

POSTMODERNISM, CHILDREN'S THINKING AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RALPH GOWER: POSTMODERNISM, CHILDREN'S THINKING AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

Concerned by statistics that highlight the departure of 'Secondary stage' children from church life, and by lack of clarity concerning the nature of 'Postmodern' culture that might explain it, I set out to eliminate confusion about the nature of Postmodernism, and to investigate whether there is any connection between contemporary Postmodernism and teen-age rejection of Christianity. Part 1 of the study examines the nature of Postmodernism, showing that it is basically a reaction against power initially expressed in the Medieval church and subsequently revealed in 'Modern' philosophy and culture, oppression against the disadvantaged, Capitalism and consumerism, and Scientism. Ultimately it reacts against religion, primarily in its Christian form. Part 2 of the study first analyses a series of discussions held with groups of children between education years 6 and 8 in Sefton schools, to investigate how far they could use the language and understand the concepts embedded in elements of Postmodern theory. It demonstrates that there was sufficient understanding among the children to be able to identify areas of understanding in culture, in business and commerce and in thinking, that could serve as the basis of a brief survey into reactions to Postmodernism amongst some of their contemporaries. It goes on to describe the construction and use of such a survey in other Sefton schools, inclusive of a section on attitudes to Christianity, adapted, with permission, from a nationally-used test. Although unable to prove causation, results show that children of 11-12 years are already developing parallel (negative) attitudes to rationality, repression and (Christian) religion that can be described as 'Postmodern.' Part 3 concludes the study by examining the implications of the findings for Religious Education in school and in church, and suggesting further areas in which this study might be followed up.

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INTRODUCTION: **THE POSTMODERN PROBLEM**

[1] SIGNPOST

I commenced this study by looking backwards. Aware that Religious Education might need some form of change because many children were reacting against it in the classroom, I suspected but needed to confirm, that the reaction lay in children's adoption of a Postmodern perspective. The question, "What, exactly, does one mean by 'Postmodernism?'" also needed answering because much of the writing about it seemed to me to be partial and even confusing. I therefore set out to do three things that became the basis for this dissertation. First, to undertake a comprehensive study of Postmodernism so that there was no doubt about its direction and content. Secondly, to devise a test to show if and how children were affected by Postmodernism, as defined by part 1 of the study. Thirdly and finally, to examine the implications for teachers of Religious Education, if indeed, children were affected by Postmodernism. What follows is a record of what I have done. Part 1 will record my examination of the nature of Postmodernism. Part 2 will record steps taken by means of conversations and survey to see how far some children in Sefton could understand and had even adopted Postmodern thinking (as defined in Part 1). Part 3 will record what I believe are the implications of the findings, and where future research might be directed.

[2] WHY THIS STUDY IS BEING UNDERTAKEN

We live in a time of change. Nostalgically older people say, "How things have changed!" It is not that they do not appreciate the convenience of electronic equipment, the ability to travel world-wide and the accessibility of information; but, somehow, they have the impression that their early years were 'golden.'

When I was an adolescent, about sixty years ago, society in the United Kingdom was a 'Christian' society, which meant that individuals growing up into it did 'Christian things.' Many people went to church. Most children went to Sunday school, even if it was a means of giving hard-pressed parents an afternoon's rest at a time when there were few family-owned cars, no theme parks to visit and little money was available for leisure activities. But 'Christian things' were more than an alternative to secular activities. The Bible was read with interest and respect, and in times of crisis it was natural for those in Government to call the nation to a 'Day of Prayer.' It was no mere tradition, but a personal enthusiasm on the part of many people, and of which I was part. Even when, fifty years ago, I commenced a career in Religious Education in both school and in church, the emphasis was the same. The Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education I used encouraged teachers to teach about the Bible so that it gave opportunity for children to respond positively to the Christian faith.¹ There was a school Christian Union of over a hundred active members and a local church bursting with large numbers of young people who were taking part in Christian youth activities.

That things have changed is now more of an observation than an impression. R.E. syllabi in schools have moved through liberal teaching about Christianity and the Bible to multi-faith teaching and an emphasis upon 'spirituality.' At the same time, there has been a departure of the secondary-school age group from churches so that their absence is no mere disappointment, but a symptom of a dying church where old members who 'pass on,' are not replaced by an influx of young people. When Churches Together in Ainsdale set up a series of Lenten studies for all church members in 2003, the published theme was, 'The Church – Dying or already dead?' It enabled churchgoers of every denomination to look at contemporary challenges to the Christian faith, but the title seemed to speak for itself. Such observations are not simply personal or local. When Archbishop George Carey spoke to bishops, missionaries and other clergy at a meeting of the Church of England Board of Mission in March 1999, he said, 'The church is one generation away

¹ SURREY EDUCATION COMMITTEE: *Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education*, Kingston-on-Thames, 1960.

from extinction.’² It was an impression shared with Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, who, speaking at a conference of priests in Leeds in September 2001 said Christianity in Britain was ‘almost vanquished.’³

The ‘lost generation’ of ‘teen-agers’ to the church is a reality, with statistics supported by both informal and formal research. At an informal level a survey was made of 1000 children prior to the carol concert at Manchester City, Maine Road stadium’s event, ‘*Sing your heart out for the Lad.*’ The organisers asked the children to identify their favourite carol. The only Christian carol the children identified was ‘*Away in a manger*’ with 11% support. The most popular Christmas carols [songs?] were ‘*Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer* (29%), ‘*I wish it could be Christmas every day,*’ (24%) and ‘*Jingle Bells*’ (16%).⁴ When Experian, a market research company polled 6,700 people during the same period they found that only 1 in 4 people (mostly elderly) intended to attend a church service over the Christmas period, and that only 15% of respondents associated the 25th. December with ‘celebrating the birth of Jesus.’⁵

Formal research has been undertaken as well. Surveys undertaken by Christian Research and by Churches Information for Mission on a much wider scale have borne this out. Churches Information for Mission, undertaking a national survey in 2000, found that the 15-24 age range constituted 15% of the national population but only 6% had any church connection.⁶ This seemed high when compared with the results obtained by Christian Research in another national survey of 378,717 churchgoers at the end of 1999. An overall decline in churchgoing over the previous decade was reported, due to the ageing of regular congregations and non-attendance of young people. Only 4% of children under 15 attended any Sunday School compared with 56% in 1905.⁷ Most church leaders I have

² Quoted by BRIERLY, P: *The Tide is Running Out*, London, Christian Research, 2000, p.93.

³ BRIERLY, P: Op.cit. p.93.

⁴ EDITORIAL: Rudolph is Top Carol for Children, Didcot, *Baptist Times*, 28.11.02. p.1.

⁵ SUNDAY TIMES: 15.12.02, London, p.7.

⁶ CHURCHES INFORMATION FOR MISSION: *Faith in Life*, London, C.I.M., 2000.

⁷ Reported in *Baptist Times*, Didcot, 13.01.00, p.3.

spoken to would reduce the figure still further – to between 2% and 3%. Brierley, who compiled the report commented:

The trends in the current churchgoing numbers are frightening for those who care about the church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ for which it stands. They suggest an indifference, a lack of understanding, commitment and interest perhaps unparalleled since St. Augustine came to these shores in 597 A.D.⁸

The problem goes beyond church attendance and ageing congregations and extends to provision of R.E. teachers and church leaders. If children have found an alternative to the Christian faith, they are less likely to decide to study religion and theology at higher education level, and this will result in fewer qualified teachers of Religious Education and fewer candidates for Christian ministry. Such a situation is borne out by further statistics. The National Association of SACREs reported in 2002 that there were insufficient numbers of graduates coming forward to teach Religious Education in schools so as to maintain the subject. Seven hundred teachers a year are required but there were, at the time of reporting, only 1250 students studying Theology or Religious Education in all Higher Education institutions to meet the yearly needs of both school and church. The report said that Theology and Religious Studies departments were already closing in Derby, Sunderland, Middlesex and Gloucester due to lack of applicants.⁹ The shortage of applicants for Christian Ministry has involved all major denominations, other than Baptists, but in 2002, Baptists too found that there was a shortfall. It is true that some older candidates for the ministry are coming forward, but numbers do not meet the shortfall, and their entry simply underlines the fact that younger people are missing.

Why the problem? Why are 'tween-agers' to coin Brierley's term, showing no interest in Christianity? Gledhill, Religious Correspondent to *The Times*, wrote, at the end of 2002, that 'The Anglican Church is in meltdown, as attendances fall.' Responses were published the following day, and while

⁸ BRIERLEY, P: Op.cit. p.99.

⁹ POWELL, R: And Where are the R.E. Teachers of 2008? *SACRE News* (6), Autumn 2002, Birmingham, Westhill College.

no-one denied it, remedies were suggested from 'Stick to the Book of Common Prayer,' and 'Preach Christ instead of self' to analyses that suggested the decline was due to narrow-mindedness, intolerance, appointment of non-Christian clergy, outdated administration and treatment of God as a commodity.¹⁰ Nobody suggested that the decline was due to the absence of young people because they held to a different culture to that of the church. Culture did not seem to be an issue.

What exactly is meant by culture? Academically, in the Anglo-French tradition, culture is 'synonymous with civilisation,' while in the German tradition it is somewhat narrower – 'the repository of human excellence, artistic achievement and individual perfection.' 'The total set of beliefs, customs or way of life of a particular group,' seems to me to be a perfectly adequate definition of 'culture' and at the same time highlights the problem.¹¹ The beliefs, customs and way-of-life of the contemporary teen-ager or secondary school pupil seem to be at odds with that of the average, older church-goer, although not all church leaders seem to be aware of it.

The word frequently used to describe such contemporary culture is 'Postmodern,' and while used to indicate the 'very contemporary' or the 'ultra modern,' there is little understanding as to what the word really means. Many people seem to follow the advice of the *Independent* – 'No-one knows what it means, so use the word as often as you can.'¹² Richard Whitely, commenting on 'Countdown,' presented on television each afternoon said, "People keep writing to me to say that 'Countdown' is a Postmodernist programme, but I haven't a clue what they mean."¹³ The position is summed-up well by Elliott:

¹⁰ GLEDHILL, R: *The Times*, London 5/6.11.02. She followed this by a further report from the Diocese of London that was facing a £½-million annual deficit to the point where parishes with fewer than 75 regular worshippers could face closure. [*The Times*, 16.05.03.]

¹¹ ABERCROMBIE, N., HILL, S. & TURNER, B: *Dictionary of Sociology*, Item, 'Culture,' London, Allen Lane, 1984, pp.98-99.

¹² Quoted by TIDBALL, D: *A Beginner's Guide to Postmodernity*, London, .Alpha, 4.5.96, London.

¹³ WHITELEY, R: 'Countdown,' Channel 4, 19.05.99.

Across the various disciplines, the amount of books with 'Postmodernism' in the title means that it is becoming increasingly difficult to represent to all corners where it can be found. Admittedly, not all the books with the word 'Postmodern' or its cognates in the title are necessarily about Postmodernism. Very often they are about something else, with the word, 'Postmodern' thrown in to catch the eye.¹⁴

It seemed to me that three things were required:

[1] A description of 'Postmodernism' in such a way that it can be understood by people of average intelligence, and who can see its connection with problems of communication about religion.¹⁵ The kind of society we live in is fairly obvious to any intelligent and even casual viewer – materialistic (dominated by consumerism), communicative (from satellite telephones to the world-wide web), pastiche (worldwide fashion, music ... put side-by-side), subjective (truth is what works for you or is true for you) and frequently pessimistic (the inevitability of global terrorism and forecasts about the end of the world.); but why 'Postmodern' and why does it cause problems for religious belief? The term needs to be explained and justified.

[2] A confirmation that children are affected by Postmodern culture and an explanation of how it might lead children within the secondary school age-group to cease attending church, and reject the Christian faith. If there is a culturally-lost generation to the church, then at least members of the church should be able to understand why this is so. This implies that children can understand Postmodernism and can use language to express its ideas.

[3] An examination of the implications of the findings for those involved in Religious Education in community school, aided school and church and proposals as to what might be done within each sphere to bridge the cultural gap, so as to improve communication about Christianity. Postmodernism

¹⁴ ELLIOTT, M: *Postmodernism and Theology*, Leicester, I.V.P., 1998, p.5.

¹⁵ Others undertaking research into the nature of Postmodernism might come to a different analysis to my own. My approach has been influenced by my hope that the study will help those who are involved in the field of Religious Education.

presents a particular challenge to those involved in Religious Education and steps need to be taken to help them to address the challenge.

This is the purpose of my research.

[3] THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING POSTMODERNISM

Oh God, I'm so lonely. Even Jude has forgotten about me. She has been ringing all week panicking about what to buy Vile Richard. Mustn't be too expensive, suggest getting too serious or attempt to emasculate him (v.g. idea if you ask self) nor anything to wear as taste-gaffe minefield might remind Vile Richard of last girlfriend ... Latest idea was whisky but combined with other small gift so as not to seem too cheapskate or anonymous – possibly combined with tangerines or chocolate coins, depending on whether Jude decided Christmas-stockings-concept overcute to points of nausea or terrifyingly smart in its Post-Modernity.¹⁶

Whether many of those who read Bridget Jones' 'best seller' diary had any notion of the meaning of 'Post-Modernity' (sic) is doubtful. It is an attention-grabbing word that has little meaning to those in the world outside of Academia. There is however confusion even in the academic world, because it frequently has a meaning unique to the individual writer. It is, in a sense, what one would expect. Postmodernism claims that there is no 'absolute truth' or no 'overarching metanarrative.' Postmodernism can therefore claim for itself neither absolutism nor an explanation for everything. Those who take up a relative position in philosophy cannot extricate themselves from relativity. Those who insist that "What is right is what is right for me," have to accept that some people are right to hold to positions other than relativity. Those who hold to one definition of Postmodernism cannot demand the same definition from another.

This does not mean that a definition of Postmodernism is impossible. We may gain an idea of what Postmodernism is from statements and counter

¹⁶ FIELDING, H: *Bridget Jones' Diary*, London, Picador, 1997, p.297.

statements, and even from the confusing writing. If one writer sees Postmodernism from one perspective, and another sees it from another, much may be learned when the work of both scholars is put side-by-side.

In the next part of this preface to the dissertation, I will examine some of the problems that are involved, so that I can put them to one side and subsequently come to an understanding of Postmodernism that is acceptable in the academic world, and that can, at the same time, be understood by children. I will examine the confusion that arises from style of writing, from statements of origin and from the diverse concepts that lie behind the word.

3.1: Obscurity of writing – style and clarity

Writing about Postmodernism has, in my opinion, become clearer than when I commenced this study.¹⁷ I clearly recall my initial experience of reading round the subject. I had borrowed a popular academic paperback bearing the title, 'Postmodernism' and started to read while sitting in the car for a long period whilst awaiting a passenger from the local train. As I read, I became more and more confused with a confusion that bordered on panic. I could not make sense of what I was reading, and I was, from qualification and experience supposed to have a fair level of intelligence. My panic was only allayed when I realised that there might be a number of reasons behind it.

One reason might be simply that there is a style of language and writing between academics in the same way that there is a common language known as 'Scouse' used between people in Liverpool. Academic-speak may be above and beyond the language used by non-academics in normal communication, but it is appropriate to use such a style when one academic writes about a subject such as Postmodernism to another. This view is

¹⁷ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994.
GRENZ, S: *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1996.
HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown – Making Sense of a Culture*, Leicester, I.V.P., 2002.
O'DONNELL, K: *Postmodernism*, Oxford, Lion, 2003.
WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Postmodernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004.

supported by Woolgar who suggested that reports on research should not be written in narrative style because it is not intended to draw attention to itself as a text; it is 'a neutral medium for conveying ... facts about the world [and] its neutrality exempts it from consideration as a species of social/cultural activity.'¹⁸ Usher and Edwards seem to claim that such language is appropriate means of communication between academics, although even their argument is (therefore necessarily?) less than clear:

The academic texts of researchers are ... 'writerly' texts which [yet] point away from their 'writerliness.' Through narrative realism they direct attention away from themselves as texts to that which they purport to be about. Yet because it is writing that makes narrative realism possible, these texts clearly demonstrate that it is only through writing that the constitutive effects of writing can be denied. The textual strategies of writing have as their most important effect, that writing can conceal its own being as writing.¹⁹

Having said this, there might be another reason that is involved. Connor, himself an academic and writing about the problem of communication in the area of Postmodernism, quoted a passage by Krauss (out of context), which he believed went beyond normal levels of comprehension. It read:

If Modernism's domain of pleasure is the space of auto-referentiality, this pleasure dome is erected on the semiological possibility of the pictorial sign as non-representational and non-transparent, so that the signified becomes the redundant condition of a reified signifier. But from our perspective, the one from which we see the signifier cannot be reified; that its objecthood, its quiddity, is only a fiction; that every signifier is itself the transparent signified of an already-given decision to carve out the vehicle as a sign – from this perspective there is no opacity, but only a transparency that opens into a bottomless system of reduplication.²⁰

Quite apart from length of sentence, there were words utilised that were not recognised by the computer dictionary. Connor actually suggested that sometimes his university-lecturer-colleagues deliberately wrote in such an

¹⁸ WOOLGAR, S: *Knowledge and reflexivity*, London, Sage, 1991, p.28.

¹⁹ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.151.

²⁰ CONNOR, S: *Postmodern Culture* (2nd. Ed), Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, p.101.

abstruse manner in order to distress students to the point where they would be driven to read again and again and absorb more during the struggle. Some academic writers regard such writing as a continuing problem among their colleagues. Leading a conference on writing for research, Fairbairn suggested that "The main concern of many academic authors seems to be with their intention to attempt to demonstrate how clever they are, what big words they can use; how familiar they are with the things that other writers in their fields have written in their area of study – or at any rate with the names of authors and researchers who are currently important or at any rate trendy, and what torturous constructions they can employ rather than to communicate as clearly and as simply as they can communicate in their written work."²¹

Another reason for lack of clarity is that the subject-matter is more complex than the content of the average conversation and the problem seems to be intensified in writing about Postmodernism. Jacques Derrida (a key Postmodern thinker) might have deliberately made his writing obscure as a demonstration of his belief that words have little meaning but it convinced some Cambridge dons that he was unworthy of an honorary doctorate. In a letter to the 'Times' in March 1992, they gave their reasons:

M. Derrida's work does not accept standards of clarity and rigour. M. Derrida's writings seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and puns. He seems to have come close to making a career out of translating into the academic sphere, tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or the concrete poets. ... M. Derrida's voluminous writings stretch the normal forms of academic scholarship beyond recognition. Above all his works are written in a style which defies comprehension.²²

Even when effort is made to explain Postmodern theory outside of the academic world, it is extremely difficult. When Cray attempted to explain the nature of Postmodernism to a denominational assembly he described Postmodernism as "a way of looking at the world in which the concept of a

²¹ FAIRBAIRN, G: *Academic Writing as a Species of Storytelling*, Liverpool, Hope University College, 12.4.03.

²² Quoted by COLLINS, J. & MAYBLIN, B: *Derrida for Beginners*, Cambridge, Icon, 1996, p.9.

steadily rising graph has been replaced by the image of a web of interconnecting links which have transformed the cultural landscape (especially the concepts of time and space) and have developed the practice of consumerism." A reporter reckoned that it was 'too hard' for most people.²³

There are ways of justifying academic language, but it can become a problem when one is seeking to communicate with children about Postmodern theory, and indeed when adults with average intelligence seek to understand what is involved.

3.2: Confusion of timing – first use of term

Further confusion has been caused because different scholars have seen the origin of the concept of Postmodernism as arising at different times. The architect, Charles Jencks, gave his point of view about origins to an enquiring public through the correspondence columns of *The Times*:

The first use of the term "Postmodernism" ... extends to the 1870's, when it was used by the British artist, John Watkins Chapman, and in 1917 when used by Rudolf Pannwitz. "Post Impressionism" (1880's) and "post-industrial" (1914-1922) were the beginning of the "Posties" which flowered intermittently in the early 1960's in literature, social thought, economics and even religion ("Post Christianity"). "Posteriority," the negative feeling of coming after a creative age or, conversely, the positive feeling of transcending a negative ideology, really develops in the 1970's, in architecture and literature, two centres of the post-modern debate (hyphenated half the time to indicate autonomy and a positive, constructive movement). "Deconstructive Postmodernism" comes to the fore after the French post-structuralists (Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard) became accepted in the United States in the late 1970's and now half the academic world believes postmodernism is confined to negative dialectics and deconstruction. But in the 1980's a series of new, creative movements occurred, variously called "constructive," "ecological," "grounded," and "restrictive post modernism." It is clear that two basic movements exist as well as "the postmodern condition," "reactionary

²³ CRAY, G: *Christ, Lord of Culture Even Tho' it Conceals Him*. Keynote address at Baptist Assembly, Plymouth, 5.4.02, and summarised in the *Baptist Times*, Didcot, 9.4..02., p.11.

postmodernism" and "consumer postmodernism," for example the information age, the Pope and Madonna I should add that one of the great strengths of the word, and the concept, and why it will be around for another hundred years, is that it is carefully suggestive about our having gone beyond the world-view of modernism – which is clearly inadequate – without specifying where we are going. That is why most people will spontaneously use it, as if for the first time. But since "Modernism" was coined apparently in the third century, perhaps its first use was then.²⁴

It is not an account that would be accepted by all scholars. Sardar suggests an early use by Frederico De Onis in 1934, and points to its use in Toynbee's 'A Study of History' in 1947.²⁵ A letter to *The Times* by a Stephen Humphreys as a contribution to the debate about when the term was first used, claimed that art critic Leo Steinberg had used the term in 1968, that Bernard Rosenberg the cultural historian had done so in 1957, and that D.C. Somervell used the term in 1947.²⁶ This is, however what one might expect. To give a date and title for Postmodernism is to confer upon it an identity and status that it will not own. As Usher and Edwards put it, 'Any attempt at definition must lead to paradox since it is to totalise, to provide a single unified explanation of that which sets its face against totalisation.'²⁷ i.e. When it began depends on what it is.

3.3: Diversity of concept – variety of terms

'Postmodernism,' 'Postmodern,' 'Postmodernity.' Is there any difference? Some writers appear to use the term 'Postmodern' to describe the age in which we live or are entering into. It is modern, and yet somehow it reaches beyond. For some writers it is exciting – 'Post' means 'after,' and 'modern' means 'up to date' or 'now.' Thus the term 'postmodern' could be translated as 'beyond the now.'it is fast, on the go, ever changing...²⁸ Others view

²⁴ Quoted by APPIGNANENSI, R. & GARRATT, C: *Postmodernism*, Cambridge, Icon, 1999, p.3.

²⁵ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other*, London, Pluto Press, , 1998, p.10.

²⁶ HUMPHREYS, S: Questions Answered, *The Times*, London, 25.02.03.

²⁷ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.7.

²⁸ O'DONNELL, K: *Postmodernism*, Oxford, Lion, 2003, p.6.

it pessimistically, pointing to weapons of mass destruction, global warming and antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Still more view it analytically. Heelas supported the idea that in contrast to Modernism where there is an attempt at differentiation in contrasting elements that have arisen in the development of thought and society.²⁹ Postmodernism seeks what he called 'Dedifferentiation' – a search for unification of difference.³⁰ It is an age in which there is (1) a refusal to regard positivistic, rationalistic, instrumental criteria as the sole or exclusive standard of worthwhile knowledge; (2) a willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes or frameworks of meaning, even at the cost of disjunctions and eclecticism; (3) A celebration of spontaneity, fragmentation, superficiality, irony and playfulness; (4) A willingness to abandon the search for over-arching or triumphalist myths, narratives or frameworks of knowledge,³¹

At other times it is used to describe the *world* we are entering into. Lash and Urry identify four components of the Postmodern world – (1) globally circulating objects (capital, goods, services, information, communication); (2) Mobile subjects (global labour market leading to global migration, permanent and temporary); (3) steady increments of cognitive and aesthetic activity; and (4) individualism in economic and social life – all facilitated by information and communication structures.³²

But even within categories of the age and the world, Postmodernism has not stood still. Sardar points out that changes such as the demystification of scientific objectivity (Kuhn, Feyerabend), the collapse of the worth-whileness of Western philosophy (Wittgenstein, Derrida, Rorty), the emphasis on indeterminacy in quantum physics and mathematics, the emphasis on discontinuity and difference in history (Foucault), the rise of the 'magical

²⁹ e.g. LASH, S: *Sociology of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge,, 1990.

³⁰ HEELAS, P: *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, Introduction pp. 1-18. But the point might be made that while Postmodernism has brought together the sacred and the secular, Modernism developed the unifying idea of humanity and the Romantics the idea of the soul of the universe. Modernism might have seen the rise of inclusive denominations in the Christian faith, while Postmodernism sees the multiplication of religious sects.

³¹ BECKFORD, J: Religion, Morality And Postmodernism, in WILSON, B. (Ed) *Religion, Contemporary Issues*, London, Bellew, 1992, pp.11-27.

³² LASH, S. & URRY, J: *The End of Organised Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity, 1987.

realism' school of fiction (Borges, Marquez), the secularisation of Christianity and its removal from society as a moral force ... have given a new foundation for Postmodernism. It is no longer concerned to dethrone Enlightenment Reason, or with art and architecture. 'Postmodernism has penetrated all spheres of disciplinary thought, established deep roots in daily life, while becoming a global cultural force underpinned by free market bourgeois liberalism. The Postmodern world is being built by the mass media. The glue that binds it all together; the Postmodern economy,'³³

There have been many attempts to define 'Postmodernism' in relation to 'Modernism.' Usher and Edwards attempted to analyse Postmodernism as a rupture from the Modern, as part of the Modern, and as an intensification of one particular part of the Modern, but failing to make progress, they concluded that 'In attempting to answer this question, the only thing which is clear is that the answer is unclear.'³⁴ Another approach might have helped them – that Postmodernism is a space that exists after Modernity but has no meaning of its own, and which precedes something that still has to move in – a lack of dominant ideology with a consequent 'endless plurality of ways to believe and live.'³⁵ Postmodernism therefore becomes 'the presence of an absence' with a bewildering number of attempts to find a new world. Foucault saw Modernity and Postmodernity as oppositional attitudes that can always be found and are always present in any epoch or period.³⁶ While Featherstone is specific about a period in time, identifying a break between Modernity and Postmodernity with a 'qualitative' difference in between, others like Harvey³⁷ and Jameson³⁸ do not see it as a reaction at all, but simply as a

³³ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other*, London, Pluto Press, 1998, pp.7-8.

³⁴ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.168.

³⁵ HOLMES, S: Postmodern Living, in *The Bible in Transmission*, Swindon, Bible Society, Summer 2002, pp.6-7.

³⁶ FOUCAULT, M: What is Enlightenment, in RAINBOW, P: (Ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, Harmondsworth, Peregrine Books, 1986.

³⁷ HARVEY, D: *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991

³⁸ JAMESON, F: Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, *New Left Review* 146, 1984, pp.53ff.

new phase, while an extreme but realistic view is that the very idea of one period following another is 'Modernist.'³⁹

So what is it? A well-known and respected commentator on Postmodernism wrote:

Postmodernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this it is not at all clear what the devil it is. In fact, clarity is not conspicuous among its attributes.⁴⁰

It is therefore understandable that some commentators do not believe that Postmodernism can be defined. Any attempt at definition must lead to paradox since it is to totalise, to provide a single unified explanation of that which sets its face against totalisation.⁴¹ 'As soon as we say, "Postmodernism is ... Q," we give it a fixed and definitive ontology and identity and Postmodernism has to reject a description of itself as embodying a set of timeless ideas contrary to those of Modernism. It has to insist on being recognised as a set of viewpoints of a time, justifiable only within its own time.'⁴² In short, from the Postmodern point of view, knowledge cannot be systematised into a single all-encompassing framework, and to attempt to do so would be to deny what one seeks to clarify

[4] AN APPROACH TO WRITING ABOUT POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism might not be *absolutely* true, but it is not impossible to at least categorise Postmodernism, to give it some form of definition; else it would be impossible to write about it at all. As Marshall put it:

³⁹ COUZENS HOY, D: *Foucault: a Critical Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989.

⁴⁰ GELLNER, E: *Postmodernism, Person and Religion*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.22.

⁴¹ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Op.cit.* p.7.

⁴² NICHOLSON, L: *Feminism/Postmodernism* London, Routledge, 1990, p.11.

There are still enough glimpses of the postmodern moment or condition in our everyday lives for it to be something which is not as alien and incomprehensible as those that seek to caricature or dismiss postmodernism would make it out to be.⁴³

It may be true that it can never be totally pinned down, that no definition is ever totally safe, but it is not true that we cannot make a provisional statement in order that it might become a focus for communication.

We can also put differing accounts or aspects of postmodernism side-by-side. Such a procedure is familiar to children who have considered the thinking behind Saxe's poem, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. The poem tells how six blind men from 'Hindostan' washed an elephant. Each was convinced from his own experience that the elephant was a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan or a rope. The poem concludes:

And so those men of Hindostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding loud and strong.
Though each was partly in the right
And all were in the wrong.⁴⁴

It is, in any case, not possible to return to pre-Postmodern times. Anderson identified three major forces that have brought about Postmodernity (sic) – the breakdown of old ways of belief, the birth of a truly 'global' culture and the emergence of a conflict about the identity and nature of reality and truth – and claimed that these factors make it impossible to return to pre-Postmodernity.⁴⁵ Aware of the indefiniteness, we therefore have no other option but to communicate about Postmodernism in an un-Postmodern way.

It is possible to make a fairly clear distinction between Postmodernity and Postmodernism. 'Postmodernity' is commonly used to describe the

⁴³ MARSHALL, B: *Teaching the Postmodern*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.2.

⁴⁴ SAXE, J: *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, in MACBAIN, J. (Ed.): *The Book of a Thousand Poems*, Evans, London, 1959, p.484.

⁴⁵ ANDERSON, W: *Reality Isn't What it Used to be*, Harper, San Francisco, 1990, p.7.

(Postmodern) world or the age in which we live, currently with its scientism, global-communication, pessimism and consumerism, all expressed through. Systems of authority. 'Postmodernism' is a series of reactions against such a world that can be seen in history.

I intend therefore, in Part I of the dissertation to examine Postmodernism as a series of reactions by various groups of people against their world:

I will examine:

The initial 'Modern' reaction against the Medieval church

Romantic reaction against rational-scientific thinking,

Philosophical reaction over two centuries

Reaction against 'high' culture by 'Generation X.'

Reaction against Capitalism and consumerism

Reaction on behalf of the oppressed

Pessimistic reaction, and

Future developments in Postmodern theory

I will also demonstrate that Postmodernism reacts against Christianity, and is strongly anti-Christian, while being opposed to other 'overarching' religious faiths. All of them are reactions against some form of power and authority.

Such an approach combines the virtues of doing justice to some key features of the Postmodern family of thought with the possibility of seeing it as a whole, and then utilising such understanding to see how far children adopt or absorb the ideas, so making it possible to see to what extent it raises a challenge for those involved in Religious Education.

PART I: THE REACTIONARY NATURE OF POSTMODERNISM

I have already explained that Postmodernism may be regarded as a series of reactions against authoritarianism, and for the purposes of simplicity I will now label the reactions, 'Philosophical,' 'Social,' 'Pessimistic,' and 'Religious.' They are labels that I have found useful when talking about Postmodernism with many professional people in the church and in education, who have been making an effort to understand the nature of Postmodernism.

What I have termed 'philosophical reaction' began with reaction against the authority and teaching of the church in Medieval times, and it is commonly referred to as a 'Modern' reaction, or 'Modernism.' This was followed by a (non-religious) reaction against 'Modernism.' Some of the reaction came from the group known as the 'Romantics,' and their reaction preceded a long-term development of opposition to 'Modernism' that has become the essence of 'Postmodernism.' There was also a 'social reaction.' One element of the social reaction was simply a cultural expression of Postmodern philosophy, but it went beyond this in reaction against other forms of authority that had resulted in oppression. Besides reaction against colonialism, racism and patriarchy, there was reaction against the form of authority exercised over consumers through Capitalism. There was also reaction against the optimism that was part of the so-called 'Enlightenment' – a 'Pessimistic' reaction. Finally there was a religious reaction, in that although not deliberately arraigned against religion, Postmodern theory conflicted with Christian belief.

I intend to give an account of the story of such 'Postmodern' reaction in this part (I) of the dissertation in four sections corresponding to the four reactions against authoritarianism, so as to bring about some understanding of the nature of Postmodernism itself, and in such a way that it will prove to be of value to those involved in the various spheres of Religious Education. The sections will vary in length, because they relate to different time-spans and because of the complexity of some of the thinking that is involved. I have laid

out a 'map' on the 'Contents' pages so that the relationship within and between the sections becomes clear.

CHAPTER 1: PHILOSOPHICAL REACTION – REJECTION OF AUTHORITATIVE VIEWPOINTS.

1.1: Reaction against the authority of the church

Tomlinson attempted a crude explanation of how the process began, writing for the non-academic clientele he met at his pub-church in London:

Modernism basically came about as a reaction to Feudalism which had trapped people by ignorance and superstition. Feudal religion was straightforward: God was the big boss in the sky and we humans were his subjects, who did his bidding without asking any questions. The church which was his earthly seat of authority determined the meaning of truth, not only in the realm of religion but in every other field as well: politics, science, history, art and so on. To dissent was to be branded as a heretic and to undergo persecution, excommunication or worse.... There was no process of independent reasoning or questioning.⁴⁶

The seeds of what Tomlinson describes were planted in the Renaissance ('Rebirth') of the 16th. Century. The Renaissance came about by the arrival of the literature of ancient Greece in the Roman 'West.' which brought about a rebirth of learning, a renewed interest in how the world worked and a placing of humanity at the centre of things at a moment in time when there was loss of confidence in the church. There was a reaction against the church in the way it diminished human beings in its teaching at that time. It was felt that human beings should be given improved status and enhanced capabilities. No longer was it acceptable that human beings should be frightened by superstition, limited to divine revelation (in effect, the teachings of the church) and condemned by 'total depravity' to moral failure in this life, with worse to come. The Renaissance stimulated a desire to go beyond this. Another adverse reaction arose because it was seen that the church was not always good. When the Thirty Years War came to an end in Europe and its people saw the devastation as a result of the different theologies within the church, they looked for something beyond (and better than) church teaching. Neither was everything the church taught true. The church had taught that the earth

⁴⁶ TOMLINSON, D: *The Post Evangelical*, London, S.P.C.K., 1995, p.63

was the centre of the universe. Galileo⁴⁷ had utilised the telescope to show that this was not true, and had suffered for it at the hands of the church. Maybe other things taught by the church were untrue as well; perhaps reason and sense-experience should be given more importance. This was the stimulus that led to the beginning of Modernism.

Many thinkers,⁴⁸ reacting against the church took one of the paths of rationality.

Some took the position in which rationality replaced revelation. Bacon believed that truth and reality arose from rational thinking + experiment, and that as such knowledge increased and inter-relationships between sciences became clear, the unity that underlay all things would be discovered and the 'Enlightenment' received by the human race would lead to improvement and superiority. Knowledge is power! Gone was the idea of inherent and original sinfulness and with it the weakness of humankind. But do human beings never make mistakes? Could human beings ever really come to the truth? Can we be certain of anything? Although initially plagued by doubt himself, Descartes believed that we can, at least, be certain that two things are real, that 'we' are 'thinking.' – 'Cogito ergo sum.' He went on to argue that the human self is the central unity underlying our different experiences, that reasoning is central and that human beings should find grounds for verifying knowledge within themselves without having to appeal to external authorities or to revelation. Descartes moved his world from one in which objective truth could be known because it depended on God who revealed all things truthfully, to one in which subjective knowers form from themselves and from their experience, the criteria of what may be known. As Honeysett puts it, 'He replaced the idea that God knows everything and I will pursue His

⁴⁷ Galileo (1564-1642)

⁴⁸ Lifespan of some thinkers is footnoted to give historical perspective. Bacon, (1561-1626); Descartes (1596-1650); Locke (1632-1704); Newton (1642-1727); Hume (1711-1776); Kant (1724-1804)

knowledge, with the idea that I myself can know things without God and can pursue my own knowledge.⁴⁹

Others took the view that revelation could be known through rationality. God was still the foundational principle on which the existence and order of the natural world depended but as Wright comments, 'Deists adopted a negative attitude towards the Christian concept of revelation, holding that religion is a universal phenomenon available to all on the basis of natural reason and as such is not dependent on any exclusive historical revelation available only to a select few.'⁵⁰ God was not so much a heavenly father as a distant designer who had made a complex machine whose principles could be fathomed by people like Newton. Locke maintained that the only secure basis of Christianity was its reasonableness; reason has the last word in the acceptance of the supernatural and in the interpretation of Scripture. The laws of nature were the laws of God; miracles and foretelling prophecy were irrational, so they were rejected.

There were still doubts. In his support for human origin of knowledge. Locke had claimed that we were each a 'tabula rasa' on which our experiences were written, while Hume contended that this could not be entirely true; there are some things that cannot be explained in this way. We know about causality but do not experience it; only sequence. We know about substance but we do not experience it; only such things as size and colour. Kant replied that there are some concepts such as space and time already embedded in and used by the mind to deal with sense experience. Some of those things that went beyond sense experience, such as moral standards, were possessed by every human being, and could be tested rationally. Modernism seemed secure. It was accepted (at least in the 'West') that:

- Truth is based in rationality and is universal; it is the same everywhere, for everyone.
- Rationality leads to human progress.

⁴⁹ HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown; Making Sense of a Culture in Crisis*, Leicester, I.V.P., 2002, p.98.

⁵⁰ WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, p.73

- Progress leads to superiority; knowledge is power.

In short, the over-arching authority of divine revelation as the way of understanding everything, had been replaced by the over-arching authority of human reason. One 'metanarrative' had been replaced by another.

What we know as Postmodernism began with a rejection of such a position. Postmodernism agreed with the rejection of authority of the church but went much further to claim that there is no authority anywhere, and it is to be resisted wherever it occurs. It began with rejection of Modernism which claimed an authority for human rationality, but in the course of development, Postmodernism became progressively more radical.

There were a number ways in which the assertion of the primacy of human rationality was challenged. I will now go on to summarise how this happened.

1.2: Romantic reaction against Modernism

Although never identified as 'Postmodern,' the reaction of artists against what they felt was slavery to the 'Rational,' and to the idea of 'subject-object dualism' re-established by the Renaissance was a pointer to Postmodern reaction that was to come.

Rationality affected the arts by bringing back Classical rules that had once dominated the artistic world and had been reinstated by the Enlightenment; if art was not subject to the rules then it was not art at all. In order to be recognised as a writer, painter, sculptor, musician, dancer ... one had to do things according to 'Classical' (rational) rules. The Romantics wanted to affirm the importance of human feeling, empathy, emotion and spiritual sensitivity. They held that artists might break all the rules in their spiritual quest for a romantic image. Feeling was more important than rationality and

intuition was more important than cognitive certainty.⁵¹ Rousseau⁵² said that Romanticism was the recovery of natural reason that returns an individual to an uncorrupted relationship with the natural order; and Beethoven, Byron, Coleridge, Goethe, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth ... would have agreed with him.⁵³ They found some support for their reaction in Kant where the 'noumenal world' is the realm of things as they are in themselves, and this is the realm, of ultimate reality, of God, of beauty and goodness, transcending the deterministic, phenomenological reality of our everyday perceptions. We have no access to this reality through our reason, but we are still capable of intimating it. The Romantics believed that we are able to reach this dimension by emphasising feeling, immediate apprehension and creativity which take us beyond rational knowledge. As Wright put it,

By contrast to the rational, real authentic freedom is based on the possibility of experience and feeling directed towards the noumenal world of reality as it is in itself – that dimension of truth, beauty and goodness which we cannot know rationally, but which we can intuit through our religious, artistic and moral sensibilities.⁵⁴

They reacted against 'Subject-object dualism' derived from Descartes because it did not add up with their experience. They were conscious of the fact that when an artist paints a picture, the result is what is in the artist's mind; the subject and object are, in the end, the same. In the creative act of moulding the unformed medium, artists discover what form the medium has in their own minds. We organise our experiences in our own way and in so doing the result is the same as ones-self.

Bauman summed things up in the following way:

⁵¹ But no complete rejection of rationality. In her study of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byatt makes it clear that Coleridge was a brilliant metaphysician, and she quotes Wordsworth's letter to Coleridge reacting against Lamb's criticism of his unpublished 'The White Doe.' Wordsworth wrote, 'Lamb has not a reasoning mind and therefore cannot have a comprehensive mind, and least of all has an imaginative one.' See BYATT, A: *Unruly Times – Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time*, London, Random House (Vintage Edition) 1970, pp.72,233.

⁵² Rousseau (1712-1778)

⁵³ Beethoven (1770-1827), Byron (1788-1824), Coleridge (1772-1834), Goethe (1749-1832), Keats (1795-1821), Shelley (1792- 1822,) Wordsworth (1770-1850)

⁵⁴ WRIGHT, A: *Spiritual Pedagogy*, Abingdon, Culham College Institute, 1998. p.58.

Modernism is all about the declaration of reason's independence; rationalism and objectivism had to take precedence over all else. It was nothing short of a war against mystery and magic in order for rationalism to win; the world had to be de-spiritualised, de-animated, denied the capacity of the subject. ... It is against such a disenchanted world that Postmodernism is aimed; dignity can once again be returned to the emotions. There is respect for ambiguity, and mystery is no longer a tolerated alien awaiting a deportation order.⁵⁵

It went further than reaction against rationality on the basis of emotions. There were other fundamental reactions associated with particular thinkers that I will now trace – Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer in respect of text, and Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Saussure in respect of language. Derrida's important work in relation to text will be taken up in the later sub-section on denial of truth.

1.3: Philosophical reaction against Modernism

Philosophical reaction had already taken place in the foundation of Modernism. This section describes the reactions that took place so as to deny reality, self and truth within Modernism itself.

There is no reality

The initial approach to this issue came through the questioning of the nature of language in spoken and in textual form - a matter that was raised by a number of thinkers within their wider work.

The evidence of text

- Schleiermacher⁵⁶ raised the question about the authority of a text in his

⁵⁵ BAUMAN, Z: *Post Modern Ethics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1933 [Quoted in TOMLINSON, D: Op.cit. p.77]

⁵⁶ SCHLEIERMACHER (1768-1834)

attempts to interpret the text of the Bible.⁵⁷ He began to realise that it was not enough to understand the text from our own vantage point. We also need to understand it from the writer's vantage point, entering into the mind of the writer as the writing was taking place. In order to understand a text one has to 'reconstruct' it by retracing the process by which it came to be; it is necessary to understand the text as the writer understood it. In order to understand a text we have to go back to the social and cultural meaning-systems of the writer.⁵⁸

- Dilthey⁵⁹ removed any objectivity from texts in general. Aware that Kant had said that the mind constructed the world through the transcendental principles of space and time, he went further by claiming that 'space' and 'time' were themselves derived from experience. All of our thinking, he said, is governed by our surrounding world so that what we see, know or write (our worldview) is governed by our personal experience. I believe that my worldview is true, but nobody's personal worldview has ever been universally accepted because of the individual perspectives that underpin them. We therefore have to admit our personal limitations and learn from the worldviews of others; what is true is true for us but not necessarily for others, philosophy and religion included. He suggested that two things have to be borne in mind when interpreting texts. First, worldviews change with history; meaning associated with human activity is always embedded in a historical context from which we can never escape. To understand a text one needs to understand the social and cultural meaning systems that operated at the time the text was written. Secondly, all writing is subject to a 'hermeneutical circle' in which individual words get their meaning from the whole text, and at the

⁵⁷ His work is summarised in THISELTON, A: *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, Grand Rapids, Mi., Eerdmans, 1980.

⁵⁸ An interesting contemporary example in which I have been involved, revolves round the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2.11ff. in the New Testament which includes the injunction, 'I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men.' Some Christian groups/churches have used their literal understanding of the text to deny women any teaching function in the church other than to children. Recent research on the word 'authentein' (to teach) however, reveals that in the world of the writer it referred to the way a woman might lead a man into (teach him) immorality, and the rubric is to prevent women from doing such in church – a serious problem in the ancient church in view of the female based fertility cults which came over from paganism. See GREEN, M: *To Corinth with Love*, London, Hodder, 1982, p.159.

⁵⁹ Dilthey (1833-1911)

same time the whole text gets its meaning from individual words. He illustrated his point from the sentence, "Hand me my club," in which 'hand' and 'club' derive their meaning from the whole, but at the same time, the whole takes its meaning from the individual words.⁶⁰ Interpretation therefore involves a gradual give-and-take process between the whole and the parts. In short, interpretation of text (and analysis of truth) is both subjective and difficult. Therefore, when we speak of 'truth' it has to be something which is 'true for us,' but not for others; not universally.

- Gadamer⁶¹ agreed with Schleiermacher that it was important to interpret a text by understanding what the author intended. He pointed out however, that while this is important, we each see reality in our own way, so that when we talk to one another there is a 'fusion of horizons' that produces a common language and actually changes what we were.⁶² To come to meaning in a text the interpreter has to engage with the text in the same way, in a kind of dialogue, so that meaning emerges from the conversation. It may be that there are a number of interpretations and we cannot claim that any one of them is correct in itself. This understanding, however, is not limited to literature; it affects our understanding of reality. Our relationship with the world is linguistic and meaning emerges from the linguistic enterprise. Meaning does not exist in the external world waiting to be discovered, but it emerges as the interpreter engages in dialogue with the world. It emerges as we experience the 'play' of language in a 'game.'

Evidence from language

- Nietzsche⁶³ believed that we cannot come to a knowledge of truth through

⁶⁰ RICKMAN, H: (Ed.) *Dilthey: Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp.10ff

⁶¹ Gadamer (1900-2002)

⁶² GADAMER, H-G: *Truth and Method* [Tr. BARDEN, G. & CUMMING, J.] New York, Crossroad, 1984, p.349.

⁶³ Nietzsche (1844-1900)

our experience at all. Knowledge with all its concepts and super-concepts is an illusion; we build concepts simply by ignoring differences. There is, for example no such thing as 'a leaf,' which is merely a human creation, because there are billions of leaves, none of which are the same. When we are faced with a large number of objects and place them into categories, the categorisation is quite arbitrary and can be on grounds (say) of colour, shape or size.⁶⁴ 'Knowledge' is simply another human construct; the intellectual dimension is an illusion. We have no access to reality at all; everything is a 'perspectival appearance,' the origin of which lies in us. Language does not help at all because language itself is an aesthetic creation. Truth is an illusion – simply the way that we see things; our world is a world of art! As he put it:

What then is truth? A noble army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to all people; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power, coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.⁶⁵

This meant that there are no values set in the universe that we can discover and this took him beyond the nature of language to another issue that is central to Postmodern thought. There are no values in the universe that we can discover. The values that we say we have are simply part of a 'will to power.' Belief in a God whose standards constitute moral values have gone; 'God is dead,' to use his phrase put on the lips of 'The Madman.'⁶⁶ Instead, humankind followed its own instincts of self-preservation and self-promotion as a 'will to power' – the desire to achieve self-preservation and self-promotion in a 'will to power;' the desire to achieve perfection by ones-self, - without any external help, and the construction of one's own concepts to get us there. Such achievement is 'superhuman' where in the absence of

⁶⁴ NIETZSCHE, F: On Truth and Falsity in an extra-moral sense, in, MUGGE, M: (Trans.) Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays, in *The Complete Works of Fredrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 2., New York, Russell & Russell, 1964, p.44-46.

⁶⁵ KAUFMANN, W: *The Portable Nietzsche*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, p.46.

⁶⁶ NIETZSCHE, F: *The Joyful Wisdom*, 1882, Para. 125, quoted by HAYMAN, R: *Nietzsche*, London, Phoenix, 1997, p.4.

knowledge of reality, we create our own world. He attacked Christianity by rejecting a God who gave moral laws; declaring that Christian obedience and humility were nothing less than slave mentality.

- Postmodern theory is not necessarily the sole philosophic viewpoint held by an individual. Heidegger⁶⁷ was known for his thinking about Existentialism and Postmodernism, and in some ways they overlap. He is Existentialist⁶⁸ in his emphasis that we should be more concerned with our subjectivity than with the external, objective world. We have to start our thinking with human existence. The fundamental thing about human existence is not that I am a thinking subject apart from an external world, but simply that I am 'here in, and part of (he might have said 'embedded in') the world.'⁶⁹

His contribution to Postmodern theory lies in his views on 'presence' and on language. He noted that in the recognition of the subjectivity of thought and language, what we are is reckoned to be determined by our present experience. In fact, he pointed out, we are as much determined by our past and our future, not because it IS there but because it *isn't* there; being is determined by 'absence' as well as 'presence.' Put another way, 'An existing thing is not merely what presents itself to us at the present; it is also what is *not* now present to us, because it is either past or future.'⁷⁰ With respect to language, Heidegger claimed that since we are embedded in our world, the

⁶⁷ Heidegger (1884-1976)

⁶⁸ Existentialism is not easy to define, and is omitted from some texts on the history of philosophy. It might be better described as an attitude to life rather than a philosophy. 'The word, 'Existentialism' is used to emphasise the claim that each individual person is unique in terms of any metaphysical or scientific system, that he is a being who chooses as well as a being who thinks or contemplates; that he is free and that, because he is free, he suffers; and that since his future depends in part upon his free choices it is not altogether predictable. There are also suggestions in this special usage that existence is something genuine or authentic in contrast with insincerity, which a man who merely contemplates the world is failing to make the acts of choice that his situation demands. Running through all of these different though connected suggestions is the fundamental idea that each person exists and chooses in time, and has only a limited amount of it at his disposal in which to make the decisions that matter to him. Time is short. There are urgent decisions to be made. We are free to take them, but the thought of how much depends upon our decision makes our freedom a source of anguish, for we cannot know with any certainty what will become of us.' ACTON, H: Existentialism, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. VIII, p.962A.

⁶⁹ HEIDEGGER, M: *Being and Time*, New York, Harper & Row, 1962, p.78

⁷⁰ GRENZ, S: Op.Cit. p.106.

empirical approach, that truth is a correspondence between what we say and a reality that lies outside of us, is nonsense. He understood 'truth' in terms of 'revelation' or 'disclosure,' but where? In art and in language; but not in any form which a Modern/Enlightenment thinker would recognise. He saw language itself as a form of Being, and as we enter into it and experience it we are transformed.

- Wittgenstein⁷¹ saw language as a kind of art; it is something we use to 'picture' the world. He recognised that we do not always use the same form of language; we use different forms of language for different situations. We have one form of language for prayer, another for ceremonial, another to state facts ... and each occasion has its own rules of language rather like rules of a game. It is the form of the language we use (the game which we employ) that gives rise to reality, rather than reality being 'out there.'⁷² What a sentence means depends upon the context in which it is used. "I am overcome" has a totally different meaning in a formal speech of thanks at a presentation, from an expression of grief made at a funeral. His work was foundational to the later work of Lyotard in his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.⁷³ Lyotard claimed that science has a language and a language-game of its own amidst an infinite number of other language games, which means that all utterances are provisional, unclear and moveable. He went on to say that science cannot claim a representation to be true because language games undermine the very idea of representation. As Usher and Edwards put it, 'The rules of language games provide for a consensus on what is to be considered 'true,' but cannot establish the truth independent of language.'⁷⁴ Definitive statements therefore have to be regarded as moves within a language-game and not as the establishment of truth - the very opposite of definitive scientific statements of truth (which Lyotard identified with cultural imperialism

⁷¹ Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

⁷² WITTGENSTEIN, L: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Trans. PEARS, D. & McGUINNESS, B.). London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, , 1961, p.39

⁷³ LYOTARD, J. F: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.

⁷⁴ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.157.

originating with the Enlightenment). What has happened, claimed Lyotard was that there has been a complete mix-up between scientific and narrative language, each of which had its own game-rules. Science's answer to the claim of illegitimacy was to turn to grand-narratives (or metanarratives) – overarching, epic stories of knowledge, which privilege scientific language above other forms of language because they lead to emancipation of and progress of humanity and to the unity of all knowledge - which so far as Lyotard was concerned were equally illegitimate.

- Saussure⁷⁵ was important in using a 'structuralist' approach to make it clear that language is a social phenomenon – getting its meaning from social interaction. Language is a complete and coherent system, like a piece of music – a network of inter-related sounds and meanings. The word sounds we use (phonemes) cannot strictly be defined since they are simply a social convention and are quite arbitrary; there is no logical connection between the sounds we make (the signifier) and the object it refers to (the signified). A linguistic system is simply a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas.⁷⁶ The meaning of the signifier is not to be found in the signified, but in the social system that generated it. Deeper than language is the assertion that follows this through – that a cultural system structures our mental process and is evidenced in both human language and in social institutions. Usher and Edwards incorporate a useful paragraph in their work on Postmodernism and Education in this respect. They write:

In modernism, meaning is established through a clear representational relationship between the referent (the 'real' object) and the sign consisting of the signifier (the word/image that 'names' the object) fixed to a signified (the concept associated with the word/imager). Postmodernism problematizes this relationship by not only questioning the very notion of representation, the relationship between sign and reality, but also by arguing that because the word/image (signifier) is no longer attached to fixed signifieds, the sign becomes the signifier and therefore becomes its own 'reality.' The signifier actually comes to replace an independently existing 'objective' reality such that the referent becomes an effect rather than a source of the

⁷⁵ Saussure (1857-1913)

⁷⁶ HOLDCROFT, D: *Saussure: Signs, Systems and Arbitrariness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.120

sign and therefore 'everyday life becomes pervaded by a reality – in TV, adverts, video, communication, the Walkman, cassette decks in automobiles, and now, increasingly CD's, CDV and DAT - which increasingly comprises representations.' This is what Baudrillard refers to as the 'simulacrum' – the condition in which reality is already reproduced.⁷⁷

Why stop at language and text?

If the meaning of any unit of language is simply the product of 'difference' from other units of language, then why should a human being be any different? If a human being is a product of intersecting relations (each human being being completely embedded [lost?] in a cultural and conceptual context in which all human beings participate) then the self finds its identity only through its place in the larger system, like a word in a language. There can be no self in the way that it was understood in the Enlightenment period, or by Descartes. This was the position taken by Levi-Strauss and was followed through by Foucault.⁷⁸

Foucault denied that human beings have any basic knowledge that is neutral, value-free and of value to humankind, that our perceptions provide no accurate representation of the world – indeed, that there was such a world of knowledge waiting to be discovered at all, or even that there is such a thing as the 'Self' since we are simply the internalisation of social experiences. Although he denied that he was a Postmodernist,⁷⁹ with him we are now effectively in what Postmodernist thinkers would recognise as an aspect of Postmodernism – a reaction against that element of Modern/Enlightenment thinking which claimed that there is an objective reality outside of us which can be apprehended by human rationality.

⁷⁷ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: Op.cit. p.14.

⁷⁸ Levi Strauss (b. 1908); Foucault (1926-1984)

⁷⁹ He is normally regarded as one of the key Postmodern thinkers. A lecturer at a French university and prolific writer, he is regarded as a 'rebel,' not only in his thinking, but in his lifestyle. He rebelled against his own family and religion, rebelled against the establishment by siding with students in the 1968 Paris student revolt, separatists in Spain and revolutionaries in Iran, and against contemporary views on morality in coming out as a homosexual. Eventually he died of AIDS.

It is a short step from this position to that which claims that reality itself is a social construction. As Sardar put it, 'All we do as humans, it seems, is to construct realities to fit our own mental picture of the world. Everything 'out there' is a figment of our imagination.'⁸⁰ He quotes Anderson:

Reality construction is a process, and although some constructs may be tenacious they are still only temporary manifestations of a dynamic flow of thought that no philosophy or science has yet been able to map or describe in its entirety. Cognition ... is a process of computing a reality – not the reality. And it appears that we construct not just one reality but realities and realities and realities and that they overlap and enclose one another and sometimes conflict.⁸¹

It is difficult to improve on the way that Sardar continues:

This means that the world has been transformed into a theatre where everything is artificially constructed. Politics is stage managed for mass consumption. Television documentaries are transformed and presented as entertainment. Journalism blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. Living individuals become characters in soap operas and fictional characters assume 'real' lives. Everything happens instantaneously and everybody gets a live feed on everything that is happening in the global theatre.

Baudrillard,⁸² prolific writer and lecturer, is sometimes referred to as the 'High Priest of Postmodernism,' although he denied it to say that he was simply analysing the current 'void.' He argued that the entire global theatre is 'fluctuating in indeterminacy,' so much so that reality is being absorbed into the fictionally created 'hyper-reality.' All social life is now being regulated not by reality but by simulations, models, pure images, representations⁸³. The

⁸⁰ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other*, London, Pluto Press, 1998, p.23.

⁸¹ ANDERSON, W.T: *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be*, San Francisco, Harper, 1990, p.68.

⁸² Baudrillard (b.1929)

⁸³ Conscious that one of the objectives of this study is to be able to talk to children about Postmodern thinking and how it affects their outlook, this discussion raises the question of how the idea of hyper-reality might be raised with them. It is not impossible, if an approach in this issue is made through newspapers. An event happens, but REPRESENTATIONS of that event are recorded in different newspapers each of which has its own way of describing things. If we bring together those representations from the newspapers and other media into summary-form, we get REPRESENTATIONS OF REPRESENTATIONS and we are in the

postmodern age has unleashed a process in which reality is systematically manufactured as representation. But the process does not stop there: the representations themselves produce new simulations totally divorced from the original reality, and the simulations themselves go on to produce pure images, the progeny of other images. He took the argument about the social construction of reality to its conclusion. If there is no reality, then the future is not a reality either, and this logical step led Baudrillard into extreme pessimism. One reason why he is sometimes ignored is perhaps because he (famously) took his thinking to a point where it was rejected. He denied that the Gulf War was about to, or had ever taken place,⁸⁴ and that the whole episode was an artificial construction, and by so doing denied the death and suffering which were part of the war, and also the possibility of taking up any moral position about it.

Conclusion – there is no reality

Derrida⁸⁵ makes it clear that there can be no external metaphysical reality behind language to give meaning, no way of getting into a text to understand the meaning or get in to the author's intention, and no exhaustion of the possible interpretations of a text.⁸⁶ In short, there is no reality at all. This can be illustrated from further Postmodern thinking - about science and about simulation.

Postmodernism looks back at the authority of 'Science' (which was integral to the Enlightenment) and denies any truth or reality in what science 'says.' It does not accept that science can 'master' (know directly and certainly) and 'present' (perfect representation) the world because human consciousness and the nature of language makes this impossible. Freud⁸⁷ had shown that 'beneath' consciousness which thinks itself as the centre of being, is the

area of what Baudrillard called 'hyper-reality.' It is a better phrase for children than 'simulacrum' and it accurately describes our world.

⁸⁴ BAUDRILLARD, J: The Reality Gulf, London, *The Guardian*, 11.01.91

⁸⁵ Derrida (b.1930)

⁸⁶ See summary in JOHNSON, C: *Derrida*, London, Orion (Phoenix Edition), 1997.

⁸⁷ Freud (1856-1939)

unconscious with its prejudgements which are formed by interpretative traditions, a network of beliefs and values, and language, so that the subject can have neither a complete knowledge of himself nor of the 'external' world. However much consciousness might come to know, there is always something that remains unknown, and which can never be known because it is constantly changing. Freud demonstrated that since the conscious is shaped by the unconscious it cannot know and represses, the (psychological) reasons for many of our actions are obscured, ambiguous and difficult to find. As Usher and Edwards put it,

Consciousness cannot be transparent to itself, nor, since prejudices are historically situated in traditions which are continually changing, can consciousness be identical with itself.⁸⁸

However much consciousness might come to know, there is always something that it does not know.

Lacan⁸⁹ took this further. He claimed that the human self consists of the 'Ego' (moi) and 'I' (je), both having conscious and unconscious elements.⁹⁰ The ego is the self as posited by science and psychology, and operates in the 'imagining' order of images, visual presentations and visual identifications that give a sense of wholeness of being. It receives a degree of stability from the 'I' through which subjects speak and are named; it sees itself as others see it. The 'ego' thinks it is autonomous, that 'This is me,' (rather like a child looking at its reflection in a mirror) but such thinking is an illusion; the 'ego' is neither stable nor united, nor has a transparent knowledge of itself; it cannot know either itself or reality. The 'I' is the subject or representation of oneself by language. But here too something is missing due to the very nature of language; words replace things.⁹¹ Further, since language works through

⁸⁸ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.58.

⁸⁹ Lacan (1901-1981)

⁹⁰ See SMITH, J. & KERRIGAN, W; *Interpreting Lacan*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983, pp.57ff.

⁹¹ 'I' am the father of ..., the cousin of ..., the uncle of And I exist not as myself but in relation to others.

difference and negativity,⁹² and each has a meaning only in relation to other signifieds that are constantly changing, then the 'I' is continually changing and has no permanent meaning. The signifiers of language rather than their psychological processes, constitute subjects, as science holds. Neither 'Ego' nor 'I' can therefore be truly known, we cannot equate the subject merely with the ego, and 'truth' is an involvement of the whole language process – we *speak* the truth, it has to be accepted and interpreted as the truth by others. Truth depends on the total interpretative transaction – the speaker's utterance, the response of the other and the dialectical relationship between utterance and response. It is the action of communicating itself that is of significance, just as much as the content conveyed in the communicating.

Beyond this, Lacan claims that entry into language also fills human beings with desire; meaning is not a function of the individual signifier attached to a signified but is rather a function or connection between signifiers, and as the fixing of a meaning is continually changing it creates a loss or lack that underlies desire. Desire is in effect a desire for other's recognition.

Baudrillard did not believe in the existence of reality at all. Foregrounding simulation, he claimed that we live in a world, not of reality but of hyper-reality. Reality is when we take the world as it is, but we are no longer in a position to take the world like that because the world is mediated to us. Unmediated reality has been replaced by *simulation*; we live in a world when one cannot tell the difference between the real and the simulated. A pilot-in-training cannot distinguish between a flight simulator and the real thing. A hypochondriac produces his illness so well that it is not possible to tell whether it is real or psychosomatic. It was noted earlier, how he famously believed that the Gulf War was not real; it was a media presentation. There is no external reference point; we cannot know God because we cannot have any knowledge of the really real. Hyper reality is the only reality we know. Truth and reality have ceased to exist. Everything we know is media-spun; we cannot speak from facts – only from different models of reality, none of

⁹² The signifier, 'box' has no meaning in itself; it simply distinguishes the signified from other signifieds, and 'box' is not 'dog' or 'hat.'

which has more validity than another. Even our personal identity is affected – we become the simulation. The whole system is dedicated to mass consumerism that is inescapable.

Everything and everyone, all ideologies and religions, indeed truth itself, have simply become products to be consumed. Truth is replaced by TV-truth and TV truth is about the consumer as the centre of attention. Life is now indistinguishable from a film set; we are faced with the dissolution of TV into life; the dissolution of life into TV.⁹³

Meaning itself is a human creation, free-floating and nothing to do with what is really real.

I find two weaknesses in such an approach – overstatement and contradiction. Baudrillard claimed that media manipulation is total; but it is not true that content is always dominated by image. Not all cultures have TV. There is contradiction in the sense that he undermines his own position. If what we learn from another person is simply their 'spin,' then in what way can Baudrillard's own pronouncements avoid the charge of 'spin' and be, themselves, real?

There is no self.

Contemporary Postmodernism denies the existence of a self. Up to Reformation times, it was a common belief that the 'self' was some kind of reality that dwelt in the human body. It had been expressed in early religion such as that of the Egyptians where servants and tools that would be useful in the life to come were buried with the mummified body. It was part of Hinduism where the eternal 'soul' was reincarnated into another life on earth. It had been expressed in the Old Testament where the inner life centred in the 'heart' could be called 'soul' in relation to humanity, and 'spirit' in relation to God. It had been expressed in the New Testament in the doctrine of resurrection in which the spirit of the individual Christian who was 'asleep in

⁹³ HONEYSETT, M: Op.cit. p.84

Jesus,' would be 'awakened' and given a new body for a new life.⁹⁴ During the early phases of Modernism the concept was held that the self lived within the body, and it gave rise to the popular phrase, 'When you see me, you do not see 'me' but the house that I live in.' Later, such a 'self' was lost.

In his search to find something he could trust as true, Descartes could find such only in the fact that he was a thinking being – 'I think, therefore I am.' Locke cast further doubt. As an Empiricist he trusted only what could be discerned through the five senses, and distrusted anything that could not be measured by physical means, and that included any 'spiritual' soul. The issue of the true nature of the self was complicated by the development of analysis in psychology. Freud believed that below the level of conscious (mental) operations where we are fully aware of events, there is also an unconscious mind consisting of mainly repressed, unpleasant experiences which could not be entertained at conscious level, and a preconscious mind from which past experiences might be recalled. At the heart of human driving force were the id (sexual + biological instincts) and the super-ego (internalised parental and societal pressures) hopefully balanced by the ego. As O'Donnell puts it,

At root [the self] was a formless, silent, chaotic sea of desires that needed to be tamed by the censorious ego.⁹⁵

Jung,⁹⁶ who was one of Freud's students, saw the unconscious not only as a dark repository of unacceptable experience but a kind of repository of many ancient forces, symbols and wisdom that worked for the harmony of the individual was somehow common to all people – the 'collective unconscious.' The (capitalised) Self was part of, yet separate from, any individual self. Neither Freud nor Jung were seeing the 'self' as in ancient times. Meanwhile Saussure and the 'Post-structuralists' who followed him, were suggesting that the 'self' existed only as a signifier, and did not exist in reality. If, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, the meaning of any unit of language is simply the

⁹⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 15.

⁹⁵ O'DONNELL, K: *Postmodernism*, Oxford, Lion, 2003, p 68.

⁹⁶ Jung (1875-1961)

product of 'difference' from other units of language, then why should a human being be any different? If a human being is a product of intersecting relations (each person being completely embedded [lost?] in a cultural and conceptual context in which all human beings participate) then the self finds its identity only through its place in the larger system, like a word in a language.⁹⁷

This had an influence on Lacan, one of Freud's students, who combined the insights of structuralism with psychoanalysis. He did not believe that the 'self' was an entity but was formed from those things poured into us from the outside in two phases. In infancy, during what he termed the 'mirror phase,' the ego is formed by fixing upon an image outside of the child such as another infant or a reflection in a mirror. The 'symbolic phase' is formed from the language in which the child is immersed; the promises, ideals, expectations, confirmations, threats, comparisons made in the family; and from identification with an 'ideal' who could be anybody spoken into the child's life by the community, such as parent, grandparent or sibling.... all create a world of meaning in which the child finds a sense of identity and belonging. As the child moves towards maturity, the symbolic phase takes over from the mirror phase as the world of signifiers moves out into the wider community. There is therefore no 'fixed' self or 'thinking subject.' Our sense of self is constructed from the outside; we are a product of signifiers and images.

Foucault took things even further. He claimed that there was not even any humanity. 'Humanity' was simply a concept that had arisen from a development of history since the sixteenth century.

There seems to me to be a flaw in what is being said. The signifier relates to the signified; so what use is the signifier if the signified does not exist? The situation is not dissimilar to a proposal made in 2003 by the Ordnance Survey to omit signs for some churches from its maps, where the building was of little importance or had changed its nature, perhaps by becoming a furniture store or local fitness centre. The proposal was withdrawn because

⁹⁷ p.31

even though the church might not exist as a mapping symbol, it was still there. At about the same time, Crick (who discovered the DNA double helix) claimed to have found a group of cells responsible for generating consciousness and an individual's 'sense of self.' Different parts of the brain mesh together to generate consciousness – 'actual consciousness may be expressed by only a small set of neurons, in particular those at the back of the cortex to parts of the frontal cortex.' Reiss responded by saying that Crick had only discovered the neural components of consciousness. 'It is like saying that a cathedral is a pile of stones and glass. It is true, but too simplistic and misses the point.'⁹⁸

Despite the denials, there has to be something there that can be designated as 'nothing.'

There is no truth

Postmodernism denies the existence of truth. There are several elements, and I will examine them separately – overarching truth (or 'metanarrative'), historical truth, written truth and objective truth. Postmodernism also denies truth in the area of religion, but I will examine this in a later chapter.

There is no overarching truth (or 'metanarrative').

Lyotard suggested that the failure of modernism to emancipate humanity and bring about progress⁹⁹ not only makes us suspicious of the science-and-progress myth, but suspicious of *any* big story that sets itself up as the answer to the whole of life. He described such a story as a 'Grand Narrative' or 'Metanarrative.' Others have reduced it to technicality; metanarratives are 'large scale theoretical interpretations purportively of universal application.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Report in *Sunday Times*, London, 09/03/03, p.15.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) on Postmodern denial of Enlightenment promises of progress.

¹⁰⁰ WAUGH, D: *Postmodernism – a Reader*, London, Edward Arnold, 1993, p.1.

Great 'explanations' such as Communism or Christianity have no place in Postmodernism, and have been replaced by segmentation, collage, plurality and diversity. Truth is seen not in the absolute or abstract but in the 'indwelt truth' of local stories. There is no limit to the number of stories and no basis on which to assign them anything but equal worth.¹⁰¹ Culturally this results in fast moving images with criss-crossed story-lines and no logical development of theme. Such an approach reinforces what is believed about the 'self;' there is no way of finding our true selves. 'We are only a story composed of unrelated episodes which make us not an integrated being, but merely a series of selves constructed as appropriate for the various settings in which we find ourselves.'¹⁰² Bauman puts the matter succinctly:

Modernity is characterised by a hermeneutic search for an underlying and unifying truth and certainty that can render the world, experiences and events (including the self and its experiences) coherent and meaningful. Postmodernity on the other hand is marked by a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority with no horizontal or vertical order either in actuality or in potency.¹⁰³

To reject metanarratives is to do more than reject master stories of modernism. It questions totalising explanations and foundational logic; the very notion of 'system' and 'systematic' explanation. As Usher and Edwards put it,

The epistemological, metaphysical and humanistic assumptions which have constituted the modern condition and within which debates have raged over the means of achieving knowledge, rationality and emancipation, fragment under the impact of their own failure and postmodern challenge based on that failure... The 'postmodern' refers to something more inchoate and difficult to pin down It is

¹⁰¹ Almost jocularly it was suggested to me that the Old Testament text, Judges 21.25. ['In those days ... every man did what was right in his own eyes'] was a Postmodern text. It was an example of the way that an element of Postmodern thought has been grasped, without a knowledge of the philosophical development through Modernity.

¹⁰² TIDBALL, D: *A Beginner's Guide to Postmodernity*, Alpha, London, 4.5.96.

¹⁰³ BAUMAN, Z: *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.35.

more to a state of mind, a critical posture and style, however oppositional to an unchanging set of critical techniques.¹⁰⁴

Or further, 'The Postmodern moment involves the rejection of all essentialist and transcendental conceptions of human nature; the rejection of unity, homogeneity, totality, closure and identity; the rejection of the pursuit of the real and the true.'¹⁰⁵

There is no historical truth

Neither, to the Postmodernist, is there historical truth. There are two major grounds which underlie the Postmodern distrust of history; there are motives for distorting historical truth and there are methods available to do so.

One motive may be to justify one's own power-position by appeal to the past; it has frequently (and cynically) been said that history is written by the winners. Foucault saw history as a means of domesticating and controlling the past so as to vindicate present structures. He saw history as being part of the overall Enlightenment approach to knowledge - that knowledge is power. History simply serves power and domination; history is knowledge used to gain power ['You know what happened when "x" happened in "y." We must not allow that kind of thing to happen again']. Another motive may be to wish to commend present-day belief or practice by appeal to origin and development through history - a prime example is the claim that the Christian faith is historically based.

Motives can be realised in a number of ways. The evidence can be interpreted in whatever way fits best into the storyteller's or historian's scheme. The evidence of the empty tomb could be interpreted by soldiers to mean that the body of Jesus had been stolen, while to the disciples it was evidence that there had been a resurrection.¹⁰⁶ The historian, David Irving,

¹⁰⁴ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: Op. cit. p.17. quoting WEEKS, J: *Rediscovering Values*, in SQUIRES, J. (Ed.): *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1993, p.186,

¹⁰⁵ SQUIRES, J: Op.cit. p.2.

¹⁰⁶ NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew 28.

wrote a German history entitled *Hitler's War* in which he used archival material to deny that the gas chambers at Auschwitz were part of the Nazi extermination programme. He wanted such a viewpoint to be accepted.

Historical fact may also be hidden by literary presentation. Wansborough controversially claimed that the Qur'an had utilised this approach. It is a fundamental Muslim belief, (and a standard part of teaching in R.E. in schools) that the Prophet received direct angelic revelation in Macca and M'dina in the early 7th. Century. This was recorded by his family and became the Qur'an about 650, and became the basis of the Islamic faith. Wansborough applied canons of Biblical criticism to the Qur'an and commentaries on it and claimed that the traditional Muslim view was not true. He claimed that there was very little Islamic literature before 800, and that in fact, Islam evolved from sectarian forms of Judaism over a period of 150 years following Arab conquests in the mid 7th. Century. Accounts of the Prophet and the Qur'an were a back-projection of views that were formed as the culture and religion of Islam emerged out of intense polemic between various monotheistic groups.¹⁰⁷

The facts of history can also be 'spun' or 'doctored' so as to give a more acceptable picture, such as those put forward in political broadcast or in newspaper. Foucault said it is only possible to get continuity in history by neglecting certain events, or smoothing down the things that do not fit, so that history is an overall myth – not dissimilar to a tele-news broadcast where the events have been fitted into a viewpoint, availability of time-clips and a time slot. In his studies he sought to uncover what he called 'genealogy' which is not history but anti-history - the story of how a body of knowledge (concepts, disciplines, human science) came to be. In so doing he sought to destroy the unifying concepts of society, politics, and (of course) history. By doing this he sought to expose the fact that these were simply means of

¹⁰⁷ Wansborough died, 10.06.02, and a summary of his work and life was given in the obituary of the *Times*, Daily Register, 14.06.02 His key book on the subject – WANSBOROUGH, J: *Narratives of Islamic Origins; the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, London, McGraw Donner, 1998

legitimising present social structures and holding on to power.¹⁰⁸ He worked to show that one could unmask unifying concepts such as tradition, influence, development, evolution, source and origin, by uncovering their opposites (discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, transformation). He saw history not as a process that is controlled by destiny and purpose (which he regarded as the invention of historians) but as a number of haphazard events. Genealogy criticises present structures and emphasises the past struggles and discontinuities and paths to understanding which were not taken. Not that Foucault wants to replace it with anything, because such substitution would lead to further slavery and undermine the struggle against power.

There are problems about the Postmodern perspective on history. It might be true that history is not absolutely true, but neither is it absolutely false. This was painfully illustrated in the challenge to Irving's work on Hitler's Germany. The book led to a claim by Deborah Lipstadt that he was a 'holocaust denier,' and Irving brought a lawsuit against her and Penguin books for libel. It fell to Cambridge historian, Richard Evans to demonstrate that the denial of Irving's history was justified, and that the systematic mass murder of Jews was a fact – which he established through painstaking evaluation of detailed evidence, that took over two years.¹⁰⁹ It was not only Evans' evidence that was vindicated by the High Court, but history itself. History *can* be distorted, but it can also be redeemed. There is historical *untruth*, but also historical truth. It is also true that the objectivity of the genealogist might be in some doubt; can the genealogist claim an objectivity that is absent in the historian? Further, can one use objectivity to discredit objectivity; or a rational approach to undermine rationality? There is a wider issue here too –

¹⁰⁸ FOUCAULT, M: *The Order of Things; an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, Pantheon, 1971, p.342. 'To all those who still wish to think about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting point in their attempts to reach the truth ... to all those warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh – which means, to a certain extent, a silent one.'

¹⁰⁹ Now published as EVANS, R. J: *Telling Lies about Hitler*, London, Verso, 2002.

Foucault is on the horns of a dilemma: if he is telling the truth about the impossibility of detached truth, then all truth is suspect. But if this is the case then Foucault's truth cannot vouch for its own truth.¹¹⁰

Although I have recorded a negative Postmodern stance on history, there is another side. There is an interest in ancient history among many of those who would call themselves Postmodern, even though the approach might be said to be basically self-contradictory. Kelly¹¹¹ notes the interest in Aboriginal culture (and he might have extended it into Ancient Egyptian or Inca culture). The Postmodernist does however have a defence. First, is his belief that primitive humanity knew more about spirituality than the current generation (and it is therefore invaluable for 'New Age' purposes). Secondly, there is little historical consciousness in primitive culture. Thirdly, our future is so unreliable that it is worth exploring ideas from the past. The net result is an element of confusion.

There is no truth in written words (text)

When an author is seeking to communicate meaning or truth with words, he is powerless, (dead, according to Barthes), both in his choice of words and because of the way that his words cannot be understood by the reader. Several scholars have contributed to this view. I have already noted that Saussure held that words themselves have no meaning; that there is no significance in this or that word; the word is simply an arbitrary but compulsory signifier. If however we are not in control of language, then (because, for example, we are compelled to use binary opposition¹¹²) language must control us.

¹¹⁰ HORROCKS, C. & JEVTIC, Z: *Introducing Foucault*, Cambridge, Icon, 1999, p.168.

¹¹¹ KELLY, G: *Get a Grip on the Future Without Losing Your Hold on the Past*, London, Monarch, 1999, p.201.

¹¹² A system of opposites which contrast and compare such as hard/soft, kind/cruel, black/white.

Derrida¹¹³ demonstrated this in what he termed 'difference' - that language is not always what it is thought to be.¹¹⁴ He said, for instance, that when we use language, there is no evidence that meaning is given to the words by 'us.' When we use language, whether of intention, indication or whatever, the words do not have a fixed meaning within themselves but they derive their meaning from the language system; meaning is produced by differences in the language chain, and so we have to examine them in their context to see what they mean and, indeed, how many meanings they have. Almost as a joke, he pointed out that the word 'or' in Mallarmé's writings and the word 'the' in Joyce's writings can mean any one of dozens of things and how we regard a text depends on the way/format in which it is presented to us. 'We' do not decide the meaning; the idea that a person or 'self-presence' decides the meaning is an illusion. Further, he pointed out that some words that sound the same are not in fact, the same. 'Difference' is not the same as 'differance' although they sound the same. Writing cannot therefore be simply the representation of human speech; speaking is much closer to thought than it is to writing. He pointed out too (like Heidegger) that words take their meaning not only from what is there but from what is not there; there is a presence and an absence in meaning.

From a different perspective, Foucault noted that if it is true that there is no single genius behind a work, because the creative self is a construct – a product of cultural systems over which the individual writer has no control - then there can be no 'meaning to a work;' it is in reality a 'formless material on which structured modes of reading impose a shape.'¹¹⁵

Barthes¹¹⁶ believed that meaning is not to be found in words themselves but in deep underlying structures that underlie all writing. O'Donnell illustrates this from Barthe's analysis of Racine's writings in which he claimed that

¹¹³ Derrida (b.1930)

¹¹⁴ DERRIDA, J: *Of Grammatology* (Tr. SPIVAK, G.) Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1976

DERRIDA, J: *Writing and Difference* (Tr. BASS, A.) London, Routledge, 1978

¹¹⁵ LENTRICCHIA, F: *After the New Criticism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p.108.

¹¹⁶ Barthes (1915-1980)

Racine did not really know what he was doing when he was writing. Racine's tragedies, he says, were really about underlying structures of power and jealousy, whatever their storyline. One person had power over another but was unable to find love – a reflection of the eternal conflict between fathers and sons in the underlying (unconscious) human structure proposed by Freud.¹¹⁷

Derrida resisted 'Logocentrism' - the claim that written words were superior to speech – to declare that writing was less clear and transparent than speech, (transparency and clarity not being his prime concern in his own writings!), and that meaning was given to any word by contemporary society. He went further, and pointed out that even the spoken word is not always clear, and is not under the control of the lecturer or author because the listener is the real 'master.' This is because of two factors. One is that we cannot speak truth that is relevant to others since what is true is (only) true for me. The other is that the interpretation of what an author says by the reader is of far greater significance than the intention of the writer.

Foucault went further. In his essay, 'What is an author?' he asked, 'What does it matter who is speaking; authors are unknowable and are not authoritative?'- somewhat akin to Nietzsche on the unknowableness of God. Foucault claimed that it is a modern idea that an author communicates clear and obvious meaning in their work.¹¹⁸ Authors are knowable more through their *works* than through their *words* - echoes of the Sermon on the Mount!¹¹⁹ We cannot tell whether a particular author wanted to say a particular thing or not; we cannot get at the author's intentions. So the real pleasure of reading is not what the author said, but what we make of it when we play with it. The reason why contemporary literature has replaced classics in schools, he says, is because the thrillers are those that the pupils *enjoy*. We cannot know the authors, their intention and therefore their meaning; we make of it

¹¹⁷ O'DONNELL, K: *Postmodernism*, Oxford, Lion, 2003, p.48.

¹¹⁸ He says writing is currently all about money and copyright! See FOUCAULT, M: *The Discourse on Language*, appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon, 1974.

¹¹⁹ NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew 7. 15-20

what we like – including the author's value judgements; we cannot know what is the truth, right or wrong. Foucault went beyond writing as a text, to recognise painting, music and the other arts as 'texts' too, and some modern writers might say that the world is also a text. Foucault therefore believed that because one cannot know truth, one can live how one likes – and he did. It seems to me that insofar as Foucault is actually using words so as to communicate what is the truth for him and we are able to receive it, then he goes too far. We can know some things about an author; it is not true that we cannot know anything – indeed we share the same humanity¹²⁰ and some writing is deliberately straightforward. We can therefore move in the right direction so far as interpretation is concerned.

He is however supported by Derrida, not least because Derrida's own writings cause problems of comprehension and understanding for the reader! It has been claimed that the contradictions that shaped Derrida's life have shaped his teaching. He was and was not – a Jew, an Algerian, a Frenchman, an Academic.¹²¹ Similarly his writing is, and is not; it is dense and difficult, full of jokes, puns and wordplay which, even though academic, refuses to conform to academic writing. Seeking to problematise things rather than to explain things, he appears to attempt to destabilise the normal process of reading rather than to 'say' anything which philosophy considered was worth saying. Usher and Edwards describe his writing as 'drifting'¹²² because there is no clear starting point and no apparent goal in his writing, neither indicating a clear position nor clearly showing what his writings are about.

One might acknowledge a certain 'creativity' about his writing or even that his writings 'resonate'¹²³ with readers. He is not so much helping us to see a

¹²⁰ HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 2002, p. 32

¹²¹ Born of partly assimilated French-Jewish family in Algeria, a teacher in Higher Education, but without election to the College de France.

¹²² USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.119f.

¹²³ 'Resonating' was Derrida's own phrase indicating that truth in writing might be recognised but not defined. One can feel that something important is being said without being sure exactly what it is, and you might have to look at it in a different way and realise that there might be more to be known and more to be said.

truth as to provide us with a way of seeing things differently. It was for this reason that he utilised a style of 'jokiness' and lack of seriousness with which he attempted to subvert what we take for granted in the use of language. It is not always possible to understand what he is trying to say by traditional philosophical frames of reference because these are the very thing he problematises; he will not take anything for granted. Derrida was particularly anxious to deny the truth of philosophy and the truth of any ultimate reality (God).

He felt that philosophy was far too logocentric in its search for any ultimate reality that lay behind language. Because philosophy adopted the literary genre to further its own position, he felt that it had no grounds for adopting an objective-observer viewpoint when looking at language and asking questions such as 'What is literature?' or 'What is poetry?' Philosophy needed to have its assumptions upset (= 'be deconstructed'¹²⁴) and all texts should be analysed by groups oppressed by texts, such as women, ethnic minorities and homosexuals, so as to demonstrate their inner contradictions and 'explosion of meanings' (also = 'deconstruction'). Derrida also believed that neither reason nor language could be used to reach reality: firstly because we cannot trust language-statements to represent the world as it really is,¹²⁵ secondly, because if reality did exist it would be beyond language, and thirdly because we cannot trust any underlying conviction that there is at the foundation of our language a 'presence' of being or essence or reality that we can come to know, because there is no guarantee that it (i.e. God) exists.¹²⁶ He believed that there is no God outside of the system; the only relationships or 'discourses' we can know are within the system of the world, and because

exactly what it is, and you might have to look at it in a different way and realise that there might be more to be known and more to be said.

¹²⁴ Different interpreters of Derrida give different definitions of his terms (which Derrida would have expected [!]). PAYNE, M: *Reading Theory* Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p.121 says, deconstruction is 'the name given simultaneously to the stress created in texts (between what they want to say and what they do say) and so the detection of such gaps. A deconstructive reading attends to the deconstructive processes *always* occurring in texts and *already* there waiting to be read.'

¹²⁵ Derrida believed speech was superior to writing in many ways. Speech is personal and immediate and dependent on the speaker; writing is none of these things. See for example, DERRIDA, J: *Plato's Pharmacy in Dissemination*, London, Athlone Press, 1981, in which he records the discussion between Socrates and Phaedrus over the supremacy of speech.

¹²⁶ DERRIDA, J: *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p.11

there is no fixed centre, there should be no limit to what it is possible to think or believe. 'Truth' and 'falsehood'; are false distinctions used by people in the exercise of power – especially Christianity. He claimed that Christian belief about a God who started everything and will bring things to an end stops people from thinking, and is inherently oppressive; any idea of revealed truth is evil because it prevents people from thinking more widely. When we realise this and stop considering everything in life, culture and thought in relation to absolute truth we can be more playful and flexible in the way that we think. Derrida seems to me to be beset by inner contradiction.

If he is challenged by saying that in deconstruction he is taking something out of context and lets it say simply what he wants, and he then denies it, then by his own presuppositions he has no grounds for denial; we are perfectly at liberty to let it say what we want about his denial. Further, he is concerned about the way that individuals have been oppressed or suppressed through text; yet as Honeysett clearly demonstrates in his biographical studies of those who meet Postmodernism head-on, Postmodern exponents frequently oppress and suppress those who do not hold to their viewpoint.¹²⁷

There is no objective truth

Rorty¹²⁸ exemplifies another aspect of the subjective approach. University philosopher, lecturer and writer, from the U.S.A., he is often called a 'relativist' by his critics although he has referred to himself as a 'postmodern bourgeois liberal' which indicates something of the inclusiveness of views within Postmodernism as a reaction against original Modernism/ Enlightenment thinking. The philosophy that shapes his Postmodernism is Pragmatism. Three things stand out in his Pragmatism: (i) 'Truth' is a convention, like 'white.' Snow is 'white,' not because it is white but because we have chosen to call it 'white.' (ii) Any object does not have essential

¹²⁷ e.g. Nursing College student. HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, IVP, 2002, pp.63ff.

¹²⁸ Rorty (b.1931)

qualities in itself, but qualities related to other things – similar to the position taken on language by Saussure, except that Rorty goes further than language and everything is relational. (iii) Language cannot re-present the world in any way; language cannot bring what is absent into our presence. All of which means that he is non-realist, non-essentialist and non-representationalist! Like other Pragmatists, Rorty holds that 'truth' lies in coherence rather than in correspondence. He rejects the view that a statement is true if it corresponds to reality because this requires 'God's eye-view' which we simply do not have. Beliefs do not represent reality but are useful for dealing with reality. A thing is 'true' insofar as it coheres with the entire system of beliefs. Truth is what works rather than what is theoretically correct; what is true is what is 'useful.' He rejects the description of himself as a Relativist, and explains his views about relationships, again in three ways:

(i) We cannot actually attain a system of beliefs that is perfectly consistent internally. Just as we have no access to a perspective outside of the world, so we have no access to a perspective of objective rationality or morality outside of our historically conditioned vocabulary from which we can judge that vocabulary. He sees no metaphysical difference between the language of ethics and science; they are both just language (although science happens to be more tolerant than ethics!)

(ii) There is no such thing as a Cartesian 'Self.' He sees 'self' as a centreless and ever changing web of beliefs and desires that produce action. Neither is there a universal human self; we all have our personal identities. All that we say about truth is dependent upon the society in which we live. We cannot escape from our historical context. There are no absolutes – no voice of God, nothing that cannot be doubted; no categorical imperatives. We cannot find a starting point for our discourse outside of our own historical context. We cannot rise above human communities. There can be no overarching, universal authority.

(iii) Such an approach to understanding of truth builds a sense of community – ‘The proper goal of philosophy is not to uncover objective truth, but to maintain the discussion among these differing interpretations.’¹²⁹

In a wider, ethical context, since all truth is relative, there can be no absolute standard of right and wrong. What is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ is what is right or wrong for me. But again, there is an inherent weakness; the Postmodern relativist cannot accept that another person might be right to hold absolute views. The Postmodernist can be ‘relative’ about everything except that it is possible not to be ‘relativist,’ and in many cases is oppressive and intolerant. It is parallel to liberalism. Mullen, chaplain to the Stock Exchange and writing about the tendency towards liberalism among Anglican clergy says, ‘Actually, the so-called ‘liberal’ clergy are not liberal at all. They are extremely doctrinaire and intolerant of anyone who does not share their opinions and methods.’¹³⁰

1.4: The future for Postmodernism

Reactions against Modernism have taken place for centuries. There is no reason to think that such reaction should stop. As we move into the third millennium, Wright has identified two strands within contemporary Postmodernism that indicate trends for the future. One he terms Anti-realism, and the other Alterity.

Anti-realism he associates with Baudrillard. There is no reality; only simulacra or intimations of reality, because we live in a world of hyper-reality where we are overwhelmed by a multiplicity of signs and symbols with no means of prioritising one over another. Baudrillard invites us to enjoy it all and fulfil our immediate desires rather like a viewer channel-hopping on TV. Which means that we put ourselves into slavery to the capitalistic consumer advertising that he loathes. Wright quotes Norris approvingly, that such an

¹²⁹ RORTY, R: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979. p.337

¹³⁰ MULLEN, P: Why we need Defenders of the Faith, London, the ‘Times’ (T2), 01.08.02, p.2.

approach is one of the 'shallowest, most enervating brands of present-day cultural junk-theory.'¹³¹ Anti-realism undermines itself because the theory itself has ultimately to be no more than a simulacrum; statements made about deconstruction have, themselves, to be deconstructed.

Alterity is a term used to indicate a note of caution – a reflective moment within Modernism, in which account is taken of alternatives, of other world views such as that of Eastern thought and theology – 'The Other.' Modernism has dealt with the Other by emphasising commonality and similarity, and by so doing has sought to take authority over it and Westernise it. Alterity accepts the challenge of the Other so as to perceive new horizons and new relationships, to acknowledge mystery and to experience freedom, not as freedom from relationships but as freedom for relationships.¹³²

Wright goes beyond such recent elements within Postmodernism to what he terms 'Critical Realism' which while engaging with the actual order-of-things, recognises the limits of our knowledge and understanding. It rejects the total scepticism inherent in the Postmodern anti-realist view, while looking at the world realistically but critically (it is not simply a matter of appearances), and accepting that we need to respond to reality. It is ultimately a rejection of Postmodernism in its denials and the acceptance of a middle ground, where knowledge is limited, provisional and open and the cultivation of wisdom.

¹³¹ WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, p.48, quoting NORRIS, C: *The Truth about Postmodernism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p.63

¹³² WRIGHT, A: Op.cit. p.50

CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL REACTION – REJECTION OF ‘HIGH CULTURE’ AND OPPRESSION

In Part I of this dissertation, I am seeking to set out a clear account of the nature of Postmodernism. I have shown in Chapter 1 of the study that in part it is a philosophic reaction against Modernism; hence the name – ‘Postmodernism.’ In this second section I will examine a further reaction, a social one. One’s beliefs normally find expression in way-of-life or culture. Modernism found expression in what is often termed ‘High Culture.’ I will first of all show that Postmodernism rejects the ‘High Culture’ associated with Modernism, and I will then go on to show that Postmodernism opposes a number of forms of oppression characteristic of contemporary society.

2.1: Philosophy expressed in culture

Culture and belief

Culture and belief are inter-related because beliefs are expressed in and through behaviour, and culture can be understood as a form of behaviour. Beliefs can be expressed culturally and culture can express beliefs. In a Christian context, the Christmas culture of giving, evergreens and lights express belief in the gift of an incarnate God to the world who would bring life and light. By contrast, Foucault, accepting Postmodern theory, believed that one could not know truth and therefore one could live as one liked; and he did. He was imprisoned, and died of AIDS.¹³³ By contrast again, acceptance of Biblical truth leading to conversion to Christianity leads to a change in behaviour to a pattern acceptable to God; ‘Faith without works is dead.’¹³⁴

¹³³ p.47

¹³⁴ NEW TESTAMENT (Revised Standard Version): Matthew 7. 15-21: ‘Beware of false prophets ... you will know them by their fruits..... Every sound tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears evil fruit..... Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.’ James 2. 14-17: ‘What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but no works Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead”

There is more than a simple 'link' of expression, the one through the other. People come to belief through culture – not by adoption of belief but by absorption of it. One can absorb the belief that underlies the culture without properly thinking about it at all. This is particularly important for children. Some beliefs (such as 'all flames are hot') might be held as a result of thinking things through, but many more (such as 'Santa Claus comes each Christmas') are held by absorption from culture and upbringing. Children brought up in an Islamic, Jewish or Christian community will (at least, initially) adopt Muslim, Jewish or Christian beliefs. Children commencing their Secondary School education are unlikely to adopt Postmodern theory on the basis of logical-philosophical argument. 'Thinking Postmodernly' is not a simple process, and not many children will be able to think through the elements of definition or the process of reaction against Modernism and the Enlightenment. They might however adopt a Postmodern position by the absorption of Postmodern culture from contemporary lifestyle.

[This has implications for my research. The link between belief and culture-as-lifestyle makes it possible to use culture so as to investigate the nature of Postmodernism. It is also likely to be a more natural and familiar approach in talking with children about Postmodernism.¹³⁵ They are likely to absorb aspects of Postmodern theory not through thinking about Postmodern theory but through contemporary Postmodern culture, adopting a stance by absorption rather than by formal understanding.]

There is however another way of linking belief with culture; there is an alternative in looking at culture as artistic expression in which one's beliefs are joined to one's feelings and expressed through the media of architecture, painting, music and drama – in short, the 'Arts.' It also governs one's attitude to (appreciation of) the 'Arts.' Not that it is possible to completely separate such from lifestyle. Upbringing and related beliefs underlie the contrast between reactions to art displays in the National Gallery and the Tate

¹³⁵ In fact it depends upon the curriculum design and the skill of the teacher. I have found that children aged 11-13 are able to understand issues such as relativity in ethics, ideas about hyper-reality, doubts about the truth of history, but they do not often meet them.

Modern, between reactions to *The Passion of Christ* and *The Life of Brian*, and between reading the *Times* and the *Sun*.

The cultural relationship between belief, lifestyle and reaction to the Arts is not easy to elucidate. This is partly because 'culture' is itself defined 'culturally.'¹³⁶ The Shorter Oxford Dictionary identifies two meanings over time. One from 1510 sees it as 'Improvement or refinement by education and training,' but a later definition from 1805 expresses it as 'The training and refining of mind, tastes and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined; the intellectual side of civilisation.'¹³⁷ The first might be thought of simply as 'schooling' and the second as 'appreciation of the Arts.' There are geographical differences too. In the Anglo-French tradition, culture meant more-or-less the same as 'civilisation,' while in Germany, culture was held to be 'the repository of human excellence, artistic achievement and individual perfection' while civilisation was regarded as a process of material development that threatened individual culture. Lifestyle, or 'an attitude to life'¹³⁸ is set against an appreciation of (or attitude to) the 'Arts.' It was some American sociologists who made a connection by bringing 'lifestyle' and 'art appreciation' together under the aegis of belief-systems. They refer to the culture of social groups as the 'total set of beliefs, customs or way of life or particular groups,'¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Gallagher points out that there is 'no cultural metanarrative; no overarching definition of culture. He compares statements by Arnold (1869) ['The pursuit of perfection which entailed an inward condition of mind and spirit, a quality at variance with the mechanical and material civilisation of that industrial age,'] with Tylor (1871) ['Culture and civilisation is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.']

GALLAGHER, M: *Clashing Symbols*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003 edition, pp.13ff.

ARNOLD, M: *Culture and Anarchy*, (Ed., SOPER, R) Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1965, p.95

TYLOR, E: *Primitive Culture*, London, John Murray, 1871, Vol.1. p.1.

¹³⁷ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972 Edition

¹³⁸ The late Archbishop of Liverpool seems to agree – "It's the way we do things round here!" OSBORNE, L: *Restoring the Vision; the Gospel and Modern Culture*, London, Mowbray, 1995, p.1.

¹³⁹ ABERCROMBIE, N., HILL, S. & TURNER, B: *Dictionary of Sociology*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 3rd. Edition, 1994, p.98

Postmodernism as reaction against 'Modern' culture.

It is therefore clear that there are two different Postmodern positions, one being related to the Arts, and the other to lifestyle, both of which seek to oppose the rationality that is inherent in Modernism. On the one hand there is opposition to what has sometimes been called the 'high culture' that is an expression of Modernism in art. Rationally-based Modernism will, for example express itself through painting as one of the arts, by following rational rules of colour, form and perspective. Postmodern painting will express itself in forms that are a denial of such rationality.

On the other hand there is adoption of a lifestyle that is a reaction against a rationally-based lifestyle. This is normally identified with the lifestyle of people born within the period 1960-1979, commonly referred to as 'Generation X'¹⁴⁰—the period in which Connor declares that the social and the cultural have become indistinguishable.¹⁴¹ Their lifestyle-outlook was in conflict with (rational) parental institutions, lifestyle, standards and beliefs. The 'Re-Imagine' conference held in Manchester was told that this generation could be described as 'clubbers.' Members of the generation find meaning, fellowship and recreation in clubs rather than in church, where previous generations gathered together. Their lifestyle is much wider than it had ever been before and is so different that it is not merely a change between generations but in era; things held for hundreds of years have changed.¹⁴² In general their outlook is much wider than ever before; involving every area of the whole planet. Their world has become a global village, and the Internet a global mind [meaning that, for example, Indian citizens can manage computer operation for business and government in the U.K.]. It is also wider in its sense of inclusiveness; in part by incorporation of the cultures of many national and tribal groups; in part by incorporation of every social class [every social class was involved in reaction at the death of Princess Diana]; and in

¹⁴⁰ There are other, similar, designations: 'Boomers' were born 1946-1964; 'Busters' between 1965 and 1983. 'Generation Y' were those born 1980 - 1999

¹⁴¹ CONNOR, S: *Postmodern Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2nd. Edition, 1997, p.61

¹⁴² ALTRINCHAM BAPTIST CHURCH/ WORLD WIDE MISSION TRIBE, Altrincham, June 1999.

part by inclusion of almost every experiential sphere – technology, business, family, church, shopping, social institutions, the arts, the media - all of which have changed by reaction against Modernism. Not only is their lifestyle wider than ever before but also it is much faster than ever before. One aspect of this is Instantaneity; people want a thing once and at once; they want it temporarily and instantly.¹⁴³ Another aspect is related to what Alvin Toffler referred to as 'Future Shock' because of the dread that arose from 'the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.'¹⁴⁴ We experience 'Culture Shock' when we travel and find ourselves in a completely new orientation to life, but in such a case we know that 'the culture I have left behind exists somewhere.' But in 'Future Shock,' the past is gone, vaporised.

When culture is still defined in 'Modern' terms, it is an easy (but false) step to take to say that in a Postmodern world, culture no longer exists. This is not true. Contemporary 'culture' is in many ways the expression of Postmodern theory within society and the arts. Martin writes:

Postmodern culture, the construct of postindustrialised electronic and computerised communication and information, mimics the philosophical aperçus in its own fragmented, discontinuous and fluid character. According to the postmodern vision of culture, 'all the walls and boundaries are collapsed – between interior and exterior, public and private, imaginary and real – while signifiers float free from the signified, meanings are destabilised, everyday life is aestheticised and culture is marked by fusion and confusion of 'high' and 'popular' forms by the relevance of simulation, spectacle and a commercialised nostalgia.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ It was possibly failure to recognise this feature of Postmodern culture that led to the Millennium dome becoming a failure, whereas the Festival of Britain in 1951 was a resounding success. In 1951, people were prepared to wait and to prolong experience; but not now. The Dome was for 1999/2000 – a moment in time – and beyond that moment there was little or no significance.

¹⁴⁴ TOFFLER, A: *Future Shock*, New York, Pan, 1970. Older generations find difficulty in coping with computers, mobile phones, new styles of banking and money, sound equipment, games such as Playstation, digitalisation, e-mail etc.

¹⁴⁵ MARTIN, B: *From Pre to Postmodernity in Latin America*, in HEELAS, P: *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1998, p.103

Both elements of anti-Modern art and Generation X lifestyle, have to be held side-by-side. Contemporary, lifestyle culture is not no-culture, but a particular kind of culture. When we live in a society in which criteria to evaluate what is valuable have been removed, and generates an attitude of 'Do your own thing,' in which we are simply influenced by 'style,' it might not be the same as culture in a Modern setting but it is not culture free.¹⁴⁶ If one feels that there is no value in a culture that puts details of the lives of soap stars alongside war with Iraq other than style and that we define ourselves by surface appearances and in a choice from the mass of alternatives, do our own thing,¹⁴⁷ it may not reflect the same values as those of a previous generation, but they are not value free. It is an expression of a different kind of value because in the self-contradictions of Postmodernism, what is of value is that there is no (hierarchy of) value. Postmodern culture seeks through its artists to draw attention to this fact and to draw others to the viewpoint. Postmodernism expressed through culture is therefore of great importance, although there is an uneven emphasis upon the different Postmodern elements.

Postmodern culture

It is possible to demonstrate the nature of Postmodernism by analysing its cultural life. Comprehensive accounts of Postmodern Culture have already been produced by various scholars,¹⁴⁸ and so instead of lengthy account or

¹⁴⁶If Postmodernism is simply a development of or a reaction against Modernism, the origin of which lies somewhere in the Renaissance period, than some cultural areas (such as studio productions) cannot be analysed for Postmodernism when they could not have passed through a Modern period? There are several ways of dealing with this: (i) The problem can be sidelined if one defines Postmodernism as the cultural effects of late Capitalism¹⁴⁸; film and television are simply commodities for sale and profit. The problem can however, still be met if one holds to Postmodernism as a development of or reaction to Modernism. (ii) One way (genealogical postmodernism) is to claim that there has been an accelerated interior history in which earlier periods of history correspond to Modernism, and the current trend is Postmodernism. (iii) Another way (analogical postmodernism) is to define the contemporary (digital) electronic world as Postmodern, and the earlier stage of electronics as Modern.

¹⁴⁷ HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, I.V.P., 2002, p.101

¹⁴⁸ e.g. CONNOR, S: *Postmodernist Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1977 (2nd. Edition)

explanation I will use brief statements about different elements of culture that illustrate Postmodern reaction, footnoting where necessary.

Postmodernism rejects rationality.

- In the rejection of 'modern' rational/geometric style in architecture. It can be achieved by destroying geometric buildings,¹⁴⁹ the mixing of historical, geographical or cultural styles to produce pastiche or irony,¹⁵⁰ and the creation of hyper-reality in theme parks.¹⁵¹
- Modern art (painting) was always rational. Originally it held to the rules of Classical Art with regard to perspective, form, and colour. Even in what is termed 'Modern Art' of the 20th. Century, rationality was still paramount. It used a rational approach to purge itself from all that painting was not – it was not 'saying' something to the viewer, it was not reproducible (except as a fake); and developments such as minimalism, abstraction and impressionism were still rationally based. Postmodern art denied rationality; anything can be included in Postmodern art with no rules of style, usage or representation.
- Elimination of difference between high and low culture. High culture, whether in rules for art, rules for music, or rules for writing, is basically derived from a rational approach to culture which developed within and from the Renaissance. It is therefore reserved for the highbrow, the cultured, the knowledgeable and the academic, and as such has been utilised as a means

¹⁴⁹ A well-known quote about the origin of Postmodernism was made by an architect. He said that Postmodernism was born in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15th. 1972, at 3.32.p.m. The point he was making was that the 'modern' geometrically-designed buildings which had arisen in the 1930's were dynamited; the 'modern' with its little *boxes*, *grid* system and tower *blocks* had given way to something else. JENCKS, C: *The Language of Modern Architecture*, London, Academy, 1984, p.9.

¹⁵⁰ e.g. the decoration of the Pompidou building with its service provisions, or total rejection of architectural rules in 'Le Parc de Villette' both in Paris.

¹⁵¹ Not merely Disneyland, but Portmeirion on the Welsh Mawddach estuary.

of oppression of those who have not had such opportunity, who simply make their own music (or any other avenue of culture) in an un(low)cultured way¹⁵².

- During the 'Modern' period, the commonly held view was that 'fashion' is un-natural, artificial and false. The Postmodern change in the 1960's was startling – multiplicity of materials, improvement in manufacture, disposable income, media advertising and newspaper columns on fashion all encouraged people to choose what they wanted to be. There was no 'authentic self;' clothing created identity instead of reflecting it.¹⁵³
- Postmodernism claims that the legal system is based upon rationalisation of an ancient legal system, and not upon foundational, ethical truth. Even the language, rhetoric and architecture of the courts reflect 'Modern' rationality that must be resisted.
- Developments in music paralleled those in painting, in that 'Modern' music developed the classical structure by the incorporation of dense overlaying of harmonies, mixture of melody and harmony, emphasis on percussion, incorporation of folk-songs and extension of the octave to twelve notes, but Postmodern music went beyond this in creating a pastiche of sound (sometimes termed a 'soundmass') from different periods of history, different regions, different traditions.

¹⁵² Lash has argued that Postmodernism breaks with Modernism in that the latter is a process of cultural differentiation producing clearly defined boundaries of practice and meaning whilst Postmodernism on the other hand is a process of 'de-differentiation' where boundaries break down, and consequently different cultural spheres begin to lose their autonomy. 'The breakdown in the distinction between high and popular (low) culture marks a different relationship between consumers-audience and producers-artists. The cultural producer is no longer the autonomous genius, the legislator of 'good taste,' whilst the consumer now has the opportunity to actively engage, and in a sense therefore 'produce' the cultural event rather than being a merely passive receiver LASH, S: *Sociology of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 1990, p.11.

¹⁵³ 'The new messages conveyed by [such] dress, unlike those in earlier periods, were not about fixed class and status. From the early 1950's onwards, clothes became about choosing a sense of who you really were – whether as a red, mod, Goth, punk, skinhead, new romantic, hippy – or, as today an eclectic combination of a number of such styles. Or else a chosen conventionality of appearance expressed a deliberate rejection of the aberrations of subcultural style. After the war, purchasing became a means of establishing identity, off-the-peg personae for those desperate for both a sense of who you really are and for peer- group affirmation. STARKEY, M: *Fashion and Style*, Crowborough, Monarch, 1995, p.73

- Contemporary (Postmodern) culture in TV, film, video and DVD cannot be described as a reaction against Modernism, unless one uses the concepts of genealogical or analogical Postmodernism.¹⁵⁴ It rejects rationality by its inclusiveness, (that involves the pastiche of different cultural backgrounds, historical periods, types of material -from classical to pornographic- and styles) and by bringing the elements together so as to manipulate different (or imaginative) patterns of events or history with no rational sequence. It also eliminates difference between high and low culture to promote mass culture because programmes that did not eliminate elitist-rational-Modern culture would not be commercially viable.

*Postmodernism resists authority.*¹⁵⁵

- Massive slum clearance, restricted available finance, availability of new materials and new methods of construction have enabled those in power to say how and where people should live. Connor expressed it well: 'Line and form were to be pared to their essentials and the self-sufficient functionality of every building frankly proclaimed.'¹⁵⁶ Postmodern architecture resisted the bureaucratic town planners.
- Inclusiveness sometimes involves the deliberate inclusion of style, fashion and art of those who have been marginalised by those with economic or political power in contemporary society.

¹⁵⁴ Genealogical Postmodernism claims that there has been an accelerated interior history in which earlier periods of history correspond to Modernism, and the current trend is Postmodernism. Analogical Postmodernism defines the contemporary digital electronic world as Postmodern, and the earlier stage of electronics as Modern. CONNOR, S: Op.cit. p.141

¹⁵⁵ As Usher and Edwards put it, 'Hutcheon argues that the postmodern appears to coincide with a general cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not *reflect* society so much as grant meaning and value within a particular society. The granting of meaning and value is never a process that operates outside of either language or power. Thus in postmodernism there is a recognition that while representation is problematic, it is always inescapably implicated with power and therefore cannot be abolished by avant-gardist acts of will.' USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: Op.cit. p.15

¹⁵⁶ CONNOR, S: *Postmodernist Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, (2nd. edition, 1997) p.75,

- In Modernist terms, 'freedom' brought about through education meant a life led by reason that is natural to humankind and freedom from dependence upon external authorities such as superstition, religion, rulers and emotion which are external and often irrational. Postmodern theorists deny that such freedom exists. Foucault claimed that the Enlightenment created the disciplines of systematic bodies of knowledge that provided the basis of social discipline through which power is exercised.¹⁵⁷ Derrida claimed that control is exercised through language in the classroom.¹⁵⁸ Lyotard objected to the scientific metanarratives that are part of education and opposed to individuality. Postmodern approaches to education resist this and encourage individual access to information through computer technology (which it is felt [hoped?] will eventually make schools redundant), vocational alongside academic education, learning by experience and appraisal and evaluation rather than assessment (an emphasis on value and quality rather than productivity).¹⁵⁹

- Postmodernism claims that the present ('Modern') legal system conceals

¹⁵⁷ CUNDY, I: Exercising Authority in a Postmodern World, in C.E.B.E. (CHURCH OF ENGLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION): *Tomorrow is Another Country*, London, 1996, p.62

¹⁵⁸ DERRIDA, J: *Writing and Difference*, London,, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p.109 is explained by Usher and Edwards (p.139) "We seem in speech to be putting our very thoughts into words, filling them with meaning, and as we hear ourselves speak we seem to be hearing our thoughts – hence the idea that in speech we seem to be present to ourselves, in direct unmediated touch with ourselves. But Derrida points out that when we speak it is our words which have been put into thoughts. It is the pre-existence of language which fills our thoughts with meaning and as a consequence we do not have complete control either over what we say or over how what we say will be received by our interlocutors. Instead, we must depend on language which is filled with meanings from which we borrow and reproduce. Because language is, for example, gendered, we cannot say that in speech we are in control of what we say and fully present to ourselves because we speak, without realising it, in a gendered way. Speech is a specially woven tissue of meaning and it works in exactly the same way as writing (in the narrow sense). Moreover the idea that speech is unmediated and thus closer to the truth or the originating thoughts in the mind is itself presupposed and produced by writing. It is writing which produces the illusion of autonomous speech; it is writing which refers to speech as the foundation of its own legitimacy."

¹⁵⁹ See also CUNDY, I. & REDFERN, A: Accountability: Assessment and Appraisal in a Post-Modern world, in C.E.B.E.: Op.cit. p.71

hidden interests, because it marginalises some groups such as workers, women, blacks and homosexuals; and it enables those with money to afford more able defence lawyers than those without money.¹⁶⁰

- Within literature, Intuition rather than intellect is used to come to meaning; the message is created by the receiver, not the presenter, so that neither the original writer nor text has any authority. Umberto Eco, a Postmodern Italian author is said to have commented, 'The author should die once he has finished writing so as not to trouble the path of the text.'¹⁶¹ Any reader attempting to read Joyce's *Ulysses* or *Finnegan's Wake* has to make their own interpretation and assessment, because there is no authoritative (meaningful) text.¹⁶²

- Like art, Postmodern music sometimes reacts against the entrapment of musical art for the commodity market by refusing to be art at all.¹⁶³

- Postmodernism understanding of the theatre is that theatre is performance art – happenings, spectacles – to which there is neither script nor text. Theatre must be free from text. [Derrida pointed out that contemporary theatre is normally *re*-presentation, whereas it should be presentation] and free from direction so that players have the freedom to be themselves (in reality, to do what they like!), and if that causes confusion, inability to grasp what is going on, and anxiety, then so be it!¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ CONNOR, S: *Postmodern Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997 pp.61-70 provides an invaluable summary about the law, with reference to other key writers.

¹⁶¹ BARNA, G: *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000*. California, Regal, 1990, p.185.

¹⁶² DEANE, S: *Introduction to Finnegans Wake*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1992, p.vii.

¹⁶³ This was taken to something of an extreme on September 26th. 2002, when a concert was presented at the Roman Catholic Cathedral Church of Christ the King in Liverpool, where the frequency of the sound was so low, that it could not be heard by those who attended the concert! Those who attended the concert were told that they might experience an atmosphere or a "shiver."

¹⁶⁴ CHATER, D: Choices, *The Times*, London, 22.05.02, p.28.

Postmodernism denies reality

Postmodernism places emphasis on individuality and subjectivity so as to underline its rejection of any belief in an objective, external reality. It claims that what we mean by 'reality' is personal, individual experience. Reality is subjective; it is what speaks to the individual. It is not the writer who 'speaks' but it is our own interpretation that speaks to us.

- Those things that are not real, such as television 'soaps,' films and Disneyland all become reality to us although they do not exist in reality. There is no Coronation Street community other than actors who perform on a 'set, Emmerdale does not exist. Even news reports are sometimes not authentic. Grootius claimed that American TV is a guilty party in an era of 'Truth Decay.' He pointed out that all 'truth' seen via the media is 'edited truth' so that we never see the real event in question; and further that the immediacy and impact of the images and the fragmentation prevent any real evaluation of what is happening on the screen.¹⁶⁵
- Literary activities have changed for Generation X. Its members use simultaneous sources (image, text, voice, sound, movement) taking threads from each and weaving them together into new meanings, often in patterns that do not exist in any of the originals.
- An important element in this rejection of reality is the rejection of any claimed objective reality such as 'God' in (traditional) religion

Postmodernism is pessimistic and despairing

- There is emphasis on emptiness and despair in the mental disturbance that comes to the viewer in trying to make 'sense' of the medium or in the depressing subject matter of the book, lyric or script. Contemporary culture

¹⁶⁵ GROOTHIUS, D: *Truth Decay*, Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2000, p.281

is quite frequently referred to as 'the culture of despair,' and its themes are frequently reflected in its writing.¹⁶⁶

- In Postmodern music the pastiche of sounds are sometimes so averse to a 'Classical' approach that they disturb and disorientate because the sounds do not 'naturally' go together. A similar outcome arises from Postmodern theatre, where elements of the performance disturb by their incongruity, or by the inability of the viewer to enter into and understand what is taking place. In Postmodern dance, breathing, bending, yawning, walking and the use of common objects are included. There is no attempt to blend things into a unity, but constant movement that leads to confusion in the observer in a way that makes interpretation impossible.

- Postmodern TV, film, video and DVD can be pessimistic in the themes chosen. 'Blade Runner' is frequently cited as an example of a Postmodern film with pessimistic themes. Pessimism goes considerably beyond this when the amount of time spent 'viewing' the screen and the instantaneous communication in a contemporary, Postmodern age makes us participants in the collapse of space and time in the global village, that involves pessimistic reaction characteristic of the Postmodern age. The traumatic stress induced by the continual imagery of the terrorist destruction of the twin towers of New York's Trade Centre is a well-known example.

¹⁶⁶ In the cover-blurb to Susan Howatch's *The High Flyer* we are told that "The High Flyer' is a classic novel of suspense and evil embedded in our society and the search for healing and salvation in our Postmodern world.' There is no mention of Postmodernism in the book, but there are recurring themes which resonate with a description of postmodern society. Carter Graham the heroine is a successful tax lawyer, so pro-feminine that she is against any form of masculinity [Feminism]; healing becomes an issue – Christian healing through Nick Darrow or occult spirituality through Mrs. Mayfield [Spirituality]; consumerism is paramount – a Porsche to move between a house in Surrey and a flat in the Barbican, and a 5-year gap to have children before resuming the career [Last stage of Capitalism]; pressure which leads to sheer chaos and destruction [Pessimism about Enlightenment hopes].

2.2: Reaction against social oppression

When Kant made his thinking about reality known, he claimed that those who had come to his viewpoint were in some way 'superior.' In consequence, Modernism has often been associated with superiority, particularly in the West, and this has led to repression of groups of people. Postmodernism reacts against such oppression.

After the collapse of the feudal order in which human beings were assigned to their positions, the possibility theoretically existed for human beings to make themselves and shape their future. The Enlightenment construction of the 'rational man,' however, affected all areas of life from religion and ethics to jurisprudence and economics and was fabricated for social control. When Bacon applied the statement that 'Knowledge is power' to the natural sciences, it was not long before it was used in the human sciences as a description of the way that knowledge gave one human being power over another. It is this sense of 'order' intruding into areas where it had no right to exist that Postmodernism seeks to demolish.¹⁶⁷

This lay behind Foucault's claim, that Modernism was inseparable from power, and such power was evil and therefore had to be resisted. Protest was required against the 'transcendental pretence of the West' that led to Colonialism, Racism and Patriarchy. In short, he 'reversed' ('reversal' was his word) the idea that progress, emancipation and betterment that were part of the enlightenment project were such. Modernism might have ended pre-Modern coercion and subjugation, but it still maintained power through education and discipline.

Working in asylums, hospitals and prisons Foucault claimed that knowledge was inseparable from power, despite its denial in its declaration that 'the truth shall make you free,' and 'academic freedom,' 'professional responsibility'

¹⁶⁷ See JAMES, W. & RUSSELL, B: How Has Postmodernism Changed Education? in CHURCH OF ENGLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION: *Tomorrow is Another Country*, London, Church House, 1996, p.27.

and 'balance' in the curriculum. Foucault claimed that knowledge is not only the truth of what is, but is a discourse is what is taken to be, or counts as, or is produced as truth and not simply the outcome of methodological investigation. It therefore dominates what people can say or think, or what is an acceptable or unacceptable authority. It is a means of saying whether a thing is true or not. Discourses, as Foucault used the term, are systems of possibility that make knowledge possible; they are not about objects, but constitute them. Discourses are never questioned; they are unseen and behind things allowing some people to speak, but silencing others.¹⁶⁸ 'Madness,' he said, 'is not a thing in itself, but it is a term or concept or discourse which people have invented or reinvented at different times. It is an object constituted by a modernist discourse of madness.'¹⁶⁹ Discipline by corporal punishment may have been replaced by (Modern) individual self-discipline as a result of the student's knowledge about himself and what he is required to do to show competence in his subject, but the power-discipline in self-discipline is just as real a power. He illustrated what is involved from the Panopticon, a prison in which the prisoners were always open to observation but did not know when the observation was taking place. They disciplined themselves as though they were under observation all the time. Similarly if one is aware of surveillance in, for example, continuous assessment, one disciplines ones-self, and the surveillance is inseparable from the power that is inseparable from the discipline. Knowledge in whatever form, involves power. Foucault called for (Postmodern) reaction to resist new forms of power.

I will now go on to look at three areas, where oppression has taken place, and which are resisted by Postmodern theorists.

¹⁶⁸ Usher and Edwards (Op.cit p.89) raise the issue noted in the opening of this dissertation in the context of Foucault's writing that frequently postmodern writing is difficult and obscure. They claim that what is happening is that Modern presuppositions which include the need for transparency of language and plain forms of speaking and writing (which are challenged by the Postmodern) are used to argue against Postmodern forms of writing, whereas Postmodern writers are really foregrounding the problem of language in their text.

¹⁶⁹ SHUMWAY, D: *Michael Foucault*, Virginia, University Press of Virginia, 1989, p.17.

Colonialism.

Colonialism from the Postmodern viewpoint is the practice of subjugation and exploitation of a weaker community for the benefit of a stronger nation (although euphemistically seen as for the benefit or advantage of the weaker community). Colonialism still exists even in a period of dissolution of empire, in saying, 'Let us demonstrate the value of former 'colonial' culture by the incorporation and inclusiveness of 'colonial' fashion, hairstyle, music, architecture, art etc. into the culture of the contemporary 'Western' world.' It takes such culture for itself, but from a Postmodern perspective it should be a token of the measure of guilt felt because local culture has been negated and even destroyed by Colonialism.

One of the problems of Postmodernism is that in its denial of over-arching truth, and the emphasis upon individualism, one sometimes finds a web of contradictions. Hence, while some see Postmodernism in opposition to Colonialism, others see it as a means of perpetuating it, which it is possible to do if one understands Postmodernism as 'contemporary thinking' rather than 'reactionary thinking.' Sardar, writing of the former 'colonial' world, brings out the bitterness of colonialism in his claim that far from reacting against Colonialism, in fact Postmodernism (i.e. as the contemporary world) seeks not only to perpetuate it but also to extend it. It is a pity that his views are inseparable from his hatred of the United States of America in which he sees the U.S.A. as the arch-colonial-power to which the whole world is subject and by whom the whole world is impoverished.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless his arguments that Postmodern culture supports a colonial attitude reveal the evils of colonialism and regrettably still have considerable strength. Writing from an overall perspective, he says,

Far from being a new theory of liberation, postmodernism, particularly from the perspective of the Other, the non-Western cultures, is simply a new wave of domination riding on the crest of colonialism and modernity. Alterity (along with other

¹⁷⁰ SARDAR, Z. & WYN DAVIES, M: *Why Do People Hate America*, Cambridge, Icon, 2002.

euphemisms signifying the Other or the non-West) is a key Postmodern term. Postmodern relativism embraces the Other, making alterity far more than just the representation of all non-Western cultures and societies. Alterity is the condition of difference in any binary pair of differences; there is even alterity within the self. Thus postmodernism avoids, by glossing over, the politics of non-Western marginalisation in history by suddenly discovering Otherness everywhere, and arguing that everything has its own kind of Otherness by which it defines itself. While this proves the triumph of the postmodern thesis that everything is relative, it is incapable of suggesting that anything is in some distinctive way itself, with its own history. The postmodern prominence of the Other becomes a classic irony. Instead of finally doing justice to the marginalised and the demeaned, it vaunts the category to prove how unimportant, and ultimately meaningless, is any real identity it could contain. We are all Others now, can appropriate the Other, consume artefacts of the Other so what does it matter if Others want something different in their future – such as the chance to make it for themselves!¹⁷¹

In his book, *Postmodernism and the Other*, he examines contemporary culture, and seeks to show that the Other, non-Western world continues to be marginalised, as it was at the beginning of Colonial history. Starting from the point that in the current world we are all required to make choices about our realities for ourselves and so we create our own realities, he bitterly goes on to show that the Other is left out; poverty, ill-health, famine, sickness all take away the possibility of choosing. In a world in which there is no possibility of distinguishing between reality and simulation, how can one living in the Postmodern West even begin to know whether the pain and suffering of the Other is real or not?

His critique of Western colonial attitudes seems never-ending. Examining the recognition (absorption?) of other cultures into the West, he sees this not so much a recognition of their cultural importance, but a Westernisation of their uniqueness. Claiming that the Postmodern West should feel guilt at its ceaseless oppression of the Other, he claims that Postmodern morality which postulates that no moral stance is possible because all are equally valid or equally absurd, lets the West off the hook. The ambivalence of Postmodern morality makes it impossible to make a judgement upon oppression and

¹⁷¹ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other*, London, Pluto Press, ,1998, p.13.

barbarity, past or present and therefore justifies inaction in, for example, destruction of Muslims by Serbs at Sebrenecia. Backward 'Colonies' that needed Western investment during the Modern period have simply remained backward because they cannot keep up with the thought and culture of the Postmodern West. Postmodern Capitalism has created a world of business corporation empires, supported by politicians, which continue to exploit the Other. Postmodern emphasis on human rights does not recognise the emphasis on human responsibility towards Other cultures because responsibility is linked to the morality which Postmodernism cannot define. Postmodern emphasis upon individualism is destructive of those Other communities where the emphasis is on community..... It is a book of cynicism and bitterness, but which from the viewpoint of many of the Other is perfectly justified. Far from affirming those once marginalised and oppressed by Colonialism, Postmodernism has, according to Sardar, not only continued but enhanced the oppression.

It is a pity that Sardar does not recognise the problem of his own position. He has an important point, that Postmodernism in the West may still demonstrate what he calls the 'imperialism of Western Culture,' but fails to see that he is as much part of the Postmodern world as anyone else. He does not correct history so much as re-write it from his particular viewpoint which sees an initial and continuing oppression of the Other. There are other ways of writing history. Watson has related why the West replaced the prominence of the East during the period of Modernity which differ from Sardar's view. By so doing, he not only gives an alternative to Sardar's account, but illustrates the difficulty of establishing historical truth. It was certainly true that at the end of the first Millennium A.D., the North Europeans were disregarded in the intellectual world. Not only did Said ibn Ahmad from Toledo write a book on the categories of nations that had contributed most to knowledge (which included Indians, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Arabs ... but not North Europeans) but Bacon petitioned Pope Clement IV to produce an encyclopaedia of new scientific knowledge from the translations currently being made from Arabic. But by 1500 the position was reversed and the

'West' had begun.¹⁷² Watson suggests that the reason the East (Islamic States) is not recovering is because their autocracies are supported by the Mukhabarat (intelligence services) that control large economic sectors similar to the kind of Mandarinate which held China back when the West was developing.¹⁷³ If so, then neither Western Modernism nor Western Postmodernism is to blame for the marginalisation of the Other. Sardar shows a similar weakness in his analysis of Christianity as a source of oppression, but the Christian references he quotes are certainly not, in many cases, ones I would recognise as even 'Christian.'¹⁷⁴ He is very selective. Neither does he seem greatly aware of the very fine line that exists between support for the Other and exploitation of the Other.¹⁷⁵

Racism

Racism is wider than colonialism, but it is closely linked to it. It can be no accident that the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.A. happened concurrently

¹⁷² Watson traces several possible reasons. (i) That the overland trade route which was used by Europe to purchase from the East came to an end – partly because the route was fragmented by the depredations of Tamerlaine, partly because of the spread of the Black Death from China, and partly because Portuguese sailors found sea routes to the East; (ii) Feudalism and the knightly class in the West was replaced by a mercantile class at a time when Europe became fully populated necessitating new systems of agriculture (horses and water mills) and marketing which rendered Europe independent of the East; (iii) Once monasteries became fully developed, there was a cross-European unity of thinking - constitution, law, architecture, science - with the use of Latin as a common language; (iv) At the same time the Christian faith became much more individualistic and this led to individual initiative such as the commercial triumph of the Italian states and the Renaissance flowering of the Arts.

¹⁷³ WATSON, P: reviewed his own book, *A Terrible Beauty*, London, Phoenix, 2002, in *The Times*; T2 p.4. of 13.06.02 under the title, How the East Didn't Win.

¹⁷⁴ He claims, for example, that Christians see nature as 'evil' on the basis of Aldous Huxley's account of what happened in a 13th. Century convent, and therefore it is to be attacked and exploited. Quite to the contrary, Paul in Romans sees Nature as one of the ways that we can see God (Romans 1. 19-20) [SARDAR, Z: Op.cit. p.237]

¹⁷⁵ It was brought home to me at the moment of writing this section of the dissertation. I was a guest at a concert at Southport Arts Centre, produced by children from Sefton schools as part of a scheme of work in which they learned about the life and culture of nations involved in the Commonwealth Games of 2002. When the children learned to dance out, sing out and act out the culture of the people they had studied, they were raising those cultures to a height to which they as learners had needs to be subject, with respect, understanding and submission. When they performed what they had learned on stage, it might well have been that the same cultural activities were reduced to a kind of mere entertainment of the West. It would be easy to focus on the theatre performance and to forget what led up to it, because the line between is so narrow.

with the birth of Cultural Postmodernism. Martin Luther King would never have seen himself as Postmodern, but his protest against Southern society and against the Southern Baptist Church as recorded by Yancey may be to contemporary ears almost unbelievable, but it was the reality which led to Postmodern opposition to power over Blacks. Not only did many of the S.B.C. leaders claim that the acceptance of Blacks was contrary to Biblical teaching, but they stood aside while violence was used against the Blacks. He describes the event recorded on ABC Television that so shocked the nation that it did cause some change of heart.

Many historians point to one event as the single moment in which the (Civil Rights) movement attained at last a critical mass of support for the cause of civil rights. It occurred on a bridge outside Selma, Alabama, when Sheriff Jim Clark turned his policemen loose on unarmed black demonstrators. The mounted troopers spurred their horses at a gallop into the crowd of marchers, flailing away with their nightsticks, cracking heads and driving bodies to the ground. As whites on the sidelines whooped and cheered, the troopers shot tear gas into the panicked crowd. Most Americans got their first glimpse of the scene when ABC Television interrupted its Sunday movie, "Judgement at Nuremberg," to show footage. What the viewers saw broadcast from Alabama, bore a horrifying resemblance to what they were watching from Nazi Germany. Eight days later, President Lyndon Johnson submitted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to the US Congress.¹⁷⁶

Racism was not simply endemic in the U.S.A., but there was concern locally and nationally in the U.K.¹⁷⁷ Opposition to such racism is Postmodern, although I am not aware of the word ever being utilised. It has led to a Postmodern culture that incorporates Black culture (dress, music, hairstyle) into Western culture as a means of protest against racism, and possibly an admission of communal guilt, but there is sometimes a subtle contradiction in

¹⁷⁶ YANCEY, P: *Soul Survivor*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2001, p.27.

¹⁷⁷ This is the first personal written record of work undertaken for Liverpool City Council (followed by interview with Granada TV in Manchester), and for the Inner London Education Authority: I was required to give evidence to the Race Relations Committee on behalf of Liverpool City Council because there was national concern about the disadvantages possibly suffered by black children in school following the revelations of racial tension in the Toxteth Riots. Later, I worked with black Church leaders in Inner London, who had formed black Churches because they were unable to find fellowship and welcome in London's (White) churches. Personnel had been encouraged to leave the West Indies to take up employment as bus drivers, and undertake labouring tasks of many kinds.

what happens. Incorporation of non-Western cultures because they have been oppressed and reckoned to be barbaric, can simply lead to a form of patronism which confirms that they are barbaric. This has led to the claim that Postmodernism itself is still an instrument of Western Oppression. Tidball commented on the fact that Postmodernism has received very little attention in Eastern Europe or the poor part of the world, and therefore seemed to be a luxury for those who do not know scarcity and who were preoccupied with liberty and the individual.¹⁷⁸ I have already noted how this is brought out with some strength by Sardar who writes from within a Middle Eastern perspective. Although writing from an extreme point of view which assumes that everyone in the West is Postmodern in the sense that he sees it, he does make a strong (perhaps bitter) case that 'Postmodernism, particularly from the perspective of the Other, the non-Western cultures, is simply a new wave of domination riding on the crest of colonialism and modernity.'¹⁷⁹

Even the idea of a 'Multicultural Society' might not be free from racism. The Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, concerned about the fact that British Muslims appeared to be involved in Terrorism, expressed the view that multiculturalism encouraged 'separateness' between communities, whereas there was a need to 'assert a core of Britishness' across society. He said, 'We are now living in a different world from the Sixties and Seventies. What we should be talking about is how we reach an integrated society, one in which people are equal under the law, where there are some common values.'¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ TIDBALL, D: A Beginner's Guide to Postmodernity, *Alpha*, 4.5.96.

¹⁷⁹ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other; the New Imperialism of Western Culture*, London, Pluto Press, 1998, pp.20ff.

¹⁸⁰ TREVOR PHILIPS, CHAIR OF COMMISSION FOR RACIAL EQUALITY: 'To aid young British Muslims is to tell them that they are British again and again until they know they are accepted. What the extremists are telling them is that they need to be extreme because these non-Muslims will never accept you because of your colour and your religion. The rest of us have to say even if we disagree with your views on the Middle East or religion, you are still one of us.' In BALDWIN, T. & ROZENBURG, G: Britain Must Scrap Multiculturalism, *The Times*, London, 3.4.04., pp.1,9.

Patriarchy.

Feminism developed during the last stages of Modernity and overlapped the period of Postmodern thought, and it is therefore sometimes unclear where the dividing line is to be drawn. It has parallels to the development of music and art where 'advanced modernism' is not easy to separate from Postmodernism. In one way or another, Modernism subjugated the female to the male. One way was through assessment of reality. Modernism claimed that in reality there is a basic duality – high v. low, heavy v. light, old v. new, and a prioritisation of one above the other. Hence in the analysis of Humankind as male v. female, it was the male with its rationality, objectivity and universality that was prioritised above the female. This was reinforced from theories of sexuality within the field of psychoanalysis. Lacan claimed that the male child's penis signified sexual power which enabled him to identify with the father and move from the imaginary phase of childhood into the symbolic order of kinship, rituals, and gender roles that prioritised the male. The objectivity of 'God's eye-view' was supposed to transcend the viewpoint of any particular group, but in fact there was little objectivity and it was value-laden in favour of the male.

How were women to react? Irigaray believed there were only two possibilities. Either one accepted patriarchy, or opposed it in the development of a separatist movement.¹⁸¹ In separatism, one could set out the characteristics and values of femininity as different to, but just as important as male characteristics and values and claim that as a part of a common humanity, women are free, autonomous and rational and can therefore determine their identity and aspirations – the 'equal rights' approach.

Brown argued that 'From 1800 to the mid 1960's, women constructed their personal identities around traditional concepts of Christian piety for women, especially motherhood, housewifery and being guardians of morality in home

¹⁸¹ Quoted in APPIGNANESI & GARRATT, op.cit. p.95

and society.¹⁸² [This was not completely true; there were non-religious characteristics of value too, held by non-religious women - caring, intimacy, relatedness, community and aesthetic awareness.] Brown reckoned that when secularisation happened, in the 1960's, women 'reconstruct(ed) their identity around secular concepts such as individualism, career, fashion and sexuality.'¹⁸³ There was however a problem in such an approach. It involved a commitment to the concepts of reason, objective truth and beneficial progress through scientific enquiry and this could never lead to an acceptance of their potential and capacity to be regarded as men's equals; it simply confirmed the priority of rationalism, and with it the priority of the male. Further, any new centeredness of female issues confirmed the subordination; if women are brought to the centre of thinking because they have been marginalised, then the very act of bringing them to the centre confirmed the marginalisation. Or put in another way: in the past femininity had been a 'not known,' but by becoming known, it actually came under power control and therefore lost its own authority.

There was another problem; there was no one approach so that feminists could agree amongst themselves. The rise of Postmodern thinking that rejected rationality and took a pluralistic approach was eagerly seized as an ally by some feminists, such that Postmodernism is frequently associated with Feminism. But it has been an uneasy alliance. Neither Feminism nor Postmodernism is a unified discourse and so relations between are not easy. Nor do all Postmodern arguments support feminism. If things are uncertain, then there can be no certainty in political action or its outcomes. If male absolutes have to be abandoned as part of the abandonment of all absolutes, then so too are absolutes related to feminism; and if rationalism has to be

¹⁸² BROWN, C: *The Death of Christian Britain*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul,, 2001

¹⁸³ Callum Brown's thesis: The Christian ideal of dutiful motherhood and home-maker gave way to secular independent woman, sexually 'liberated' by the pill, and ready to divorce if marriage gave inadequate fulfilment. "Masculinism" was the position held by the church, and he believes that while Christianity had initially made it possible for women to define their identity in Christian terms, a crisis of Christianity in the 1960's (Postmodernism??) enabled them to be free of the identity it gave to them (Feminism). Certainly this would be the case in "Postmodernism."

abandoned then those feminists who use rationalistic arguments to make their case also undermines their position.¹⁸⁴

Flax was wary of Postmodernism because if there was either a 'unified self' or a 'textually constituted self,'¹⁸⁵ then there was no consideration of gender, even though when the self is constituted through relationships, the first intimate relationship is a gender relationship. Kristeva rejected any idea of 'woman' or of 'gender,' but appears not to follow through because she believed the main problems of patriarchy have already been met.¹⁸⁶

Butler denied gender altogether. She claimed that gender is not inherent in us as people, but is constructed by our environment. She believes that gender is a category invented by men and operated through law, taboos and language, so as to keep women in subjection. She does not believe that traditional feminism goes far enough because it tries to work from within the system so as to free women but she believes that the system is so male-dominated that this is not possible. Femininity is simply 'non male.' The very idea of gender itself is constructed and imposed by men so that women grow up thinking of themselves as feminine because this is the way that males have ordered things. Butler therefore denies the whole concept of gender – unless it is that there are as many different genders as people!¹⁸⁷ We should therefore be free to try whatever expression of our identity and our sexuality we feel drawn to - i.e. we form our own identity, including (encouraging) homosexuality because it encourages people to live outside the norms of 'male' and 'female' and thus escape domination. We can be whatever we like because there is no right idea of what it is to be human; there is no right idea of what it is to be a woman, because it is simply invented and imposed by a male-dominated society, and it isn't even open to discussion because

¹⁸⁴ HARTSOCK, N: in 'Foucault on Power: a Theory for Women,' in NICHOLSON, L. (Ed.) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 1990, rejects alliance with Postmodernism. She claims that Foucault (typically – postmodern) thought in terms of resistance to power, whereas she went for transformation of power.

¹⁸⁵ FLAX, J: *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

¹⁸⁶ Follow through NICHOLSON, L. J. *Feminism/Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 1990.

¹⁸⁷ BUTLER, J: *Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire in Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London, Routledge, 1983

the discussion itself is male-dominated. The only way to liberate women is therefore to deny identity. The trouble with this is that if we say that the sexuality we choose is whatever we find fulfilling, then there is nothing to stand against paedophilia. Her stance is weak in that she makes presuppositions (sex is political, the legal system is male; language is male; gender identity is culturally imposed) all of which might be challenged.

Colonial and non-colonial; racist and non-racist; feminist and patriarchist; it is sometimes difficult to place Postmodernism. The element of confusion in Postmodernism is a reflection of the confusion in contemporary society, and the denial of any over-arching truth is clearly evident here.

2.3: Reaction against Capitalism and consumerism

Many texts on Postmodern theory do not include an account of its resistance to the power of the Capitalist-Consumerist system; they confine themselves to an analysis of resistance to 'Modern' philosophical and cultural developments. I am aware from a lifetime of working with children, that although they might not always be able to follow Postmodern arguments against rationality, they recognise the problems of the disadvantaged and the oppressed and they will also be sensitive to those who are victims of Capitalism and Consumerism. For this reason, what follows in this chapter is of considerable importance in preparation for talking to children about Postmodern issues.

Reaction against Capitalism and Consumerism is not always immediately identified as Postmodern. One reason is that the area is complex. Jameson says that 'Like a Postmodern text, global capitalism flaunts its centreless ubiquity, its refusal to stand still and be itself for the analyst.'¹⁸⁸ Neither is it always clear whether Postmodern theory relates to the resisters of, the

¹⁸⁸ Quoted by CONNOR, S: *Postmodernist Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p.48

victims of, or the perpetrators of Capitalism.¹⁸⁹ I will take the view in this chapter, that Postmodernism reacts against Capitalism and Consumerism, in parallel with reaction against philosophical modernism. It seeks to make people aware of what is happening in society. I will briefly trace its three stages of development and the reaction that grew against it.¹⁹⁰

The development of Capitalism-Consumerist Power

The Pre-modern phase (The beginnings of money)

In feudal society, before Capitalism developed, only a small proportion of what was produced in the family dwelling or plot of land and produced as handicrafts or agriculture was surplus, and therefore available to be sold or exchanged in the market place. What is termed 'use value' was greater than 'exchange value.' As exchanges multiplied, one commodity crystallised out as 'money;' and the value of everything (including work) was related to what has been decided upon as money.

Once a money economy had been agreed, traditional communities were replaced by 'money communities;' i.e. there was a move from a personal society in which people depended on individuals, to one in which there was a dependence upon impersonal relations, and money became a power external to and independent of producers. Once money came into general use and was exchanged for commodities, contact was lost with the persons involved in producing the commodity; daily breakfast was taken without a thought

¹⁸⁹ TAGGART, G: Mickey Mouse Spirituality? Children's Worldviews and the Culture Industry, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 25.1, Autumn 2002. Taggart is aware that some writers distinguish between 'Resistance Postmodernism' in which they resist the intensification of Consumerism, and 'Reaction Postmodernism' which actually embraces Consumerism, celebrates the collapse of meaning and ends up with consumable rubbish being sold as works of art.

¹⁹⁰ JAMESON also identifies three phases but they are not exactly the same: Market Capitalism (The growth of industrial capital in national markets, 1700-1850), Monopoly Capitalism (The age of imperialism – colonialisation, cheap labour, cheap raw materials) and Multinational Capitalism.

about the myriad people involved in its production Marx referred to this as the 'fetishism' of commodities.¹⁹¹

If money was to function properly it needed to be replaced by some kind of symbol of itself – coins, notes or whatever was convenient. Further, the coins and paper needed to be given names [or 'signifiers' -pounds, pesetas, piastres]. It is through such (mere) symbols that the whole world of social labour, production and hard work became represented.

The Modern phase (Accumulation of money/ development of money-power)

The possibility then arose that the signifiers themselves could become objects of hoarding and greed, and this would be desirable to those who already had money, because the accumulation of money leads to social power. This possibility was realised by commodity producers who sought to accumulate money and acted in a number of ways.

- The first step was to gather individuals who did work 'at home' into workplaces such as mills, or 'factories' where, utilising new resources of industrial power such as coal or steam, it was possible to produce goods (commodities) more cheaply than could be produced at home. This made it necessary for people to work in factories and be provided with a minimal amount of money which while it enabled them to purchase necessities, paid them less than the value of their labour so that it made a profit for the mill, factory or mine owner. [i.e. the workers are 'exploited' (Marx said they had been reduced to slavery; the 'fruit of labour becomes capitalist profit')¹⁹²]. In effect, those with the capital to bring people together in this way took over the means of production, and the workers become mere appendages of the machines – 'hands' – and formed a working class. The aim was not simply to

¹⁹¹ HARVEY, D: *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p.101 One of the problems at this point is when Postmodernism actually begins and what it entails.

¹⁹² MARX, K: 'The absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa which makes a man a mere fragment of his own body becomes realised.' *Capital* Vol.3, New York, p.340

produce commodities but to make money through the production of commodities, and to limit the amount of money that the workers might have.

- Initially workers were paid sufficiently to provide for their necessities, but when the existing market for what they produced was saturated, it paid to pay workers enough money so that they might purchase some of what they produced, for themselves. This enlarged the market and actually increased the profit, and therefore the power.
- There came a point, however, where the market was saturated again, and manufacturing had not yet reached a point of manufacturing for replacement (built-in obsolescence), and innovation was very limited. Profit could however be increased further by greater efficiency - faster speed of production and fewer workers to pay. Greater efficiency could be gained by breaking-down and streamlining the work of production so that each worker performed a single rapid action on an assembly line. Industrialism, or "Fordism" as it was called, after Henry Ford, depersonalised and dehumanised the workers by the repetitive action on the assembly line but resulted in greater profit for the owner of the factory. Marx referred to this stage of Capitalism as 'Slavery to the workplace.'
- This was followed by a "Post-industrial" stage in which advances in technology drove changes in economics, the world of work and lifestyle. The change can be demonstrated by the fact that in 1950, machine operators were the largest group of workers in mass production industry; but by 1990, after the launch of the personal computer in 1981 by IBM, only 20% of the workforce were machine operators. They had been replaced by 'knowledge workers' who processed information and offered services instead.¹⁹³ 'Brute force economy' had been replaced by 'brain force economy.' They were concerned with the production of symbolic knowledge rather than material goods and were identified as those working in areas such as teaching, social services, banking, the media, architecture, culture and aesthetics.

¹⁹³ DRUCKER, P: - the 'father' of contemporary management studies.

As this process developed further and faster, at some point it became 'Postmodern.'¹⁹⁴ Some writers pinpoint the moment in time when this occurred, as when those belonging to the new strand in social structure sought for new and changing experiences, the breaking down of the established order and the adoption of a learning-mode towards life. I will identify the Postmodern phase as the point where money becomes power.

The Postmodern phase - Money itself becomes power

Marx saw the third stage of development of Capitalism as the stage where the workers themselves took over production, but it has not (so far) worked out that way. The third stage has become, in fact, that which most writers regard as 'Postmodern,' because the changes that took place towards the end of the 20th. Century are too great to be seen simply as a carry-on of Modernity. The explanation of what it is and how it happened varies with the writer, as pointed out in the preceding section. The only point of agreement is that something significant has changed in the way Capitalism has been working since about 1970.¹⁹⁵ As the third stage of Capitalism it is about power, and Postmodernism identifies and resists it, in a way that is parallel to its resistance of the power of Rationalism over 'Modern' minds. The Postmodern age is the age or stage where money and power have coalesced. Those with capital (money) have steadily developed power and domination over people who need money. It is a stage where money has become the supreme representation of power and the object of lust, greed and desire. Money is still the means of purchasing labour time and commodities but at the same time it is a means of control.

[It] fuses the practical and economic into a genuine political economy of overwhelming power. The common material languages of money and commodities provide a universal basis within market capitalism for linking everybody into an identical system

¹⁹⁴ HARVEY, D: *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989,p.173 . He says that theories are so diverse that many academics have ceased to try to sort things out.

¹⁹⁵ As above; ref. 218

of market valuation and so procuring the reproduction of social life through an objectively grounded system of social bonding. Yet within these broad constraints we are 'free' as it were to develop our own personalities and relationships in our own way, our own 'otherness,' even to forge group language games, provided of course that we have enough money to live on satisfactorily.¹⁹⁶

Features of Capitalism-Consumerism Power

Postmodernism resists the power Capitalists hold over others through the power of money, and seeks to make people aware of what is happening. There are several forms of power inherent in the third stage of Capitalism's thirst for money and power, that I outline below.

Power over Producers

There are a number of ways by which workers and working conditions are manipulated so that in their need for money, workers will acquiesce to the control and new arrangements of those who have power. Lyon described the position in this way:

Postmodernisation has to do with the altered industrial landscape with its mobile, flexible production, the upheaval of the occupational structure that places services and so-called information workers in a majority and a compressed world where new technologies enable not only new methods of production, but different ways of relating.¹⁹⁷

Power over producers takes several forms:

- **Technological dynamism.** This refers to replacement of outdated investments in buildings, machinery and labour skills and investment in smaller units linked by computer and satellite. It causes the death of the

¹⁹⁶ HARVEY, D: Op.cit. pp 102-103

¹⁹⁷ LYON, D: *Postmodernity*, Bletchley, Open University Press, 2nd. Edition 1999, p.70.

local community in the need to move house and home, and the break up family security where the worker no longer has a job for life and is involved in moving house (or working away from home), acquiring new skills and forming new relationships.

- **Flexibility.** This involves the training of key workers in new skills for service industries, or multiple skills so that skilled staff can operate at different times and in different places. Low-skilled rapid-turnover, easily-available, part-time, staff (often women) are then used for other, non-pensionable, work. Key workers are still not secure; they will be replaced, when feasible, by computer power that is cheaper, more accurate and becomes less fatigued.¹⁹⁸ Flexibility involves speedily-moved components purchased in small batches from suppliers who can be forced to produce things cheaply by threat of competition, and so that there is no need for warehousing and storage. This is not mere technical advance that we would term 'Modern,' but it is social transformation.

- **Rapid Relocation.** Goods are produced in places in the world where labour and material is cheapest, production units being computer-linked, and goods then moved by high-speed transport. Office work can be done from home anywhere in the world by similar computer-link and negates the need for office-accommodation. Harvey refers to such (Postmodern) characteristics as a collapse of space and time.¹⁹⁹

- **Reciprocal arrangement between companies and State.** Multinational companies threaten Government with withdrawal of industries of economic importance to the country if Government reduces their profits,²⁰⁰ and if they are denied positions of economic power within Government. Government

¹⁹⁸ Although perhaps somewhat exaggerated, KAKO, K: [*Visions: How Science Will revolutionise the 21st. Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.73-74] foresees Biomolecular revolution where new forms of life are creatable and genetic manipulation replaces drugs, Quantum revolution where there is manipulation of matter and development of molecular machines, and Computer revolution where technology is used to enable machines to think for themselves.

¹⁹⁹ HARVEY, D: Op.cit. p.254

²⁰⁰ HARVEY, D: Op.cit. p.164.

can support industry through the World Bank / G7 which regulates finance while giving opportunities for big business.²⁰¹

Power over consumers

Power through money over producers is paralleled by power through money over consumers. Lyon goes so far as to say that 'The temporary creation of the new consumer gives a clue to the understanding of Postmodernity and Postmodernism.'²⁰² He explains:

Where once Westerners might have found their identity, their social togetherness and the ongoing life of their society in the area of production, today these are increasingly found through consumption. It's not that companies are producing less, or that people no longer work. Rather, the meaning of these activities has altered.²⁰³

Power over consumers is achieved in a number of ways. Some of it is direct and obvious such as by producing goods with that are not intended to last, or making them obsolescent so that 'spares' are unavailable, but it is also indirect and subtle in ways of which many consumers are unaware.

- By keeping individuals under surveillance. Whether surveillance is by record of use of credit or trade cards, monitoring of mobile telephone calls, co-ordination of information on insurance, banking or taxation, or by visual record on security cameras, the means utilised can be and are co-ordinated so that detailed information is available on each individual. Utilised by police and security forces, the information is also collected (purchased) by marketing groups and consequently consumers are targeted by mailshot, telephone or digital T.V. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* is becoming a reality.
- By the creation of 'stars,' (presented by the media) who by their very

²⁰¹ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: Op.cit. p.188

²⁰² LYON, D: *Postmodernity*, Bletchley, Open University Press, 1999, p.70

²⁰³ LYON, D: Memory and Millennium, in BRADSHAW, T: (Ed.) *Grace and Truth*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998, p.284

appearance encourage participation in their lifestyle in fashion, sports equipment, electronic gadgets, holidays, dwellings, etc.

- By inculcation of a culture of dissatisfaction with the present and the immediate that continually looks forward to something better and more satisfying, but which can never be achieved.
- By reducing everything to a commodity. Academic study and religion have both become commodities instead of centres of experience. It is done in the 'city' which is the centre of cultural shifts; 'Fun and entertainment, consumption and 'tourist gaze,' is the way that Lyon describes the Postmodern city.²⁰⁴
- By contriving needs. By advertising, utilising fantasy and fiction, which creates needs by acting upon and controlling the mind.²⁰⁵ When basic commodity-needs are met, new needs are created by control of the media in a way that not simply controls, but subverts the minds of the consumers.²⁰⁶

Baudrillard claimed that 'Ambience' or 'Consumerism' is simply a more recent form of slavery to capitalism than the slavery of the workplace identified by Marx. Affluent society changes things by surrounding us with objects rather

²⁰⁴ LYON, D: Op.Cit. p.74.

²⁰⁵ FREAN, A: Tweenage Consumers Hit the High Street, *The Times*, London, 16.08.00, reports that when Datamonitor published research to show that 10-13 y.o's spending money had risen by more than 5% to £4.17p. per week (a greater rise than any other in the youth market – due to divorced parents, compensation for lack of parenting, + payment for household jobs). They were immediately targeted by advertisers

²⁰⁶ Evidence for subversion was convincingly illustrated in BBC2: *The Century of the Self*, 17.03.02. Starting with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, it demonstrated that his nephew, Edward Bernays, in the U.S.A., utilised his uncle's psychoanalytical insights to influence public opinion with respect to Government policies and with regard to purchase of commodities through advertising, by manipulating unconscious desires. He believed people could behave irrationally if products were linked to their (unconscious) emotions. One application was manipulating women so as to encourage them to smoke. On the one hand, cigarettes were openly advertised as 'torches of freedom,' declaring women to be powerful and independent and not enslaved to men. On the other it was covertly suggested that cigarettes were penis-shaped, and under the control of instead of controlling women. Another application was at the point of over-production of commodities at a time when sales were made on the basis of need. Bernays made desire, rather than need the basis of sales, encouraging peoples' desire to express themselves to others or to copy the lifestyle of "stars." He gained support from Government by claiming that the aggressive instincts of the human tribe could be controlled if satisfied by consumer goods. It is an interesting counter claim to STARKEY (Note 153).

than people. At one time we went to work, enjoyed leisure, took part in cultural pursuits and went out into nature, but now everything has been taken away from us in shopping. Humanity is diminished by such consumer culture. We become slaves to artificial needs that can never be satisfied, created by advertising; and slaves to consumer choice because not only do we *have* to make choices, but contemporary 'fun morality' demands that we try everything. Further, he claimed that in order to further its ends, Capitalism has actually changed our experience of reality; it controls all the signs and what they signify.²⁰⁷ In Consumerism we lose experience of natural things, of physical activity, and of things as they are in themselves, because they are manipulated as signs of something else, and we enter into a stage of hyper-reality in which a BMW is not a car, so much as a sign of managerial success. Consumer objects are unreal because they are simply relations and significations; culture is unreal since it becomes simply the production and consumption of signs so that 'everything is now cultural.'²⁰⁸ 'Needs' have been analysed as follows:²⁰⁹

- Need, not for the commodities themselves, but for the status signified by the commodities. Status might be signified by a certain make of car. Social recognition might be signified by the ability to provide certain foods and drinks in a luxurious home, or the purchase of brand-named goods

²⁰⁷ Almost all; except in the area of symbolic exchange, like a wedding ring, which leads us into social obligation.

²⁰⁸ HORROCKS, C. and JEVTIC, Z: *Introducing Baudrillard*, Cambridge, Icon, 1999, p.49.

²⁰⁹ What follows in the main text is strongly rejected by STARKEY, M., in *Fashion and Style*, (Crowborough, Monarch, 1995). He claims that options might be limited, but choices are still real for the individual and are not imposed. 'A girl may choose a 'get well' card from a range of 10 on display, or from a range of 300. But in either case she will use the card to communicate authentic sentiment.' i.e. she is not a slave. Further he claims that it is not true that 'fashion, like other aspects of culture is imposed, limited and false. It underestimates the playful, subversive character of today's style.' He illustrates this from school uniform which is never the same. 'Imposed norms are constantly subverted by the angle of a tie, the bagginess of a cardigan, whether hands are pulled up inside sleeves or stick out, the cut of a shoe. No two punks or Goths are ever alike; minor changes and additions customise and individualise the common theme.'" (pp.81-83); but he seems to miss the point. Individual choice and creativity is still limited by the choices of the providers. Later (pp.192ff) he claims that the fashion industry does not have such power, but desperately seeks ways of finding trends it can utilise so as to make profit; there is something else that controls fashion. Rejecting theories of economics (fashion reflects national prosperity or recession), wealth (fashion reflects personal wealth with many changes of clothing) or erogenics (fashion does the round of emphasising erotic areas), he claims we are 'all adolescents', in the contemporary age, and the adolescent drive for sensation, novelty and certainty creates a series of 'fashions.'

that are purchased by those who are 'with it.' Linked with this is what Lyon identifies as a key aspect of consumerism –the human body, as a site for style and signification.²¹⁰ Whether it is offers of enhancement (prosthetics) experiences (thrills) or relationships (blind date) the body is of prime importance.

- Need for new experience in new-style commodities such as pleasure, education, holidays, sex, leisure... and events varying from air shows to firework displays. Love, goodness and knowledge come into the area of exchange value; are 'up for sale.' The need for leisure is met not simply by commodities such as sports equipment, but by the creation of the idea that purchasing is itself a leisure activity, aided by the provision of shopping malls and innovative web sites. This has been taken to the extreme in encouraging consumers to spend so as to help their country in time of depression.
- Need for change, exemplified by, "You are not feeling so bright; you need a change." Advertisers home in on the unconscious, utilising our reaction to the collapse of time to identify it with boredom and to suggest that the cure is in something new. Change has been made basic human need whether by shopping, continually changing the TV programme, going out to somewhere or trying on half a dozen outfits for a night out before being satisfied. People find their identity not so much in what they produce as in what they consume. Rowan Williams, before becoming Archbishop of Canterbury said,

We are a deeply, dangerously bored society. In part it is because the pace of modern life demands immediate answers. Our sense of time has contracted. We can't understand that it's good to take time to cope with a look past boredom: that shrinking of time, our perspective on life and contemporary culture, the impatience with the invisible We look for short term results in

²¹⁰ LYON, D: Op.Cit. p.84.

education and religion so there's a kind of secularism to our understanding of time and growth.²¹¹

- Need for contemporaneity – being 'with it' - creation of the idea of fashion, that objects 'date,' and that to be socially acceptable one must keep 'up-to-date. TV news is unreal – it simply holds the masses captive to its images; above all we are unreal as we lose ourselves because the consumer is simply an *effect* of the way that consumer goods circulate as meanings. And the future? That too is unreal and we are left with nothing. Jameson links consumerism (which he identifies as acceleration of style and fashion, power of advertising, electronic media, universal standardisation neo-colonialism and the green revolution) with a fading sense of history. We have lost our capacity to know the past, and therefore we live in the present.²¹²
- Another contrived need is the need for precisely what we need, called "hyperchoice consumerism." Consumers are encouraged to seek *exactly* what they 'need.' Digital technology delivers exactly what the purchaser wants. 'The customer is king and has almost unlimited choice of where to spend, and what on, with miracles of information processing to cope with the complexities of servicing the choices made.'²¹³

Power over society.

Power over consumers is bringing about a change in society itself; Capitalism determines culture. Capitalism is a process of reproduction of social life through commodity production. It is a dynamic and revolutionary mode of social organisation, restlessly and ceaselessly transforming the society within which it is embedded. The process masks and fetishes, exploits the capacity

²¹¹ MORGAN, C. & DRISCOLL, M: You're bored, damned bored,, *Sunday Times*, London, 31.03.02, News Review p.3.

²¹² JAMESON, F: *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham (U.S.A.) Duke University Press, 1991, pp.42/44

²¹³ KELLY, G: *Get a Grip on the Future Without Losing Your Hold on the Past*, Monarch, London,, 1999 p.79.

for human labour and desire, transforms spaces and speeds up the pace of life.

An interesting example of the changes in this respect is the treatment of 'stars,' (pop-idols, football stars, popular authors). When artists perform for companies (music, football clubs, publishers ...) for great income, they are still exploited by the companies who use them to increase their profit. It generates in the artists, different attitudes to those who receive wages for labour, and creates another distinct layer in society within the middle class – a group for which symbolic capital, fashion, localism, nationalism, language, religion... can be very important, because the cultural aspects identify them socially. The new 'Yuppies' are demanding new cultural forms of their own.

The Archbishop of Canterbury made a similar point in giving the Dimbleby Lecture on 18.12.02. He argued that the traditional model of the nation state is being superseded by the market state in the economically-developed world, where the basic assumptions about how states work are shifting. The job of being a politician and citizen has changed, because whereas in the past those who ran the state had the job of guaranteeing the general good of the community, the state no longer has the power to keep its side of the bargain. The international power of the markets and consumers means that any one country is unable to guarantee employment – and because electronic communication means that organisations inhabit a virtual world, there is no identifiable headquarters either. All this has meant that the state has withdrawn from many areas where it used to provide some moral pressure. Williams believes that the vision has been lost in education which by parental choice + publication of results = consumerism. He believes that a society without deeper meaning behind its culture can lose itself in repetitive behaviour from which it never learns.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Edited Summary in *The Times*, 19.12.02, p.4.

The Future of Capitalism-Consumerism Power

Is the Postmodern phase of Capitalism the final phase, or is there a Post Postmodernity? Some look ahead with optimism. Capital enables us to overcome the limitations of nature by new means of production (Genetic research; nuclear power, fish farms). The 'fragmentation' of labour can lead to well-rounded individuals who can put their hand to anything rather than acting as living machine cogs. It links us with other people and cultures.

Most look ahead with pessimism to the point of absolute saturation where it is no longer possible to increase profit and power through money. Whether saturation means that there is no more space for profit, or whether saturation means slavery, the pessimism expressed by Baudrillard might be a reality and it has already become a reality for some Capitalists who have been forced to take desperate measures to maintain profit.²¹⁵ There are sound reasons for such pessimism.

There is a high degree of insecurity. There is no certainty that a person will survive in a society where they cannot stay in their secure social environment because they may not continually receive the money that they need (want) to stay there. They can be manipulated in time and space by those with power so that they have to go 'where the money is.' Further, they can be replaced, initially with cheaper labour in other places, and ultimately by fibre optics and robotics. There is no certainty that a person can cope with their changing world. In some cases the insecurity brought about by rapid change leads to despair; some people are overwhelmed by too much deconstruction, information, nihilism. In other cases it leads to withdrawal where the complexities of the world are denied, and the attempt is made to describe it with simple slogans ("These are the last days; prepare ye the way of the

²¹⁵Illustrated by Eason who reported that football clubs have reached a stage where earnings from trading and TV have reached saturation point, and they are therefore looking for new ways of making money. He reported that the top European football clubs are to set up their own motor racing series, in which the 30 cars (of the 30 clubs) participating will all be identical. It is estimated that it will bring in £100M per year. The point has already been made that in some places in Japan, there is a deliberate return to 'Rustication.'

Lord.”) There are those who fall in between – those who have abandoned metanarratives but are prepared to take limited action. It is the attempt to carve out at least one knowable world from the infinity of possible worlds that are daily shown on the TV screen. There are those who ‘try to ride the tiger of space-time compression through construction of a language and an imagery what can mirror and hopefully command it’ like Baudrillard and Jameson.

When the Bishop of Maidstone gave the Keynote Address to the Baptist Assembly in Plymouth in May 2002,²¹⁶ he drew out several characteristics of what he termed the ‘web’ society, all of which underline insecurity. It has no shared sense of direction. Nor has it any fixed or shared overall purpose because in a throwaway society it is not just goods, but values, lifestyles, stable relationships and received ways of doing things which are thrown away. Nor, despite its power is it without vulnerability.²¹⁷ He quoted Baudrillard – ‘Everything we once thought dead and buried, left behind by the march of universal progress, is not dead at all, but likely to return with a vehemence and a virulence and reach to the heart of our ultra-sophisticated but ultra-vulnerable systems.’

There is a high degree of frenzy in a ‘must have’ society where its desire has been taken over by the media. This is illustrated by the long midnight queues to purchase the latest volume in the Harry Potter series, and the rise of street violence to steal mobile telephones, leather jackets and jewellery. Another element of frenzy arises from information overload. We are bombarded with so many messages that it is not simply that we do not know what to choose, but that we become incapable of making a choice. For some this leads to relativism; [how can anyone say any more that anything is true?] and for others it leads not simply to transience of point-of-view but transience of relationships. For others again, this leads to breakdown; the pressure of multiple choices and uncertainty about making the right decision have led to

²¹⁶ Reported in *Baptist Times*, Didcot, 9.05.02, p.11.

²¹⁷ The rapid spread of foot and mouth disease arising from the consumer need of pre-packaged meat products) the alarming AIDS/HIV epidemic in many parts of the world, and violent fluctuations on the world’s money market emphasise the weakness.

depression, eating disorders and attempted suicide, all becoming more common, and especially among the young. Multiple choice, self-identity through consumerism, freedom as the opportunity to pick and shed ones true self leads to great ambiguity about the nature of self. For if your identity is made up, who is the you who chooses who you want to be?²¹⁸

²¹⁸ CRAY, G: Keynote address at Baptist Assembly, 4.5.02. Reported in Baptist Times, 9.5.02. p.11.

CHAPTER 3: PESSIMISTIC REACTION – REJECTION OF A SCIENTIFIC ‘GOLDEN AGE.’

If Postmodernism defines a way of life, then life should have elements of hope, playfulness and freedom – ‘Everything is now your choice; come and get it, enjoy it and live.’ Hopefully we can look forward to a newly structured society following Marxian guidance. Playfully, we can make things mean what we wish them to mean; we can take elements of culture to make them be what we wish them to be. Free, we are delivered from overarching authority.

Not only has Postmodernism failed to draw the majority of people to such a standpoint, but Postmodernism has been discredited by elimination of its own metanarrative among all metanarratives. Its hopes have been dashed because its demand for an alternative to the rational-scientific-technological world has been rejected, and Postmodern theory appears to be hollow, a hyper-real claim set against the reality of the world we live in; a world on a pathway to disaster.

In this chapter I will examine why, instead of positively defining a way of life, Postmodernism has become, in part, a negative pessimistic reaction against the rationally-scientific based world in which we live.

3.1: Denial of the truth and objectivity of science.

Postmodernism reacts against the nature and origins of science as normally understood – that it was a rational development, originating in the West, that left other primitive cultures behind, as it followed experiment, observation, deduction, hypothesis, testing, value-free-conclusion as the procedure within ‘scientific method.’ Denial takes several forms:

- Denial that Science originated in the West. Sardar, writing on behalf of

the Other, catalogues pre-Columbian agriculture, Pacific island navigation, carbon-steel in Tanzania, China's discovery of gunpowder and the rudder, and the mathematics of the 14th.Century Muslim world that anticipated the discoveries of Copernicus as examples.²¹⁹

- Denial that science is truly objective, claiming that scientists do not discover the laws of nature so much as manufacture them; that they do not make neutral, objective observations in isolation, but work within a theoretical framework; that even their objectivity is altered by their expectations. In theory, there is doubt about scientific method, and the fact that science is not value free. As Usher and Edwards put it:

All claims to knowledge, [including scientific knowledge] are always partial, local and specific rather than universal and ahistorical, and ... they are always imbued with power and normative interests – indeed, what characterises modernity is precisely the concealing of the partiality and rootedness of knowledge claims in the cloak of universality and value neutrality.²²⁰

- Denial that progress and emancipation of humanity has come by understanding the simplicity of all things through metanarratives. [Lyotard exemplified Auschwitz as proof that it had not]. Far from identifying a basic (Higgs-Boson) particle, science has already discovered that in fact, the world of matter is best described as 'chaos' and 'complexity,' which indicates that such simplistic approaches have gone. Quite apart from the identification of a basic particle, science has been unable to disentangle its own language-game from that of narrative, and indeed, science itself has developed into chaos as one designated area generates another or others, and others are combined into new areas of scientific discourse. As Lyotard puts it,

Disciplines disappear, overlappings occur at the borders between sciences, and from these, new territories are born. ... The old 'faculties' splinter into institutes and

²¹⁹ SARDAR, Z: *Postmodernism and the Other*, London, Pluto books, 1998, pp.203/4.

²²⁰ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.10.

foundations of all kinds, and the universities lose their function of speculative legitimation.²²¹

Lyotard critically suggested that in the Postmodern world there is a new basis for legitimating knowledge – that of efficiency v. inefficiency, or 'performativity.' In this Postmodern world, 'knowledge' has become a commodity to be exchanged, a centre for labour to be reorganised around knowledge-intensive industries, a new means to governmental power. The ability to access and decode computer-based information becomes the crucial thing. Science therefore only has value insofar as it is possible to be reduced to computer language and to be available for exchange and consumption – an emphasis on diversity rather than on totality.

Postmodernism rejects the belief central to Modernism that there is a legitimating centre upon which beliefs and actions can be grounded; there is no foundational knowledge or inevitable progress. It holds to a world where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points. It recognises that the contemporary world is unstable and changing, with alteration in knowledge and meaning; but this is to be celebrated. We are free from metanarratives and the power structure that goes with them. While for some this is cause for celebration, for others it leads to pessimism.

3.2: Failure of Modernism's hopes for the future

Fukuyama saw the point where evolution came to an end; where there was no further place to evolve to – the end of History (his capitalisation) as he put it. Commenting on the contemporary situation he wrote,

What we are witnessing is not just the end of the cold war, or the passing of a particular point of post-world history, but the end of History as such; that is, the end

²²¹ LYOTARD, J: *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1979, p.39

point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western democracy as the final form, of human government..²²²

Postmodern writers see the potential for good inevitably twisted into potential for evil, and they cannot escape from their conviction of the ultimate meaninglessness of life. Postmodernism claims that Modernism has 'gone to seed.' It is commonly illustrated in a number of ways:

- Aspects of technology that should have been used for advantage, have been used for disadvantage. Nuclear fission that can be used to provide sources of power has also been utilised to produce weapons of unprecedented destruction. Experimental work in cancer therapy is exploring the possibility that cancer cells can be induced to 'commit suicide,' but the same techniques can be used for weaponry in biochemical warfare. Genetics has allowed the mapping of the human genetic code and has opened up the possibility of replacing defective genes that cause disease, by sound genes, but at the same time it opens up the possibility of producing biological weaponry that replaces sound genes by those that cause fatal disease.²²³ In short, society has become destructive rather than constructive.²²⁴

- Agricultural advantages that might have led to universal plenty have not led to sufficiency for all. The Appeal literature produced by T.E.A.R. Fund in 2000 highlighted the problem with respect to provision of water. More money was spent in a year on ice cream in Europe than was needed to provide adequate, safe water for the whole of Africa.²²⁵

²²² FUKUYAMA, F: *The End of History and the Last Man, and Our Posthuman Future*, Profile, London, 2002.. Reviewed in Profile: Francis Fukuyama, *Sunday Times*, 05.04.02. p.17 and the subject of lectures at Bishopsgate Institute, London, 26.05.02 and London University Institute of Education on 30.05.02..

²²³ FRASER, C. and DANDO, M: in *Nature Genetics*, October, 2001 (Reported in the '*Times*,' 22.10.01, p.5).

²²⁴ The Pope illustrated the destructiveness of society on a visit to Israel in November 2000. Standing where Christ had delivered the original 'Beatitudes,' he presented a set which fitted contemporary (Postmodern) Society: "Blessed are the proud, Blessed are the violent, Blessed are those who prosper at any cost, Blessed are the unscrupulous, Blessed are the pitiless, Blessed are the devious, Blessed are those who fight, Blessed are the persecutors."

²²⁵ Another example of 'man's inhumanity to man,' was the Holocaust, and for LYOTARD: *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1984*, London, Turnaround,

- Figures published in 2001 suggest that Western society is deteriorating. The incidence of mental disorder and poverty among children in one-parent families are double those among children living with both their parents.²²⁶ Yet whereas two-parent families with dependent children formed 92% of all households in 1971, the figure was 74% in 2001. While there is a relatively small increase in the numbers of young people taking alcohol, there is a significant increase in the numbers of young people who take excessive alcohol. Frean suggested that the driving force behind the changes in the last fifteen years has been a big increase in mothers who have never married, and not marital breakdown. The proportion of all families headed by single or never-married mothers rose from 2% in 1981 to 9% in 2001.²²⁷
- Language skills are threatened by technological advance. The current technology of the mobile telephone is seen as a threat to language skills in the future. Laufer interviewed over 100 children aged 5 – 11 concerning communication. The report noted that:

We are witnessing a communications revolution to which children have adapted very quickly; our language is changing in front of our eyes. More than half a billion²²⁸ text messages are sent by mobile phone every month. [as at September 2000]. The growing trend coincides with concern over standards in formal writing. Just 54% of 11 year olds achieved the expected level in writing in last years [achievement] tests.²²⁹

1992, and for BAUMAN: *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Routledge, London, 1992, this signalled the failure of Modernity

²²⁶ Reported by FREAN, A: Children Suffer Mental Fallout from Decline of Nuclear Family, in *The Times*, London, 31.01.02

²²⁷ To most people the condition of many children in contemporary society can hardly be imagined. DRISCOLL, M: Tough Talk on the Mean Streets, *News Review (Sunday Times)*, 3.03.02. (p.8) reported on 'Kids Company,' set up in Camberwell, S.E. London under railway arches to 'provide a haven for children whose home life is unimaginably awful.' In London there are currently 25,000 muggings of children by children per year, part of the outcome where 150 children a day have their only 'proper meal' at the club and where (normally single) parents are totally out of control because of drug addiction. The organiser of Kids Club said, "They are probably the closest we have to the feral street children of Brazil."

²²⁸ To illustrate: gr8 = great; eya = see you; :- (= sympathy, disappointment, bad news; tah = take a hint; duwnt2goout2nite = do you want to go out tonight?; lol = laughing out loud; btdt = been there, done that; mte = my thoughts exactly; brb = I'll be right back; cu2morrow = see you tomorrow; fanx4orhelp = Thank you for your help; even the current "Word" computer programme changes :-+ to ☺ automatically = be happy!

²²⁹ CHARTER, D: (Educational Correspondent) reported in *The Times*, London, 2.9.00. p.1.

Further, the mobile telephone not only encourages and responds to the mobility of contemporary society, but reinforces the instability that is part of a mobile society.

- Information overload has reached the point where Baudrillard claimed that the distinction between reality and word/image breaks down into the condition he described as 'hyper-reality.' Words, images and the information they convey become open to multiple interpretations, mirroring multi-perspectival knowledge and the breakdown of objectivity so that no single, unified, coherent grid of 'common sense' can be applied. In such a world, the key desire is for constant new experiences unrestrained by a hierarchy of values. It is experience that matters whether it be in the purchase of new commodities or the channel hopping of the TV viewer – an experience not unlike that of a cruise ship, taken up by Baudrillard who commented, 'The further you travel, the more clearly you realise that the journey is all that matters.'²³⁰

Theory or practice, there are few means of demonstrating progress. Postmodernism therefore rejects any idea of progress and improvement in the lot of humankind resulting from rationality. The pessimism about the future (elimination of humankind by perversion of science) and despair about the present (information overload; future shock) is simply the result of Modern scientific rationalism. It was always assumed, in the Modernism which followed the Renaissance that there would be an Enlightenment - that the fulfilment of the aspirations of human beings could take place now that rational-scientific thinking had replaced ignorance and superstition and would lead them into an age of peace, plenty, health and leisure. There was a surge of optimism. Science is a fundamental element of the Enlightenment, the 'Modern' world, and expectation of a future enhanced world, brought about by practical application of science. What in fact has happened is exactly the opposite: conflict internationally, nationally and socially, starvation and poverty. It is easy to feel depressed as one takes in that in many parts of the

²³⁰ BAUDRILLARD, J: *Cool Memories*, London, Verso, 1990, p.168

world there is not even a supply of fresh water; that the ability to treat some forms of disease is becoming more and more limited as 'bugs' become resistant to advances in drug therapy or as the poor nations have no means of purchasing drugs; leisure which on the one hand has led to utter boredom and the need for stimulation from drugs or criminality and on the other to overload in work.

Vividly recalling my daily sight of the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' crowning Hyde Park Corner in London, one has to affirm the reality of the oppression, warfare, starvation and disease which they represent²³¹ as a realistic vision of the doom of humankind, from a Postmodern perspective at the start of the third millennium. There might however be more to the emptiness and despair than recognition of a situation brings about. Although religion is tacitly rejected in Postmodern thinking and culture, religious people claim that their faith makes possible a spiritual relationship with a Being who gives meaning and purpose to life and so overcomes the elements of emptiness, pessimism and despair, that are characteristic of contemporary, Postmodern life. From their viewpoint there are therefore elements within Postmodernism itself that account for its downside.

3.3: Loss of security

Postmodernism removes many of those things in which humanity has found security, and in resultant loss of the security there is 'emptiness' and 'despair.' If there is no objective reality, no truth, no morality and what we follow is 'what we are comfortable with,' then confidence and security can go too. Human beings seek the answers to certain fundamental questions that have been traditionally answered by religion and philosophy. In refusing to allow religion and philosophy to answer these questions, Postmodernism confirms that it is anti-religious in providing an alternative for religion. I will

²³¹ NEW TESTAMENT: Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) 6. vv.1-8

examine this in more detail in the next chapter. In the meantime, I will look briefly at some of the questions raised:

“Who am I?” There is no way of knowing; the answer is in human preference.

“What is important?” It depends on the individual; what is important for one is unimportant for another, and things can change, anyway. Apart from this, the proliferation and speed of information is so great that it is not possible to rank the information in order of importance.

“How can I see things clearly in the contemporary world?” You probably cannot because image is overcoming the word (particularly in an advertising culture) and because the information flow is too vast to receive, let alone too great to take in or to utilise. The flood of information makes it impossible to sort out the true from the false, the meaningful from the meaningless and the vital from the trivial.

“What is the meaning of life?” Meaning is disconnected from anything outside of ones-self; everything can mean anything and nothing – ‘style is all that remains; substance disappears’.²³² What was once abiding and fundamental has destabilised; style and appearance have become absolute.

We might add, *“Can we be sure that the Postmodern vision is right?”* No, because Postmodernism itself is a metanarrative and there are no metanarratives; it is right only if it is right for you.

²³² GROOTHIUS, D: Op.cit. pp. 53ff.

CHAPTER 4: RELIGIOUS REACTION – REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY

4.1: Reaction without being Postmodern

Although some forms of reaction against Christianity might have been justified because of abuse of power by the church and inconsistency of life among its adherents, much of the contemporary reaction against Christianity is due to misunderstanding, because it is reacting against something that is not true Christianity. It is important to examine this for a moment because it enables me to define what I really mean by a Christian, and Christianity, and it will enable me to separate such general criticism from that which is involved in Postmodern theory that is centred upon belief (by denial) and lifestyle (by offering alternative forms of spirituality).

- The first mistake is to limit what is involved in being a Christian. One of the foundation stories of Christianity tells how the Apostle Paul, and his companion Silas, were released from prison in Philippi after an earthquake. The gaoler, probably concerned about his position before the Roman authorities said, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul's answer was 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'²³³ The answer highlights what makes a Christian 'different.' S/he has a different belief (believe in the Lord Jesus), a different life (and you will be saved) and belongs to a different community (you and your household); all three together. It is a mistake to define Christianity in terms of any isolated 'difference;' One cannot be a Christian and hold to a Christian creed, or follow a Christian lifestyle or belong to a Christian community; a true Christian takes up all three.

- The second mistake is to forget that adoption of Christian belief, lifestyle and community is not sufficient in itself to make a person a Christian; there is a necessary experience that underlies the adoption. One can be 'christian' without being 'a Christian.' When Jesus was explaining this to the academic,

²³³ NEW TESTAMENT: Acts 16. 30-31 (Revised Standard Version)

Nicodemus, he said, 'You must be born ANOTHEN (Gk.)'²³⁴ It was a word that had a triple meaning – 'for the second time,' 'from the beginning,' and 'from above.' In short, a Christian is a person who has to have a fresh start, enabled by the presence of God (in Spirit-form) in their lives. One cannot have a different lifestyle, follow a different creed and be part of a different community without being underpinned by the spiritual presence of God in one's life. Peter identified such a step as 'repenting' and 'being converted.'²³⁵ Without such an initiatory experience, the rest is simply subterfuge.

- The third mistake is to assume that such initiatory experience will have an immediate moral effect, and to look for a form of maturity bordering on 'sinless perfection.' This is something that a Christian has to grow into and it takes time. Genuine 'conversion' results in an immediate difference, but metaphors of spiritual babyhood²³⁶ and mature growth²³⁷ used in the New Testament indicate that significant difference takes time to develop. Spiritual immaturity in the genuine Christian is the explanation of spiritual imperfection, and ultimately that imperfection within the church which led to Modern reaction against abuse of authority, that was taken over in turn by Postmodernism.

Such criticism put to one side, I can now go on to examine two critiques of Christianity made from a specifically Postmodern perspective – denial of Christian belief, and offer of a spiritual alternative.

²³⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: John 3.7. The Revised Standard Version translates ANOTHEN as 'anew.'

²³⁵ NEW TESTAMENT: Acts 3.19. The Revised Standard Version translates EPISTREPHO as 'turn again'

²³⁶ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Cor.3.1; 'I could not address you as spiritual men, but ... as babes in Christ.' Hb.5.13: 'One who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.' (Revised Standard Version)

²³⁷ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Pe.2.2: 'Like newborn babes, long for pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation.' (Revised Standard Version)

4.2: Postmodern denial of Christian belief

There is seldom a deliberate (negative) attempt to deny Christian belief in the way that it is expressed within a formal creed,²³⁸ although Derrida began from a conviction that there is no God. Postmodern denial of Christian belief arises from its own (Postmodern) creed.

There is no truth

Postmodern perception of truth lies in relativity and pluralism.²³⁹ Relativism claims that there is no absolute truth. What is true is what is true for me and all claims to truth are relative to all other claims. This leads on to pluralism. If what is true is true for me, then all views have to be treated with equal respect.²⁴⁰ As I go on to analyse the elements of Postmodernism that are concerned with denial of the possibility of truth, it conflicts with the

²³⁸ e.g. Apostles Creed:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and Earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell: The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting."

²³⁹ HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Fellowship, 2002, p.12.

²⁴⁰ I have to say at this point that with fifty years experience of pastoral work within the church, I find that Christians tend to be denied the freedom of such an approach. Certainly the evangelical-Christian view that holds to the authority of the Bible is treated with scant respect, and the view that Relativism and Pluralism are themselves only relatively true is seldom even considered. Others have found this too. HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, IVP, 2002, p.63ff. describes the situation in a number of University departments where students who hold absolutist views suffer at the hands of those who are relativist. The Postmodernist can be 'Relative' about everything except that it is possible not to be 'Relativist,' and in many cases is downright intolerant! Similarly, MULLEN, P: [Chaplain to the Stock Exchange] Why We Need Defenders of the Faith, London, *The Times (T2)* p.2. 01.08.02,] writing about the tendency towards liberalism among Anglican clergy says, 'Actually, the so-called 'liberal' clergy are not liberal at all.... They are extremely doctrinaire and intolerant of anyone who does not share their opinions and methods.'

statement made by Jesus and held by Christians that he is the truth.²⁴¹
Denial of truth is expressed in the following ways:

There is no overall/overarching truth (or metanarrative).

I have already outlined the thinking behind denial of overarching truth in Chapter 3,²⁴² where philosophical reaction against modernism is recorded. I noted that Lyotard suggested that the failure of modernism to emancipate humanity and bring about progress not only makes us suspicious of the science-and-progress myth, but suspicious of *any* big story that sets itself up as the answer to the whole of life, any such story being described as a 'Grand Narrative' or 'Metanarrative.' Others have reduced it to a technicality; metanarratives are 'large scale theoretical interpretations purportively of universal application.'²⁴³

Biblically-based Christianity is a metanarrative. It tells a story of human nature corrupted by a falling from the standards laid down by the Creator-God, and of an incredible act of grace in which the same God took human form in the person of Jesus Christ in order to teach humanity the right way to go, show how it could be done in his own life, and made it possible for human beings by providing the possibility of a new beginning, legally achieved by his death on behalf of humanity through his crucifixion, and practically achieved by the indwelling of individual human lives by God in Spirit form (the Holy Spirit).

Christian metanarrative is therefore in conflict with Postmodernism that claims that truth as metanarrative cannot exist. The Christian might reply however, that such a (Postmodern) view is subject to the weakness of inner-

²⁴¹ NEW TESTAMENT: John 14. 6. 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (Revised Standard Version) He goes on to refer to the Spirit of truth who indwells every Christian (v.17)

²⁴² pp.40-41

²⁴³ WAUGH, D: *Postmodernism – a Reader*, London, Edward Arnold, 1993, p.1.

contradiction, in that it, itself, is a form of metanarrative, and if there can be no metanarrative there can be no Postmodern metanarrative.

There is no absolute truth.

Postmodern theory claims that any truth we think exists is relative to ourselves; what is 'true' is what is true for me, and what is 'right' is what is right for me. I have already outlined Rorty's important views in this respect in Chapter 3.²⁴⁴ This is in strong contrast to the claims of Christianity.

When a Christian says that God is truth, s/he means that God's revelation is absolutely and totally true, in character with a God who is absolutely true.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.²⁴⁵

The Old Testament Prophet looked forward to a golden age when

He who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath on the land shall swear by the God of truth.²⁴⁶

God's nature exists and his revelation stands whether it appears to be true for me or not,²⁴⁷ and whether it works for me or not. This is no mere rejection of relativism. When it was believed by many people that the earth was flat, whereas it was really spherical, the view that the earth was flat was not subjectively right but absolutely wrong. Moreover if all truth is relatively true, then the 'truth' that 'all truth is relative' must also be relatively true. The Christian takes this further in the field of morality and ethics where the

²⁴⁴ pp.50-51.

²⁴⁵ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 John 1.5. (Revised Standard Version)

²⁴⁶ OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 65.16 (Revised Standard Version)

²⁴⁷ It might be objected that the very existence of denominations demonstrates that God's revealed truth is subjective. The position taken within the Bible, however, is that God's truth is to some extent beyond human comprehension (Romans 11.33 – O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!). The differences are not caused by relativity, but by human inability (ultimately due to human sin) to enter into the revelation in full depth.

breaking of God's revealed law or standards is 'sin.' Centralised in the Ten Commandments and extended in the Old Testament law books, Jesus declared that he had not come to abolish the law but to make the laws work.²⁴⁸ If there is no 'sin' then there was no need for the death of Christ on our behalf, and his life and death therefore become meaningless. The subjectivity of truth and of personal morality lie at the heart of conflict between Postmodernism and Christianity.

There is no historical truth.

Postmodernism denies that history tells the truth; it is simply an account of things in the distant past, written by the 'winners,' and similar to accounts of the recent past that are 'spun' or 'doctored' in news broadcasts and in newspapers. History is therefore an overall myth – not dissimilar to a tele-news broadcast where the events have been fitted into a viewpoint, availability of time-clips and a time slot. I have already outlined Foucault's (Postmodern) views in this respect in Part 1, Chapter 1 of this dissertation.²⁴⁹

Such a viewpoint on history is in conflict with Christianity as a religious faith that is rooted in history. Christians believe that the historical sections of the Bible are true history so that, for example, Jesus was a real, historical person. Many Christians hold that because God is truth, then any revelation of God is also true in every respect. Beyond this, the historical nature of events are made clear in such passages as the preface to the documents written by Luke, in the first century:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you,

²⁴⁸ NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew 5.17, (Revised Standard Version) where 'fulfil' = 'made to work.'

²⁴⁹ pp. 41-43.

most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

And later,

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus Christ began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up.²⁵⁰

Christians are also aware of the continuing inner contradiction within Postmodernism that carries over to its stance on history made clear by Horrocks and Jevtic:

Foucault is on the horns of a dilemma: if he is telling the truth about the impossibility of detached truth, then all truth is suspect. But if this is the case then Foucault's truth cannot vouch for its own truth.²⁵¹

It might be true that history can sometimes be relative and that documentary evidence itself is not absolute evidence as to the truth of its content, but Postmodernism goes too far. As has already been shown²⁵² from Irving's *Hitler's War*, history might be distorted, but it is still distorted history, and careful (historical) research can establish the (historical) truth.

There is no truth in writing.

One focus of Postmodern theory is on the writer. Words themselves have no meaning; they are mere signifiers. But the meaninglessness goes further than then words themselves; it includes what is being conveyed by the words - what a writer is seeking to 'say' to a reader. I have already outlined Foucault's thinking in this respect.²⁵³ Foucault claimed that the author or writer cannot be known; the author is not seeking to communicate clear and obvious meaning (which is a 'Modern' approach) but to gain money and copyright! This was part of the wider viewpoint, that we cannot know what is being communicated as the truth, right or wrong. It is not only literature that

²⁵⁰ NEW TESTAMENT: Luke 1.1-4; Acts 1. 1-2.

²⁵¹ HORROCKS, C. & JEVTIC, Z: *Introducing Foucault*, Cambridge, Icon, 1999, p.168

²⁵² Dissertation, Part 1, Chapter 1, pp. 42-43

²⁵³ pp. 46-47

is a text – so are painting, music and the other arts; and some Postmodern writers would say that the world is a text too. Because one cannot know truth, one can live how one pleases.

The second focus is on the reader, and is particularly associated with Derrida whose thinking is outlined, again in part 1, chapter 1.²⁵⁴ Much of his thinking is a reaction against the power he believes is used against the weak in society that frequently operates through writing,²⁵⁵ and is exemplified in Christianity and Colonialism (he noted a link). Even 'truth' and 'falsehood' are false distinctions utilised by people in the exercise of power over the oppressed. He is strongly anti-Christian in his thinking. He claimed that Christian belief about a God who started everything and who will bring things to an end, stops people from thinking, and is inherently oppressive. Such belief stops people from looking more widely and prevents them from being flexible, even playful, in the way they think. Neither could any written revelation from God be absolute and beyond contradiction.²⁵⁶

He prioritised speech over writing (he called the prioritising of writing, 'logocentricism') because he believed that writing was even less clear and

²⁵⁴ pp.47-49

²⁵⁵ It is the duty of oppressed groups (women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals) to demonstrate the way that text is used for suppression.

²⁵⁶ This is involved in his description of deconstruction. 'Deconstruction' is the demonstration that all texts contradict themselves and show many meanings. Literature is however, not the only 'Text.' Anything can be a text – music, art, a city, people; everything is a mere vessel full of contradictions and meanings – so that not only communication but human beings themselves can never be coherent. Language itself is not always what it is thought to be – a characteristic he termed 'Difference.' As recorded in the main text on p.45ff, he pointed out that when we use language, there is no evidence that meaning is given to the words by 'us.' When we use language, whether of intention, indication or whatever, the words do not have a fixed meaning within themselves but they derive their meaning from the language system; meaning is produced by differences in the language chain, and so we have to examine them in their context to see what they mean and, indeed, how many meanings they have. Almost as a joke, he pointed out that the word "or" in Mallarme's writings and the word "the" in Joyce's writings can mean any one of dozens of things and how we regard a text depends on the way/format in which it is presented to us. 'We' do not decide the meaning; the idea that a person or "self-presence" decides the meaning is an illusion. Further, he pointed out that some words that sound the same are not in fact, the same. "Difference" is not the same as "differance" although they sound the same. Writing cannot therefore be simply the representation of human speech; speaking is much closer to thought than it is to writing. And he pointed out too (like Heidegger) that words take their meaning not only from what is there but from what is not there; there is a presence and an absence in meaning.

transparent than speech and its meaning had to be established by the reader.²⁵⁷ Even speech is not always clear; it is not under the control of the Lecturer because the listener is the real 'master.'

Further, Derrida believed that neither reason nor language could be used to reach reality, firstly because we cannot trust language-statements to represent the world as it really is;²⁵⁸ secondly because we cannot trust the underlying conviction that there is at the foundation of our language a 'presence' of being or essence that we can come to know because there is no guarantee that it exists;²⁵⁹ and thirdly because if it did exist it would be beyond language.²⁶⁰

There are many things here that would cause disagreement between Foucault and Derrida, and Christians. Sensitive to their belief that God has made things clear in the Bible as written revelation, Christians might say that while there is some truth in Foucault's recognition that the author cannot convey exactly what is in his mind through words, even when human authorship is considered, his view goes too far. We can know some things about an author; it is not true that we cannot know anything – indeed we share the same humanity and can move in the right direction so far as interpretation is concerned. In any case, some writing is deliberately straightforward. God has the Divine means of ensuring clarity and does so as declared within the Bible:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Although transparency and clarity were not his prime concern. It is not possible to understand what he is trying to say by traditional philosophical frames of reference because these are the very thing he problematises; he will not take anything for granted.

²⁵⁸ Derrida believed speech was superior to writing in many ways. Speech is personal and immediate and dependent on the speaker; writing is none of these things. See for example, DERRIDA, J: *Plato's Pharmacy*, in *Dissemination*, London, Athlone Press, 1981, in which he records the discussion between Socrates and Phaedrus over the supremacy of speech.

²⁵⁹ DERRIDA, J: *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p.11

²⁶⁰ From dissertation, Chapter 3, p.49.

²⁶¹ NEW TESTAMENT: 2 Timothy 3.16-17

Derrida rejects any Christian notion of God to begin with. He starts from the assumption that there is no God to guarantee absolutes, and ideas about certainty are therefore simply imposed on us by our past or by institutions of society, and God does not exist at all. Because there is no God outside the system, the only relationships (which he calls 'discourses') we can know are within the system of the world, and because there is no fixed centre (no absolute God), there should be no limit to what it is possible to think or believe (nothing has any meaning and we can make of it what we like).

While Derrida finds deconstruction in the way that things contradict and do not hold together coherently, due to the absence of any God, a Christian might agree about the situation but then put the problem of inability to see clearly down to universal sin of humankind. Further, if Christians wish to utilise a non-Christian argument against deconstruction, they might do so by claiming that contradictions are found by taking elements of the text out of context and allowed by the deconstructionist to say what they want. If Derrida-disciples deny it, then Christians can claim that they have no grounds for denial by their own presuppositions. Furthermore, if any (radical) thought is as valid as any other, then it is not possible to come to a decision – a point Derrida admitted, saying that decisions must be delayed. Honeysett goes further still and as a Christian, claims that Derrida has a false idea of freedom.²⁶² To be liberated from the truth is not to be free. To jump of a cliff because you believe you can fly is not really freedom at all! 'Know the truth and the truth shall set you free!'²⁶³

But having said all this is to lose the wood for the trees. The central issue involved is that Derrida and Foucault deny that there is truth in words; the writer cannot convey his thinking by words, and the recipient cannot receive communication by words. This is in direct conflict with what (at least, Evangelical) Christians believe about the Bible – that it is God's revelation to humankind in written form both in itself and as a record of revelation made through spiritual means; and that it can be clearly understood both in itself

²⁶² HONEYSETT, M: *Meltdown*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 2002, p.46

²⁶³ JESUS CHRIST: Quoted in NEW TESTAMENT, John 8.12.

and because God in spirit-form (the Holy Spirit) helps us in coming to the correct interpretation.

No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Ghost spoke from God.²⁶⁴

And again:

JESUS: I will pray the father and he will give you another counsellor (PARAKLETOS (Gk.) – one called alongside to help) to be with you for ever....He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you He will guide you into all truth.²⁶⁵

It is clear that the Christian believes that whatever problems might exist between human writer and reader, there is meaningful revelation and communication in the Bible.

There is no Reality

The Postmodern case against reality has already been detailed.²⁶⁶ I have noted that if Derrida be followed, there can be no external metaphysical reality behind language to give meaning, no way of getting into a text to understand the meaning and no way of getting into the author's intention. Interpretations can never be exhausted. Denial of reality takes this further – denial of a real self that has perceptions that provide an accurate representation of the world, and denial of any sound basis of knowledge or real experience. Foucault claimed that there was not even 'humanity.' This was simply a concept that had arisen from a development in history since the sixteenth century. Science cannot help us. It cannot 'master' (know directly

²⁶⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: 2 Timothy 3. 16-17 (Revised Standard Version)

²⁶⁵ NEW TESTAMENT: John 14. 16-17, 26; 16. 13

²⁶⁶ Part 1, Chapter 1, pp.34-36

and certainly) and 'present' (perfect representation) the world because the nature of language and human consciousness makes this impossible.

Baudrillard, I have shown, denies reality from another point of view. The whole world that we live in is a world of hyper-reality, un-really transmitted to us through the media. There is no external reference point. We cannot know God because we cannot have knowledge of the really real.

A great deal of what Baudrillard is saying is 'irony.' He starts with the assumption that there is no external reference (God), but this is open to question. He also assumes that media manipulation is total; but is it true that content is always dominated by image? What about cultures where there is no TV? How far are Baudrillard's pronouncements themselves, real? This leaves us in the arena of uncertainty. According to Postmodern conception, we cannot tell how far and whether we ourselves are real, we cannot tell whether our world and experience is real. We cannot therefore tell whether what is said by Postmodern theorists is real – yet another example of its inner contradiction.

The Christian challenges this by claiming that God has broken into this uncertainty to bring reality and truth – that God is real, that Jesus Christ as God who took human form is real, that the Holy Spirit as God who takes spiritual form is real. It is not so much a proof that generates certainty so much as a statement of faith – and that not of ourselves:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.²⁶⁷

It is in this connection that the personal name of God is significant. 'Yahweh' (sometimes represented by 'LORD,' and sometimes misrepresented as 'Jehovah') means 'I am' and when used by Jesus Christ of himself as God in human form, led to violent reaction.²⁶⁸ 'I am' is a way of declaring reality.

²⁶⁷ NEW TESTAMENT: Ephesians 2.8 (Revised Standard Version)

²⁶⁸ NEW TESTAMENT: John 8.58; 18.5 [The word 'he' is not in the original]

There is no (secure) future

Postmodernism is basically pessimistic, denying that science can solve problems faced by humanity, and seeing, rather, science as one of the causes of the problems faced by humanity. It is commonplace to read that there is little for humanity to look forward to. Disaster might come because of shortage of resources (especially water), and shortage of inhabitable space to live either because of global warming that reduces land-mass, or because the existing world will become a desert. Alternatively, disaster might come because the planet becomes so polluted that it is unfit for human life. It might come because medical science generates such resistance in organisms responsible for sickness, that there is no longer means to resist it. It might come because weapons of mass destruction cause mass destruction. And so on, and so on - quite apart from assaults from space and cyber men. This is the stuff of the sensational magazine and newspaper article that appears with increasing frequency, and is brought together earlier in this dissertation.²⁶⁹

Christians acknowledge that the world is going to face problems. Jesus himself said,

You will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.²⁷⁰

Beyond the problems, however, there is a hope, enshrined in statements of Christian belief within the Apostles Creed – ‘From thence [Jesus Christ had ‘ascended into heaven’] he shall come to judge the quick and the dead’ when there will be a ‘resurrection of the body’ and ‘life everlasting.’ It appears that Jesus Christ as God in human form had, on a number of occasions told his disciples that although he was going away from them, he would return,²⁷¹ and

²⁶⁹ Dissertation, Chapter 2, pp. 91-97

²⁷⁰ NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew 24.6-8 (Revised Standard Version)

²⁷¹ NEW TESTAMENT: John 14.28; Matthew 24. 29-30

when he actually did leave the earth passing through the heaven of the clouds and the heaven of the stars to the 'third heaven' where Jews believed God to be, they were authoritatively told that 'This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'²⁷²

It was a promise that caused problems for those who believed it was to happen very quickly, before co-followers came to the end of their lives,²⁷³ and it was a problem for those who could not imagine what life would be like. Jesus had made it clear that there was to be a resurrection,²⁷⁴ but it was Paul who set out the theology of the resurrection in one of his letters to the Corinthian Christians.²⁷⁵ It was not easy to write about 'heaven on earth' to a generation that believed the 'third heaven' was another world above the sky, but the attempt was made in the closing paragraphs of the Apocalypse in which the old heaven and earth were replaced by a new heaven and a new earth brought about because the 'New Jerusalem' had descended to earth from heaven for Jesus Christ to reign over a restored earth, with no tears and no death.²⁷⁶ In effect, planet earth and humanity with it, would be brought back to all that God had intended they should be in his initial act of creation.²⁷⁷

Personal experience within the church has convinced me that the eschatological content of the Apostles' Creed is neither well-known nor well-understood by many Christians, because those in the church with teaching-responsibility have 'soft-pedalled' things so that they would neither be identified with extremists nor mocked as those who held to a belief in 'pie in the sky when you die.' There is however no doubt that belief in an optimistic final triumph of Jesus Christ as expressed by Christians in the Apostles' Creed, is very different to the pessimism about the future articulated by Postmodern theorists.

²⁷² NEW TESTAMENT: Acts 1. 11.

²⁷³ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Thessalonians 4.13 - 5.4; 2 Thessalonians 2. 1-12

²⁷⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: John 11.25

²⁷⁵ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 15. 12-57

²⁷⁶ NEW TESTAMENT: Revelation 21. 1-4

²⁷⁷ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 15.27-28.

4.3: Postmodernism offers spiritual alternatives to Christianity

Modernism emphasised the rational element in the Christian faith – sometimes referred to as a ‘reasoning faith’ in contrast to ‘blind faith.’ Renaissance thinking challenged the superstition of the dark ages and the leaders of the Church moved with the times so as to ‘rationalise’ the Christian faith.

This was not a new or difficult theological task, since Christianity was based on revelation that had been committed to writing in a book, much of which was ‘rational.’²⁷⁸ Rationality in Christianity from the Renaissance took two opposite paths. ‘Liberals’ looked at aspects of Biblical content that appeared to them to be irrational, such as miracles and futuristic prophecy, and therefore removed them from serious consideration:

If everything is natural, then whence the supernatural? This mechanistic conception automatically ruled out two of the features of the Biblical story – miracles and prophecy. Miracles could not happen because they were not subject to ‘natural law,’ and prophecy in the sense of foretelling the future was unrealistic, because such knowledge was limited to scientific predictions based on natural law. This being so, then how could one come to terms with the facts of miracle and prophecy of future historical events in the Bible? There were two possibilities. Miracles could have been recorded so long after the event that they could be exaggerations of perfectly natural happenings; and prophecies could have been written up after the event in order to give an aura of mystery and conviction to the text.²⁷⁹

‘Evangelicals’ on the other hand used rational argument so as to defend the faith – ‘We know Christ was risen because the grave clothes were undisturbed in the tomb;’ ‘We know that the Holy Spirit is real because of the support given in individual Christians’ lives;’ ‘We know that Christ heals today because people are healed after prayer.’ This was the approach taken in

²⁷⁸ e.g. the Apostle Paul presents rational arguments for the Christian faith in Athens I (New Testament – Acts 17) and his letter to the Romans is largely rational argument.

²⁷⁹ GOWER, R: *Fundamentalism in Religious Education*, M.Ed. Dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1971, p.76.

*The Fundamentals*²⁸⁰ - a series of booklets designed to prove that fundamentals of the Christian faith were a reality at the beginning of the 20th. Century. It continues in publications such as 'Evidence That Demands a Verdict'²⁸¹ towards the close of the century. One way or another, Liberal or Evangelical,²⁸² Christianity was enveloped in rationality.

There have been a number of reactions against such rationality. Within Christianity itself, is a reaction resisting over-rationality by emphasising spirituality. The word 'spirituality' itself is not Biblical; it first appears in a letter attributed to Jerome (342-420), but there is a fairly common use of PNEUMATIKOS (Gk.) – 'spiritual,' which simply describes living as a Christian, in fellowship with and close to God who is with us in Spirit-form (the Holy Spirit).²⁸³ It involves the whole life and not simply a 'spiritual' part. Paul makes this clear in writing to the Corinthian Christians:

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but in himself is judged by no one. 'For who knows the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' [Quote from Isaiah 40.13] But we have the mind of Christ.²⁸⁴

Postmodernism also reacts against Modern rationality, but it does so in quite different ways to that of the Christian. It does not deny 'spirituality' but it describes it in ways that differ from Christian spirituality. There is a search for and alignment with what is called 'Spirituality.' There are two major approaches that I will go on to describe.

²⁸⁰ *The Fundamentals* were a series of 12 books published by the Testimony Publishing Company, Chicago, U.S.A., in opening years of 20th. Century, and given, freely to clergy in the English speaking world. Prominent 'Evangelical' scholars argued 'Rationally' against Liberal positions. e.g. KYLE, M: *The Recent Testimony of Archaeology to the Scriptures* (Book 2); GRAY, J: *The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent and Proof.* (Book 3)

²⁸¹ McDOWELL, J: *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, San Bernardino U.S.A., Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972.

²⁸² Some critics of Christianity would wish to refer to those who countered Liberalism in Christianity as Fundamentalists. This term tends to be offensive to those who take a 'Conservative-Evangelical' position, and does not properly indicate their position. See GOWER, R.R: Op.cit. pp.17-20

²⁸³ HINGLEY, C: Spirituality, in ATKINSON, D., & FIELD, D: *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Leicester, I.V.P., 1995, p.807

²⁸⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 2. 14-16 (Revised Standard Version)

New Age Spirituality [or Self-spirituality].

One form of contemporary 'spirituality' is frequently associated with the popular movement commonly referred to as 'New Age' and many who are attracted to Postmodernism find spiritual meaning in 'New Age-ism.' 'New Age' takes its name in popular thought from the dawning age of Aquarius the water carrier that speaks of peace, plenty and harmony in contrast with the age of Aires the bull (Judaism) and Pisces the fish (Christianity) which speak of conflict; but because of its loss of respectability by association with 'Hippy Culture' and the like, the term 'New-Ageism' has often been replaced by another – 'Self-spirituality.' Whatever its name it originated with resistance to Modernism,²⁸⁵ and in its contemporary form is linked to Postmodernism.²⁸⁶ Heelas, a sympathetic commentator on 'New Age,' and who likes to describe it as 'Self-spirituality' writes:

The great refrain running through the New Age is that we have been indoctrinated – or, in the New Age sense of the term, been 'brainwashed' – by mainstream society and culture. The mores of the established order – its materialism, competitiveness, together with the importance it attaches to playing roles – are held to disrupt what are authentically human. To live in terms of such mores, inculcated by parents, the educational system and other institutions is to remain the victim of unnatural, deterministic and misguided routines; to be enslaved by unfulfillable desires and deep-seated insecurities; to be dominated by anxiety-generating imperatives such as creating a good impression; to be locked into the conflictual demands of the ideal relationship.²⁸⁷

Understood this way, New Age spirituality offers a way to be free, not by coming to a universal truth since anything coming from beyond the self cannot be relied upon, but by way of individual, personal experience. Guidance and ethics are decided by the self, but this is no mere Humanistic self-development. 'New Agers' may well use whatever guidance is appropriate to them, be it ancient religion, alternative medicine, Zen,

²⁸⁵ HEELAS, P: *The New Age Movement*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996 on p.17. lists New Age references as far back as Swedenborg (1688-1772)

²⁸⁶ DRANE, J: *What is the New Age saying to the Church?* London, Marshall Pickering, 1999, Preface p.x.

²⁸⁷ HEELAS, P: *Op.cit.* p.18

understanding of the inner life, use of drugs, contact with alien beings ... or whatever; but the prime element is self-responsibility.²⁸⁸

Looking where? Accounts of 'New Age' or 'Self-spirituality' focus on five areas that may be seen as alternative approaches to spirituality within the New-Age movement:

- Looking within. Shirley Maclaine's experiences in the Peruvian Andes²⁸⁹ led to new spiritual awareness (astral projection?) in a world of expanded consciousness, where feelings were more important than knowings, and where a 'mystical essence of personal, direct encounter with God' is possible. Some 'New-Agers' searching for similar experience invoke concepts from Eastern religion through Brahman, 'a kind of cosmic essence, present in all things.' To get to such a reality, a combination of approaches is in order, and can involve dance, channelling, technology, addictions and consciousness of ones own consciousness [which we do not normally experience because we are said to be 'left brained' (using only the rational side of our brain) and do not know how to communicate within ourselves.]
- Searching for the Unknown, or receiving messages from other worlds, through spirit guides or extra terrestrials. A key book for many 'New-Agers' is *A Course on Miracles*, supposedly received in a trance by Helen Schucman between 1965 and 1972, and including passages from Jesus. McWaters wrote,

'We are listening to messages of guidance from every possible source; tuning in our astro-radios, talking to dolphins and listening more and more attentively to those among us with psychic abilities. Is there help out there? Will anyone respond?'²⁹⁰

This has been taken to extremes. In *News of the World*, Broadbent (writing from Los Angeles) reports that 'The dead are now talking on several

²⁸⁸ There is a briefer, harsher way of describing things – that New Age is where people are looking for things beyond the rational that will bring spiritual satisfaction, and they may look where they like.

²⁸⁹ DRANE, J: Op.cit. pp. 60-69

²⁹⁰ McWATERS, B: *Conscious Evolution*, Los Angeles, New Age Press, 1981, pp.111-112.

competing television shows,' as the psychic relates to the person seeking contact with the dead.²⁹¹ She continues, 'Since rubber-necking on human suffering has become a national obsession in a land gripped by reality TV shows, America's latest trend is one that the psychics among us should have predicted. Chatting to the dead has gone mainstream.' It appears that as people have been educated to understand that energy and information can be invisible yet still exist, and starlight we see from planet earth might be from a star that 'died' many years before, then communication with the dead is more acceptable and more real than traditional religion. There is a parallel approach that looks forward to the mystical experience (parallel to that of the medieval alchemist) in which the collapse of time and space through cyber-technology causes us to lose the distinction between human and non-human.²⁹²

- Looking to positive thinking (an element which is closest to Heelas' interpretation). There is no place for failure. We can achieve anything through positive thinking. Ferguson almost seems to parody this approach:

You can break through old limits, past inertia and fear to levels of fulfilment that once seemed impossible ... to richness of choice, freedom, human closeness. You can be more productive, confident and comfortable with insecurity. Problems can be experienced as challenges, a chance for renewal rather than stress, Habitual defensiveness and worry fall away.²⁹³

- Looking to alternative medicine. 'New-Agers' consider contemporary medicine to be rationally based and money-led and many would affirm the comment supposedly made by Voltaire – 'Physicians pour drugs of which they know little, to cure diseases of which they know less, into humans of whom they know nothing.' They believe that there are other reasons for poor health – emotions, being cut off from a cosmic energy system, spiritual powers ... and these need to be tapped into so as to ensure health.

²⁹¹ BROADBENT, L: News of the World, *The Times Magazine*, London, 10.08.02, p.12.

²⁹² TAYLOR, M: Terminal Faith, in HEELAS, P: (Ed) *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, pp.36-54.

²⁹³ FERGUSON, M: *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, London, Paladin, 1982, p.24.

- Looking to planet earth. 'New-Agers' believe that the earth is sick, and that it has energies of its own which have to be correctly channelled so as to promote healing. Within the pick-and-mix characteristic of New Age, some believe that there are earth spirits which whom we have to co-operate, or with Gaia (the earth-mother) herself, and others believe that there is psychic spiritual energy in the planet, or that the planet itself is a deity.²⁹⁴

New-Age is a striving towards new, exciting experience whether it be in the supernatural, the occult, astrology, ancient religion, superstition, extra-terrestrial beings or new experience opened up by drugs. It is an experience that is communal rather than individual. The club dance may not be a congregation, but it is a community experience in which the emotional boundaries between people are lowered. It may not involve reading the Bible, but it often involves reading the *Celestine Prophecy* and *A Course on Miracles*. Drane himself has no doubt that this is Postmodern:

The New Age ... has become coterminous with what we are now calling Postmodernity. or (more clearly) the New Age is the religious manifestation of Postmodernity.²⁹⁵

There are clear differences between the 'New Age' approach within Postmodernism and that of Christianity. First, 'New Agers' identify the basic human dilemma as an alienated or undeveloped consciousness, while Christians affirm that the underlying problem is a moral one and not a metaphysical one. Secondly, 'New Agers' emphasise the 'power of positive thinking' (especially in courses run for business management); but in

²⁹⁴ There are other ways of comparing Christianity with 'New Age.' DUNN, K: *Changing World – Changing Spirituality*, Keynote address at North Western Baptist Association Ministers Conference, Llandudno, February 2002. reduced the characteristics of religion identified by Ninian Smart to four: Ritual-Practical, Mythic-Narrative, Experiential-Emotional and Organisational-Social. He claimed that New Age Paganism is a substitute for the first, New Age Metaphysical thought a substitute for the second, and New Age Spirituality a substitute for the third, and as such (except in the fourth dimension) New Age is a replacement for Religion.

²⁹⁵ e.g. DRANE, J: Op.cit. p.187.

claiming that everyone must make their own choices to meet their own perceived spiritual need (choices made not only in this life but also in a previous existence) it implies that suffering is the result of choice and it is an invasion of the person's freedom of choice to help them avoid their chosen suffering. Christians deny reincarnation, and understanding suffering as the result of evil; seek to alleviate it. Drane expresses his Christian feelings about this with some force:

Values (of compassion, selfless service – Christianity; following a 'right livelihood' or not doing work which involves the suffering of others – Buddhism) have little attraction to most people in Postmodern Western culture which tends to glorify the uncontrolled expression of individual desires. As a result we find notions from many different religions pulled from their original cultural contexts and reduced to marketable techniques in order to fulfil the insatiable self-centredness of many of today's people. Far from being a way for a New Age, this is arguably an extension of the old way of being. For the underlying philosophy is grounded not in any form of holistic mutuality, but is really a radical form of Enlightenment-inspired individualism. The disadvantaged and marginalised people of today's world are no strangers to this form of institutionalised selfishness and morality. It is hard to pay attention to an outlook that claims to be committed to a holistic world vision but at the same time abandons any sense of social conscience.²⁹⁶

Spirituality as that to which religions give witness

This approach to spirituality has become of great importance in consideration of contemporary Religious Education and will therefore be dealt with in full in Part 3 of this dissertation, 'Changes in Religious Education and the Implications.'²⁹⁷

When the *Education Act* was drawn up in 1944, it stated that 'The statutory system of public education ... contributes towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community.' It was tacitly understood that 'spiritual' development was equated with Christianity, and this was confirmed

²⁹⁶ DRANE, J: Op.cit pp.172/173

²⁹⁷ Dissertation, Part 3, Chapter 7. pp212ff.

when the 1977 Green Paper, *Education in our Schools*, actually stated that 'The spiritual area is concerned with everything in human knowledge or experience that is connected with or derives from a sense of God or Gods.' It went on to say that the term was a meaningless adjective for the atheist and was of dubious use to the agnostic.²⁹⁸

Two factors conspired to provide pressure to change this meaning of spirituality. One was a rise of atheism and agnosticism, chronicled by Thompson.²⁹⁹ The other was the increase in numbers of children of non-Christian family background who had been concentrated in cities and industrial towns following a wave of immigration. Teachers were given instruction so that they knew about the religions that were represented by children in the classroom, but there was far too much material to be able to use. One way forward was by taking a thematic approach, investigating those areas which underlay all religions, such as creeds, holy books and festivals – the approach suggested by Smart, and supported by the Schools Council. Even this produced too much material. Another way forward was to look at the area that overlay all religions – the spirituality to which all religions pointed and gave witness.

The new approach to spirituality was supported by a number of scholars.³⁰⁰ Research by Hay in the Sixties, and by Hardy in the Seventies indicated that people were having what they termed 'spiritual experiences.' Such experiences were outside of the field of religion and connected people with what seemed to be some kind of non-material, spiritual reality. The idea was born that religion could be a useful tool to investigate such spirituality. Children could learn from religion rather than learning about religion. Religion becomes a metaphorical language for what lies behind it. This has largely become one of the recommended ways forward in Religious Education, and 'Learning from Religion' has become a turn of phrase currently utilised by the

²⁹⁸ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE: *Education in our Schools*, London, H.M.S.O., 1977

²⁹⁹ THOMPSON, P: *Whatever Happened to R.E?*, Cambridge, Lutterworth, 2003

³⁰⁰ Detailed footnotes of sources given in Part 3 of dissertation

Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority.³⁰¹ Spirituality centres more on awe, wonder, beauty, care, justice and mysticism than on sacred buildings, texts, belief and festivals.

Things have not stood still, and important research described in some detail in Part 3 of this dissertation, has been undertaken in examining modes of such spirituality.

The Religious Experience and Education Project, centred upon Westhill College, Birmingham, at the end of the Eighties went beyond seeking the best way to give knowledge and understanding of religions. It also sought to assist child development through engagement with issues that were fundamental to human life, and to give awareness of that religious dimension of life that went beyond formal religion such as awe and wonder, belonging and commitment, caring and compassion.

Grimmitt, adopting the Postmodern perspective that there was no knowable (religious) reality, and noting that every religious believer made their own faith-construction, sought to use R.E. to provide a means whereby children could construct their own realities about religion.

The 'Native Pedagogy' used in the Children and Worldview Project by the Errickers is again strongly Postmodern in its insistence that there is no religious metanarrative. Children are encouraged to communicate about relationships, secret places, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, death, separation and the environment, as a means of developing feeling for others and constructing their own world views.

Spiritual Education supported by Wright accepts that religion, religious dogma, religious culture ... are external expressions of an inner religious experience which transcend the 'ordinary,' and seeks to help children to bring out their culture into the classroom and explore their own ideology. A child's

³⁰¹ SCAA: R.E. – *Model Syllabuses*, York, SCAA, 1994.

own 'horizon' is brought to bear upon the 'horizon' of other belief systems, and in the adjustment that takes place the child can evaluate him/herself and the belief system at the same time.

In short, the 'Spiritual' Education that features in many contemporary approaches to Religious Education, and that has been generated by Postmodern thinking, is not the same as 'Spirituality' within the Christian Faith and as such can be understood as a reaction against Christianity. The outlook which goes with the Postmodern attitudes to Spirituality taught within Religious Education in school was well summed up in the 'Thunderer's' headline in *The Times* – 'To teach religion, first throw God out of school.'³⁰² The point made in the column was that those areas that are important within religion such as forgiveness or love are of great interest, as matters for discussion in life, in school or in church – but not if God is brought into the equation. It summed up the Postmodern position on spirituality, but to the Christian, it is not an alternative.

³⁰² LOTT, T: To Teach Religion, First Throw God out of School, *The Times*, London, 16.03.04, p.20

PART II:

CHILDREN'S THINKING ABOUT POSTMODERNISM

In the two chapters that follow, I want to show whether Postmodernism as it has been described in the earlier chapters of this dissertation influences children in the first two years of their secondary school education. In the earlier chapters, I have used 'Postmodernity' to describe the contemporary world in which we live; and 'Postmodernism' to describe reactions to authority-positions within that world.

Postmodernism has been described as a reaction against [frequently overarching power enshrined in]

- Rational-scientific thinking that lay behind Modernism and the Enlightenment
- The expression of such thinking in much contemporary culture
- Oppression (e.g. colonialisation, racism, patriarchy)
- Capitalism/Consumerism
- Scientific progress (a pessimistic reaction)
- Christianity

I have found that texts about Postmodernism are frequently unclear, sometimes unbalanced and generally incomplete, with the result that many people are unable to understand it in whole or even in part. This can be illustrated from reaction within the church. I have found a desire to understand the nature and effect of Postmodernism among Christians. There is a recognition that the loss of 'teen-agers' from some church congregations, resulting in ageing congregations and late entrance into ministerial training, is because of a cultural difference between most churchgoers and 'teen-agers.' By contrast, those churches that attract large numbers of teenagers appear to make their appeal through contemporary culture. Many clergy and older members within the churches would use the word 'Postmodern' to label teen-age culture, but it is only a label. When the Bishop of Maidstone, who as an able communicator in the Postmodernism

attempted to clarify the issues for a conference of churchgoers, he was reported as speaking 'over their heads,' because they could not understand him.³⁰³

I have shown from the earlier study of Postmodernism, that reaction against rational-scientific thinking and the cultural expression of such thinking is associated with reaction against Christianity. This might mean that adoption of Postmodern theory and culture leads a person away from the church and Christian beliefs; it certainly raises some questions. Does this, in fact, lie behind the absence of teen-agers from church? Have they adopted a Postmodern stance such that Christianity has little or no relevance for them? Beyond church, does the adoption of such a position affect attitudes to Religious Education in school in view of the fact that there is a required emphasis upon Christianity? If so, then at what stage does Postmodern theory and practice become significant? Are some elements of Postmodernism more influential than others?

One means of pointing towards answers is to produce a questionnaire for children to complete at the start of their secondary school education, to see whether there is any correspondence between attitudes towards Postmodern theory and practice, and towards Christianity; indeed towards religion in general and towards Religious Education. This I intended to do, and the survey and the results will be set out in chapters 5 and 6 of the dissertation.

There was however a large and preliminary problem. If intelligent adults in conference could not understand the Bishop, how would children be able to understand the issues foregrounded by Postmodernism, and what language could be used to facilitate the exercise? A prior exercise was necessary so as to register the language and ideas children would use. It could be done, theoretically, by interviewing small groups of children in school and talking through some of the issues concerned. The procedure is explained in the next chapter (Section 5.1) of the dissertation.

³⁰³ Report on Baptist Assembly at Plymouth in *Baptist Times*, Didcot, 09.05.02, p.11.

That highlighted two further problems; where might I be granted access to children, and how could the cost be met in view of the fact that I had no sponsor for the research? I was fortunate in that both problems were solved by the Education Authority in Sefton, where I had lived for nearly thirty years, and where I was known by many of its political members and officers as Free Church representative on the Education Committee and as a former employee initially responsible as Senior Assistant Education Officer for the planning and development of education within the Borough, and later, responsible for support of teachers as Humanities Adviser.³⁰⁴

Sefton is a coastal, Metropolitan Authority, north of Liverpool and the river Mersey. It is triangular in shape, the long base of the triangle stretching along a sandy coast from Southport in the North, through Ainsdale, Freshfield, Formby, Blundellsands and Crosby to the container docks at Seaforth in the South. At the apex of the triangle, inland and to the East, is Maghull, outer 'suburbialand' for Liverpool. Bootle lies to the South, an old and once distinguished suburb of Liverpool. Further north and in between urban settlements, there is open, flat countryside given over in the main to arable farming. Roughly in the centre lies a small village with a historic church and (at one time) a manor house, Sefton by name. It gave its name to the Metropolitan Borough that was created around it in the early 1980's.

There was a time when it was relatively easy to meet with and to talk with children – a time prior to child protection measures, when there was less anxiety concerning abuse of children than there is today. One cannot, nowadays, simply ask a head teacher for permission to talk with children in school, and gone was the time when as Staff Inspector with the Inner London Education Authority or as Registered Inspector with OFSTED, I was able to enter a school and talk confidentially with groups of children. But there were no black marks on my past. I was recognised as a Baptist church minister in

³⁰⁴ DAVIES, C: *Reflexive Ethnography*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp.45ff. advises foregrounding of personal information in an account of research of this kind.

Sefton, was vice chair of Sefton's S.A.C.R.E.,³⁰⁵ and books I had written either for teachers or for children within the realm of Religious Education were on the shelves of teaching staff libraries.³⁰⁶ But further, in what Postmodern proponents would probably describe as mere coincidence, at the time access to schools was needed, the Senior Adviser for Religious Education in Sefton had her job description changed. She was required to investigate the effect of contemporary culture upon children and was given one working day each week to effect this. Knowing about my preliminary study of the nature of Postmodernism from information conveyed at S.A.C.R.E. meetings, she suggested that she might support my research, and that it should encompass children from education year 6 to education year 9, with emphasis on years 7 and 8. She went further, and undertook to make arrangements with Sefton schools which would give me access; and for the Authority to publish records of the research in schools³⁰⁷ and to print survey sheets/questionnaires.

³⁰⁵ Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

³⁰⁶ GOWER, R: *Life in New Testament Times*, Loughborough, Ladybird, 1968
GOWER, R: *Second Thoughts about Readiness for Religion*, Belfast, Baptist Union of Ireland, 1970
GOWER, R.: *Home and Family Life in the Bible*, Berkhamstead, Lion, 1978
GOWER, R: *Religious Education in the Infant Years*, Tring, Lion, 1982
GOWER, R: *Frontiers*, Tring, Lion, 1983 [Revised edition, 1986]
GOWER, R: *Religious Education in the Junior Years*, Tring, Lion, 1984
GOWER, R: [Pseudonym – JONATHAN FISHER] *Interface*, Tring, Lion, 1986
GOWER, R: *Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, Chicago, U.S.A., Moody Press, 1987
GOWER, R: *Frontiers Master Copy Book*, Tring, Lion,, 1988
INNER LONDON EDUCATION AUTHORITY: *Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education*, London, I.L.E.A., 1988
GOWER, R: *Religious Education at the Primary Stage*, Oxford, Lion, 1990.
GOWER, R: Cooking & Heating, Food, in BUTLER, T: (Ed.) *Holman Bible Dictionary*, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A., Holman Press, 1991.

³⁰⁷ GOWER, R: *Conversations with Children*, Sefton, Sefton Education Authority, 2003.

CHAPTER 5: TALKING WITH CHILDREN

In this chapter I will first of all describe how interviews were set up with children and how problems were overcome. A complete account of the conversations with children that took place at the interviews have been published by Sefton Education Authority under the title 'Conversations with Children,' but I will select from the full account so as to demonstrate that children as young as at 'top junior' stage of education can understand and talk about issues that are important for Postmodern theory. I will then focus upon four areas that featured in the conversations: relativism and morality, culture and taste, consumerism, and religion (especially Christianity).

The general problem of gaining access to children in schools was solved by Sefton Education Authority, but there were still a considerable number of problems involved in finding the language and ideas children would use in talking about issues foregrounded by Postmodernism.

- First, of access to children at lower secondary, and top primary school levels. How might a situation be set up in which it was possible to talk with children so as to ascertain their language level and their understanding of the issues that lie behind Postmodern thinking?
- Secondly, of content. What material might be utilised so as to form a basis for talking with children and how might interviews be conducted?
- Thirdly, how might it be done by a deaf person – a personal problem! I have been deaf as a result of research into hearing aids undertaken for the National Health Service as a trainee-engineer in the 1950's. It left me with no hearing in one ear and loss of high-frequency hearing in the other, which made it extremely difficult to communicate with high-pitched-voiced children.

5.1: Overcoming Problems

The place of the interviews (and provision of security)

Head Teachers took me on trust with the support of the L.E.A. Senior Adviser, aware of past records in working with and for children, and acted as what Davies calls 'Gatekeepers,' since they felt the project was sufficiently linked to Religious Education in schools so as to remove the need to seek parental permission. It was still necessary for me, however, to gain interest and support for the research from individual Head Teachers and to discuss with them the kind of questions that might be used at interviews with the children. This necessitated a prior interview with them, and it required time and patience. Beyond this however, it was still necessary to ensure for their sake and for my own, that a situation could not arise in which I might be falsely accused of untoward behaviour by the children. This was effected by the simple use of a clearly-visible but non-intimidating tape recorder that was switched on before children arrived for interview and remained switched on until after they had departed. Had there been any incident apart from the conversation, there would be an audio record of proceedings. Initially it was agreed that either the Senior Adviser, or another member of staff should sit in at the interviews, but this proved to be unnecessary and impossible. Advisory staff and schools were all involved in a Commonwealth exhibition in connection with the Commonwealth Games at the time of the work with the children. It probably removed what might have been an inhibiting factor in the conversations, and the tape recorder proved to provide adequate protection.

This was simply the start of problems to be overcome. How could a school cope with withdrawal of groups of children from class for interview purposes? In fact, the practice was quite acceptable because similar interviews take place in an OFSTED inspection.³⁰⁸ There the Registered (lead) Inspector meets groups of children whose work has already been presented by the

³⁰⁸ OFSTED: The Handbook for the Inspection of Schools, Amended Edition, *Inspection Guidelines*, London, Stationery Office,, 1994. p.13

school as examples of standards achieved by a cross-section of children in the school. It is possible to talk to children in small groups of five children about their work and to elicit attitudes and feelings about other elements of importance to them in the school community for about twenty minutes at a time. Twenty minutes is a limit. Continually interviewing children in groups in this way can be exhausting such that the quality of the interaction deteriorates if interviews go on ad infinitum. Having arranged things for OFSTED inspections, it was feasible to make similar arrangements in this case. In actual fact, in recognition that the research might ultimately be of value to practitioners in Religious Education, arrangements were somewhat simplified and it was arranged that children should be released in groups of five from R.E. classes, and I am grateful for the support of R.E. staff who not only released children from lessons, but ensured that I saw a cross section of children so far as ability was concerned. The importance of the arrangement was that it should be done with the least possible disruption to school, staff or education of the children. It was also important that children (and parents!) be assured of absolute anonymity so that they would have the confidence to speak out without come-back from any source. This was promised to them at the commencement of each interview when they were also told that the interviews were being held to see whether they could talk with understanding about some of the everyday issues in society, with a view to the making of a test paper that would have a wider use in the future. They were also promised complete anonymity in transcription of interviews eliminating any means of personal identification, and no photographs were allowed, even for an illustration for the cover of the transcriptions.

With such precautions and arrangements, Head Teachers were willing for me to interview children in the relative privacy of Library, Information Technology room or Medical Inspection room, at times convenient to the school management, R.E teacher and to the children concerned. I am greatly in their debt for their support and help. It did not work perfectly. School timetables did not always fit with 20-minute sessions with groups of children; not all timetabled lessons are 40-minutes long, and it resulted in occasional groups with shortened or lengthened sessions, and in one case where there

were ten children present instead of five. There was also one occasion when the power was switched off to the chosen venue, so that there was neither protection nor record of the conversation. Fortunately there were no problems!

It was agreed with the Senior Adviser that two secondary schools and two primary schools from the Southern part of the Borough should be approached - in Formby, Waterloo, Bootle and Seaforth. The Head Teachers all agreed to support the research.

- Formby High School is the older one of two secondary schools serving the areas of Formby and Freshfield – seaside settlements without exactly being seaside resorts, and housing residents from the multi-millionaire category to those who were 'ordinary, semi-detached.'
- Waterloo Primary School is within Crosby, occupying the buildings of an old secondary school on one of the main N-S roads through Sefton. It lies in an area of Victorian terraced housing with dockland to the South and an area of greater affluence to the North that incorporates public schools and leads to open countryside.
- William Gladstone Church of England (Controlled) Primary school is further South along the N-S road, and separated by it from the new container docks at Seaforth. An old single-storey building, it lies alongside the main W-E road to the docks in what is almost an island of housing from the 1930's and earlier.
- Bootle High School is a modern building on an open site, surrounded in the main by pleasant, modern housing – the remaining one of several schools that have been pulled down to match the decline in school population. Bootle in the past was a populous extension of Liverpool – a place for dock workers and for wealthy merchants. There are large areas where urban renewal has taken place and other areas where it is awaited.

The actual numbers of groups/individuals who took part in the conversations were as follows:

YEAR	SCHOOL	GROUPS	NUMBERS	TOTAL
6	Waterloo	6	30	55
	Seaforth	5	25	
7	Formby	3	15	40
	Bootle	5	25	
8	Formby	8	40	55
	Bootle	3	15	
9	Formby	3	15	30
	Bootle	3	15	
				180

The content of interviews.

The primary purpose of the interviews was to give an opportunity for a number of issues to be raised that would be foundational for the preparation of a future test-paper/questionnaire. It was therefore necessary to look at the elements of Postmodernism (as defined in Part I of this dissertation) to see in what respects children are actually touched by Postmodernism in that the areas are recognisable and have any meaning to children in education years 6-9, and whether discussion has to be by illustration or in exact language.

In fact, the use of language by children might depend not so much upon knowledge and thinking, but upon social groupings and influence. Within any element of Postmodernism, there are aspects that are likely to be absorbed by children from social experience but not from thought, because the children may not yet have reached the point of maturity where such thinking is possible. It is a possibility, for example, that because one learns about a number of religions in school, and that there are adherents of several religions in a class and among friends, that the attitude is absorbed that no one of them is more 'right' or 'better' than another, and what is 'right' is 'right for me.' It might not be expected though, that the same children will have necessarily thought through issues of relativism and have applied them to religion. Again there might be serious doubts as to the truth of a news broadcast or a history book, but whether this arises from an understanding of

deconstruction or because of comments made by parents at home is another question.

This problem might be overcome by constructing a schedule of groups of questions that explore an issue from both the level of experience and the level of thought while eliminating any areas that children are unlikely to understand. It would not be very helpful to construct a questionnaire with a five-point attitude scale, if it was necessary to include a further 'box' to indicate that the question has not been understood! It will ultimately be necessary to relate test results to age, sex, ability and socio-religious background, but none of this will work unless children are addressed in language they understand, about issues they understand, and which they can put into their own words. Is it possible to find a form of language or context through which they are able to put their feelings into words? Underlying all the questions is the deeper one, "Where does one begin?"

I began with four areas to serve as a framework for interviews with children - culture, life in a contemporary-capitalist society, [philosophical] ideas behind postmodernism, and religion. I added a list of technical words I needed to explore to see whether they were understood. The first four areas were set out in the order indicated, basically from intuition founded on over fifty years experience of working with children. The first three appeared to me to be in order of their personal experience (and difficulty), and the final one (religion) is related to all three, although it was not expected that a developing discussion through all four areas would be possible within a 20-minute period! i.e. I seek to find, primarily:

- Do the children understand the issues that are involved?
- What language is needed to connect to the issues?

The secondary aim was to see whether or not there is any indication that responses are affected by age, sex or ability, whether children are 'easier' with one aspect of Postmodernism than another, and whether they reveal any reasons why they respond as they do. It is important to note that at this

stage any findings of this nature are secondary and in a sense, incidental, because there are other factors that might also determine attitudes, such as attendance at a church school or attitudes of parents. Were an investigation to be undertaken that made it possible to answer such questions with confidence, it would require a far larger sample of children and schools. It might, however, be possible to obtain a preview of matters to be elicited through the, later, printed questionnaire, such as:

- Is there any evidence that certain factors lead to 'Postmodern' attitudes in children?
- Are children influenced by one aspect of Postmodernism more than another?
- Is there any sequence that might be important in construction of a questionnaire?

In identifying the areas in which discussion might take place, I have followed a procedure in which the questions raised all have a positive postmodern content (in contrast with the later test paper which will contain an equal number of attitude statements which are positive and which are negative) covering the whole area identified as Postmodern. This approach was used to formulate a question-bank to be used during interviews. It was not possible to create an exact interviewing schedule because each group of children varies in its background, experience and interests, and because questions need to be introduced so as to meet some of the responses made by children. Further, it would be impossible in a 20-minute interview to cover every question so that different questions might be used with different groups of children, although the procedure would be the same. Starting intuitively³⁰⁹ with a question directed towards a discussion of key issues, one follows through with further questions until the area is reached. In doing so, one captures the language and degree of understanding of the children. At this stage one could only imagine what might take place:

³⁰⁹ This was important. In one school visited the day after the current Harry Potter film had been produced on DVD, it gave opportunity to raise the moral issues raised in the books. In another school, work in a library surrounded by modern art gave opportunity to discuss issues of classical v. modern art. In a Medical Inspection room, vividly coloured curtains gave opportunity to discuss what colours were 'true' for a colour blind person.

[With a year 6 primary group]

"How many of you went to the Easter presentation put on at the church?"

"We all did; we went as a class from school."

"What did you do?"

We had to find out whether the Easter story about Jesus really made sense.

"And did it?"

"Yes. He was a real person, and Pilate was real, and they did crucifixion."

"Yes, and they buried people in caves too."

"And something must have happened because Christians started then."

"So do you believe that what it says in the Bible is true?"

"Y-e-s, but there are some hard bits."

"What?"

"Well, can you ever imagine a whale swallowing a man and him living in it for days and days?"

"Or a man who lived over nine hundred years?"

"Or a giant who was nine foot tall and got killed with a stone?"

"What would you mean then if you said something was 'True'?"

[Or with a Year 9 secondary school group]

"Has anyone any idea of what work they are going to do when they leave school?"

"Yes, I want to be an engineer."

"What kind of engineer?"

"Designing computer controlled domestic equipment – like fridges which will order what you need when you begin to run out!"

"Sounds great; but where will you do that?"

"There's already some design companies that are working on it."

"What do the rest of you think about a job like that."

"You have to get good exam. results."

"Anything else?"

"You have to be prepared to move; even work overseas."

"Why? What do you mean?"

“Well, the big companies will build factories where they can get cheaper workers overseas, so that they can make more money.”

“Yes, just like Dysons are taking their factory to Malaysia and putting a lot of people out of work in this country.”

“My dad says big business always does that”

“Does the advertising ever tell you all about this? What would be the truth?”

The imaginary interviews turned out to be somewhat idealised! Interviews were generally good, but there were considerable silences.

The schedule of questions was drawn up so as to reflect the analysis of Postmodernism described in Section I of this dissertation and so that in sections on culture, commerce and anti-Christianity, a positive answer would indicate that the responder is ‘Postmodern’ in attitude or recognises that they live in a ‘Postmodern’ world. Reactions to philosophy required a negative answer because Postmodern thinking is anti-Enlightenment and anti-Modern, often with (bracketed) implications. The schedule (which would be used with all ages) was drawn up as follows:

1. Culture:

Do you think everybody should be able to enjoy the same thing?

Do you enjoy spending your evenings at a club if you have the chance to go?

Everyone has his or her own “world.” Does yours include everyone and everything?

Do you do one thing after another so that life passes quickly?

Do so many things happen so quickly that you do not really know where you are?

Do you like buildings with decorations from different times and places?

Do you like roads that wander around instead of being regular like a block system?

Do you prefer art in the form of a collage instead of real pictures of things?

Do you think a pile of bricks in an exhibition can be real art?

Should a photograph tell us more about the photographer than his subject matter?

Do you like music that brings together all kinds of sounds and rhythms?

Do you like to hear music that unsettles or disturbs you?

Is what the reader gets out of a book more important than the intention of the author?

Do you like books that play with words instead of telling a story?

Do you like scary books that look at the future of the world?

Do you like plays that make you uneasy because of their discontinuity?

Do you like performances that incorporate everything possible?
Do you like performances (like dance + music) where things do not fit together?
Do you like T/V that brings together different cultures, times and places?
Do you like it when the programme changes rapidly from one thing to another?
Do you think that what you see on T/V is made up rather than true?
Should things on T/V frighten or depress us in looking at the dark side of the world?
Do you think that the way the law and courts deal with people is fair and right?
Should the artist be able to do what he likes rather than have to follow "rules?"
Do you think "rules" in the arts are a means of keeping power over artists?
Do you think it wrong that a lot of money is often made out of work some artists do?
Is it what you personally enjoy that matters and not what other people say?
Do you think we live in the crazy mixed-up world that is expressed in some art?

2. Commerce:

Do you think it is big business that has the real power in the world?
Do you think when you leave school you will have lots of jobs instead of just one?
Do you think you may have to move to another place to get work?
Do you think robots and computers will replace human labour and thinking?
Do you think we are persuaded to buy things rather than need them?
Do you want things for what they signify, or simply for what they are?
Do you buy things because your favourite "star" has them?
Do you think it is important to keep "up to date" and be fashionable in clothes?
Does it matter that you get exactly what you want when you buy something?
Do you think the advertisements tell the truth about their products?
Does it worry you that records of what you buy and where you go are on computer?
Are you afraid of what will happen when everyone has got everything they want?
Do you think that having lots of money is important?
Do you think it is really important to have some material things?
Do you think the world is getting too complex and complicated?

3. Philosophy

When you do an experiment and think about it, does it lead you to the truth?
Do you think you can prove the existence of anything like God?
Do you believe that science and technology can solve the world's problems?
Do you believe that human reason and arguments based on it are important?
Is the way we think about things in the "West" better than the way other people think?
Do you think that the human mind can work out anything?
Do you think a good building, painting or performance is one that keeps to rules?
Do you think mystery and magic are stupid?
Can we ever really know the truth about something? [or is it illusion?]

Can we discover real values in the universe? [or do we make them up ourselves?]
Is it false to say that "a thing is true if it works"? [Or is it true if true/right for you?]
When someone writes a book will it mean the same to everybody? [Why?]
Are things really there simply because we speak about them? [or is it just language?]
Are the sounds we use to make language logical? [How did language come about?]
Do you think we have a "self;" is there a real "Me?"
Do you think there are "big truths" which can explain everything?
Do history books and news broadcasts really tell the truth about what happened?
If there is something like God, could we ever find the language to describe it?
Is it wrong to use paganism, witchcraft and magic to try to discover the truth?
Do you think people who say the earth is sick and needs our help, are wrong?
Do you think you can really be certain about anything?
Do you think that there is any real hope for the world in the future?
Do you think that the world is a fair place for women and for black people?

4. Anti-Christian

Do you believe that any religion can be right for a particular person?
Do you believe there are other ways to get to spiritual truth beside religion?
Do you think that the story of Jesus is unreliable history?
Do you think Christians are wrong to say they are sure that theirs is the only way?
[What other ways are there to have spiritual experiences?]
Are Christians too narrow-minded to enjoy everything the world has to offer?
Do you think Christianity does not make sense?
Do you believe in reincarnation?
Are Christians wrong to say that other beliefs are basically selfish?

5. Language. (What do you think the following words mean? Can you use them?)

Truth

Absolute

Collage/pastiche

The arts

Big business/Capitalism

Spiritual

Reason and rationality

Logic/logical

Relative

Subjectivity

Paganism

Self (as "Me")

The character of the interviews

The interviews took place between May and July, 2002. How far are the children's responses likely to be genuine and uninhibited? Davies raises the question of reflexivity - in this case, does the child's perception of the interviewer change the character of the interview?³¹⁰ All the indications I received pointed to the fact that responses showed that children were interested and uninhibited and that responses were genuine. It probably helped that I have been working with children for more than fifty years, and over such a period of time, one develops an easy, natural relationship with them. The children knew that I had been a teacher and responded in the way that they normally do to a trusted teacher; and while being in school, they were not in a classroom situation. In this case, however, age seems to have been useful too. To most children, age and appearance gave me a 'grandfather-look' and children tend to trust grand-parents and exchange confidences. In addition too, deafness seemed to elicit a sympathetic response through which the children did everything they could do to help overcome any problems – that were minimal in fact. I had been given a state-of-the-art hearing aid that minimised problems. Problems that occurred did not arise in the interviews themselves but in their transcription. The recordings had a limited frequency range, and were extremely difficult to hear, even with a digital aid, and transcriptions were made with my wife, Margaret's, hearing over many, many hours.

With the exception of one group, and one person within a group, there was eagerness to take part.³¹¹ Their enthusiasm went beyond the interviews and was carried with them on their return to normal classroom activity. Their freedom went to the point of telling personal reminiscences from home, and sharing jokes with the interviewer. This has been the experience of others

³¹⁰ DAVIES, C: *Reflexive Ethnography*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp.101-102

³¹¹ Head-teachers and R.E. staff were what Davies calls the 'gate-keepers.' They chose the groups and the individuals. By sheer chance, one group member was a junior member of the church where I am minister, and was reticent about participating.

who have utilised similar methodology in working with children.³¹² The Errickers' 'Worldview' project is a good example. One of their interviews with two Year 5 boys at an inner-city school in Southampton went like this:

Q: Damien, you're not sure about your granddad. Is it possible to be in touch with your granddad now?

D: I'll always be in touch with him.

Q: How will you be in touch with him?

D: By prayer. I pray for him every night before I go to bed. I say, please God could you make my granddad be alive soon. I want to see him.

Q: Do you think it's possible for him to be alive again?

K: He's still alive, Damien. He's an angel.

D: I know, he's flying around now, probably.

Q: Where are the angels Kevin; are they with us or somewhere else?

K: At night they come. They're in the air. They never come in your house.

D: They look in through the window.

K: When my mum dies, I'll put some blood on the gravel and then she'll stay alive a bit longer, 'cos I don't want her to die. When my mum goes I might want to go with her.'³¹³

Children in Sefton were just as 'free.' There were many reminiscences about ghosts:

"I've never seen a ghost." "I've seen one, but it might have been the light."

"Where did you see one?"

"I was in my bedroom on my bed watching 'Big Brother' and I turned off the light and then 'Big Brother' had finished. And I switched off the telly and then, you know the telly lights up. Well it was a ghost family and there was something standing by the telly and it moved and ran into the door. And my brother saw it against the door.....

We think it was my nan."³¹⁴

³¹² ERRICKER, C. & ERRICKER, J: Where Angels fear to tread; Discovering Children's Spirituality. In BEST, R. (Ed.): *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*, London, Cassell, 1996 pp. 184ff.

³¹³ ERRICKER, C and ERRICKER, J: Op.cit p.184 quoted by TAGGART, G: Mickey Mouse Spirituality? Children's Worldviews and the Culture Industry, in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 25:1, Autumn, 2002.

³¹⁴ GOWER, R. R: Conversations with Children, Sefton S.A.C.R.E., 2003, pp.133-134. [From this point references to the book will be designated 'SEFTON SACRE.']

Not only were they unafraid to exchange confidences and talk about personal things but they were relaxed to the point where they could have fun with the interviewer. One group in one school playfully pleaded for a cup of coffee, since the aroma of coffee was filling the room from a coffee machine. Another group was asked what one would call it if colours, shapes and even materials were mixed together. Instead of 'collage,' the reply was 'a masterpiece!'³¹⁵ A primary school group was seeking to understand the difference between 'material' and 'immaterial.' The interviewer was interrupted when one girl, touching her blazer and skirt said, "This is material too," and the session dissolved into laughter.³¹⁶ Another group was discussing whether the images and fears created by an author in a book could have an effect on the reader. "Can a book hurt you?" it was asked. "Yes, you can cut your finger on the edge of a page" was a reply while the group again dissolved into laughter. The interviewer responded in kind [with a year 8 group]:

"Say someone is a Christian here, and they say, 'God is real; there really is a God; I believe in God which is the truth.' How could you know if that was true?"

"You couldn't." "The truth is in your own beliefs. It's what you believe in."

"Do you realise what you've just said? You've just said that what you believe in is really the truth. Do you believe what you've just said?"

[Laughter] "Yes."³¹⁷

The importance of this is the recognition that the children were relaxed, interested and co-operative to the point where it was possible for humour to arise naturally. There were no enforced answers.

Overall, it was surprising that there was little significant difference in the areas of content or degrees of complexity of conversation between children in year 6 and year 9. It was as if children within these school years had reached some kind of plateau in the content and development of their thinking about the issues we discussed. Such an impression was

³¹⁵ SEFTON SACRE: p.139.

³¹⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.108

³¹⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.123

underscored by the fact that there was no discernible difference between the responses of boys and of girls. Children in year 6 sometimes discussed things at a level one would expect later. During a discussion about authorship and whether it is the story or the author that is the more important, a child in year 6 responded:

"I think it's the person behind the story because when she's writing the story she's actually ... it's her own idea but she puts a bit of herself in it; it's like she puts a bit of her personality in it."³¹⁸

And another Year 6 child stated,

"What they believe in is true to them because that's what they believe inI've come to that conclusion."³¹⁹

Such insights did not mean that they always came easily. There were sometimes silences and no response, but it was almost as if the interviewer could 'hear them thinking.' Sometimes the thinking came out in a jumble and muddle. A Year 8 group was discussing whether punishment of young children for misdemeanours had any effect. One Year 8 child responded:

"If children are hit early on, and it hurtsand you could tell people didn't like that at allmy grandparents when they were hurt when they were little but we weren't and people take it to their advantage."³²⁰

Another Year 8 group were discussing mixtures of styles and cultures and they were asked if they could think of any reason why artists often tried to mix the worlds cultures and styles together. One child responded:

"Yes, because everyone who likes that culture, say someone likes a certain book, if they mix that style with their book, then the people who read the first book will like yours."³²¹

³¹⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.82

³¹⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.157

³²⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.21

³²¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.29

It made little sense, but the children were trying to think things through. There were many other evidences of struggle with the thinking. There were ideas in the discussion they had never encountered before, but they were interested and wished to think things through. One boy said simply "I've never thought of this stuff before."³²² And sometimes when they tried, they showed typical reactions of forgetting what they had just said. The tape recorder picked up the whisper of a Year 7 girl to her friend: "I can't remember what we've been saying!"³²³

Yet there were differences between the oldest and the youngest. Generally speaking the younger age group enthused about Harry Potter, whereas children in Year 9 varied in their responses; some liked the books but others felt they had outgrown them. Some recognised the reality of parts but the nonsense of others. A three-headed dog was scornfully dismissed but there was an unwillingness to reject accounts of the spirit world.³²⁴ This might have been because of an awareness engendered through use of the ouija board (q.v.), which was common among older children. There was slight evidence of thinking more deeply on the part of older children. Young ones simply recognised that there were different things that made different people happy; Year 9 pupils had in some cases come through to the idea that choice was the key factor; choice underlies happiness.³²⁵ There was considerably more evidence that the extra years of experience led to reasons behind opinions, even though the opinions expressed were similar to those of younger children. They believed in the lack of objectivity in news reporting because they had experienced it; they had listened to cynical adults commenting on advertising; they could relate family stories of experience with ghosts. There were however, considerable areas they had not experienced or thought about. They had not come to grips with the idea of over-arching explanations or 'metanarratives.'³²⁶ They could understand the

³²² SEFTON SACRE: p.118

³²³ SEFTON SACRE: p.106

³²⁴ SEFTON SACRE: p.55

³²⁵ SEFTON SACRE: pp 53-54.

³²⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.51.

possible twisting of truth in advertising, newspapers, and sometimes TV news, but nobody had come to the point of doubting history, to the point that evidence itself might be twisted, basically because there was a high degree of trust in the history that was taught in school.³²⁷ They had experienced plays, films and television shows that were beyond their understanding, but nobody said they had experienced postmodern theatre in the form that things of opposite nature are brought together so as to cause confusion and disturbance.³²⁸

In short, they were varied in their ages, but there was a consistency in their responses to discussion about Postmodern matters. I now go on to look at the areas of consistent response:

5.2: Specific areas of discussion.

Although groups were limited in number and in time, there was an indication of ways in which children consider issues of importance within Postmodern theory:

Thinking – Relativism and Morality

It was clear from the discussions that the children interviewed found it easier to talk about 'true' than about 'truth,' 'real' rather than 'reality,' and that they did not believe that there were absolute moral standards. When trying to define 'truth,' they tended to say that a thing was 'true' if it corresponded to reality (things as they really were), and it was therefore 'the truth,' but not in any absolute sense. What was 'true' or the 'truth' was relative to them. They confirmed several times that they would be happier with statements in an attitude test that referred to the 'true' and the 'real' rather than to 'truth' and 'reality.' Sometimes when groups were asked what 'truth' was, the question was greeted by absolute silence.³²⁹ But there were other reactions that also

³²⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.40

³²⁸ See, for example, SEFTON SACRE: p.45.

³²⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.41

underlined the difficulty. In reply to the question put to a Year 7 group, "So when we talk about speaking the truth and telling the truth, what do we really mean by 'Truth?' there was a double reaction:

"Please will you repeat the question?" [Laughter] "I know what it means but I find it hard to put into words."³³⁰

Initial thinking led to the idea that a thing was true if there was sufficient evidence for it. It is true, they said that Chester was a Roman city, because the evidence could be seen. Roman remains could be seen there in the Grosvenor museum and in the excavations of the houses and the amphitheatre. It is true that the 'Titanic' existed and sank, because it is possible to see objects that have been brought up from the wreck.³³¹ There was a parallel perspective in the scientific world – that a thing was true if it held up to scientific tests; that a gas was truly oxygen if it met all the tests for oxygen. They had not yet come to the point of realising that evidence and even test results could be faked, although they were aware of the way that presentation in the media was not always true. But when they did, they came to a relativistic view of truth: A lively exchange with a Year 9 group made the issues clear:

"When you come to history books and you read history about things that happened a long time ago, how do you know whether it is true or not?"

"You look for evidence; like whether there was an ice age or not."

"It would be possible for me to write a book about something that happened about five hundred years ago, and I could actually make up the evidence to go with it. How would anyone who read the book know whether it was true or not?"

"Well, you could go to the first site of evidence there was and compare it with what you had written."

"Let's take that a bit further into Egyptian history. If you go back to the story of the pyramids you would find that most historians date them at around 3000 B.C. But there were two newspaper journalists who wrote to prove that they (and the Sphinx in particular) were 12,000 years old, and they produced their evidence in some very large books about it. How could you begin to find out what the truth really was? Could you do it?"

³³⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.13.

³³¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.49

"No you couldn't. You'd have to make your own mind up."

"So that would be true for you."

"There are people who should know, but you wouldn't know for certain. But you can have a belief in what you think."³³²

There was little difference between such ideas of Year 9 pupils and ideas of pupils in Year 6. With one Year 6 group there was an earnest discussion about the issue that started with colour blindness:

"One of my grandchildren is colour blind and if he came in here and I asked him what colour those curtains arewhat colour are they? ["Red."]..... He would say that they are grey. Who is speaking the truth? Is he telling the truth in saying that they are grey? ["Yes"] or are you speaking the truth by saying that they are red?"

"Both." "If you're colour blind you don't know what colour you're looking at, so it doesn't matter what colour it is. So to them it is grey."

Right. Let's ask you another one. You are going on a long walk in the Lake District. You have gone up there by coach from school. Some of you are really strong and fit, but some of you aren't. The teacher takes you up a slope, up and up, and at the end of it, someone's going to say, 'That was great; that was easy,' but someone else will say, 'That nearly killed me; it was hard.' Who's telling the truth?"

"Both of them." "It's their opinion."

"It isn't just an opinion, is it? There's more to it than that because if you asked, 'Is that your opinion?' they would say 'No. It's more than an opinion because I've got blisters on my feet.' So if a thing is true, it really depends on us, doesn't it? Are you saying then [just think before you answer] that truth depends on us, or does truth depend on something outside of us?"

[Silence and then "m-m-m-m" and then a very quiet "Us."]³³³

They found it easy to take a relative view of truth. Only once in all of the interviews was any kind of objective view taken – that truth is that which is spoken by someone in authority. In a discussion with a Year 8 group about the nature of truth, there was a sudden interruption – "The teacher tells us." Nobody else took it up. Even in discussions about religion there was no idea that God is the source of absolute truth. Just once in over twelve hours of interviews – truth is in what teacher says.³³⁴

³³² SEFTON SACRE: pp. 56-57

³³³ SEFTON SACRE: pp.149-150

³³⁴ SEFTON SACRE: p.120

In one sense practically all children identified truth with reality. When made aware of Jean Baudrillard's claim that the 'Gulf War' was an invention of the media, they simply identified reality or unreality with the truth or untruth of the news reports. But there was another sense in which reality was as subjective to them as truth. It quite often happened that an element of discussion would commence by my banging the table and saying that it was real because it could be seen, felt and (when banged) heard. Presumably it could also be tasted. But could the group identify anything which was also real, but for which we could not use our senses? It was common to get replies like 'air' and 'wind' because they could not be seen, and even ghosts, because they were of a different nature. Then the suggestions moved on to feelings, dreams and emotions such as fear or love.³³⁵ They were real in a different (some would say 'spiritual' as opposed to 'material') way. But they were also personal, and therefore a subjective and relative reality.

If there was no external, objective authority for truth or reality, then where did that leave morality? If there was no absolute 'truth' then where did 'telling the truth' actually feature? Complaints have sometimes been made against the Harry Potter stories that Harry disobeys rules and then lies to keep himself and his friends out of trouble. But the rejoinder has sometimes been made that such is real life, and

by taking such action he gets himself into a position where he is able to overcome the wrongdoing in those who are more evil than he is; and that is a good thing. In other words, right and wrong are measured by the outcomes of an action, or by the relative character of the person who is involved, and things are not simply right or wrong in themselves.³³⁶

Most children can identify with Harry Potter, because they have the same [?](im)moral standards as he does, and the identity is just one of the reasons for the popularity of the books. If necessary children would use the words

³³⁵ SEFTON SACRE: pp. 71-72

³³⁶ GOWER, R.R.: *Harry Potter: A Christian Perspective*, Paper Read at Hope Theological Society, May 2002, p.11.

'moral' or 'morality.' Because generally they were unfamiliar with the word 'ethics.' The lack of external objectivity for their moral standards was made clear in many of the conversations with the children. You know for yourself whether things are right or wrong because you can feel it:

"You can feel it in your bones and you know it's wrong." "If you are doing something wrong, you just kind of know and you feel it's wrong."³³⁷

But although personal, it can go beyond feelings:

"You use your common sense and common sense is the thing that tells us whether a thing is right or wrong."³³⁸

- even when discussion moved to the moral standards set out in the Jewish Ten Commandments, the Christian Bible or the Muslim Holy Qur'an. Common sense was the criterion used to judge the moral requirements laid down. The blunt reply to whether they should be received as authoritative was "They have to be sensible."³³⁹ It was not that external authority did not exist, but that such authority was itself subject to common sense because the authority itself might be wrong. This became clear in a lively exchange with children from Year 6 in one of the Primary Schools:

"How do you know whether a thing is right or wrong?"

"You get told."

"You get told. Yes. What other ways?"

"You get told off."

"You get told off. So a thing is right if people tell you a thing is right or wrong. We are right if we do it and wrong if we get told off for it? ["Yes"] Is that really what 'right' and 'wrong' are?"

"No, because supposing we are told the wrong thing?" "Because some people can tell us to do wrong things, can't they?" "And they can tell you it's right too."

"That's right. So how do we know that a thing is really right or wrong? It can't be because of what people tell us, can it?"

"You don't know." "Because of our feelings."

³³⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.59

³³⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.59

³³⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.69

"Because of our feelings?"

"Common sense." "You just KNOW whether it's right or wrong."³⁴⁰

There was however, a basic conviction on which most children were agreed across the entire age group. An action is wrong if people got hurt as a result of the action. Greed was therefore wrong. It was wrong, for example, that manufacturing should be transferred to areas where lower wages could be paid because it was exploiting the workers. This was typical of greed – not that greed was possible to define objectively; greed arose from individual or group relationships.³⁴¹ It could be wrong to tell the truth, [provided it is not too big a lie] if as a result someone else was hurt, upset or disadvantaged.³⁴² The problem was, in what way were people disadvantaged? One group discussed whether you should lie to a person who was in the last stages of terminal illness to tell them they would recover. On the one hand it might be good because it could make them feel better, but on the other hand it might be bad because it could prevent them from properly preparing themselves to die (a 'Christian' sentiment that was quickly denied by others in the group).³⁴³ Another year 6 group enjoyed the confusion that subjectivity can sometimes cause:

"Suppose you were to find someone in this group who was absolutely starving hungry and they needed a packet of biscuits, and you hadn't any money at all, but the shop just down the road had masses and masses of biscuits and they wouldn't miss one packet. Would it be right or wrong to take a packet of biscuits without paying for it to give to the person who was very hungry?"

"No." "It would be right to help him but it would be wrong to steal." "Both." "You could tell them to take the packet of biscuits!"³⁴⁴

The children were clear about what morality was not, but they were not completely clear as to what exactly it was. Their dilemma could be summed up in the final exchange with a year 9 group: I asked, "How do you decide

³⁴⁰ SEFTON SACRE: pp. 68-69

³⁴¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.71

³⁴² SEFTON SACRE: pp.77,85

³⁴³ SEFTON SACRE; p.85

³⁴⁴ SEFTON SACRE: p.70

that a rule is right or wrong?" and was told, "For ourselves." "Are you really saying, then," I continued, "that when there are rules, they are not really right or wrong in themselves, because it's what is right for you that matters." Answers – "Yes." "Yeah." "Sort of."³⁴⁵

Rejection of overarching objective moral standards was perhaps the first step in rejection of any overarching 'metanarrative,' particularly if the overarching reality was called 'God.' It was the individual, self, that was the key factor.

Culture – pastiche, authorship and world-view

Few children actually knew the word 'pastiche' but they were all familiar with 'collage' in the art world. In Postmodern culture, an appreciation of collage or pastiche is expected, but among the children interviewed their tastes were very mixed. Some liked the 'pick and mix' approach but others still appreciated the 'classical' traditions where pictures and paintings were to be judged by rules such as depth of colour, positioning and perspective. They frequently took the [Postmodern] approach that everybody should be able to enjoy different things, which inevitably conflicts with any view that prefers artwork of a particular kind such as [Postmodern] pastiche. It is not the only example of an inner contradiction within Postmodern theory. A Year 8 group was comparing 'a painting of something' with 'a mix up of all kinds of colours' and four of the five members of the group said, "I like it separate," "I like a mix-up," "I just like shapes and squares" and "I don't like modern art."³⁴⁶ One of the strongest individual statements for contemporary art came from a child in year 6:

"I like doing a big picture, all yellows and greens..... I like – it's absolutely crazy but I like it. I don't [see things so as to try to make sense of it] I just look at that green thing there and think, 'What does that do?' Maybe it could be a rabbit and maybe it could be something else. Or maybe it's upside down."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ SEFTON SACRE: p.136

³⁴⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.29

³⁴⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.63

But while children were familiar with and often liked collage in painting, they had very seldom experienced pastiche in other expressive arts. They sometimes watched films or television programmes that were difficult to follow or understand ('The Matrix' was given as such an example of film) but nobody had experienced the deliberate [Postmodern] attempt to disturb the viewer by bringing together contradictory elements on to a stage. They enjoyed and approved the mixture of music from different cultures, partly on grounds that it was better for the immigrant who would feel 'more at home,' but they had not normally experienced the conglomeration of extreme pick and mix which resulted in a cacophony of noise.³⁴⁸

But if a typically Postmodern approach was moderately present with regard to the expressive arts, it was strongly present with regard to literature. A typical Postmodern approach to literature is that the author is of minimal importance; it is the text as interpreted and understood by the reader that is of prime importance. Somewhat to my surprise, this view was strongly expressed by all children in every age group. Typical was an exchange between myself and a Year 8 group:

"Do you think it more important what the author writes, or is it more important what you get out of it?"

"I think, the things you get out of it, because they're writing it for you and then it's your interpretation of it."

"O.K. You used a word there – 'interpretation.' What do you mean?"

"They can write the books but you must make what you want out of it."³⁴⁹

There was some doubt among some children whether the writing was really for the reader or whether it was to get income for the writer, but in general other children were in agreement that the reader has priority over the author. "What you get out of it [a book] is the most important."³⁵⁰ "What you, yourself

³⁴⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.30

³⁴⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.28.

³⁵⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.34

get out of it” is the important thing in reading a book.³⁵¹ “You choose the way that you want to understand the book. You can choose whether you want it to frighten you, whether it makes you romantic, good or sad and so on.”³⁵² It was for this reason that objections were made to films being made of books. What you see is the film-director’s interpretation of the book, and you should be able to interpret it for yourself.³⁵³ Such an approach did not mean that the author was hidden; one could use a book to discover the author. Many examples were given from the Harry Potter books of the way that they revealed Joanna Rowling to the readers, and the way that she put herself into the writing. The revelation of the person behind the work of art was stronger still in the field of photography. It was a general opinion that the picture had more to tell us about the photographer than about its subject.³⁵⁴ Neither was this absent from painting. Talking to a group of children from Year 6, surrounded by many lovely pieces of work on flowers, everyone agreed that the pictures told more about ‘the person who painted them’ than the flowers themselves, and for this reason they did not like copying paintings.³⁵⁵

Another cultural element within Postmodernism is a pessimistic reaction to the world into which we are born. This element was largely absent when attempts were made to raise it with the children interviewed. One reason for the absence was that some children, particularly the younger ones, were unaware of the issues involved at all, possibly because they had been protected from such anxieties. They had no idea that opportunities for work might be taken over by computers and robots, that the place of work would be at the computer station at home with little social contact with others, that medical research had over-reached itself in stimulating the evolution of bacteria and viruses that were beyond human control, that global warming would result in even less habitable space to live, and that weapons of mass destruction might eliminate all human life and so on – the grim picture

³⁵¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.42

³⁵² SEFTON SACRE: p.55.

³⁵³ SEFTON SACRE: p.95

³⁵⁴ SEFTON SACRE: p.34

³⁵⁵ SEFTON SACRE: p.80

that is sometimes painted of the future world. It was not however, just that they were not aware of the dark picture. Some indeed did not want to know, some felt that there was a need to know, and others believed that there was light even in the darkness, or that there was room for strong optimism about the future.

Those who did not want to know tended to silence rather than answering questions or discussing issues. There was occasional realism in that sometimes there is a need to know. A Year 8 group had been discussing reaction to news items such as that a comet might hit and destroy the whole planet earth, or that acts of terrorism such as New York's September 11th. might destroy part of it. They were asked, "Do you think, when you learn about things like that, that television should be used to frighten you?" They continued:

"No." "No." "You need to know these things, don't you?"

"That's a different answer. You say that you need to know these things. Why is that?"

"Because they say things about a war and you need to know in case they're going to attack you."

"What about those of you who say that you shouldn't know about these things? Is it just that you feel happier not to know about them?"

"It would terrify little kids; they just sit there watching it." "If people are reporting it they should know so they can try to stop there being a war, but if nobody knew and they were just attacked, then everyone would die."³⁵⁶

It was, however, an isolated instance. More typical was the inherent optimism from a group in year 7. They were discussing the issue of whether future work would require flexibility and movement. One child was not concerned about it at all because he would take over his father's business and change it as was required. Another would simply move where the work was. Another intended to become an author and would work by herself from home anyway. And yet another said that redundancy could be a good thing because it enabled his dad to leave work with a higher pay-off than had he worked all his life! Nobody in the group was aware of the possibility that

³⁵⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.39

because of an ageing population it might not be so easy to provide pensions.³⁵⁷ Nor did they wish to know. One boy expressed it this way: "I think there are some bad things, but we'll just cross that bridge when we come to it,"³⁵⁸ and another: "When we're forty, we can worry about dying, but we should enjoy our life and not be worrying about the earth being polluted and about comets almost hitting New York." Yet again, "When I get older, I'll think of things like that." (Year 6)³⁵⁹ Indeed, they did not believe that everything they heard about a black future was true. They believed that things were exaggerated on TV for effect, so that people will watch and it will increase the viewing figures to put before the advertisers.³⁶⁰ They gave examples that even when news was bad, it was never entirely bad and could be about good things such as the Queen's Jubilee, or about Posh and Becks.³⁶¹ A bit trite perhaps, but they really did believe that 'every cloud has a silver lining.' They had not generally adopted a negative Postmodern view about the future.

A criticism of children in the age group examined is quite often heard in that they are said to be 'bored with everything,' and some evidence for this is advanced in the way that they are said to sit in front of a TV set going from one channel to another without really looking at anything. This issue was raised on several occasions, and as with attitudes to the future of the world in general, attitudes were much more positive than their critics might have expected. Children admitted that they did 'channel' when switching on the TV, but it was not so much because they were bored as because they were searching for something of real interest. An opening exchange with a group of children from year 7 makes the point:

"When you are watching T.V., how many of you simply flick over from one channel to another?"

"I do." "I do." [General assent]

³⁵⁷ SEFTON SACRE: pp 10-11.

³⁵⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.28

³⁵⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.141

³⁶⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.37

³⁶¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.83

"Can any of you tell me why you actually do that?"

"You want to see what's on other channels." "To see if there's anything good on another channel." "I want to see if there's anything better on another channel."³⁶²

Another group, asked directly if they channelled because they were bored, denied it, giving two alternative reasons – that they were searching for another programme on another channel they knew was on at the time, and because "You might want to watch a certain programme because you want to see it – not because you are bored."³⁶³ Children were much more positive than has sometimes been alleged.

Consumerism:

Despite absence of any objective moral code, there was a strong reaction against what the children felt was 'unfairness.' They identified it in a number of areas. Women were treated unfairly because they cannot be taxi drivers because of threat of violence, they are not physically strong enough to play Premium Division football, and they are underpaid at Wimbledon. They claimed that in areas where Islam is the main religion, women have fewer educational opportunities. They claimed that Blacks are treated unfairly as though low class, and that only recently has a degree of fairness been established in the U.S.A. It was unfair that they sometimes felt marginalised in the U.K. and needed to be able to feel at-home through music and fashion of their own. There was a division of opinion over whether the U.K. should receive all asylum seekers in view of the fact that some were not so much asylum seekers as welfare seekers who were unfairly treated in the world.³⁶⁴ Above all however, they were also aware of, and reacted against, the power exercised against consumers through advertising. The picture frequently drawn of young people - that they have a lot of money and go for the latest in designer clothes and mobile telephones, and as such are the victims of manipulation by companies through clever advertising - did not appear to be

³⁶² SEFTON SACRE: p.27; also p.31.

³⁶³ SEFTON SACRE: p.61

³⁶⁴ SEFTON SACRE: pp.86-87;67; 127

true; the children identified with Postmodern reaction, often with great cynicism. [Whether they lived up to what they said could not be tested. Some children proudly wore the England 'strip' to school during football World Cup games, carried mobile 'phones and had purchased the latest Harry Potter DVD]. Their views were scathing.

They said that folk heroes like David Beckham wore sports clothing when their picture was taken so that people who hero-worshipped him would want to purchase the same clothes, high-priced, inferior or whatever.³⁶⁵ They claimed that TV advertising is sometimes designed to put you into a good-humorous mood with a dancing chicken or laughing cow so that you will purchase the product.³⁶⁶ They added that sometimes TV advertising is designed to exploit people by making them feel dissatisfied so that they will want to buy the new product whose usefulness is deliberately exaggerated.³⁶⁷ They resented attacks on their intelligence where prices are made to appear less in sales and discounts and by knocking off the odd pence to price an article at £x.99p.³⁶⁸ They resented targeting through mail shots based on purchases with credit cards and the invasion of their computers by E-mail – "It's like going into your life without permission – trying to make money out of you and using you."³⁶⁹ They resented the pressure put on them to purchase mobile phones which are "all pretty much the same and they're not very good. They only do it to make you buy them."³⁷⁰ They felt strongly that it was more important to buy trainers or clothes that fitted or were of good material, rather than go for a 'Brand' name.³⁷¹ To sum up they felt that advertising 'by big business' was false and cheating, and an abuse of power.³⁷² Even the Harry Potter books were seen as part of a scam to get people to go to see the film and to buy the products associated with it.³⁷³

³⁶⁵ SEFTON SACRE: pp.7,10

³⁶⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.40

³⁶⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.73

³⁶⁸ SEFTON SACRE: pp.35; 66

³⁶⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.16

³⁷⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.31.

³⁷¹ SEFTON SACRE: p.65.

³⁷² SEFTON SACRE: p.129

³⁷³ SEFTON SACRE: p.131.

There seemed to be little interest within this age group to 'go shopping,' and shopping malls as centres for recreation were never mentioned.

Their attitudes to exploitation through advertising was reflected in other areas too, although slightly less in intensity. They felt that there were attempts to influence them falsely through actual TV programmes and through newspapers:

"Do you believe everything you read in newspapers and hear on television?"

"No."

"Why don't you believe it?"

"Because they just make it up to sell the paper." "It's not the actual truth."³⁷⁴

Several reasons for this were put forward. It was to make things more interesting than they really were so as to increase audience figures so as to attract more advertising. Typical was an exchange about newspapers."

"When you get a newspaper and read it (Do you read them?) ["Yes"], do you believe everything you are reading?"

[Definite] "No."

"Why don't you believe everything you read in a newspaper?"

"Because ...they're twisted."

"What do you mean by 'twisted?' – a very important word, that!"

"Like they've given different information to what you've heard, so you don't know what to believe."

"....Why do you think newspapers 'twist' things. Why do they do it?"

"To get more people to read the paper." "To get more money" "To make stories more attractive.".... "They will tell you about the way a dog has been mistreated to get you to look after it."³⁷⁵

They might have added, "Because it is not always easy to check up on it." A group of children from the Crosby area felt that you could only trust their local newspaper, the *Crosby Herald*, because the newsprint could be checked by

³⁷³ RUSSELL, U: *Living Faiths in Sefton*, Sefton CVS., Sefton Community Empowerment Fund, Diocese of Liverpool, 2003, p.5.

³⁷⁴ SEFTON SACRE: pp. 48-49

³⁷⁵ SEFTON SACRE: pp.118-119

the readers, and the editorial staff could not therefore afford to take chances! Other groups suggested that there was a viewpoint held by the editorial staff and they wished to persuade readers to their point-of-view. Their scepticism about the 'truth' conveyed through the media was extremely strong and was linked to a number of reasons.

Interestingly, they had not yet reached the point of doubt with regard to historical accounts. Assuming that the evidence was there for all to see, they accepted that what they learned from accounts of history was true, and they were not therefore manipulated in the way they believed 'truth' to be manipulated by contemporary media.

Attitudes to Religion and Christianity

While this chapter was being written in March 2003, the Board for Social Responsibility for the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool published the results of a survey of religious faith in Sefton entitled 'Living Faiths in Sefton.' Quoting figures from Christian Research, the survey stated that one significant change in Christian Research's figure is the drop in church attendance by children and young people (under 19) in Sefton from 30% in 1989 to 19% in 2000, which might mean that by 2002 only 15% of church-goers would be under 19. Conversations with children seemed to indicate that at least among children about to move up to secondary school, or in the first three years of secondary school, the figures could be much lower. Only 2.7% of children interviewed gave any indication of church attendance.

One of the reasons appeared to be that the children had adopted a different view about 'spirituality' to that held in church or other religions, and church/religion was therefore irrelevant to them. They utilised the word 'spiritual' for the immaterial world that they could not hear, see, feel, smell or taste, but it was not the world to which God belonged in which 'spiritual' often indicated an attitude of holiness. Neither was it a world that lay behind religions to which the various religions gave witness, but it was a world of

spirits that could occasionally be seen as ghosts, and could be experienced in games such as the ouija board. This was not a mere occasional reference, but it was a common subject of conversation.

The Harry Potter books were frequently a stimulus to talking about the spirit world. A group of children in Year 7 started with an example from the books:

"When I was reading the secrets of Azbekhan and something was creeping up behind him, I couldn't ... I was afraid. "It was like ooh, ooh, ooh and turning round." "I can't remember what book it was but someone was walking down the street and a police helicopter was following him and I looked outside and there was this police helicopter hovering really, really low ..." "Yeah, but it doesn't scare you, but it makes you think it's happening."

"Do you think then that there are purely spiritual things as well as things you can simply see and handle? Do you think there is anything beyond this world?"

"Yes." "Once I watched TV and it said about ghosts and stuff, and a ghost disappeared through a door, and I looked at my door." "I think it's beyond our understanding." "Like my Nan died; I don't think she's actually gone; I think she's there. She's gone somewhere else but I can't see her." "I believe in life after death; you know the ouija board; well, I actually believe in that sort of thing."³⁷⁶

Another Year 7 group were discussing the 'scary' elements in the Harry Potter books and one child had come to the point of saying that they do not make you scared of monsters and things, but they do make you realise that there are bad things that can happen to you when on ones own. They continued:

"Which ones made you think that there are spiritual things (because they're not material)?"

"Not magic and monsters, but ghosts, yes."

"So you think they're really there?"

"Yes."

"If I were to say to you, Do you just believe in material things or do you think there are spiritual things which are real things ...?"

³⁷⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.8

"Yes, it's because I didn't really believe in the chain-rattling evil monsters, but it's because my Mum saw the ghost of my grandma, or thought she did, and started chatting to her. That's why I believe it."

"What do you think ghosts are? Is it just people's memories or is it something more than that?"

"It's memories mixed with other things."³⁷⁷

Another group were discussing how they knew there was a spiritual world and agreed that one could 'basically feel a presence' which when tied down meant "Yes, I've felt things like ghosts."³⁷⁸ Some children were aware of beliefs about spirit-possession, that spirits could actually get inside a person and act through them,³⁷⁹ but it was much more real when talking about their experiences with the ouija board. One group agreed that it was 'the devil' who operated the glass, and there was a wide consensus that children took part in the games because they wanted the frisson which went with it.³⁸⁰ Children in every age group and in every school had experienced what they believed to be the spiritual world through the ouija board.

By contrast, the spirituality which was part of theistic world religions, was unreal to most of the children. It was reflected in the fact that only three girls admitted to attendance at [Roman Catholic] churches, and there was indication of attendance by only two boys. There was a general feeling that a person was 'religious' if they had been brought up that way by their parents, but that the parents' religious world was a different one to the one lived in by the children who made conversation.³⁸¹ It was a world where most people went to church and the majority believed in God, said their prayers and accepted the stories of the Bible. When followed through, the reasons for their rejection of God were fundamentally that nobody could prove the existence of God. Typical responses were, "Some people say that they've seen God, but I can't prove that they have ever seen Him." Some children

³⁷⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.11.

³⁷⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.15

³⁷⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.92

³⁸⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.124

³⁸¹ e.g. SEFTON SACRE: pp.72, 78.

found the idea hilarious. You'd know God is real if you could do something like – phone Him:

"If your dad was down the pub having a drink you'd know he was there because you could phone him ... and you could hear him [but you can't do that with God.]"³⁸²

It was not always so blunt. Children in a Year 8 group agreed that they could believe in God if he did a miracle or actually stepped in to help them and they mused over the fact that the Brazilian Football team might have been helped because five of their players wore a shirt that said 'I believe in Jesus.'³⁸³ But when it came to considering the life of Jesus and the miracles associated with him, they could not accept them either because stories of the feeding of 5000 and walking on water³⁸⁴ seemed exaggerated and there was no way of proving that they had really happened. In some areas there was confusion:

"I believe in God, but I don't believe in Jesus.... How did that baby get into Mary's belly when she didn't have sex?"³⁸⁵

The confusion went much further when children continued to try to work out how God could have a son, and how they could both be God at the same time.³⁸⁶ Some children found church boring – a kind of commodity that could be accepted or rejected at will.³⁸⁷ In other cases there was already an acceptance of religious beliefs outside of Christianity. A reason for this for one child was that coming to an understanding of several religions in R.E., helped them to find one of their own.³⁸⁸ Reincarnation was accepted by a significant proportion of children. A Year 6, Primary school child put it this way:

³⁸² SEFTON SACRE: p.72
³⁸³ SEFTON SACRE: p.113
³⁸⁴ SEFTON SACRE: p.159
³⁸⁵ SEFTON SACRE: p.132
³⁸⁶ SEFTON SACRE: p.162
³⁸⁷ SEFTON SACRE: p.65
³⁸⁸ SEFTON SACRE: p.30 (See also pp.37,46)

"I believe ... I don't know why we're made if [life] is just going to stop. I think ... like in heaven you choose what you want to do next or where you want to go next. So if you want to be a cat you say, 'I want to be a cat.'"³⁸⁹

The overwhelming response from children was however that it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you believe it for yourself and it does you good. The truth of religion lies in whether or not it is 'good for me.' As a Year 6 pupil put it, "The truth is your own beliefs; it's what you believe in."³⁹⁰ 'Postmodern' though that might sound, there was no evidence of other elements of postmodernism in their responses. Nobody rejected Christianity because as a metanarrative it needed to be rejected. Nobody cast doubt on historical records because they could be twisted and adapted by original writers. Nobody placed their optimism for the future against the teaching of Jesus about the end of the world. Nobody had been influenced by New Age speculation that there was a real spiritual world that lay behind religions. Yet the implications were not far away, and possibly dimly realised. If there is no absolute morality and no God, then there can be no sin; and if there is no sin then the idea of God's 'son' coming into the world to die for sin makes no sense, even if the historical records of the happenings were to be accepted. It is not really surprising that children in Years 6 to 9 had rejected the Christian faith, and were seeking spirituality in a world outside of and alien to Christianity.

It was never the intention to use conversations with children to indicate links between postmodern thinking and attitudes to religion in general and to Christianity in particular. The purpose of the questions was to establish the level of language and understanding of children so that no mistakes would be made in the construction of elements of an attitude test.

Yet the comments and reactions of children did reveal in a very general way that there were links between their positive attitudes towards Postmodern thinking and their attitudes towards Christianity. It was clear that they

³⁸⁹ SEFTON SACRE: p.86

³⁹⁰ SEFTON SACRE: p.123.

adopted a position of relativity towards truth; 'What is true is true for me.' It was clear that they accepted a 'pick-and-mix' attitude towards religion. They saw no problem in believing in a Christian concept of God and a Hindu concept of reincarnation at the same time. They could take what they liked and what suited them best.

They did react against power structures that resulted in unfairness whether it was in discrimination against the disadvantaged or the exploitation of consumers through dishonest advertising. It appears that such indications are more than mere chance happenings through relatively informal conversations. Whether they are indeed expressions of deeper held convictions will need to be confirmed by a simple attitude test. If they are expressions of deeply held convictions there will be implications for both teachers of religious Education and for those responsible for teaching-ministry in churches.

So far as the content of R.E. is concerned, if one adopts the point of view that the purpose of R.E. is to inform children about faith positions so that they are able to understand and relate to those of other faiths and from that understanding find a context for their own faith, then it is already clear that teaching about one fundamental aspect of Christianity was defective. Many children who claimed a 'belief in God,' said that they did not 'believe in Jesus.' Nobody seemed to have any idea of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation - that Jesus was God in human form.

So far as method of teaching R.E. is concerned the discussion-in-groups-of-five method worked well, and some children asked their teacher if it could be continued in R.E. They seemed to get greater stimulus, perhaps because of greater opportunity of participation in a small group, and they were certainly more relaxed in an informal setting. One must not forget however, that they were meeting with someone they felt they could trust from outside of their school, rather than with a teacher who made an assessment of their progress. Perhaps R.E. 'works' in something less formal than a normal classroom situation.

I will look into these implications when we have set up and applied the attitude test, utilising the language and content that has proved successful in conversation.

5.3: Postscript

Before leaving an account of their reactions, it is interesting to record and compare the reactions of the children in years 7 and 8 (and even year 9) with those aged 15 – 24. Right of Admission Reserved (Channel 4, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and media agency OMD UK) commissioned a survey of 1200 in the age group, and the results were published in Autumn 2002 under the title 'Having Great Time.' An article in the *Daily Mail*³⁹¹ called the age group the 'Me, Me Generation.' and drew out the following characteristics:

- Family and Religion are not central to their lives any more, so they are not growing up with the same networks of support.
- Programmes such as Big Brother have showed that anyone can be famous, anyone can be beautiful (with plastic surgery) and anyone can be rich (if they work hard for it)
- They feel they are more in control of their destinies, so if they do not succeed they have only themselves to blame.
- They feel they can make little difference, that Government is out of their control, and therefore have lost interest in voting in elections.
- Clubbing is the preferred way for a night out but 51% enjoyed "hanging out" at friends houses. Clubbing is more for Friday and Saturday night after a week's work.
- Although interested in fashion as many as a third have turned their backs on designer labels believing them to be 'uncool.' They choose clothes to express individuality

HULL, L: Me, Me Generation, *Daily Mail*, London, 11.10.02. p.31.

It seems that the young people involved had taken their thinking (characteristic of children in Sefton schools) to a further level. It was additional confirmation that Brierley's 'tween-agers' are Postmodern in outlook. For my part, it was necessary to seek confirmation within the same age group, but in different schools within Sefton, and the way that this was done by utilising ideas of children in an attitude test will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: A SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES

I have described in the previous chapter how it is possible to talk with children between educational years 6 and 9 about many issues that arise in connection with Postmodernism, although there are some words with which they are not all familiar. Words like 'pastiche,' 'ethics' and 'capitalism' are not known by all children. 'Good behaviour' was more familiar to them than 'morality,' and they prefer 'true' to 'truth' and 'real' to 'reality.' Further, when they speak about 'spiritual' things they are more likely to refer to ghosts and the strange power that lies behind the ouija board, than to a deep relationship with God. This did not mean that the children resisted or resented the talk-about; most children positively enjoyed talking about such things even though in some areas, it was breaking new ground for them in school and they needed to 'think aloud.'

The children interviewed talked so freely, that it was possible to discern links between the various ideas that they held. While they seemed to have been affected by Postmodernism in many ways, they had not always come to their conclusions by thinking but by some form of absorption from contemporary life. They agreed with its emphasis on relativity, somewhat accepted its influence upon culture, identified with its opposition to the power of commercialism and advertising and were generally united in a rejection of religion overall and of Christianity in particular.

Were these trends real? Were they set up by the interviewer? Were they temporary? My investigation needed to go further to see whether the attitudinal connections that appeared in the interviews always held. No test of attitude towards Postmodernism (certainly in the more elaborated way that it has been analysed in this study) was available to test links between attitudes to Postmodernism and attitudes to Christianity, but it could be constructed, based on the conversations already held with children, and then utilised with another group of children, preferably restricted to years 7 and 8, and subsequently made available to others in a similar field of research who wished to follow through things in their own way.

It is one thing to talk to children about issues that interconnect religion and postmodern theory and to record the outcomes of the conversation. It is quite another to devise an objective survey for future use, that can be used with confidence with large numbers of children and by those who not yet having been persuaded by Postmodern (anti-scientific-statistical) theory, still wish to base their conclusions on formal test methods. In this chapter, I will describe the steps taken to produce and then administer such a survey. I will explain the problems that had to be overcome, describe the schools where the survey was used, and give an account of the findings, in terms of whether or not, relationships really exist between acceptance of Postmodernism and rejection of the church/Christianity.

6.1. Problems to be overcome

The first step was to overcome problems familiar to those involved in the construction of such attitude tests.

The subjectivity of the researcher

It could be argued from a Postmodern perspective that it is not possible to develop an objective test because its construction is inseparable from the attitudes and outlook of the person who set it up. In Medieval times, although they worked in different fields and did not publish tests and tables, scholarship exercised within and through the monastery was inseparable from the spirituality of the monks. In the contemporary, secular world there is sometimes a suspicion of the spiritual in scholarship as though religion or spirituality might somehow at least be irrelevant and at worst distort results.³⁹² It might even be that in some cases such suspicion has been justified because it is not impossible for statistics to be 'laundered' such that they support a particular point-of-view whether arising from religion or from

³⁹² SULLIVAN, J: Scholarship and Spirituality in CARR, D. & HALDANE, J (Eds.) : *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2003, pp.127-140

secularity. At least, true spirituality should engender transparency and honesty, and at best, while recognising the dangers of subjectivity, seek to utilise every opportunity to overcome them.

I have tried to make clear exactly where I stand at relevant points in this study, but for purposes of transparency I reiterate my personal position:

- I have been a Christian for about 60 years, and most of my working life has been involved in Religious Education. My involvement in R.E. of children has been accomplished through the national education system, and that of adults through teaching-ministry in the church and through lecturing within a theological college distance learning project.
- I am concerned about the future of the church because a succession of statistical studies suggests that churches are 'dying' in the United Kingdom, partly because young people are not replacing the older ones who pass on, and partly because in some churches (or denominations) insufficient candidates are coming forward to be trained for leadership and ministry. In both cases the problem might lie with the 'younger generation.' I am seeking answers as to why this might be so, in order to help to reverse the process, and am concerned that the problem might be arising through the pressures and attractions of contemporary culture, commonly referred to as 'Postmodern.' This raises the problem that when the term is used in academic circles, there has been minimal agreement about its meaning, and when it is heard by the average churchgoer, there is marginal understanding about its meaning.
- I have therefore sought to set out an acceptable, substantial account of the nature of Postmodernism, and have been given the opportunity to talk about the elements of Postmodernism with a limited number (180) of children in schools in the area where I live, within the age groups where the majority appear to begin to drop out of church activities. The object of the conversations was to see whether Postmodern ideas and culture have any meaning for them, and what language they use to speak about them.

The children I talked with certainly appeared to hold Postmodern ideas of a breadth that justified the extensive survey undertaken on Postmodernism and recorded in Part 1 this dissertation. It was also clear that views they held were in conflict with Christian and other monotheistic faiths.

- I wished to take this a step further by developing a survey (a psychologist might refer to it as a 'psychological attitude test') to show whether or not there are any relationships between acceptance of Postmodern ideas and the rejection of Christianity, among children between (educational) years 7 and 8. It was intended to use the instrument with a small but similar number of different children to those already interviewed, and then make it available to others who might wish to investigate further. [This was not acceptable to my sponsors (Sefton Education Authority), as they wished to check earlier findings against a larger number of children.] The purpose of the survey is: (a) to confirm whether or not trends seen during informal conversations hold in a formal [form-completion] situation by showing any links between Postmodern thinking/culture and the rejection of Christianity/church in children at the commencement of their secondary school education; (b) to establish whether the survey is useful enough so as to be made available for wider use; and (c) to make the results of the survey available to teachers of Religious Education in schools and in churches so that if a relationship between Postmodern theory and rejection of Christianity is demonstrated, they might (re)consider the content and method of their current teaching.

I do not wish my commitment to Christianity to distort the results of the research, which would in any case be counterproductive to my purpose. I have therefore taken steps to prevent distortion by viewing the issue from a Postmodern perspective and by talking with children to ascertain their interest and language level before construction of a test. Strong Christian conviction does not mean that there will be distortion. Sullivan has argued convincingly for the place of Christian Universities that are 'open and

inclusive to those who see things differently.³⁹³ Indeed, to deny the Christian University a place is to 'distort any education that claims to be liberal in nature and intention.'³⁹⁴

The use of objective-scientific method in a postmodern situation.

Postmodern thinking has rejected and replaced the thinking of Modernism. The utilisation of statistics so as to draw conclusions from attitude tests is an example of objective-scientific methodology that is part of the Modern world that has been rejected by Postmodern thinkers. Further, if there are doubts about objectivity within natural science, there are still more doubts about psychology. There are sound reasons for Postmodern scepticism. While natural science considers itself to be completely objective and above subjectivity, such that if something cannot be objectified by method then there can be no science of that area, it fails to recognise its own fallibility; it investigates everything except its own nature. Critics within Postmodernism point out that what the scientist 'sees' depends upon the history and culture that underlies his consciousness; consciousness comes with ready-made understandings that cannot be eliminated by method. There is no non-presuppositional knowing; one has to accept some things before one can know anything. Some scientists seem to be unable to see or to accept that science is historically and culturally conditioned – that the scientist is formed and acts through an unconscious acceptance of a traditional community-based authority that provides a way of theorising, working on and changing the world.³⁹⁵ And what a world! It was Bernstein who claimed that science developed in order to counter irrational fears of powers of darkness (q.v). Beyond such criticism, Postmodernism accuses science of scientific imperialism - the attitude that it has the mastery because it knows everything,

³⁹³ SULLIVAN, J: University, Christian Faith and the Church, In_ ASTLEY, FRANCIS, & SULLIVAN, J: (Eds.) *The Idea of a Christian University*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 2004, Ch.12.

³⁹⁴ Quoted from NORD, W: Liberal Education and Religious Studies, in BLUMHOFER, E: *Religion, Education and the American Experience*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2002, p.15.

³⁹⁵ KUHN, T: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University Press, Chicago, 1970, p.xx.

and as such an element in the exercise of power, its 'objective' knowledge is used to keep people in their place.

The objections, while real and important, seem to me, to have missed the point to some degree. They are set out as objections to science, whereas they should be objections to the scientist. It is the *scientist* who refuses to recognise his own fallibility through his own social-cultural conditioning and exercises a power position above others because as a scientist he claims to have objective (if not absolute) knowledge. In order to overcome this particular problem, I approach the provision of an attitude test tentatively, in the attitude of what Bernstein, writing in 1983, termed 'democratic discussion.' Such 'discussion' includes the following:

- The tentativeness of all knowledge
- The infinite variety of perspectives and understandings that people bring to discussion
- The endless nature of enquiry and the refusal to accept a definite answer
- A genuine receptivity of other views
- A striving for agreement that may be impossible to achieve
- The patience to hear out all possible opinions,³⁹⁶

Beyond 'science' as such, there are also specific objections to psychological research. It has been objected that as a science, psychology never investigates itself, examining, for example, reasons why psychologists undertake psychology. But beside (sometimes misplaced) objections to science itself, there are other objections to psychology, although they appear to me to be shallow and it is a temptation to dismiss them. It is sometimes objected that psychology is not even an acceptable science because of its many schools and disagreement among practitioners as to its nature. It is sometimes objected that far from being a study of human conduct and experience it is more concerned with how we can improve information flow and efficiency so as to regulate people rather than understand them, and as such is a power-tool for business. It is sometimes objected that whereas

³⁹⁶ BERNSTEIN, R: *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, p. xx.

psychology sets out to investigate human nature, its very methodology dehumanises the subjects. It is easy to respond by saying that the diversity of psychology is grounded in the fact that it is still an infant-science, and that criticism of its use within power-structures should be directed more at business than at psychology itself. The point about dehumanising has been taken in this study. One way of overcoming the problem is:

Commitment to a phenomenological approach where the subject is seen as a source of data rather than an object of experimental investigation – thus for example, allowing subjects to give their own accounts rather than having them jump through experimental hoops.³⁹⁷

It is what Foucault called 'subjugated knowledges' – local and unelaborated knowledge and experience traditionally ignored or downgraded because it was considered as having failed to pass the test of universality and scientificity.

To return to the subject of subjectivity: there is a parallel problem that is similar to it. Derrida called it 'Reflexivity.' It is a fact that research can be known only through the researcher who is affected by social connections such as financial provision, influence by the powers that be and the expected use of language.³⁹⁸ Sullivan too refers to factors such as finance, relationships with others and the depth of knowledge of specific methodology.³⁹⁹ I have to acknowledge the truth in this in that I have already explained on p.128 that I have been encouraged by members of Sefton's S.A.C.R.E., and have been assisted by one member of Sefton's advisory team in particular, who has not only made it possible for me to visit schools, but who has made it possible for the Authority to bear the expense of publishing the report and test paper on my behalf. But there has never been any pressure put upon me to meet their requirements other than the inclusion

³⁹⁷ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Postmodernism and Education*, Routledge, London, p.43, referring to ROGERS, C: *On Becoming a Person*, Constable, London, 1967.

³⁹⁸ USHER, R. & EDWARDS, R: *Op.cit.* p.149.

³⁹⁹ SULLIVAN, J: *Scholarship and Spirituality*, in CARR, D., & HALDANE, J (Eds.) : *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, pp.127-140

of top junior children (Year 6) in the original 'Conversations with Children' because of (what turned out to be) correct intuition that there was little difference between attitudes to contemporary society between children in educational years 6 and year 7. Moreover I have resisted the pressure to write in 'academic' language partly because a personal aim in teaching has always been to communicate effectively, and partly because I wish the results of the research to be easily available to those concerned about Religious Education who would not call themselves 'Academic.' I have tried to overcome the problem of subjectivity by taking time to be totally transparent as to my personal position, and taking time to talk matters over with children, letting their language and thinking shape the formal survey. This necessitates giving the children opportunity to express their own feelings about the survey itself, room for which needs to be found on the published test-paper. It also necessitates open-ness in encouraging others to utilise the survey so as to confirm or reject the results, and suggestion rather than authority [power-position] when making observations for the use of teachers in school or in church. This being done, I see no overwhelming objection to the approach taken in this study.

Use of existing material:

Why not use material already available? At least a starting point could be made by using an existing attitude test towards Christianity among children, already used in numerous research projects. Such a test was originally produced by Francis in the University of Wales, and not only has it been widely used, but an invitation had been given to others to use it.⁴⁰⁰ In the test, responses were made to statements about Christianity and marked on a Lickert-type five-point scale from 'Agree strongly,' through 'Agree,' 'Neutral' and 'Disagree,' to 'Disagree strongly,' and confirmation that such a simple approach was as effective as more complex methodology, had been

⁴⁰⁰ KAY, W. & FRANCIS, L: *Drift From the Churches*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996. They issue an invitation –'to pick up our scale of attitude towards Christianity, and set it to work, both to replicate our own studies, and to push the boundaries further into other areas.'

demonstrated by Francis in his own study.⁴⁰¹ He contrasted the methods of attitude testing used by Thurstone⁴⁰², Lickert⁴⁰³, Guttman⁴⁰⁴ and Edwards,⁴⁰⁵ all of which had been tested over time, and concluded that

The Lickert scaling technique is able to provide the most consistently reliable and valid measure of attitude towards Christianity over this wide age range from the age of eight years and over. Its excellence has been demonstrated in use of the test in many researches.⁴⁰⁶

When used by Thompson in his work at Bangor on *The Religious Beliefs of Young People*,⁴⁰⁷ the original attitude test on attitudes to Christianity was utilised to produce a questionnaire as set out on the following page:

⁴⁰¹ FRANCIS, L: Unpublished PhD thesis – *An Enquiry into the Concept, 'Readiness for Religion,'* University of Cambridge, 1976.

⁴⁰² THURSTONE, L. & CHAVE, E.: *The Measurement of Attitude*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1929.

⁴⁰³ LICKERT, R: A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes, *Archives of Psychology*, 140, 1-55, 1932.

⁴⁰⁴ GUTTMANN, L: A Basis for Scaling Qualitative Data, *American Sociological review*, 9, pp. 139-150, 1944.

⁴⁰⁵ EDWARDS, A: *Techniques of Attitude Scale Construction* New York., Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957

⁴⁰⁶ FRANCIS, L: The Development of a Scale of Attitude Towards Christianity among 8-16 Year Olds, CORE (Collected Original Resources in Education) Vol.12. (3), Carmarthen, 1988..

⁴⁰⁷ THOMPSON, P: *The Religious Beliefs of Young People*, Bangor, University of Wales, 2002

Please answer the [following] questions in the following way. Read the [statement] carefully and think 'Do I agree with it?'

If you agree strongly, put a ring round	AS A NC D DS
If you agree put a ring round	AS A NC D DS
If you are not certain, put a ring round	AS A NC D DS
If you disagree, put a ring round	AS A NC D DS
If you disagree strongly, put a ring round	AS A NC D DS

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. I find it boring to listen to the Bible | AS A NC D DS |
| 2. I know that Jesus helps me | AS A NC D DS |
| 3. Saying my prayers helps me a lot | AS A NC D DS |
| 4. The church is very important to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 5. I think going to church is a waste of my time | AS A NC D DS |
| 6. I want to love Jesus | AS A NC D DS |
| 7. I think church services are boring | AS A NC D DS |
| 8. I think people who pray are stupid | AS A NC D DS |
| 9. God helps me lead a better life | AS A NC D DS |
| 10. I like to learn about God very much | AS A NC D DS |
| 11. God means a lot to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 12. I believe that God helps people | AS A NC D DS |
| 13. Prayer helps me a lot | AS A NC D DS |
| 14. I know that Jesus is very close to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 15. I think praying is a good thing | AS A NC D DS |
| 16. I think the Bible is out of date | AS A NC D DS |
| 17. I believe that God listens to prayer | AS A NC D DS |
| 18. Jesus doesn't mean anything to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 19. God is very real to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 20. I think saying prayers does no good | AS A NC D DS |
| 21. The idea of God means much to me | AS A NC D DS |
| 22. I believe that Jesus still helps people | AS A NC D DS |
| 23. I know that God helps me | AS A NC D DS |
| 24. I find it hard to believe in God | AS A NC D DS |

The test could be extended through similar style statements to investigate areas of Postmodernism and to seek any connection between the areas/elements. When the initial test of attitude towards Christianity is brought together with three other 24-element statements of attitude towards Postmodernism as defined in this study, and four personal statements that indicate area lived in, school, year group and sex, are included it conveniently produces a document that requires 100 responses together with space given for children to react freely, personally and anonymously to the test as a whole.

There is however a complication. Although denied by some churches where a high success rate is claimed in 'holding on' to children,⁴⁰⁸ it is clear from surveys undertaken by Christian Research, from denominational statistics, from the occasional newspaper article and from personal experience in some 50 years' involvement in Religious Education that there has been a great and recent change in the attitudes of children at the start of their secondary school education towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. Attitudes towards Christianity have changed among children in educational years 6-9 to such a degree that some of the statements in Francis' attitude test would almost certainly appear to be unrealistic. It is not simply loss of interest and mental retraction from religion. There is a change in the personal, feeling element too. Thirty or more years ago, children who were part of church life would resonate with statements such as 'I want to love Jesus,' 'I know that Jesus is very close to me,' and 'I know that God helps me,' Such personal love-relationship is central to Christianity. Christians believe that following the step of faith in which a person accepts that Jesus was crucified on their behalf so that God might judicially meet the penalty for their sin, God as Spirit (as the Spirit of Christ, or as the Holy Spirit) actually enters into that persons life to change them on a step-by-step basis so that they can overcome sinful failure in their own life. The personal relationship that this involves becomes increasingly real and important as individuals

⁴⁰⁸ "Kidscape," operating in Inner City Liverpool is an example. Activities are intensely controlled, and homes are visited weekly, but organisers would claim that this is the way the Holy Spirit has led them and is working through their 'outreach.'

grow in their Christian faith. The Easter hymn written for children by Mrs. C. Alexander in the 19th. Century (and sometimes used in contemporary Primary school assemblies) says it all:

There is a green hill far away,
Outside a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has He loved!
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood
And try His works to do

In short, there is a loving, personal relationship resulting from gratitude at being forgiven, and for help received from God so as to lead a better life. It is this relationship that is reflected in Francis' attitude test by such statements as 'I know that Jesus helps me,' 'I want to love Jesus,' 'I know that Jesus is very close to me,' and 'God is very real to me.' These words would have meant a lot to Mrs. Alexander, and a great deal to children of an earlier generation. Those who reject any absolutes that make a doctrine of sin possible, who believe that the New Testament accounts of the life of Jesus are exaggerated and untrue (and in any case have to be interpreted as

required by the individual), and who claim that statements implying personal relationship with Jesus are meaningless; even 'sick,' live in a different world. Hence the fact that no such relationship was even hinted at by the few children interviewed, and that most indicated that they had no church connection at all. The few children who *believed*, having been brought up in Christian beliefs by their parents, did not appear to believe that God actually helps people to meet their daily needs. Prayers, as read in church or school are a formality and not personal conversation. The seven positive statements in the test, of help from God or help through prayer, again, would have little meaning to the children interviewed so far in Sefton schools. It is not so much the rejection of Christianity because Fundamentalist concepts are outgrown⁴⁰⁹ when children come to mature thinking⁴¹⁰ as Greaves suggested. It is a much earlier rejection than that, before rational thinking even fully takes place, that appears to have been absorbed from the culture in which the children are immersed.

There is another problem. Discussion with children over all of the elements revealed that attitude-statements cannot always be written very briefly and this contrasts with the extreme brevity of some of the attitude-statements in the Francis test, and therefore, for continuity there is a need to expand some of the original statements. Further, the attitude-statements in the Francis test do not cover all of the areas that came to the fore in talking with children. The additional statements, added to the Francis test by Thompson, are often fuller, and deal with additional religious subjects. I have therefore found it necessary to add to the length of some of the individual attitude-statements, and also add to the scope of the questions as a whole.

⁴⁰⁹ GREAVES, S: Early Adolescents and Biblical Literature; Postmodern Youth Making Meaning from Ancient Texts, *Journal of Religious Education*, 51(1) 2003, p.21.

⁴¹⁰ e.g.

1967: GOLDMAN, R: *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul,

1989: FOWLER, J: *Stages of Faith; the Psychology of Human Development and the Search for Meaning*. San Francisco. Harper & Row,

1990: HYDE, K: *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence; a Comprehensive review of the Research*, London, Religious Education Press.

1998: COPLEY, T: *Echo of Angels; the First Report of the Biblos Project*, Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter.

1998: HAY, D. & NYE, R: *The Spirit of the Child*, London, Harper Collins,

It therefore appears that while the format can be borrowed, the content of some of the attitude statements towards Christianity need to be changed, while retaining 50% positive and 50% negative statements, and that the format be followed through in other sections.

Scope of questions.

Comparison of the earlier chapters of this dissertation that set out the full scope of Postmodernism, with the content of conversations with children, demonstrate that there is a considerable difference in level in many respects. There are some aspects of Postmodernism that could not sensibly be talked through with children between the ages of 10+ and 13+. Many children 'thought on their feet,' because although they had absorbed Postmodern attitudes from contemporary culture, they had not, until the time of the conversations, actually talked things through; and there were some areas of silence that indicated that they were not yet ready to think (and talk) things through. This is not surprising. It was pointed out in the initial pages of this study that writing about Postmodernism is incoherent for many intelligent adults and they do not understand what it is about. There are therefore legitimate areas for inclusion in a test of attitude towards Postmodernism that cannot be included in this particular investigation. It would be quite in order in a test of influence by Postmodernism to include (in the 'Cultural' section):

Education should be adjusted to the needs of the child;
the child should not be adjusted to the needs of the
curriculum.

AS A NC D DS,

or:

There is no such thing as 'high' or 'low' culture in
reading; it is simply a book.

AS A NC D DS

but not for children of 11+ - 12+. One might get over the problems inherent in the second example by referring to 'Classics' and 'Thrillers,' but attitude

statements have to reflect the age and experience of the children as demonstrated in the conversations held with children. It might be for others to take this study further so as to explore more complex areas with older or more able participants. It will be necessary to confine ourselves to issues of relevance and understanding of the children concerned instead of including the whole gamut of Postmodernism.

These considerations being brought together, the following Attitude Test Paper was developed, and printed over four pages.

6.2. The Formal Survey:

WHAT I FEEL ABOUT LIFE.

Your attitudes to the statements that follow in this survey about life as it is today will be used to try to make some parts of the education syllabus more meaningful for you. Look at each statement carefully, indicate what you really think about it and try to be as honest as possible. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and although each successive section might seem to get harder and harder, it would help if you do not spend too long over any one question and if you do not discuss your answers with anyone until papers have been handed in. Every answer you give is absolutely private and confidential. You do not have to give your name or say what form you are in, but we do need to know a few things about you so as to see what other people who are similar to you, feel about the same things. At the end there is space for you to say what you think about the questions and the paper. Was it – hard, stupid, a waste of time, thought provoking, easy or whatever. Thank you for your help.

ABOUT YOURSELF:

Write your answer, using one of the words in brackets if they are there:

1. I live in [Ainsdale, Birkdale, Blundellsands, Bootle, Crosby, Formby, Freshfield, Hightown, Ince Blundell, Litherland, Maghull, Netherton, Seaforth, Sefton village, Southport] _____
2. The name of my school is _____
3. I am in [Year 7, Year 8] _____
4. I am [Male, Female] _____

ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDES TO LIFE:

Answer the remainder of the paper by looking at the statement and asking yourself, "Do I agree with this?"

If you agree strongly, put a ring round **AS**

AS A NC D DS

If you agree, put a ring round **A**

AS A NC D DS

If you are not certain, put a ring round **NC**

AS A NC D DS

If you disagree, put a ring round **D**

AS A NC D DS

If you disagree strongly, put a ring round **DS**

AS A NC D DS

CULTURE:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 5. Plain buildings need some form of decoration | AS A NC D DS |
| 6. You don't need to understand a book - just enjoy it! | AS A NC D DS |
| 7. Newspapers twist the truth to get better sales | AS A NC D DS |
| 8. History isn't real; it's made up by people for their own ends | AS A NC D DS |
| 9. Some paintings are good and some are bad. | AS A NC D DS |
| 10. I like songs that have a good tune and clear words | AS A NC D DS |
| 11. A photographer shows us more about himself than his subject | AS A NC D DS |
| 12. Pop music, and text messages are poor music and writing | AS A NC D DS |
| 13. Books that lead you into a strange, future world are exciting | AS A NC D DS |
| 14. I dislike plays and drama that I do not understand | AS A NC D DS |
| 15. I like big square buildings like blocks of flats | AS A NC D DS |
| 16. When you dance you should feel free, not follow steps | AS A NC D DS |
| 17. I prefer a straight picture rather than a collage | AS A NC D DS |
| 18. Art is just art; not 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' | AS A NC D DS |
| 19. I prefer reading a book to watching TV | AS A NC D DS |
| 20. It's stupid to ornament the human body with rings and tattoos. | AS A NC D DS |
| 21. An artist should keep to the rules, not just express himself | AS A NC D DS |
| 22. When choosing a book, 'Thrillers' are different to 'Classics' | AS A NC D DS |
| 23. I like mixtures of styles in everything | AS A NC D DS |
| 24. In the end, the reader is more important than the writer | AS A NC D DS |
| 25. Films that collapse space and time are very good | AS A NC D DS |
| 26. TV tells us what's really going on in the world | AS A NC D DS |
| 27. Scoring a goal is more important than the celebration | AS A NC D DS |
| 28. I like fashions that mix up things from all over the world. | AS A NC D DS |

COMMERCE:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 29. There's no harm in making a lot of money | AS A NC D DS |
| 30. You should build workplaces where labour is cheap | AS A NC D DS |
| 31. It is evil to treat people like human machines in a factory | AS A NC D DS |
| 32. It is just hard luck when workplaces close and there's no jobs | AS A NC D DS |
| 33. Week-end and night-work destroys families | AS A NC D DS |
| 34. It's good for people to work from home as it will cost less | AS A NC D DS |
| 35. People with money are the people with real power | AS A NC D DS |
| 36. We are exploited by advertising to buy things we don't need | AS A NC D DS |
| 37. Real power should be with Government, not big business | AS A NC D DS |
| 38. Rich people get richer by exploiting other people | AS A NC D DS |
| 39. It's a good idea to make things that wear out quickly | AS A NC D DS |
| 40. I don't like the thought that machines might replace workers | AS A NC D DS |
| 41. There's no harm in commercial e-mails and text messages | AS A NC D DS |
| 42. It's wrong to employ women simply because they are cheaper | AS A NC D DS |
| 43. Colonialism was good as it developed farming | AS A NC D DS |
| 44. It is wrong to move business overseas where labour is cheap | AS A NC D DS |
| 45. You can't ever get too much information about things | AS A NC D DS |
| 46. I don't like being watched by cameras and computers | AS A NC D DS |
| 47. Companies should move abroad if taxes get too high | AS A NC D DS |
| 48. People working from home lose out on social life | AS A NC D DS |
| 49. You need to keep up-to-date with fashion | AS A NC D DS |
| 50. Robots instead of people working is a good idea | AS A NC D DS |
| 51. "Stars" shouldn't wear things to persuade us to buy them too | AS A NC D DS |
| 52. Part time work saves giving pensions - a good idea! | AS A NC D DS |

RELIGION:

53. There's no difference: all religions worship the same God	AS	A	NC	D	DS
54. I say prayers and it helps me a lot	AS	A	NC	D	DS
55. God can help people to live better lives	AS	A	NC	D	DS
56. Stories about Jesus in the Bible are exaggerated.	AS	A	NC	D	DS
57. Someone had to create the world; it must have been God	AS	A	NC	D	DS
58. "Spirituality" means what it is like to be near to God	AS	A	NC	D	DS
59. When you die, you are reincarnated into another life	AS	A	NC	D	DS
60. Miracles do sometimes happen	AS	A	NC	D	DS
61. It doesn't matter what religion you believe in	AS	A	NC	D	DS
62. Jesus was only a man and didn't rise from the dead	AS	A	NC	D	DS
63. Playing with the ouija board is exciting and real	AS	A	NC	D	DS
64. Jesus dying for our sin makes sense to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
65. Going to church is a waste of time	AS	A	NC	D	DS
66. People who die will one day be brought back from the dead	AS	A	NC	D	DS
67. The world came into being through chance	AS	A	NC	D	DS
68. "Spirituality" means ghosts and spirits	AS	A	NC	D	DS
69. There is some spiritual world behind all religions	AS	A	NC	D	DS
70. The Bible is true in everything it says	AS	A	NC	D	DS
71. Jesus was God and the things he did proved it	AS	A	NC	D	DS
72. Christians live better lives than other people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
73. Witchcraft and 'New Age' are as good as other religions	AS	A	NC	D	DS
74. People who pray are stupid	AS	A	NC	D	DS
75. Christianity is the only true religion	AS	A	NC	D	DS
76. I often go to church	AS	A	NC	D	DS

THINKING:

77. Truth is what is true for me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
78. There is something big and wonderful that explains everything	AS	A	NC	D	DS
79. Human thinking is more important than feelings	AS	A	NC	D	DS
80. There is no one meaning in anything said or written	AS	A	NC	D	DS
81. There is no absolute power or being to tell you what is right	AS	A	NC	D	DS
82. You should never, ever tell a lie	AS	A	NC	D	DS
83. Mystery and magic are nonsense	AS	A	NC	D	DS
84. The only real things are things you can use your senses for	AS	A	NC	D	DS
85. "Good" is whatever helps me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
86. You should always tell the truth and never lie	AS	A	NC	D	DS
87. What a person says can mean almost anything	AS	A	NC	D	DS
88. Thinking and ideas in "the West" are superior to others	AS	A	NC	D	DS
89. My 'self' is the most important part of me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
90. Science is the basis for human progress	AS	A	NC	D	DS
91. History doesn't really exist; it is written by the 'winners'	AS	A	NC	D	DS
92. You can use reason to answer anything	AS	A	NC	D	DS
93. Science has made a mess of things; there is no real future	AS	A	NC	D	DS
94. Nothing or nobody has the answer to everything.	AS	A	NC	D	DS
95. When a thing is said to be 'bad' it is a way of controlling us.	AS	A	NC	D	DS
96. Some viewpoints cannot be treated with respect	AS	A	NC	D	DS
97. Life is full of contradictions	AS	A	NC	D	DS
98. Things can be real even if we can't use our reason to prove it	AS	A	NC	D	DS
99. Truth is what works rather than what is correct	AS	A	NC	D	DS
100. There will always be a better world to look forward to	AS	A	NC	D	DS

Now, if you wish, tell us what you think about this paper:



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Extent of the survey:

It was my intention to try out the survey sheets on 180 people, to match the numbers of children who had taken part in the earlier 'conversations' from four areas of Sefton. This did not work out. One reason was that some head teachers and heads of department of R.E. were enthusiastic in wishing to see for themselves whether there was any link between response to the Christian faith and response to other elements of Postmodern theory in their own schools (although that did not make it possible for them to present the survey sheet to all children within the age groups). Another reason was the enthusiasm of Sefton Education Authority staff, who wished to involve areas of Sefton not previously involved, and who wished to involve Roman Catholic schools. As a result, 426 children took part as follows, each individually identifiable by a number placed on their survey sheet, but kept confidentially by myself.

SCHOOL	YEAR 7		YEAR 8	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Ainsdale High School	26	28	22	14
Deyes High School	19	25	26	17
Range High School	26	25	0	0
St. Ambrose Barlow R.C. High School	21	26	16	22
Maricourt R.C. High School	26	29	32	26
Totals	118	133	96	79
Overall total	426			

The schools' catchment areas may be described as follows:

- Ainsdale High School serves the Southern area of Southport. Ainsdale is a large, seaside village (13,000) with a mixture of working class and middle class inhabitants. The village was formed in Victorian times to

provide a centre for agricultural and railway workers, but it became popular with those in the professions and in business who wanted to live by the sea.

- Deyes High and Maricourt R.C. High school are both in Maghull, which is mainly an upper working-class suburb of Liverpool, as an extension of an original rural village. Deyes High School draws on children on the Eastern side of the arterial road that runs through the area. Maricourt R.C. High School has a large catchment area that extends outside of Sefton.
- Range High School is in Formby, meeting the needs of secondary education for local children together with Formby High School – an area which is 'seaside' without being a seaside resort, and housing residents from the multi-millionaire category to those who are 'ordinary, semi-detached.'
- St. Ambrose Barlow R.C. High School is a modern building in a mainly recently developed area of Bootle, surrounded by pleasant, modern housing. Bootle in the past was a populous extension of Liverpool – a place for dock workers and for wealthy merchants. There are large areas where urban renewal has taken place and other areas where it is awaited. The catchment area is small, as there are a large number of Roman Catholic families who live in the area.

Findings of the survey

The response to each statement was marked on a 1-5 basis. Statements concerning culture, commerce and thinking were marked such that strong agreement with the Postmodern position inherent in the statement scored 5, agreement with the Postmodern position scored 4, unsure or neutral responses scored 3, disagreement with the Postmodern position scored 2, and Strong disagreement with the Postmodern position scored 1. In the case of religion, the scoring was reversed. Children affirming some form of identification with the Christian position rather than a Postmodern position

scored highly, and those who denied it obtained a low score. This meant that in each section of the survey, the lowest score obtainable would be 24, and the highest, 120. A score of 72 would indicate a neutral (or uncertain) position. Bearing in mind that it was not intended to apply statistical formulae to the figures, which would be in denial of a Postmodern standpoint, this generated a number of positions from the allocation of figures in the marking of papers.

POSITION	SCORE
Exceptionally strong negative attitude	24 - 36
Strong negative attitude	37 - 48
Weak negative attitude	49 - 60
Neutral but negative	61 - 72
Neutral but positive	73 - 84
Weak positive attitude	85 - 96
Strong positive attitude	97 - 108
Exceptionally strong positive attitude	109 - 120

When the papers were being marked, it was noted that quite often, a child's score for Culture was identical to their score on Thinking. Theoretically (but unrealistically) they could have been up to 96 points apart, but in fact more than half of the papers from each school indicated that scores from the two sections were within 6 points of each other. The actual numbers and percentages of papers within 6 points of each other for each school were as follows:

SCHOOL	SCORES WITHIN 6 POINTS	%
Ainsdale High School	47/86 (*)	54.6
Deyes High School	51/87	58.6
Range High School	37/51	72.5
St Ambrose Barlow R.C. High School	43/65 (*)	66.2
Maricourt R.C. High School	64/113	56.6
Overall	242/402	60.2

Asterisked figures indicate the presence of spoiled papers. There were 4 papers that could not be used from Ainsdale and 20 that could not be used from St. Ambrose Barlow because for one reason or another, the papers were 'spoiled.' In some cases this was due to the fact that the section on 'Thinking' was not completed, perhaps due to insufficient time that the child needed for completion, perhaps because the stress of thinking through nearly 100 questions had been too much when the most difficult section was reached,⁴¹¹ and the child could attempt only one answer (all 'Not Certain'). Occasionally, however, there was opposition to the paper expressed by the construction of patterns and pictures in the grid of responses.

Nevertheless, for nearly 2/3rd. of the participants, the total scores for 'Culture' and for 'Thinking' were within 6 points of one another. Although a surprise when the papers were being marked, such a relationship between 'Culture' and 'Thinking' should not be unexpected, because where thinking has taken place it is likely to be expressed in culture, and where thinking has yet to take place, attitudes that prepare for future thinking are easily absorbed from culture. Such consideration, combined with the recognition that had I increased the allowable difference to 12 points, agreement would have been greater than 80%, persuaded me that I could combine the scores for 'Culture' and 'Thinking' (and divide by two) and investigate the relationships between

⁴¹¹ It has to be recognised too that in an age when children use interactive computer games, DVD and the Internet, an approach which requires responses to 100 questions in an economical presentation, must seem boring to the extreme.

Postmodernism in Culture/Thinking, Commerce and Religion in three categories rather than four. – i.e. Postmodernism as reaction against rationality, reaction against power and reaction against religion.

So what were the attitudes of children in years 7 and 8 of five Sefton schools to Postmodernism as expressed in thinking and in culture? The surprising thing was that the responses could be summarised in very few categories, and that they were mainly in one direction. Results are tabulated on the following page. An examination of the tabulated results will show that

- There are no negative attitudes expressed to Postmodernism among the children who took part in the survey.
- Positive attitudes towards Postmodernism are rare and are confined to 'weakly positive.'
- Most children are neutral, but over 70% were positively neutral
- Although still neutral, Girls were more positive towards Postmodernism than were the boys
- There was little difference between responses from children in Roman Catholic High Schools and Community High Schools, except for boys at St. Ambrose Barlow in Year 7. The responses in this respect are too limited to draw any conclusions

The overall result of the survey at this point appears to indicate that the year 7 and year 8 children surveyed have not adopted Postmodern theory with regard to thinking and to culture, but while they are generally neutral, most children are positively-neutral which means that they have their feet on the bottom rung of the Postmodern ladder. Whether they climb it or not, might be dependent upon a number of factors that will be discussed later.

ATTITUDES TO POSTMODERNISM IN THINKING AND CULTURE

Scores:			61-72	73-84	85-96	97-108
			Negatively neutral	Positively neutral	Weakly positive	Strongly positive
Sex:	Year:	School:				
M	7	A	7	17	1	
		D	3	15		
		R	9	16	1	
		AB	12	6	1	
		M	6	19	1	1
		Totals		[37]	[73]	[4]
	8	A	7	15		
		D	4	22		
		R				
		AB	4	4		
		M	7	25		
		[Totals]		[22]	[66]	
F	7	A	3	23	2	
		D	3	21	1	
		R	5	19		
		AB	2	21		
		M	7	25	1	
		[Totals]		[20]	[109]	[4]
	8	A	2	11	1	
		D	3	13	1	
		R				
		AB	3	12		
		M	2	23	1	
		[Totals]		[10]	[59]	[3]
Total Boys			59	139	4	1
Total Girls			30	168	7	0
Overall			89	307	11	1

Having investigated attitudes to Postmodernism as reaction against Rationality as expressed in thinking and in culture, I then went on to undertake a similar analysis with regard to Postmodernism as a reaction against Power (designated on the survey sheet as Commerce). Results are tabulated below:

ATTITUDES TO POSTMODERNISM IN COMMERCE

Scores:			49-60	61 -72	73 - 84	85 - 96	97-108
			Weak	Neg.	Pos.	Weak	Strong
			neg.	neutr.	neutr.	pos.	pos.
Sex:	Year:	School:					
M	7	A	2	9	13	2	
		D		8	11		
		R	1	11	12	2	
		AB		5	8	4	
		M		9	11	6	
		[Totals]	[3]	[42]	[55]	[14]	
	8	A		7	14	2	
		D		8	16	2	
		R					
		AB	1	2	4	2	
M		1	9	13	8	1	
	[Totals]	[2]	[26]	[47]	[14]	[1]	
F	7	A		9	18	2	
		D		9	15	1	
		R		10	13	2	
		AB		7	19	1	
		M		3	20	5	1
		[Totals]		[38]	[85]	[11]	[1]
	8	A		5	7	2	
		D		6	10	1	
		R					
		AB		7	7	1	
M			5	19	2		
	[Totals]		[23]	[43]	[6]		
Total Boys			5	68	102	28	1
Total Girls				61	128	17	1
Overall			5	129	230	45	2

An immediate contrast will be noted between the figures for Postmodernism as reaction against rationality and Postmodernism as reaction against power. If the tabulated figures were to be converted into histogrammes, then the curve for the second set of figures (v. power) would be flatter and wider than for the first (v. rationality). i.e. the views are much more 'spread out.' Although not strong, there is a larger reaction against Postmodernism from some of children, indicated by the larger proportion of negatively neutral, and weakly negative responses. By contrast there are a small proportion of weakly positive scores. It would appear that some children are more familiar with the power-situation than they are with the rational-situation, so that they are therefore able to move beyond the 'Uncertain' reply.

But are there some areas of Postmodern reaction against power that affect children more than others? In order to investigate this, I picked fifty papers at random, to see what issues were either 'agreed strongly' or 'disagreed strongly'. Only 8 attitude statements out of the 24, elicited a united approach from 10 or more papers.

- **Machines should not replace workers – 12 Agreements**
- **We are exploited by advertising to buy things we do not need – 14 Agreements**
- **It is just hard luck when workplaces close and there's no jobs – 14 Disagreements**
- **I don't like being watched by cameras and computers – 16 Agreements**
- **Robots instead of people working is a good idea – 16 Disagreements**
- **It's a good idea to make things that wear out quickly – 21 Disagreements**
- **It's wrong to employ women because they are cheaper – 22 Agreements**
- **It is evil to treat people like human machines in a factory – 28 Agreements**

Interestingly, it is the situations that are faced in the family and at home - issues of work and purchasing that are the most important.

Where does adoption of a Postmodern reaction against power come from, and why is it seemingly better understood and stronger than adoption of

Postmodern reaction against rationalism? The answer is not inherent in the figures as such, but there are indications in the work I have done that point to small group interaction as the means, at this stage of dealing with the issues.

Firstly, the 'Conversations with Children' indicated that views about the issues of control that lie behind the Postmodern reaction have been experienced, talked through and understood in a small-group situation, normally in the family or in the friendship-group at school. Going through the opening pages of *Conversations with Children*,⁴¹² it is clear that many issues reflected in the attitude statements have been experienced by them and discussed by them in small-group situations. They are aware, for example:

- Of the power and subterfuge used by advertisers to persuade them into making purchases.
- Of the power of companies to make employees redundant
- Of the intrusion of junk mail in the letter-box and 'spam' on the computer
- Of the desirability of making money in business
- That some dictators can do good for their people
- That some dictators can exploit their people
- Of the experience of discipline (and physical punishment) at home to make one keep the rules
- Of the means used by the school to keep things under control
- That people should be made to keep to rules, so as, for example to prevent chewing gum in the streets
- That people should be made to protect the environment so as to preserve the world for the future.
- That TV broadcasts and newspapers do not always tell the truth

In short:

⁴¹² GOWER, R; *Conversations with Children*, Sefton Education Authority, 2002, pp. 1-24

[1] Although not yet either clearly Modern or Postmodern in attitude, their neutrality expresses the beginnings of understanding of contrary viewpoints – that ‘there is a need for power’ v. ‘there should be resistance to power,’ probably derived from experience in a small-group (family/domestic) situation

[2] The desire for small-group discussion was reflected in the response to the conversation situation. Not only were the interviews themselves alive, but children returned to their classes, asking their teachers if it was possible for them to ‘do R.E.’ in such a way. They seem to have understood issues, and contributed enthusiastically in a small group discussion situation in a way that they did not progress in the normal classroom situation. The things discussed in small groups were much more meaningful than normal class teaching.

[3] There was space for children to react to the survey on its back page, and a large number of children did so. Their responses indicated what they felt about the survey.

- 89 responses indicated that the child thought the survey was thought-provoking, good, useful or interesting.
- 107 responses indicated that the child thought the survey was a waste of time, stupid, pointless or boring.
- 111 responses indicated that the child thought the survey was hard or difficult to understand in whole or in part.

The importance of this is that, by contrast, in the small-group discussion situation, children DID understand, and were not only enthusiastically interested, but they did not find it boring and understood the issues, even down to year 6; but in losing such stimulus, they also not only lost their understanding and enthusiasm in the survey, but the loss led to rejection. This might indicate that issues of Postmodernism are best dealt with in a small groups discussion situation.

To sum up. There is no indication that children in Years 7 and 8 have come to any understanding or decision about Postmodern theory with regard to

reaction against rationality; they are neutral, but inclined towards a Postmodern perspective. They have, as was put earlier, put their foot on the bottom rung of the Postmodern ladder. The same children have, however begun to show understanding and positioning with regard to Postmodernism as reaction against power. Understanding of the Postmodern perspective appears to develop in the small-group interactive situation rather than through any formal teaching, and issues of power are of particular relevance to the small family and small friendship group. It is the medium and not the message that is of greatest importance. We shall now examine results of the survey with regard to Christianity

ATTITUDES TO CHRISTIANITY

Scores		—Negative—		—Neutral—		—Positive—		Very +
		<48	49-60	61-72	73-84	85-96	97-108	>109
Sex/Yr.	School							
M7	A	3	5	9	8	1		
	D	1	3	11	4			
	R	2	4	11	7	2		
	AB		1	8	3	6		
	M	1	2	6	10	6		
	[Total]	[7]	[15]	[45]	[32]	[15]		
M8	A		3	6	12	1		
	D	2	3	10	11			
	R							
	AB			7	3			
	M		2	17	10	3		
	[Total]	[2]	[8]	[40]	[36]	[4]		
F7	A	4	3	15	5	1		
	D	2	3	10	7	1		
	R		11	12	9	2		
	AB	1	4	9	6	3		
	M		3	4	20	2		
	[Total]	[7]	[24]	[50]	[47]	[9]		
F8	A		6	6	2			
	D		1	6	6	1	1	2
	R							
	AB		1	5	8	1		
	M	1	3	14	8	1		
	[Total]	[1]	[11]	[31]	[24]	[3]	[1]	[2]
Total boys:		9	23	85	68	19	0	0
Total girls		8	35	81	71	12	1	2
Overall		17	58	166	139	31	1	2

Several things are noticeable from the scores. The 'curve' of responses is even flatter and broader than on the previous two analyses. There is a broader spread of attitudes as they have hardened – hardened in this case in a negative direction. A positive 'feel' towards Postmodernism contrasts with a marked negative reaction against Christianity.

But was there anything more marked than general, where conclusions had already been reached, where questions that received an average score of 2 or less, or 4 or more, i.e. on what most children agreed or disagreed? There was a remarkable uniformity about the responses across sexes and across schools. [In the list below, the figures outside of the brackets identify statements on the survey sheet. And the numbers in brackets show the average score for each statement. Neutrality would be signified by 3, Agreement with 4 or more, and disagreement with 2 or less.] Reactions to survey statements are given below:

Ainsdale Boys Year 7	61(1.80)
Ainsdale Boys Year 8	61(1.95); 72(2.00); 75(1.95)
Ainsdale Girls Year 7	61(1.71); 72(1.89); 75(1.96)
Ainsdale Girls Year 8	61(1.85); 72(1.50); 74(4.00); 75(1.42); 76(1.57)
Deyes Boys Year 7	61(1.78); 75(2.00)
Deyes Boys Year 8	53(4.07); 61(1.61); 75(1.69)
Deyes Girls Year 7	72(1.92); 74(4.08)
Deyes Girls Year 8	60(4.05); 61(2.00); 62(4.05); 74(4.29)
Range Boys Year 7	75(2.00)
Range Girls Year 7	61(1.68); 72(1.96); 74(4.20); 75(1.64)
AB Boys Year 7	61(2.00); 74(4.05); 75(1.94)
AB Boys Year 8	None
AB Girls Year 7	61(1.82); 75(2.00)
AB Girls Year 8	None

Maricourt Boys Year 7	74(4.26)
Maricourt Boys Year 8	74(4.09)
Maricourt Girls Year 7	61(2.00); 74(4.37)
Maricourt Girls Year 8	61(2.00); 72(1.85); 74(4.03); 76(1.92)

The areas of agreement and the numbers of groups that agreed are listed below. [Statement numbers are given first, numbers of groups agreeing, in brackets]

53 [1]	All religions do not worship the same God
60 [1]	Miracles sometimes happen
61 [12]	It does matter what religion one believes in
62 [1]	Jesus was more than a man and did rise from the dead
72 [6]	Christians do not live better lives than other people
74 [9]	People who pray are not stupid
75 [9]	Christianity is not the only true religion
76 [2]	I don't often go to church

Most of the agreed responses were supported by 'near misses' in the scoring. It is clear that the children had already come to agreement about a number of factors in religion - that although they had ceased to attend church, they had a respect for Christianity and religions although they did not believe that Christianity helped people to live better lives, nor that it was the only true religious faith. They believed that religions were different and one's religious faith was a personal choice. In short they were in the course of adopting a [moderate] Postmodern position towards Christianity but had not yet arrived at a typical Postmodern position that had no place for Christianity at all.⁴¹³ They had already begun to climb the Postmodern ladder; their foot was higher than simply placed upon the first rung. But they could not yet be considered to be 'Postmodern.' There were many questions where their

⁴¹³ In my opinion, Postmodernism has become distorted in its utilisation as a tool by many persons who are strongly anti-Christian. Typical of such a position is that taken by DOBSON, R. & UNGOED-THOMAS, J: in *Beyond Belief*, *Sunday Times*, 2/11/03, p.23. in which attempts to meet the need of spirituality through various therapies are discussed. There Christianity is described (and rejected) as, 'Ancient religion long riven by bloody doctrinal disputes. In danger of being reduced to a rump of believers among thirty-something women, West London middle classes and gay Americans.' Postmodernism by definition cannot be an overarching truth to exclude others, but is predominantly inclusive.

responses indicated uncertainty about belief and practice, and this seems to indicate that they want such questions answered before they make a decision.

Areas of uncertainty indicated by 'Neutral' responses and by mixed responses are listed below. They were unsure:

- Whether the Bible was true in everything it said
- Whether God was creator or the world came into being by chance
- Whether stories about Jesus were exaggerated or not. They accepted that Jesus was more than human and did rise from the dead, but they could not affirm that he was God
- Of what happened to human beings when they died; was there really a resurrection, reincarnation or nothing?
- How to make sense of 'Jesus dying for our sin.'
- As to the efficacy of personal prayer and church attendance
- Whether God could actually help us to live better lives.
- As to the nature of 'spirituality' – whether it was related to nearness to God or whether it was something that lay behind all religions and even behind the occult

Children in Years 7 and 8 want answers. They are not formally Postmodern, and nor have they completely rejected Christianity. They wish to know whether what Christians believe makes sense - what evidence there is that there is a resurrection to come, how prayer works and what is meant in claims that 'The Bible is true.' They also wish to know why Christians disagree with some of the positions they are beginning to (lightly) hold. They are not likely to respond to answers given in a sermon delivered to a significantly-sized group in church or on an school assembly; not even in a class of thirty pupils. They need to be helped to be able to think the issues through in a small-group situation; all of which leads us into the final section of this dissertation – implications of the findings for Religious Education.

PART III:

CHANGES WITHIN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, AND THE IMPLICATIONS

In the closing section of this study, I will show in two chapters, that Postmodern theory lies behind the changes that have taken place in Religious Education over the past forty years, and that it also lies behind continuing, contemporary changes. I will then go on in a final chapter to examine the implications of what I might term 'Postmodern pressure' on the teaching of R.E., in community schools, in church (Aided) schools and in church itself.

CHAPTER 7: CHANGES IN R.E. IN THE 20TH. CENTURY.

7.1. The change from Religious Instruction to Religious Education

Learning about religion in school has a long history of many years. Initially the subject-area was termed 'Religious Instruction' and sometimes even the 'Scripture lesson' because it involved instruction from the Bible about the Christian religion, and induction into the Christian faith. It was built upon an earlier foundation in which education about the Christian faith was part of teaching given within the monastery, local parish church-school or a Robert Raikes, Gloucester-type Sunday School. Sometimes as a response to social concern, Religious Instruction had its origin in the desire to prepare young people for service within the church, or in the desire to lead them into Christian faith.

In the past forty years or so, ⁴¹⁴ there has been a broadening of content due to a reaction against both the narrowness of the field, and the intended objective. The broader approach is better described as Religious Education. Evidence for the change can be found in the content of professional and governmental papers, ⁴¹⁵ and from the experience of R.E. teachers during this period.

7.2. Differences between Aided and Community schools

Not all teaching about religion has changed. While 'Religious Education' might be present in the majority of community schools, Religious Instruction

⁴¹⁴ There is an excellent summary in THOMPSON, P: *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?* Cambridge, Lutterworth, 2004.

⁴¹⁵ Changes can also be traced through changes in examinations [KEAST, J: *Issues in the Teaching of Religious Education; Assessing Achievement in RE from Early Years to A-Level*], and in inspection [THOMPSON, J: *Inspecting Religious Education; Can Inspections Improve Religious Education*] in BROADBENT, L. & BROWN, A: *Issues in Religious Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2002, pp.56, 71ff.]

(sometimes referred to as 'Confessional R.E.' by its opponents) is still the norm in many (Church) Aided schools,⁴¹⁶ and instruction into the Christian faith is a fundamental aspect of church life. This is because of a conviction that this is the right thing to do, rather than because of some tenacious hold by the past.

It is a difference that can be illustrated from two syllabuses in use within Sefton. Community schools teach R.E. according to the local 'Agreed Syllabus' frequently of an 'open' nature with a sociological objective. One of the attainment targets laid down in the Sefton Agreed Syllabus states that:

Pupils should be able to understand that the development of the human spirit involves positive reaction to crises by making sense of them and accepting the challenge of a new situation; and that some people may interpret the experience in a religious way.⁴¹⁷

It is part of a broad scheme aiming for 'religious literacy' and for 'spiritual development.' Religious literacy is defined as 'a grasp of the concepts which will enable a pupil to understand the nature, beliefs, language and practice of religions and the ability to communicate about religious experience.' Spiritual development is defined as 'the gradual maturing of a person's inner nature' stimulated by struggling with intellectual questions, appreciating aesthetic experiences, reacting to a sense of moral responsibility and working through personal crises.'

The Aided school follows the syllabus laid down by the religious body to which it belongs, and the Religious Education provided is frequently of a 'closed' nature still designed to draw children into or support children in the Christian faith, and in this respect does not differ significantly from syllabuses

⁴¹⁶ Within the Church of England there is great variety between dioceses each of which develops its own syllabus with the approval of the Diocesan Board of Education. Bailey compares syllabi from Durham, Winchester/Salisbury and Manchester and notes the inclusion of non-Christian faiths, encouragement to use critical faculties and to see the whole community, albeit from a Christian viewpoint. BAILEY, J: Religious Education in Church Schools, in BROADBENT, L. & BROWN, A: Op.cit. p.27.

⁴¹⁷ SEFTON COUNCIL: *Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education*, Bootle, Sefton Council, 2000, p.13

of forty years ago. The learning outcomes from teaching in the Autumn Term of Year 8 at Maricourt Roman Catholic High School, and which is based upon *Icons*, the scheme recommended by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales provides a good example:

By the end of this section of work, students should be able to recognise the importance of history to every family and nation, know key people and events in the history of the Church in Britain from the first to fifteenth centuries, and have an appreciation of how these have shaped the Catholic faith in England and Wales.⁴¹⁸

The whole scheme in years 7 and 8 is a strong means to Christian Religious Instruction, and includes the nature, festivals and sacraments of the church, the person of Jesus Christ and an introduction to the Gospels.

I will continue this chapter by giving an account of what has happened in Community schools (called County schools at the start of the period) to bring about the broader form of 'Religious Education.' The change in direction within R.E. in Community schools has certainly been part of my personal experience. When I first became an 'R.I. teacher' in Surrey in 1960, I was guided by an Agreed Syllabus that was tied to Biblical/Christian content, with a view to children adopting the Christian faith as their personal faith. Although more liberal in tone this was still the position taken when I taught in Wales at the end of the 1960's. [Teaching in the church where I am currently minister, has a similar objective]. When I became Staff Inspector for Religious Education with the former Inner London Education Authority in the 1980's, Religious Education was undergoing change. Grimmitt, in *What Can I do in R.E?* had demonstrated a distinction between what he termed 'dimensional' and 'experiential' modes of R.E. He distinguished 'learning about the phenomena of religions' from 'learning how to come to understanding about religion.'⁴¹⁹ Cox also recognised a difference which he referred to

⁴¹⁸ MARICOURT R.C. HIGH SCHOOL: *R.E. Schemes of Work*, Maghull, Maricourt High School, 2000, p.47

⁴¹⁹ GRIMMITT, M: *What Can I Do in R.E?* Essex, Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1973.

as 'understanding religion' and 'religious understanding.'⁴²⁰ I find it helpful to 'sharpen up' what is being distinguished by describing the two dimensions as 'learning about religions' in a mental, academic way and 'learning so as to become religious,' in a committed, spiritual way.

7.3. Conflict over changes in Religious Education

I will now examine some of the main arguments that have taken place between those who have supported the original, Christian, Religious Instruction and those who have opposed it, and which have influenced the change to Religious Education:

There is a need to avoid indoctrination.

That 'Education and indoctrination are incompatible' is generally taken for granted. It has often been claimed that teaching Christianity so as to bring children to Christian faith is indoctrination and cannot therefore be part of education.⁴²¹ There are two problems in this challenge. One is the nature of indoctrination; what it is, is not at all clear. It cannot be defined simply as the opposite of education because such a definition is too broad and general to be useful. Hirst was not even sure exactly what indoctrination was. He said,

What is plain from the work that has ... been done on the concept of indoctrination, is that most terms in this area are likely to be in some respects unclear, being used in a number of inter-related ways.⁴²²

The other problem is a possible inherent contradiction. The very statement that 'Teaching Christianity in school is a form of indoctrination,' might be itself, indoctrination, if it is an example of pressure and distortion. Jeffreys

⁴²⁰ COX, E: Understanding Religion and Religious Understanding, *BJRE* 6:1 1983, pp.3-7.

⁴²¹ BRAY, G: Indoctrination, in ATKINSON, D. & FIELD, D: *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 1995, p.481.

⁴²² HIRST, P: *Knowledge and the Curriculum*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, pp.112-113.

argued that indoctrination is something less than the truth, and that teachers should be allowed to present, openly, what they believed to be truth, without being charged with indoctrination. Children should then be allowed to do their own thinking about what was conveyed by the teacher.⁴²³

Leaders of world faiths meeting in London, defined indoctrination in terms of deliberate, intentional, deception; in short, distorted truth. They produced a statement that was incorporated into the Agreed Syllabus of the Inner London Education Authority. It read:

The true nature of indoctrination has sometimes been obscured because of the tendency to use the term when the content, intention, method or result of communication is disliked. 'Conditioning,' 'training' or 'instruction in doctrine' perfectly acceptable to some people would therefore be called 'indoctrination' by others. Indoctrination is in fact a presentation of information or ideas in such a way that because of the influence, bias or selectivity of the presenter, the receivers accept the information or ideas, although they might not otherwise have done so. The influence might lead to the acceptance of belief on non-rational grounds. The bias might involve partial – or half – truth. The selectivity might involve failure to reveal that a matter is controversial. The acceptance might lead to a closed mind. But indoctrination is more than all of these aspects even when they are added together, it involves placing the receiver into a position of disadvantage when judged from the standpoint of a rational human kind. It is, in fact, impossible to bring together all elements of truth for a totally informed decision; but when the truth known is consciously withheld with intent to persuade to a particular viewpoint, it is indoctrination. (Equally it is necessary to be aware that the unconscious withholding of truth may have the same effect in the mind of the recipient.) Similarly it is unlikely that any matter could be presented which commanded universal assent; but when ideas or information are presented and the receiver is not made aware of the controversial nature of the material, it is indoctrination. Ideas may sometimes be accepted on other than wholly rational grounds: indeed, it may be that no ideas are received without some involvement of emotion; but when the presenters bypass the critical faculty by imposing their personalities or if they seek to manipulate emotions to obtain acceptance, then that is indoctrination. It is perfectly acceptable to encourage children to have set views, such

⁴²³ JEFFREYS, M: *The Truth is not Neutral*, Oxford, Religious Education Press, 1969, pp. 227, 238.

as not to cause unnecessary pain to others, but it is not acceptable to encourage children to have closed minds on matters of debate.⁴²⁴

Thiessen claimed that charges of indoctrination in R.E. were prejudiced because while many other areas of teaching could be similarly castigated, they are not.⁴²⁵ Denying that similarities in etymology denote similarities in concept, he claimed that linguistic similarity between 'doctrine' and 'indoctrination' meant nothing. He pointed out that history and science also have 'doctrines' which are never linked with 'indoctrination.' Challenging the idea that Christian teaching is indoctrinatory because it is sometimes inconclusive and illogical and even contradictory, he pointed out that much of it is, in fact, conclusive and logical, and that many elements of science are inconclusive and contradictory, but are not regarded as indoctrination. Reacting against the claim that teaching methods within Christianity are a form of indoctrination, he pointed out that such are similar to teaching method in the early years of education, which are never described as indoctrinatory. Disputing the claim that religious teaching in institutions such as Catholic residential schools was a form of indoctrination, he pointed out that education takes place in other institutions such as public schools without being thought of as indoctrination, and that television programmes and advertising are commonly a form of indoctrination. In short, he claimed that contemporary views that Christian teaching was indoctrination, was the effect of prejudice rather than reality.

The point was made in the 'Durham Report,' that what is castigated as indoctrination is unavoidable. One reason is that one cannot understand several religions until one has a good understanding of just one of them. Another is that what is termed 'indoctrination' is unavoidable in education, because initially much has to be taken on trust, and as the boundaries of learning are extended, there is still more to be taken on trust. Assumptions

⁴²⁴ INNER LONDON EDUCATION AUTHORITY: *Indoctrination*, in *Religious Education for our Children*, ILEA Learning Resources Branch, 1988.p.39

⁴²⁵ THIESSEN, E: *Teaching for Commitment*, Montreal, Mc.Gill-Queen's University Press, 1993, pp.204ff.

may later be reviewed and modified, but they have to be used to start with. Initial teaching about Christianity was not therefore indoctrination.⁴²⁶

There is a need to avoid discrimination

Strong arguments have been put forward for neutrality, or a broader-based R.E. than Christianity. They claim that when children brought up in a non-Christian faith are taught about or from the Christian faith without reference to the fact that there are other faiths, including their own, then such teaching discriminates against their person, their home and their faith. Children put into this position feel that their faith and their home background are of no importance, and it can result in a negative, depressing self-esteem. Children can be mocked and abused because of clothes they wear, festivals they keep and food they eat. One way of protecting such children and preventing such discrimination is by conveying accurate and sympathetic information about their faith.

Discrimination can continue into the adult world when children leave school and enter the workforce or higher education if colleagues who have not been given instruction about their faith, sideline their calendar and festivals, devotions, dress, and customs.

Another important reason for broader-based Religious Education highlights the world of international politics within the global village. Some of the conflicts that take place between groups and nations would not happen if there were sympathetic understanding of the other's faith.⁴²⁷

These are not mere theoretical points. I often received appeals for help on behalf of religious leaders, parents and children who experienced

⁴²⁶ THE DURHAM COMMISSION: *The Fourth R; the report of the Commission on Religious Education in Schools*, London, National Society/S.P.C.K., 1970

⁴²⁷ BROADBENT, L: A Rationale for Religious Education, in BROADBENT, L. & BROWN, A: *Issues in Religious Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2002, pp.16ff. points out that there is a large amount of communication about religion in the media, [Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel,] and religious response to disaster, and there is a need to understand it.

discrimination because of race, colour or religion during the period I had responsibility for R.E in Inner London. The international aspect proved to be important too. I had the inestimable privilege of meeting with the Islamic Council of Jordan in Amman to discuss what should be taught about Islam in London schools, and what should be taught about Christianity in schools in Jordan, so as to avoid cultural clash and misunderstanding. Those who have needed to support children and families who are victims of discrimination or who have been involved in inter-religious dialogue have supported the need for breadth across a number of religions in Religious Education.

The extent of the need for broad-based R.E. was brought home to me when I discovered the extent of immigration in some areas of the Inner London Education Authority. In one primary school in West London, admittedly due to its geographical location, 43 different languages were spoken by children in the school. This was high; more normal was the figure for a secondary school in south London where there were 15 languages spoken by the boys in attendance. Religious faith other than Christianity, was also predominant in some areas. The local primary school in the area of north London where I lived, had a majority of Hindu children. Of 40 children in education Year 5, 26 of them were of the Hindu faith.⁴²⁸ Children in such situations needed support. Should all-white areas be permitted to discriminate against parts of the country that have provided a home for those of other faiths, from overseas? Should children from overseas be denied support in their own cultural background? Have the Christians opposing a broader-based Religious Education forgotten that Jesus never discriminated against the Samaritans?

⁴²⁸ In their case we had a week's R.E., in which the children turned their classroom into a Hindu temple, with leaders from the Hindu community coming into the school to teach their children about their faith and at the same time giving opportunity to the other children (some of whom were Muslim) the opportunity to learn by observation, by questioning, by talking to their Hindu friends or (if it was wished by parents and children) by instruction. At the same time we imported a film unit into the school, so that a film could be made of children talking to children about their faith and experience, and that could then be used in other schools. It was a procedure that fitted the ILEA Agreed Syllabus. It was right for the children of Hindu and non-Hindu faith, and it provided a resource for teaching about elements of the Hindu faith in other schools as children responded to children on film. It incurred considerable opposition from the Christian community. A Christian teachers' centre in Nottingham objected that a classroom should never be 'turned into a Hindu temple.'

Furthermore, learning about different faiths held by different members of the community went beyond reduction of discrimination. It was felt to be a positive contribution R.E. could make to Social Education or Citizenship. Rabbi Middelburgh demonstrated the way that separation of Jewish and Christian faith and culture for centuries in Germany underlay the Holocaust of the Nazi period, and went on to spell out the advantages of broadly-based Religious Education for citizenship at an AGM of the National Association of SACRES:

First, It will broaden our children's minds. Second, it will promote toleration of difference. Third, it will encourage adherence to a moral code. Fourth, it will inspire the adults of the future to adopt an automatic response of respect towards strangers, rather than suspicion or outright hostility. Fifth, it will direct our youth to engage not just in their own needs, but with the needs of others less fortunate than themselves. Sixth, it will clarify the significant areas of similarity between faiths, encouraging the members of different faiths to allow the similarities to bring them closer together instead of the differences pulling them apart. Good Religious Education can be a vital component in the creation of better people, who by definition will be better citizens and better citizens will inevitably wish to promote and fashion a better society.⁴²⁹

Within the Inner London Education Authority, 'learning about religions' became paramount, and meant giving children information and insight into the major world religions practised in the city, so that they were accurately informed, without the pressure to adopt any particular religious stance. This approach reflected the thinking expressed in the Swann Report of 1985:

We believe that religious education can play a central role in preparing pupils for life in today's multi-racial Britain ... challenging and countering the influence of racism in our society.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ MIDDLEBURGH, C: Why Religious Education: better people, better citizens, better society?, *SACRE News 7*, Birmingham, Westhill College, Spring 2003, pp.4ff.

⁴³⁰ SWANN REPORT: *Education for all; The Report of the Committee of Enquiry Into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups*, London, HMSO, 1985, p.496.

'Learning about religions' did not mean that teaching could be given in every aspect of a particular faith. In a situation where there was neither time nor expertise to inform pupils about every relevant religion, there was a movement towards elements of commonality between faiths – what Wright refers to as 'common denominator religion,'⁴³¹ - to which religions within the community conformed. The outcome was an emphasis upon 'Neutrality' - that R.E. should be 'neutral' such that children should be aware of many different views. The overall effect, together with an interpretation of the law⁴³² within the 1988 Education Reform Act which said that the syllabus should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain,' has led to a form of Religious Education that is determinedly neutral. Understanding the nature of religion and religious concepts arises from the study of a number of religious faiths, and restriction to a single faith is regarded as unacceptable indoctrination and discrimination against others.

Christians have been divided about the issues. On the one hand are those who hold to the view that Christianity is the only, absolutely true, revealed faith, and instruction about other faiths can lead children astray. On the other, there were those who are concerned about the needs of children and the need to avoid discrimination. Some apologists have defended their position that R.E. should be centred upon Christianity. First they claim that children of non-Christian faith make up no more than 5% of the school population and there is therefore no great need to teach about religions other than Christianity. Secondly, they claim that it is important that children of other national and faith cultures should understand Christianity because it constitutes the background to the history and culture of the country they now live in. Yet such a position has to be strongly resisted. The 5% figure may be true overall, of the whole country, but it is not true of many of our towns and cities; try telling the 5% story in Blackburn, Burnley or areas of

⁴³¹ WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, p.183

⁴³² THOMPSON, P., Op. cit. argues that the *Education Reform Act*, Section 8,3, 1988 has been misinterpreted [p.123]

Birmingham! Further, the Christian background can be over-stated. It is an element in our culture, an important element, but only an element.⁴³³

Other Christian teachers went along with humanists and atheists to broaden Religious Instruction in such a way that use of the term 'indoctrination' would not be possible. In order to avoid any possibility of the charge of indoctrination, a group of Humanists and Christians published a paper in 1965 entitled *Religious and Moral Education in County Schools* and gave suggested criteria for R.E for 13-16 year olds:

Wherever possible the course should draw on teachers with a variety of beliefs and standpoints working in an integrated team, and all alike should be free to express their own beliefs as personal beliefs. Where this is not possible, a teacher who deals with moral and religious views that are not his own must be extremely careful in his method of presentation and scrupulous to avoid subtle indoctrination of his own standpoint.⁴³⁴

There is a need for Christian apologists to bring about some reconciliation of the two viewpoints expressed within the Christian community.

There is a need to avoid too narrow an interpretation of 'spirituality.'

Two elements of 'common faith' began to be emphasised in in-service training of teachers in Inner London in the 1980's. One emphasised the objective - 'Scriptures,' buildings, founders and festivals. The other emphasised the subjective - inner, personal experience, such as prayer, devotion and worship. There was too much material to cover the objective side of things adequately in the limited time set apart for R.E; and if the additional knowledge was ignored in the interest of giving adequate teaching about Christianity, it appeared to be unfair. It was more practical and sometimes more interesting to look at those things that actually lay behind all

⁴³³ Things are changing. LUCAS, C., reported in A Night of Passion, in *The Times* (1/5/04) that Paganism (Galia worship, described by Drane as an element of Postmodern Spirituality), is growing rapidly and now has 200,000 adherents and has 11,000 hits each day on its popular website, www.witchcraft.org (*Body & Soul*, p.16)

⁴³⁴ In *Learning for Living*, 5.2., November 1965, p.7

religions, and the similarities in the subjective element gradually began to be referred to as 'spirituality.' The practical needs of a shift in emphasis gained strength from a number of other elements that were evolving nationally .

One was the view that 'spirituality' lies behind all religions, and is that to which all religions bear witness.⁴³⁵ Identification of experience within any one religion, such as Christianity, as (true) 'spirituality' was therefore false. Another was that children did not always link spirituality with religion. *Conversations with Children* revealed that children regarded 'spiritual' in the broad sense of being non-material so as to include love, friendship, dreams, frisson at the ouija board and Harry Potter's experiences.⁴³⁶ Yet another was the discovery by Hay at Nottingham⁴³⁷ and by Hardy at Oxford⁴³⁸ which showed that people were having what they referred to as 'spiritual experiences' outside of religion, or as it was put, experiences to which religion gave witness but which were not themselves, religious.

It began to be suggested that if it were possible to focus upon such experiences and even help children to reach such experiences, then there was something at a higher level than world religions that truly provided spiritual education and lessened the importance of huge amounts of content. Cox put forward the idea that 'Instead of learning about religion, children should learn from religion,'⁴³⁹ a turn of phrase that has been copied into the model syllabus of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority.⁴⁴⁰ Priestley suggested that the language of religion was in fact a metaphorical language for what lay beyond religion in spirituality – 'the process of learning to use religious language correctly may well involve an intellectual awareness of the world outside us, but it does so for the purpose of evoking the world

⁴³⁵ PRIESTLEY, J: Towards Finding the Hidden Curriculum; A Consideration of the Spiritual Dimension of Experience in Curriculum Planning, *BJRE* 7.3, 1995, pp.130-132

⁴³⁶ GOWER, R: *Conversations with Children*, Bootle, Sefton Education Authority, 2003, p.169

⁴³⁷ HAY, D: *Exploring Inner Space; Is God still Possible in the 20th. Century?* Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982

⁴³⁸ HARDY, A: *The Divine Flame*, Oxford, Manchester College, 1966

HARDY, A: *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979

⁴³⁹ COX, E: Understanding Religion and Religious Understanding, *BJRE* 17.3, 1995, pp.130-132.

⁴⁴⁰ SCAA: R.E.- *Model Syllabuses*, York, SCAA , 1994

inside us.⁴⁴¹ Wright records the considerable debate that developed,⁴⁴² Some sought to identify 'spiritual development' in schools with the 'self-spirituality' that was Heelas' way of describing 'New Ageism.' Webster quoted Tillich to say that in the depth of every living religion there is a point at which it loses its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom.⁴⁴³ Holley quoted Kant in claiming that the spiritual realm is the ultimate source of all physical and mental phenomena.⁴⁴⁴ Hull resisted the approach, saying, 'Spirituality as the cultivation of an inner journey of discovery is anarchy and subjectivism.'⁴⁴⁵

The debate was won by those who regarded spiritual experience as that to which religion bore witness, rather than experience within religions themselves, as is clear from the statement about spirituality made by the National Curriculum Council:

[Spirituality is] fundamental to the human condition, transcending everyday ordinary experience and concerned with the search for identity and meaning in response to death, suffering, beauty and evil.⁴⁴⁶

Spirituality is currently seen in terms of a number of aspects – a sense of awe, wonder and mystery; feelings of transcendence; search for meaning and purpose; self knowledge; relationships; creativity; feelings; and emotions. When the OFSTED Handbook for the Inspection of Schools was produced, inspectors were told that spiritual development is to be judged by how well the school promotes opportunities to reflect upon aspects of their lives and the human condition through, for example, literature, music, art, science,

⁴⁴¹ PRIESTLEY, J: Op.cit. pp.112-119

⁴⁴² WRIGHT, A: *Spiritual Pedagogy*, Culham, Culham College Institute, 1998

⁴⁴³ WEBSTER, D: Being Aflame: *Spirituality in County and Church Schools*, in FRANCIS, L. & LANKSHEAR, D. (Eds.): *Christian Perspectives on Church Schools – A Reader*, Leominster, Gracewing, 1993, p.130

⁴⁴⁴ HOLLEY, R: *Religious Education and Religious Understanding; An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religious Education*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul,, 1978, pp.52ff.

⁴⁴⁵ HULL, J: Spirituality and Money Culture, *Editorial BJRE* 17.3, 1995, pp.130-132.

⁴⁴⁶ NATIONAL CURRICULUM COUNCIL: *Spirituality and Moral Development*, York, NCC, 1993, p.5

religious education and collective worship, and how the pupils respond.⁴⁴⁷

Grimmitt was even more radical:

"In speaking of human spirituality ... I am referring to a human capacity of a certain type of awareness ... the activation of the human capacity for self-transcendence and movement towards a state of consciousness in which the limitations of finite identity are challenged by the exercise of creative imagination."⁴⁴⁸

Sefton Education Authority,⁴⁴⁹ Lealman, the Errickers, McLean and Davie, as contemporary R.E. writers simply make the same point – that in Religious Studies, and indeed in contemporary thought, the meaning of spirituality has significantly changed.⁴⁵⁰

It needs to be emphasised that such 'spirituality' is not what is meant by 'spirituality' within the Christian faith.⁴⁵¹ The apostle Paul saw spirituality as wisdom, discernment, and knowledge of God brought about by the Spirit of God in human life,⁴⁵² and in weaker, contemporary terms, spirituality is understood simply as 'living as a Christian.'⁴⁵³ Understanding of spirituality in religious terms lay behind the 1944 *Education Act* where it was stated that 'The statutory system of public education ... contributes towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical

⁴⁴⁷ OFSTED: *The Handbook of Inspection of Schools*, London, HMSO, 1994, p.21

⁴⁴⁸ GRIMMITT, M: *Religious Education and Human Development; the relationship between Studying Religions and Personal, Social and Moral Education*, Great Wakering, McCrimmon, 1987, p.125

⁴⁴⁹ See also SEFTON COUNCIL: *The Edge of Wonder; Spiritual Development*, Video, produced by Sefton Council, of practice in Sefton schools, 2003.

⁴⁵⁰ LEALMAN, B: *Blue Wind and Broken Image*, in WEBSTER, D. & TICKNER, M: (Eds.) *Religious Education and the Imagination*, Hull, Aspects of Education, 28, Hull Institute of Education, 1982, p.76

ERRICKER, C. & ERRICKER, J: *Reconstructing Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education*, London, Routledge/Falmer, 2000, p.62

MCLEAN, T: *Contemporary Spirituality and the Church*, in *The Bible and Transmission*, Swindon, The Bible Society, Autumn 2002, pp.9-11

DAVIE, G: *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994,

⁴⁵¹ GALLAGHER, M: *Clashing Symbols*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, (Revised Edition 2003) sees the existence of spirituality within Postmodernism as a positive advantage when contrasted with Modernism's reaction against religious faith. But he does not make clear that Postmodern 'spirituality' is quite different from Christian spirituality. (e.g. p.103)

⁴⁵² NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 2. 6-16.

⁴⁵³ HINGLEY, C: *Spirituality*, in ATKINSON, D. & FIELD, D: *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 1995, p.807

development of the community,' and 'spiritual' meant 'religious life.' Such meaning was still held thirty years later when an HMI response to the 1977 Green Paper, *Education in our Schools*, stated that 'The spiritual area is concerned with everything in human knowledge or experience that is connected with or derives from a sense of God or gods.⁴⁵⁴ 'Spirituality' is a meaningless adjective for the atheist and of dubious use to the agnostic.'⁴⁵⁵

7.4. Explanations of opposition/change

A Deliberate Anti-Christian approach

Thompson argued that the changes in R.E. were the result of deliberate attacks upon Christian content by atheists and humanists. When she recorded the history of Religious Studies in schools during this period, she noted a continuous and developing conflict between those seeking to induct children into Christianity and those who have opposed it. She wrote,

This book has recorded the story of what has happened to RE over the last 40 years. The most significant change was the move away from the traditional view that took place in the 1960's, following the failure of the profession to stand up to the attacks upon the Christian hegemony made (not for the first time) by the humanists. Ever since then, the profession has attempted to develop new forms of RE that do not presume the truth and worth of Christianity.⁴⁵⁶

She concluded that contemporary Religious Education in which children learn about religions and learn from religions is an indication that the anti-Christian, agnostic lobby has secured a victory.⁴⁵⁷ I understand her feelings, but have to differ from her because when I was responsible for RE within the Inner

⁴⁵⁴ This involves philosophy and science – at least, mathematics, physics and psychology according to Clouser, who demonstrates that the theoretical basis of all science is based upon religious belief. CLOUSER, R: *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, Indiana, U.S.A., University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, pp.111-163.

⁴⁵⁵ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE: *Education in our Schools*, London, H.M.S.O., 1977

⁴⁵⁶ THOMPSON, P: Op.cit. p.170

⁴⁵⁷ THOMPSON, P: Op.cit. p.149

London Education Authority during the 1970's and 1980's, I did not experience the intense opposition to Christianity that she records. There was no personal opposition, even though my Conservative-evangelical background as a Christian was known, and the situation I faced where RE was not undertaken in the majority of Primary schools lay in other directions:

- That there was anxiety that if Christianity alone was taught in schools, then children of other faiths would feel marginalised and effectively discriminated against. There was a need for children to understand the faiths practised in London so as to pre-empt any prejudice. Teachers therefore needed training so as to be able to teach about other faiths.
- That there was ignorance about the Christian faith. The majority of teachers in Primary schools in the 1980's were not churchgoers, and outside of the major festivals and historical church buildings, they did not know enough about the Christian faith so as to teach it effectively. The church had largely missed the need to inform teachers about the Christian faith.

When *both* elements of training were undertaken, there was a turn-round in RE in Inner London schools, and children learned about Christianity alongside other religions. Opposition to Christian R.E. among teachers was not grounded in opposition to Christianity, but because of ignorance of it, and from a deep concern for the children and their home backgrounds.⁴⁵⁸

Postmodern influence.

I have already argued that some features of Postmodernism are anti-Christian. Postmodernism is not deliberately anti-Christian so much as inadvertently anti-Christian because the views held conflict with tenets of the Christian faith. During the period 1950 – 1980, Postmodernism was not

⁴⁵⁸ The opposition came from the evangelical wing of Christianity, because of the belief that learning about other religions would prevent children from becoming Christians. At a Public Meeting in Wimbledon, the opposition was largely withdrawn when it was acknowledged that New Testament teaching was that a person is 'converted' to Christianity, not by human reasoning but by a Divine understanding given by God. (cf Acts 16:14: [R.S.V]: 'Lydia ... the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.')

influencing children to any great degree, but it was influencing the thinking of those in the academic world. The arguments against Christian R.E. seem to me to be a reflection of the absorption of Postmodern theory by those in a position to be aware of it at the time rather than being simply anti-Christian. i.e. there was inadvertent opposition arising from Postmodernism rather than deliberate opposition arising from an anti-Christian perspective. I have examined the key changes that took place in R.E. in the second half of the 20th. Century. They took place against a background of R.E. that was designed to teach children about Christianity and to induct them into Christianity. This led to a number of concerns:

- There was concern about indoctrination – that teaching about Christianity as though other faiths did not exist was wrong, and to seek to induct them into the Christian faith should not take place in the classroom.
- There was concern about discrimination – that teaching about Christianity without teaching about other faiths in a Multifaith population disadvantaged children and families of non-Christian faiths and was wrong.
- There was concern about too-narrow a view of spirituality – that spirituality as defined in (for example, Christianity) was too narrow, and that teaching needed to be given about a broader 'spirituality' to which all religions gave witness.

It is clear that each concern opposes Christianity, but it goes beyond direct opposition. Each concern also expresses elements of Postmodernism, as Postmodernism has been described in Part 1 of this dissertation.

- The concern about indoctrination is a concern about authority – authority within institutions (the church), authority in metanarratives, authority in texts and authority in the classroom. Postmodernism emphasises personal experience.

- The concern about discrimination is not only of direct relevance to thinking that is against racism in particular and the disadvantaged in general, but in its desire for inclusiveness, sees a need to make a pastiche of many cultures, experiences and beliefs.
- The concern about the too narrow view of spirituality is difficult to separate from Postmodern viewpoints on spirituality and its rejection of reality and acceptance of New-Ageism. Wright makes a similar point:

Given the way inner experience functions as a key driver of modern religious education, it comes as no surprise to find it slipping, with apparent ease and increasing frequency into forms of post-modern(ism/anti-realism).⁴⁵⁹

In short, the reason for the changes that brought Religious Instruction to Religious Education between 1960 and 2000, is not to be found in direct opposition to Christianity from Atheism or from Humanism, but from those being influenced by Postmodern theory who were therefore inadvertently opposed to Christianity. The process did not come to an end at the commencement of a new Millennium, and I will go on, in the next chapter, to show continuing Postmodern influence over Religious Education in the 21st. Century.

⁴⁵⁹ WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, p.195.

CHAPTER 8: CHANGES IN R.E. IN THE 21st. CENTURY

The changes that underlie the approaches to R.E. in schools in the 21st. Century can be approached in two ways – by utilising an overall analysis of approaches to R.E. that were inherited from the previous century, and by examination of research projects that will influence practice in the new one. I will undertake the analysis, and give an account of research in the present chapter.

8.1. Changes in R.E. in the 21st. Century

The debates about the purpose of R.E. at the end of the 20th. Century, recorded in Chapter 7 have resulted in analysis that leads to a number of different approaches within the subject area. Grimmit calls them 'pedagogies' – theories of teaching and learning encompassing aims, curriculum content and methodology.⁴⁶⁰

The attainment targets in the SCAA 'Model Syllabuses' in 1994 confine them to *two* - that children should learn about religion and that they should learn from religion.

The Schools Council in its Working Paper (36) of 1971 identified *three* approaches – the 'Confessional' or dogmatic approach, the anti-dogmatic approach ('an academic exercise, dispassionate and objective,' similar to history) and the phenomenological, un-dogmatic or educational approach (that was also anti-dogmatic but went beyond the informative to help children enter into the feelings of believers).⁴⁶¹

I have found it helpful to use *four* descriptive words when speaking to teacher-groups about R.E. – singular, neutral, pluralist and open. 'Singular'

⁴⁶⁰ GRIMMITT, M: *Pedagogies of Religious Education*, Great Wakering, McCrimmon, 2000, p.16.

⁴⁶¹ SCHOOLS COUNCIL: *Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, London, Evans/Methuen, 1971, p.21

describes the situation where only one religion is taught with the implicit (in schools) and explicit (in churches) declaration that all other faiths are false, inadequate, incomplete, sometimes even demonic in turning people away from truth. 'Neutral' describes the approach in which the teacher teaches about a number of different faiths without giving precedence to any – a vulnerable position because there is insufficient time to deal with each faith adequately, and superimposed upon them all is the teacher's idea of neutrality. In the 'Pluralist' approach, the teacher is a resource. Each religion is allowed to speak for itself, and theoretically, the child makes up his or her own mind without critical guidance or assessment from the teacher. In fact the child is limited to a study of those religions for which resources are available. The 'Open' approach encourages children to critically examine each faith through open discussion, and in which they examine religions in the light of their own experiences.

Grimmitt identifies *five* different pedagogies outside of the 'Confessional' R.E. that is taught by those he calls 'Religionisers.'⁴⁶² He emphasises the links between a child's own spirituality and the spirituality within the religion that is being explored. Children may:

- Explore religions by use of themes (such as Smart's six-dimensional model⁴⁶³) which as external, public phenomena are common to all religions.
- Explore what it is like to be a believer within a particular faith or the way that different people/groups express their faith within the same religion. [Some theorists allow material of the teacher's choice, others insist on the faith's choice.]
- Explore religions by means of themes arising out of their own experiences (e.g. what they experienced as 'spiritual') and interpret their own experiences in the light of what they learn.

⁴⁶² It is a pity that such emotive terminology is utilised; it does not help relationships with those who follow a course of 'Confessional' R.E. He identifies eight pedagogies outside of 'Confessional' R.E., but they may be reduced to five as in this account.

⁴⁶³ Doctrines, myths, ethics, ritual dimension, experiential dimension, social dimension. See SMART, N. & HORDER, D: *New Movements in Religious Education*, London, Temple Smith, 1975, pp14-16.

- Explore religious texts so that they can articulate their own beliefs and understand the beliefs of others.
- Enable children to find, reflect upon and share their own meanings derived from the religions they explore

What is interesting is that each of the non-confessional approaches features some aspect of Postmodern theory as identified in Part I of this dissertation, and shown, in chapter 7, to be present in developments in R.E. at the end of the 20th. Century. In the variation from two to five approaches, it is clear that there is no pedagogical metanarrative. Beyond this, one can identify a 'Postmodern' inclusiveness of all religions, an individual approach to the interpretation of a text, an emphasis upon 'spirituality', and finding ones own meaning within exploration of religion.

Opposition to and weakening of Christianity (in 'Confessional' R.E.), is a further Postmodern feature, and such is the stated intention from a number of sources for the future. The Institute for Public Policy Research has published a paper, *What is Religious Education For?* that is radical in its approach by inclusion of Atheism within the curriculum, for presentation to ministers at the D.E.S (Department of Education and Skills).⁴⁶⁴ Speaking about the report, the author said,

There are huge numbers of people who are atheists or whose family are atheists and who are coming into a class where their family's view is not acknowledged. You should be able to have a conversation about ethics that does not collapse into a conversation about religion.⁴⁶⁵

This appears to be supported by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority although their report will not be issued until later in 2004. A spokesperson reported that the Authority is to recommend 'a wider (R.E.) curriculum, including the teaching of agnosticism, humanism and atheism alongside

⁴⁶⁴ ROGERS, B: *What is Religious Education For?* London, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004.

⁴⁶⁵ HINSCLIFF, G: Children to study Atheism at School. London, *The Observer*, 15/02/04

Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.' According to a response to a Sunday Times reporter , he continued,

It is very much the intention that young people in the context of religious education should be studying non religious beliefs. There are many children in England who have no religious affiliation and their beliefs and ideas, whatever they are, should be taken seriously.⁴⁶⁶

This is not far removed from the opinion of the Chief Inspector of Schools. Writing in *The Times Educational Supplement* he suggested that the daily acts of worship in schools need no longer be a statutory requirement. School assemblies should be used as 'an opportunity to debate and discuss as well as to worship.'⁴⁶⁷

Whether or not this will come about remains to be seen,⁴⁶⁸ but it is an interesting and further Postmodern development in the approach to Religious Education.

8.2. Account of recent research into R.E.

A number of new and continuing research projects' have suggested alternative ways of teaching R.E. effectively.⁴⁶⁹

Projects involving R.E.

- The *Chichester Project* set out to provide material for the teaching of Christianity as a world religion in secondary schools, so that children should be informed rather than converted, and would approach Christianity in the

⁴⁶⁶ KIRKHAM, S: Atheism set to be taught in R.E., *The Sunday Times*, London, 15/02/04.

⁴⁶⁷ BELL, D: Column in *The Times Educational Supplement*, London, 23/04/04

⁴⁶⁸ According to TEECE, G: Has the Silly Season come early? Birmingham, *SACRE News*, Spring 2004, p.1. the whole issue is an invention of the press in order to gain attention, initially in the *Observer* of 15/02/04. The rejoinder does say that the QCA is however seeking to produce a National Framework for R.E. by consultation with key R.E. groups, and will attempt to publish results in September, 2004.

⁴⁶⁹ These are very helpfully summarised in GRIMMITT, M: Op.cit. Chs. 3-9

same way that they would approach any other world religion.⁴⁷⁰ Any personal outcome was not to be the concern of the teacher. There are so many differences in belief and practice between Christians (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal....), and so little material available about some areas of Christianity (such as in central Africa) and the contribution made by Christianity to culture, that it was not a simple project despite the historical link between Christianity and R.E. It treated the Christian faith objectively, not dissimilar to Smart's approach at Lancaster and provided another element in the study of world religion.

- It has sometimes been questioned whether the *Religious Experience and Education* project at Nottingham was really about R.E. at all. It was based on the idea that to be 'spiritual' is to be human – that part of humanity that lies behind and is expressed in all religions; therefore to develop human spirituality is not simply R.E., but it is also P.S.E.⁴⁷¹ The objectives of the project were to help children to have an open mind that is not restricted by contemporary culture - to explore different ways of seeing, and to develop their personal awareness, features of what Hay described as 'Relational Consciousness.' Many children from years 7 and 8 who took part in the (neutral) survey described in chapter 10 of this dissertation, used the opportunity they were given to say what they felt about the survey. They called it 'weird,' 'boring' and 'crazy,' because although they had undertaken the survey within R.E., it did not 'mean' R.E. to them. The Nottingham project might represent Postmodern R.E. but like some elements of the survey, it might not mean 'R.E.' to the children.

- I took part in the *Religious Experience and Education Project* at Westhill College, Birmingham for a short time during the 1980's. It was designed to bring children's patterns of belief and behaviour to maturity. It involved a vast map of the nature and content of Religious Education, the provision of materials to make it possible for children to see details of the map more

⁴⁷⁰ ERRICKER, C: *Teaching Christianity: a World Religions Approach*, London, Lutterworth, 1987

⁴⁷¹ HAY, D. et al: *New Methods in Teaching R.E.*, 1990, awaiting republication.

clearly, and practical help for teachers faced with the demands of the 1988 Education Reform Act.⁴⁷² The project started with the idea that Religious Education was intended to do three things: (i) to give knowledge and understanding of religions; (ii) to assist child development through engagement with issues that were fundamental to human life; and (iii) to give awareness of a religious dimension of life that went beyond formal religions, such as awe and wonder, belonging and commitment, caring and compassion. The field of enquiry that was to make this possible was vast and complex. It examined personal, family, social and community life in relation to traditional belief systems, shared human experience and individual patterns of belief, and the beliefs, spirituality, ultimate questions and values that underlay them. It is not possible to do justice to the project in a brief paragraph, but the concept of religion seemed to me to be humanistic rather than one that sought to do justice to the concept of revelation, something central to many religions. It also seemed complex to the degree that it was more suited to a four-year religion course at University than to children aged between 5 and 16 in the community school. It was, once again, Postmodern – Postmodern in a replacement of Divine authority with human comprehension and reaction.

- The 1984 *Religion in the Service of the Child* project at Birmingham University arose from an attempt to find a form of R.E. that would be effective in the primary school sector.⁴⁷³ Effectiveness had been lost, largely because of anxiety occasioned by Goldman that young children were not 'ready for religion'⁴⁷⁴ and because R.E. was being replaced by 'human-spiritual' exercises centred on such areas as senses, families, and the wonder of living things. Phenomenological approaches utilised in the secondary school had failed to arouse great interest and had failed to stimulate the children's human and educational development. The project put children into direct contact with religious artefacts, or 'numens,' in the classroom (such as a bell,

⁴⁷² WESTHILL PROJECT: *How do I Teach R.E?* Birmingham, Westhill College, 3rd Edition, 1998.

⁴⁷³ GRIMMITT, M., GROVE, J., HULL, J. and SPENCER, L: *A Gift to the Child: Religious Education in the Primary School*, Birmingham, Simon and Schuster, 1991

⁴⁷⁴ GOLDMAN, R: *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964

statuette, incense, story) that would appeal to one or more of the senses, and observed how it could give something to the child by affecting and stimulating their human and religious development. It was found that because there were different effects on children from a religious and from a non-religious background, classroom procedure needed to be varied. Initially children were brought close to the numen, (the words, 'engagement', 'exploration', 'contextualisation' and 'reflection' were utilised) and then distanced from it – a form of teaching and protection of children at the same time. Religion was indeed to be put at the service of the child rather than children being put in the service of religion. Again, there is a Postmodern influence. In the Birmingham project, Religious Education is not seen to be learning how response has been made by others to Divine revelation but growth into an individual personal response (positive, negative or neutral). of one's own.

- The team working with Jackson at the University of Warwick in what was termed the *Interactive Approach to R.E.*, took a similar approach to that of investigating a 'numen' but in this case the 'numen' was an individual or group of people, adherents from a particular religion. It noted that religions themselves are dynamic and constantly changing, and that it is therefore more useful to study the life of an individual in a particular religious group rather than to look at the religion as a whole. There is a significantly Postmodern element in the way that Jackson puts it:

It deconstructs Western, post Enlightenment models of representing 'world religions' as schematic belief systems, whose essence can be expressed through a series of propositions or doctrinal statements.⁴⁷⁵

Those taking part in the project look at what it is like to be an individual believer in a particular place, time and culture. In general children in KS1 focus on the experiences of a single child; in KS2 they focus upon a group of children; and in KS3 they examine the situation of young people or families in the faith examined. The child then uses his/her understanding of the

⁴⁷⁵ JACKSON, R: *The Warwick Religious Education Project: The Interpretative Approach to Religious Education*, In GRIMMITT, M: Op.cit. p.130.

individual so as to assess and critically reflect upon his/her own position in a way that will bring about personal growth. There is an important principle involved here that I will take up later – that R.E. that does not connect with pupils' own questions and concerns is unlikely to engage them.⁴⁷⁶ It is admitted that the process might appear threatening to some parents, but Jackson meets this by saying that 'Children from any religious background have to face the juxtaposition of their 'home' way of life and those which constitute the pluralistic, predominantly secular and increasingly globalised [i.e. Postmodern?] society around them.'⁴⁷⁷

Such projects clearly identify with Religious Education in one way or another, but three recent approaches, following what I would identify as a Postmodern perspective, are radical to the extent that it is not always easy to be clear whether they, or what is taught in school, are R.E. at all, because 'Spirituality' or something else has taken its place. Grimmitt, for example takes the position that it is not possible to come to a knowledge of religion, because there is no knowable (religious) reality, and that this is demonstrated by the fact that there is neither unity nor agreement among religious people.⁴⁷⁸ Each believer makes their own construction or interpretation (or comes to their own knowledge). Grimmitt supports this viewpoint by reference to the work of Vygotsky who claimed that the construction of knowledge occurs through interaction in the social world, and von Glaserfeld who claimed that theories of reality could be held, just so long as they were personally useful [akin to Lyotard's Postmodern 'performativity'].⁴⁷⁹ Religious Education should therefore provide a means through which children can construct their own realities about religion.

⁴⁷⁶ See ERIKSSON, K: In Search of the Meaning of Life; A Study of the Ideas of Senior Compulsory School Pupils on Life and its Meaning in an Experiential Learning Context, *BJRE* 22 (2), 2000, pp.115-127

⁴⁷⁷ JACKSON, R: Op.cit. p.137

⁴⁷⁸ GRIMMITT, M: *Pedagogies of Religious Education* Essex., McCrimmon, 2000, pp.207ff.

⁴⁷⁹ LYOTARD, J: *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 47-53.

I would feel happier about this approach if I could be reassured about what seems to me to be an internal contradiction: if it is not possible to have any absolute knowledge of religion, it seems impossible to have any absolute knowledge about the knowableness of religion. Further, the Christian would probably claim that Grimmitt's problem is precisely the reason why God did not leave it with human beings to discover truth, but revealed the truth, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ. And the differences? Not because the revelation is incomprehensible, but because humanity seeks to follow its own will and to go its own way, which is, perhaps, a less objectionable way to some people than the use of the word, 'sin.'

Radical projects

Grimmitt's radicalism does involve *Religious Education*, which is more than can be said of two other approaches, although R.E. is seen as an appropriate vehicle for the approach.

- One such radical project is 'Narrative Pedagogy,' used in the *Children and Worldview Project*, that utilises time set apart for R.E., and is based in a small group of collaborating Southern colleges. Starting from the conviction that R.E. (and other curriculum subjects) are too content-laden, knowledge-centred and rational, the point is made that each child lives in a totally different world of their own, and attention needs to be paid to their individual capabilities and experiences, so that they can express a point-of-view in their own way and be given the confidence and opportunity to do so. Each child has a unique narrative or story to tell. The subjectivity is Postmodern-based in Lyotard in his insistence that all knowledge is relative; there is no 'God's eye-view' or metanarrative. The teacher's function is so to work with the children that the classroom evokes a confident, individual response to others. There is no external laid-down curriculum or subject matter, but work with children on the part of members of the project have shown that there are a number of areas children wish to communicate about and a number of skills they wish to practise. Children find it important to talk about relationships,

secret places, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, death, separation, and the environment. They practise certain skills as they engage with each other: reflection (on ones emotions and the emotions of others), understanding (why people do things, consequences), self-criticism, self control, empathy, criticism, of others, recognition of relationships, difference, and complexity of social discourse. As children 'narrate' and express their own self-understanding, they construct their own world-views. Conventional subject-knowledge has been replaced by a process that forms the basis of the New R.E. As the Errickers put it,

From a narrative perspective .. faith is wholly subjective, there is no object of faith, it involves a subject relating to another subject. The same is true of values; values are not objects but means of relating. In short, religious education has to reject its exclusive epistemological justifications and construct ontological ones. If we attempt to place this approach within the current framework for provision, related to the teaching of world faiths and Christianity in particular, we must recognise the important issue as being that young people are introduced to the struggles and joys of faith, the difficulties and successes of constructing value and community without recourse to simply presenting them with the sanitising ideological platitudes of religious tradition.⁴⁸⁰

- Another radical approach is that of *Spiritual Education* led by Wright in a project centred on King's College, London. It continues in the Postmodern perspective in its assertion that language imprisons us all within subjectivity; that religious language describes not religious reality, but religious experience or spirituality. He follows the Critical Realist approach which

seek(s) to uphold the humanistic commitment to reason and thirst for truth first established by the Enlightenment. [Critical Realists] recognise ... that modern, Western culture has been guilty of abusing the ideals of the Enlightenment. Critical Realism ... rejects the quick-fix approaches of scientism, emotivism, positivism and absolute idealism in favour of a more patient engagement with, and interrogation of,

⁴⁸⁰ ERRICKER, C, & J: The Children and Worldviews Project: A Narrative Pedagogy of Religious Education, in GRIMMITT, M: *Pedagogies of Religious Education*, Great Wakering, McCrimmon, 2000, p.204.

reality. For the Critical Realist, the truth is indeed out there, but is larger than our ability to comprehend it.⁴⁸¹

Religion, religious dogma, religious culture are seen as external expressions of internal 'religious' experience – i.e. those experiences that transcend the ordinary; and is less to do with Truth than with personal integrity. Spiritual education aims to help pupils to create their own personal world-views, an aim incompatible with, for example, traditional Christianity. The view of spirituality itself is not absolute, but is relative to the child's own culture – a culture that a child brings to the classroom, needing to be given skills and knowledge so that they can identify and explore their own ideology and those presented by religious and secular traditions. As a child's own 'horizon' is brought to bear upon the 'horizon' of any belief system, an adjustment occurs between the two; the child is brought into a position where they can evaluate both themselves and the belief system, and at the same time (Postmodernly) recognises the power-structures inherent in religious and educational discourse. Wright meets the objection that such an approach is too difficult for children by claiming that it is the overt simplicity of current approaches to R.E. that results in lack of interest in R.E.; children are not challenged and stimulated sufficiently. Reactions to the survey sheets used in this research where children in years 7 and 8 claimed that the statements were too difficult to understand, and were not really interested in trying to understand, support the objectors rather than Wright .

It is clear that there is no agreement as to the ultimate number of approaches among theorists; nor will there be. Each research project seeking an effective practical means of teaching R.E. will hold to its own perspective that will be added to the number of approaches already available. Confronted with what must sometimes seem an infinite number of possible approaches, though constrained by Agreed, Diocesan, Iconic or Examination Board syllabus, the R.E. teacher will tend to take the approach that means most to them. Beyond this, there is a much simpler, two-dimensional analysis. At

⁴⁸¹ WRIGHT, A: The Spiritual Education Project, in GRIMMIT, M: Op.cit. p.173.

the institutional and political level, there is that which Grimmitt has called the 'Religionist-Confessional' approach and that which is not. At the level of academic institutions for the training of teachers and clergy, there is the Postmodern-philosophical approach and the contrary Modern-Christian philosophy (although recognition of what I might term the 'Postmodern factor' seems currently to be marginal for many trainees). There is the pedagogy of the Aided school and the pedagogy of the community school supported by different forms of inspection. In short, for our purpose, there are two basic approaches to Religious Education – that which comes through an Aided school (and through the religious institution that is behind it) and that which comes through the community school. I will therefore use the next chapter to look at the implications of the findings of the research described in this paper for teachers in just two domains – Aided and Community schools.

8.3. Religious Education in church.

R.E. also takes place in church and brief mention is needed at this point. Writing from fifty years personal experience as Baptist church minister in four churches in London, Somerset, Chester and Merseyside, I am aware that such Religious Education has been changing during the period. Alongside worship and pastoral care, a key element in church work has always been the education of the congregation into the content of the Bible and into the elements of the Christian faith. Children were (and are) taught in Sunday School, and those who reached their 'teens,' joined with the adults in being educated through the sermon.

There have been significant changes in such education for children during the fifty years. Before 'church' becomes the significant educational area, improvements have been made in the Sunday School. The materials available to teachers in the Sunday School have been improved as Christian publishers have sought to match contemporary teaching methods in community schools, by provision of high-quality handbooks, workbooks, craft materials and material for audio-visual presentation.

The most significant change for adults has been the shortening of the sermon in many churches because, it is often claimed, adults have a far shorter attention span than they used to have. The sermon might well be aimed to challenge or to support members of the congregation, but it is also a key teaching medium, that has been replaced in many churches by such elements as personal testimony, drama, dance, film clips and contemporary music. In some churches this does not appear to go far enough for the 'teen' age-group, and an alternative Youth Church has been devised. This takes personal experience and band-led contemporary music still further, in a way that many of the adult members of a church find difficult to handle.

The significance of what is taking place is not simply that 'education-time' has been shortened (and some would say has been replaced by 'entertainment-time'), but that generally it does not normally address those areas of concern to young people that have been revealed in the survey described in Part II of this dissertation. Not only is education-time shortened, but in terms of the queries raised within the survey, its content is frequently irrelevant.

CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS

The nature of Postmodernism as reaction against authority, and an expression of that reaction through culture has been set out in Part 1 of this study. I was then able to show in Part 2, from discussion with children and by means of a survey, that at least from education year 6, children can be seen to be beginning to be influenced by Postmodernism. I have also shown in Part 3, in Chapters 7 and 8, that those involved in the theory and practice of Religious Education in the latter half of the 20th. Century, and at the start of the new Millennium are also influenced by Postmodern theory. Such findings have important implications, and I will examine the implications in this final chapter of the dissertation. The implications are different for teachers and children in community schools and for teachers and children in (Christian) Aided schools. What is relevant for (Christian) Aided schools is also relevant to church in that clergy and some lay persons would normally be involved in communication and teaching about the Christian faith to church members. I will look at each field in turn.

Before doing so I need to reiterate that one of the significant reactions from children who took part in the 'Conversations' was that they gained a great deal by working in small groups of five with the 'teacher.' With very few exceptions, there was full co-operation, and nobody opted out of the discussions. It led in one case to a deputation being made to the Head of Department of R.E., asking whether it might be possible to 'Do R.E.' in that way. It does not, in reality, raise the question as to whether R.E. could be undertaken in small discussion groups because this would not be a practical possibility; but it does raise the question of how the situation might be improved to encourage discussion-participation in classes of 20–30 where discussion when attempted, often ends in failure because very few children take part.

9.1. Implications for R.E. teachers in Community schools:

Recognition that R.E. Theory has become 'Postmodern.'

When one is involved in conflict of any kind, it is necessary to recognise one's opponent, and not merely to recognise them, but to understand them. Without such recognition, defeat is inevitable. I believe that Thompson in her thoroughgoing history of R.E. since 1944 has done just this in misidentifying her opponent. She argues that the demand for broad-based Religious Education rather than Christian Instruction within an Agreed Syllabus was always, intentionally, anti-Christian, and that it originated among atheists, agnostics and humanists. There is some evidence that with the passing of time since the 1980's, there has been an increasing anti-Christian element, sometimes stimulated by atheistic or humanist convictions,⁴⁸² but originally it was not so. The Initial demands that R.E. required a broader base than that provided by Christianity alone was the result of professional concern, and not anti-Christian sentiment. I have already commented that although I was known as a Christian of 'conservative-evangelical' persuasion, I never experienced anti-Christian opposition from those outside of the Christian faith or from 'liberal' Christians within it when I held responsibility for the development of Religious Education in Inner London.⁴⁸³ Strong viewpoints were always an expression of professional concern for children. Thompson seems to me to have identified the wrong opponent.

R.E. has been broadened to include other-than-Christian faiths, largely due to the influence of Postmodernism., and instruction into the Christian faith has been limited to Aided schools. R.E. 'Professionals' who undertake the training of R.E. teachers and who influence the profession through writing

⁴⁸² That this can happen is clear from a brief article by a Humanist who sat on the Brent SACRE, in praise of their new Agreed Syllabus that was broad enough to include Humanist perceptions. KUTCHINSKY, J: A Humanist at the Launch of a New RE Syllabus, *SACRE News* 7, Spring 2003, Westhill College, Birmingham, p.7 Attention has also been drawn to current supposed proposals that Atheism, Agnosticism and Humanism should feature within an R.E. programme. [See also pp.219-220]

⁴⁸³ 1970's – 1980's, when ILEA was brought to an end by the Thatcher government in 1988.

have generally adopted a Postmodern position. The influences upon R.E. theory are all linked to Postmodern theory. It holds that:

(1) Teaching Christianity so as to bring children to Christian faith is indoctrination and not education. Postmodernism is anti-Authoritarian and as such is averse to any form of indoctrination bearing in mind the authoritative position of the one who indoctrinates.⁴⁸⁴ Put another way, Postmodernism recognises no over-arching metanarrative that might be imposed upon the thinking of others.

(2) Christian Religious Instruction discriminates against other minority religious faiths. Postmodernism is inclusive in bringing together every available (even incongruous and minority) element from a trans-world or trans-historical perspective so as to find a new unity.

(3) Teaching about Christian 'spirituality' is not the same thing as true spirituality. Postmodernism sees the 'spiritual' in denial of rational-scientific thinking, and in seeking for a spirituality that lies behind those things, referred to as 'spiritual' within religion

(4) It is necessary to add a (normally unstated) fourth point – that teaching, or teaching about, Christianity does not fit with contemporary acceptance of Postmodern theory. I have shown in some detail (pp.103ff.) that Postmodernism opposes Christian belief, and that Postmodernism is therefore anti-Christian. It is anti-Christian in its involvement in every one of the arguments (listed above), that have been used to argue for a broader-based Religious Education in schools, and is in itself also anti-Christian.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ See earlier quotation from I.L.E.A. Agreed syllabus; dissertation, p.203.

⁴⁸⁵ This is not true in every element of Postmodern theory. Many Christians oppose colonialism/racism (as exemplified in *Fairtrade* support) and many Christians are opposed to and are concerned about consumerism/Capitalism

Recognition that teachers might have become 'Postmodern'

Without attending a course on, or consciously reflecting upon Postmodernism, it is likely that many teachers have become Postmodern in outlook because they have absorbed the Postmodern perspectives that underlie contemporary Religious Education theory. They are concerned to resist the authority that lies in indoctrination, in the powerful discrimination inherent in one-faith teaching, and in an overbearing and too-narrow view of spirituality. Like the children who talked about Postmodern issues and who took part in a survey in education years 7 and 8, they have absorbed elements of Postmodernism from contemporary (Professional R.E.) culture.

Recognition that children have become 'Postmodern.'

Teachers may also have adopted a Postmodern perspective because insofar as 'successful' teachers seek to identify with the outlook of children so that they work together for a common aim, they will utilise and identify with the Postmodern perspectives of the children. 'Successful' teaching necessitates teacher and taught sharing overlapping objectives. When a teacher cannot identify with the child's interest, there sometimes results boredom, ill discipline and even truancy on the part of the child. A successful teacher is one who is regarded by children as being 'on their side,' children responding with interest, enthusiasm, response, hard-work, discipline and enjoyment – enjoyment being part of the teacher's experience as well as that of the children. Identity of common interest lies at the root of the child's interest in the lesson that makes progress realistic. The position taken by the child is of equal importance to the position taken by the teacher; there has to be common ground.⁴⁸⁶ Insofar as children have adopted a Postmodern

⁴⁸⁶ Commonality is not merely a matter of teaching theory; it is common sense. When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians about the practice of 'speaking in tongues,' he said that if there are visitors to the church from outside, they would regard such speakers as completely mad, because the language of 'tongues' will have no meaning for them. If a German-speaking child with no knowledge of English enters an English-speaking classroom,

perspective, a good teacher, almost by instinct, will find common (Postmodern) ground with them. It was interesting to note that in the Aided schools that took part in the survey (where R.I. took place), a small number of children deliberately spoiled their papers, and some went beyond the comments invited about the paper they had completed and indicated that they were bored with R.I.⁴⁸⁷ It seemed to indicate that the objectives of the teachers were not the same as the objectives of the children. It is when teachers adopt a Postmodern standpoint in their thinking such that they are allied with the children they teach, that their R.E. teaching becomes more successful.

Overall implications

There are therefore three important implications for teachers of Religious Education in community schools:

(1) 'Postmodernism' might well be misunderstood by many people because of its complexity and because it has simply become synonymous with the developing world. It is not however acceptable for teachers to absorb or adopt a Postmodern (or indeed any) position without understanding what it really involves. Teachers need to understand what they are absorbing or adopting, and what is being absorbed or adopted by the children they teach. My impression from meeting with R.E. teachers is that there is minimal knowledge about Postmodernism; and this needs to be corrected. It is an issue that needs careful consideration by those responsible for the initial training of teachers, and by those responsible for in-service training.

(2) Where it is not already taking place, teachers need to adapt approaches in teaching so as to work with, rather than against the cultural

the language, skills, methodology and enthusiasm of the teacher will leave the child bored, inattentive and ill disciplined, because the lesson has no meaning for him or her
⁴⁸⁷ e.g. in one school: "I liked the questions. We got to miss a lesson in R.E." "More OK than RE lessons." "It was as boring as R.E."

perspectives of the child. Broad-based, non-authoritative, new-age-spiritual Religious Education is already taking place in many Community schools. Where it has taken place, attention has sometimes been drawn to the increased interest that is reflected in increased numbers of children taking R.E. for examination purposes at Key Stage 4.⁴⁸⁸

(3) R.E. teachers should not allow themselves to be taken too far. This can happen in a number of ways:

- By being taken beyond current legal requirements. It is still *Religious Education* that is required, that meets the requirements of the law and is within the capacity of the pupils. I accept that teaching about religions has to be put into context, but I do not personally believe that there is a strong argument (or time) for Atheism, Agnosticism, Humanism and Marxism to be included on the R.E. syllabus.⁴⁸⁹ They might feature in a course on philosophy but such would be anti-Religious Education and would certainly be outside of the original intention of the religious clauses within successive Education Acts. It goes too far.
- By accepting the suggestion that R.E. should be replaced by 'spiritual education.' I do not consider that some contemporary suggestions for teaching in R.E. are *Religious* education at all. Erricker acknowledged that his ideas for 'spiritual education' would bring about the end of R.E. as we know it.⁴⁹⁰ His scheme seeks to free the pupil from reality and all

⁴⁸⁸ To be realistic it is at least equally likely that this is due to the fact that the Examination syllabus has replaced the Agreed syllabus, and if it has to be studied one might as well try to get another subject listed on the certificate! To some extent such a negative view is supported by the fact that there are insufficient candidates going forward for R.E. in Higher Education either to sustain some University departments or to provide sufficient clergy or R.E. staff. See

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SACRES; SACRE *News*, Autumn 2003, Birmingham, Westhill College;

BRIERLY, P: *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*, Christian Research, London, 2002.

⁴⁸⁹ Although Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury makes the point that learning about the opposition both clarifies the opposition and helps a person to understand the key points of his own faith. WILLIAMS, R: *Belief, Unbelief and Religious Education* – speech given 8/3/04 <www.archbishopofcanterbury.org>.

⁴⁹⁰ ERRICKER, C: Shall we Dance? Authority, Representation and Voice; the Place of Spirituality in Religious Education, London, *Religious Education* 96.1, 2000, pp.20-35.

forms of power (all of which he declares are false) – so that children are free to choose whatever beliefs and lifestyles they prefer. His scheme has already been deconstructed by Wright.⁴⁹¹ Wright's own approach seeks to use R.E. to turn children into what he calls 'discontented philosophers,'⁴⁹² and incorporates into an R.E. programme, an examination of the 'transcendent,' 'sacred' or 'numinous' dimension in religion. As he puts it,

Any study of religion that does not have at its heart the exploration of questions of transcendence – regardless of what conclusions might be drawn – will, from the outset, be a reductive activity unable to do justice to the heart of religion.... Enabling children to encounter and critically engage with the transcendent horizons of religion, constitutes one of the major tasks facing religious educators today.⁴⁹³

Wright suggests that Religious Education must be honest about the problems of language exposed by Postmodern theory; receptive to the insights of others; and wise so as to include religious and philosophical literacy.

- By upgrading the level of the R.E. course too highly. Wright's proposals could well be beyond the capacity of significant numbers of children to follow the course. Such a course might be suitable for 'top stream,' or for pupils in the old-style grammar school, but I am much less sure about a mixed ability group in the local community school at Key Stage 3.
- By becoming involved in practice dependent upon a philosophical theory that they do not fully understand themselves. How much do teachers understand of Postmodernism that underlies so much of contemporary thinking about Religious Education? They need to know enough so as to be able to expose the flaws in Postmodern theory where necessary. There are many:

⁴⁹¹ WRIGHT, A: *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2004, pp. 199-207

⁴⁹² WRIGHT, A: Op.cit. p.209

⁴⁹³ WRIGHT, A: Op.cit. pp.212,213

- **Self-contradiction.** If metanarratives are to be rejected, then the metanarrative of Postmodernism has to be rejected; if all truth is relative then the truth about Postmodernism is also relative. Put another way, if there is no certainty, then one cannot be certain that there is no certainty. If all texts have to be deconstructed then texts about Postmodernism have to be deconstructed. If there is no historical truth, then the line of historical development of Postmodernism is itself at risk. Postmodernism claims to incorporate every possible viewpoint but rejects the viewpoint that not all views should be included; and rejection leads to oppression:
- **Oppression.** Those who do not hold Postmodern views are frequently oppressed, despite the fact that oppression is an area condemned by Postmodern thinkers. 'Liberal' thinkers are seldom 'liberal' in their attitudes to those who disagree with them; 'Postmodern' thinkers are seldom 'Postmodern' in their attitudes to those who disagree with them.
- **Extremism.** Another problem with Postmodernism is that it is frequently extreme, adopting, for example, the view that *all* media are hyper-reality, that *all* history is false or that it is not possible to understand what is in the mind of *any* writer. There might be some truth in what is being claimed, but not absolute truth.
- **Discontinuity.** Few Postmodern thinkers will go to the lengths Foucault was prepared to go. Despite belief that 'What is right is right for me,' I have yet to meet the Postmodernist who is a paedophile and claims that it is right for him, or one who claims that he can rape who he likes. Ultimately Postmodernism denies responsibility and criminality.

9.2. Implications for R.I. teachers in Aided schools

Secondary stage pupils who have adopted or absorbed Postmodern culture seem to have little interest in receiving instruction into the Christian faith, whether it takes place in Church (Aided) schools, or within church itself. It was children in Church (Aided) schools rather than children in community schools who took part in the survey recorded earlier in this study who volunteered statements admitting boredom with R.I. Persuasive communication about Christianity to young people of secondary-stage education is failing; the gap between Christian culture and Postmodern culture is not being bridged. Religious Instruction has changed in Aided schools, but insufficiently. The change has been described by Wright:

Traditional confessional Religious Education [assumed] that pupils are embryonic Christians requiring no more than an ongoing nurture into their faith [and has changed] to an assumption that pupils are implicitly religious, lacking in explicit religious belief and practice but retaining the capacity to have their innate religious potential unleashed by effective teaching,⁴⁹⁴

I am not convinced that it goes far enough.

Teachers in church (Aided) schools need to know and understand the nature of Postmodern theory in the same way that teachers in Community schools need such knowledge and understanding, but they need to go beyond it because of Postmodernism's oppositional stance towards Christianity. Admittedly, material available about Postmodern theory has, in the past, been incomplete and difficult to read – a point made in the introduction to this study - but even during the time this study has been in progress, accessible material has become available. There are two areas where teachers in Aided schools need to go beyond teachers in Community schools

⁴⁹⁴ WRIGHT, A: The Spiritual Education Project, in GRIMMITT, M: *Pedagogies of Religious Education*, Great Wakering, McCrimmon, 2000, p.177.

(1) Classroom material used for Religious Instruction needs to present Christianity in an interesting and relevant form so as to bridge the gap between the church and the 'Postmodern pupil.' One way of achieving this might be to utilise the theory and materials produced for the Stapleford Project, *Theology as the Basis for Religious Education*,⁴⁹⁵ although its intention was to correct R.E. in community schools. Starting from the point that 'the roots of R.E. lay in the Post-war confessional vision that schools should be building the Christian character of the nation,' it noted that

the vision collapsed in the 1970's due to awareness of religious pluralism and fear of religious indoctrination such that students (sic) are (*not* – my insertion) introduced to a systematic coverage of the key elements of Christian doctrine.⁴⁹⁶

This, it was said, was largely due to the fact that teachers did not know Christian theology sufficiently well to be able to translate it into the pupils' world and experience. The point was made that Christian doctrine rather than Christian stories unites Christians of all denominations and lies at the heart of Christianity, and the project therefore attracted to itself the descriptive title of 'Concept Cracking.' Although intended to produce materials that would go to the heart of Christianity in its theology at a level understood by the children as a Christian contribution to R.E. in community schools, it seems to me to be more appropriate to aided schools. This is because the basis of the unity of Christian doctrine used in the scheme is narrower than that of the world-wide Christianity that is relevant to the Community school; the fact is that there are Christianities, not Christianity. Cooling claims that it is possible to identify a core of beliefs that the vast majority of Christians would recognise and identify with.⁴⁹⁷ But I am not so sure, and my uncertainty lies in answers to the following:

Is the Bible a Divine revelation or a human construct?

⁴⁹⁵ COOLING, T: *Concept Cracking: Exploring Christian Beliefs in School*, Nottingham, Stapleford Centre, 1994.

⁴⁹⁶ This and other quotes taken from COOLING, T: *The Stapleford Project: Theology as the Basis for Religious Education*, in GRIMMITT, M: *Pedagogies of Religious Education*, McCrimmon, Essex, 2000, pp.153-169

⁴⁹⁷ COOLING, T: *Op.cit.* p.159.

Does one become a Christian by *incorporation* into the Christian community?

Is a Christian a person who accepts the teaching of Christ, or one who is indwelt by the Spirit of God?

The answers given by some groups of Christians are strong enough to deny that those who disagree are Christians at all! Although the Project's approach is similar to what a minister in 'Free' church might call a 'Children's Talk' in the first part of a Sunday Morning service, or that is to be found in good Sunday School material, Cooling claims that the outcome is not 'confessional' with the purpose of urging acceptance of Christian belief, but it is the transmission of an accurate understanding of what Christians believe. Teachers using the material adhere to a code of conduct which requires them to avoid language and behaviour that seeks to induct students into belief. This however would not be possible for (some?) Christians, who, remembering the teaching of Christ,⁴⁹⁸ believe that becoming a Christian is not the result of human persuasion about Christian doctrine, but the result of Divine intervention by the Spirit of God through Christian doctrine. So understood, the theory and practice of the project and its material is of real value within the Church, Aided, school rather than in the Community school.

(2) Teachers in Aided schools need to be aware that Postmodernism is anti-Christian, and in what way. Although Drane is one of the few writers to underline the anti-Christian nature of Postmodernism, there is little doubt that it does undermine the certainties of the Christian faith:

If there is no self, then there is nothing to be 'saved.'

If there is no metanarrative there is no Gospel and no salvation; truth is what you make for yourself.

If there is no truth in history, then the story of Jesus is a myth.

If there is no absolute truth then we have to decide for ourselves the nature of right and wrong

⁴⁹⁸ NEW TESTAMENT: John 3.3. "Unless a man is born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (*Revised Standard Version*) The word translated 'anew' (another) has a triple meaning – from the beginning, again, and from above. Nicodemus took the initial meanings. Jesus pointed out that it was the third meaning that was important - "...so is every one who is born of the Spirit" (v.9)

If there is no authority in the writer, we can interpret the Bible to mean what we like,

If words are simply signifiers then sin has no reality.

These problems have to be addressed in institutions where training is given for teaching R.E. in schools and for teaching the Christian faith in a church context. At the conclusion of Part II of this dissertation, a summary was given of those areas of the Christian faith where children are uncertain, and on which they wish to know the grounds of Christian assurance.⁴⁹⁹ It is essential that these areas are dealt with in a (Christian) Aided school. In addition, quite apart from claims that the Church is a power-structure, it has been claimed that Christian mission has been part of colonialism and has encouraged racism, and that in its practice it has encouraged patriarchy. They are serious challenges, and they are real challenges. They underlie problems that many secondary stage pupils find with Christianity and they need answers. The questions have to be answered; the challenges have to be met. It is not enough to provide the positive doctrinal teaching envisaged in the Stapleford Project within an Aided school or within a church. The Apostle, Peter, put it:

Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.⁵⁰⁰

9.3. Implications for those with teaching responsibility in church

The teen-age group is generally absent from church services,⁵⁰¹ despite the desperate efforts being made to overcome irrelevance and boredom so as to try to draw them back into church. Figures showing decline in attendance by Brierley⁵⁰² were supported by a report laid before the General Synod of the Church of England in February 2004 entitled 'Mission-shaped Church',

⁴⁹⁹ Dissertation, p.200.

⁵⁰⁰ NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Peter 3.15. (Revised Standard Version)

⁵⁰¹ AINSDALE LEADERS FORUM (ALF) claimed in a letter to churches in the area, January 2004, that although 2000 secondary-stage children live in Ainsdale and in Birkdale, only 4 children in this age group are regular attendees at church services in Ainsdale.

⁵⁰² BRIERLEY. P: Op.cit., pp.3ff.

⁵⁰³produced to provide remedies for the serious decline of numbers among Sunday teenage-worshippers in the Church of England.⁵⁰⁴ It is clear from books, conferences and letters that have been referred to in this dissertation that how do deal with the situation is a matter of considerable concern. Christian parents are anxious, but so far as the majority of Christian parents are concerned which whom I have contact, they are frequently out of touch with teen-age culture in the same way that they are ignorant about what really happens in R.E. in school.⁵⁰⁵ In view of the fact that R.E. in schools is often implicitly anti-Christian, steps need to be taken so that they can be informed.

This would normally be done through clergy and church leaders, but tragically there are few clergy I have met who are fully aware of trends in R.E., and are well-informed about Postmodern theory. There therefore needs to be informative education of church leaders and church members through theological colleges, so that they are aware of the changes that have taken place and are currently taking place. There is a need for agreement about the best way to close the gap between church and the Postmodern-influenced teen-ager and ability to take appropriate action within a church situation.

Clergy need not only to know Postmodernism well enough to be able to identify the problems, but to possess the skills to use the language of Postmodern theory and develop a strategy for meeting the problems. It is not enough to proclaim that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' It is necessary to contend with denial of history, denial of absolute standards of morality and denial of author-objectivity in literature – all with reference to Postmodern language and concepts. Neither is it enough to meet the

⁵⁰³ CHURCH OF ENGLAND, *Mission-shaped Church*, London, Church House Publishing, 2004

⁵⁰⁴ GLEDHILL, R: Archbishop Backs Guerrilla Tactics in War on Secularism, London, *The Times*, 20/01/0r4 p.22.

⁵⁰⁵ They seem to think that the R.E. being taught in community schools is basically Biblical-Christian, similar to what they experienced at school, and in accordance with what they generally understand to be legal requirements, revised to some extent to take account of other world religions. Very few parents have any idea of the way that R.E. teaching has been influenced by Postmodern Theory, or even what Postmodern theory has to say.

problems from the pulpit. A retired primary Head Teacher writing in the 'Public Agenda' section of *The Times*, stated that Head Teachers need help from clergy; they do not normally have the expertise to answer such [Postmodern-induced] problems in the daily school assembly, and they need the help that clergy might give.⁵⁰⁶ Like St. Paul, clergy and teachers within the Church and Church schools need to become all things to all men:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not myself being under the law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak; that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.⁵⁰⁷

Perhaps more important, they need to be able to avoid those practices that are counterproductive. Not only must the issues that need to be understood in Community schools and in Aided schools be taken up and understood, but two additional areas need attention.

Bridging the culture gap

The adoption of contemporary (Postmodern) culture by the church so as to attract those absorbing Postmodern theory is sometimes put into operation. It is an issue that needs to be carefully examined in all centres involved in the training of church staff.

The relationship between Christ and culture is no new problem for the Church. When Neibuhr wrote his classic book, *Christ and Culture*, he identified at least five different ways Christians have approached culture.⁵⁰⁸ Of key significance are the approaches that have been labelled 'Christ

⁵⁰⁶ MILLARD, A: No Place for the Lesson in School, in Public Agenda section of *The Times*, 11/5/04., p.16.

⁵⁰⁷ NEW TESTAMENT: *1 Corinthians* 9. 19-22 (Revised Standard Version)

⁵⁰⁸ RYKEN, L: Culture in ATKINSON, D. & FIELD, D: *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 1995, p.278

against culture,' which indicates Christian hostility to contemporary culture, and 'Christ in harmony with culture' which indicates Christian acquiescence to contemporary culture. It is what Gallagher terms 'tense hostility' and innocent acceptance.⁵⁰⁹ Christians who take one view or the other tend to be hostile to one another and to claim Scriptural support for their position. Those adopting the 'Christ against culture' position claim support from James and John:

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?⁵¹⁰ Do not love the world or the things in the world; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are not of the Father.⁵¹¹

Christians who adopt the Christ in harmony with culture position note that the Gospels were written in the language of the culture of the people for whom they were written, and that St. Paul adopted the language and culture of the Greek world when meeting the Education Committee of Athens on Mars Hill.⁵¹² There has to be a third position that Gallagher terms 'Discernment.' The problem is not insoluble once false antithesis is recognised. Christians can adopt the language of non-Christian culture for communication purposes, but not adopt cultural practice. Only when Christians discern the implications of Postmodern culture, understand them and then work out how to meet the issues raised, will effective communication take place. Evidence from the New Testament is that contemporary cultural language and concepts were used for communication⁵¹³ without adoption of the culture itself. As Christ put it, there is that which has to be rendered to Caesar and that which has to be rendered to God.⁵¹⁴ Putting the matter somewhat crudely: if we go to France we need to speak French, and we need to understand the French way of life, but we do not have to become French. If we go to Postmodern land, we

⁵⁰⁹ GALLAGHER, M: *Clashing Symbols*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, (Revised edition) 2003, p.135

⁵¹⁰ NEW TESTAMENT: *James* 4.4. (Revised Standard Version)

⁵¹¹ NEW TESTAMENT: *1 John* 2. 15-16 (Revised Standard Version)

⁵¹² NEW TESTAMENT: *Acts* 17. 22-31.

⁵¹³ Paragraph 58 of *Gaudium et Spes* from Vatican II points out that God's progressive self communication adapted itself to the culture of different ages. See GALLAGHER, M: Op.cit. p.46

⁵¹⁴ NEW TESTAMENT: *Matthew* 22.21.

have to speak, and we have to understand but we do not have to become Postmodern; and this, quite simply, is what the church has to do. Its proclamation of the Truth to those immersed in Postmodern culture, and the issues of the UNtruth of Postmodernism, as Christians see it, have to be explained at the same time in a language that people understand. The alternative forms of worship, base ecclesiastical communities, café church, cell church and seeker church suggested in the 'Mission Shaped Church' are unlikely to succeed because they do not meet the problems raised by the absorption or adoption of Postmodern culture by (the missing) teen-agers. It is almost impossible for teen-age children to accept that God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, and died for our sins, when they have lost the concepts of spirituality, morality and history that underpin such a central Christian belief. It is a form of Religious Instruction that utilises a common language so as to explain Christian apologetics as well as a proclamation of Christian faith that is required.

Avoidance of practice condemned by Postmodernism.

It is not only teen-agers who have left the church. There are increasing numbers of people in older age-groups who feel that the church has little or nothing to offer them any longer. People have left the contemporary church for reasons of conscience for centuries, each new denomination being based on withdrawal from the previous one. People leave the 21st. century church because of anxiety about what they see as discrimination against minority groups, varying from policies towards forms of colonialism, patriarchy and sexuality. There is now a different reason for leaving the church; it does not satisfy, and there is need for a change, in the same way that repetitive diet and soft furnishings need a change. One reason for leaving the church is that people have become so conditioned to want change by consumerist promotional advertising, that they look for variety and change in the church. When it is not to be found, they look for satisfaction outside. Understanding what is happening, some church leaders have themselves adopted the practice of commodification and offer commodities to the person who attends

church - come and buy the performance of the band, the latest in Christian drama, the excitement of meeting important personalities, the week-end event , the best in church furnishings, the singing of the group..... In operating within a consumerist culture, they reinforce the reactions of the congregation to commodities, and by the adoption of such procedures enhance the very area opposed by Postmodern theory, encouraging its (dissatisfied) congregation to look elsewhere. Wells puts the matter succinctly:

Allowing the consumer to be sovereign in this way in fact sanctions a bad habit. It encourages us to indulge in constant internal inventory in the church no less than the marketplace, to ask ourselves perpetually whether the 'products' we are being offered meet our present 'felt needs.' In this sort of environment, market research has found that there is hardly any consumer loyalty to particular products and brands anymore. The consumer, like the marketeer, is making fresh calculations all the time. And so it is that the churches that have adopted the strategy of marketing themselves have effectively installed revolving doors. The pews may be full but never with the same people from week to week. People keep entering, lured by the church's attractions or just to check out the wares, but then they move on because they feel their needs, real or otherwise are not being met.⁵¹⁵

Sometimes even the very name, 'church' is hidden and the local Christian church becomes 'The Family Life Centre' or 'The Lighthouse.'⁵¹⁶

9.4. Implications for the future

The implications drawn out in this chapter are extremely important, but they are based upon reactions of a relatively small group of children in a restricted age-group and in a limited geographical area. This might be extended:

- Is there any further evidence that children in secondary school become more and more 'Postmodern' in attitude as they progress beyond educational year 8?

⁵¹⁵ WELLS, D: *God in the Wasteland*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1994, p.75

⁵¹⁶ Actual, relatively local changes of name.

- Is there any further evidence that the attitudes found among 400 children in an area of North Merseyside is general and can be found among more children in other parts of the country?
- Is there any further evidence that the resistance to R.E. found in Aided schools is to be found in other Aided schools?
- What might be done to find answers to problems of Christian belief raised by Postmodern theory and expressed by children?
- Is there any evidence that a permanent positive attitude to Christianity can be engendered by churches and youth groups that attempt to adopt a form of Postmodern culture?

Answers to these questions are indeed, important. It is clear that the children who took part in the research element of this study have reacted against Christianity and constitute part of the 'lost generation' to the church, revealed by current statistical studies. It is also clear that among the children who took part in this research project, rejection of 'church' is due to the absorption of Postmodern theory through contemporary culture rather than by thinking things through. Whether they are enabled to think things through and obtain the answers they need depends upon provision of relevant elements of Religious Education in schools and in churches. It also appears to depend upon the method of teaching; small group discussion appears to be more helpful than large-class instruction. Such issues are not only important for the community school; they are important for the aided school and also for the church.

It is a pity that the limited number of children involved in this project leads to suggestiveness rather than conclusiveness. Research needs to be followed through with more children, and in a wider area, and I will support such extension in any way possible.

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