only the God of the Bible to considering the spirituality of other religious paths.

Postmodern churches are represented by Unity, Christian Science, New Thought churches, and the most progressive of the churches in the United Church of Christ and other mainline denominations. The Center for Spiritual Living group is postmodern but does not identify as Christian even though Ernest Holmes based his teachings on Jesus.

I do so love and honor Unity for opening the doorway to a postmodern Christianity. Unity seems now to be debating within the movement whether to move to a postmodern position of leaving any specific Christian identity or to maintain their identity as followers of Jesus. Integral Christianity could provide a way for Unity to maintain its Christian identity in an ever evolving way while moving past traditional Christian understanding and practice.

Marcus Borg is the premier theologian of the postmodern church. I like his thinking very much. He understands Jesus as Jewish mystic, healer, wisdom teacher, social prophet, and movement initiator.¹ He sees Jesus as the decisive revelation of God for Christians, but certainly not the only way to God.

The strengths of postmodern Christianity and church are inclusion of the marginalized, diversity, personal growth, advocacy of justice issues, eco friendliness, and embracing altered states of consciousness.

From my perspective, postmodern Christianity, like all stages, also has weakness. The postmodern church can be narcissistic and into the "prosperity gospel," which is spirituality in service of the ego. For all their

inclusiveness and acceptance, postmodern Christians are also often still angry at the tribal, warrior, and traditional church.

Another weakness of the postmodern church is resistance to any kind of hierarchy. This leads to extreme relativism and a refusal to make value judgments. Postmodern religion is not the modern view that doesn't believe anything. Rather, postmodernism believes in everything. Their religion can be 300 miles wide and 3 inches deep.

Jesus never criticized any other religion except his own. It is stunning in our world of religious one-upmanship that Jesus never criticized other religions. He was a good postmodern in that respect. On the other hand, he was devastating pointed in his criticism of his own religion. That was not very postmodern at all. He made clear distinctions between what he considered the best in his religion and the worst.

The most repressive factor in postmodern Christianity, church, and spirituality is the loss of the 2nd-person perspective on God (see my book *Integral Christianity: The Spirit's Call to Evolve* or my previous posts here on The Three Faces of God.). This dialogical dimension of I-Thou which is what I call "communion with the Intimate Face of God" is not only missing but often felt to be "unevolved." It has been said, only half-jokingly, that you can tell if a Christian is postmodern because they get embarrassed if caught praying.

Ken Wilber says, "In today's "new paradigm" spiritual movements, we usually see . . . *a complete loss of Spirit in 2nd-person.* [italics his] What we find instead are extensive descriptions of Spirit in its 3rd-person mode, such as Gaia, the Web of Life, systems theory, akashic fields, chaos theory, and so on. This is coupled, to the extent there is a practice, with Spirit in 1st-person modes: meditation, contemplation, Big Mind, Big Self, Big Me. But no conceptions of a Great Thou, to whom surrender and devotion is the only response."

"This amounts to nothing less than the repression of Spirit in 2nd-person. Remember, all 3 faces of Spirit are simply faces of your deepest formless Self, or the 3 faces of Primordial Self/Spirit as it first manifests. The 4 quadrants, or simply the Big 3 (I, We/Thou, It), are the 3 fundamental dimensions of your Primordial Unmanifest Self's being-in-the-world. In short, failing to acknowledge your own Spirit in 2nd-person is a repression of a dimension of your very being-in-the-world."²

There are at least three other factors that seem to have led to this loss. The first is that the idea of having a personal relationship with God or Jesus sounds just like those Baptists and others who carry around the religious baggage postmoderns left long ago. These limiting beliefs include believing that only Jesus is divine and the only way to God, eternal hell, Jesus dying for our sins, and other traditional evangelical beliefs.

It is interesting as I speak at conferences around the country and read emails from those who have read *Integral Christianity*, that many are hungry for a very real and transforming personal relationship with Jesus but without all these beliefs from previous stages.

A second reason for the loss of any devotional relationship with Spirit in personal form is the postmodern resistance to hierarchy, even natural ones. The idea of love, honor, and adoration for anyone further evolved than we are such as Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, or any devotional approach to a Beloved with a name and a face seems to be taboo.

A third reason for the loss of any personal relationship with Jesus or Spirit is the assumption that any truly evolved spirituality will be beyond the institutional church and all of its old fashioned rituals. Because so many have been hurt by the institutional church, it is understandable that they feel they must distance themselves from it. And that is exactly what many need to do in order to get healing from the religious abuse they have received from the church of their youth. Others have simply outgrown their traditional Christianity.

However, the emerging integral stage of development now holds the possibility of a truly integral Christianity and an integral church life that centers on Jesus as a model for us of what it means to be fully human and fully divine. One can remain on the Christian path and yet follow a more evolved model. I know it can be difficult to find such a church or group, and I get many emails asking me for a church in Australia, or England, or Pittsburg that at least sounds integral. I'm not much help with that, so I usually recommend going to a church (like Unity) that may be as close as you can get given where you live. Enjoy the church, while translating any of their beliefs and practices that don't fit with where you are into another dimension for yourself. Most of us have to do that anyway whatever church we attend. You can also add the personal, devotional, 2nd-person relationship with God for yourself if they leave it out.

Or be bold - find a few partners and start an integral Christian group/church together! That leads us to next month's post - Integral Church, one of the loves of my life!

¹ *The Heart of Christianity*, Marcus J. Borg, p. 89-91.

² *Integral Spirituality*, Ken Wilber, p. 160.

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<http://integrallife.com/integral-post/postmodern-churches>