

The paradigm shift of practical theology and theological practice to overcome modernism and postmodernism

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Abstract

This thesis will examine past research to study the postmodern era's core idea and shed light on how this idea relates to modernism, i.e., the previous era. The thesis will also consider the foundation upon which these eras are built and see what they have in common and what sets them apart. The eras have humanism in common, but conformism (or standardization) and pluralism separate them. Through the dualism of Greek philosophy and the fall story of the Old Testament, I will show the origins of conformism and pluralism and propose a path to overcome them. I will discuss how, as Christianity comes across Greek dualism, the field of practical theology and theological practice has trended toward prioritizing *theoria* over *praxis*. In the tradition of Hebrew beliefs and the good news of Jesus Christ, practice and life are one, and I will emphasize that if one was to be prioritized, it should be practice. Life in the early Churches, which began through Jesus Christ and his disciples, was based on the practice of the Triune God's love through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Hence, a newly reflected paradigm based on the threefold love of Trinity is required in the postmodern era.

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Introduction

Regardless of whether we know what post-modernism exactly is, we are already breathing in the postmodern age and living under its influence. A normal Christian would not find it easier to live through this era than walking on the street while breathing air packed with ultrafine dust or walking

against stormy winds in the midst of a raging typhoon. Although there will be differing ideas about what 'practice' in Christian theology or 'practical theology' means and what they do, none would argue against its relationship to individual Christians or Christian communities that practice God's love as revealed through the love of Christ on the Cross.

This thesis will study the core idea of the postmodern era by examining past research and shed light on how this idea relates to modernism, i.e., the previous era. It will also consider the foundation upon which they are built and see what they have in common and what sets them apart. They have humanism in common, and conformism

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(or standardization) and pluralism separate them. I will examine the origins of this conformism and pluralism by studying, on the one hand, the dualism of Greek philosophy and, on the other hand, Hebrew tradition, namely the fall story in Chapter 3 of Genesis in the Old Testament. I also propose a path to overcome both of them. In the postmodern era, mainstream evangelical practical theology would criticize the pluralism of postmodernism. However, it is then seriously required to reflect in earnest on whether many people, although they criticize pluralism within postmodernism on theoretical and sentimental grounds, actually see-saw between conformism and pluralism, as the root of their lives and practices are removed from an actual relationship with the Triune God. Therefore, the paradigm shift of practical theology in the postmodern era would not be about the practicality of theology or searching for a new methodology for practical theology; it will instead be about identifying and eliminating standardized, pluralistic elements, which have been inherent in traditional practical theology or in pursuit of theological practice, followed by an attempt to seek a fundamental change.

I will then discuss how, since Christianity came across Greek dualism, the field of practical theology, along with other fields of theology, has trended towards prioritizing a life of contemplation (*vita contemplativa*), i.e., theory (*theoria*) over a life of activity (*vita activa*), i.e., practice (*praxis*). However, in the tradition of Hebrew beliefs and the good news of Jesus Christ, practice and life are one, and I will emphasize that if one were to be prioritized, it would be practice.

What has been mentioned above relates to the theme of faith and deeds, thus being inherently linked with the relationship between faith and love. All of these elements directly relate to experiencing and having a fellowship with the Triune God. Discussion of the Trinity has traditionally focused on the theoretical side, and the Trinity has been understood as belonging to the field of theoretical theology. However, life in the early Churches that began through Jesus Christ and his disciples was based on practicing the Triune faith, which involved the love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Hence, based on the threefold love of Trinity, a newly reflected paradigm is required in the postmodern era. This paper will discuss why this paradigm is necessary and propose an appropriate practical measure.

The paradoxical relationship between modernism and postmodernism

It would be difficult to see the true identity of postmodernism unless it is considered in terms of its

relationship to modernism. On the one hand, postmodernism succeeds modernism; on the other hand, postmodernism surfaced as a reaction against modernism. Postmodernism is etymologically derived by combining “post” (after) and “modo” (right now), which could seem rather puzzling in an etymological sense. Postmodernism is sometimes used to refer to groups of movements, arts, architecture, literature, music, social science, and humanities that are incompatible with each other. Postmodern approaches or “postmodern descriptions” describe the present state of our knowledge, which has emerged in the forefront of the pursuit of modernism with regard to authority, process, and generalization. These approaches also continuously describe the assessment criteria for knowledge requests. Postmodernity is something that is strongly supported by those who seek more flexible approaches to inflexible morality and norms, which are the legacy of the modern era that would approach politics, philosophy, psychology, and theology in a more holistic manner [6].

The modern era (modernism) was a period that flourished in 17th century Europe, which saw the authority of church weakening, the progress of secular culture, the formation of politically centralistic nations, and the adoption of methodological rationality in both philosophy and science. It is generally viewed that medieval thought saw its end at the beginning of the new Age of Reason in about 1630, when the rational method was adopted by Galileo Galilei in science and by René Descartes in philosophy. The age of Western medieval thought is categorized as pre-modern, which characteristically involves faith in God and metaphysical reality, understanding the relationship between the supernatural and natural in dualistic terms, and revelation-oriented epistemology. In contrast, the Age of Reason is viewed as the beginning of the modern era ([11], 31).

However, Stanley J. Grenz claims that modern consciousness had already begun during the Renaissance (31). Two major thoughts were developed on the threshold of the Enlightenment or “modern era” (circa 1550–1945). First, beginning with René Descartes (1596–1650), rationalism emphasized the validity of human reason, which realizes the objective, rational truth. Therefore, we no longer need to depend on special revelations from Scripture in the search for universal truths ([18], 26–27).

The other major thought is empiricism, which asserts that we only can grasp what we touch with our hands, taste with our tongues, see with our eyes, smell with our noses, and hear with our ears. Empiricism

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