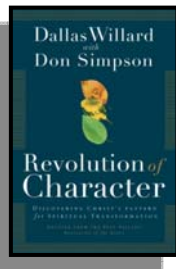


Post-Modern Spirituality

**Stuart McAllister
Ravi Zacharias International Ministries**

Philippians 3:17-19

Romans 12:1-2



“Our life and how we respond to the world is a result of who we have become in the depths of our being. We call this inner being our spirit, our will..... or, as a comprehensive term, our heart. From the contents of our heart, we see our world and interpret reality.

From that decisive place in our self, we make choices, break forth into action, and try to change our world. We live from our depths – most of which we understand only in part.”¹

- What do we mean by spiritual formation?

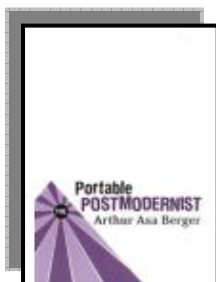
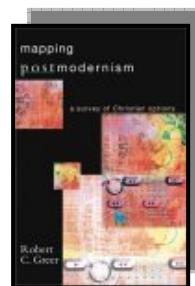
“Although every human being is formed spiritually – for better or worse - spiritual formation for the Christian refers to the Holy Spirit – driven process of forming the inner being of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself. To the degree spiritual formation in Christ is successful the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression of the character and teachings of Jesus.”²

¹ Dallas Willard and Don Simpson, *“Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ’s Pattern for Spiritual Transformation”* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2005), p. 12

² Ibid, p. 16

- What do we mean by Post-Modern?

We mean broadly, all that is entailed in the period following the Modern era, including a rejection of its main philosophical views, a deconstruction of its historic claims, processes and projects, and an openness to redefine and remodel everything in whatever way best fits. At the heart (though this is a gross simplification) is a change in epistemology. Robert Greer says, *“Roughly stated, modernism affirms the existence of absolute truths. Post-modernism affirms the opposite: the non existence of absolute truths.”*³



*“In the same way, the post-modern aversion to facts and the idea of absolute truths was elaborated by Nietzsche more than a hundred years ago. He emphasizes, like the postmodernists who followed him, that we can’t ‘know’ facts and reality, but only interpret them. There are, he tells us ‘countless meanings’ to the world, which suggest his position – perspectivism.”*⁴

³ Robert G. Greer, *“Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options”* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2003), p. 13

⁴ Arthur Asa Berger, *“The Portable Postmodernist”* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2003), p. 17

“What fuels our battles over truth and reality and facts is, as Nietzsche puts it, ‘a kind of lust to rule’. We want everyone else to accept our perspective on things as the true perspective. There is, then, behind assertions that philosophers make about reality a psychological need to triumph over others, or what Nietzsche describes as a will to power.”

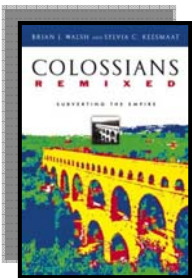
The post-Modern ethos is profoundly contrary to that set forth in scripture for the following reasons.

- i.) It rejects all sources of authority outside of the self.
 - ii.) It insists on the right to choose any and every pattern that fits personal taste, needs and preference.
 - iii.) It pursues ultimately only that which makes one feel good and hopefully look good too.
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I. Jesus in Disneyland

Vincent Miller writes, *“Consumer culture is best diagnosed not as a deformation of belief but as a particular way of engaging religious beliefs that divorces them from practice.”*⁵

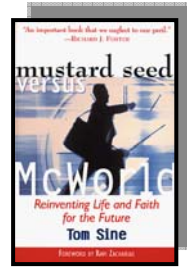
A. The market....if it works, make it, sell it



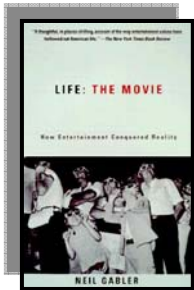
*“When a religion aggressively proselytizes and seeks to transform the world, its most important resource is its images. It is image that transforms the imagination, and it is imagination that engenders a lifestyle. And what globalization does better than anything else is transform the imagination. That is why entertainment and advertising industries are the first wave of the emerging global consciousness.”*⁶

⁵ Vincent J. Miller, *“Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice In A Consumer Culture”* (New York, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2005), p.12

They “are working to redefine what is important and what is of value in people’s lives all over the planet.”⁷



B. The screen, the stage, all the world’s a movie?



“While an entertainment driven, celebrity-oriented society is not necessarily one that destroys all moral value, as some would have it, it is one in which the standard of value is whether or not something can grab and then hold the public’s attention. It is a society in which those things that do not conform – for example, serious literature, serious political debate, serious ideas, serious anything – are more likely to be compromised or marginalized than before. It is a society in which celebrities become paragons because they are the ones who have learned how to steal the spotlight, no matter what they have done to steal it.

And, at the most personal level, it is a society in which individuals have learned to prize social skills that permit them, like actors, to assume whatever role the occasion demands and to ‘perform’ their lives rather than just live them. The result is that Homo Sapiens is rapidly becoming Homo Scaenicus – man the entertainer.”⁸

Three things stand out.

⁶ Brian Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmat, “Colossians Remixed: Subverting The Empire” (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004), p. 29

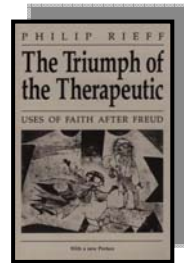
⁷ Tom Sine, “Mustard Seed Versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future” (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), p. 21

⁸ Neal Gabler, “Life: The Movie. How Entertainment Conquered Reality” (New York, New York: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 8

1. The need/demand for everything to be entertaining or fun.
 2. The pursuit of “celebrity” status, so we stand out.
 3. The focus on “performance” or “show” in all that we do or want to do.
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C. The Consulting Room....tell me your story

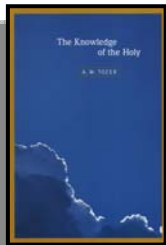
“The analytic attitude has discovered no natural harmony of goals, no hierarchy of value inscribed on the universe. Confronted by the equality of choice, the individual could resort to the analytic attitude in order to limit the folly of being drawn too far outside the protective management of his own pleasures.”⁹



- Analysis becomes a tool to justify or support a personal, internal journey.
- Subjectivity means, we are isolated, alone, and “free” to determine our own course.
- Preference then becomes vital in choosing what satisfies which needs.

⁹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 51

II. Challenges To Be Weighed and Considered



“That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God.”

“A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure to applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”¹⁰

¹⁰ A. W. Tozer, *“The Knowledge of the Holy”* (New York, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 10

A. The Lordship issue

Colossians 3:1

*“Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus. Its good is conformity to Christ, a process that arises out of purposeful interaction with the grace of God in Christ. Obedience is an essential outcome (see **John 13:34-35; 14:21**).”*

B. The issue of transformation

Luke 9:23 -26

“The self that goes unchallenged here is precisely the consumer self. It is on a quest not for self-transformation but for spiritual experience.”¹¹

He cites Rich Warren who said, *“Our message must never change, but the way we deliver that message must be constantly updated to reach each new generation.”¹²*

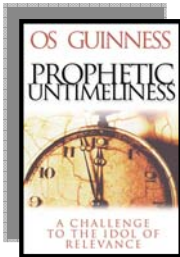
A good and valid point. Hipps challenge comes through that *“the primary measuring stick for determining the value of new ministry methods or means is usefulness.”*

He goes on to remind his readers from the wisdom of Marshall McLuhan *“Whenever methods or media change, the message automatically changes along with them.”*

¹¹ Vincent J. Miller, *“Consuming Religion”*, p. 139
¹² Shane Hipps, *“The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, The Gospel and Church”* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 29-30

- The constant expectation of being entertaining, fun, hip, cool, relevant.
- The pressure to “perform”.

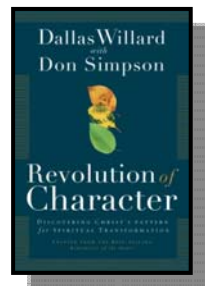
III. Begin With The End in Mind (Stephen Covey)



“By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful but irrelevant; by our determined efforts to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful in Christ, we have lost not only our identity but our authority and our relevance. Our crying need is to be faithful as well as relevant!”¹³

A. The call to repentance, a change of mind

“The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to choose what we let our mind dwell on.”¹⁴ In a media saturated age, we need to work long and hard on the “renewing of our minds”. (Psalm 19:7-8; 119:11; 105; 127; 128; 165). I like what Willard and Simpson say, “The intention to have our mind properly formed is to have the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ a constant presence in our mind, crowding out every false idea.”¹⁵



¹³ Os Guinness, “*Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge To The Idol Of Relevance*” (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), p. 15

¹⁴ Dallas Willard and Don Simpson, p. 33

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 93

B. According to pattern

John 13:34-35; 1 Timothy 1:5-7

- It is to actively, constantly and faithfully seek God as the highest good and as the greatest desire.
- It is to dedicate our life to the pursuit of faithfulness and service.
- It means we explore ways and means to make the Christ life, our vision and our values.

“In the person with a ‘well kept heart’, the soul is properly ordered under God and in harmony with reality.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 159

