4-2018

Judeo-Christianity Amidst a Postmodern Culture

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Judeo-Christianity Amidst a Postmodern Culture

A Case for Existence

Taylor LaHaie

Grand Valley State University
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Abstract

As modern culture is steeped in a major shift in thinking, many facets of human life have become increasingly difficult upon which to agree. This shift, coined postmodernism, unveils a reality in which claims on Truth are questioned readily, and denied—almost eagerly. Amidst this culture, the key questions in life revolve around whether it is possible to answer life’s fundamental questions: “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?”, “Is there a God?”, and “What is my Purpose in it all?” The key claim of Judeo-Christianity, hinging on the resurrection of Jesus, claims to accurately depict the answers to these questions. This paper discusses whether the assumption and claims of Judeo-Christianity, in light of postmodernity, are still relevant today.

An Introduction

Culture today hangs in a peculiar balance, displaying a brilliant dance between objectivity and relativism. A great tension has arisen that has altered the trajectory of modern art, innovation, technology, and thought—one few would audibly admit as tension. Perhaps the most significant impact lies in the shift from modern to postmodern thought.

In his publication of “The Postmodern Condition” in 1979, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard first coined this cultural shift as “postmodernism” (Aylesworth, 2005). Prior to postmodernity, in modern thought, Truth was largely understood and agreed upon as “an accurate description of reality, useful for making predictions (Affholter, 2018).” However, the postmodern movement questions whether Truth is comprehensible to humanity, and in its’ extreme form, whether Truth in itself exists.

In Encyclopedia Britannica, Brian Duignan describes postmodernism as, “A late 20th—century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general
suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology” (Duignan, 2017). The
movement could be summed up around one saying, “Humanity cannot, or likely cannot arrive at
an understanding of Truth – as the human experience is entirely relative.” This view of truth,
coming as a direct result of the postmodern condition, is highlighted well in the Stanford
Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s compilation of the current modern theories on Truth.

The problem of truth is in a way easy to state: what truths are, and what (if anything)
makes them true. But this simple statement masks a great deal of controversy. Whether
there is a metaphysical problem of truth at all, and if there is, what kind of theory might
address it, are all standing issues in the theory of truth. (Glanzberg, 2006)

It is no surprise then, to find that the Oxford Dictionary’s 2016 word of the year was Post-Truth.
Post-Truth is an adjective that defines “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential
in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries,
n.d.). Society will invariably turn to an appeal to personal belief and emotion in light of culture
and circumstance in which the ideals of both Truth and objective fact are more readily
scrutinized.

In light of, and in response to this shift – the aim of this work is to thoroughly examine
and better understand the underlying assumptions of both the postmodern condition and the
Judeo-Christian worldview. Thereby, the hope is to determine whether it is still reasonable to
arrive at an over-arching Truth that accurately describes the human existence.

**Fundamental Assumptions**

As modern culture progresses into postmodernity, humans are finding it increasingly
difficult to agree with one another on the previously unquestioned Truths of the human
existence. Truth is becoming progressively more personal and subjective, and these Truths no
longer come as shared beliefs. While culture may have previously held many shared beliefs, postmodernity ushers in a paradigm in which humanity agrees less and less on the interpretation of reality. This reality is unpacked well in a 2017 podcast by a group called The Liturgists, where it is noted that, “We [as humanity] are nearing a point right now where we can’t agree on the basic facets of reality” (Gungor, 2017). As Truths become increasingly more difficult to agree upon within societies, the postmodern reality has fed itself – leading to a greater and greater scrutiny of claims on Truth.

In order to have reasonable dialogue in a postmodern culture about differing worldviews, one must carefully articulate and understand the basic building blocks that are foundational to a worldview. More simply, before discussing how one sees the world, it is essential to first understand how one has arrived at the conclusions they have made. Without this basic understanding, the result – though it may play out many different ways – will undoubtedly be characterized in many distinct means: confusion, frustration, uncertainty, discomfort, etc. The reason being, for these different responses, is that worldviews make absolute claims about the world and the way in which it works (claims about humanity, purpose, death, etc.). The starting point then for both reasonable dialogue and navigating the waters of conflicting worldview and belief starts with the recognition that all worldviews make absolute claims that are intrinsically rooted in very basic assumptions.

Within a worldview, it is impossible to construct complex beliefs about the world and the way in which it operates, without assuming basic components about reality itself. Herein lies the foundation for understanding both postmodernity and Judeo-Christianity: understanding the assumption in thinking that is at the core of it all – the basic assumptions being made within the worldview. See appendix A for a Summary of Underlying Assumptions within both worldviews.
Postmodernism: Underlying Assumptions

Two distinguishing assumptions ought to be pointed out within the postmodern view. Firstly, the premise that either “Truth cannot be known,” or in a less extreme statement, “Truth may not be comprehensible.” This comes as a sharp contrast to a key assumption in the modernist worldview which suggests that, “Truth can be known.” Secondly, to both simplify and state where this conclusion is derived from is to assume that human experience is entirely relative. If all humans perceive and experience life in vastly different ways and have no objective lens in which Truth can be compared, there is either no possibility or there is an inherently difficult possibility of arriving at a knowledge of Truth. Neil Martin, author of *Keep Going* (2008) – a book concerned with addressing doubts within the Judeo-Christian faith – suggests that: Postmodernism tells us that everyone looks at the world with different eyes, and that a single fact can make as many different impressions on the human mind as there are different individuals, or different “interpretative communities” to appreciate it. (p. 104)

This core assumption of the postmodern worldview, that the human experience is relative, explains the dance between objectivity and relativism well; the core assumption being made sheds light as to why culture is now considered a “Post-Truth” culture. If the human experience is relative and Truth cannot (or may not) be known, then, on an individual level, personal belief and emotion ought to be chosen over “objective fact.”

Judeo-Christianity: Underlying Assumptions

Much could be said about differing assumptions within the Christian worldview. However, for the purpose of easing the comparison between Judeo-Christianity and postmodernism, here the assumption that “Truth can be known” will be the basis for the
modernist worldview. Rather than starting with the assumption that “There is a God,” the statement that “Truth can be known,” reaches one step further as an underlying assumption of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Reducing this assumption to a simple statement would result in saying, “there is an over-arching Truth or theme in which the human experience is rooted.” In other words, there is an accurate depiction of reality, and this can be applied consistently across the entirety of the relative human experience – Truth. Similar, to a sailor’s compass on the vast ocean, by using the term rooted, the assumption of the Judeo-Christian worldview is that of a set of Truths that accurately are able to guide humanity amidst the many difficulties and confusions of the human experience.

By understanding the assumptions within both worldviews, it is possible to begin to weigh the claims – the assumptions – made within each. With an understanding that absolute claims are exclusively built off of basic building blocks that are assumed, one can begin to dissect those assumptions – testing their weight against the human experience, other Truth-claims, and human history. The rest of this paper begins by recognize that postmodernism, at its core, makes absolute claims on Truth – and ends by positing that Judeo-Christianity is still a reasonable assumption to arrive at an over-arching Truth that accurately describes the human existence.

Postmodernism: A Praise and a Critique

To reiterate, postmodernism – the term for the major shift in thought, occurring in the late 20th century – is “a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology” (Duignan, 2017). From heightened skepticism, to an emphasis on subjectivity, to the questioning of Truth itself, postmodernism, at its core, is the belief that all Truth is personal. Before
providing a critique of postmodernism, it is necessary to mention the positive externalities associated with the shift.

A Praise of Postmodernism

Postmodernism assuredly brings much to the table in society. As Truth becomes increasingly more individualistic and personal, the urge to establish oneself becomes greater. A successful argument can be made that technological advancement, innovation, and artistic influence are all positively affected by postmodernity. Additionally, as individuals within societies – whether implicitly or explicitly – conclude that the human experience is un-rooted from an over-arching story or narrative, the driving force roots itself in a desire to do things that are significant (Affholter, 2018). The postmodern reality challenges the individual to find one’s own purpose, within the uncertainty of an over-arching purpose. Perhaps in searching to find purpose in a seemingly purposeless universe, a reality may be discovered in which purpose transcends through a previously thought purposeless universe.

Additionally, when contrasted to the structured lens that can be found within modernism, the postmodern movement has the benefit of healthily challenging absolute claims on Truth. The movement holds a higher standard to claims, which – if carried out in a balanced manner – has the ability for more careful comparisons of differing worldviews. Additionally, heightened scrutiny and skepticism have the ability to filter out beliefs within societies that do not accurately depict reality.

Overall, the associated benefits that are derived from postmodernity are certainly propelling society to new heights in human life in many ways. From scientific growth in newfound theories, to social justice movements, to innovative advancement,
postmodernity challenges humanity to search far and wide for purpose. However, as the aim of this paper is to determine whether it is reasonable to conclude that an over-arching Truth accurately describes the human existence, a postmodern (skeptical and scrutinized) look at the assumptions of postmodernity is necessary.

**A Critique of Postmodernism**

If an individual has started building on the assumption that either Truth cannot be known, or that Truth likely cannot be known, then all proceeding claims of Truth are immediately either invalidated or are initially more heavily scrutinized. Here, it is not the study of this assumption that will be addressed, but rather it is using this assumption as the foundation for investigating Truth-claims that will be addressed. Firstly however, clarification is needed as to the “relative human experience.”

**The “Relative Human Experience” Unpacked**

One key thought within the shift from modernism to postmodernism is found in the conclusion that the human experience is subject to a much greater level of subjectivity and relativity than that which was previously assumed. While many vary as to the degree of which human relativity has affected Truth-claims, here the extreme of a completely relative human experience will be discussed.

In a conference in 2007 titled, “Contending for the Truth,” speaker Ravi Zacharias – author and editor of over 25 books concerning Jude-Christian theology, apologetics, comparative religion, and philosophy – describes Postmodernism and the belief in a truly relative human experience in the following way (Ravi Zacharias, n.d.):

“It [postmodernism] is based on an epistemology that holds to a limitless instability of words. Texts are stripped of their meaning, and words are given no
point of reference…. You have your point of reference for language, I have my point of reference, and so the ground is always shifting in speech, and in thought, and in any form of propositional truth.” (Ravi Zacharias, 2015)

Within the assumption that the human experience is entirely relative, there becomes no fixed reference point in which humanity can compare beliefs, worldviews, and emotions. Within a truly relative human experience with no Truth in which to ground reality or to root humanity to a fixed reference point, there is limitless instability. That is, if words cannot be a basis for shared beliefs, conclusions, and history over cultural, and linguistic barriers, then hope begins to dwindle in arriving at any sort of conclusions about major questions within humanity that Truth attempts to answer.

Few scholars would argue that the human experience is not, to a certain degree, relative – including Judeo-Christian scholars. Here it is important to distinguish and discuss the line that separates this assumption for the postmodernist and the Judeo-Christian thinker. Referred to earlier in describing postmodernism, Martin discusses this line in Keep Going (2008):

It [postmodernism] has a lot to teach us about the problems of communicating across cultural, historical, and literary barriers and about the influence of our personal prejudices. But if we are not careful it can also lead to some unbalanced assumptions. Without care, it can leave us assuming there is no point trying to understand the words or feelings of writers from the past. (pp. 104-105)

Here, Martin asserts that – while bringing both a great benefit and analysis to the ways in which culture, history, and literature are evaluated – postmodernism can lead to unbalanced assumptions. When phrased as a question, the unbalanced assumptions that
Martin refers to can be pointed out in the following: “Does it necessitate that Truth cannot be known, or is likely not able to be known – especially in the context of recorded human history – resulting from a varying degree of relativity within the human experience?”

When the relative human experience becomes the basis for filtering Truth-claims, rather than first weighing the assumption that Truth in itself can be known, the ability to weigh and test *Truth-claims* is lost within the necessity to apply postmodern thought consistently. Postmodernism necessitates a filter in which any would-be-evidence of a more reasonable assumption than its own must be rejected on the grounds that Truth is only personal, not universal. If the Judeo-Christian belief in a Truth-giver, who has rooted the human experience in an over-arching story *were* in-fact True, postmodernism – in the foundation of its underlying assumption – creates a picture in which this belief (and many others) must become culturally obsolete.

**Jumping to Conclusions**

The core assumption of postmodernism, again, is that Truth either cannot be known, or is likely not comprehensible due to a relative human experience. If there is no shared experience, no grounded or rooted-ness to the human experience, and no over-arching narrative to human life, then, and only then, would it be reasonable to conclude that Truth is by nature both a human construct and at the core, non-existent. If there is no reasonable belief in, or logical assumption in a Truth-giver – providing an over-arching meta-narrative that the human experience can be grounded in, and explainable by – then it becomes more and more reasonable to conclude that Truth cannot be known.
However, the jump in postmodernism is in this: it is assumed that the belief in a divine being who would reveal himself to humanity is both likely unreasonable and unbelievable. This assumption is likely the result of the pendulum shifting in thought as a reaction to the absolute claims of belief in a Truth-giver or the denial of a Truth-giver that was all too common in modernism. Within the jump in the postmodern assumption though, a Truth-giver who has revealed himself and grounded humanity in the ability to know Truth must altogether be denied. In other words, if the logical conclusion from a relative human experience is that Truth cannot likely be known – it should be noted that in the jump from point A to point B, a Truth-giver becomes obsolete. In its assumption that Truth cannot or likely cannot be known because of a relative human experience, postmodernism largely can be seen as a reaction to the absolute claims that existed similarly in modern thought.

Where Does One Start?

If there are comprehensive answers to the major questions that all of humanity shares: “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?”, “Is there a God?”, and “What is my Purpose in it all?”, the claim will unquestionably be in opposition to the assumptions of postmodernity. Perhaps moving forward ought to entail an inventory of basic, fundamental assumptions made, as well as a recognition that all of humanity equally desires to answer these questions together. From this point, the weight of each Truth claim can be given equal support and scrutiny.

Rather than assuming either worldview, recognizing many of the assumptions being made should perhaps be the place to begin. Perhaps the point of origin is in determining whether it is reasonable to conclude a Truth-giver who has grounded humanity in an over-arching Truth that accurately describes the human existence. Rather than empirical proof, as this aim often leads to absolutism and a tight grip on underlying assumptions, rationale in belief should be the
primary aim. In this way, the second half of this research will focus on this question: “Are there grounds for reasonable belief in Judeo-Christianity, and its underlying assumptions?”

**Judeo-Christianity**

Again, the starting point for the Judeo-Christian worldview is in the assumption that there is an over-arching theme or story in which the human experience is rooted. Unlike the conclusions that are often made within the postmodern worldview, Judeo-Christianity takes the stance that although the human experience is certainly relative to one degree or another, Truth can be known.

The key assumption that there is an over-arching story to the human experience brings the questioner to a place of weighing Truth-claims. Within the key assumption, the path forward lies in weighing the claims to this over-arching story. In contrast, postmodernism challenges the validity of any claim of Truth – and in its extreme form, nullifies Truth absolutely. If the goal is to determine whether it is reasonable to conclude a narrative Truth that accurately depicts reality, the first question then becomes: Is belief in a Truth-giver reasonable?

**Belief in a Truth-Giver**

Modern philosopher, Alvin Plantinga, in his journal article titled “Is Belief in God Properly Basic,” defends the position that belief in a Truth-giver is a ‘properly basic’ assumption. Plantinga asserts that, “it is perfectly rational to accept belief in God without accepting it on the basis of any other beliefs or propositions at all” (Plantinga, 1981, p. 42). Plantinga makes the distinction that reasonable belief can (and should) be separated from the perceived need to fully support both the evidentialist and the naturalist objection that stems from modern thought.
To both simplify and paraphrase, Plantinga asserts that ‘properly basic’ beliefs do not rest on other propositions but are simply basic; these basic assumptions are the basic building blocks of a worldview. Inasmuch as postmodernism makes the basic assumption that Truth may not be known (or cannot be known) because of a relative human experience, Judeo-Christianity presupposes belief in a Truth-giver as reasonable.

A Truth-giver as Reasonable

In realizing that the goal is not in an infallible argumentation that often sustains absolute thinking, approaching the evidence to the existence of a Truth-giver becomes a new conversation. Rather than leveraging demands for undoubted evidence in the possibility of a God stemming from the pre-supposed belief that Truth may not (or cannot) be known, the realization that all have made varying assumptions that are ‘properly basic’ is extremely helpful in moving forward. In laying down many of the absolute claims that are all-too-easy to make in a postmodern culture, asking the question of ‘whether belief in a Truth-giver is reasonable,’ becomes an invitation to the evidences for this possibility.

Christian theologian Tim Keller has posited a term for these evidences: The Clues of God. In his book titled, The Reason for God, Keller admits that, “There cannot be irrefutable proof for the existence of God,” yet continues by saying, “many people have found strong clues for his reality – divine fingerprints – in many places” (2008, p. 131). Much could be said in opposition of these basic yet thought-provoking ‘clues,’ however, here a few challenging potential evidences for a Truth-giver will be stated briefly.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

This evidence, or clue rather, dates back to Muslim philosophers al-Kindi and al-Ghazali and has recently been brought into the modern discussion by Judeo-Christian
philosopher William Lane Craig (Holt, n.d.). In his book, “The Kalām cosmological argument,” Craig simplifies the argument by al-Ghazali to the following:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the universe has a cause of its existence.

(Copan, P., & Craig, W. L., p. 63).

This argument aims to construct a clue from the observation that all which begins to exist within humanity has a cause to its existence. From artwork, to music, to city infrastructure, to human life, the argument made by Craig asserts that everything that begins to exist has had a cause of its existence. From this point, Craig observes that the universe began to exist, and that therefore the universe has a cause of its existence.

The Fine-Tuning Argument

This next argument, expounded upon by American philosopher Robin Collins in his short essay titled “The Fine-Tuning Design Argument,” posits that life is far too complex to sustain human life without a designer. In other words, the complexities of life – its ability to thrive in the universe – are described as a clue to the existence of an intelligent designer. Collins describes the argument using the following example:

“Suppose we went on a mission to Mars and found a domed structure in which everything was set up just right for life to exist. The temperature, for example, was set around 70° F and the humidity was at 50%; moreover, there was an oxygen recycling system, an energy gathering system, and a whole system for the production of food. Put simply, the domed structure appeared to be a fully functioning biosphere. What conclusion would we draw from finding this
structure? Would we draw the conclusion that it just happened to form by chance? Certainly not. Instead, we would unanimously conclude that it was designed by some intelligent being. Why would we draw this conclusion? Because an intelligent designer appears to be the only plausible explanation for the existence of the structure.” (Collins, 1999, p. 1)

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy compiled a list of suggested realities that point to the fine-tuning of human life – among these are both presently-occurring dynamics and past-occurring dynamics (those seen in the early universe). At present suggested realities are: the strength of gravity, the strength of strong nuclear force, and many others. In the past, the global cosmic energy density, and the initial entropy of the universe are both seen as basic components of the fine-tuning argument (Friederich, 2017). In short, the fine-tuning argument suggests that life mirrors a creator, rather than random occurrences (that are without cause) that have led to human life; it suggests that the complexities of life point to a fine-tuner who made human life possible.

The Clue of Beauty

In the absence of a Truth-giver, human life is ultimately of no more significance than natural processes evolving over time. Yet simultaneously much of the human experience seems to point to (or has the internal desire to point to) a more significant story. This clue, observed by Tim Keller (2008) in “The Reason for God,” is painted in the following way:

“In the presence of great art and beauty we inescapably feel that there is real meaning in life, there is truth and justice that will never let us down, and love means everything…. We may, therefore, be secular materialists who believe truth
and justice, good and evil, are complete illusions. But in the presence of art or even great natural beauty, our hearts tell us another story.” (p. 138)

What Keller gets to the heart of, when communicating this clue, is that there are key aspects within humanity that seem to point to an over-arching story in which humanity is rooted. In addition to beauty, this clue can be seen in: intimacy, sacrificial love, in hope, and in many other dynamics of human life. In other words, at certain points within humanity, the story seems to point to something greater than the product of “accidental natural forces” (Keller, 2008, p. 138).

Not included in this discussion, but to be further investigated are: humanity’s desire to uphold a moral-law, the complexity of human life (biology, DNA, etc.), and many others. While clues alone cannot provide a watertight argument for the existence of a Truth-giver, they can aide in building the case as to reasonability in belief. Clues provide both a foundation and potential explanation to the absolute claims being made within postmodernism.

**Drawing a Conclusion From “Clues”**

While a pitfall of postmodernism is often found in jumping to conclusions (refer back to pages 11-12), here, a great benefit is derived within the heightened investigation of Truth-claims in present culture. With the potential possibility and reasonability of a Truth-giver, comes the need to weigh Truth-claims – against the human experience, against other Truth-claims, against history, and against time itself.

As the aim of this work is to determine whether it is reasonable to arrive at a narrative Truth that accurately describes the human existence, then the next sequential step to the reasonability of belief in an over-arching Truth is in the Truth-giver providing humanity a means to know Truth. The Judeo-Christian scriptures are claimed to be this divine revelation – the
Truth-giver communicating to humanity in order to ground their relative experience to an over-arch ing story.

**Scripture (“Canon”)**

The Bible – commonly referred to as Scripture, the Holy Scriptures, Canon – is a composition of 66 books, written by as many as 40 different authors (ESV Study Bible, 2016). Comprised of both the Old Testament (Hebrew scriptures) and the New Testament (writings after Jesus life and death), the Bible claims to be an accurate depiction of reality, and of human history. Canon is a word used to describe scripture as “the correct collection and list of inspired books” (ESV Study Bible, 2016, p. 2577). Scripture claims to be divine revelation, from God – to people – through people.

**The Over-Arching Story**

The Bible, throughout both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, narrates the over-arching story of humanity. If the story were to be broken into four key pieces, the pieces that claim to accurately depict reality are: creation, the fall, redemption, and completion. In the Hebrew scriptures, after the creation account in Genesis 1, where a Truth-giver’s creation of humanity is purposed in security, belonging, and significance within the Truth-giver, humanity rejects the Truth-giver. From the time between the account of the fall in Genesis 3 – where humanity rejects the Truth-giver, insisting on life apart from him – and the New Testament, humanity awaited the fulfillment of the promise made by the Truth-giver of a rescuer to restore the creation to life no longer in separation.

In the New Testament, Greek scriptures, the depiction of the Truth-giver at work within human history (in the Old-Testament) comes to fruition in the person of Jesus
Christ of Nazareth. In the New Testament, in John chapter 14, when one of Jesus disciples asks the way back to the Truth-giver, Jesus says, “I am the way, and the Truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (ESV Study Bible, 2016, p. 2052). John depicts and conveys Jesus as the Truth-giver in the flesh, as the rescuer. A short time after claiming this, Jesus is crucified on a Roman cross and his body placed in a tomb. The Truth-giver’s plan for redemption, foretold in many of the Hebrew Scriptures (see Isaiah 53), depict a man who would bear the separation and iniquity of humanity – in order to provide a way back to the Truth-giver. In John 19, the unfolding of the foretelling of a rescuer who would redeem humanity by his death is clearly unveiled. It becomes clear that the Truth-giver’s plan, from the beginning, was to rescue humanity through sacrifice.

While any man could have lived and claimed similar, the account of the New Testament gospels is not only of the life and death of Jesus, but of his resurrection back to life, as depicted in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21. The rest of the New Testament, unpacking Jesus life and teaching, death and resurrection, seeks to both provide an accurate depiction of reality, and to convey to humanity that life does not have to happen apart from the Truth-giver. The rest of the story then is still unfolding. The promise is that one day the creation, fall, and then redemption that has happened will be brought to completion – the promise of the Truth-giver will become fully realized. This reality is shared by John, one of Jesus disciples in the last letter of the New Testament (Revelation 7:9), when he describes that, “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,” would know and be in relationship once again with the Truth-giver (ESV Study Bible, 2016, pp. 2473-2474).
In light of postmodernity, the aim of this work is to determine if it is reasonable to arrive at any narrative Truth that accurately describes the human existence. As the claim of scripture is that the Bible itself is Truth, given by a giver of Truth, the next chronological assumption that must be challenged in its reasonability, is the reliability of Scripture. Under the assumption that belief in a Truth giver is both reasonable and properly basic, the claim of scripture as Truth given by a Truth-giver will be the grounds for examination. Next, the discussion concerning reliability of the Judeo-Christian scriptures will revolve around the New Testament, primarily, the four canonical Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

**The Cases for Biblical Reliability**

In the same way that the “clues” of a Truth-giver merely act as potential evidence pointing to a larger reality, the following two cases ought to be seen as simply the “clues” to the reliability of scripture as an accurate historical account. Without making dogmatic assertions, the following both provides a closer look at the best defenses of the New Testament gospels and also provides the greatest criticisms that arise in contradiction.

**Case 1: Manuscript Evidence**

Could it be possible in a postmodern society to lose the forest for the trees?

Again, “Without care, it [postmodernism] can leave us assuming there is no point trying to understand the words or feelings of writers from the past” (Martin, 2008, pp. 104-105). The point illustrated here, is that the conclusion can readily be made that “because of the difficulty of communicating across certain literary barriers, one cannot hope to know the values being communicated by past writers.”

Here, to circumvent this thinking, is a short list of other ancient Greek manuscripts which includes both the approximate time span between the original and
copy and also the number of copies obtained. Providing consistent application of scrutiny and skepticism to all early manuscripts, but also consistent belief in the ability of humanity’s ability to communicate over history and time perhaps could soften the heightened criticism of the New Testament texts made readily today. For a full list, see Appendix B

<table>
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<th>Author</th>
<th>Date Written</th>
<th>Earliest Copy</th>
<th>Approximate Time Span between original &amp; copy</th>
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<td>1200 yrs</td>
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<td>A.D. 1100</td>
<td>1400</td>
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(Slick, 2018)

The table above portrays the magnitude of the amount of New Testament documents, and comparatively – the short timespan between which the original document would likely have been written and when the first manuscript copy is dated. Placing the gospels alongside other historical documents avoids inconsistency and moves towards balanced inquiry. Within postmodernity, while dealing with ancient historical documents provides a heightened level of criticism – it becomes increasingly important to view texts with the same lens of criticism.
However, the question at the heart of the discussion here is this: “Do the gospel accounts that are circulated today accurately depict reality as it happened in the 1st century A.D.?” More specifically, can the New Testament gospels be trusted as historic accounts written by eye-witnesses and carefully copied, or can they be discarded as mere fabrication and illusion of history?

**Objection to Biblical Manuscript Evidence**

While the sheer number of manuscripts and the accuracy amongst them are telling of the care and accuracy of scribe’s translation and copying, a key question remains. Leading scholar Bart D. Ehrman, author of *Misquoting Jesus*, and *Forged: Writing in the Name of God*, has aimed to show that scripture is nothing more than human effort to convey a Truth-giver. Ehrman moves one step further than claiming errors in translation, and messages being lost over time; Ehrman, in an article published in the Washington Post titled, “Who wrote the Bible and Why It Matters,” is quoted raising this question: “Is it possible that the problem is worse than that – that the Bible actually contains lies?” (Ehrman, 2011). Many other scholars, like Ehrman, have concluded (or rather, assumed) that the Bible is no more than a fabrication of these lies by Jesus’ early followers in order to obtain a following of Jews to the new religion.

In order to level the playing field and move forward on the same page – seeking the facts that are un-argued historically becomes wholly imperative. As the objection of postmodernism necessitates an intense investigation of the biblical account, the ability to step back and analyze the facts while recognizing
key assumptions made appears to be an increasingly important tool in wading through the waters of historical events and manuscripts.

**Case 2: The Minimalist Fact Argument**

Taking a step back from the Bible is, without exception, critical when seeking to determine its validity. As the claims of, and authorship of scripture are both heavily debated in the modern scene, it becomes of great importance to narrow down the focus to the data that is not easily construed or misrepresented. Additional weight ought to be incrementally placed on the bigger-picture facts that are agreed upon by both Judeo-Christian and secular scholars alike.

Judeo-Christian scholar, Gary Habermas, developed the minimal facts argument while writing his PhD dissertation; Habermas states that the argument has two requirements for the historical facts that are used. The first argument is that “Each must be confirmed by several strong and independent arguments,” additionally, “the vast majority of even critical scholars must recognize the occurrence’s historical nature” (Habermas, 2017). The following, published by Habermas (2017), is the summary of his minimal facts argument:

The half-dozen facts we usually use are these: 1) that Jesus died by crucifixion; 2) that very soon afterwards, his followers had real experiences that they thought were actual appearances of the risen Jesus; 3) that their lives were transformed as a result, even to the point of being willing to die specifically for their faith in the resurrection message; 4) that these things were taught very early, soon after the crucifixion; 5) that James, Jesus’ unbelieving brother, became a Christian due to his own experience that he thought was the resurrected Christ; and 6) that the
Christian persecutor Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) also became a believer after a similar experience.

At the very least, a simple conclusion can be drawn from these minimal facts that are agreed upon by the majority of modern scholars – something significant occurred in the events that led to the spread of Christianity. Were these facts due to a misrepresentation of reality, a fabrication of history, or could these have been the result of a legitimate, significant event in human history?

Whether a magnificently designed plan to depict a resurrected Jesus and obtain a massive following that would last over 2000 years, or a legitimate risen Jesus, these minimal facts point to some significant event that caused the early Christians to believe the resurrection was true. Of Jesus’ closest followers who shared in much of his last years, four were crucified, one beheaded, one boiled in oil, one hanged, one stabbed, one speared, and one stoned (Barrett, D. B., & Johnson, T. M, 2001).

**What Does It All Hinge On?**

Both the underlying assumption of postmodernism (that Truth cannot or may not be known) and of Judeo-Christianity (that there is a narrative Truth that roots humanity to an overarching story) can be seen as reasonable worldviews. Both worldviews attempt to accurately depict reality, answering life’s central questions: “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?”, “Is there a God?”, and “What is my Purpose in it all?” Perhaps the words of one of the most influential believers and followers of Jesus becomes relevant. Here Paul, the author of several of the letters in the New Testament, while writing to believers in Corinth (In 1 Corinthians 15:14,17) points out the magnitude of the claim of Jesus’ resurrection:
“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain…. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.” (ESV Study Bible, 2016, p. 2214)

Paul directly states that if Jesus did not historically rise from the dead, then his preaching and faith were in vain. Here, to interchange and paraphrase Paul’s words for the modern twenty-first century reader: “If Christ has not been raised, then our pursuit of an over-arching Truth is in vain, and if Christ has not been raised, then perhaps the postmodern worldview is accurately – reality.” It is as if Paul truly believed that Jesus had risen – as if he knew how clearly the argument hinged on one Truth-claim.

Concluding Thoughts: What is at Stake

The brilliant dance that culture is engaged in – that of the balancing act between objectivity and relativism – collectively termed postmodernism, leaves humanity with consideration needing to be well-thought out. “Where is humanity at, where is humanity going, and is there a need for an over-arching Truth?” Postmodernismushers in a reality in which humanity, on an individual level holds to personal Truths but collectively dismantles and denies any attempt at a unified, over-arching Truth. These questions become increasingly prevalent as one looks in hindsight at the brevity of time in which this thinking has existed within human history.

If postmodernism is accurately reality, then there likely is no rootedness within humanity – no compass on a vast sea of personal Truths in which to guide humanity toward any over-arching purpose or story. If an accurate reality, the human longing to find answers to life’s pressing questions remains unanswered. If humanity in fact longs for answers to these questions and to provide understanding amidst the search for significance and purpose, then the answer of
postmodernity is that these longings will not be met. If an accurate reality, constructs such as religion – and other attempts to answer the intricate questions within the heart of humanity – become recognized as humanity’s desire to find hope in a reality that extends beyond the brevity of human life. If there is Truly no rootedness, no direction or fixed reference point in which humanity is headed, and no over-arching story to which the human experience is connected, then the postmodern reality is perhaps the best answer, for now, to humanity’s longings.

If Judeo-Christianity is accurately reality – if it is True, then the questions at the core of all of humanity begin to find answers outside of personal Truth – and ultimately despair. If an accurate reality, there is an ultimate reason for life – both significance and purpose can be found. If an accurate reality, there is an ultimate identity that exists – security and belonging become reality. If an accurate reality, hope extends expansively in all directions. If Judeo-Christianity is accurately reality – if the resurrection of Jesus was historical – the reasonable assumptions that lead up to the hinging point of Jesus death and resurrection become the pillars that support a sound faith, rather than the false hopes that maintain a sure ruin.

“If True, we’re part of a larger story, one that is headed towards an indescribably great ending, which is only really a beginning” (LaHaie, 2018).
Appendix A

**Modernism**

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**Postmodernism**

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(Slick, M.)
References


