Secular & Theory
Religious Faith

How to Think Christian in a Postmodern Society

By Daniel Reynaud

Introduction: The Need for an Adventist Understanding

Scientific advances in astronomy during and after the Renaissance led to radical changes in the way people understood the universe and the place of our world in it. The shift involved more than going from a flat-earth model to one that placed a globe on the edges of the universe. It also signified a major theological shift, one that was contested at the time by entrenched power groups within the Church as being fundamentally opposed to Scripture. Such opposition was not warranted, and it soon became evident that these secular theories did not contradict faith. Quite the opposite: they enhanced our understanding of the nature of the conflict in the universe. The change demonstrated that Christianity could be positively affected by advances in secular learning.

A similar situation exists today with postmodernism's impact on Christian faith. While postmodernism is

fading as a cutting-edge academic ideology, its impact on our society and culture will long remain. In particular, its tolerant relativism has permeated the media and become part of our value system, fostering for example the development of multiculturalism and the religious toleration that is a feature of Western society. While young Adventists who have grown up in a postmodern society are comfortable with a postmodern faith, older generations of Seventh-day Adventists find aspects of postmodernism quite threatening.

These issues were highlighted for me when I began postgraduate studies in media at a secular university, at the same time I began to investigate the practical implications of contemporary literary theory for teaching English. It became clear to me very quickly that aspects of postmodernism were undeniably true, but they conflicted with aspects of my Adventist upbringing. This posed a radical and threatening challenge: how much of my faith was valid? Shortly after, I met one of my former students, a brilliant scholar whose faith was in tatters after several years studying linguistics and modern literary theory at the university. Her schizophrenic talk about contemporary theory and faith juxtaposed incompatible dogmas of Adventist faith alongside the freethinking attitudes of postmodernism. She was a very confused and cynical young lady, trapped between simple faith in her heart and sophisticated doubt in her head. Seeing her dilemma, and facing one of my own, I began to research a practical answer to the problems I faced.

It is an issue that has attracted much attention of late in Christian circles, with a variety of responses. Some liberal theologians have adopted postmodernism almost entirely, creating a radically altered faith that treats the Bible as merely a culture-biased text from which modern thinkers can create their own paradigms of belief.[1] I find this unacceptable, replacing a God-centered and revealed faith with one of human invention, and all too often human convenience. Other Christian responses are characterized by a defensive and fearful tone that is too ready to criticize the new without giving enough consideration as to whether recent secular ideas have anything to reveal. But it is not secularism or other religions per se that we should fear, for virtually no philosophy without a grain of truth has gained currency. And, as Christians have long recognized, all truth is God's truth, even when it comes wrapped in secular philosophies complete with human mistakes. It would be reckless and unwise of us to discard postmodernism entirely without giving it a fair hearing, lest we discard some gems with the dross.

Whereas some Christian books dealing with these issues have very useful points of view, they are often still overly afraid of postmodernism, defensive about issues that they need not be, and frequently fail to acknowledge ways in which postmodernism can provide useful insights for the Christian. One example is *The Death of Truth*, in which writer after writer mixes valid criticism with unnecessary attacks on postmodernist ideas that have a certain truth of their own. The chapter titled "Evangelical Imperatives" is perhaps the most balanced.[2]

Yet the impact of contemporary theories need not be negative. Indeed, they are often valuable to the Christian, enhancing faith and giving a better understanding of God and his revelation. Christianity has been most effective when it uses compatible contemporary belief as an entry point for its unique claims. A number of Christian commentators have found in postmodernism aspects that have made the gospel more relevant and practical than ever. Valuable discussions are included in such books as *Christian Apologetics and the Postmodern World*, with some excellent material showing how postmodernism can revitalize and energize evangelism,[3] and in *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, with a fruitful exposition on how postmodernism can enrich our understanding of the Bible and uplift Jesus.[4] Literary theory need not pose a threat to Christianity. As more than one critic has noted, literature and literary theory are closely connected with religion, because all are concerned with insight into the human condition and issues of textual interpretation.[5] We would do well to note ways in which literary criticism can enhance our understanding of the Bible.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a Seventh-day Adventist worldview in the light of literary theories and the work of other Christian scholars, with particular reference to the interpretation of the Bible. A glance at the development of literary theory will give a context in which to understand traditional Christian thought and the challenges of literary theory.

Traditional Literary Criticism

It is possible to argue that literary theory has gone through three broad phases of development, each with its particular characteristics and implications.[6] The oldest school of literary thought is the traditional author-centered approach. It argues that because the author generated the meaning of the text, the meaning resides in the author. Its approach is to study the

author's life for clues about the meaning of the text. The author wrote down (universal) truth and the reader's task is to discover the truth.[7]

By adapting the language of Roland Barthes[8] we can construe the determinant of meaning as a god-like figure, the authority on meaning and truth for, after all, whoever determines meaning acts as God for that particular event or text. There is also, in the very real sense of the word, a displacement by recent theories of the centrality of God in defining meaning. The use of the term "God" in this context may be disturbing, but it is meant to be, for the various literary theories have profound implications for our understanding of God, inspiration, and the Bible. The traditional school of literary interpretation could be summarized like this:

Author is God

This school of thought has a long Christian tradition, felt to this day in Adventist circles. It is the basis of fundamentalist views of the Bible, and usually accompanies a belief in verbal inspiration. Many have felt most comfortable with it, conforming best with the idea that God is the author of the Bible. Under this theory, the Christian's task is simply to read what the Bible says, and then to accept that as God's word, true, universal, and unchangeable. The attraction of such a position lies in its simplicity, in assuming that the Bible is transparent. It also reflects the anti-intellectualism common to the English nonconformist tradition (to which Adventism in part belongs) in its insistence on the ability of the common person to understand the Bible without special training.

The strength of this position is in recognizing the divine inspiration of the Bible, and in affirming the right of the individual to read and interpret it. For the most part, this holds true. Many parts of the Bible are transparent in their meaning and can be understood by the ordinary reader. But a major problem is that the Bible can be, and is, interpreted differently by various groups, with each claiming it is right, that it has *the* Truth. Each group naturally says it is merely passing on God's view. However, even the most literal interpreter has some parts of the Bible that he or she does not interpret literally. Whether it is the abandonment of the Levitical code, or a reconciliation of the many surface contradictions in the Bible, or an attempt to annul the Pauline restrictions on women in church, it must be done. Fundamentalists of course provide some justification for reinterpreting these passages, but the fact remains that they feel obliged to explain away the apparently transparent meaning. In doing so they transgress their own code for understanding the Word of God.

This dilemma has always dogged traditional Christian Biblical interpretation. It stems, of course, from a mistaken belief in verbal inspiration, a view that many Adventists hold despite the church's early declaration affirming inspiration of thoughts rather than words. That Ellen G. White and her son W. C. White further denied verbal inspiration of either her writings or of the Bible seems to have escaped many Adventists.[9] The dilemma is further compounded by a failure to recognize the part played by the human authors of the Bible, who phrased the inspired ideas they received from God within the language and cultural context of their day, a fact more easily understood through textual approaches to the Bible.

Textual Approaches

The second school of literary criticism said that meaning was best understood not in the life of the author, but in the text itself and its context. Subdivided into Formalists, Structuralists, Semioticians, and Marxists, some textual critics even argued that regardless of who the individual author was, meaning was generated by larger and deeper structures that underpinned human existence. They studied the characteristic qualities of tales and the social conditions that produced them, noting that regardless of author, stories shared common underlying structural features.[10]

This school could be summarized like this:

Text is God

The textual school of thought has helped reveal the human dimension in the creation of the Bible, unraveling various sources from which the existing text of, for example, the Pentateuch was compiled, and identifying the literary genres within which biblical writers worked. This school's findings are widely accepted in Christian academic circles. Valuable as it is though, it poses some problems for traditional Christian thought. In finding diverse sources for books, or in suggesting that others are more mythic than historical, it tends to undermine faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible. If indeed the Bible or parts of it have been compiled and edited from myths[11] and oral traditions, not all of them Hebrew in origin, then how can Christians claim it is the Word of God?

The work of scholars such as Walter J. Ong and Jack Goody[12] on the differences between oral and chirographic, or written, cultures sheds some light on this dilemma. Their key findings include the tendency for oral cultures to define meaning contextually through narrative or proverb (as opposed to the abstract definitions of written cultures), to possess an integrated worldview fusing the spiritual and material worlds (where scientific written cultures separate the spheres), and to define the universe mythically (rather than historically and scientifically). In particular, Ong and Goody argue that historical thinking as we understand it is only possible in a written culture, which allows facts to be collected, scrutinized, and queried. They see oral cultures as ones of faith in which beliefs are not questioned, whereas chirographic cultures are marked by scepticism, requiring things to be proved before they are believed. Other scholarship confirms the findings of Ong and Goody, noting that the notion of realism was hazy in the English language until very recently and that the distinction between news and fiction is less than three hundred years old. In fact, the differentiation of the two began with the development of regular newspapers, themselves made possible by the printing press.[13]

A written culture has the potential to categorize information two ways. On one spectrum we can oppose truth and falsehood, and on another distinguish between fact and fiction.

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                  fact
  true ————————————┼———————————— false
                 fiction
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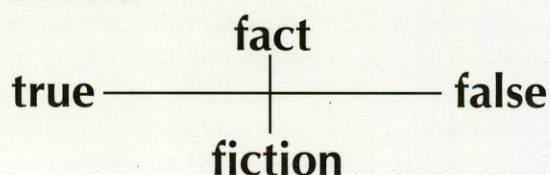
We can identify things that are facts and true, for example the law of gravity. On the other hand we might label Superman a fiction, which is false. Literature provides many examples of fictions that are true, stories that have never literally occurred yet represent truth. One might point to the psychological insights of the works of Tolstoy or Jane Austen as examples. It is also possible to identify facts that are false, things whose existence is a fact, but that represent a moral falsehood. The popularity of racist ideas or of the continuing popular fascination with the dark side of Nazism as exhibited in best-selling books on the SS provides contemporary examples. While the terms "fact," "truth," "fiction," and "false" are not completely separated in written cultures, we can still make these distinctions—ones that have already been made by some Adventist scholars in order to help make sense of other literary

questions, especially over Ellen G. White's attitude toward fiction.[14]

There are some who argue convincingly that the introduction of a fact-fiction axis has been harmful to Christianity. Some Christian scholars have attacked the Western tradition of objectivism, claiming that the obsession with factuality often prevents our engagement with truth on a personal level, and calling for a reintegration of knowledge with faith and obedience. These scholars insist that knowledge of facts without practice is in fact ignorance, for knowledge can never really be separated from truth. Facts do not exist outside of relationship, and true relationship is found in Jesus. Significantly, he claimed to be the Truth, rather than merely having it. If this is so, then facts and knowledge can never be separated from relationship.[15] In effect, these scholars are critical of operating on the fact-fiction axis, calling on Christians to return to the true-false axis alone—a view that, incidentally and ironically, receives much support from postmodernism, which itself is critical of the false objectivity of the Western academic tradition.

It is interesting that oral cultures are not usually concerned about facts as externally verifiable, objective data. The notion of factuality as distinct from truth is hazy, and there is a strong tendency to overlook historicity in favor of myth.[16] In effect, the thinking of these cultures is best characterized by only one axis: the true-false axis. Therefore all true fictions are treated in precisely the same manner as true facts—they are usually indistinguishable; similarly, false facts are treated in the same manner as false fictions. Anything that reveals truth is treated as truthful, whether historical or not. To a written culture this presents a potential problem. We may insist on the historicity of stories originally valued for their truthfulness, imposing on them a dimension not under consideration at the time. But if the stories can be demonstrated to be unfactual, faith in the truthfulness of the collection tends to be seriously damaged.

The Bible, while composed by members of a literate nation and displaying some of the qualities of chirographic thought processes, also bears many of the hallmarks of oral thinking, for the written word was still in very limited circulation at the Bible's creation. In particular, the literature of the Old Testament is colored by the concrete nature of the limited Hebrew vocabulary. Consequently, the Old Testament's dominant literary forms are narrative, proverb, and poetry characteristic of oral literary forms, and the relatively small sections of abstract reasoning and logic tend to be

couched in poetic imagery and narrative forms. The Old Testament is also marked by an integrated worldview in which the gods interact with the human world and cause all natural phenomena. This does not detract from its literary depth or brilliance, for an oral-based literature is in no way inferior to chirographic literature, but it can leave the Bible open to misinterpretation by modern minds, who may decode it according to chirographic rather than oral codes. Recent challenges to the factuality of elements of the Biblical account have disturbed many Christians. Of course, like too many Christians of the Renaissance era, we could rant and rail against heresy in science and scholarship, but we risk embarrassment, not to mention the damage done to God's name, if time shows the challenges to be right.

Alternately, if we keep in mind that the Bible writers were interested in truth, not factuality, then there need be no question over its truthfulness, and the issue ceases to be a problem. Furthermore, neither Ellen G. White nor her son saw the Bible as an absolute authority on history, the Scriptures described in W. C. White's words as having "disagreements and discrepancies." But none of this detracted from the Bible's ability to reveal the way of salvation.[17] Should science or archaeology demonstrate that our belief in the factuality of elements of Bible stories is misplaced, we have lost nothing, and gained a clearer understanding of God's truth. Such has been the case often in the past, when theologians have resisted scientific insight as contradicting the Word, only later to find that there was in fact only a failure on their part to understand the Bible rightly.

When we consider literary genre, the problem recedes even further. A recognition of the imaginative elements in some stories and parables and of the hyperbole characteristic of both Bible prose and poetry helps us understand the theme even more clearly without needing to take every element literally, and without damaging our faith in its inspiration. It is critically important that we decode literature according to the codes by which it was created, if we wish to understand what it meant to the original readers, and for this reason we should be wary of moving outside of the true-false axis when engaging in Biblical criticism. For example, the factuality of the story of Jonah has been questioned by scholarship, which points out details in the story incompatible with all our knowledge of the ancient world.[18] But, among other things, the book is a satire, a powerful attack on racial and religious prejudice, in which all the heathen display more godliness than the supposedly Godly prophet. Even animals such as great fish, cattle, and worms are more obedient than Jonah! This is a truth that remains true, applicable to good church-going people of all ages, whether one feels the story is factual or fictional. It need not lead to a loss of faith in the Bible.

Postmodernism

The most recent school of thought, growing out of developments in textual criticism that were labeled "modernism," has questioned the authority of authors and texts in determining meaning. Postmodernist theories such as deconstructionism and reader-response have helped us recognize that language is polysemic and unstable—that signifiers do not have either fixed or single meanings. In revealing the multiple signification of texts, they identify the reader as the place where meaning is generated. Without a reader, argues the postmodernist, there is no text. Each reader produces her own construct of meaning, which is not inherent in a text. Each reader produces a meaning differing in some way from every other reader; furthermore, each reader produces a different reading during each successive reading of a text. Here there is no universal truth. Each reader constructs her own truth, according to her set of experiences and the parameters of the text.[19] Postmodernists reject meta-narrative—stories that claim to explain the world—for in their eyes meta-narrative makes certain constructed meanings appear natural, suggesting a universal ethic, which inevitably condemns those who do not belong to it. The Bible, for example, as a meta-narrative favors Jews and Christians and proclaims the damnation of nonbelievers, an attitude that history has sadly revealed to be common among those supposedly God's people.

By denying the existence of universal truth originating either from God or from common human experience, postmodernism deconstructs the very foundations of Christianity, removing the authority of the Bible as the revealed Word of God and reducing it merely to a series of constructs made by individual readers. All external authority is denied, the concept of universal truth is exposed as merely social convention, and all significance is reduced to the level of the individual.

This school could be summarized like this:

Reader is God

This view presents the greatest contemporary challenge to the Christian. Ignoring for a moment the self-deconstructing nature of postmodernist theories

(postmodernists absolutely and universally deny the absolute and universal), we must concede that they reveal a truth about language and texts. It is true that people read texts differently and construct meanings that vary from individual to individual, or within an individual when revisiting a text. This is because language is open to variable interpretation, words shift in meaning over time, and because people bring different experiences to texts. As we have noted, this is especially evident in the history of Christianity, in which the bewildering diversity of Christian denominations, each insisting that it is right, provides further evidence for the postmodernist assertions that texts do not have single, fixed meanings.

Postmodernists leave the Church in a dilemma, for they deny the tenets of the Christian faith. The consequences are that doctrine ceases to exist, faith is individualized, and the evangelical character of Adventism must be dropped. The imperative to evangelize comes from the belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation, but postmodernism denies the exclusive universality of truth.

There is an alternative to the either-or conflict between traditional Christian belief and postmodernist thought. The postmodernist challenges to divine inspiration need not make them a threat to faith. A Christian context can turn them into an invaluable resource. Their relativist ideas are undeniably true when applied to humanity, providing an excellent explanation of the human world. It is true that we are relative beings, imperfect, incapable of grasping the universal, always understanding and expressing it in incomplete, imperfect terms.
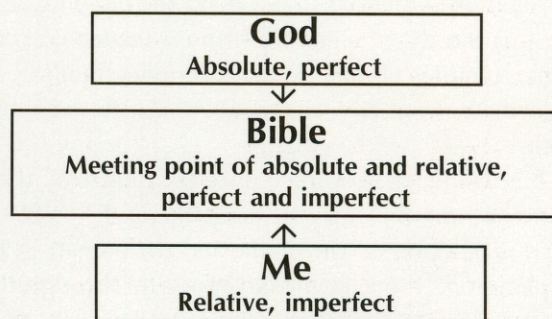
The failings of the theories are in trying to make themselves universal—a tension that we have already noted. We must recognize their limitations—rather than offering a universal model for approaching texts, they provide only a partial explanation of the process of generating meaning. Meanings and texts are not as slippery as postmodernists sometimes seem to indicate.[20] While language is polysemic, its conventions are stable enough to allow humans often to achieve significant consensus on meaning. Cultural and literary contexts contribute a pool of common codes that constrain the meanings of texts. Genres help readers determine the nature of meaning: some, like poetry or apocalyptic, invite multiple significations; others, like scientific papers, strive to eliminate alternative interpretations. Authors are involved in shaping meaning by their choice of genre and their skill in manipulating language.

A Christian Model

Postmodernism accurately describes the temporal, relative human state—a condition that Christianity agrees with. But Christianity goes further, saying that there is an absolute, an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God who, by his very nature, is beyond our finite comprehension. It is natural therefore, that postmodernist thinking is often unable to perceive him. Its error is in declaring that therefore there is no infinite truth. Recognizing our limited state, God did what we were incapable of doing: he revealed himself to us through the Bible, as the author-centered approach affirms. In order to explain himself to limited and relative creatures, he adopted their terms and frames of reference. Christians have long understood that God is anthropomorphized in the Bible. He creates pictures of himself—necessarily limited—which are accessible to relative beings. The Bible itself makes this clear. Ezekiel (1:26-28), Daniel (10:5-6), and Revelation (1:13-16) all describe God in metaphoric terms, for literal human language is inadequate. 1 Corinthians 13:13 reminds us that we see God indistinctly, but later will see him clearly; that now we know in part, but later will fully know, even as we are fully known. The Bible is therefore not a *complete* picture of God, but it is a *sufficient* one. It reveals enough about him for us to know and trust him, to develop a saving relationship with him.

The point is made even more clearly in the incarnation of Christ. God recognized that the Old Testament was an incomplete revelation of his character, hence the fuller revelation of God in the person of Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). Even then, he adopted the guise of humanity, shrouding divinity in a form that was accessible to us. The consequence was that many refused or were unable to recognize who he was (John 7:40-44, 14:8). In a similar manner, though less perfect than Jesus, the Bible is divine insight wrapped in limited human thought and language.

The model of this world view would look like this:

| **God** |
| Absolute, perfect |

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| **Bible** |
| Meeting point of absolute and relative, perfect and imperfect |

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| **Me** |
| Relative, imperfect |

This model helps us see that while God is absolute, our grasp of him is always limited. This means that we have some things right and some things wrong. We also have large areas of ignorance, and even what we know is only partial. Recognizing the absoluteness of God and our relative understanding of his will can save Adventism from two errors that have dogged the Christian Church throughout its history.

First, this recognition is a powerful preventative against dogmatism, pride, and a persecuting attitude toward those who differ from us. The sad legacy of Christian intolerance and persecution of infidels and other Christians has too often been based on an author-centered approach to the Bible. People who believe this naturally believe that their understanding of the Bible is the unmediated Word of God. They fail entirely to perceive that between God's revelation and their own ideas is both the filter of a human Bible writer and the reader's own imperfect, limited, and fallible understanding. And, as some have shown, the Bible is unlike other meta-narratives in that it is very sensitive to suffering and posits a God equally outside of all human cultures.[21] His interest extends to all people in all cultures in all time. The nature of the Biblical narrative, therefore, also argues against human spiritual arrogance, rather suggesting tolerance and peace.

Second, recognition of God's absoluteness and our relative understanding provides a secure base from which to face challenges to our faith. Christians have often reacted to challenges to their treasured beliefs by either attacking the change or abandoning their faith. Neither is healthy. The failure of Christianity to accept scientific discoveries that overturned an earth-centered view of the universe cost the early modern church considerable credibility. On the other hand, many have lost their faith in God because one of their cherished beliefs was demonstrated to be no longer true. This model allows us to avoid both extremes, for the problem in both cases can be seen to reside in us, not the Word of God or even science. New truth that contradicts old beliefs reminds us that we understood the old only in part, or incorrectly. It is not God who is inadequate; it is our understanding of him. With this understanding, new information can be welcomed without threatening our faith.

This also helps us to recognize the nature of the inspiration of the Bible. In the language of Ellen G. White, it is "a union of the divine and the human."[22] It is the revelation of the Eternal and Absolute through the temporal and limited understanding and language of relative human beings. As the textual critics remind us, writers wrote within a cultural perspective that was often woven into the fabric of their message. For example, the difference in perspective of 1 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 partly reflects the fact that the first writer wrote at a time before a theology of Satan had been developed. Hence, all human actions were considered to be prompted by God. This tendency to ascribe all motivation—good and evil—to God can be seen in other parts of the Old Testament, with Pharaoh for instance during the ten plagues of Egypt (Exod. 9:12, 10:1, 19, 27, etc.).

It is worth considering two other helps to understanding the Bible aright: that of the Holy Spirit and of the collective wisdom of the Church. The Holy Spirit was promised to us to lead us into all truth, which assures us of divine assistance in interpreting the Bible. The caution of course is that experience shows us that many people, even good people, have misinterpreted Scripture. The failing is not in the Spirit, but in human limitations of understanding, in failure to follow it, and in arrogance in assuming that our understandings are God's intentions, in part or in whole. The Church's collective will has similar strengths and weaknesses. The counsel of the Church can prevent extremism and heresy, but can also fail to respond positively to new light, as witnessed in the successive reform movements in Protestantism as each previous movement refused to grow further. In effect, these two guides share the strengths and weaknesses of the model proposed above: the divine element is reliable, but we are apt at times to confuse this with the fallible human element.

The emphasis on the weaknesses and relativity of our ability to know God can make some feel insecure. But while all human knowledge is fallible, all knowledge is not equally worthless.[23] We can do better than random chance in making spiritual choices. The many paths to knowing God—through the Bible, prayer, illumination of the Holy Spirit, guidance of spiritual mentors, providence, and so on—collectively provide some certainty the we are in fact on the path of truth, even though individually each path is open to misinterpretation.

As the Bible reveals, the genius of God is in accomplishing his divine purposes without violating the will and freedom of fallible and often uncooperative human beings. The human element of the Bible never prevents God from revealing his true nature to us. However, it does require that we be wise in interpreting his book. Recognizing that it is the Word of God expressed in human terms, we need to be careful to

distinguish between its divine precepts and their human expression. Otherwise we are likely to take as absolutes some of the relative and very human statements in the Bible that have disturbed Christians throughout the ages.

Contemporary theory confirms what the Bible says about the fallen and limited human condition. It further affirms our need of external divine intervention, as our own efforts are inevitably flawed, incomplete, and introspective. It helps us trust God more completely, while being less certain of our own righteousness and infallibility. It also strengthens our dependence on the Word of God as the only sure guide of God's will, being the product of his divine intervention into our world. While we may hold firmly to our understanding of God, we simultaneously acknowledge that a better, clearer picture is just around the corner. Should this image disrupt some of our preconceptions, the problem lies with us, not with God or his revelation.

Notes and References

1. See David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

2. Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth: What's Wrong with Multiculturalism, the Rejection of Reason, and the New Postmodern Diversity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996).

3. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

4. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

5. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 93-94. Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 75, offers a much-quoted analogy of three baseball umpires. One says, "There are balls and strikes and I call them as they are;" the second says "There are balls and strikes and I call them as I see them;" whereas the third says, "There are balls and strikes, and they ain't nothing till I call them." One might loosely equate each position to the three schools of literary interpretation.

6. Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Brighton, Eng.: Harvester, 1985), 4; and J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, "Facing the Postmodern Scalpel: Can the Christian Faith Withstand Deconstruction?" in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 133.

7. The simplicities of this are delightfully satirized in Wilfred L. Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 1-2; and further discussed in Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 67-70, 112; and Selden, *Reader's Guide*,1, 52.

8. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, eds., *Modern Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 116.

9. George R. Knight, "The Case of the Overlooked Postscript: A Footnote on Inspiration," *Ministry* 70 (Aug. 1997): 9-11.

10. See, for example, Selden, *Reader's Guide*; and Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, on Formalism, Marxism, and Structuralism.

11. I use the word myth in the literary sense, not as an untrue story but as any story that explains origins and meaning.

12. Their work is neatly summarized in Abdul JanMohammed's article, "Sophisticated Primitivism," *Ariel* 15 (Oct. 1984): 22-27.

13. Lennard J. Davis, "A Social History of Fact and Fiction: Authorial Disavowal in the Early English Novel," in Edward W. Said, *Literature and Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 122, 127, 129-30.

14. George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1985), 155.

15. See Philip D. Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 155-70; and Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 66-67.

16. JanMohammed, "Sophisticated Primitivism," 24.

17. Knight, "Case of the Overlooked Postscript," 10.

18. For a range of views, see Phyllis Trible, "The Book of Jonah. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

19. For more detail, see Selden, *Reader's Guide*; and Eagleton, *Literary Theory*.

20. A good discussion of language and meaning is Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 208-9; see also Selden, *Reader's Guide*, 101-2.

21. Middleton and Walsh, "Facing the Postmodern Scalpel," 63-107.

22. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 25. See also George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1997), esp. chap. 17.

23. Colin W. Evers, "Recent Developments in Educational Administration," *Leading and Managing* 1 (1995): 10.

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