

Shaking the Foundations:

The Shift in Scriptural Authority in the Postmodern World

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When the foundations are destroyed, what are the righteous to do? I wanted to see for myself. For years I'd read and heard about "postmodernism," a new way of seeing truth and the world. Scholars claimed that this "paradigm shift" is leading to a world view unlike any the church has encountered, and that it renders most of our ministry methods obsolete. But I wasn't sure this shift was as threatening as its prophets claimed.

So I arranged to send a film crew to interview people in our community. The church I pastored, Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, is in Buckhead, the nightclub district of the city and only a mile from the most popular hangouts for younger adults. We asked some television ministry volunteers to take a camera and hit the streets. They were to tell people they're making a documentary about religion in America, but not to tell them they're from a church. They simply asked people what they thought of religion, good or bad.

The result: we got several hours of the most depressing, discouraging footage I've ever viewed. Again and again people called the church irrelevant and outdated. Three times someone said the church is at least one hundred years behind the times. They chided us for our materialism and greed, our hypocrisy, and most of all, our irrelevance. And while only one person interviewed claimed any kind of church membership, every person was *sure* he or she was right. They were sure that the church was insensitive, irrelevant, outdated. And we had no ministry response to give them.

How did our society change so much, so quickly? What is this "postmodern" world in which we now live? And what authority does the Scripture possess in reaching such a world?

Founding the "modern" world

For nearly twenty centuries the Christian church has built its theology and ministry upon the foundational belief that the Scriptures possess inherent authority for faith and practice. Before we can understand how this foundation has crumbled in this generation, we must first know how it was built. Then we can see the cracks and respond to them.¹

The patristic and medieval authority structures

The first Christians held a clear and positive view of biblical authority. Peter's Pentecost sermon presumed the binding authority of Old Testament prophetic literature; Stephen's

defense was largely a retelling of the biblical history of Israel; James built the Jerusalem's council acceptance of the Gentile mission on Old Testament prophetic texts; and Paul could say that "All scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16).²

However, the authority structures of the Christian movement soon shifted from the Bible itself to the Scriptures as they are interpreted by the Church. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch argued for the authority of the bishop over the church³ and a "college" of bishops as the ruling authority of the universal Church.⁴

Irenaeus further identified the Roman Church as the "preeminent authority" in Christendom, with her leaders emanating from Peter and Paul through the bishops who have succeeded them.⁵

Soon (ca. 250) Cyprian of Carthage had separated the "clergy" from the "laity" and made his famous claim, "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."⁶ When Constantine made his conversion to Christianity in 312 and subsequently legalized the church, the institutional authority of the Christian movement was clearly defined as the Roman Church and her leadership.

Of course, this concept of ecclesiastical authority molded greatly the patristic and medieval concepts of Scriptural authority. As God gave the Scriptures through the Church, so (it was argued) he guided the Church through her leaders to the proper interpretation and application of his word. Creeds, councils, and papal rulings became the means by which the biblical materials were understood and transmitted.⁷

And so the Catholic foundation blocks of the modern world were set in place: objective truth and absolute authority structures, centered in the teachings of the Church.

The Reformation project⁸

In shorthand, the Protestant reformers sought to relocate authority with the Scriptures as they are interpreted by the individual believer. William of Occam argued that the revelation of God in Scripture is the authoritative basis for Christian faith, not the authorities of the church. His position greatly influenced Martin Luther, who studied under professors committed to Occam's theology. In fact, Luther called Occam his "beloved master."

Luther in turn made the famous claim, "Only the Holy Scripture possesses canonical authority."⁹ He discounted in turn the claims of magistrates, church councils, church fathers, bishops, and even the pope to authority over the Scriptures.¹⁰ John Calvin agreed: "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures";¹¹ "Scripture has its authority from God, not from the church."¹²

With the reformers' achievement the Protestant foundation blocks of the modern world were laid: a Bible which possesses objective meaning, theological positions which are certain and true, and Scriptural authority which is final and absolute.

The "modern" mind

While the religious world was experiencing this monumental conflict between ecclesiastical and Scriptural authority structures, the philosophical world was undergoing a struggle equally foundational and far-reaching.

Rene Descartes, a Catholic mathematician with an intense personal need to find foundational truth, sought that truth which he could not doubt. He determined that the existence of the thinking self was the first truth which doubt could not deny. As a result, he defined the human condition as one centered in the autonomous rational process.¹³ The "rationalist" worldview followed Descartes' location of authority within human reason.

The empiricist reaction focused upon personal experience as the true authority for knowledge. John Locke asserted that the mind is born not with innate ideas (the Cartesian system) but as a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*.¹⁴ David Hume claimed that this empirical method cannot lead to true and certain knowledge. Every belief is derived from an object; our minds connect these objects into patterns on the basis of the appearance of unprovable causal relations. We cannot defend our reason by reason.¹⁵

Immanuel Kant forged that merger between the rational and the empirical worldviews which organized the foundational building blocks of modernity into their final form. In short, his truce between mind and senses combined both into a larger whole: the senses furnish "raw data" which the mind organizes according to categories within itself, and the result is "knowledge."¹⁶ However, according to this system we can have certain knowledge only of the "phenomena" (those objects which are present to the senses of the knower), not of the "noumena" (objects lying beyond sense experience).¹⁷ This distinction would prove to be crucial for the later shift from the "modern" to the "postmodern" world.

With the Kantian synthesis the philosophical foundation stones of the modern world were laid beside the Catholic and the Protestant. In all three, truth is certain and available, and epistemic authority is clear and absolute. Whether authority resides in the Church, the Scriptures, or empirical knowledge interpreted rationally, there is no question in the modern mind about its objective character.

Remaking a "postmodern" foundation

These "modern" foundation stones contained within themselves unseen fissures; soon the cracks would widen and the house would shift. The foundation would crumble, with another built in its place.

The Kantian fissure

The philosophical problem was this: there exists within the Kantian synthesis a subjective element undetected by most of its contemporary followers. In short, if knowledge is the result of our individual interpretation of our personal sense experience, then in what sense

can this knowledge be objective? My sense impressions may be different from yours. My interpretation of this data is personal and subjective as well. Not only can I not know the "noumena" (the "thing-in-itself" which lies beyond my senses), I cannot claim objective authority for my interpretation of the "phenomena," either.

Soon two very different builders, one a strident anti-Christian and the other a very pious theologian, would exploit this fissure.

The first "postmoderns"

First we must consider Friedrich Nietzsche, the "patron saint of postmodern philosophy."¹⁸ According to this critic of the Christian faith, the world is composed of fragments, each one individual. We construct concepts which rob reality of its diversity and individuality (such as forming the concept "leaf" for leaves, an idea which can never do justice to the diversity of leaves). These concepts or laws are actually illusions or convenient fictions.¹⁹ "Truth" is solely a function of the language we employ and exists only within specific linguistic contexts. It is a function of the internal workings of language itself.²⁰ The authority structure of the Church, whether centered on the Bible or the Church's teachings, is therefore unfounded and irrelevant.

Nietzsche's hermeneutical insights parallel Friedrich Schleiermacher's earlier theological assertions. According to this "father of theological liberalism," biblical texts are not systematic theological treatises but reflections of the minds and contexts of their authors. The interpreter must move behind the text to its author's mind. The work of theology is therefore to "abstract entirely from the specific content of the particular Christian experiences."²¹

And so an entirely different epistemological foundation began to be laid by Nietzsche and Schleiermacher, one which rejected the objective building blocks of the modern world for a knowledge base centered in subjectivity. In their view, truth is not absolute and objective but relative and individual. Recent philosophers of language would soon finish this foundation and build a new house on it.

Finishing the new foundation

According to Wilhelm Dilthey, hermeneutics functions in a circle. We comprehend language by understanding its words, yet these words derive their meaning only within their holistic context.²² Objectivity in interpretation cannot be achieved, and should not be desired.

Hans-Georg Gadamer agreed that the interpreter must "fuse the horizons." Meaning emerges only as the text and interpreter engage in dialogue, a "hermeneutical conversation."²³ Because each reader will conduct his or her own conversation with the text, objective meaning is obviously impossible.

Ludwig Wittgenstein rejected his earlier language philosophy (built on a scientific, mathematical, positivistic hermeneutic) for a view of language as "game." Social rules determine the use of words and their meaning. Language is a social phenomenon which

derives its meaning from social interaction.²⁴ Since each "player" works from personal and subjective rules, there can be no objective authority within any speech act.

The "structuralists" further developed the social nature of language. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, language is like a work of music in which we focus on the whole work, not the individual performers of the musicians. As social constructs, texts are developed to provide structures of meaning in a meaningless existence. These structures form the foundation for hermeneutical theory and practice.²⁵

The movement known as "deconstructionism" moved even further toward subjectivity: meaning cannot be inherent in a text or speech act, but emerges *only* as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the author.²⁶ One significant role of the contemporary interpreter is to deconstruct the modern epistemological structures with their mythical claims to objective authority.

In this century language philosophers have largely discarded the hermeneutical foundations which undergirded speech and faith since the time of Christ. Claims to objective truth and absolute authority have been dismissed, whether their source is the Church, the Scriptures, or interpreted experience. In their place we have seen the construction of a foundation and building called "postmodern." The implications of this project for Scriptural authority are historic and monumental.

Building a postmodern world

The "postmodern" movement which has resulted from such foundational shifts is still evolving and ill-defined.²⁷ However, three names stand above the rest in stature and significance: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty.²⁸

Michel Foucault: unmasking motives

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was the most significant bridge figure from Nietzsche to the postmodern world.²⁹ His ideas relative to hermeneutics can be grouped in three categories.

First, his *epistemology* rejected the Enlightenment claim to objective knowledge. With Nietzsche, we must focus on the individual and the specific. Therefore, language cannot express universal truth but only the personal experience of its user and/or interpreter.

Second, his *anthropology*: humans use language to express and to gain power. With Nietzsche, the basic human drive is the 'will to power.' To name something is to exercise power over it. We seek knowledge for the power it gives us. The goal of hermeneutics should therefore be to unmask those power drives which created the text before us.

Third, his *historiography*: we create history to make or preserve those mythical worldviews which enhance our power and status. There is no objective "world" behind our historical recording of its events; we choose which events to report and the interpretation we give them based on our ambition for power. "Truth" is the fictional

fabrication of those who claim it. The result for language should therefore be to introduce discontinuity into the reader's life, jarring him or her into admitting that life is chaotic and subjective.

Jacques Derrida: deconstructing "reality"

Jacques Derrida critiques the Enlightenment ontology with the approach known as "deconstructionism."³⁰ While Foucault's epistemology leads to his view of language, Derrida's ontology serves as the foundation for both his epistemology and his hermeneutics.

According to Derrida, there is no fixed or universal reality. Not only can we make no objective claims to knowledge, given the subjective nature of the interpretive process; there *is* no independent reality to describe. No "world" exists, only your world and my world. "Onto-theology," the attempt to articulate ontological descriptions of reality, must be abandoned.

We "create" our own world by speaking of it. Language possesses no fixed meaning and is not connected to a fixed reality. Our words do not *carry* meaning ("logocentrism"); rather, they *create* it.

For instance, the device on which I am typing these words is either a word-processor, a fancy typewriter, or a strange box which makes annoying clicks, depending entirely on whether I, my grandfather, or my preschool friend is describing it. We cannot get beyond the words to the "reality," for the words create that reality for us.

As a result, the work of interpretation has as its goal the deconstruction of logocentrism. We must admit the absence of transcendent reality and focus only upon the text itself as it speaks to us personally. We must deconstruct our view of language which posits an objective world beyond our words. As we live with the anxiety produced by the absence of transcendent truth we come to terms with life as it truly is. And as we deal with the text separate from its author's intention or any claims to represent objective truth, we reconstruct our own world.

Language is therefore the door to whatever meaning is possible for us.

Richard Rorty: building pragmatic community

Richard Rorty, one of America's most popular philosophers, completes the postmodern foundation by demonstrating its pragmatic usefulness for our daily lives.³¹ While Foucault and Derrida develop their language theory on the basis of their epistemologies, Rorty bases both his epistemology and his pragmatic program on his view of language.

Rorty agrees with Foucault and Derrida that language is a matter of human convention, not the mirror of an objective reality. All language is derived from and dependent upon its context, and is thus subjective and relative. Rorty's contribution to postmodernism is his extension of this foundational conviction to its larger pragmatic consequences.

Because no foundational truths or "first principles" exist apart from our linguistic creation of them, we must develop our personal ways of coping with reality as we see it. "Truth" for us is what works for us. Language is therefore to be judged by its pragmatic value, not its supposed representation of objective reality. Language is a tool for interpreting and coping with life.

Four results for language follow. First, language is equally valuable and useful regardless of its field of use. Science is no more objective than ethics, for instance. No one genre of speech act possesses meaning of greater value than another.

Second, language and the life it creates and interprets is best viewed in narrative context. No speech act stands alone. Every context is temporal and contingent.

Third, language functions best as the creator of community. As we tolerate and affirm other speech acts and the realities they create, we foster a larger sense of acceptance. As we share common linguistic experience, we forge a common life. Given that no objective reality stands outside our linguistic interpretation of our own experience, such community is our best hope for belonging and meaning.

Fourth, this pragmatic language theory possesses the capacity to lead us to a kind of postmodern utopia. Once we have banished our power-driven, manipulative attempts to require and enforce one particular view of reality and truth, we will be free to live in a society built on tolerance and mutuality. Such a postmodern hope offers an enticing, accessible, and nonjudgmental alternative to the Christian eschatology built upon our acceptance or rejection of a single Way, Truth, and Life.

To sum up, the postmodern worldview is built upon three foundation stones. First, the ontological and epistemological belief that no reality exists independent of the linguistic interpretation of our personal experiences. Second, the linguistic belief that we literally create our own worlds by the speech we employ to describe and interpret these experiences. And third, the pragmatic belief that such language acts, when affirmed as mutually acceptable and equally valuable, forge a community of tolerance and shared, created purpose.

The Bible in postmodern hands

These foundation stones stand alongside and, for many, in place of the foundational convictions upon which Christendom was built. Belief in an objective world as created by God, described and interpreted through the authoritative Scriptures, is fast losing credibility in contemporary culture. But the postmodern interpreter does not stop with constructing an alternative worldview to that of the Bible; he or she then proceeds to reinterpret the Scriptures themselves in light of the postmodern project.³²

This postmodern approach to biblical authority centers in two agendas. First, we must examine previous uses of the Bible and critique their weaknesses. Postmoderns work hard to expose the "dark underside of Scripture"--ways the Bible has been used to

engender obscurantism, racism, sexism, and authoritarianism. In their view, much of the oppression so common to our culture has its roots in "modern" uses of biblical authority. Men have cited the Scriptures in their continuing effort to subjugate women; the wealthy, to use the poor; the powerful, to oppress the weak; heterosexuals, to condemn homosexuals; and so on. We must unmask all such power motives for what they are, and disabuse the Bible of such manipulative uses.

This critical function extends beyond such historical misuse of biblical authority, however, to the assumptions within the Scriptures themselves. Wherever the biblical authors intended intolerance, their texts must be "deideologized." Much as Bultmann sought to expose the myths inherent in the text and free the overarching, relevant principles of Scripture from such first-century bindings, so the postmodern interpreter seeks to liberate the inclusive message of love from bondage to ignorant or oppressive intolerance. As a result, much of the work of postmodern exegesis lies in identifying and discarding noninclusive ideology, whether imbedded in the text or in Christian tradition.

The second agenda within postmodern biblical hermeneutics is to define the authority of religious literature properly. As we have seen, postmoderns do not locate such authority within the belief that the Bible reflects and reveals an objective reality. Rather, they center biblical authority in the ways it is used by the ecclesial community to foster a new kind of corporate existence. Whenever the text works to help the reader create and understand his or her own reality, it has functioned with authority. And when such revelatory experiences cohere with those of others, a larger community is built.

Biblical interpretation now helps us understand ourselves, but it does not lead to normative, objective truth. Our biblical traditions possess authority only insofar as they aid us in achieving insight for our situation and needs.

Four theological tasks result from this postmodern view of biblical authority. First, we seek central Christian symbols as they are appropriate for the contemporary situation and apply to the current plurality of needs. Second, we remove oppressive distortions and judgmental illusions, whether they are native to the text itself or imbedded in our traditional understanding of the biblical materials. Third, we use these symbols in a prophetic critique of secularizing and/or oppressive trends within the contemporary faith community and larger society.

Most of all, we seek a transcendent meaning and purpose for the human community without a transcendent source. We point to the diverse range of religious experiences and seek to further conversation and dialogue in hopes of discovering mutual, pragmatic meaning and purpose. This program clearly lacks the optimism and catalytic energy of Christendom's "Kingdom-building" mission. But for those who believe there is no objective Kingdom, it is the most popular alternative available today.

An apologetic for biblical authority

How shall evangelicals respond to this alternative worldview and its threat to objective biblical authority? Is it possible to defend today Paul's absolute claim that "all Scripture

is inspired by God"? What follows is a brief sketch of such an apologetic, approaching an engagement with postmodernism along both philosophical and pragmatic lines.

First, a philosophical response. Unfortunately, one approach to postmodernism among evangelicals is to accept its foundational beliefs and attempt to build a Christian structure upon them. This results in an intensely subjective faith which possesses no intrinsic or objective merit for others. Fortunately, there are other ways.

I suggest that the postmodern rejection of objective truth contains within itself the fissures which may lead to its collapse. In brief, if no objective truth exists, how can I accept this assertion as objectively true? According to postmoderns, no statement possesses independent and objective truth. And yet the preceding statement is held to be independently and objectively true. This seems a bit like the ancient skeptics (ca. 500 BC) who claimed, "There is no such thing as certainty and we're sure of it."

A second philosophical critique of postmodernism centers in its rejection of objective ethics. Since all ethics are purely pragmatic and contextual, no ethical position can be judged or rejected by those outside its culture. If this be so, then how are we to view events such as the Holocaust? Within the interpretive culture of the Third Reich, Auschwitz and Dachau were pragmatically necessary and purposeful. And yet they stand as the quintessential rejection of the tolerance and inclusion so valued by postmoderns. The postmodern must choose between his insistence on inclusion and his rejection of intolerance. Logically, he cannot have both.

The postmodern rejection of objective biblical authority thus rests upon illogical and mutually contradictory foundational principles. This "apagogic" apologetic (defending one's position by exposing the weaknesses of its opponents) may prove effective with the postmodern who values logical consistency.

If, however, our postmodern friend simply shrugs her shoulders and says, "So what"? we can turn to a pragmatic response. Here the postmodern rejection of modernity is in our favor. The chief obstacle to faith posed by modernity was its insistence on empirical proof and scientific verification. The postmodern rejects such a materialist worldview, insisting that all truth claims are equally (though relatively) valid. The result is a renewed interest in spirituality unprecedented in our century. While this contemporary spirituality is unfortunately embracing of all alternatives, at least Christianity can function as one of these options.

How can we make an appeal for biblical authority in such a marketplace of spiritual competitors? By reversing the "modern" strategy. In modernity we told our culture, "Christianity is true; it is therefore relevant and attractive." We invited nonbelievers to accept the faith on the basis of its biblical, objective merits. "The Bible says" was all the authority our truth claims required.

In the postmodern culture we must use exactly the opposite strategy: our faith must be attractive; then it may be relevant; then it might be true (at least for its followers). If we

can show the postmodern seeker for spiritual meaning that Christianity is attractive, interesting, and appealing, he will likely be willing to explore its relevance for his life. When he sees its relevance for us, he may decide to try it for himself. And when it "works," he will decide that it is true for him. He will then affirm the authority of the Scriptures, not in order to come to faith but because he has.

Remembering our future

Can such an approach be effective? If we jettison our "truth first" approach to biblical authority and begin by appealing to our culture on the basis of attractive relevance, will we abandon our Scriptural heritage? No--we will return to it.

We live in a postmodern, post-denominational, post-Christian culture. The first Christians lived in a pre-modern, pre-denominational, pre-Christian world. They had no hope of taking the gospel to the "ends of the earth" by beginning their appeal to the Gentiles with biblical authority. The larger Greek world shared the postmodern skepticism of any absolute truth claim, let alone those made on the basis of Hebrew scriptures or a Jewish carpenter's teachings. And so the apostolic Christians build their evangelistic efforts on personal relevance and practical ministry.³³ The result was the beginning of the most powerful, popular, and far-reaching religious movement in history.

I am convinced that we are now living in a culture more like that of the apostolic Christians than any we have seen since their day. They had no buildings or institutions to which they could invite a skeptical world, and so they went *to* that world with the gospel. They had no objective authority base from which to work, so they demonstrated the authority of the Scriptures by their attractive, personal relevance. We now live in a day when nonbelievers will not come to our buildings to listen to our appeals on the basis of Scriptural authority. But when we show them the pragmatic value of biblical truth in our lives, ministries, and community, we will gain a hearing.

Postmodernity offers us a compelling opportunity to "remember our future." To remember the biblical strategies upon which the Christian movement was founded, and to rebuild our ministries on their foundation. To move into our postmodern future on the basis of our premodern heritage.

Every person we interviewed in Atlanta wanted the same thing: a faith which is practical, loving, and hopeful. The tragedy is that our churches did not offer them this biblical truth in a way which was attractive and relevant. The good news is that we can.

¹ Will and Ariel Durant, the famous historians, once made a telling confession about the recording of history: "The historian always oversimplifies, and hastily selects a manageable minority of facts and faces out of a crowd of souls and events whose multitudinous complexity he can never quite embrace or comprehend" (*The Lessons of History* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968] 12). Never was their comment more appropriately applied than to what follows here.

The literature dealing with the history and methods of biblical interpretation is, of course, voluminous. We smile today at H. Wheeler Robinson's statement in 1943 that hermeneutics is "a rather neglected branch of Biblical study at the present time" ("The Higher Exegesis, *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 [1943] 143). Among the many good historical treatments of biblical interpretation the following are recommended: John Rogerson, Christopher Rowland, and Barnabas Lindars, *The Study and Use of the Bible: The History of Christian Theology*, ed. Paul Avis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2d ed. rev. (n.p.: Fortress Press, 1984 [1963]); A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963) 20-53; James C. Denison, *Seven Crucial Questions About the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1994) 113-36; and the classic text, Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1961). Excellent articles include John P. Newport, "Representative Historical and Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation, *Faith and Mission* 3 (Spring 1986) 32-48; and Justo L. Gonzalez, "How the Bible Has Been Interpreted in Christian Tradition," *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) I:83-106.

² All references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

³ In the *Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans* he wrote, "Let the laity be subject to the deacons; the deacons to the presbyters; the presbyters to the bishop; the bishop to Christ, even as He is to the Father" (ch. ix). Later in this chapter Ignatius claimed, "Nor is there any one in the Church greater than the bishop, who ministers as a priest to God for the salvation of the whole world."

⁴ Williston Walker, professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale University, states that "By the sixth decade of the second century monarchical bishops had become well-nigh universal" (*A History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970] 42).

⁵ Irenaeus spoke of "that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops." Then he added, "It is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2).

⁶ *De unitate ecclesiasticum* ch. 6. For an excellent discussion of the "clergy" in the patristic era see A. Di Berardino, "Clergy, Clerics," *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, trans. Adrian Walford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 1:181-3.

⁷ Robert McNally, S.J., describes the early medieval view of Scripture thus: "a sacred authority which was transmitted through the activity of the monastic scriptorium and understood through the books of the monastic bibliotheca. The monastic library, built on patristic tradition, provided intelligence of the *sacra pagina*, while the monastic scriptorium transmitted the text of Scripture, and together with it certain *nova et vetera*, the new medieval commentaries and the old commentaries of the Fathers" (*The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986 (1959)] 29).

Mickelsen characterizes the medieval culture regarding Scripture thus: "Throughout the Middle Ages interpretation is bound by a dull conformity. Church tradition stands supreme. The Scriptures and the fathers--or collections of sayings gathered from both--were offered as supports for tradition. Philosophical theology and theological philosophy controlled the thinkers. Inferences from basic ideas were more important than examining whether these basic ideas had any biblical validity. Except for an oasis here and there, the Middle Ages were a vast desert so far as biblical interpretation is concerned" (p. 35).

Even Grant and Tracy, in their generally positive assessment of the period, admit that "there is little in medieval interpretation that is strikingly novel" (p. 83).

⁸ An excellent introduction to this area is *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, The West from the Fathers to the Reformation, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

⁹ *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) 37:76.

¹⁰ *Letters of Martin Luther*, trns. and ed. Margaret A. Currie (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1908) 93; *Table Talk*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) 346-7.

¹¹ *Institutes* I.vi.1.

¹² *Ibid.*, I.vi.2. Calvin believed that God accommodates himself to our understanding through the Bible: "the gospel so far transcends the perspicacity of human intellect, that to whatever height those who are accounted men of superior intellect may raise their view, they never can reach its elevated height"; therefore "[God] accommodates himself to our capacity in addressing us" (*Commentary* on 1 Cor. 2:7). But this accommodation in no way lessened the authority of the Scriptures in Calvin's theology.

¹³ See *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980) part 4, pp. 17-21.

¹⁴ Locke's central claim: "All ideas come from sensation or reflection," our senses or the operation of our minds on them (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.1.2).

¹⁵ See *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967) 49, 84.

¹⁶ See *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1950 [1783] 5-12).

¹⁷ See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964) 126-7.

¹⁸ Stanley Grenz has written perhaps the best short introduction to postmodern thought and its implications for evangelical ministry, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986). This description of Nietzsche is his (p. 88).

¹⁹ See Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956) 255; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. M. Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955) 100-1.

²⁰ *Genealogy of Morals* 209-10; *Beyond Good and Evil* 18-9; cf. Grenz's commentary, p. 97.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976) 131. For more on Schleiermacher's seminal hermeneutical contributions see Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992) 204-36.

²² See Grenz's description, 99-103.

²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976) xix.

²⁴ *Philosophical Investigations* 1.65.

²⁵ See Daniel and Aline Patte, *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

²⁶ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 261.

²⁷Sources for the following survey include (alphabetically): James Breech, *Jesus and Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); *Christian Scholar's Review*, special issue: Christianity and Postmodernity (Winter 1996); Ronald W. Johnson, *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994); Grenz's *A Primer on Postmodernism*; J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1995); Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996); Craig Kennet Miller, *Postmoderns: the beliefs, hopes and fears of young Americans (1965-1981)* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996); Ronald N. Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World: the modern church in the postmodern world* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 1997); Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1993); James W. Sire, *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994); Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994); and William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996).

²⁸ For extended discussions of these seminal leaders in postmodern philosophy consult Grenz, 123-60; and Lundin, 185-211.

²⁹ Foucault's most important writings include *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House-Pantheon, 1971); *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

³⁰ Derrida's major works include *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

³¹ Rorty's major work is *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). His own summary of his pragmatic philosophy is "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism" in *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

³² An excellent introduction to postmodern theology is Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993).

³³ Cf. Acts 2.42-47; 3.1-12; 4.32-35; 5.12-16; 6.1-7; 8.4-8; 8.14-25; 9.32-35; 13.6-12; 14.3; 16.25-34; 19.11-20.