

Postmodern Politics

I. Introduction

- A. As Christians we must view everything through the lense of the Biblical Worldview, making all thoughts captive to Christ; and always seeking the mind of Christ (IICor 10:5; Phil.2:5). This includes political philosophy and economic theory, though many Christians still mistakenly think these areas are neutral territory. The truth is, some theories harmonize better than others.
- B. We are all aware that discussions in the realm of politics and economic theory these days can be filled with vitriol and rancor like no other subject. We need to ask why this is so? Why is it such an emotional subject?
- C. Postmodernism is the prevailing paradigm today and it affects every area of our culture, and in particular, politics. For postmodernists *all life is politics*. We will explain why this is so, and why it must be so. (Note: A paradigm is a model for interpreting life or reality)

II. Summary of Postmodernism

- A. The paradigm of Postmodernism came about as a reaction against the rationalism of Modernity (the previous paradigm which came to the fore during the Enlightenment. It came under attack in the 19th Century).
- B. What are the major components of Postmodern belief? (See Briefing #58, #52 for more detail):
 1. **Reality is a social construct.** Truth does not exist in an objective sense. There is no one (true) worldview that explains all of life. There are only *stories*, or *narratives* that are valid only within a community. *Knowledge is wholly subjective and is the result of culture and language.* You can never be wrong about what you believe. Relativism is therefore, the outstanding theme of PM.
 2. **The Preeminence of the group.** Humans are an extension of culture and are social constructs, i.e., they are socially determined. *As a result, PM see the group as more important than the individual.* According to PM we should become a society of inclusion, tolerance, and multi-culturalism. As a result there is increased emphasis on differences. This has led to what some call the *new tribalism*.
 3. **Postmodernists reject reason.** PM believe reason is used to gain power over others. Emphasis then is on subjectivity and passionate feelings. *Reason, is the ultimate language of madness.* Foucault (Quoted in Hicks, p. 2) Fish says: *Deconstructing reason relieves me of the obligation to be right... and demands only that I be interesting. (Is There a Text in This Class?, p. 180).*
 4. **Revolution.** The repression of the past must be righted. All the old ways and traditions based on a rational order must be uprooted and be replaced by a new world order, i.e., some kind of yet unclearly defined communal order based on multi-culturalism where groups are in harmony with their natural environment. *Postmodernism seeks not to find the foundation and conditions of truth but to exercise power for the purpose of social change.* Lentricchia (*Criticism and Social Change*, p. 12).
 5. **The Denial of the Transcendent.** This ultimately means there are no absolutes of any kind. There is no infinite, eternal, personal deity to dictate right from wrong. Good and evil are likewise, a social construct. While there is some talk of god or gods, they are generally referring to the gods within (immanence). The PM mentality makes for a fertile ground for New Age religious movements and environmentalism.
 6. **The Importance of Language.** For PM language is a central theme, but not just written or spoken language: for a PM all the world is text. Everything is a text! One of the prime virtues of human beings is their ability to interpret, but only subjective interpretation is possible. While one can never know the original meaning of the author, you can be sure that the author's words are meant to have repressive effect. This explains the trashing of the Western canon of literature.
 7. **Postmodern view of education.** Mohanty believes: *postmodern education should emphasize works not in the*

canon; it should focus on achievements of non-whites, females, and the poor; it should highlight the historical crimes of whites, males, and the rich; and should teach students that science's method has no better claim to yielding truth than any other method and, accordingly, the students should be equally receptive to alternative ways of knowing. Quoted by Hicks p18.

III. Who are the main PM Thinkers?

- A. The leading Postmodern strategists and thinkers are: Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish, Frank Lentricchia, Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Jacques Lacan, Robert Venturi, Andrea Huyssen, and Luce Irigaray
- B. Who influenced these PM? All of the above admit to being influenced a great deal by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, and Marcuse. All of the above are not only leftist politically, *but far left*. I'm not aware of any exceptions. For more info see: *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, by Stephen R.C. Hicks.

IV. Characteristics and Results of PM Thinking:

- A. Because of the above belief in immanence PM are ardent activists for the environmental movement. Rather than superintending nature they believe humans should have a holy awe of nature. And, because of their opposition to rationalism and modern science there is an increasing wackiness to this movement. i.e., all creatures of the evolutionary ladder have equal rights. Switzerland now has a new law giving rights to plants!
- B. Hypocrisy: For a modernist, traditionalist, or a Christian, this is the most difficult to deal with. PM believe you cannot know the original intent of an author yet they write many books! Why should we take them seriously? Should we interpret their erudite tomes subjectively? In these texts they make assertions, and in doing so they employ the laws of logic which they deny. The hypocrisy among the political left is simply incomprehensible. Strong enough adjectives in the English language do not exist to describe how blatant it is.
- C. Hostility and Intolerance: While tolerance is proclaimed as one of PM highest values they are often incredibly intolerant, particularly of those holding Christian beliefs. They refer to such believers as *totalizers*, or *absolutists*. Another example of PM intolerance: on many state university campuses a student can be severely disciplined for something as simple as inappropriate laughter. Speech and behavior codes are strictly enforced. Political correctness on most college campuses often takes precedence over academic integrity. Is it just me, or does the Left seem to be perpetually angry?
- D. Inconsistent Relativism: (See B above) PM often call for justice to groups that have been victimized, but to call for justice assumes some standard of right and wrong. PM rail against traditional standards (mainly Judeo-Christian ethics) that claim to be universally true, but in their place are new absolutes that they actively try to apply to all. Bill Watkins documents these new absolutes in his excellent book: *THE NEW ABSOLUTES*. Watkins demonstrates the impossibility of consistent relativism. For example: to declare that there are no absolutes is itself an absolute.
- E. Irrationality and Irony: Since a PM is likely to think unsystematically we should not be surprised to find that they often hold to ideas that are mutually contradictory. For example, Veith, in his book (see below), gives the example of a person who declared that he held to the doctrines of the reformed faith but also believed in reincarnation. Often PM make their case when the facts are either totally absent or in contradiction to their conclusions. To a traditionalist they will appear bizarre and even humorous. Critics like Rush Limbaugh make a good living pointing out these inconsistencies with his own brand of humor and satire. (Christians must remember, however, that PM are very serious and inappropriate laughter in their presence does not advance the Gospel.)
- F. Victimization: Everyone (with the exception of white males, of course) is a victim of some sort of oppression (usually by white males). Generally this oppression takes the form of one of these five great evils: (1) Sexism: and there are more than just two genders! At a recent world seminar feminists suggested as many as five or six genders! (2) Racism. (3) Specieism: discrimination of one species over another. There are serious journal articles published on the rights of bacteria! (4) Nationalism: one nation lording over another. (5) Religious bigotry: the belief that one religion is better than others.

V. How PM affects Political and Economic Theory

- A. As you might guess, PM thinking has thoroughly permeated politics in this country. Earlier we noted that to a PM all life is political. This is not hard to understand when the major conclusion of PM is relativism. If there is no truth, and no

laws of logic, how do you settle arguments? This should explain the increasing level of rhetoric that we witness everyday. When the claims of truth, i.e., facts that correspond to reality, and laws of logic are considered oppressive, what remains? Only politics. Nothing is outside of the political realm. Along with this denial of truth comes the impossibility of lying. Hence you can make a persuasive documentary pushing your favorite political cause without any regards to facts. (See Michael Moore and Al Gore or current campaign ads). Every device, i.e., images, rhetoric, emotional appeals, can be used because your main goal is to persuade to your point of view. The ultimate goal is power for your group.

- B. PM for the most part, seem to gravitate to some form of socialism. (The current form is Gramsci socialism where it comes to power through cultural subversion). All the original proponents of PM, as noted above, are self proclaimed, hard-core leftists. Why is this so? I believe they find it attractive for the following reasons:
1. PM are drawn to its radical egalitarianism. Those with Marxist worldviews assume that the major cause of strife and war is due to inequality among individuals and nations, i.e., economic. Therefore, to eliminate this scourge of mankind, it is the role of government to redistribute the wealth and enforce fairness. Hence, an appeal to fairness and class envy *will always* be a campaign tactic. Our Declaration of Independence says *All men are created equal*, but the original intent of the author was not equality of outcomes, but rather, equal rights and equal opportunity. The Bible also talks about equality, but it's about being equally guilty before God and our standing as redeemed men. In Paul's teaching about gifts, all believers are important to the whole, but certainly not equal giftedness.
 2. Socialists assume that the rich got that way through some form of oppressive action. They see economics as a zero sum game. If a person gets rich it automatically means someone must get poorer. Excluding thievery, and bad business ethics, this is only true in the commodities market. PM tend to be very naive about basic economics. I recently spoke with a PhD who believed that big oil companies set the price of its oil to make obscene profits. In reality, oil is traded as a commodity on the commodity exchange like wheat or soybeans. It's price is determined by supply and demand.
 3. The various forms of socialism do not view man as anything special. He simply has evolved more brain cells. To its credit socialism does acknowledge some flaw in man, but it is due to his evolutionary past. Salvation then must be arrived at socially, and with the help of a big, benevolent government. Radical egalitarianism can never be harmonized with a Christian worldview, in my opinion, because of its defective view of human nature and utter destruction of the *imago dei*. We only have to look to former communist countries to see what socialism does to creativity.
 4. In the absence of a transcendent god, socialists elevate government to take its place. It becomes a substitute religion for many. The government then takes on a Messianic role and becomes the source of all man's needs. New rights are arbitrarily decided by the government: the right to own a home, right to medical care, minimum wage, food, transportation, etc. In real life, most of us, and most socialists, know men are not equal, and this persistent fact brings about even more schemes to force equality of outcomes. Because of this appeal of socialism to bring about equality of outcomes, a powerful government must be implemented to bring this about. Socialism either rots, goes bankrupt, or the pendulum turns back to enlightened self interest (individual responsibility) and free enterprise, or turns into tyranny. The later is the most likely. Socialism ultimately becomes irresistible to politicians because they can promise their constituency largesse from the public treasury in turn for votes.
 5. With most forms of Marxism anything is legal if it brings about equality. They may also use the term social justice or fairness. Anything is justified to bring this state of affairs about. It is why leftist adore dictators; they've created an egalitarian society and they envy their power. Therefore, we should not be surprised by the ignoring of the rule of law, deception, control of the media and press, lack of secret ballot voting in labor unions, creating fiat money, or voting fraud. Remember evil does not exist; good is whatever brings victory to your cause or group.
 6. For PM the constitution of the United States is a living and breathing document since original intent cannot be found. In reality, in this country, liberal leftists almost never campaign as such or they would not be elected (there are more and more exceptions: note Bernie Sanders of Vermont). Hence, the modus operandi of the left is to use the courts to legislate the changes they want to bring about.

VI. In a discussion with a PM about politics or economics:

- A. Be aware that any false worldview (one that does not correspond with the way things really are) contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. PM and its accompanying socialism will ultimately fail because it does not correspond to

reality. For example, Milton Friedman proved empirically that socialist economics will ultimately go bust. His research was based on natural theory and for it he won a Nobel prize.

- B. The emotionally charged nature of confrontations with PM, in my opinion, are due to the fact that their political ideas constitute their real worldview, or at least what they regard as the most important aspect of their worldview. As noted above, their political views have become a substitute religion. The emotions and passion is due to its defense. (A worldview is a system of beliefs; it is what we really believe about the world (universe) and ourselves and how we fit into the scheme of things, and it is these beliefs which influence our thought and action.)
- C. In the calmest way possible, ask questions. Force them ultimately to disclose their primary assumptions about their view of life. Find out what they regard as ultimate authority. But at the same time, be aware, PM are not always comfortable answering questions, but gently push until they, on their own, arrive at a point of absurdity. For a good review of this method, I recommend Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, Section IV, Chapter One. *Finding the point of Tension*. You must ask them (if there are no absolutes): “Who decides what is *fair* and who is *rich*?”
- D. Inconsistencies will abound. In the kindest way possible (see I Pet. 3:15, and 16) ask how they deal with these. In reality, what you find is, while they strive for equality on one level, there is never equality of power. Some are more equal than others (apologies to Orwell). In any socialist system there is always an elite that evolves who know what’s best for the others. Example: one wealthy Hollywood personality advises on her website that ordinary peons should hang their wash outside on a clothes line to save the planet. There are literally dozens of these examples in the news every day. In actuality the elite over time accrue wealth for themselves that they then hide from taxation through foundations, or other loopholes. If the Republican party is the party of the rich then the Democrat Party has become the party of the Super Rich. Isn’t it ironic that these billionaires who made their billions in a free market now want to redistribute the wealth of others. I speak of myriads of politically active Hollywood stars, billionaires like George Soros, Warren Buffet, Peter Lewis (Progressive Ins.), John Sperling (U of Phoenix), John Sinegal and Jeff Brotman (Costco) dozens of others.

VII. Conclusion

As I write this, the future of our nation hangs in the balance. The majority seem to want to move toward more equality and away from personal freedom. What will be the ramifications for the family, the church, and our national security? I personally believe our nation is at its most dangerous position since before the Civil War. The cultural war which has been going on for decades is coming to a head. While I’m no prophet, I believe things are about to get nasty and physical. It’s going to hit the streets. As believers we may rest assured that God is active and involved in bringing history to His own decreed end. However, it may mean that our level of comfort may decrease. As always we must view this as an opportunity for the Kingdom of God.

Veith, I believe, is correct in his appraisal:

“American democracy arose from a long-held intellectual and spiritual tradition. Its balance of individual rights and majority rule and its heritage of economic and ideological freedom have been among the greatest achievements of Western civilization. The question is, can American democracy survive in a postmodern society?”

What will happen to America’s freedoms once the *self-evident* truths upon which they were founded are no longer self-evident? Currently, nearly every assumption that gave rise to democracy is under attack, from the freedom of the individual to the existence of a transcendent God whose Law is above all cultures and who endows human beings with inalienable rights. Not only do postmodernist theories undermine the notion of a free, self-governing society; the practice of contemporary politics seems to be following their lead in moving governmental structures in a sinister, anti-democratic direction.” P.157.

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