

How to Defend the Faith In a Postmodern World

Norman L. Geisler¹

Copyright © 2017 Norman L. Geisler – All rights reserved.

In his postmodern critique of Christian apologetics, Myron Penner, a philosopher of religion, opined, “I suggest that modern Christian apologetics subtly undermines the very gospel it seeks to defend,” “apologetics itself might be the single biggest threat to genuine Christian faith that we face today,” and “Not only *can* apologetics curse, it actually *is* a curse.”² I would like to suggest that this position is not true, give reasons why we believe that apologetics in the postmodern world is not working, and explain in four points how to defend the Faith in this postmodern world.

What is Postmodernism?

A History of Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism

Premodernism, or the premodern period, ended roughly around 1650. In that period, thinkers stressed reality and metaphysics. Modernism, or the modern world, lasted from about 1650 to 1950. It stressed epistemology—how can we know? Postmodernism is a view that has

¹ After fifty years of teaching Christians to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3 ESV), Norman Leo Geisler (1932-2019), gave his last public lecture at the National Conference on Christian Apologetics. From “How to Defend the Christian Faith in a Postmodern World,” recorded October 2017, YouTube video, 1:16:58, <https://youtu.be/kxhePYpgHjM>. Transcribed by Azure AI and edited by Christopher T. Haun. Used with permission of Geisler Enterprises, LLC.

² Myron B. Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 49, 12, 9.

emerged roughly around 1950 and endures to the present. In this period, the focus has been on interpretation, on hermeneutics.

We can illustrate the difference between the three views of the three periods with an umpire in his judgments over pitches and plays in the game of baseball. In the premodern world, the umpire would say, "I call them like they are!" In the modern world, the umpire would say, "I call them like I see them!" In the postmodern world, an umpire would say, "They are not anything till I call them!" You can see that there is a radical difference in the premodern and postmodern worlds. And the radical difference is going to come out in something called relativism.

Forerunners of Postmodernism

There are a number of forerunners of postmodernism. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is credited with being the father of modernism. He was the one that famously said, "I think, therefore I am." But, actually, he got it in reverse. It should have been: "I am, therefore I think." (You see, he kind of got *de cart* before *de horse*!). David Hume (1711-1776), the famous Scottish skeptic, was a radical empiricist who held that we can only know what your five senses tell you about our world. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was the first great agnostic who said you just *kant* know. His agnosticism set the stage for the postmodern world. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the Danish existentialist, also set the stage by teaching the philosophy of existentialism. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), taught atheism.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), one of the fathers of the postmodern world, taught the view called deconstructionism. He taught there is no fixed objective meaning or truth in a text. Every text can be deconstructed and reconstructed with new meanings as the reader determines. It can mean many things, many times. In fact, every time it is read or said, it changes its meaning. He wrote *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967),

Limited Inc. (1970), *Post Card: From Socrates, Freud and Beyond* (1972), *Spectres of Marx* (1994).

Paul-Michel Foucault (1926-1984), another one of the fathers of postmodernism, was influenced by Kant, Nietzsche, and Husserl. He died of AIDS at age 58. He wrote *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Death and Labyrinth* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1976), *History of Sexuality* (1976-1984). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault stressed the death of God in the 20th century and argued it is the precondition for the death of man.

Contrasting Postmodernism with Modernism

How can you tell that you have moved from modernity to postmodernity? Whereas modern thought stressed the unity of the mind and the unity of thought, postmodern thought stresses diversity of thought. In the modern world, the emphasis was on the rational; in the postmodern world, it is on the social and psychological. In the modern world, the stress was on the conceptual; in the postmodern world, it is on the visual and the poetical. In the modern world, truth was absolute; in the postmodern world, truth is relative. In the modern world, they taught exclusivism; in the postmodern world, the emphasis is on pluralism. In the modern, there were two forms of foundationalism on which we based our thinking; the foundation of postmodernism is anti-foundationalism. In the modern world, the emphasis was on epistemology—how we know; in the postmodern, it is on hermeneutics—how we interpret things. In the modern, there was a quest for certainty—how can we know things for sure? In the postmodern, there is a stress on uncertainty. There is no certainty. In the modern, they sought to find the author's meaning—they wanted to know what the author meant by a term. But in the postmodern, they are looking for the readers' meanings.

Nature of Postmodernism: The Root is Atheism

Postmodernism is a condition where, since God is dead, as Vaclav Havel said, “anything is possible and nothing is certain.”³ And that is the world in which you and I live. The influence of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was very seminal. Nietzsche, an atheist who referred to himself as the Antichrist, wrote, “God is dead. God remains dead. He did not just die, he remains dead. How shall we, the murders of all murders, comfort ourselves?”⁴ God being “dead” is kind of the basis for postmodern thought.

But God is dead in different ways—in different spheres. God is dead *epistemologically*. The epistemological death of God may be attributed to Immanuel Kant. Although he personally believed in a deistic God, he nonetheless believed that you cannot know this God with your mind. God is dead *mythologically* according to Nietzsche. He means that the myth of God died. And, per Foucault, we died with him. Or God is dead *dialectically* according to Hegel, a famous philosopher who is credited with starting a dialectic, and Altizer, his disciple who took his thinking to an extreme. Or God can be dead *linguistically*. A.J. Ayer, author of *Language, Truth, and Logic*, who said that God is dead *linguistically*. We cannot know the meaning of terms. Or God can be dead

³ Václav Havel, “The Need for Transcendence in this Post-Modern World,” Liberty Medal Acceptance Speech, Independence Hall, Philadelphia, October 4, 1994.
<https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/theology-philosophy/the-need-for-transcendence-in-the-postmodern-world/>.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Madman,” in *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974. There is room to debate whether Nietzsche was an atheist or a “Dionysian” pantheist. He admired both Spinoza and Heraclitus while championed Dionysianism (chaos, dissolution of self, unity of the whole) over Apollonianism (order, boundaries, individualism). Regardless, he was antagonistic to the idea of a God who was beyond our world that designed, created, and gave order and purpose to our world (theism).

phenomenologically, taught Husserl, the great philosopher of phenomenology. Or God is dead *existentially* per Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the famous French existentialist. Or God is dead *cognitively*, per Wittgenstein, such that there is no cognitive knowledge of God. Or God is dead *hermeneutically*, according to Heidegger and Derrida. But God is dead one way or the other. Many of these thinkers (Nietzsche, Altizer, Ayer, Sartre, Derrida) also believed that God is dead *actually*. But all of them believe in the death of God in various other ways—either epistemologically, mythologically, dialectically, linguistically, phenomenologically, existentially, cognitively, or hermeneutically. God is dead is the characteristic of this new postmodernism.

The Result of Postmodernism: The Fruit is Relativism

So what is the result of postmodernism? In a single word: relativism. If you want to understand what is going on in the world today, it is relativism. If there is no Absolute *Mind*, then there is no absolute *truth* (epistemological relativism). If God died and the mind died, then absolute truth dies with an absolute mind. Nor can there be absolute *meaning* (semantical relativism) because minds can mean things. There can be no absolute *history* (reconstructionism). We have to reconstruct history. If there is no Absolute *Author*, then there is no absolute *writing* (textual relativism) and no absolute *interpretation* (hermeneutical relativism). Every text means something different. And if there is no absolute interpretation, how can you be absolutely sure of the meaning of any text? There is no absolute meaning. If there is no Absolute *Thinker*, then it follows that there are no absolute *thoughts* (philosophical relativism) and no absolute *laws of thought* (anti-foundationalism). If there is no Absolute *Purposer*, then there is no absolute *purpose* (teleological relativism). If there is no Absolute *Good*, then there is no absolute *right* or *wrong* (moral relativism). So we live in the postmodern world, which is characterized by relativism. It is relativism on every level—relativism of truth, of meaning, of history, of writing, of interpretation,

of thought, of the laws of thought. There is no absolute purpose, no absolute good. Objectivity does not exist. All absolutes died without God and a future life.

In the famous book by Dostoevsky, Ivan Karamazov summed it up well: “Without God, and the future life? How will man be after that? It means that everything is permitted now.”⁵ Or, as Jean-Paul Sartre put it, “I knew myself alone, utterly alone, in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who lost his shadow. And there was nothing left in heaven, no right or no wrong, nor anyone to give me orders.”⁶ That is it, in a nutshell. A lonely life where there is no right or wrong and no one to give any orders. Aldous Huxley admitted, “The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”⁷ So the brave new world of postmodernism is one where there are no absolutes—no absolute right or wrong, and no absolute truth or falsity.

So what is postmodernism? Its root is atheism; its fruit is relativism—relativism in every area.

How to Defend Against Postmodernism?

In order to defend against the loss of truth in the postmodern age, we have to defend foundationalism.

⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1991), 589.

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Flies,” in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 121-122.

⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), 272.

Definition. What is foundationalism? It is the view that there are foundational, fundamental, self-evident first principles which form the basis of all knowledge. Foundational truth is based in these first principles. But in postmodernism, there are no self-evident first principles of knowledge and, therefore, no basis for knowing anything with certainty.

Distinction. There are two kinds of foundationalism—deductive and reductive. Generally, the former is rejected while the latter is neglected. In reductive foundationalism, all truths are *deducible* from self-evident first principles. Spinoza and Descartes are proponents of this view. Deductive foundationalism operates like Euclidean geometry based on self-evident axioms. In some forms of geometry, parallel lines never meet in infinity, for example. It deduces all truth from these type of axioms. The problem with deductive foundationalism is that not all axioms are necessary. There are different axioms that are possible in some forms of geometry. Parallel lines do meet in infinity according to projective geometry, for example. Riemann geometry has still other starting and ending points. Even if there were necessary first principles or axioms, they are empty. They yield no knowledge about reality. For example, “All triangles have three sides.” That does not tell us whether there are any triangles or not. It just says, *if* there is a triangle, it must have three sides. Or consider, “All husbands are married men.” It does not tell us that there are any husbands. It just says, if there is a husband, he must be a married man. It is empty knowledge.

By contrast, in reductive foundationalism, all truths are *reducible* to (are based upon) self-evident principles—not deducible from them. A proponent of this view is Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), one of the greatest thinkers of all time. And we think highly of Thomas Aquinas because of his philosophy and because of what it provides or as an answer to postmodernism and an answer for certainty in the modern world. So, we, along with the rest of the modern world, reject deductive

foundationalism. But we accept a reductive foundationalism, such as Thomas Aquinas held. Every statement, not evident in itself, must be evident in terms of something else.

You can reduce all knowledge to first principles. But there cannot be an infinite regress of non-evident statements. And since there cannot be an infinite regress of non-evident statements, there must be first, self-evident principles in terms of which non-evident statements are made known to be true. We are going to defend reductive foundationalism as the basis for knowledge and for answering postmodernism. An endless regress of explanations is an attempt to explain away the need for explanation. If you had an endless regress of statements, you would explain away explanation itself. C.S. Lewis said there is a need for first principles:

You cannot go on ‘explaining away’ forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. ... It is no use trying to ‘see through’ first principles. If you see through everything then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see though’ all things is the same as not to see.⁸

That statement makes clear what you and I believe about knowledge. Knowledge is possible, knowable, and absolute because knowledge can be reduced to self-evident first principles which are undeniable.

What are the First Principles?

In the reductive foundationalism, first principles that lead to certain knowledge are either self-evident statements or statements where the predicate term is reducible to the subject term. Consider this statement: every *contingent* being has a *cause*. Now that is not obviously self-evident but it is

⁸ C.S. Lewis, 2001. *The Abolition of Man*. Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, No. 9. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 91.

reducible to the self-evident. Contingent means could not-be. But non-being cannot cause being. Hence, every contingent being has a cause.

Well, what are first principles? The knowledge is possible because of first principles. What are the first principles on which we can base our certain knowledge? First principles defined in a reductive view. Self-evident statement, a statement where the predicate term is reducible to the subject term. Take, for example, “Every contingent being has a cause.” Now that is not obviously self-evident, but it is reduced to the self-evident. The contingent means could not be. Contingent is something that is, but might not be. But non-being cannot cause being. Hence, every contingent being has a cause. The reason that you and I can be certain about the principle, say for example, of causality, is it is reducible to a first principle.

Some First Principles Listed

Once you understand these first principles, we can know things with certainty, prove certain things. The first one we call the **Law of Existence: “Being is” (i.e., Something exists. e.g., I do)**. That is self-evident. Without the obvious certainty that something exists, we cannot know anything. Principle number two, the **Law of Identity: “Being is being” (B is B)**. We cannot deny it without affirming it. Third, the **Law of Non-Contradiction: “Being is not non-being” (B is not non-B)**. The law of non-contradiction is one of the three fundamental laws of thought that are literally undeniable. Fourth, the **Law of Excluded Middle: “Either Being or non-being” (Either B or not B)**. Something either is or it is not—but it cannot be and not be at the same time. Fifth, the **Law of Causality: “Non-being cannot cause being” (Non-B \nrightarrow being)**. Nothing cannot cause

something. As Julie Andrews famously sang, “Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could!”⁹ Sixth, the **Law of Analogy: “An effect is similar to its efficient cause” (B--->b)**. Seventh, therefore, God exists—that is, a first, uncaused Cause exists that is similar to us (his effects).

First Principles Lead to God

Now notice, just taking the six basic laws themselves, all of which are self-evident, you can arrive at certain knowledge. You can be sure of the conclusion that follows from them. If these laws are true, then God must exist. God exists. The first uncaused cause of all that exists is similar to its effect.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a famous American theologian and philosopher, also held that first principles lead us to believe in God. He argued: (1) Something undeniably exists. (2) Nothing cannot cause something. (Nothing can only cause nothing.) (3) Therefore, something exists eternally and necessarily. (4) A personal, intellectual, and moral being undeniably exists (e.g., me, you). (5) Hence, a personal, intellectual, moral, external, and necessary Being exists (i.e., God.).¹⁰ He used several of the first principles to make one of the most profound proofs for the existence of God. And he wrote this proof around the age of nineteen years of age!

Somebody a little older, a contemporary atheist, Anthony Flew (1923-2010), one of the great atheists of the 20th century, said this in his book, *There is a God*: “It is simply inconceivable that any material matrix or field can generate agents who think and act. A force field does not plan or

⁹ Richard Rodgers, “Something Good,” Concord Music Publishing. 1965.

<https://rodgersandhammerstein.com/song/the-sound-of-music/something-good>.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” No. 27a, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The “Miscellanies,” Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 213.

think. So... the world of living, conscious, thinking beings has to originate in a living Source, a Mind.”¹¹ And with that, the world’s most famous atheist, Anthony Flew, was converted to believe in God. You cannot deny God without denying that something exists and nothing cannot cause something. And if something exists, then nothing cannot cause something. And the something that exists is a personal, conscious, thinking being. I am a personal conscious thinking being, undeniably, then there must be an eternal, conscious, living being. And with that Anthony Flew was converted to believe in the existence of God.

What is wrong with Postmodernism?

It Cannot be *Thought* Consistently

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wrote, “If there were an infinite regress in demonstration, demonstration would be impossible, because the conclusion of any demonstration is made certain by the reducing of it to first principles of demonstration.”¹² The only way we can be sure of something is by knowing that these first principles exist and what we are saying is reducible to—not deducible from, but reducible to—these first principles. It cannot be thought consistently without these first principles.

Every attempt to deny first principles uses them in the very denial. For example, thinking that “nothing exists” implies that something exists—namely the person who is denying it. So, to say nothing exists is a self-defeating statement. You have to exist in order to say something does not exist. To propose that “being is not being” assumes the term “being” is identical to itself. Otherwise,

¹¹ Anthony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 183.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), 244.

the negation of it would not be of the same thing. Instead, being is not non-being. Saying “nothing exists” is self-defeating. Similarly, arguing that “contradictory statements can both be true” implies that contradictions of that very statement can be true. So, it cannot be thought. You cannot even think rational thoughts without using first principles of knowledge.

Let me put it in simple language. The statement, “I do not exist.” Well then, who said that? If I do not exist, Who was it that said I do not exist? It is a self-defeating statement. Or “opposites can both be true.” It is a self-defeating statement. Is the opposite of that true? Opposites can both be true? Can the opposite of that statement be true? Clearly not. Not only can you not state these principles, you cannot think them consistently. Every attempt to deny first principles of knowledge uses them in the very denial.

Relation of logic and God. Ontologically, in the order of being, the basis for logic follows from God’s rationale nature. If there is a rational being, who therefore has a rational nature, then there must be a rational basis for that being’s existence. Epistemologically, in the order of knowing, logic is the basis for knowing God. God is the basis for logic, but logic is the basis for our knowledge about God. The statement, “logic does not apply to God,” is itself stated as a logical (non-contradictory) statement about God. You cannot possibly escape first principles of thought.

It Cannot Be *Spoken* Consistently

So, what is wrong with postmodernism? Well, it cannot be thought and spoken consistently. Consider this example of a self-defeating statement: “I cannot speak a word in English.” You will respond, “But did not he say that in English?” One cannot say a word in English without affirming that he is speaking in English. And if you deny it, you are denying the self-evident.

That words cannot express meaning is a common belief in our postmodern world. But to say, “Words cannot express meaning,” leaves us with the question of what these words then mean. If words cannot express meaning, then the very statement words cannot express meaning cannot mean anything. Similarly, when states, “There is no objective truth. Everything is subjective. It is true for you and not for me,” we have to ask whether that truth statement is an objective truth or not. See, the statement there is no objective truth is offered as an objectively true statement. To assert, “There is no objective view of history. You cannot know what happened in the past,” begs the question of whether that view of history is an objectively true view or not. How can you make objective statements about the past, which is history, if you are denying objective statements cannot be made about the past? To those who argue, “There is no objective interpretation of anything, of any biblical text, of any literary text,” we have to ask whether that is itself an objective interpretation of something or not. It is a self-defeating statement. Postmodernism is like a gun with a barrel that bends back towards the shooter. As it aims at something else, it kills itself. To think and speak consistently, we need the first principles of reductive foundationalism.

The objection is sometimes raised that postmodernism is not making any truth claims. And if is not making any truth claims, then It is not involved in any self-defeating statements. If is is true that they are not making any truth claims, we should ask them why they bother to write books, give talks, and try to convince others that their views are correct. C. S. Lewis says it very clearly:

You can argue with a man who says, “Rice is unwholesome,” but you can never, should never argue with a man who says “rice is unwholesome, but I am not saying this is true.” I feel that this is a surrender of the claim to truth has all the air of an expedient adopted at the last moment. If [they] do not claim to know any truths, ought they not to have warned us rather earlier of the fact? For really from all the books they have written...one would have got the idea that they were claiming to give a true account of things. The fact surely is that they nearly always are claiming to

do so. The claim is surrendered only when the question discussed...is pressed; and when the crisis is over the claim is tacitly resumed.¹³

Now let me explain that a little more clearly because it is a very important point. Can the postmodernists claim not to be making a truth claim? And can he just say he is making no truth statements at all? Well, what are you doing? You certainly made a statement. A statement makes a declaration of some kind. How do you argue with someone like that?

Alan Watts was famous New Age influencer who wrote twenty-five popular books, gave almost 200 recorded talks, and spoke in countless interviews. With his views on Zen and the Tao, he claimed that the Tao goes beyond true and false, beyond right and wrong, and that it transcends the laws of logic. And yet he wrote and spoke prolifically as if it did not. When he was asked to defend this inconsistent position, he claimed he was not actually making any truth claims. When asked why he writes books if he is not making truth claims, and why he speaks if he is not saying something, he answered, “The reason I write is the same reason birds fly. Birds fly and authors write. That is just something they do.”¹⁴ What is that? They claim to not be making meaningful truth claims while they are making meaningful truth claims. They are really making the statement

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 24

¹⁴ Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 20. This is likely what is being paraphrased: “The Book I would pass to my children would contain no sermons, no shoulds and oughts. . . . Thus I am not saying that you ought to break out of your shell. If, then, I am not saying that you ought to awaken from the ego-illusion and help save the world from disaster, why The Book? Why not sit back and let things take their course? Simply that is part of things taking their course; that I write. As a human being it is just my nature to enjoy and share philosophy. I do this in the same way that some birds are eagles and some doves, some flowers lilies and some roses. I realize, too, that the less I preach, the more likely I am to be heard.”

even if they claim they are not making a statement. They are trying to change the readers' minds while saying they are not trying to argue their position. And so they cannot even speak consistently.

It Cannot be *Lived* Consistently

Postmodern man cannot live consistently in a postmodern world. Francis Schaeffer said, "All men constantly and consistently act as though Christianity is true... Modern men say there is no love, there is only sex, but they fall in love... Actually—every moment of his life—he is acting as though Christianity is true and it is only the Christian system that tells him why he can, must, and does act the way that he does."¹⁵ It is impossible to live consistently in a postmodern worldview because all men live as though it is not a postmodern world.

Atheists admit their need for God. Even Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, "I reached out for religion. I longed for it. It was the remedy. Had it been denied me, I would have invented it by myself... I needed the Creator...."¹⁶ Atheists like Albert Camus. First, anyone who was alone without God and without a master, the weight of days is dreadful. It is dreadful to try to live without God. It is dreadful to try to subsist in the world without God. Nietzsche, he actually wrote a poem to the unknown God. And he says halfway through "and my heart's final flame flares up for thee. Oh, come back, My unknown god! My pain! My last-happiness!"¹⁷ He is crying out to God. He could not live his atheism. Bertrand Russell, famous agnostic/atheist, said, "Even when one feels nearest to other people, something in one seems obstinately to belong to God." And then he catches himself, and adds, "at least that is how I should express it if I thought there was a God... *There must be*

¹⁵Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), 70–71.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 102.

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), Part 4, "The Magician."

something more important one feels, though *I do not believe* there is.”¹⁸ What an honest confession. What an unbeliever. There must be something more than this life. There must be something more. But I do not believe there is. It is a choice. It is a faith that the atheist expresses.

I visited his tomb of Karl Marx near London a number of years ago. On the way back I was reading European issue of Time magazine, which said, “God is dead. Marx is dead. And I am not feeling too well either.”¹⁹ Why? You cannot live without God. Nietzsche said, “I hold up before myself the images of Dante and Spinoza, who were better at accepting the lot of solitude. Of course, their way of thinking, compared to mine, was one which made solitude bearable...My life now consists in the wish that it might be otherwise... and that somebody might make my “truths” appear incredible to me....”²⁰ Isn’t that an interesting confession? I wish I had a god for company, but I do not. My life now consists that it might be otherwise, and that somebody might make my truths seem incredible to me.

David Hume, the famous skeptic, said, “Most fortunately, it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds [of doubt], nature herself suffices that purpose, and it cures me of the philosophical melancholy and delirium.”²¹ It drives me nuts, this atheism. I do not get any consolation from it. It drives me to melancholy and delirium. Maybe the greatest skeptic who ever lived tells where skepticism leads. He said, “So, what do I do? I dine. I play a game of

¹⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Letters to Lady Ottoline*, ed. Nicholas Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Emphasis his.

¹⁹ *Time*, “Is God Dead?” April 8, 1966, Vol. 87, No. 14. The line “God is dead, Marx is dead, and I’m not feeling so well myself” is attributed to the absurdist playwright Eugène Ionesco.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, July 2, 1865.

²¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 1.4.7.

backgammon, I converse . . . and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther."²² He could not live his skepticism.

Russell could not live his atheism. Will Durant, famous atheist said, "I survive morally because I retain the moral code that was taught me along with the religion, while I discarded the religion.... You and I are living on the shadow.... But what will happen to our children...? They are living on the shadow of a shadow."²³

They could not live their atheism. What is wrong with humanism? What is wrong with atheism? British atheists put it well in their magazine: Humanism is almost "clinically detached from life." They recommend that they develop a humanist Bible, a humanist hymnal, Ten Commandments for humanists, and even confessional practices. In addition, "the use of hypnotic techniques—music and other psychological devices—during humanist services would give the audience the deep spiritual experience and they would emerge refreshed and inspired with their humanist faith."²⁴ In other words, make up a religion. Get yourself a hymnal, get yourself a set of beliefs, some hypnotic practices, and replace all of that.

I decided to write a hymn for their hymnal. It is titled My Hope is Built on Nothing Less than Jean-Paul Sartre and Nothingness. It goes, "Open my eyes and I may see / More of my own subjectivity. Help me, Derrida, ever to be / All absorbed in uncertainty. Then I will know what it is to be / Lost forever in postmodernity."

²² Ibid.

²³ Will Durant, interview in *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 24, 1975, 1B.

²⁴ British Humanist Magazine, 1964.

Atheists evaluate Atheism. Will Durant says it is a shadow of a shadow. Nietzsche said is not bearable. Albert Camus admits it is dreadful. Sartre deems it cruel. Hume admits it leads to delirium. The main point, postmodernism is not only unthinkable, and unspeakable, but it is unlivable—the three main arguments against postmodernism.

Camus also wrote, “Nothing can discourage the appetite for divinity in the heart of man.”²⁵ What a confession for an atheist. Nothing can discourage the appetite for divinity in the heart of man. Pascal put it famously from which we get the summary that he believed there is a God-sized vacuum in a human heart. “What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him...though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”²⁶ What a beautiful way it has been put. You cannot fill an infinite vacuum with anything but an infinite. You cannot get eternal happiness with anything but the eternal.

Real Needs Call for Real Fulfillment. Dr. Collins, who is the head of the Human Genome Project, said, “Why would such a universal and uniquely human hunger [for God] exist, if it were not connected with any possibility for fulfillment?... Creatures are not born with desires unless the satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well there is such a thing as water.”²⁷ There is a desire for God.

²⁵ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 147.

²⁶ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1995), §425.

²⁷ Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 38.

According to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in his famous book, *The Future of Illusion*, “What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes.” They wish it to be true, but they have no reason to believe that it is true. As for “religious doctrines,” “all of them are illusions and insusceptible of proof.”²⁸ One of the greatest responses to this was written by a Christian who turned Freudianism on Freud and came to the conclusion that Freud was killing the father and at the heart of atheism is the desire to kill God.²⁹ That’s what Nietzsche said, God is dead and we have killed him. Paul Vitz wrote, “Indeed, there is a coherent psychological origin to intense atheism” and “Therefore, in the Freudian framework, atheism is an illusion caused by the Oedipal desire to kill the father (God) and replace him with oneself.”³⁰ Now, this is interesting, because the common explanation for why people believe in God by an atheist is, it is an illusion. It’s an illusion, and they want to kill the Father. Well, the truth of the matter is that atheism itself is a desire to kill the father and replace the father.

Sartre dismissed God. He said, “I had all the more difficulty of getting rid of him in that he had installed himself at the back of my head... I collared the Holy Ghost in the cellar and threw him out; atheism is a cruel and long-range affair; I think I’ve carried it through. I have lost my illusion.”³¹ Unfortunately, he did not lose. He said in the *National Review*, before he died, “I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 49–50.

²⁹ Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999), 3, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 252–53.

expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here.”³² He confessed before he died that he believed in God, he believed in a creator.

The Solution to Postmodernism

The solution to postmodernism is reductive foundationalism, which Thomas Aquinas taught in self-evident, undeniable, first principles which lead inevitably back to God. The cure for postmodernism is the vaccine of Thomism, administered by the angelic doctor. Evangelicals need to stop singing “Should old Aquinas be forgot and never brought to mind?” As the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* puts it, “there is logic and rationality, because we are created in the image and likeness of God....So, even though our [post-modern] opponents might insist that a rational argument cannot operate upon them...we can still have confidence that our rational arguments can affect their minds.”³³ Even the popular wisdom tells us that Christians know that you must speak, you must think, you must write, all of which are contrary to what the postmodernists are saying.

Conclusion

In conclusion, how can we defend faith in the postmodern world? We defend it in the same way we do it in the modern world—by logical arguments based on first principles that come to logical conclusions. You know, it is kind of silly. We go through all these stages, all these ages, and it gets back to the same thing. They are denying man as man. They are denying there is a rational creature, a thinking creature, a speaking creature, made in the image and likeness of God.

³² *National Review*, June 11, 1982, 677.

³³ K. R. Birkett, “Christian Apologetics,” in W.C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin J. McGrath, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 31.

We fight bad reason with good reason, not with no reason. In fact, I listened to a well-known contemporary Christian recently give a lecture on how to reach people in the postmodern world. And he did the typical thing by saying, well, they do not respond to poetry, they do not respond to art, they do not respond to this, they do not respond to that. So, we have got to ignore all of that and tell them stories. Ironically, there is not a single story in his book. His entire approach to reach postmodernism was itself a modern approach. He used thoughts, arguments, reasons. And you and I, if we are going to reach the modern world, have used thoughts, reason, first principles, and undeniable arguments. We have to fight bad reason with good reason.

What reasons do we have to believe in Penner's view? None. He does not have any reasons; he is a fideist. He wrote, "Rather than arguing for the superiority of postmodernism, I assume postmodernism as a starting point and try to make this standpoint intelligible."³⁴ He assumes his starting point by faith is an anti-modern view, and, not surprisingly, he, concludes postmodernism is the way to go. But if so, then there is no way to adjudicate conflicting views. It has numerous self-defeating claims: We cannot know the objective truth, and yet this is presented as an objective truth. Truth does not correspond to reality, and yet this statement corresponds to reality. The answer to postmodernism: Thomism, the angelic doctrine. Back to the first principles of reason—which the Bible itself uses—which alone will suffice in reaching people.

³⁴ Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 14.

Recommended Reading

Geisler, Norman L. *A History of Western Philosophy, Vol. 2: Modern and Postmodern: From Descartes to Derrida*. Arlington, TX: Bastion Books, 2016.

_____. *Christian Apologetics*, Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

_____. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

_____. *Is Man the Measure: An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983.

_____. *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*, Second Edition. Arlington, TX: Bastion Books, 2025.

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943.

Régis, Louis Marie. *Epistemology*. New York: Macmillan, 1959.

Wilhelmsen, F. D. *Man's Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology*. Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2021.