

INTRODUCTION

In 1967 Sidney Poitier and Rod Steiger starred in a dramatic blockbuster that focused attention on racial hatred and the possibility of finding common ground. *In the Heat of the Night* told the story of how a white rural southern sheriff and a black northern urban detective moved beyond their mutual prejudice and suspicion to develop a basis for working together. In the climax of the movie a lynch mob prepared to hang the black man, but in a moment they turned from their hostility. The entire plot of the movie hinged on the white and black races being united in their view of right and wrong. Every identifiable group has its own spin on what it likes and what it does not like, which usually gets translated into what is right and wrong. What a group likes are its prejudices; but what is right is the truth, whether the group likes it or not.

The mob suspected the black man of raping a white woman. The mob did not like this kind of behavior. The mob probably would not have approved of a white man raping a white woman, but it took the black man to turn the group into a mob. If a white man had been suspected, then they would have thought that the woman probably deserved it, and a mob would not have emerged. Such is the reasoning of “the group.” For *In the Heat of the Night* to work, the white mob had to be so shocked and appalled by a white man’s behavior that they would turn away from their black victim. The movie had to draw on a crime so deep-seated in the common understanding of both black and white people that its exposure would stop a mob. It had to be something of greater emotional intensity than racial hatred, because its recognition would leave no place for racial hatred. Such is the power of truth over preference.

In the movie *In the Heat of the Night*, the black and white communities find common ground in their shared horror of abortion. Thirty years later

this powerful story of racial struggle would no longer work. It depends on a universally shared view of abortion that no longer exists. For the story to work, the audience must cringe at the notion of abortion. The audience cringed in 1967, but today the average viewer would be left asking, "What's the big deal?" What has happened in thirty years to the sense of right and wrong, which people possessed even when they did not like what happened or what it caused them to do. The mob did not like the idea of letting the black man go. Without an overriding sense of right and wrong, people are free to follow their prejudices, which become self-authenticating in a relativistic society.

Well-meaning people debate whether or not the United States was ever a Christian nation. The debate is rather academic, however, compared with the reality that Christians face at the close of the twentieth century. When I was a prison chaplain, the men on the yard had a great deal to say about "prison religion," which appeared shortly before a man was scheduled to go before the parole board and disappeared just as miraculously after the board had met. They spoke of the danger of "playing games" with God. They showed me the cost of being a Christian in a culture where faith was ridiculed by the power structure and by the community. It was not against the law to be a Christian in prison, but more effective means for discouraging faith exist than mere laws. As a result of the unacceptability of religion, I found in the prison a vibrant faith community in spite of the "persecution" or perhaps because of it. Being Christian had no earthly advantage, but for that reason it was always possible to know why one was a Christian.

For centuries, Christianity has enjoyed most favored religion status in the Western world. People agreed about the basic worldview of Christianity even if they did not accept its faith commitments. Even the person who did not believe in God had the Christian understanding of God in mind when rejecting God. All of that is now rapidly changing. It has not completely changed, but it is changing as a new paganism becomes the worldview of people in the United States. In this situation Christians are hard-pressed to know what to do. The first reaction tends to be the impulse to save the culture. This reaction tends to ignore the fact that modern culture has never been friendly to Christ and his church. It has tolerated the church as the church was willing to become "modern." By and large the church gladly modernized, and in so doing rendered itself no threat at all to the popular culture.

For the time being, people call the emerging new era *postmodernity*. It is a frightening era because all of the rules have changed. To be more precise, there are no rules. All of the old apologetic arguments fall flat because they were developed to address the modern mind-set, which is quickly being

replaced by the postmodern mind-set. Rather than panic, however, Christians may find a fresh openness to the gospel, which has not been seen in the West since the Second Great Awakening. Christianity has spent the last two hundred years pointing out the spiritual failings of the modern world. Finally, a generation has appeared that has reacted against the spiritual decay, intellectual stagnation, and artistic mediocrity of modernity to the extent that it has rebelled against modernity's deepest held convictions.

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate how the gospel speaks to the underlying spiritual questions of the emerging postmodern world. In so doing, it will show how the postmodern revolution has swept away many of the greatest barriers to the gospel; such as the old scientific attitude that allowed no place for spiritual reality. The book proceeds from a deep-seated prejudice that only God can bring down a culture. Throughout the Bible we see God raising up and bringing down nations, cultures, and civilizations from the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah to Canaan, Israel, and the four great world empires of Daniel. In all situations of major cultural change, God at the same time judges a culture that has failed and creates a situation in which his name may be proclaimed.

TRIUMPH OF THE COUNTERCULTURE

While in Moscow in 1995 I visited the Pushkin Gallery, where I saw an exhibition of Picasso's paintings. I had seen the paintings of Picasso in a dozen American and European galleries, but this exhibition stood out from all the rest. I had seen larger collections, and I had seen more famous paintings by Picasso; but I had never seen a collection that captured the complete chronology of his work from beginning to end. Before my eyes I saw how he had developed as a painter. From year to year, from creative period to creative period, his work changed. As I looked around the room, the collection took on the character of a stop-action movie of a changing landscape from spring to winter.

I saw before my eyes how his painting changed from recognizable forms to cube-shaped figures to erratic lines that suggested what Picasso intended, though the viewer was never quite sure what that might be. This one exhibit captured the cultural history of the twentieth century in art, but it reflected virtually every other realm of knowledge or expression. All the old rules and expectations, the guidelines and norms, the laws and directions, the patterns and customs of culture slowly collapsed. It did not happen suddenly like the collapse of the Berlin Wall, for even the circumstances that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall did not happen suddenly.

Both the United States and China experienced social upheaval in the

1960s. In China the upheaval came as a directive from Mao himself, who provided the movement with the resources and leadership it needed to destroy traditional Chinese culture. The movement was called the Cultural Revolution. In the United States the upheaval arose spontaneously without leadership as much as personalities. It had no clear direction for where it wanted to go. It only intended to leave the old behind. This movement came to be known as the *counterculture*. Mao's movement with its official government sanction failed, but the counterculture in the United States succeeded in scoring a deathblow to any significant presence of tradition in American society.

In 1967 the United States was in ferment. The baby boom generation had started college a few years earlier. Not only did this group represent the largest population pool in American history but it also represented a disproportionately large group of college students, even for its size. A variety of social forces combined to open college to many people who in an earlier time would not have thought of college. State schools heavily subsidized college education, and the federal government made a major investment in state schools to open them up to minority groups and the poor in general. In California, college education came to be regarded as as much of a right and a necessity as public primary and secondary education. In such a climate, college education came virtually free to those who could gain acceptance to a California school. College enrollments soared. College campuses became great hoards of lemmings.

With huge student populations, colleges could no longer exercise the ancient tradition of *in loco parentis*, or operating as the parent of the student while they were in school. The old idea of the college as *alma mater* (foster mother) disappeared except in the more sentimental school songs, which the new glut of students never sang because, due to their unwieldy size, they no longer had occasion to gather in school assemblies. When I started college in 1969, the male curfew had just been abolished but the women still had a curfew. By my sophomore year the administration abolished the offices of dean of men and dean of women. By the time of my graduation the school had open dorms.

During this period, enormous numbers of people came to college unprepared by their parents to live on their own and make life decisions. The World War II generation had raised the baby boomers with one overriding theme in mind: I want my child to have all the things I did not have growing up. As a result, baby boomers had life on a silver platter. They had hula-hoops, Barbie dolls, transistor radios, madras shirts, and English Leather (or "Old Saddle" as my father termed it because he said it smelled like an old saddle). They learned to live from one fad to the next.

To the materialist philosophy that said that my child will be denied nothing, Dr. Spock contributed a radical understanding of child psychology that permeated the raising of children in the fifties and early sixties. Spock taught that children should not be disciplined or prevented from any behavior because the restraint would frustrate them. In essence, Spock encouraged a generation of parents to abdicate the primary responsibility they had for socializing their children. This attitude left a huge group of late adolescents without a road map for navigating life as they went away to college. They were left to experimentation, driven by a lifetime of encouragement to gratify themselves without consideration for other people.

The experimentation expressed itself in the drug culture, the sexual revolution, student demonstrations and riots, unconventional dress, and a total rejection of the values and customs of their parents' generation. The norms of polite society disappeared as the notion of behaving like a gentleman in the presence of a lady became not merely a ludicrous idea, but the essence of what the counterculture hated. Vulgar language became the medium of casual conversation.

The counterculture was not so much about the development of a belief system as it was about leaving Momma and Daddy, not having to go to bed at ten o'clock, not eating any vegetables (which eventually led to not eating any meat for some), and above all, not being someone Momma and Daddy could be proud of. With all of the materialism and indulgence of this generation by their parents, the parents still maintained the "great expectation." They wanted their children to have all that they did not have, but they also wanted their children to be all that they had not become. Their parents had defeated the enemy in the second war to end all wars, so the children refused to fight the little war in Southeast Asia.

Instead of ideology, the counterculture had slogans. These children had not studied Marx and Engels. They had watched TV commercials. Their belief system was all sensory: "If it feels good, do it." Variations included: "Do your own thing," and "Let it all hang out." It was not a very original philosophy. It did not require much thought to understand. All it required was an unrestrained desire for self-gratification. Movies like *Goodbye, Columbus* explored the concept of premarital sex and the idea that abstinence merely prolongs parental control. In the closing scene of the movie, Ali MacGraw's character ends the relationship because her parents found out. Richard Benjamin's character argues that her parents' values do not matter. He demands to know, "But do you think it is wrong?" Hollywood successfully set the agenda for discussion. Sex was not a matter of right and wrong, but of personal preference.

Birth control made free love easy, but not foolproof. Inconvenient

pregnancies arose from time to time as a result of casual encounters completely devoid of any sense of commitment. One couple I knew settled the problem by selling their bikes, then reporting them stolen so they could collect the insurance money. With the extra cash she flew to New York and got an abortion without her parents being any wiser. What for centuries had been primarily the problem of the poor and those with “no background” had suddenly become a problem for the children of the middle class. The Supreme Court capitulated to the new social pressure in 1973 and struck down laws against abortion as a violation of a woman’s right to control her own body.

Another dimension of the sexual revolution began to appear in the early seventies. As men and women flaunted their sexuality in public orgies, the homosexual community wanted to experience the same sense of freedom. Rejecting the old derogatory terms like *queer* and *fag*, homosexuals adopted the term *gay* to express their sexuality as thousands began to “come out of the closet.” From a position of fairness, it seemed only fair that if heterosexuals could do it hanging from the rafters, at least homosexuals should have the freedom to express themselves sexually in public without any social stigma. The fairness argument goes a long way with people who do not want their own freedom for self-gratification restricted. The “*Playboy* philosophy” was expanded to make room for homosexuality because one could not very well view one kind of sexual expression wrong when arguing for complete freedom in sexual experimentation. To say that one thing may be wrong would only open the door to the idea that maybe some other things were wrong as well. Bit by bit the American moral landscape changed. Like the song in *Oklahoma*, it seemed each time they had “gone about as far as they can go.”

THE COLLAPSE OF CULTURE

Oswald Spengler described this collapse of culture in *The Decline of the West*, written in the early days of this century. Arnold Toynbee made the same point in the middle of the century with his monumental *A Study of History*. Historians and philosophers have made observations of the phenomenon for centuries. Edward Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written in the eighteenth century, makes the same point, as does Augustine’s fifth-century work *The City of God*: all civilizations collapse. Some last longer than others, but all civilizations collapse.

This phenomenon places Christians in a difficult position. When a culture or civilization begins to collapse, does their first loyalty lie with defending the old order or with advancing the cause of Christ? Unfortunately, when

Christianity holds a preferred place within a culture for a long period of time, Christians have a difficult time distinguishing between the culture and Christian faith. The two become intermingled because people belong to a culture.

The crisis arose for early Christians who had stayed within the Jewish synagogue and continued to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem when the Jewish revolt began in A.D. 68. In that struggle the Christians chose not to revolt against those in authority, but in that choice they made themselves traitors to the old order. To this day, a Jew may be an atheist and find acceptance in the Jewish culture, but a Jew may not be a Christian. Even before the Jewish war, however, the early church began to deal with the problem of cultural differences and how they would affect the church. At the Jerusalem Council mentioned in the book of Acts, the leaders of the church accepted the idea of pluralism within the church. A Jewish church and a Gentile church would exist side by side with different customs, rituals, and values. The willingness of the apostles to accept a Gentile church represented a relativizing of twelve hundred years of Jewish theological tradition. The decision at Jerusalem required the apostles to reflect on the difference between the essence, or eternal truth of their faith, and the external ceremonial forms through which faith expressed itself.

Some Christians tend to think the matter was settled by Constantine, who supposedly made the Roman Empire a Christian nation. While Constantine may have ended the persecution of the Christians, Rome did not cease to have a pagan culture simply because the emperor lifted the persecution. Pagan culture thrived alongside Christianity for more than a hundred years before Augustine wrote *The City of God* to refute the idea that Christianity was to blame for the declining fortunes of the Roman Empire. In this book Augustine laid the intellectual cornerstone of the new culture that began to emerge even as Rome struggled to maintain the old pagan culture. Augustine laid the cornerstone for Christendom, a culture that would thrive for a thousand years until modernity edged it out.

For a thousand years, Western Europe was a politically chaotic region bound together by a common, unifying politicoreligious worldview known as Christendom. The Celtic peoples and their neighbors came to believe in the Creator God who ruled over all people and things, and under whose authority all power is exercised. In the eastern Mediterranean basin, the Eastern Roman Empire or, more popularly, the Byzantine Empire continued to exercise political stability while incorporating the Eastern Church into the official structure of society. Five hundred years of political, linguistic, and cultural separation between the West and the East resulted in different organizational systems for the church, different approaches to biblical

interpretation, different worship ceremonies, and different theological explanations of basic Christian doctrine. After 1054 the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church formally considered each other heretical because of these differences.

Christians have always had a difficult time deciding how close to get to the culture in which they find themselves. Historically this problem emerged most visibly for missionaries, some of whom adopted native dress and others who required their converts to adopt Western dress. Quite subtly, we tend to see some cultures as “Christian” while we label other cultures as pagan. Few people ever recognize the extent to which they equate the way they do things and the things they value as God’s final word on the subject. In the nineteenth century this attitude surfaced with the notion that “God is an Englishman!”

In describing the collapse and rise of cultures, modern thinkers like to give a date for the beginning and ending of epochs or cultures. Whereas one may speak fairly authoritatively that Abraham Lincoln lived from 1809 to 1865, one may not make such claims about the life span of a culture. Did Christendom begin with Constantine, Augustus, Gregory the Great, or someone else? Did it end with Martin Luther, the Thirty Years War, the French Revolution, or something else? In fact, most cultural periods overlap, unless all the members of a culture are killed by the succeeding culture. Just as Christendom coexisted with the old pagan culture for many years, modernity coexisted with Christendom for many years. The changes in culture took place so gradually that no one would have noticed except for the occasional military, political, or intellectual battle. One could tell that the thirteenth century was a far cry from the tenth century, but no one noticed much difference between 1034 and 1035. Cultures change. Cultures die. Some cultures are destroyed.

In the last five years the discussion of postmodernity has become a minor industry among Christians and Evangelicals in particular. Books have been written that describe in detail the philosophy of postmodern culture. Thomas Oden dates the beginning of postmodernity with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Others speak of postmodernity as though every person who had a modern worldview had suddenly died so that only people with postmodern views remain to populate the earth. As these commentaries describe in detail the postmodern culture, one is left with the thought that for the first time in history an entire culture has emerged fully formed and universally accepted. Describing the characteristics of baby boomers or generation Xers is one thing, but describing the defining characteristics of the next thousand year epoch as though it is fully formed borders on arrogance. On the other hand, the subject of postmodernity has arisen because culture has begun to change

in some perceivable ways. While postmodernity may not yet be an accomplished fact, the changes in contemporary culture relate to a growing rejection of the basic values of modernity.

Because Christianity has continued to exist or coexist with modernity after the collapse of Christendom, many Christians believe that a rejection of the values of modernity means a rejection of the values of Christianity. This assumption would only be valid for those Christians who have compromised their faith to the extent that it has become indistinguishable from the values of modernity. Postmodern thought proceeds from a basic ignorance of Christianity rather than a rejection of it. Modernity rejected Christianity. Whatever the next cultural era will be has not yet developed. The name *postmodern* is no name at all. It only says that something will come next.

Postmodernity represents the period of chaos as modern culture collapses, but it does not yet represent the period of creativity in which the new culture emerges. Because postmodernity represents a rejection of modernity rather than a rejection of Christianity, Christians have more to contribute to the definition of the new culture than anyone else. Christians identified the flaws in modernity, which the broader culture has now grown to realize. In this context Christians once again face the dilemma: Will they defend the old order or advance the cause of Christ?

THEOLOGY AND MODERNITY

When Christendom ended, Christians of both liberal and conservative stripe gradually embraced modernity as God's "truth" because it represented their culture. In spite of embracing the new philosophy, however, the majority Christian groups tended to cling to one aspect of Christendom: the union of church and state, which had marked the old Byzantine Empire and Russian Empire in the East and the medieval world in the West. The Lutheran Stats Kirche in Germany, Calvin's Geneva, Puritan England and New England, Catholic Spain and France all represent this tendency to cling to the old era after modernity began to take hold.

Evangelical Christians have long divided between those who took a first-century approach to Christianity and those who took a Christendom approach to Christianity. The first-century Christians believed that society would only change when a sufficient number of people were converted to Christ, the leaven affecting the whole lump of dough. Christendom Christians have tended to act as though society rightfully belongs to Christians and that the laws of the land can create a Christian society. As the fourth great cultural era begins in the West (paganism, Christendom,

modernity, postmodernity), many evangelical Christians still look to the attitudes of Christendom to solve the problems of society and to make it reflect Christian values. In seventeenth-century England, the evangelical Christians successfully established a “godly commonwealth” complete with the laws governing behavior that would make the nation pleasing to God. Unfortunately, they failed to convert the next generation, which recalled the king from exile, overthrew the godly laws, and instituted a fierce persecution of nonconformists, which lasted for more than one hundred fifty years.

While clinging to the preference for most-favored religion status within a country, emerging modern theology also reflected a scientific bias, which emerged so gradually that one could hardly notice it. In some sense, Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century could be called the father of modern theology. He represented the apex of the intellectual revolution of that period, which has been called the Magnificent Century, a prelude to the Renaissance. His theology is marked by a concern for what people might know because of the existence of a creator God. This approach to theology based on the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle gave an impetus to what today would be called scientific inquiry; but in the thirteenth century under the influence of Aquinas, all inquiry was theology. With that mind-set, theology came to be regarded as the queen of the sciences. Christendom would crumble as this way of thinking blossomed into the Renaissance and Reformation.

With the reform movements of the sixteenth century, theologians presented new understandings of church organization, worship ceremonies, and doctrinal interpretation. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli disagreed not only with Rome but with one another. These disagreements led to the great religious wars of the seventeenth century as Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic, and Radical armies fought one another.

The tendency to develop theology on philosophical foundations continued to dominate modern theology. Calvin, a popularizer of Augustine, built his theology on Platonic philosophy. William Perkins, the great English advocate of Reformed theology who gave the Puritan movement its intellectual foundation, built his theology on Ramist philosophy. This approach mirrored the development of modern science, which sought an organizational basis for itself. Theologians sought to discover “spiritual laws” just as scientists sought to discover “natural laws.” This discovery of the laws of theology represented a major concern of the Puritans in setting up the new government of England in the Civil War period. At the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1644), which Parliament called to settle the question of religion in England, the first order of business revolved around a discussion of whether or not the Bible contained a rule for the government of the

church and, if so, how that rule might be discovered. The Assembly could never reach agreement on the question, and the English church splintered into presbyterian, congregational, and episcopal forms of church government.

Experiences like that of the Puritans led to a movement in theology to establish the scientific study of the Bible. This movement flourished among the Pietists of Germany, led by August Hermann Francke at the University of Halle. Reformed theology took a speculative turn in England and New England, which spawned such views as unitarianism and universalism. Bishop George Berkeley stressed the idea that theology was subject to the laws of scientific observation. In this climate, religious experience came into disfavor as a preference for an intellectual approach to religion prevailed. The supernatural element of religion became discredited as theologians turned instead to a discussion of the moral laws of religion. Deism provided a means of retaining a belief in God without the necessity of retaining belief in the supernatural.

The embracing of modernity occurred in conservative as well as liberal circles. The strategy of modern theology, both conservative and liberal, was to accept the presuppositions of a scientific worldview. In the nineteenth century, the American evangelist Charles Finney established himself as a scholar on the basis of his study of the laws of revival. C. I. Scofield claimed to have developed a "scientific" approach to biblical study at the same time the higher critics of Germany were doing the same thing. Liberal theology retained its allegiance to religious form while rejecting the essence of the Christian faith. Conservative theology, on the other hand, had a preference for reducing the Christian faith to an easily explained formula, repeating the mistake of the scientific method, which tends to observe only what it is looking for.

Rudolf Bultmann conceded the scientific view on miracles, resurrection, and incarnation. He reasoned that since science tells us such things do not happen, the task of New Testament study consists in understanding why the early church would have invented such stories. Karl Barth conceded the scientific view on revelation, thus relativizing the Bible to the same status as all other holy books in the world. No longer was the Bible the word of God. It was now "the word of God for me."

Theologians have always had the danger of confusing theology with the truth. Theology is human thought about God. The word *theology* does not even appear in the Bible, but theology sounds more academic than the word the Bible uses: meditation. All theology is wrong because it involves the human attempt to understand and explain God, but some theology is more wrong than other theology. Christian theology grew too familiar with modernity, such that the old enemy grew into an old friend. Christian theology may

have made few converts with its rationalistic arguments in dialogue with modernity, but at least it knew how the conversation went. One of the problems of Christian theology during the modern period was that it matched modern philosophy idea for idea, conceding one major presupposition after another until it looked and sounded like the rest of modernity. With the collapse of modernity and its presuppositions, however, the landscape has changed. People have different views. They do not argue the same way. In fact, they do not want to argue at all.

One group of Christian theologians argues rather vigorously that we should not give up the old theology. The old theology represents their arsenal of weapons against the enemy. Unfortunately, the enemy has changed, and the enemy has a new arsenal of weapons against which the old theology has no effect. It is not ineffective because it is not true, but because it does not aim at the spiritual issues with which the new generation struggles. When Hitler invaded Poland with the most technologically advanced armored cavalry in the world, the Polish cavalry charged Hitler's tanks on horseback. They were not prepared to meet the threat. They were valiant and faithful, but highly ineffective if their commission was to defeat the enemy.

During the Battle of the Bulge, my father fought with the Combat Engineers as Hitler's Panzer divisions drove hard into the Allied lines. Those engineers had no tanks to match the German tanks, but they understood that they did not need to blow up the entire tank to defeat it. They only had to knock out one side of one plate on one track on one side of the tank. They discovered that in their arsenal they had the power to knock out the enemy tanks.

Another group of Christian theologians today advocate embracing the presuppositions of the new postmodern world. On the surface this approach seems to match the enemy weapon for weapon in an intellectual arms race. It actually represents an approach as reactionary as the horse guards. First of all, these theologians begin by conceding the intellectual field just as modern theologians did before them. Then, theology becomes a matter of responding to the agenda of the postmodern mind in kind, or worse, trying to make the Christian faith fit into the worldview of postmodernity.

Theology in the twentieth century became a "discipline" among both conservatives and liberals, practiced by experts in an academic setting. This radical break with the tradition of the church did not happen suddenly; it stood alongside the biblical view of meditation as an alternative since the time of Thomas Aquinas. Great theology, however, requires a ministry context rather than a speculative context. Augustine and Gregory the Great were bishops with specific issues to deal with, which required meditation on

the word of God. Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa were all hard-working bishops. Anselm was a hard-working bishop. John Calvin and John Wesley labored in parish ministry. With the dawn of the modern world which began in the late-Middle Ages, theology increasingly came to be viewed as a science in which God became the object of study rather than the teacher. It grew too important to be left to those outside the cloistered halls of learning. Lesslie Newbigin represents a return to the minister-theologian of the Pauline-Petrine-Johannine tradition as the modern paradigm spins into irrelevancy.

CONCLUSION

A wise parent answers the questions a child asks as the child grows up, rather than lecturing the child on what life was like “when I was your age.” I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the English Puritans. I have a deep admiration for their love of Scripture, their commitment to the church, and their faithfulness in preaching the gospel to a largely unevangelized nation. I have learned from them, but I also know that their theology spoke to the questions of their day. Postmodernity represents a tragic collection of unanswered questions. The average American today who embraces the postmodern attitudes toward values, spirituality, truth, and consistency has not rejected the biblical meaning of absolute truth. Modern theology speaks of absolute truth as an intellectual concept, when “it” is actually a “he” whose name is Jesus.

One last observation should be made, which deserves a book of its own. Culture in the Middle Ages centered around the tiny part of the population we might call the upper class. During the modern period, culture came under the domination of the middle class. As we move into the future, culture will belong to the widest breadth of people. The counterculture was a movement of white, middle-class kids with the financial resources and time on their hands so that they could afford the luxury of rebellion. In a sense, the counterculture represented the suicide of middle-class domination of Western culture. It had no particular place for most young black Americans who still struggled for a place in the culture against which the leisure class was rebelling. Mass media has had more to do with the spread of the new culture than anything else. Whatever the new postmodern culture will be, however, will only be apparent in the years to come when peoples of color begin to exercise greater influence. For the time, postmodernity remains primarily a white, Western phenomenon—but that is changing.

Christians have the task today of forgetting how they had gone about theology during the modern period, just as the Reformers of five hundred years

ago had to forget how theology had been done in Christendom. We must start over very simply with the Bible in hand and listen to the questions the world is asking. The central themes of theology will change, but the gospel will continue to provide the framework for life. Postmodernity as yet lies unfinished. People talk about it and try to describe it, but the most we can say now is that it will be different from modernity. Christians stand in a unique position to direct the next age rather than to fall victim to it.