

PART TWO

**POST-MODERN EPISTEMOLOGICAL THINKING AND ITS EFFECT UPON
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY**

2. THE POST-MODERN MINDSET

David Tomlinson in his work, *The Post Evangelical*, encapsulated very effectively the relevance of post-modernism to the evangelical school of Christianity. He writes (1995:6),

My thesis is simple: that post-evangelicals tend to be people who identify more with the more tentative post-modernity (the culture of the post-modern) than with modernity; their belief combines faith and doubt, commitment and enquiry, confession and self criticism.

What Tomlinson says if correctly understood, explains much of contemporary evangelical Christianity's seemingly often arbitrary approach to Christian revelation sources and methodologies (Tomlinson 1995:6). Post-Modernism is the prevailing philosophy of our times. It is a 'pendulum swing' reaction to the reductionist confidence to knowledge that exists in the philosophy of modernism (Cahoone 1996:14). At the turn of the twenty-first century, post-modernism is both widespread and deeply influential in our society (McCallum 1996:27). There is no major field of study that has not in the past twenty years or so, been profoundly effected by this new world-view, and Christian theology is no exception (Brooke 1998:32). What is Post-Modernism? McCallum, in his important work, *The Death of Truth*, supplies the following definition (1996:12),

Now in the late twentieth century, we are caught up in a revolution that will likely dwarf Darwinism in its impact upon every aspect of thought and culture: post-modernism. Unlike Darwinism, post-modernism isn't a distinct set of doctrines or

truth claims. It is a *mood* - a view of the world characterised by a deep distrust of reason.

This distrust of reason is firmly based upon the conviction that all human self-awareness is linguistically and culturally bound up in an inescapable subjectivity (McCallum 1996:27). John McGowan in his work entitled, *Post-modernism and its Critics* (1991:4) supplies a clear definition of this mindset. He writes,

Willful modernist self-exclusion, the claim to stand outside, is only a delusion; the post-modernist insists that everything is included (within social reality), that nothing can achieve the autonomy or distance in which the modernists found their last defense against all-encompassing capitalism.

Reality, in other words, is an entirely subjective matter. Each culture to this mind-set (even sub-cultures i.e. gender, age group, socio-economic class) possesses within itself, its own system of signification and rationality, this is fondly termed by post-modernists, *paradigm*. A self-conscious individual therefore, being culture-bound and able only to perceive objects through the spectacles of subjective conditioning, exists as the *constructor* of his/her own conception of reality. Reality, in other words, is *configuratively* perceived (Taylor 1992:133). Truth, to the post-modernist means primarily, '*truth for me*'. Jerome Bruner, in his book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, writes (1986:195),

The moment that one abandons the idea that 'the world' is there once for all and immutable, and substitutes for it the idea that what we take as the world is itself

no more or less than a stipulation couched in a symbol system, then the shape of the discipline alters radically. And we are, at last, in a position to deal with the myriad forms that reality can take - including realities created by story, as well as those created by science.

Bruner is optimistic as he considers the possibility of a coming society where traditional concepts of reality are replaced by the subjectivity of multiple realities. Post-modern innovators are working hard to bring this about (Giroux 1991:45). This conception of '*myriad forms of reality*' does not, to the post-modern mindset, invalidate inter-cultural communication however. According to post-modern epistemology, when some semblance of inter-cultural activity is necessary for the purpose of solidifying a working consensus among culturally divergent individuals, it is to be constructed by the varying cultures in an *inter-subjective* manner by prior agreement. This means that in any consensus-seeking conference of differing cultural viewpoints, each individual world-view and value system needs to be considered as being equally valid and made compatible to all the others. This, it is claimed, must always be the case, as no human being lives outside of his/her own *solipsist monad* of experience. '*Truth claims*' are never to be '*proven*' but rather *deconstructed* for the sake of inter-cultural cooperation. The traditional conception of there being a possibility of one particular person's paradigm holding to any objective truth that exists somewhere '*out there*' is flatly resisted by post-modernists as *metanarrative*. In fact, such claims to possessing an access to any true

objectivity are frowned upon as being *imperialistic* and *insensitive* towards other differing world-views (Shorto 1997:237). Academic post-modernism has the ideological goal of ultimately eliminating any form of exclusivity and intellectual domination of one culture over another (Lyotard 1984:10). Jacques Derrida has termed such arrogance *logocentricity* (Derrida 1974:10). Educationist Henry A Giroux, who typifies the above post-modern academic mindset in the present American education system writes (Giroux 1991:49),

The Enlightenment notion of *reason* needs to be reformulated within a critical pedagogy. First, educators need to be sceptical regarding the notion that purports to reveal the truth by denying its own historical construction and ideological principles...This suggests that we reject claims to objectivity in favour of partial epistemologies that recognise the historical and socially constructed nature of knowledge claims and methodologies.

Contemporary society has been influenced by the above mind-set in no superficial way. It should therefore come as no surprise that post-modern influences are to be discovered already operating within contemporary Christian and even evangelical theology. McCallum writes (1996:202),

Let's be clear: Post-modernists aren't against religion. They are only against religious teaching that holds to objective truth and the usefulness of reason. Religion based upon personal experience and 'what's true for me' is perfectly compatible with the post-modern world-view. But once reason is rejected, truth in the objective sense must be rejected as well. What use is a 'truth' if the opposite, or 'anti theoretical' position is also true?

For any Christian denomination to insist upon any single ‘correct’ interpretation of a dogmatic position, is in many intellectual circles today frowned upon as being ‘*logocentric imperialism.*’ American theologian Mark Taylor believes that there are as many valid interpretations of Scripture as there are readers (Cahoone 1996:523). With such a philosophy reigning in contemporary academia and ‘*filtering down*’ to mass consciousness through the media, art and education (Swartz, *South African Baptist Journal of Theology*: 1999:122), one can only anticipate some definite and significant effects upon contemporary Christian thinking. The effect of post-modern influence on contemporary religious thought can be observed many times, in the Church’s seemingly uncritical acquiescence towards teachings such as the present *Spiritual Warfare Movement* and Inter-Faith dialogue (Swartz *South African Baptist Journal of Theology*: 1999:120). The very fact that such a paradigm shift in Christian academic thinking, resulting in the uncritical evangelical acceptance of many recent doctrinally divergent trends, can only be explained in the light of the prevailing *zeitgeist* of our era (McCallum 1996: 204). The influence of post-modern epistemology upon contemporary Christianity can be demonstrated in three major areas. These three major areas have impacted upon the dogmatic confidence of the Baptist Union of South Africa and it is from this context that the present writer writes from personal experience.

2.1 **The Post-modern Emphasis upon Subjective experience over Objective Theological Dogmatism**

It may well be argued that the appeal to ontological subjectivity goes much further back than post-modernism - it goes back to *Kierkegaardian existentialism*, or even further back - to *Cartesian duality* (Palmer 1996:57). It may be argued therefore that philosophical subjectivism chronologically precedes the epistemology of post-modernism by many years. It needs to be realised however, that much ontological existentialism owes its contemporary acceptance and philosophical justification in our present time, to the post-modern appeal to the cultural and linguistic conditioning of every human individual (Cahoone 1996:20). Post-modernism is, in a very real sense, *a justification of existentialism*. But there is a scientific as well as a purely philosophical justification for such a subjectivist epistemological position. Walter Anderson, in his book entitled, *Reality isn't What It Used to Be* (1991:196) offers two examples from recent neuro-physiology research that he claims indicates effectively that objective perception is not real,

1. Kittens raised in environments devoid of vertical visual cues have brains that are devoid of regions that respond to such cues, and behaviourally, these kittens cannot be conditioned to respond to reward triggers that are vertically oriented.

2. Subjects who have lost or never had neuronal connections between their right and left cortex have behaviours that indicate they don't know why they are doing what they are doing...Subjects with damage to the visual cortex are essentially blind, yet they can react to things in their visual field while denying that they see anything - a phenomenon called 'blind sight'.

These are all used to illustrate that we might be perceiving things that are different from 'objective reality' and different from what other people see because our brains are wired differently.

This post-modern epistemology, increasingly being *backed* by contemporary academic and scientific consensus (McCallum 1996:48), insists that an individual's subjective experience will always precede and regulate one's rationality. Campolo writes concerning this outlook (1987:88), 'Truth is not composed of facts, rather it gives meaning to facts.' Individual human self-awareness to the post-modernist, is the '*launching pad*' for all construction of meaning. This approach to epistemology surely impacts profoundly upon evangelical Christian theology. An example of this impact may be read in the writings of Spiritual Warfare theology teacher, Evelyn Christenson. In her book *Battling the Prince of Darkness* (1991), she claims that it is ultimately subjective human conceptions of truth that will be the deciding factor in the *Parousia* of Christ (1991:177).

2.2 The Post-modern Appeal to Pragmatism

Post-modernism is not so much concerned with truth as with *pragmatics* (McCallum 1996:177). The positive outcome of a particular event is considered to be the optimum purpose for any rational undertaking. Whether a proposition is considered *consistent*, or *absurd*, is to post-modernism, of secondary importance to whether a proposition is *helpful*, or *constructive* (Cahoone 1996:696). Because it is believed by this mind-set, that any appeal to an objective rationality amounts to an imperialism of *logocentricity* (Derrida 1974:26), it is argued that the final ‘*court of appeal*’ in deciding any proposition’s validity is to be voted upon the grounds of its usefulness (Giroux 1991:47). Ideas in post-modernism are used to *equip* rather than to, *prove* or to *inform*. Education therefore, is considered chiefly as an instrument of *empowerment* (Giroux 1991:55).

2.3 The Quasi-scientific Linguistics of Post-modernism

Post-modernism as a mind-set, tends to frown upon the self-confident definition and systematisation of reality that has been practiced by modernism, and calls for a more agnostic and mystical approach to phenomena in general (Cahoone 1996:14). In spite of this rejection of modernistic scientific methodology, post-modern innovators tend to utilise the very same scientific terminology in

order to express, describe and vindicate their own particular views (McCallum 1996:58). Universities around the world, having been influenced by the post-modern world-view, are pressured to relax the stricter modernistic standards of scientific definition (Giroux 1991:45). Higher learning authorities have begun to recognise certain fields of study as being academically respectable that would previously have been considered void of any content for the purpose of objective scrutiny. Astrologers and traditional *sangomas* are, in many quarters, now looked upon as practicing '*professionals*' who are merely offering alternative approaches to the traditional western methodologies (Bruner 1986:195). This trend has afforded accreditation to many previously discredited fields of study. McCallum writes (1996:12),

(Post-modernism) is a completely new way of analysing ideas...A fresh onslaught on truth that brings a more or less cohesive approach to literature, history, politics, education, law sociology, linguistics, and virtually every other discipline including science. And it is ushering in a cultural *metamorphosis* - transforming every area of everyday life as it spreads through education, movies, and other media.

The shift from modernism to post-modernism - the radical change of attitude that has taken place in the academic world, has enabled mystic and anti-objective world-views to utilise scientific jargon and pose as objectively verifiable systems of thought, while at the same

time, denouncing by their very nature, any possible objective scrutiny of its propositional content (McCallum 1996:26).

2.4 **Post-Modern Impact upon Spiritual Thought**

The major shift in academic thinking over the past thirty years has obviously impacted significantly upon Christian thought as well as spiritual thought in general. A new spirituality has found worldwide acceptance in the present era - especially in our own Western culture, this is commonly admitted (McCallum1996: 221). This shift in spirituality is not any one set of spiritual propositions being an influence *per se*, but rather a new attitude towards spirituality (Chandler 1987:27). This new spiritual tendency has influenced the Western mind so successfully for two main reasons.

Firstly, in the last forty years of the twentieth century, migration, transportation, and communications technology has tended to '*shrink*' the world into what has been termed the '*global village*'. Western cities like London, New York and Frankfurt are now multi-cultured '*melting pots*' where ethnic, racial, and religious people share with other communities, the very same day-to-day environment. With the Western world facing this radical population change over only a few short decades, the need for inter-cultural tolerance and harmony has become essential to the survival of

society (Groothuis 1986:132). Nationalist, religious, and racial exclusivism can no longer be tolerated in this new, multi-cultural world. Universal harmony is regarded as the imperative for the New World Order (Cahoone 1996:475). One of the products resulting from the call for an inter-culturalism, has been the success of the New Age Movement. It is the synthesis of Western individualism and Eastern monism where all can be one, and one can be all (Chandler 1987:17). In this mind-set, all forms of religious dogmatism are considered subordinate to the underlying spirituality that validates what is believed to be the goal of true religion (Chandler 1987:17). The appeal of this new spirituality is towards syncretism and inter-faith dialogue, rather than the aggressive, proselytising exclusivity of traditional Western spirituality.

The second reason for this widespread acceptance of the paradigm shift upon the Western spiritual mind is due to the human existential cry for significance and purpose in a world subjected to atheistic materialism. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the traditional Christian cosmology has been by many largely rejected, and an exclusively empiricist, scientific approach solely adhered to (Cahoone 1996:11). This has led to the world-view of a materialistic reductionism. In this particular philosophy, humanity is regarded as merely another material substance - a highly evolved species of

animal that only possesses true significance on the political and economic level. This world-view has left humanity with a spiritual void - a hunger for significance and purpose that is beyond the mere material. Groothuis writes (1986:41),

No culture is able to survive a steady diet of atheism...We seek transcending meaning, purpose and value. Nihilism is unpalatable because it is unlivable. This 'firm foundation of unyielding despair' is not congenial to the human spirit.

The middle of the twentieth century experienced a paradigm shift in all the fields of knowledge (Cahoone 1996:667). The emergence of sub-atomic, post-Einstein science, as well as the iconoclasm of post-modern philosophy in response to it, have pointed to the absurdity of the scientific reductionism of the previous century (Cahoone 1996:12). Philosophical materialism as an academic world-view is now pretty much extinct. It is now generally held in intellectual circles, that we live in a world of impenetrable mystery. Quantum physics and black holes defy human rational explanation or even conception. The new science can feel quite at home with concepts such as pantheism (Groothuis 1986:95), and hold firmly to a belief in both the natural laws of the universe as well admits to the reality of profound mystery. The New Age Movement stands in full sympathy with the post-modern view of the world. It is itself not *supernatural*, in the Christian sense of the word, in that it is *monistic*

(Chandler 1988:28). Also, it is mystical - In other words, it seeks to *enquire* rather than *pontificate* axioms (Chandler 1988:31). The influence of a new and open spirituality can be recognised in a number of ways, as well as in all sectors of Western society - in science, in education, in the arts, and of course, in religion itself (Cahoone 1996:514).

This new religious shift has effected the Evangelical Christian Church in one of two ways;

- i) Firstly, there have been those who have tended to imbibe the prevailing *zeitgeist* into their own particular system thereby blending new spiritual concepts in with their own Christian belief system. The *Word of Faith Movement* has definitely done this to some extent. Smail, Walker and Wright have written an extensive research paper on the New Age and Neo Gnostic influences found in the teachings of the Word of Faith movement (Smail 1994:88). Dr. Richard Mayhue of the Master's Seminary, wrote an extensive article on this very subject, and it may be helpful to present a summary of his paper in order to illustrate as well as vindicate my present point with reference to a representative and credible scholar. Mayhue writes (*Sword and Trowel* , Vol III. 1999:10),

Francis Schaeffer, now with the Lord, wrote a book entitled, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. In it, he decried the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. David Wells who has written a landmark book for this decade entitled, *No room for Truth*, states that in the evangelical world there has been a shift from God to self as the focus of faith. George Marsden, a noted historian, warns evangelicals of the intrusion of humanism into the Church. Others speak of the Church becoming like the world, and undergoing secularisation. A striking observation was made by a mainline denominational spokesman who wrote: 'Evangelical theologians and pastors can learn from the mainline experience of placing relevance above truth.'

Mayhue goes on to list four contemporary evangelical Church leaders who fit the above description of following the trend to place pragmatics above propositional truth (*Sword and Trowel* 1999:10),

We will focus on four well-known writers in the modern Church-growth movement in America, some of whom you may know of. Let me begin with George Barna. He is the George Gallop of the Church world, because he is forever taking a poll. And wherever the poll goes, George Barna wants the Church to go. He has written such books as *User Friendly Churches*. His most recent is, *The Second Coming of the Church*, which has nothing to do with eschatology. We see what he means by these words: 'Today's Church is incapable of responding to the present moral

crisis. It must re-invent itself or face virtual oblivion by the mid-twenty-first century.

Leith Anderson may be the least known of all the men referred to here. However, he is an immensely influential pastor among the 'mega churches' in America. He has written a book entitled, *A Church for the 21st Century*...Leith Anderson thinks that McDonald's and Wal-Mart are the best models for new churches. The shopping centre is the ideal. What he provides us with, is a man-centred approach. He advances a *needs-based* philosophy, and a consumer mentality.

The third author to be mentioned is Rick Warren. His best known book is *The Purpose Driven Church*. He says: 'Church growth occurs when the type of people in the community match the type of people that are already in the church, and they both match the type of person the pastor is'. Given time we could examine that statement, but it is enough to say that if it were true, then every city in the first century would have needed separate Jewish and Gentile congregations. It is, of course, untrue and unbiblical.

The fourth name is very well known, and that is the name Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek church near Chicago. In *Rediscovering Church*, Bill Hybels explains that what worked with teens in the streets of Chicago in the early seventies (the hippie generation) is what has been done for adults in the eighties and nineties.

In all these writers, and many others there is almost nothing about being God-focused. There is little or nothing about going to the Word of God for our instructions as to what the Church ought

to be or how it ought to be built. There is only a consumer mentality, with little about sin and redemption.

Mayhue in this article, proceeds to render an explanation as to why the above trend is in fact so popular and so 'in tune' with our post-modern society (*Sword and Trowel* 1999:11),

The state of affairs just described may be elaborated in the following way. First, these writers and their churches elevate culture to be more important than Scripture, both in understanding the world around them and themselves. Secondly, they market image and appearance rather than reality...A great segment of evangelical churches (and a growing proportion of evangelical literature) is virtually embarrassed by biblical priorities. Here is a list of ways in which this is happening: 1.) There is an over-emphasis on man's reasoning and a corresponding under-emphasis on God's revelation in scripture. 2.) There is an over-emphasis on human need as defined by man and a corresponding under-emphasis on God's definition of man's need. 3.) There is an over-emphasis on the temporal side of life, and a corresponding under-emphasis on the eternal side. 4.) There is an over-emphasis on satisfying contemporary culture and a corresponding under-emphasis on God's pleasure.

When it comes to the late twentieth-century evangelical Church as a whole, techniques have replaced truth, style has supplanted substance.

- ii) The second evangelical response to the new approach to spirituality has been one of 'knee jerk', negative and defensive reaction (Horton 1992:265). Evangelical Christianity is seen by many within this camp to be under threat. The Church no longer holds the position in society of being the sole moral and religious advisor, and has in recent decades been 'demoted' to having to compete in a '*supermarket*' of numerous and varying religions. Evangelicalism has become an insignificant minority group within an indifferent and sometimes critical secular society. The response to this, by many threatened evangelicals, has been to reduce the world to a dualistic battleground where the Church is seen to be taking on the full onslaught of Satan's worldly minions (Horton 1992:227). The above response to the prevailing spirituality of our times was termed by writer Kim Riddelbarger (Horton 1992:265), *This Present Paranoia*, (obviously a tongue-in-cheek reference to Peretti's novel, *This Present Darkness*). It requires no stretch of the imagination to infer from the spiritual climate of our time, a major reason why the Spiritual Warfare Movement is so popular in many evangelical circles today (Horton 1992:227).

The term 'spiritual warfare' clearly suggests a polemic opposition of one (or more) party against another in a spiritual realm. Within the

term, *warfare*, a number of possible positions or meanings could be applied. *To wage a war* could mean to struggle in an aggressive or a defensive posture. It could mean an opposition between two or more parties or it could mean the rebellion of an inferior party against a superior or even the oppression of a superior over an inferior. A war may be physical or emotional, financial or verbal. Beyond these possible definitions of a warfare, one need not go in the defining of the spiritual warfare movement.

The spiritual warfare movement holds that open hostility existing between God and satanic forces is raging in the spiritual realm, and is profoundly and directly effecting the human condition. Godwin writes (1994:29), 'God wants us to have His Kingdom. Remember though, that Satan is still around and does not want us to have any more of God than we already have. The devil is doing his best to keep us from God's Kingdom.' Spiritual warfare teacher Rebecca Brown writes (1987:9),

The war is upon us beloved. Whether we like it or not, there is no escaping it. The days are evil, and time is short. We ourselves are faced with a decision. Either we serve Satan, or we pick up the sword and fight - many of us will lay down our lives in the process.

The spiritual conflict therefore encompasses both realms, spiritual and natural. There is a comfortable consensus among the

protagonists of the movement on how this spiritual warfare came to be. Before the creation of the heavens and the earth, God created angelic beings (Arthur 1991:48). These were rational and self-aware creatures which existed in some composite spiritual form (Christenson 1991:21). Unanimously, the spiritual warfare teachers point to an angelic being by the name of Lucifer, a highly favoured cherub, as being the leader of a rebellion in the heavenly realm against the sovereign authority of God (Godwin 1994:7, Arthur 1991:38). The reason for this angelic rebellion is not clearly taught, but many suggest that satanic pride and jealousy were the root cause of its eruption (Arthur 1991:43, Green 1995:41). Citing Ezekiel 28:11-19 the teachers of the movement claim that Satan, along with a third of the angels were cast down to earth (Green 1995:84). It was then that humanity, which had been subsequently created by God to inhabit and rule the earth for His glory, was deceived and conquered by Satan's deception in the Garden of Eden (Arthur 1991:35, Brown 1987:65). Causing a separation, an unreconcilable chasm that effectively divided humanity from its Creator - the Holy God, effected this coup. Satan tempted, and succeeded in enticing Adam and Eve, who are, by imputation, representatives of all their human ancestors, to sin. Sin, being repugnant to God's holiness, and repelling to His presence, caused an immediate separation between man and his Creator. God's

absolute and innate justice inevitably demanded eternal death as the price of such an act. Fallen humanity at this stage, lost their relational privilege with God, and became fallen, spiritually blind, and wretched (Brown 1987:281, Prince 1990:40). Satan, according to a majority of the teachers in this movement, was at this point, free to usurp the God-given human mandate to rule the earth from Adam, and became by right (*South African Baptist Journal of Theology*. Winfield 2001:114) legally entitled to rule and control the entire human race. Satan at this point, became designated 'god of this world' and 'prince of this age' (Green 1995:47). Arthur writes (1991:83),

Romans 5:12 says, 'Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.' Sin and death began through one man, a man named Adam. When Adam had intercourse with Eve the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20), sin was inherent in his sperm. They reproduced after their own kind...From that point on, the whole world lay under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:9). Satan became the ruler of the world (John 14:30). The creation which Adam was to subdue and govern was relinquished to Satan when Adam disobeyed God.

It is from this advantage point that Satan and his demonic servants (who most protagonists of the movement would consider to be the third of the angelic beings that were cast out of Heaven along with Satan), rules and controls the world through human drudgery to this

very day (Christenson 1991:32, Horton 1992:277, Wimber 1985:27). Satan's rule over humanity exists by the means of blinding and deceiving people with their own native fallen bias towards fleshly desire (Green 1995:12, Liardon 1995:12), and by encouraging their inborn aversion to Divinity (Green 1995:68). Also, because Satan possesses a legal right over this fallen world, he has the power to abuse and distort nature so as to cause suffering and confusion for humankind - hence the existence in this world of sickness, deformity, and death (Liardon 1995:93). Direct demonic possession, from the direct indwelling of inanimate objects, to human bodies by evil spirits is also possible for satanic forces (Green 1995:51, Taylor 1993:15), and is often done in order to further entrench satanic dominion over the fallen human race. The motive behind Satan's resistance to God seems to be Satan's blindly proud desire to be as God (Arthur 1991:52), as an absolute despot over his place of imposed exile. Godwin writes (1994:20),

God threw Satan out of His Heaven into the heaven beneath Him. Satan is ruling from this heaven, sandwiched between us on earth and God's Heaven...God has already judged him guilty and sentenced him to Hell. Now Satan is awaiting the execution of his judgement that Christ brought on him by His death and resurrection...Satan is still on the loose. God warns us, 'Be sober and vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5:8). Satan still has authority over carnal man. The old man, the carnal man is no match for Satan.

Such is the theology held by many conservative evangelicals at the turn of the twenty-first century. One can recognise in the spiritual warfare movement both acquiescence to post-modern thinking in its blurring of scriptural and propositional revelation with mysticism, as well as a defensive and reactionary response to the post-modern denial of true religion. Kim Riddelbarger expresses very well the disturbing shift that recent evangelical theology has experienced due largely to post-modern influence (1992:279),

Those who see reality exclusively through the lens of warfare between angels and demons will inevitably read the turmoils of life as proof of a struggle between those spiritual combatants. People in the culture around us are looking for answers to the great questions of life in the 'spiritual dimension'. Yet many evangelicals are preparing for the wrong kind of warfare. They are being told that they should be looking for demons to cast out if they wish to be victorious Christians and liberate society.

2.5 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF POST-MODERNISM

It is certainly not an easy task to come up with a working definition of Post-modernism. This is simply because the very term *post-modern* is applied to so many differing and unconnected disciplines at one time, which appear to have been thus termed in an arbitrary manner. A working definition however, may be rendered that will adequately suffice for the present dissertation's purpose. Cahoone writes (1996:2),

At a minimum, post-modernism regards certain important principles, methods, or ideas characteristic of modern Western culture as obsolete or illegitimate. In this sense, post-modernism is the latest wave in the critique of the Enlightenment, the critique of the cultural principles characteristic of modern society that trace their legacy to the eighteenth century, a critique that has been going on since that time.

Post-modernism, generally refers to the challenge, on philosophical grounds, to *Enlightenment* presuppositions that are inherently characteristic in contemporary Western thought. It may therefore be necessary to firstly define the term, *modernism*, before proceeding to define post-modern epistemological roots. In his book, *The Death of Truth*, McCallum defines the essence of enlightenment thinking (1996:22),

Inspired by Newton's laws of mechanics, these new modernists viewed nature as a grand machine whose processes could be understood only through the grid of natural law. People began to study nature by applying reason and increasingly standardised rules of investigation. As they searched, modern scientists discovered principles in nature that explained how the natural order worked.

Modernism, the contemporary offspring of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, is the mind-set that holds to the ability of human rationality to conceive, measure, predict, and regulate observable phenomena. Because of this confidence, observable absolutes are assumed to truly exist that stand as objects to all inquiring minds at all times. The negative reaction to this modernistic confidence is post-modernism, which is practiced by academics, primarily in order to *undermine* the above

modernistic confidence in immovable axioms, by means of *de-constructive* criticism (Giroux 1991:45). The fundamental objective of post-modernism is to replace objective and absolute Western thinking with a more agnostic and more culturally tolerant worldview (Lyotard 1984:31).

Where Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century had, by his argument, established an unbridgeable barrier between phenomena and the metaphysical (Bencivenca 1987:27), post-modernism seeks to create a chasm far more profound - a barrier between the knowing subject, and all reality whatsoever that exists outside of one's own cultural and linguistic self-awareness (Lyotard 1984:47). The basic method of assault upon modernistic presuppositions therefore, focuses on the inescapable subjectivity of the human mind, and how all human awareness is essentially *interpretive* by nature (McCallum 1996:54). How this contention is effectively expressed, may be clearly grasped by introducing into the post-modern world view, one who has been considered a key pioneer in post-modern circles - one who has been widely acknowledged as a *founding father* of the movement (Cahoone 1996:177).

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) has been acknowledged as a key figure of influence in the movement that was to come of age some seventy years after his death. In his work, *A Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure presented a radically new approach to the

study of language. Because language is so intricately bound up in human thinking in general, the effect of Saussure's work has been profound in a number of related disciplines. To grasp the fundamental point of Saussure's argument for linguistics is to grasp the basic contention of the post-modern epistemological argument (Cahoone 1996:177). Saussure suggested that language is never merely a collection of sounds that represented different objects, he writes (1966:65),

This conception is open to criticism at several points. It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words; it does not tell us whether a word is vocal or psychological; finally, it lets us assume that the linking of a name and a thing is a very simple operation - an assumption that is anything but true.

Here it has to be admitted that people do indeed often naively consider their very words as being merely indicators of objective and universally perceived objects. A far more complex dualism that exists between a word (*a sign*) and its object (*its significance* to the observer) is fundamental to Saussure's whole argument, and consequently, also to the basic epistemology of post-modernism. Saussure writes (1966:66),

The linguistic sign (i.e. a word) unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses.

In other words, Saussure is saying that the meaning of a word is determined, not by any natural or pre-conventional relation of word to object, but by the word's relation to other words, psychological stimulus,

and reflex (Cahoone 1996:177). The entire process of human thinking to Saussure, is an act of associating significations (*la parole*) within a particular linguistic pool of vocabulary (*la langue*) (Saussure 1966:67). When a person speaks descriptively therefore, the words of the description are to be primarily understood as a reflection of the speaker rather than the speaker's subject. This argument cannot be refuted on the grounds that every object described in human language is an object that is firstly *perceived* through the lens of human subjectivity. Saussure writes (1966:69),

Units of grammatical facts would not be confused if linguistic signs were made up of something besides differences. But language being what it is we shall find nothing simple in it regardless of our approach; everywhere and always there is the same complex equilibrium of terms that mutually condition each other. Putting it another way *language is a form and not a substance*. This truth could not be overstressed, for all the mistakes in our terminology, all our incorrect ways of naming things that pertain to language, stem from the involuntary supposition that the linguistic phenomenon must have substance.

There can be no talk on any objective reality whatsoever that does not take firstly into account the fact that subject and object in all human thought are absolutely inseparable. Derrida, a pioneer of post-modern thought, writes in his work, *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing* (1974:7),

Thus the constitutive mark of any sign in general and of any linguistic sign in particular is its two-fold character; every linguistic unit is bipartite and involves

both aspects - one sensible and the other intelligible, or in other words, both *signans*, 'signifier', and *signatum*, 'signified'. These two constituents of a linguistic sign necessarily suppose and require each other.

It may be safe to say that this simple statement above is the foundation on which the general understanding of post-modern epistemology is based. Lyotard writes (1984:31), 'Thus the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language games, a heterogeneity of elements.'

Post-modernism is, therefore, based upon theoretical presuppositions that cannot simply be brushed aside. The contention of their particular epistemology that modernistic confidence in objective absolutes cannot be justified due to the human thought process has been successfully (on the philosophical level) pointed out by the post-modern movement (Kraft 1992:291). The above argument against modernistic Western thought has not, and, as far as I can see, cannot be refuted when it is taken on its own terms (Shorto 1997:5). A consistent thinker has to admit that it can never be simply ignored in philosophy, that one's own subjectivity in every mental exercise whatsoever is always inescapable. This, if understood on materialistic grounds, results in a number of serious epistemological consequences. There are innumerable possible epistemological repercussions derived from this that could be brought up for consideration

at this point. For the limited purpose of the present dissertation however, I shall mention just five of what I believe are the most influential epistemological by-products of post-modernism upon the evangelical Christian mindset.

- a) Truth is something flexible and plastic. Because no human mind can possibly encounter reality as it exists exterior to conscious subjectivity, the very idea of a human being knowing *truth as it is*, is absurd and indefensible. This means the truth needs to be considered as something that is merely constructed on a social level with the purpose of social synchronicity. This conclusion reached by post-modern epistemology impacts profoundly upon Evangelical Christianity, which is, by very nature, a proselytising faith, and presents an objective world-view.

- b) Closely related to the first point, is the consequential fact that pragmatism is the ultimate purpose for the utilisation of truth claims in a society. *Truth* is something that is *constructed* by a particular group, in order to function efficiently as social yet subjective individuals. Truth, in other words, is an inter-subjective pre-arrangement in which norms and regulations are set out as guidelines for interactive behaviour patterns. Truth, to this view, is never *stagnant* - it tends to evolve and adapt to the development of

the particular group that adheres to the truth construct. Evangelical Christianity therefore, with its objectivity and its inherent evangelistic thrust, is here challenged by post-modern epistemology at its very foundation.

- c) Because it is held to be impossible for the subjectivity-bound human mind to conceive of any reality as it exists outside of human consciousness (this would of course, include the supernatural), it is considered an absurdity to make any statement about any reality that might exist beyond inter-subjectively communicated human experience. Language that attempts to convey any knowledge which assumes an inexperienced reality, is philosophically self-refuting in its very contention. *Interpretation of experience* is considered by post-modern epistemology to be the primary valid function of religion, and for one to go beyond this, and to attribute an objective quality to one's personal religious view, is to be rejected out of hand as being something philosophically absurd. Because post-modern epistemology considers all human thought as being something that is inseparable from the human environmental and cultural conditioning (i.e. the *sign* and the *signifier* are always intertwined), every mental process has its roots not in a Platonic object (i.e. a universal rationality), but in the constitutional *make-up* of the thinker. An Afro-centric male, for

example, will think in a certain way *because he is* an African male, whereas a Eurocentric, gay female, will possess thought patterns that are peculiar to her own constitutional and psychological make-up. Even socially deviant behaviour can be attributed to the constitutional history of an individual. The impact upon Evangelical Christianity on this point is truly profound. It challenges evangelicals to reconsider their confident declarations concerning universal guilt, original sin, and human accountability to a single and objective code of ethics.

- d) Religious dogmatism, in the light of the above, is absolutely rejected. Because it is believed that each culture consists of its own particular paradigm of meaning, each particular religion must be considered as being absolutely valid within its own linguistic context. Any attempt therefore, by one religious group to proselytise any other, or to claim some kind of monopoly on an objective truth, is by this mind-set, to be frowned upon and resisted. The Christian faith (especially of the evangelical variety) finds itself because of this, increasingly resisted and accused of being intolerant, insensitive, and arrogantly imperialistic.

- e) The final implication that post-modern epistemology imposes upon evangelical Christianity, is that of evangelistic confidence. If what

post-modernists are claiming is to be regarded as philosophically acceptable, then it follows that all religions without any exception, are *equally true* and *valid* within their own particular cultural/linguistic context, and therefore should be regarded as being beyond challenge or criticism by members of any paradigm outside of that particular religion.

In the third and final part of this dissertation, I intend to discuss the above five points in greater detail. The focus of this dissertation will now zone into the above challenge. I intend to use the epistemology of C. S. Lewis, which was examined in the first part of this work, to engage the above epistemological contentions in a critical dialogue. I am of the firm conviction that post-modern epistemology need not be as devastating to the Evangelical message as some seem to think, and, with the help of the writings of C. S. Lewis, I intend to demonstrate this.

The above five points in particular pose an extremely serious challenge to the very validity of Christian doctrine, and especially to the legitimacy of Christian evangelism as we now know it. Post-modernism is not something that can simply be ignored by the Church; in fact, the significant impact that post-modernism is having already upon contemporary evangelicalism (as has been discussed in some measure in this chapter) clearly shows. If the Church fails to respond in an adequately reasonable manner to the above challenge, then, the present trend in evangelical Christianity towards pragmatism on the one hand, and reactionary

mysticism on the other will inevitably replace the objective confidence of Christian orthodoxy.

In 1934 Lewis wrote a poem that prophetically seemed to foresee an age when conceptions such as truth, beauty, and reality were philosophically denied (The Pilgrim's Regress 1990:235),

*'Iron will eat the world's old beauty up.
Girder and grid and gantry will arise,
Iron forest of engines will arise,
Criss-cross of iron crotchet for your eyes
No green growth. Over all, the skies
Scribbled from end to end with boasts and lies.
(When Adam ate the irrevocable apple, Thou
Saw'st beyond death the resurrection of the dead.)*

*Clamour shall clean put out the voice of wisdom,
The printing-presses with their clapping wings,
Fouling your nourishment. Harpy wings,
Filling your minds all day with foolish things,
Will tame the eagle thought: till she sings
Parrot-like in her cage to please dark kings.
(When Israel descended into Egypt, Thou
Did'st purpose both the bondage and the coming out.)*

The new age, the new art, the new ethic and thought,

And fools crying, Because it has begun

It will continue as it has begun!

The wheel runs fast, therefore the wheel will run

Faster forever. The old age is done,

We have new lights to see without the sun.

(Thou they lay flat the mountains and dry up the sea,

Wilt thou yet change, as though God were a god?)

It is my confident conviction that post-modern epistemology need present no serious challenge to Christian confidence as long as the Church remembers its own supernatural foundation.