

Postmodernism and the hermeneutical challenge: some theological reflections

G J Pillay*

(University of Otago, New Zealand)

ABSTRACT

How can one achieve the critical tension between contextual relevance in a post-modern world and “responsibility before history”? What is the justification for theological method as critical reflection within a tradition? What is the relation between ground texts that have historical authority (Scripture), the informing tradition of interpretation of these texts (Church History), and the interpretive communities that read them (context)? Raising these questions, the article argues that for all its useful insights, postmodernism fundamentally challenges theological (and historical) reflection. Theology has always contextualised itself ever since its origins. What is different in this encounter is that we are dealing with an intractable ideology that not only undercuts the fundamentals but disallows the “long view” (the informing and continually renewing tradition) and the communicativeness of theology (proclamation).

1 THE POSTMODERN QUESTION

Toynbee¹ was probably among the first to use the term “postmodern” which has since passed into common currency to describe what has been termed by some a new “paradigm” in intellectual and cultural history. It has become a description of our changed times at the edge of a new millennium. Postmodernity describes a general disenchantment with “modernism”, the predominant western intellectual tradition since the Enlightenment which scholars have referred to as “the enlightenment project” - the intellectual and cultural movement that revolutionized western life and society sweeping aside the medieval and its concomitant cosmology and way of life. It was inaugurated by the new science and philosophy that followed in the wake of rationalism and empiricism which marginalized arbitrary ecclesiastical and secular powers in the process.

*Honorary Professor in the Department of Church History, University of Pretoria.

Characteristically the world of the Enlightenment assumed an inherent rationality and harmony in society and an implicit belief in the potential for unending progress. The Renaissance, the Reformation, the political revolution in France, the industrial revolution, the emergence of modern European states and mass urban societies contributed as much to the confidence of the age as did the revolutions in science and philosophy. This confidence and optimism themselves largely spurred the advances in science and technology and the pervasive functionalism that shaped the new age.

Postmodernity ostensibly symbolises the disenchantment with this confidence and optimism. How could this confidence be sustained after the disastrous World Wars, the Holocaust and the fragmentation of the colonial empires of Europe that gave at least the semblance of control and domination at the turn of this century? Half way through this century the optimism had largely dissipated. Self doubt and an anti-authoritarian, even anti-conventionalist, mood replaced the triumphalism of western expansionism and cultural imperialism of the previous century.

It should be remembered that postmodernists in our times have not been the only voices raised against this triumphalism. The Enlightenment always included alongside it a counter movement which expressed scepticism about the pervasive secularization, capitalism, modern economic individualism and the monopoly of science; not just Romanticism but Freud's uncovering of the irrational in human behaviour, or Marx's critique of the repression that accompanies apparent economic progress or Kierkegaard's elucidation of the discontinuity between reason and faith are all illustrative of the critiques levelled against modernity in the last century. Habermas reminds us of what he terms "the counter discourse" in modernity itself among whom he lists Schlegel, Schiller, Fichte, the young Hegelians and Nietzsche who criticized the Cartesian and later, Kantian, notion of the "rational subject". Using the tools of the Enlightenment, they hoped to revise the Enlightenment².

One should be cautious, however, about generalising about postmodernity as, indeed, one should about modernity. Postmodernity embodies such a range of opinion and fields of enquiry. Its exponents differ much among themselves and disagree often. It is not a "school of thought" that lends itself to easy definition. Yet it both mirrors and informs the intellectual and cultural work of our times. It is not merely a critique of modernity, but constitutes a new intellectual outlook. Leslie Fielder, for example, describes the popular culture of our times as a "celebration of the immediacy of pleasure" that is opposed to the elitism of the hierarchical,

authoritarian and contemplative modern world³. The opposition between modernism and postmodernism, says Ihab Hassen, is the opposition between authority and anarchy with the latter admitting an indeterminacy into every sphere of human “discourse in the west”⁴. This ubiquitous indeterminacy implies for Hassen “deconstruction, fragmentation and revolt - in fact to everything anti-systematic”. These thoughts are echoed by Ernesto Laclau in his essay *Politics and the limits of modernism*. He writes, “Postmodernism exposes the abyss that exists between lived reality and the conceptual grasp of the real thus ‘weakening the absolutist pretensions of the latter’”⁵.

Postmodernism is also not merely a new cultural dispensation. It signifies something more fundamental. It is a bent of mind representing a radically different view of the world, human society and reality, in so far as one can still speak of it. Postmodernist thinkers such as Sigmund Bauman argue that we are not dealing here with “a cultural phase”. Postmodernism undermines basic concepts that modernity took for granted such as nation state, progress, order and rationality. Disorder, plurality, variableness and indeterminacy are the preferred descriptions of the postmodern condition. In fact, it eschews culture itself as elitist and is self-conscious about the relativism it assumes. Bauman writes:

“For well nigh three centuries relativism was the *malin genie* of European philosophy, and anybody suspected of not fortifying his doctrine against it tightly enough was brought to book and forced to defend himself against charges, the horrifying nature of which no one put in doubt. Now the tables have been turned - and the seekers of universal standards are asked to prove the criminal nature of relativism, and clear themselves of the charges of dogmatism, ethnocentrism, intellectual imperialism or whatever else their work may seem to imply when gazed upon from their relativist position”⁶.

Jean Baudrillard, describes postmodernity as “a new culture” determined *inter alia* by the transformation of the social reality through the “image” in what he calls the “ecstasy of communication”⁷. The pervasive simulation of the media, for example, has created a “hyper-reality”, a surrogate reality obscuring the original and therefore eliminating the possibility of assessing this reality against the original. The fact of this hyper-reality, unprecedented before the emergence of the contemporary “visual culture”, has far reaching implications for politics, society and history, a point to which I shall return. Baudrillard in his *Illusion of the End* therefore writes,

“...there is an affinity between the immanence of poetic development and the immanence of the chaotic development which is ours today, the unfolding of events which are themselves also without meaning and consequences and in which - with effects substituting themselves for causes - there are no longer any causes, but only effects. The world is there, *effectively*. There is no reason for this, and God is dead⁸”. Bauman concurs: “Postmodernism braces itself for a life without truths, standards or ideals... Deconstruction is the only construction it recognises⁹”. This view, it is asserted, prepares the ground for freedom from any overall “structure of domination” and, in the absence of any possibility of norms, for an “armistice between values”¹⁰.

Jean Francois Lyotard describes a similar outlook from the vantage point of linguistic theory especially in his denunciation of what he terms the “meta-narrative”. We have come to the end of the claims of theory building and notions of progress in history validated by reason, he claims, and we have now arrived at a comprehensive “distrust of meta-narratives”:

“I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a meta-discourse... such as the dialectics of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth... Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward meta-narratives”¹¹.

Meta-narratives served to unify and make coherent the “totality of the historical experience of modernity... within the project of global, human emancipation”¹². But the very attempts at establishing historical coherency at the same time legitimate the social order. Lyotard maintains that the “heterogenous language games” of the different disciplines cannot be grasped by one coherent “narrative”. Instead of seeking a coherent rationalisation of the whole, what he refers to as “a certain position in the Encyclopaedia recounted by speculative discourse”, he claims that the distinctive character of postmodernism is that it is essentially “subversive and disruptive”¹³.

The eschewing of meta-narrative is a consequence of the postmodern assumption “that the structure of language radically determines the human social subject”¹⁴. The subject is a linguistic entity and never actually encounters uninterpreted data. The meaning of object is already embedded in language, a differential network, and therefore there is “no transcendental signified, no origin, no centre because the process of signification is infinite”¹⁵.

2 TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

The theological responses to postmodernism have been as wide ranging as they have been diverse. They have ranged from extreme caution and scepticism to wild enthusiasm. The antagonists hold that Christian theology is fundamentally incompatible with postmodernism while the protagonists extol the new intellectual and social mood as the harbinger of opportunities for renewed theological creativity. David Wells, in his *No place for truth*¹⁶ 1993 argues that postmodernism is a recent form of the continuing “anti-modernism” that began 100 years ago. For Thomas Oden¹⁷ it is a form of “ultra-modernism” since it takes the scepticism of modernism to the extreme. Oden, nevertheless, sees in this new scepticism an opportunity for the resuscitation of the classical Christianity which preceded modern cultural forms of Christian thought that emerged since the 16th century. Others like Stanley Grenz¹⁸ point to the vulnerability of the modernist faith in the certainty that Reason can bring; of the belief in the dispassionate participant elevated above history or at least outside it; and in the optimism about the liberating power of science and education. Some theologians argue that the post-rationalist and post-individualist context creates more room for religion or, at least, for an interest in spirituality, an idea that seems more palatable now than faith or religion itself¹⁹.

A theological commentator who has had much to say about theology and the changed “paradigm” of our times is Hans Küng. In his more recent work he has been one among only a few continental theologians who has ventured into this area of the relevance of paradigm change for theological reflection. In his *Theology of the Third Millennium* he describes at length the shift from what he terms “the modern-enlightened to the postmodern paradigm”. He writes, “Since the total cultural upheaval in connection with the two World Wars writers have been continually diagnosing the ‘end of modern times’ (Romano Guardini) and the new ‘spiritual situation of the age’ (Karl Jaspers), and unless all the signs are deceptive, we are as a matter of fact in the middle of the transition from the modern to a postmodern paradigm...”²⁰. He continues, “The great god of modernity, called ‘progress’, has been unmasked by many as a false god, and the cry for the true God has again grown loud, and not only in Christianity”²¹.

Küng’s quest for a theology that will make sense in this age goes back to his inaugural lecture of 1960 which became the basis of his extensive volume *Does God Exist?* of 1978. His theological quest was how to transcend the medieval- Neo-Scholasticism that still influences so much of Catholic thought (faith over reason), the dichotomies of Reformed Protes-

tantism (faith *versus* reason) and the so-called “enlightened modernity” (reason *versus* faith)²². Seeking a critical ecumenical theology, in his *On being Christian* (1974), he describes what constitutes a meaningful theology “in the postmodern paradigm” and attempted to understand Christianity in its new pluralistic global context in *Christianity and World Religions* (1984).

In the list of distinguishing features that Küng maintains this theology for a postmodern time must have (and there are at least 10) are the following two:

(i) “The *norma normans* of any Christian theology cannot, once again, be any churchly or theological tradition or institution, but only the Gospel, the original Christian message itself; a theology everywhere oriented to the historic-critically analysed facts of the Bible”.

(ii) “We should speak neither in biblical archaisms and Hellenistic-scholastic dogmatic pronouncements, nor in fashionable philosophical-theological jargon, but in language intelligible to today’s men and women; and no effort should be spared to achieve this”²³.

It is noteworthy that Küng does not even remotely call himself a postmodernist though he accepts that a theology for the post modern age is indispensable and proceeds to describe the contours of such a theology in the terms I have described. For our purposes it is noteworthy that while he jettisons the possibility of either traditionalism or fadism which makes “any churchly or theological tradition” the *norma normans* of theology, he also insists that while being “contemporary, passionately addressing the issues of the present” theology must remain “always responsible in the face of history”; “Christocentric”, but at the same time “oriented toward the ‘ecumene’, the whole “inhabited globe”. Now here is the crucial difficulty!

This postmodernist description of the world functions with a notion of “the decentred person” and the elimination of the possibility of “metanarrative”. The great intellectual systems whether political, ideological, religious, cultural or scientific had always presupposed certain foundations - rationality, empirical observation, God, economics, class-structure etcetera. Romanticism too, although it had criticised the Enlightenment, replaced Reason with Imagination. But postmodernism denies the universal as an abstraction and rejects the metanarrative - “large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application”²⁴. It is as one writer puts it “a world-view that denies all world-views”²⁵. The possibility that

knowledge reflects truth and may have a “stable foundation in history or reason or God is consciously and deliberately denied”²⁶.

How then can one achieve the critical tension between contextual relevance in a post-modern world and (in K ung’s words) “responsibility before history”? What is the justification for theological method as critical reflection within an influential and global tradition such as Christianity or any other religious tradition for that matter? What is the relation between ground texts that have historical authority, the informing tradition of interpretation of these texts, and the contexts and interpretive communities that read them? - And, more than that, seek intellectual and moral sustenance from them? These questions bring to the fore the problem of historicity of understanding and, more particularly, the hermeneutics of biblical and church historical texts within theological reflection.

3 THE HERMENEUTICAL CHALLENGE

The universality of the textual nature of reflection and even social existence is not in question here. For human beings may easily be caricatured as text creating creatures. Cultural artifacts are texts; the world is a text. We are in postmodern terms “in the prison house of language”. Much has been made of Derrida’s now well known phrase “There is nothing outside the text”, but as Mark Poster states in his positive appraisal of postmodern thinkers for the purposes of writing cultural history, this phrase does “not postulate some ideal immanence”²⁷.

On the face of it, much can be gained by its “hermeneutic of suspicion” which through a process of deconstruction encourages the “subversion of the text” by “interrogating” it in order to expose the power relations that underlie the text. Where these interrogations help uncover social and cultural biases and indeed recover muted voices in history they are useful and indispensable intellectual devices.

However, this interpretative programme rides on a range of other ideological presuppositions that place in jeopardy the easy alliances that can be made with postmodernism; for example, the overstatement of this approach that claims not that biases are inherent in the informing tradition and that the range of sources has to be constantly enriched to overcome the biases, but that all the classical texts (the best that has been thought by both men and women in the past) are “privileged texts” which “codify and justify racism, imperialism, sexual repression, sexism” and such like. It follows then that there can be no possibility of an authoritative text or any informing tradition. The “interrogation of the text” is less like insightful

dialogue and more like a stacked inquisition. The “subverting” is less like establishing inherited proclivities and more like sabotage.

The basis for theological reflection is fundamentally questioned. In trying to ensure that endemic biases are addressed and the critical historical quest remains dynamic and in trying to ensure that there is no relapse into authoritarianism, absolutism and traditionalism, the necessary and sufficient ingredients for ongoing, critical historiography are diminished if not removed, namely, critical reflection, a basis for textual and cultural critique and of self-criticism.

The best of the hermeneutical tradition, epitomised in Gadamer’s work, has been illuminating in its description of the process and complexity of the encounter between text and interpreter. There is no scope here to delve deeply into the hermeneutical tradition or even into the work of Gadamer himself. One can here only point to some key insights.

In Gadamer’s terms, through hermeneutics “the art of understanding”, the “prudence of judgement”, is brought to self reflection; a “natural human capacity” is “cultivated” and brought to “theoretically heightened awareness”. In this period of modernity our experience of history and tradition is one of “fundamental alienation”, the effect of which is that “Every renewed encounter with an older tradition now is no longer a simple matter of appropriation that un-self-consciously adds what is proper to itself even as it assimilates what is old; rather, tradition has to cross the abyss of historical consciousness”²⁸. We are historical subjects and knowledge of and from the past is historically mediated. Hence, “As soon as one acknowledges that one’s own perspective is utterly different from the viewpoints of the authors and the meanings of the texts of the past, there arises the need for a unique effort to avoid misunderstanding the old texts and yet to comprehend them in their persuasive force”²⁹.

Gadamer’s purpose, as he states it in *Truth and Method*, is “... not to offer a general theory of interpretation and a differential account of its methods ... but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never subjective behaviour towards a given ‘object’, but towards its effective history - the history of its influence; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood”³⁰. Gadamer’s explanation of what is involved in the understanding a work of art is useful to illustrate what is involved in theological reflection itself. In his critique of the modern aesthetic consciousness, he points out that modern attempts to understand a work of art - to bring it within rational grasp - seem never quite to succeed because a really great work of art opens up a world to us. The reason for the failure is that the

aesthetic consciousness, influenced by a Cartesian conception of knowledge, is grounded on subjective self-certainty. Art is received into aesthetic consciousness as if into an empty consciousness. The only experience available to the experiencing subject is the immediacy of pure sensuous form. If we can only apprehend the work of art as an object the aesthetic encounter is an immediate, discrete experience, independent of and separated from content, time and history. But our experience of a great work of art is that it confronts us as a world opening up - not merely as sense perception, but as knowledge. This knowledge has a material impact on our perception of the world and affects self-understanding. This is what Gadamer means when he says that we put ourselves at risk when we understand³¹.

The encounter with history, tradition or a sacred text is not merely that of an observing or critical subject sitting in judgement over the object under scrutiny, but one of a relationship of mutual encounter. The subject is immediately drawn into confronting the question that called the work of art or historical text into being. A question is being put to the subject by the confrontation with the work of art. Art reveals being. Understanding art does not arise from separate analyses of form and content or from dissecting it into its component parts, "it comes through openness to being, and to hearing the question put to us by the work". Gadamer uses the idea of conversation to illustrate what he referred to as a "fusion of horizons". The interpreter and the text are engaged in a conversation where the two mutually question each other. The text is mute until it is "brought to speech first by the questions of the interpreter"³².

Like the postmodernists, Gadamer emphasises the "linguisticity" of the human world which is the medium for understanding³³. He writes, "The intrinsically linguistic condition of all our understanding implies that the vague representations of meaning that bear us along get brought word by word to articulation and so become communicable. The communality of all understanding as grounded in its intrinsically linguistic quality seems to me to be an essential point in hermeneutical experience. We are continually shaping a common perspective when we speak a common language and so are active participants in the communality of the world"³⁴.

It is this "the communality of all understanding as grounded in its intrinsically linguistic quality"³⁵ that is fundamental for both historical and theological reflection. For the meaning of a work of art (*die Sache selbst*) to be fully revealed we have to transcend the subject/object schema. We have to place ourselves within a horizon of questioning that allows art to address us as well.

The Enlightenment aimed to rid the rational observer of all prejudices. Gadamer argues that not only is this impossible, these very “prejudices” make understanding and interpretation possible. We cannot rid ourselves of prejudgements even if we may wish to. We stand, reason, think and live in a tradition and this tradition bequeaths to us our prejudices. Hence, reason and tradition do not stand in opposition to each other. Yet it is these prejudgements, “effective-historical consciousness”, which open up the possibilities for interpretation and are themselves refined in the interpretative process. He argues that “the self-interpretation of the individual is only a flicker in the closed stream of historical life. For this reason the prejudgements of the individual are more than merely his being”³⁶.

Understanding, therefore, is not a private experience of the subjective consciousness. It can only be possible within an interpretive process when one is addressed by a text or a work of art. It is “an event”. The alienation of the text is overcome by bridging the historical distance that separates the interpreter from the text³⁷. This bridge is understanding itself and comes through a dialogical encounter between the text as the tradition we seek to understand, and our hermeneutical situation. Because the text can only be read in our situation and from within our horizon what we seek to accomplish, is to achieve a fusion of horizons. The aim is to situate our horizon within a larger horizon; to open ourselves to the claim to truth that works of art, texts, and traditions make upon us; to allow them to “speak to us”.

This openness to be addressed by tradition, the openness to hear, is the basis of effective historical consciousness. Effective historical consciousness describes a relation to history where the text is never wholly alien and the present never uncritically assumed to be correct. The present is never placed outside the bounds of challenge and the interpreter is never immune from risk³⁸.

4 A THEOLOGY RESPONSIBLE BEFORE HISTORY

It is all well and good to attempt to interrogate the text, but postmodern options leaves the interpreter relatively unexamined. Historical hermeneutics takes seriously the possibility that knowledge in the human sciences is mediated through history and language and that the interpreter (the subject) is part and parcel of the interpretive process. On the one hand, the “objective detachment” of modernity is abandoned as an idealism; on the other hand, there is the creation of the individual or group or ideologically contrived interpreting community whose interpretation is hermeneutically

sealed from the critical encounter with other interpretations on the grounds that all perspectives are valid in the absence of a universal, informing norm. This is not even interpretative anarchy which could be defended as anyone's right to their own opinion or, in religious language, "unbelief". While quite understandably debunking the tyranny of tradition or authoritarianism or cultural imperialism, a new tyranny is admitted through the back door; Namely, the belief that the group's view is inviolate and incontrovertible and that it is absolved from public or catholic responsibility. In the end it is self-serving. Daphne Patai in expressing her impatience with a form of this new type of "self-reflexivity" calls this a "nouveau solipsism"³⁹.

Postmodernist scholars have shown how knowledge about the past may well be distorted by a range of power relations and authoritarianisms but the ongoing work of the historian is in fact the uncovering of these distortions and the pursuit of understanding. The case that debunks absolutism does not necessarily also debunk the possibility of historical understanding. This view is not merely limited to modern societies, but is taken for granted by traditional societies as well who have not gone through anything like the intellectual fracturing of the Enlightenment. The Zulu, for example, in venerating the ancestors assumes a fundamental historical continuity that gives meaning to life and society. It will be a new form of cultural imperialism that trivializes that frame of reference as "a totalizing discourse" or an idealistic "metaphysic of the present".

What are the safeguards? Within theological reflection the ongoing hermeneutical process that involves Scripture, the history of the interpretation of Scripture and the context and life-world in which Scripture must be read, the distortions and insights of a time are unendingly brought under scrutiny. As the sources we reflect on are enriched by a range of perspectives new understanding emerges. Often the new questions which a new context or time puts to the texts provide the interpretive process with its richest insights which are indispensable for meaning and coherency.

The act of reading and interpreting Scripture, creed or the historical heritage of the Christian message is an act of encounter between the interpreter and the texts out of which not only the past is judged, but the pre-judgements of the interpreter are refined. This is what in hermeneutical terms is referred to as the "mutual challenge" and without it there is no way of distinguishing history from propaganda. It is in this open and ongoing encounter that we term "hermeneutics" that the distortions of *a priori* ideological readings of history can be minimized since none of these perspectives can escape the critical encounter with other "readings". To

legitimate each reading as an end in itself endangers the historical conversation between the authoritative texts that shape and inform the Christian tradition and the unending innovation that proclamation brings. It bears a resemblance to what fundamentalists and traditionalists do when they lock meaning in the past or making a past moment more hallowed than the present. In both instances the interpretative process is equally endangered.

There are of course conscious attempts made to bring “the marginal to the centre” and to rewrite histories in favour of the excluded and powerless victims. These attempts serve as important correctives to biases that exist in previous writings. If these are indeed seen as correctives, limited in their own way, whereby contributions of different perspectives enrich the fabric of the informing story, then they are imperatives for the interpretive process.

The vindication of theological reflection as critical reflection within an informing tradition in many ways is not dissimilar to the vindication of historical judgement in general; it is the process whereby understanding (*Verstehen*) and insight are gained through critical encounter with tradition.

Christian reflection tests its legitimacy by ensuring its apostolic and catholic nature. The “apostolic” is its historical bond to a formative and defining historical moment which cannot be reproduced and which has laid the basis for this particular understanding of human meaning and purpose. No matter how wide ranging the social experience may extend or the contingencies wherein theological reflection takes place, making this apostolic tradition accessible is what distinguishes it from other perceptions of meaning in the marketplace of human discourse. Postmodernism undermines this task and this responsibility through its “critical deconstruction of tradition... a critique of origin, not a return to them”⁴⁰. Baudrillard in *Illusion of the End* is fully aware of this implication. He writes, “If nothing exists now but effects, we are in a state of illusion. If the effect is in the cause or the beginning in the end, then the catastrophe is behind us... We are free of the Last Judgement”⁴¹. Cut adrift from the apostolic witness on what is Christian eschatology and hope to be based?

“Catholicity” is the second necessary safeguard against theological method lapsing into the parochial. What is termed “contextual theology” is the intellectual response to cultural, social and intellectual change and renewal. It is not apologetics but the attempt to place the context at the heart of reflection so that dogmatic theology does not remain mainly historical theology or a catalogue, however sophisticated, of received dogma. It covers, at least in part, what Pope John Paul II in his *Fides et Ratio* calls “fundamental theology”. Having said this, however, contextual theology is

in service to and is part and parcel of the whole theological interpretative process. While it is true that for a theology to be catholic, it has to be conceptualised everywhere; it is equally true that any legitimate conceptualisation has to be catholic. Catholicity ensures the communicativeness of theology by placing all insights into Scripture at the service of the whole Church without which ecumenical theology is impossible. Remove this condition then all is believable.

For all its useful insights, postmodernism fundamentally challenges theological (and historical) reflection. Intellectual responses to a “post-modern age”, however we may define it, or creative thought and practice in this changed intellectual landscape are not in question here. We may say that theology has always contextualised itself in this way ever since its origins; in its development through Mediterranean culture, medieval Latin culture or Byzantine Greek culture, or through Renaissance and Reformation, and for the last 250 years through what has been called “modern culture”. And, it should be added, these contextualisations were often not the preoccupations of academic detachment, but were accompanied by struggle, suffering and even martyrdom. The attempts at adaptation to postmodern culture are already numerous. What is different in this encounter is that we are dealing with an intractable ideology that not only undercuts the fundamentals but disallows the “long view”: the informing and continually renewing tradition.

NOTES:

- 1 A Toynbee, *A Study of History* (vols 7-10), London 1954.
- 2 J Habermas, *The Philosophical discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* Cambridge 1987, 302.
- 3 L Fiedler, *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler* (Volume 2), New York 1971, 461.
- 4 I Hassan, “The Culture of Postmodernism” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2/3 (1985), 126.
- 5 E Laclau, “Politics and the limits of Modernity” in: T Docherty (ed), *Postmodernism A Reader*, London 1993, 335.
- 6 S Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London 1992, 104.
- 7 J Baudrillard, “Modernity”, *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 11/3 (1987), 69.
- 8 J Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, Cambridge 1994, 121.
- 9 Bauman, *op cit*, ix.
- 10 *Ibid*, 24.
- 11 J F Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester 1984, xxiii-xxiv.
- 12 *Ibid*, 35.

- 13 J F Lyotard, "The post-modern condition: A Report on knowledge" in: Cahoon, L E (ed), *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1996.
- 14 Nirmala and G J Pillay Seminar (unpublished) "Postmodernism: the hermeneutical challenge", Otago 1999, 3.
- 15 I am indebted to Nirmala Pillay for use of her insightful essay (unpublished) on "Liberalism and the postmodernist critique".
- 16 D Wells, *No place for truth, Whatever happened to Evangelical theology?* Grand Rapids, 1993.
- 17 T C Oden, *After Modernity... What? Agenda for theology* Grand Rapids, 1990.
- 18 S J Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grand Rapids, 1996.
- 19 Refer, for example, to J R Middleton and B J Walsh *Truth is stranger than it used to be: Biblical faith in a Postmodern Age*, Downers grove, 1995.
- 20 Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium. An Ecumenical View*, New York 1988, 198.
- 21 *Ibid*, 199.
- 22 *Ibid*, 201.
- 23 *Ibid*, 205.
- 24 D Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford 1989, 9.
- 25 G E Veith, *Postmodern Times* Crossway Ill, Wheaton 1994.
- 26 P Waugh (ed), *Postmodern Reader*, London 1992, 6.
- 27 M Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity*, New York 1997, 43.
- 28 *Ibid*, 328.
- 29 *Ibid*, 329.
- 30 *Ibid*, xix.
- 31 N Pillay, *The Hermeneutics of H-G Gadamer*, Unpublished manuscript commissioned for the Methodology Project (HSRC), Pretoria 1998, 13-14.
- 32 H-G Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York 1989, 337.
- 33 In the last two decades he has broadened his view to include ritual and ceremony. In his latest collection of essays on the significance of the beautiful Gadamer ponders our capacity to understand non-speech (but meaningful action) events. This is very significant for understanding in anthropology and for deciphering all symbolic manifestations in the past and in the present. N Pillay, *op cit*, 1998, 14.
- 34 H-G Gadamer, *op cit*, 1989, 336.
- 35 *Ibid*, 336.
- 36 *Ibid*, 261.
- 37 *Ibid*, 295.
- 38 N Pillay, *op cit*, 1998, 19-20.
- 39 "Sick and Tired of Scholars" Nouveau Solipsism' in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* February 23, 1994, A52 I have, out of considerations not ventured into the literature critical of other aspects of postmodernist thought. The following represent some key examples: See C Calhoun "Culture, History and the Problem of Specificity in Social Theory" in: S Seidman and D G Wagner (eds), *Postmodernism and Social Theory. The Debate over General Theory*, Oxford 1992; T Eagleton *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford 1996; E Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, London 1992; M J Sandel (ed),

Liberalism and its critics, New York 1984; C Taylor, "Two theories of Modernity", *Hastings Centre Report* 25/2 (1995), 24.

40 Refer to H Foster (ed), *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-modernist culture* Port Townsend 1983.

41 J Baudrillard, *op cit*, 1994, 121. Foucault in his *Archeology of Knowledge* defines post-structuralist analysis as questioning all "teleology and totalisations" purging all "anthropologisms", decentering self and deconstructing the historical world.