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## **Chapter 14**

### **EXPANDED CONVERSATION: POSTMODERN CITY**

*In the past few decades, advanced industrial societies have moved through an inflection point, from the Modernisation phase into a Postmodernisation phase... With Postmodernisation, a new worldview is gradually replacing the outlook that has dominated industrializing societies since the Industrial Revolution... It is transforming basic norms governing politics, work, religion, family and sexual behaviour.*

Modernization and Postmodernization (Inglehart, 1997:8).

I have sought to define the modern city of Auckland in conversation with the ideal city of God. In this chapter, I extend the conversation about goals of transformative revival by describing the context in elements of postmodernism, the lifestyle of the mega-city, identifying some conversation spaces within it. I will largely leave responses to the next chapter on the Kingdom of God.

The task of rational definition of postmodernism, a description of an eclectic anti-foundational milieu with shifting boundaries, is impossible, so I will simply seek to describe some elements in its (non-existent?) metanarrative. The choice of which themes to discuss reflects an extension of the previous urban themes and an attempt to identify primary aspects of change in relationship to truth and authority, the material, the nature of humanness and the socio-political.

I first consider reasons for utilising the theme of postmodernism in social analysis and its development from modernism in the New Zealand context. Then I define postmodernism in the context of postmodernisation, examine two critiques, and describe its expansion in philosophy, literary theory, physical sciences, economics and its resurgent spirituality. I then look at some characteristics: loss of metanarrative, resulting in image as substance, fragmentation and schizophrenia, the global technological society with its belief in progress, consumer society, and pragmatism as a way of life. I conclude by examining the revival movement in Kiwi Culture and its response to this new milieu. I then take a brief excursus at the end of the chapter examining whether the hermeneutic of transformational conversations of Chapter 2 is post-modern in style and substance.

#### **Postmodernism: Interpretative Key to Complex Cultural Change**

##### POSTMODERN CHILD-RAISING

My 11 year old Brazilian-Kiwi daughter comes home from an evangelical school, to sit before a computer designing 21st century cities, while messaging Pakeha friends who frequent a charismatic church and her Chinese friend whose father flies in from Hong Kong each month. At night, when she joins me to watch the news, I have to censor what she sees as she is bombarded by juxtaposed views of poverty, welfare, govern-

ment interference, homosexuality and the regular update of police response to violence.

In the midst of this plurality, sensuality, truth and sordidness, how do I interpret to her the cultural changes going on and the lack of public Christian response while expanding her understanding from evangelical retrenchment to the public engagement of the Spirit?

Unclear definition of the causes of societal change and unclear theological and strategic processes to bring about actual engagement with structural causes of moral and social disintegration leaves many in a fog of failed dreams. Social analysis, such as this chapter, is an essential step in clearing away the fog. Such analysis must take into cognizance the elements commonly lumped together under the nebulous term, “postmodernism.”

### Rural Village to Modern City to Postmodern Megacity

Fig. 24: Internal and External Forces Defining Kiwi Society

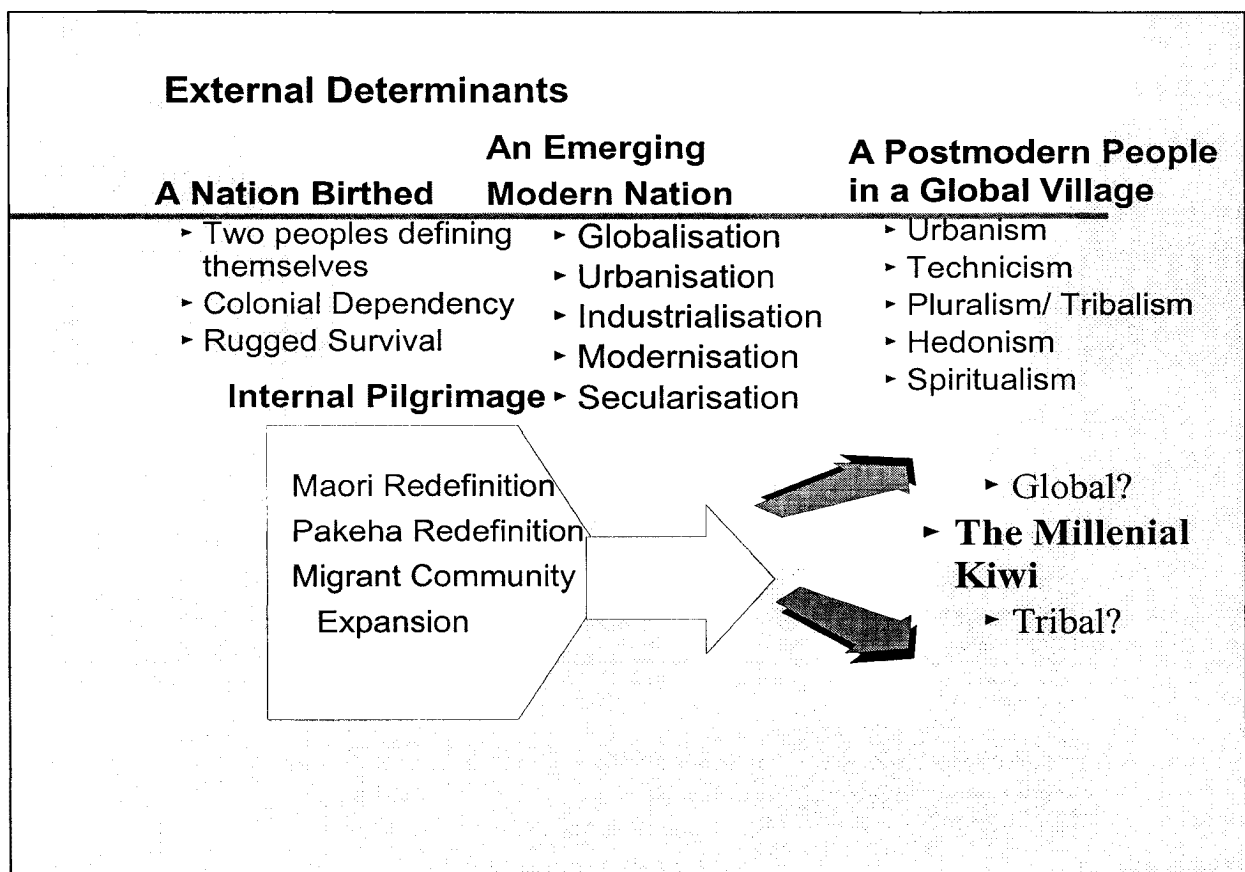


Fig. 24 shows some external determinants in three phases of development of the Kiwi soul. These are paralleled by internal communal progressions. The early phase through till the second world war was one of survival and dependency. Aspects of modernism then became central. Issues of postmodernism in the 1980's and 1990's lead to both redefinition of the tribal and expansion of migrant communities as well as characteristics of the global postmodern city.

To understand post-modernity, I need to define modernity in New Zealand. The city of Auck-

land, representative of many emerging mega-cities, is a mixture of rural/tribal, modern and postmodern cultures and values. It grew from the rationalist modern period in which New Zealand as a nation was born. Five characteristics of that period are identified in Fig. 24.

This was a philosophic wave on which the leadership of New Zealand built momentum. Rationality created the drive for the efficient running of a capitalist economy, a bureaucratic or semi-socialist state and a highly valued scientific method (that supported my father's role as a soil research scientist in sustaining agricultural pre-eminence). These were all encompassed with a sense of economic and social progress and increasing control of the forces of nature. This environment of technological modernity in which the New Zealand soul developed, has been characterised *as Descartes' autonomous, rational substance, encountering Newton's mechanistic world* (Grentz, 1996: 3).<sup>1</sup>

*Conversation Space:* For believers, inherent in such worldviews is a grieving of the Spirit, who created humanness in far greater complexity than rationality, to rule, manage, care for a world far more complex than mechanistic, and to do so, not as autonomous agents, but in dependence on himself. Modernism has been a denial of the truth that in ourselves we have no existence — a worldview denial of God as the sustainer. Evangelicalism, growing in the modernist period and using its tools has always critiqued its foundations (Vanhoozer, 1995: 10-11).

### **The Phase Shift to Postmodernism**


Twenty years beyond the failed responses of the Christian Heritage Party challenging “secular humanism” of modernism, a new cultural window has opened. For modernism, characterised by “the pervasive rationalisation of all spheres of society” (as Weber put it), has been fracturing at its centre as advanced industrial societies morph into postmodernism.

*... modernization is not the final stage of history. The rise of advanced industrial society leads to another fundamentally different shift in basic values – one that deemphasizes the instrumental rationality that characterised industrial society. Postmodern values become prevalent* (Inglehart, 1997:5-6).

This phase-shift into postmodernism provides *a window of time for new openness to transformative conversations.*

Postmodernism is a term describing a cluster of complex social analyses of cultures beyond the expansion of modernity. Modernism has now moved into a new phase of global culture

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<sup>1</sup> I would see it further characterised since the 1980's by *acceptance of plurality* begun at the Peace of Westphalia. Christian religious pluralism can be said to have been ratified at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 after decades of religious wars in Europe. It essentially partitioned Europe along religious lines, allowing for not one Christian worldview, but several (one of my reasons for skepticism towards one cluster of Evangelicals who are marketing “a Christian worldview” as the antithesis to “secular humanism” – both are straw men). 

we might call *New Global/Tribal Culture*.<sup>2</sup> It is a global civilisation, embracing that sixth of the world not trapped by poverty and filters down<sup>3</sup> to that other five-sixths, who are increasingly affirming tribal identities. It grew from a past Western Christendom and modern civilisation, based in Europe and was exported via the European empires. En route it was transmuted into a global civilisation, marked by jeans and McDonalds, Pepsi and computers, MTV and walkmans. Despite the prominence of some American cities, such as Los Angeles, in its emergence, it has no single base nor is it a politically defined civilisation. This kind of networked civilisation without central rule is something unknown in history.

### Postmodernism Defined

There are multiple perspectives on postmodernism, not all compatible. Anderson describes a global paradigm shift in belief systems:

*We still have the belief systems that gave form to the modern world and indeed we also have remnants of many of the belief systems of pre-modern societies... But we also have something else: a growing suspicion that all belief systems — all ideas about human reality — are social constructions... in which different groups have different beliefs about belief itself. A Postmodern culture based on a different sense of social reality is coming into being — and it is a painful birth (1990:3,4).*

The term *radicalised modernity*, used by Anthony Giddens in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) reflects thinking in economics and development studies. He argues that we are not so much living in a postmodern world as experiencing a fundamentally changed condition of modernity, where changing technology in late capitalism is increasing the scope and pace of change in cultural forms. This term better includes issues of continuity, in contrast to “post-” implying “against”. British sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman (2000), also extends “heavy” or “solid” hardware modernity (the mass production factory society) to “liquid modernity,” (the information, networked society).

### Postmodernisation

This Postmodernism as a description of *cultural values, beliefs, worldviews* etc., is based on postmodernisation, changes in the *structures* of society. Fig. 25 shows some of the identifiable changes in social structure from the modern to postmodern period.

**Fig. 25: Postmodernisation: Structural Changes from Modern to New Global Culture<sup>4</sup>**

	Structural Elements of Modernisation	Structural Elements of Late Modernity (or Postmodernisation)
Institutional Carriers	Modern nation-state	International institutions (UN, IMF, etc.)

<sup>2</sup>David Wells (1995) calls it ‘World Cliche Culture.’ Others use the ‘New Emerging World Order,’ which has connotations of structuralist power mentality, but nobody yet has a name for this new civilisation.

<sup>3</sup>Even this expression indicates the colonial and power-centred nature of the definitions of postmodernism.

<sup>4</sup> Developed from reflections on Van Gelder’s analysis (1996).

	<b>Structural Elements of Modernisation</b>	<b>Structural Elements of Late Modernity (or Postmodernisation)</b>
	Industrial capitalism The knowledge sector (universities)	The electronic superhighway The media
<b>Economic Structure</b>	National capitalism and communism	Global hyper-capitalism
<b>Production Technology</b>	Transition from agriculture to manufacturing	Transition from manufacturing to information
<b>Institutional Political Carriers and Allegiances</b>	Modern nation-states	Globally interconnected cities (& city-states) Ethnic political entities
<b>Organisational Structures</b>	Bureaucracies Hierarchies	Networks Flattened levels of authority
<b>Range of Decision-making</b>	Growing level of choices within a nation	Endless expansion of choices within the global city
<b>Modes of Relating</b>	In-city relationships clustered around vocation and family	Global webs of common interest relationships electronically connected
<b>Structural Location of Belief</b>	Structural relocation from centre to periphery as one societal sector along with economics, politics, sociology, psychology, etc.	Relocation from periphery to only one of multiple belief options Diversification of semi-formal religious communities

*Fig. 25 indicates structural differences between modernisation and postmodernisation. What is not indicated is that the modern continues in parallel with the postmodern, as this is at least a generational transition.*

### **The Globalisation Critique**

Critics view this term as part of an ongoing colonialist search for a universal.<sup>5</sup> Such Western definition at a global level is seen as destructive to local cultures. The global culture is not just emerging from the collapse of Western cultural integration but from the interplay of six thousand cultures across the shrinking globe. As such, to define it with a Western term inferring evolution from modernism is a form of Western arrogance. For example, Huntington (2001) argues for nine major modern civilisations around the globe. On the other hand, he concludes that modern societies resemble each other more than traditional societies because of increased global interaction and transfer of innovations and technology and because of the transition from agricultural production to industry as the basis of modern society.

Thus, I prefer not to use the term “postmodern” to imply the new cosmopolis is a culture of networked cities in opposition to the old order. Rather, it is a new emerging order building on the philosophic ruins of the old. There are metanarratives, but they are morphing.<sup>6</sup> Yet, while

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<sup>5</sup> Arturo Escobar, representative of Latin intelligentsia and of the bias born from centuries of oppression, comments similarly on development as ‘a top-down ethnocentric and technocratic approach that treats people and cultures as abstract concepts’ to be manipulated in the name of progress, ultimately destructive of third world cultures (1999: 383).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the underlying framework in the Global Values Study of modernisation processes and postmodernisation (Inglehart, 1997). He rejects the extremes of philosophers like Derrida and Rorty, preferring

bearing in mind these critiques, I *will* employ the term as a usefully descriptive category because it is popular, and opens a realm of public debate. It also facilitates analysis of the changes occurring between the coexistent urban diversity of tribal, peasant, industrial and information societies in relationships to both local and global cultural poles.

### **The Genesis of Postmodernism**

Next, I will glance over the genesis and some characteristics of global postmodernism in some fields of knowledge, with the recognition that significant parts of Auckland society and a large portion of young adults (it is a generational change) now live within this framework. The question of how the Spirit, through the revived church, will respond and redefine these values underlies this analysis.

### **Postmodernism in Philosophy**

Philosophers for more than a century have been predicting the death of Western civilisation based on the loss of the central sources of *tradition, authority and power* based in *the church, the nation-state and the university* (Fig. 25). The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), is considered to have begun the attack on modernity with his '*the death of God*' (the loss of the truth and power of Christianity in Western culture), leaving only '*knowledge as a will to power*' (Nietzsche, 1967), the pragmatic use of creative energies in language, values and moral systems to develop conceptions of truth, as perspectives for advancing causes or people. Because all knowledge is a matter of perspective, hence all interpretation is inadequate approximation, hence innately a lie, there is no truth; only *relative truths*.

This collapse of the search for universals (such as perfect beauty), devolved through the arts. I can best describe this by a presentation I used with students in the 1980's to illustrate the loss of humanity without an integrating Christ. It summarised a work of one of Francis Schaeffer's mentors, art historian Rookmaker. He analysed the collapse of the search for absolute beauty in art (1970/1999). Symbolically, the Renaissance moved God from the centre of the artist's canvas. Now Dutch canvasses had humans at centre and God in the small picture on the wall (portraying the individual human as central authority, God as peripheral). Realism led to Cubism and Impressionism which led to abstract art. Postmodern art has no human centre. God may not be present. Spirits are. Technique and technology are present, but often warped. The search for integration, perfect beauty and meaning for many has ceased. Experience of image remains.

The rise of *deconstructionism* as a literary theory provided the philosophical trigger for ana-

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to utilize ideas of generational shifts in thinking, rather than drastic discontinuities and affirming against them, that there are objective realities outside linguistic constructions.

lysing these changes. Deconstructionists reject the view of structuralists that meaning is inherent in the text. It depends on the interpreter, hence there are many meanings. Jacques Derrida, in French philosophy, rejected the “metaphysics of presence” — the idea that something transcendent, eternal, is present in reality and can be described (Sherwood, 2000). Michel Foucault, reflecting on the relationship of power and knowledge (particularly in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972a)) added that because knowledge is to name something and is an exercise of power, the great books need to be “unmasked” to show how they conceal the will to power (George, 2000). Richard Rorty adds that we cannot verify truth by correspondence between an assertion and reality through the internal coherence of the assertions themselves (1989). Thus philosophy becomes a conversation rather than discovering truth. These ideas reflect the abandonment of the search for a centre, a unity in knowledge (Grentz, 1996: 5-7).

French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* characterizes “postmodernity” as “incredulity toward metanarrative” (1985: xxiv). Thus postmodernism, as a philosophy reflecting popular culture in the West lost sight first of Christendom’s God in the modern era, then of modernity’s humanity as authority. The loss of an external anchor for truth has resulted in there being no measure to evaluate “your truth” from “my truth.” This fractionalisation results in no consensus on truth.

Yet, from dissonance, cultures seek integration<sup>7</sup> if they are to survive, emotionally, socially and morally. They may stumble on in that dissonance, or they die. For this reason in this study I posit postmodernism not as a rejection of metanarrative itself, but as *a transitional phase rejecting the metanarratives of an integrated modern Western worldview for the emergence of new integrations in the global/local culture.*

*Conversational Space:* Evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer developed one of the earliest popular evangelical critiques of these trends (1968a), showing that if there is no external reference point for truth, there is no lasting morality, for there is no basis (except the norms of the masses, not exactly the highest of moral bases) for judging what is moral. If there are no morals, there is only what an evangelical theologian of culture, Os Guinness (1976), writes of — the *Dust of Death*, the death of Western culture. But the end is not death and chaos as the philosophers of the largely atheistic left define, but an integrating city.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the New Zealand government, in one area of social change, is currently seeking migrant policies that involve “social cohesion” which “includes “belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. The negative side of these positive attributes include such things as isolation, exclusion, non-involvement, rejection and illegitimacy. A socially cohesive society is not unidirectional, but is interactive.” (McGrath (1997), utilising Spoonley (1999: 383)).

The speed of this cultural impact, also reminds me of A.F.C. Wallace's (1956) revitalisation theory about the impact of a larger culture on a tribal people and the four possible responses that occur as they lose the integrations of their culture – gangs, new prophetic movements, accommodation to the new, or anomie — only this time it is a global cultural tsunami where whole nations face these shocks and four similar possible responses.

What are the implications for revived believers in Auckland facing a culture that daily loses its commitment to truth and increasingly laughs at all authority? In what ways does the church redefine coherence and the centrality of truth for those marginalised by the oppression of incoherence in the midst of new technology? How do they portray *The Story* into a context where there is no truth, only story, with all stories of equal validity?

What I am proposing in this thesis is a prophetic response that engages the tsunami, but creates new integrations, new metanarratives running stylistically parallel to this dominating worldview (like a surfer riding the wave), but rejecting some of its core tenets.

### **Physical Sciences: Death of Materialism**

In the 20th century, a parallel shift occurred in the physical sciences. Chance and chaos, symbolised in the theory of relativity, or the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, replaced the absoluteness of Newtonian physics of inert matter, described in *Principia* (1687).<sup>8</sup> This leads Paul Davies and John Gribben in *The Matter Myth* to speak of the “Death of Materialism”:

*Newton's images of the workings of nature as an elaborate clockwork struck a deep chord. The clock epitomized order, harmony and mathematical precision, ideas that fitted well with the prevailing theology. Gone were the ancient notions of the cosmos as a living organism.... The doctrine that the physical universe consists of inert matter locked into a sort of gigantic deterministic clock has penetrated all branches of human enquiry... contributed in large part to alienating human beings from the Universe they inhabit. When extended into the domain of human affairs, such as politics or economics, machine mindedness leads to demoralization and depersonalization. People feel a sense of helplessness; they are merely 'cogs' in a machine that will lumber on regardless of their feelings or actions.... These people can take heart: materialism is dead (1991: 5-7).*

Quantum physics led to chaos theory, descriptions of nonlinear systems that become unstable and change in random and yet predictable ways. The certainty of clockwork is now replaced by a world of open futures, in which even matter acquires an element of creativity. In the social sciences the reaction to behaviourism in psychology and determinism in sociology in the 1960's has also moved increasingly to open systems approaches.

Along with this loss of unity comes an all-pervasive intrusion of what postmodern critic Neil Postman (1993) calls *technopoly*, the intrusion of technology into everything from medical

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<sup>8</sup> This, in turn had replaced concepts of the material possessing magical or active qualities, or being infused with vitalistic forces.



practice to bureaucracy to politics to religion. Ellul foresaw this decades prior (1964) in *The Technological Society*.

*Conversation Space*: How does the church redefine the human-matter dynamics in terms of such open-ended creativity and futurism? How can the church be faithful in defining the presence of a creative God in the nature of environmental space and network space?

### **Postmodernism in the Political and Economic Domain**

Paralleling these shifts in the physical sciences are shifts in the broader culture, the economic and political domains. As described in Fig. 25, nationally based production/ consumption capitalism has become the globalised economy. Economies have moved from manufacturing to information technology. The result is a flattening of bureaucracies. This has been accelerated by the rapid expansion of technology, resulting in an endless expansion of daily choices.

Concurrently, nation-state political systems have in many countries lost the allegiance of citizens who have now reverted to ethnic origins as the basis of political organisation. Tribalism and at times, balkanisation is increasing from Jerusalem to the Congo to the Maori party.<sup>9</sup>

*Conversational Space*: In the past, bishops related to prime ministers. Today in this flattened hierarchy, how does the church train its broad base to use new levels of access to directly influence national leadership?

I know urbane Christian workers and an executive who refuse or are unable to utilise email. I know of elderly folk for whom these changes are all confusion and even more confusing when brought into their safe place, the church, by enthusiastic theological college graduates bent on postmodern church growth. How does the church cater for those who opt out of the stress levels of accelerated technology into anomie?

In what ways may it affirm tribal identity, yet enhance cultural unity?

### **Beyond Secularism: The (Almost) Structural Relocation of Belief**

The church during modernisation was moved from the centre of the city to be replaced by the bank, factory and university. In post-modernity it has become further dispossessed - no longer *one sector* of society as in modernity, but *one option* "for those who like that option."

Secularism as a philosophy (as against secularisation as process) has developed hostile to spiritual beliefs and supernatural explanations. Originally, there was that area of life that "had not yet been penetrated by religious values." Gradually however, the word came to mean, "that order of society which is neutral to the influence of religion" (Cohen, 1958: 37-38). But

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<sup>9</sup> Though it can be argued that this is not an increase in ethnic political identity, but a historically recurrent process for Maori, particularly at times when rights have been trampled on.

Newbiggin argues that the state cannot be neutral in respect to other metanarratives (1986:132) so the phrase becomes one meaning hostility to religions.

Yet, this new culture is not simply secular but deeply spiritual. Moving beyond secular modernism, it involves an underlying search for the spiritual, yet a search largely outside traditional religious structure. *This opens a door for conversation about the good city*. Peter Lineham argues against extreme perspectives on this structural relocation of belief, indicating that church and state in New Zealand continue to be bound together in an “unequal co-dependency” (2000a:41). The confusion for secularists is that the thesis of secularisation hasn’t panned out: “It is in the West itself, not the century of secularisation, but of unprecedented religious innovation” (Turner, 1993:24). While there is a steady rise in those who have no religion or object to the question on religion in the New Zealand census (37% in 2001) the statistics in Chapter 4 indicate that churches in New Zealand are alive and well and with the exception of those which have bought into secular theology or are trapped in older institutional forms, they are growing. In fact, with the exception of large parts of Western Europe, the opposite to secularisation is true globally, as sociologist Peter Berger’s *The Desecularization of the World* (1999) describes.<sup>10</sup>

*Conversation Space*: Ahdar has demonstrated points of conflict in New Zealand between secularists and conservative Christians (2000: 112-115), speaking of two “disestablishments” of traditional Christianity, the improbability of re-establishing a Christian state, yet the possibility that public religion may yet make a comeback, with “some unaccustomed bedfellows” in an increasingly pluralistic society (2000:76-77). An interesting phenomenon of postmodernism, is the re-emergence of the search for spiritualities. Secularism has been found wanting. While the old institutional religions are resisted, new spiritualities are being sought. The local bookshop has a shelf of books on new age religion, witchcraft, Zen Buddhism, Yoga, one or two Bibles, but nothing of substance about orthodox Christian beliefs. Our shopping centre in Glen Eden, as in many Auckland suburbs, boasts a new store for witchcraft. In New Zealand this search for spirituality includes the use of Maori spirituality on public occasions with state acquiescence.<sup>11</sup>

Redefinition of society around “a biblical worldview” is the response of a cluster of society leaders at the Masters Institute. Ahdar gives several definitions (2000:45-54) from current discussions that devolved from Harold Turner. He uses them to contrast with the “Wellington

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<sup>10</sup> See discussion in Chapter 4, *A Secular Future?*

<sup>11</sup> Ahdar (2003:611-637), debates varying legal and governmental responses to indigenous Maori spirituality.

Worldview” in his model of engagement (2000:115). The idea of “worldview” jumped from missions anthropology into Evangelical Christianity through the Gospel and Cultures network,<sup>12</sup> and became anchored into a fight against “secular humanism as the enemy”. It has been imported into New Zealand through books like *Understanding the Times*, by David A Noebel (1991) that contrast Secular Humanism, Marxist /Leninism and Biblical Christian Worldviews, or Walsh and Middleton’s *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (1984). This is a simple, though useful, way of engaging Evangelicals with the culture. I wonder if continued rethinking by the Masters Institute of the anthropological dynamics of worldview may become significant. They will need to move beyond the analysis of secular humanism of the 1980’s into postmodernism and their use of “a” Christian worldview (viz a viz the multiple worldviews in the Scriptures, influencing the multiple worldviews of cultures).

### **Metanarrative Loss and Redemption**

Part of the folklore of postmodernism is that the metanarratives, the great traditions, have been challenged and found wanting (Lyotard, 1985:xxiv). For example, claims of rational science as a basis for “progress” are viewed sceptically by those who have benefited by the technical progress (e.g., space research), but have been damaged by its economic oppressions (e.g., agent orange). Justice is no longer seen as a universal but only as a rationally defensible concept within the society in which it is exercised.

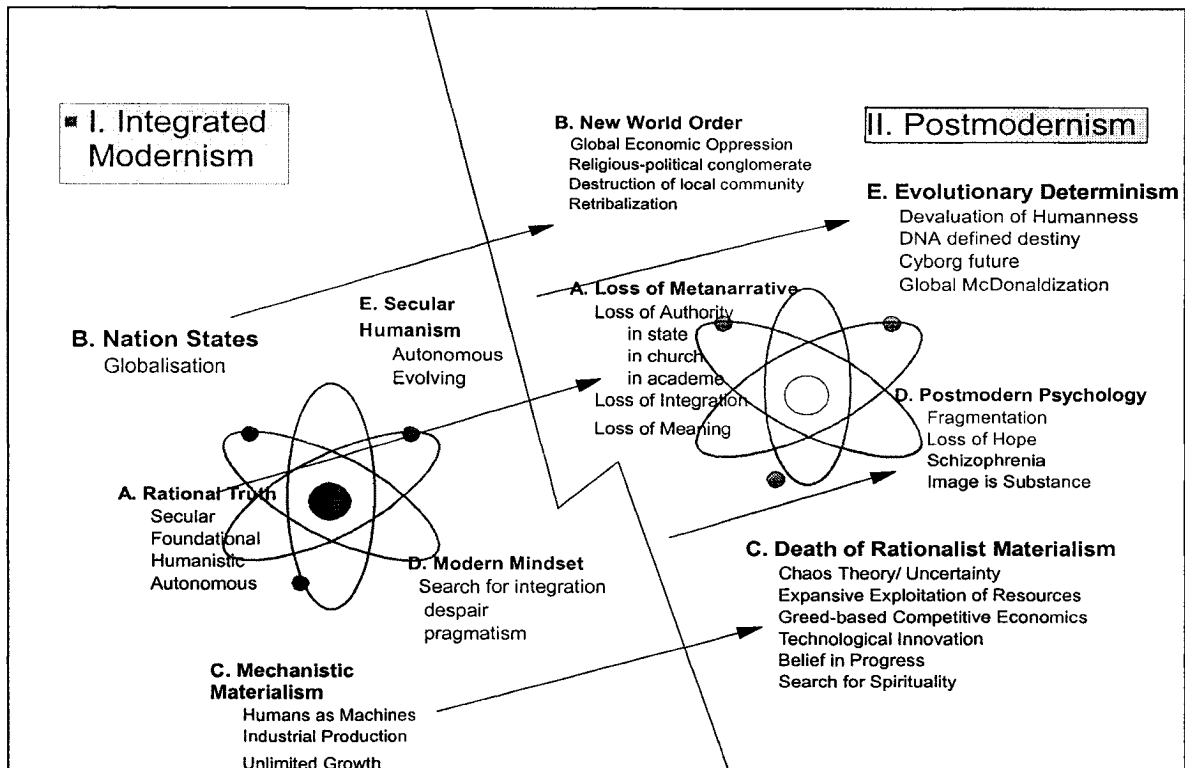
Yet in the hard sciences not all agree with the philosophers. Some indicate the possibility of the creation of new metanarratives. Certainly, economic globalisation has its own narratives and the emergence of the global order involves the creation of a new language of power, extending past modernity and the developmental thinking reflected in the Club of Rome, the World Futures Society and UNESCO.

*Conversation Space:* I have indicated earlier an anthropological view that societies collapse unless they find integrations. Christians have a metanarrative. They thus need to answer how they can remain fixed on an everlasting Kingdom in service of the oppressed. And how their metanarrative can influence emergent global narratives in media, economics, governance...

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<sup>12</sup> Partly through Kraft’s ethnotheology (1979) and other evangelical missiologists. Harvey Conn’s engaging *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds* dialogue between theology, anthropology and missions (1984), captures the period and issues of crossover.

**Fig. 26: Postmodernism: Collapsing Modernism, Emergence of Global/Tribal Culture**



*Fig. 26: A summary of discussion in this chapter of differences in five aspects of world-view between modern and postmodern era: rational truth devolves to a loss of metanarrative, nation states are increasingly subsumed in a new world order, mechanistic views of the material evolve into the creative and spiritual, while there is expanded exploitative consumption and competition, the modern search for integration devolves to a postmodern mindset of fragmentation and image, secular humanistic foundations expand into evolutionary determinism.*

### **Image and Substance**

If we can no longer stand objectively outside and look for the grand themes, the only place to stand is on the inside. If there are no grand narratives, then there are only stories, images in juxtaposition to show that there is no point of reference. Thus design uses different fonts and left margin art irregularities and films flash multiple images without seeming connection. Baudrillard (1999) logically explains why images become disassociated from the realities they represent. Style, not meaning, becomes paramount. Since we cannot integrate meaning at depth, the surface images become the media. Body and bodily sensations receive new focus. The band takes centre stage.

*Conversational Space:* In this context, one response is the creation of churches that reflect postmodernism in style, without accepting postmodernism's rejection of the search for universal truth — churches of image, drama, music, changing scenes, like the Hillsborough Baptist Sunday youth services. Worship at Christian Life Centre Auckland and other central city churches involves the swingers, the shakers, the wavers, the dancers, the lights, the band and

the projected image. Behind the image is the reality of Jesus who became the image of the invisible God. The correlation of the two is crucial for postmodern man and woman. On the other hand, juxtaposition of postmodern media that portrays rejection of authority, truth and substance, with a message of substance, eternal authority and truth, result in discord. Perhaps for many, it will result in a religious schizophrenia. Some retreat into the old certainties and old hymns in order to maintain continuity with history. Stylistically postmodern churches allow for both, usually through diverse services.

### **Fragmentation**

With the loss of authority and metanarrative, history loses meaning and time itself fragments into a series of “presents.” In politics and social structure, the loss of authority is applauded (falsely?)<sup>13</sup> as the expansion of democracy. In the medical field, the rejection of the formal medical profession and emergence of multiple medical traditions means a loss of the court of appeal. In deconstructionism in literature, loss of the search for universal truth, has resulted in an understanding that words mean only whatever you wish them to mean, as “signs.”

The loss of authority and hence integrative social structure also allows opportunity for creation of darker forms of societal control. Radical movements seek to hold society to ransom for good or ill — gay rights, ecology, environmentalism, justice for the oppressed... Law becomes fragmented into a collage of disjointed principles with no integrating theme.

*Conversational Space:* In this context, the creation of multi-generational communities of faith, where integrative belief and relational systems are transmitted across generations, provides a major source of the hope of sustaining a cultural core in a way that has relational, familial, intellectual, historical and emotional integration. At the level of the church and culture, is there a theology and missiology that can enable conversation with the metanarrative of the Scriptures with this fragmentation, replacing modernism in multiple sectors of society?

### **Psychological Schizophrenia**

In the modern period, the search for self was a central theme, but outside the external authority of God it led to despair. In the postmodern period the search is abandoned, being replaced by a series of images of self that can be pulled off the shelf. This leads not to alienation but to schizophrenia and suicide. Some have highlighted Madonna as symbolizing this multiplicity of representation from Material girl, to Marilyn Monroe, to Evita, to creator of her own sexuality, to compassionate earth mother, to sensitive spiritualist (Kellner, 1995; Ward, 1997: 117-121).

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<sup>13</sup> Barber (1996) argues that the expansion of consumer options leads to the disengagement of apathy, rather than a diffusion of power.

*Conversation Space:* The embrace of the community of faith in its realities of confession and forgiveness across the damaged personalities that each one brings into it, with the catharsis of worship, confession and small group love, is a dramatic answer to a schizophrenic culture. Deeper than that is the necessity of generating committed communities where for periods of time, damaged youth, the fallout of fragmented marriage patterns, can reconnect with patterns of disciplined love and teamwork, discovering the wholeness of the fellowship of Christ. Rebuilding a culture around stable families and *whanau* (extended family) is a central platform of all the evangelical or committed Christian politicians in whatever party in New Zealand.

## **The Global Technological Society**

### **Belief in Progress**

The term “post”-modern rather than anti-modern implies some sense of good in modernism. Perhaps it is the belief in progress, the better life, for life is economically better this decade than last and this has been the experience for billions throughout this last century. This has rarely been true before in history. Tonight’s news in French (May 4, 2004), showed the European cultural commissioners signing an accord, with a speech about the remarkable cultural progress – “more in the last 100 years than throughout history!” But progress in what?

Liberal theologians in the late 19th and early in the 20th century linked it to the moral progress of civilisation, particularly of Christendom. Auschwitz was the answer. Kosovo, two generations later, echoed the moral hollowness of European secular modernism.

What has occurred is the exponentially progressive expansion of technological innovation, with concurrent expansion of life expectancy, decrease in poverty for a significant portion of the globe, improvement in educational levels, expansion of intercultural communication through expanded travel and so on. French sociologist-theologian Ellul was one of the earliest to define *The Technological Society* (1964). Technological change has accelerated and is perceived to have speeded up each year with a new video, PC, or new camcorder, each one markedly better than the last.

If we can place a man on the moon and build a space station, of course we can civilize Mars! The future is perceived as unending in its technological possibilities, despite Schumacher’s theme in *Small is Beautiful* (1973/1980) and other predictions about the limitation to natural resources such as *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972/1977).

*Conversation Space:* Evangelicals with their high view of scriptural truth, also have a low view of the righteousness of humanity. They understand sin as being universal and apart from regeneration and sanctification through the Holy Spirit (i.e. conversion and discipleship), do

not see religious diligence, the abolition of poverty, the expansion of education, or the creation of the welfare state as seriously decreasing that level of personal sinfulness. (That is not to say they do not see these as significant areas of social justice). Apart from the ebb and flow of righteousness through revival periods, they do not see societies moving towards righteousness. These views lack a serious understanding of common grace, of God-activity reflected in common humanity.

### **Consumer Society: Jihad vs. McWorld<sup>14</sup>**

Within postmodernism's sense of technological progress, technology has come to define us. Barber tells us that as communist man and woman disappear and democratic man and woman disappear, what is left is consumer being, a one dimensional humanness. The world has become a global consumer culture. The only escape from this global consumer McWorld culture are the cultures of poverty. The mad rush for China and Africa is seen as an opportunity for consumption. Even the Internet is for sale now — watch it free if you watch the ads!!

The loss of citizenship is a side effect of consumerism. It requires time and energy. It is proactive, doing. The consumer by contrast is a (nearly) passive receptor, placid, just an economic unit. When the consumer becomes the whole of our identity, even the public place has largely disappeared. The alternative according to Barber, in an echo of Schumacher, is that peoples in free communities should be the locus of self-government.

*Conversational Space:* These ideas closely parallel the apocalyptic thinking of most Pentecostal and evangelical believers about the future Kingdom,<sup>15</sup> with their expectation of a one world socio-political-economic consumer-oriented government leading to the role of a despotic antichrist, popularised by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). This leads fundamentalists and many Pentecostals to a resistance to the UN and intrusions by the UN into New Zealand culture by such things as a bill of rights. This is in stark contrast to the optimistic view in liberal theology, the perspective of the Kingdom gradually transforming societies on earth. This apocalyptic opposition is dulled by ever-increasing consumerism. What theological motifs will both balance out and sustain such theologies and their critiques? Is there a theological middle ground that both confronts the expanding global power structures, yet works towards gradual transformation?

### **Pragmatism as a Way of Life**

With the rejection of the spiritual for the secular and an embracing of the technological, mod-

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<sup>14</sup>Title and ideas from Benjamin Barber (1996).

<sup>15</sup> For reasons of space, a chapter on the derivations, validity and implications of such apocalyptic thinking which is necessary to understand the divide in mindset between liberal, fundamentalist and emerging evangelical social action approaches has not been included.

ern personality gravitates to pragmatism, or achievement as the measures of a man or woman. Berger, Berger and Kellner in *The Homeless Mind* (1973), identify several score characteristics of the modern mindset determined by the mechanistic, mass-production age. Humankind no longer controls the technology God has placed in its hands to manage, but rather it is defined by the technology.

Our speech is full of database terminology and talk of networking (impersonal relating across a broad spectrum of secondary relationships). Our mind chops time into manageable chunks like a mass production assembly line. Rest becomes meaningless for it does not appear to produce. The interchangeable parts of an organisation, its executives, are replaced every two to three years regardless of personality. Evaluated on performance, men and women become cogs in a machine. Postmodernism rejects this scenario in a return to new communitarianism and identity found in smaller communities, a new tribalism, or what Heelas and Woodhead in their critique of Berger's homeless mind, describe as new secondary institutions that provide transitory homes (2001).

*Conversational Space:* In this context, the relational Christian community is built from a biblical understanding of a spirit-infused humanness, an alternative of integration to the lostness of being — an integration of body and soul, city technology with humanity. How can the community of faith engage this technological conversation with this life-affirming humanness?

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of progressions from modernism into post-modernism defines the context in which Evangelicals and Pentecostals need to develop transformative responses in Auckland-New Zealand. Metanarratives have been found wanting. The nature of materialism is in question. Image and media become the vehicles of cultural communication. There is a flattening of political power, and a tribalisation of politics. It is an age of fragmentation and schizophrenia. To each of these the scriptures have answers that bring integration and meaning to cultures. In the next chapter, I will expand the theme of the kingdom of God as a framework to respond to these issues.

But first, a small excursus to complete Chapter 2, an evaluation of transformational conversations as postmodern theological method. Readers may skip this, if they wish to continue with the overall flow of the main argument.

## **Excursus: Transformational Conversations and the Postmodern City**

In this brief excursus, having looked at elements of postmodernism, I ask two questions as to how the hermeneutic of transformational conversations relates in *style* to the postmodern mi-



lieu and whether such an approach to theology is *essentially* postmodern.

### **Stylistic Fit with Postmodernism**

First, there is a good fit between charismatic and Pentecostal oral theology as expressed in transformational conversations and the multiple stories of postmodernism, just as evangelical theology is heavily entwined with modernist rationalism in style.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, their experiential nature and multiple stories also relate to the search for spiritualism. Large Pentecostal churches and even charismatic St Margaret's Anglican with their media presentations, also express the overarching core of a "technique" culture, expressing image as well as search for substance (the Church Life Survey shows that substance is also welcome if imaged (Brookes, 2000)). These cultural dynamics within the movements are the context of this transformational conversations approach.

Thirdly, in the consultations and *hui* in which these transformational conversations have developed, holism is expressed by multiple stories, rather than necessarily following logical progressions towards points of universal truth. In Murphy's philosophic terms (1997:120-121) they define webs of belief not foundationalist systems. As theologian, I usually integrate the stories into a holistic summary. And leaders love this. Again, while the philosophers say "metanarrative" is rejected, I suggest that holistic processes leading to integrational truth conclusions and based on an awareness of how the disjoint elements fit together, are not unwelcome. Thus effective conversations involve both story and cosmic propositions.

Fourthly, one would expect that if charismatic Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism have migrated into postmodern styles, they would be significantly present in media, for as noted earlier in the chapter it has become the structural vehicle of postmodernism. This is the case in New Zealand music, as singers like Daniel Bedingfield rack up single after single at the top of the UK and European hit parades. Former YWAM'ers, he and his sister, Natasha, (who has done the same), are clear that their intention is to bring the Kingdom into the centre of secular music. There are others in the Kiwi music scene, less high profile, attempting the same. This is reflected in the music of the churches, the yearly Parachute weekend of thousands. Conversational theology about revival and Kingdom, becomes the theology of the balladeers.

Finally, at the core of postmodernism in philosophy is the critique of knowledge as power. Foucault's (1994: xv-xxi) assertion is that every interpretation of reality is an assertion of

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<sup>16</sup> The statements of faith of most evangelical institutions require a commitment to the infallibility of the Scriptures in various ways, statements of a foundationalism that requires significant mental gymnastics to sustain. Most seminaries are now moving to more open statements that allow for a querying of the human elements of the Scriptures (Hagner, 1998) – but for some, the fear of liberalism, continues on into a fear of postmodernism (as seen in Wells (1995)).

power. Jon Sobrino, liberation theologian, develops this in his critique of Western theology (1984:7-38). In contrast, knowledge gained by this transformational conversation approach from the bottom up has developed among the disenfranchised. This study thus illustrates a response to Sobrino's analysis of the essential demonisation of theology in its establishment nature, its use of words to control. Transformational conversations invert the power matrix.

### **Postmodern Evangelical Theology?**

From the affirmative answer above to the question, "Can an evangelical postmodern theology *stylistically relate* to postmodern milieu?" a second question is evident, "Can we *develop an intrinsically postmodern* evangelical theological approach?"

Charismatics and Pentecostals in this sense are postmodern phenomena, when one views postmodernism as a move from the integrative voices of Western power centres to listening to the multiple voices of the peoples. Pentecostals have rejected the language, the theology and the style of Christianity of the "official," "powerful" churches. It is a "popular religion," what Berg and Pretiz (1996), have good reason to term "grassroots Christianity" against the "survival of tradition." David Martin calls Pentecostalism "an option of the poor rather than the liberationist "option *for* the poor" (1995:27).<sup>17</sup>

But relating theology to the realities of the postmodern milieu does not imply full entrance into the philosophical analysis and ideas of deconstruction represented in the broad term postmodernism. We can differentiate at least two postmodern worlds:<sup>18</sup>

- urban planning, architecture, economics, politics, media and popular culture, where postmodernism describes real phenomena and with which transformational conversations are a good fit.
- the world of postmodern theologians and literary philosophers whose premises are speculative and, for Evangelicals, often suspect when viewed against biblical truth.

Those in other disciplines have the same critique of the latter world:

*We reject the notion that cultural construction is the only factor shaping human experience. There is an objective reality out there too and it applies to social relations as well as to natural science... when you shoot someone, that person dies...if one forgets objective engineering principles, the building may collapse... among physicists... a theory eventually triumphs or is rejected depending on how well it models and predicts that reality* (Inglehart, 1997:12,13).

This latter world, is heavily influenced by "language games" within closed academic commu-

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<sup>17</sup> Pentecostalism springs up all over the world among the poor, almost spontaneously, as one would expect if it was a genuine work of the Holy Spirit, when the gospel is preached and signs and wonders occur. There is generally little relationship to Western churches, money or theologies (Hollenweger, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> The difficulty of using such a global description as "postmodernism" is that there are multiple ways to define postmodernity. Murphy (1997) differentiates Anglo-American postmodernity from European in philosophy. "Post-" implies not knowing exactly what...

nities, as Lyotard (1985) so aptly describes much academic theological training. These are fashioned by symbolic words, particular fashionable theological trends that owe some debt to deconstructionism<sup>19</sup> in literary theory, philosophy and criticism.

Theological modernism rejected the metanarratives of the Scriptures for the rationalist metanarrative as source of authority. Some postmodern theologies have attempted to continue this metanarrative to its logical conclusions — and those conclusions have proven to be an empty set of contradictions, of unending deconstructions, what Gavin Hyman in *The Predicament of Modern Theology* (2001), describes as “nihilist textualism” in which the end of foundationalism brings with it the end of theology, particularly the work of Don Cupitt (1998) in the UK and Mark Taylor (1984) in the US, both writing within the framework of Nietzsche’s “death of God” and the postmodern “end of metanarrative”.

I believe we need to posit another kind of postmodern theology<sup>20</sup> when we talk of evangelical postmodern theology. For extending liberal theology into the postmodern is not helpful for Evangelicals. For example, Kim (2000b:179), in analysing the World Council of Churches gathering in Melbourne, reflects the liberal, postmodern theological literature, when she implies that to be theologically postmodern is to be “anti-” and thus will include liberationist theological stances: anti-structural, anti-establishment, anti-colonial and anti-masculine. But this is not the experience of these Pentecostal voices from the edges. These voices are postmodern in form and style, but do not confirm the categories of liberal postmodern theology. This calls into question the nature of that theology. It requires Evangelicals to posit alternative approaches relating to the “real” postmodern world.<sup>21</sup>

I affirm French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard in his definition of *postmodern* as “incredulity toward metanarrative” (Lyotard, 1985:xxiv), when it is applied to some metanarratives of the modern project, but reject the underlying modernist disbelief in the metanarrative of the Scriptures (and in philosophies that subsume housing construction, milking cows and other realities that do not deconstruct!). Such affirmation, however, does not return to fundamentalism, with the metanarrative of Scripture having only one meaning that can be rationally exegeted. Postmodern understanding, that truth is multiplex not univocal, fits with Jesus’, Pauline

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<sup>19</sup> A term “developed by Derrida, as an event provisionally described as reading, writing and thinking that undoes, decomposes, unsettles the established hierarchies of Western thought” (Odell-Scott, 2000:56).

<sup>20</sup> Evangelical attempts, so far, tend to simply be critiques of elements of modern and liberal postmodern theologies (e.g. *So What Happens After Modernity? A Postmodern Agenda for Evangelical Theology* (Oden, 1995: 392-406) or Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993) or Dockery (1995). This hermeneutic of transformational conversations appears to be one of the first genuinely postmodern theologies developed.

<sup>21</sup> Grenz indicates communitarian vs. individual, post-rational holism, spirituality-based theology as three characteristics of such theology (1995:98-101), but does not model these. This study models the first two of his categories. The analysis of how this is postmodern has come after the fact.

and Johannine multilevel exegetical usage of the OT, the tenor of the collation of story in the canon, Jesus' story-based didactic approach and the nature of wisdom in the Scriptures.

Thus at its heart, an evangelical postmodern hermeneutic can be partially and critically postmodern, just as evangelical theology to date has always been only partially modern. The biblical metanarrative transcends others or none. These ideas parallel, though don't exactly map another category of postmodern theology, which some term "radical orthodoxy" (John Milbank, 1999). Those in this category embrace anti-foundationalism, the narratives and the linguistic idealism of postmodernism, but attempt to recover a paradigm where theology absorbs and makes possible all other discourses (Hyman, 2001:3-4).

This is in the hope that, as postmodernism is a temporary philosophic and cultural phase between civilisations, the metanarratives that sustain and integrate our civilisation may perhaps be reformed around the eternal metanarrative. Thus, transformational conversations are neither rationalist evangelical theology nor non-integrated postmodernist. What has been developed here is a third way for evangelical theology — a communal transformational conversation, postmodern in that it is collaged, multivariate, story-based, yet committed to the ongoing exploration of a metanarrative.

Now, I will return to the main flow of argument, proposing the Kingdom as response to the postmodern city.