

# **POSTMODERNISM**

BY GRAHAM CRAY - NB: written in 1992 but still a relevant document

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## **Introduction**

The main thesis of this paper is that Western culture is in the middle of a major transition from one era to another; from post Enlightenment or 'modern' world view to a 'postmodern' one. In one sense all studies of culture are stills taken from a moving picture, but in a time of major transition the phenomena of a culture can only be interpreted correctly in the context of the direction of change. It is the fact and complexity of this change which is being emphasized. It is not that the emerging culture is more or less friendly to the gospel, in different ways it is both. It is simply that the cultural goal posts are being moved, the shape of the task of inculcation without syncretism is changing. 'Christianity is not dependent on one cultural expression of it' (Good News In Our Times). The task is to find appropriate expressions of the Christian faith, both for the time of transition and as the new world view becomes clearer.

Major cultural changes usually begin within the academic or intellectual world, and percolate through to alter the everyday assumptions of ordinary people. Such cultural changes can take centuries. However, the dominance of modern electronic media has in part by passed and part speeded up this process. The speed of change and the nature of modern communication media are themselves significant factors in the transition from modern to post modern. However, the intellectual questioning of Enlightenment values lies at the root of the current changes. The first part of this paper will provide some definitions and outline the main points of the intellectual questioning, so that the second part can show how this thinking now shapes and influences mass culture.

## **Definitions**

Both 'modern' and 'post modern' are slippery terms. Modern was used of the era dating from the renaissance, and was defined over against 'Antiquity'. In sociological use modernity is contrasted to traditional culture and applied particularly to the economic and bureaucratic system which brought the modern capitalist industrial state into being. It was the thinking of the enlightenment which made the development of the modern state possible. In each case modern is set against traditional.

Postmodern is even more difficult to define because it is used in different ways within different disciplines. Partially as a consequence it has also become a general term used to describe the awareness of a changing era and it is the sense in which I use it. Inevitably it has also become a buzzword. 'This word has no meaning. Use it as often as possible' (The Independent 24.12.87). Postmodern emerged as academic term in the study of literacy theory and criticism. It became better known as a style of architecture and has also been used in the study of music, art, fiction, film, drama, photography, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and geography. Each discipline uses the term slightly differently, and in some it is now passe; but as David Bosch has pointed out, 'Never before in history of humankind have scholars in all disciplines been so preoccupied as they are today, not with the study of their disciplines themselves, but with the meat questions concerning those disciplines. The state of affairs in it self is indicative of the presence of a crisis of major proportions, of the advent of a significant 'paradigm shift' in all branches of

science. And since the modern academic disciplines are essentially western phenomena and products, it is only to be expected that it is above all the West that finds itself in the midst of a crisis of gigantic proportions. It is becomingly increasingly evident that the modern gods of the West- science, technology and industrialization -have lost their magic' (Bosch page 363)

## **From here - post enlightenment**

Cultural transition is a long process, which makes it easy for those involved not to notice the significance of the changes happening around them. In the present time of cultural transition, what we are losing or can no longer trust, is clearer than what we are becoming. The full shape of the new world view is not yet clear, but Bosh shows how all 7 main characteristics of Enlightenment thinking are now being challenged (p. 264 -267, 351-362).

In the enlightenment human reason was the unchallenged point of departure for all knowing.

Subject and object were strictly separated so the rational human mind could observe the environment with scientific objectivity.

The idea of purpose was replaced by cause and effect.

All this created a belief in progress, modernization and development.

Scientific knowledge was understood as factual, value free and neutral; facts were set over and against values, based only on opinion and belief. The result was the gradual elimination of the role of religion in forming a public policy.

All problems were seen to be in principle solvable.

People were regarded as emancipated autonomous individuals.

The positive changes in the human condition which resulted from this world view have been enormous. We are all heirs of the Enlightenment and it is no part of this paper's purpose to describe the enlightenment world view as a 'bad thing' (1066 and all that). However, the enlightenment worldview has now been shown to be inadequate, overly optimistic, and to have contained the seeds of its own destruction.

The enlightenment view of reason and rationality has been shown to be reductionist, excluding whole areas of human experience, including religious experience; and to have been vastly over optimistic. Science does not so much prove as probe. Its explanations are tentative rather than exact; metaphor, symbol, ritual and sign are proving essential to knowing.

The subject / object distinction not only produced the mechanistic view of the world, but resulted in a disastrous ecological crisis. We have to stop thinking of ourselves over against the environment and start seeing ourselves as part of it.

To exclude a priori, the question of purpose, is to deny the reality of a dimension of thinking essential to human existence. 'It would seem to be proved beyond doubt that human beings cannot live in the rarefied atmosphere of pure rationality as the post enlightenment world understood rationality. There are the needs of the human spirit which simply must be met. It seems

that those religious bodies which have tried to accommodate as much as possible of the rationalism of the enlightenment are those which are in decline, and those which have maintained a strong emphasis on the supernatural dimension of religion have flourished, here I am not equating religion with Christianity. There is much flourishing of new religions and the revival of old ones which is more pagan than Christian. But this flourishing does not seem to provide nourishment for the human spirit. Moreover, quite apart from religion properly called, one has only to look at the enormous growth of astrology - precisely among the developed societies. This is surely evidence of the fact that the human spirit cannot live permanently with the form of rationality that has no answer to the question 'why' (Newbigin, L 1989)

On going progress on the basis of human rational ability is no longer self-evident. The industrial world has created the ecological crisis. Technology is most advanced in its use for the manufacture of weapons of destruction.

It is clear that there are no value free facts, but that all facts are interpreted facts, depending on the belief system of the scientist. Polanyi has shown that the only knowledge is 'personal knowledge' arising from belief. There can be no divide between fact and value or belief.

All problems are not necessarily solvable on the bias of rationality and good will.

Individualism has been shown to destroy community; while there is growing understanding that persons only know themselves as persons in relationships.

The foundations of enlightenment thinking, misinterpreting both humankind and the universe, are now crumbling; but what is emerging in their place?

## **To Where (post modernism)**

There is a substantial consensus that the dawn of the postmodern era was 'the political and cultural collapse and upheaval of World War 1' (Kung page 4). The Second World War especially the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki furthered this disillusionment. It should not surprise us that much pomo writing reacted powerfully against Enlightenment certainties. It is strongly critical of any views of knowledge, which claim certainty, any evolutionary theories of human knowledge or over arcing attempts to provide rational explanations of the world. It sees life and culture as intrinsically pluralist with facts, values, relationships and cultures, with each having no claims to greater truth than the other. In a pomo view there is no single system of values, but the vary nature of a global industrial society and economy, equipped with the latest in information technology, means that each subculture or personal world view is a hybrid, gathering components from many cultures and ages of history. The nature of such society and such media detaches specific aspects of individual cultures from the original settings which gave them their meaning and reduces them to images, which we blend them together to form our own pick and mix world view. What matters is, what does it mean to me. 'Post modernity is a flux of images and fictions. . truth is human, socially produced, historically developed, plural and changing' (Don Cupitt quoted by Gunton page 96). It is clear, that the pomo paradigm, while rejecting some elements of enlightenment

thought that were inimical to the Christian gospel, has raised up others in its place.

In itself the word post modern is not important and not particularly helpful, apart from its ability to give a name to the major cultural shift we are experiencing. 'To speak off post modernity is to suggest an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organizing principles' (Featherstone page 3). The situation is complex; in part because we are in the transition period, where one era is dying and another being born, but also because there are always continuities from one era to the next. The new culture arises in part from the relentless logic of the old one. Descartes' principle of radical doubt leads inevitably to the modern philosophy's disbelief in claims of certainty. 'There no longer seems to be access to the principles which can act as criteria of value for anything else' (Conour p.8) Yet there are obvious continuities. A mechanistic views of market forces still underlies the world economic system, rational analysis is not replaced by blind leaps of faith. At the same time there are strong reactions to the reductionism of the enlightenment. Just as the post-Enlightenment culture was plural on the surface, but had a dominant root paradigm, but the same is true of the emerging culture.

The postmodern world will be viewed through a biological not a mechanistic model. Human beings will see themselves as belonging to the environment, rather than over and apart from it. Institutions, hierarchies, centralized bureaucracies and male dominant organizations will be increasingly distrusted. Networks and local grass roots activities will grow in importance. Styles of leadership and organization will change. The book age is giving way to the screen age, already strongly influencing the way people learn. The emerging culture will be secular, in that it is pluralist and does not trust the partnership of political power and religious ideology. On the other hand it will not be, and is not now secular, in the sense of having no place for spirituality. Spirituality, drawn from many contradictory sources, will be central.

## **Aspects of everyday culture**

The key question is, have these changes in the academic and intellectual world been translated into everyday culture. Andrew Walker thinks not: 'postmodernism may cut a dash at Clare College Cambridge but it does not cut much ice in the suburbs and inner cities of Britain. . It is my conviction that intellectual fashions, however profound, have little immediate effect on popular culture' (Wilmer page 57). This is fair enough if postmodernism is only the current trend in philosophical thinking but using the word as an overall term for change in perspectives, which have been developing since the first world war, it does not take long to discover considerable evidence that we are in something of an overlap of the ages, a transmission time between a dying and an emerging world view.

## **Electronic media and commercialization.**

The primary bearers and reinforcers of values today are the mass media, television, film, radio, video, the personal computer and recorded music, rock

or dance. Furthermore, the value and fashion molders are increasingly the popular arts, rather than high art, which searches or increase its market share when packaged like pop music (Nigel Kennedy, and Pavarotti). 5% of the UK population attend the Theatre, opera or ballet. 4% attend museums or art galleries and only 2% of working class attend any of the above. Only 2% of young people excluding students attend the theatre which is the most popular trad arts venue. 98% of the population watch TV on average for over 25 hours a week. 92% of 20 - 40 year olds listen to the radio, 87% listen to tapes and records. 40% of 16 -24 year olds go to the cinema at least once a quarter. 38% of 11 - 25 year olds go to discos. 26% go to night clubs. 68% of 16 - 24 year olds live in households with a video recorder. Some two thirds of young people between 16 and 24 watch or hire videos at home. One third of 16 - 24 year olds live in a house hold possessing a micro computer, using their machines predominately for playing games. A fact of modern life, particularly for young people and young adults, is that the electronic media are an inescapable central aspect of culture. 'Our era has been united by current technologies into an instabtanous 24 hour information world' (Jencks).

The nature of such media makes them ideal developers of a pomo culture. Unlike the book culture, the screen culture presents its information in an episodic way rather than a than a liner a way. Information can be presented from all over the world, from every know culture and from every know period of history. Much screen presentation inevitably majors on the visual image.. many pop videos have

for example have no explicit story line but create a mood or an impression through a sequence of images. the draw on traditional film making skills but use them in a new way. It is important to point out that this form of communication is not irrational, it is simply an alternate way of expressing rationality. Information is communicated in different ways the human brain still reassembles it in to rational patterns. the consequence is not so much the loss of rationality as a new way of learning. Such is the impact of the screen culture that earlier forms of communication, in particular magazines and newspapers, have been redesigned to be scanned rather than read in a linear from. recent advertisements for ITV's Oracle service (a text on your TV service in the UK - ED) contrasted it with the poor newshound delivering the paper, who can not keep up with the continually updated messages on the screen.

However the media are the main purveyors of values at this time, when at the heart of the media are faithful reflectors of modern society' (McDonnell page 180)The modern media reflect pluralist society which is skeptical about claims to objectivity and detachment! Many journalists are highly sensitive to the accusation of bias. In this way they continually reinforce an attitude of scepticism in their audience. As McLuhan put it 'the medium is the message' and ' the medium is the message.'

If electronic media are the ideal purveors of post modern values, they are controlled by the strongest surviving element of post enlightenment values, market force economics.' From a commercial viewpoint all media messages are selling messages'(McDonnell page 176). New Right interpretations of the market economy have dominated the policies of many Western governments in recent years. The collapse of the Eastern Block has given this ideology on

additional appearance of validity.' The image of the market economy as a self regulating mechanism is extremely powerful. It continues to function both as belief and theory'(Collier, page 113). This model rests solidly on enlightenment assumptions. It is a machine or mechanistic model rooted in the physics of Newton rather on Einstein. It also assumes on Enlightenment understanding of people as autonomous individuals. New Right assumptions are that personal freedom for one's own ends represents the highest value, and that in a corporate pluralist state social justice is an mirage. The free market is understood as the best way to lead to a equal society although sometimes the very existence of 'society' is denied. Inequality is understood as essential to progress. The final stage of Enlightenment culture has declared economics to be the queen of the sciences, thus the most damning words in the political vocabulary is 'uneconomic'. The concept of market forces is thus introduced into other aspects of society; ( law, education, health) which do not have a primary profit motive. This is a classic case of Enlightenment reductionism for ' not all human values are comprehended in the freedom to buy and sell' (Raymond Plant).

The interlock of electronic media and big business is very powerful. The majority of the electronic media are in the hands of a number of huge multi national companies. The creation of Time Warner in 1989 and the Sony purchase of Columbia Records in 1987 and Columbia pictures in 1989 creates groups who control every stage of the creation and marketing of records, films, videos, satellite, and cable TV and computer software. This has created the possibility of artists like Maddona and Michael Jackson, having an integrated career where their performance, as musicians, actors all blend into careers as ' global personalities'.

The emergence of the pop idiom, just before the launch of . . . . MTV . . created a new form of advertisement disguised as a work of art. The a video carries various levels of meaning. It is a visual art form in itself, it interprets and compliments the music, it advertises the product; and is used as part of an extended strategy to develop and promote a career. Essentially a pop video is an advert without the explicit invitation to buy.' All messages are selling messages'.

The advertising industry has the strong links with the pop music industry. Many major acts accept commercial sponsorship of their concert tours. A number of agencies now exist to sell old songs, (which carry a strong nostalgia value to certain target audiences), to advertisement agencies. Thus Free sell chewing gum and 'The Clash', one of Britain's most influential Punk Rock bands are used to sell Levi jeans. The most significance examples are bands which connect the new records of major artists with advertising campaigns. Pepsi has consistently used major artists for promotion purposes. The most notorious case been the release of Maddona song' like a prayer' with an advertising clip based on the song and paralleling the pop video in 40 countries simultaneously. The sequence of events began with the release of the advertisement, followed by the release of the single, followed by the album. Warner Brothers sells Pepsi, Pepsi sells Warner Brothers.' The aim is to subtly transform rock into advertisements, music videos into announcements, concert tours and TV drama into advertisements'. The TV cartoon Teenage

**Mutant Hero Turtles was specifically designed as a device to promote Turtle toys and other products. The initial series was funded by the toy manufacturers. The trade's term for this inter-relationship is called 'synergy.' Commerce and culture are at last becoming the same thing' (Hewinson page 55).**

**The emerging culture (modern electronic media) and the dying culture (market force economics) can live together because materialism looks set to be a thriving prospect of the future as well as the past.' The primary cultural pursuit of the late 20 the century is shopping' (Hewinson page 82).**

### **Pluralism**

**' Pluralism the great'ism' of our time is both the great problem and the great opportunity(Jenncks). The emerging culture is pluralist in a number of different ways. Firstly, from an economic perspective where maximum choice is an ideological value, assumed to lead to a quality of service and life, irrespective of evidence to the contrary in some situations force. The continual creation of youth commodities and an increased range of choice is still largely unchallenged by the majority culture. ' The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself' (Susan Sontag in Hewson page 63). Secondly, the emerging culture is sociologically plural in the sense that is often necessary to speak of the cultures of the Nineties rather than the culture of the Nineties. This is not just a matter of a society containing minority rights of one European racial grouping or of other world faiths. It is also a matter of the increasing fragmentation of the British culture as a whole. Thirdly, the culture of the Nineties is pluralist with regard to truth. Truth is understood as only having meaning for relevance as an expression of individual preference or corporately within communities of belief, none of whom have the right or capacity to establish any absolute claims against other communities and traditions. Communities of faith are assume to have no right to make claims about the direction of mainstream culture, whereas mainstream culture continually invades traditional communities of faith.**

### **Rootlessness**

**Post modern society has little sense of history or roots. A pick and mix culture where truth is plural and compiled from diverse cultures and all periods of history. These are communicated through media which tend to detach items and images from their original context and thus lead to' the loss of a sense of historically past'. Because images are primary and multiple . . . space and time are discontinuous so that, in a sense, neither time no space exist; both have the dissolve into on eternal present (the presence of the image)'(Hebdige quoted in Begbie page 67).**

**One consequence is, that we live in a through away society. 'My songs are like Bic razors. For fun. For modern consumption. You listen to it, like it, discard it, then on to the next. Disposable pop'( Freddie Mercury). Decisions about values and morals have to be made on the basis of fragments drawn from a variety of cultures, moralities and eras taken out of the context which originally gave them meaning.' What we possess now are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now those contexts from which there significance**

derived' (Alasdair MacIntyre). 'For many people their own place lies within the technical, rational world of mass culture, with its horizons bounded by greater consumption, knowledge and personal relationships'(Peter Sedgewick page 57).

Many however, turn to the past to provide the future, and draw clues to meaning and world view from ancient, fringe, or suppressed cultures and spiritualites; through a revived nationalism, or an attempt to stem the tide of change and recreate the past through some form of fundamentalism.' You glorify the past when the future dries'(Bono).

## **Style as content**

A pluralist culture which is skeptical about claims to truth and understands truth as ' what it means to the' will inevitably 'elevate style to the level of content.' The 80's style culture was characterized by a belief that nothing matters, everything is true!' Style based magazines like the face have flourished since 1980. The group Queen built their career by turning cliches into anthems. 'We are the champions',' it's a hard life',' friends will be friends',' the show must go on' etc.' You listen to it, discard it, then put on the next one, disposable pop'(Freddie Mercury). A significant number of white rock artists have a Roman Catholic who upbringing and an even greater proportion of black singers are from Pentecostal or Baptist homes. In many cases the language of faith has been turn into a style of music, detached from the content of the original vocabulary. Artists like Madonna and Michael Jackson maintain their audiences by a continual evolving of image and style. Style not content is what builds a career. From a Catholic background Madonna as turned the crucifix into an icon of fashion. ' The medium of TV has helped to turn information itself into a commodity. Culture becomes a matter of style, a commodity within the general circulation of commodities that in the end turns the individual self into a commodity among others '(Hewson page 14).

## **Pick and Mix**

One of the best descriptions of post modern culture is that of ' shopping',' that the world and or of history is a vast supermarket, and you can just pick out the ingredients you like, and assemble them into your own version of something'. It is in just this way that Maddona and Michael Jackson and others develop their image and further their careers. As will be shown below, it is also of essence of the New Age movements ' New Agers tend to be eclectic; they draw what they think is best from many sources' (Elliot Miller).

Not just New Agers but many people today pick and mix to create a world view. 'It is not only the rich who become collectors, eclectic travelers in time with a super abundance of choice, but almost every urban dweller' (Jencks).

The singer Prince has had a profound effect on the development of black music in the last decade. Like Michael Jackson he blended black and white music styles. In one sense he stands in direct line of descent from black singers from the 50's to the 80's who have been raised in a narrow and legalistic form of Christian faith, and been unable to integrate faith and

sexuality as they achieve pop and soul fame. From little Richard through the 'divided soul' Marvin Gaye to the Rev Al Green such performers have rebounded between guilt and sexual license, faith and fear. Prince is quite different. It has been said of him 'Prince worships two gods, religion and sex, but is confused over which he likes best'. But prince does not see the necessity of this choice: rather 'in prince we see both sides of Little Richard reconciled in sacred sin'. Prince has produced and continues to produce some of the most pornographic songs and stage displays of any artist in popular music. Within the same album and concert he will sing of the cross, of salvation through Christ and in effect offer his sexuality to God. A pick and mix culture detaches its component parts from their original context and makes it possible to believe two contradictory things breakfast!

When surveyed about religious belief it is not unusual for people to reply that they believe in God, even that they believe Jesus Christ is uniquely the Son of God, when they also believe in reincarnation and astrology. They may see no moral claims as arising from any of those beliefs!

The pick and mix approach is also seen in the increasingly dominant place of techno or dance music in the music scene. Anyone who has watched Top of The pops or listened to Radio 1 play lists over a long period will have recognized the gradual emergence of a complete new style 'dance' or Techno. Dance music is based on computerized keyboards rather than trad rock guitars. One significant element is that of sampling. To sample is to extract a fragment of vocal or instrumental, a 'beat' or 'break', from an earlier record, in order to build it into the sound of the dance track. 'They molded shredded music history into new shapes with in a single tune' (Santoro in Rose). This music has provided the coherence for a whole club based sub culture with its own fashion and art. The most creative contemporary pop style is essentially high tech and pick and mix.

## **The search for wholeness**

The inadequacy of Enlightenment based mechanistic views of the world, and its separation of humans from the remainder of the environment, is now widely recognized. Environmental concerns, the promoting of environmentally friendly products, the growing profile of pressure groups like Green peace and Friends of the Earth is a fact of contemporary culture. Children know little Christian doctrine, but a great deal about the ozone layer. Paralleling this is an interest in 'alternative everything', medicine, therapies, natural remedies etc. Holistic is a current buzz word. Here is a search for symbols and vocabulary which speaks of our oneness with the created order. New Age spirituality draws from many sources to meet the this need. Rock singer David Byrne is typical of many when he says' A lot of nature is up for grabs creating these days, especially if you don't accept Christian ideas of God creating the world, and man as a separate entity . .I'm more in sympathy with pre -Christian religions . . that maintain ties with natural forces and the elements, that seek a balance.'

## **Spirituality**

The culture of the 90's is only secular in its strong suspicion of the relationship between religion and power-politics. Pannenberg has shown that the roots of secularization lie in the reaction against religious wars in Europe. However, our culture is not secular. Predictions about the demise of religion made earlier this century are now demonstrably false. Enlightenment thinking gave an appearance of pushing spirituality and transcendence to the edge of life, but in practice it created a spiritual vacuum and 'the starved imagination like the empty belly, is remarkably catholic in its tastes' (Colin Moris) There is major increase in interest in spirituality, in methods of prayer and the use of religious vocabulary to make sense of our relationship to the environment. Pluralism and pick and mix again predominates. The singer Peter Gabriel had both of his children confirmed and christened at the Self Realization fellowship in LA. His wife reported 'it was lovely actually. A mill in the middle of this wonderful lake and they were christened in 6 different religions.' Styles of prayer are separated from doctrinal content in which they originated, whether Eastern or Western; Hinduism, Zen, Buddhism, the occult, astrology and witchcraft are all raided to provide the contents of a spirituality for a commodity culture. Eastern religion is particularly popular, but world denying or world escaping elements of the major religious faiths are firmly left on the shelf. This is a spiritually hungry, but spirituality naive, culture.

## **Community, family and Sexuality**

In a culture which is individual, private and pluralist it is hard to find the means to help society to hold together. Traditional family life has been decimated in Britain. The 'traditional family of working husband and stay at home wife' makes up only 7% of all UK house holds, having declined from 12% in 1979. Single persons living alone, many of them elderly, now account for more than a quarter of all households. Single parent households are increasing and 28% of babies are born out side of marriage. The British divorce rate is the highest in Europe. Child abuse is a growing problem. Society is increasingly fragmented, and isolation is the experience of more and more people. Lasting commitments to blood family or marriage partners have to based on values, and there is a vacuum of values in our society. Sexuality has been reduced to genital acts for personnel or mutual pleasure'. There is now a major interpretation of sexual relationships as finding, in another person, the raw material for private sensations . . failure in such versions of relationship is wholly predictable since relationships are precisely an alternative to the use of others as raw material' (Raymond Williams). There is no longer a communal belief in the link between sexual activity and lasting commitment. Aids is seen more as a horror which confirms life has no meaning, than a reason to question sexual values or practice, beyond that of wearing a condom.

## **The New Age Movement as a PoMo paradigm**

Human beings cannot live fragmented lives for long. Some world view or answer to the question 'why' has to be found. The New Age movement is the

clearest example so far of attempts by pomo people to create a frame work of meaning. I describe it primarily as an example of the way in which modern western people will try to answer the question of meaning.

The New Age movement is ' the fastest growing spiritual movement in the world today' (Marget Brierly). It is not a closely organized movement; it is in no sense hierachial, being essentially individualist, and in no way a conspiracy. It is ' an extremely large loosely structured network of organizations and individuals bound together by a common values and a common vision' (Elliot Miller). Modern electronic communications make such a networking on a global scale possible and provide the sources for this particular pick and mix. New Agers believe that a new age or era is coming. They describe it in astrological terms. Their thinking has been influenced by the work of the historian of science Thomas Kuhn ( ( ( Local mirror Links Local mirror) who applied the idea of 'paradigm shift' to major to major break thoughts in scientific understanding. Theologians like Kung and Bosch have taken up this idea but it has also provided a pseudo scientific vocab for New Age claims. The New Age has picked and mixed from Astrology, Hinduism, and modern science. The influence of the physicist Franz Capra has led many New Agers to claim that particle theory and the new physics support an eastern or monistic view of reality, and that the Hindu concept that 'all is one' blend with contemporary science to provide a 'better' way of relating humans to their environment. None of these beliefs demand personal or corporate moral values. What is required is not repentance or a change of mind, but a change of consciousness and for this the new age turns to pre Christian Paganism, Witchcraft, Eastern meditation techniques and new forms of spiritualism ('channeling').In one sense the New Age movement is a religion without being a religion, with its emphasis on self realization rather than upon God. The pomo elements are clear; a change in world view, networking rather than hierarchy, a new way of explaining the relationship of people to the environment, a distrust of some aspects of science, medicine and technology, while other aspects of science and technology are used to disseminate or support new Age claims, a pick and mix from the past and present, a spirituality without moral values, and a focus on self - realization

## Lessons for the church

The challenge to the church is how to express the eternal truth of the Christian faith in and through this culture. Our reaction must not be to throw up hands in horror, nor to attempt an impossible return to the past. The task is not harder than the previous generations; it is simply different because culture is changing. The Christian faith has been faithfully expressed in every age since Christ and this can be done again. 'Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it has God who knew the way out of the grave. But the first extraordinary fact which marks this history is this; that Europe has been turned upside down over and over again; and that at the end of each of these revolutions the same religion has come to the top' (G.K.Chesterton). To fail to attempt this challenge is to disbelieve the Gospel, to give up on the world, and to speak in the language that our contemporaries can not hear. The tragic testimony of John V. Taylor would become characteristic of the whole church.

**'When my son decided to give up on the Church he said to me, "Father that man (the preacher) is saying all of the right things ,but he isn't saying them to anybody. He doesn't know where I am, and it would never occur to him to ask!":'**

**Pomo people react against institutions and hierarchical organizations, they reject truth claims that are communicated as dogma, and are accustomed to receiving content through words linked to images and symbols, rarely through linear verbal communication alone.**

**The Church needs to learn how to bear testimony to the truth of Christ in ways that people can receive, but which can also lead them to reevaluate their understanding of truth itself. As a conclusion I offer four headings to give focus to a way forward.**

## **1. Community**

**'The only possible hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation which believes it' (Newbiggin 1989).**

**The truth can only be understood within a community of belief. The only way to commend the gospel in our multi cultural society is through local communities of faith. Bodies of people open to and part and parcel of the local culture are the key to mission. The temptation for local congregations to become places of escape and cushioning from cultural change must be resisted. The parochial system is the essential foundation for this, but cultures do not function on a purely geographical basis. A missionary church will require partnership between local geographically based congregations, and gathered congregations which focus on one or more particular sub cultures. This will require a change of thinking by both eclectic and parish based churches. In particular the old 'church' versus 'sect' vocab will become increasingly unhelpful. In a plural society all communities based on belief take on some aspect of the 'sect' to maintain their own identity. At the same time they are called to be open to and committed to their culture, for it is not possible for Christians to evangelize a culture which they fear or despise. Community is also required to sustain discipleship. As gospel values overlap less and less with the values of society, so Christian discipleship will become increasingly difficult.**

## **2. Journey**

**Dogmatic claims to Christian truth are likely to fall on increasingly deaf ears in an age ") -->any claim to speak the truth is an unacceptable assertion of power' (Lesslie Newbiggin). The language of pilgrimage, or being' in the way' or 'on a journey' will be more helpful to commend the Christian faith. This involves a clear belief in the claims of Christ as the only ultimate reliable guide. It equally emphasizes how much there is to learn. The gospels' embassies on discipleship as never ending and of the continual new discovery and re-learning, needs to be recovered. The group U2 caught the sprit of the times when they described the song "I still haven't found what I'm looking for' as a gospel song;**

"I believe in the Kingdom come,  
then all the colors will bleed into one but yes I'm still running.  
You broke the chains, you loosed the chains,  
you carried the cross and my shame.  
You know I believe it,  
but I still haven't found what I'm looking for'.

The image of a journey has a number of strengths. It is corporate; individuals are not being invited through a lonely journey to self realization, but to join a people on a pilgrimage. The journey also speaks of rootedness. People on a journey of faith are the latest of many generations dating back to Christ. They have a sense of history, a sense of past and some core certainties which give them hope, for the future and the final destination.

### 3. Spirituality

Pomo people are more likely to come to faith in Christ through spiritual experience which leads to understanding of doctrine, rather than through prior intellectual assent. One of the tragedies of today is that some elements of the Church are now so firmly secularized in their disbelief in the supernatural that they have nothing to say to a culture which is increasingly takes spirituality and the supernatural for granted. The charismatic government has done a great deal to restore the reality of the Church's agenda for the next century. However, the charismatic renewal has sometimes tended to emphasize the immanent at the cost of the transcendent. As a consequence the encounter with God can be trivialized. What is needed is equal emphasize on transience. In particular public worship needs to be understood as encounter with God; to use symbolism and ritual, screen and technology, ancient tradition and contemporary language. A spirituality and way of prayer needs to be developed which can sustain the pilgrimage, and be seen to relate to the whole life. The growing influence of music of Taize and and and and Iona is relevant here. It is worth noticing the that the rock artists who have done most to open up the music scene to spirituality nearly all come from some sort of Celtic tradition, notably U2, Van Morison and Runrig. If charismatic renewal has tended to emphasize immanence over against transience, the dominant Christian theology of creation has tended to emphasize the transience of God over against the immanence of his sprit in the created order. This balance also will need to be restored. is relevant here. It is worth noticing the that the rock artists who have done most to open up the music scene to spirituality nearly all come from some sort of Celtic tradition, notably U2, Van Morison and Runrig. If charismatic renewal has tended to emphasize immanence over against transience, the dominant Christian theology of creation has tended to emphasize the transience of God over against the immanence of his sprit in the created order. This balance also will need to be restored. is relevant here. It is worth noticing the that the rock artists who have done most to open up the music scene to spirituality nearly all come from some sort of Celtic tradition, notably U2, Van Morison and Runrig. If charismatic renewal has tended to

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#### **4. Plurality**

A plural society must have culturally plural expressions of Christian faith. A single homogenous Christianity will not speak to a post-modern world. Changes in culture have made many old battles within the Church irrelevant or at least of secondary importance. Both liberalism and fundamentalism are rooted in the Enlightenment and their conflicts are of little relevance to contemporary culture. Anglican comprehensiveness in which Evangelical, Catholic, Liberal and Charismatic each embrace the insights of their own tradition, and yet are open rather than closed to other traditions, will provide us with many necessary resources. A plural society raises major issues about common prayer, particularly when common prayer is understood as being book based. The 'Patterns for Worship' approach to liturgy has more chance of relating to emerging culture. The very idea that irrespective of culture or geography an Anglican Service 'will still feel like the Church of England' has to be questioned. Core values with diverse cultural expression and emphasis is the way of the future. In particular, because we are in a period of transition from post Enlightenment to post-modern age, very different approaches will be appropriate in different contexts - for example those involved in 'modern' approaches to worship, like the charismatic movement's use of 70's rock styles through the songs of Kendrick and others, will need to run in parallel with those who are developing approaches which link ancient symbol and tradition with modern technology and dance music. Many parishes will need more low key developments of their cultural style. The modern and post-modern railway lines will run parallel for some decades to come. But it is the main thesis of this paper that the modern Post Enlightenment world is approaching the buffers while the post-modern, or whatever more appropriate title it will one day receive, is the culture which Church of Christ will have to address.

#### **Conclusion**

The growth of the post-modern culture is uneven - nowhere is untouched --electronic media reach into the deepest rural areas and the traditional cultures of all faiths. Nowhere is totally 'post-modern' -what is becoming is not yet fully clear. But the direction of change must be a key factor in steering the decade of evangelism. I wish to acknowledge the inspiration of my colleagues at St Michael - le- Belfery in establishing more culturally focused 'modern' congregations, and of the Rev CB and the (Sheffield) Nine O'clock Trust for

**their work in creating an expression of Anglicanism suited for mission in the  
pomo world.**

**Graham Cray**

**York, March 1992**