

REFORMING MINISTRY TO YOUTH IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT:
ARCHETYPES, REACTIONS, AND SOLUTIONS
FROM A BIBLICAL-COVENANTAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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I. Introduction: The Problem, The Attempt, and an Old Solution

**“Since my youth, O God, You have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.” Psalm 71:17**

Those who minister to 21st century youth know the tension between being both ‘relevant’ and ‘real’ with the message of Christ in this postmodern age. In a world of technological and sociological flux, many local churches strive to find new ways to connect with their young members more effectively. A dialectic, evident in every age, exists between relating to youth on their terms and compromising the historical message of the Bible. It is not unfair to consider whether a biblical balance is even possible. The passion for ministry contextualization in culture is not inherently negative, but far too often the pure biblical gospel is lost and replaced instead with pedagogy and preprograms that tickle ears and fill pews.

A minister must be aware of either side of this slippery slope: one leading to syncretism, the other to irrelevance. George Barna, of the Barna Research Group, notes the fearfully high rate of youth group drop-off, even in the most attractive ecclesiastical programs.¹ His research demonstrates that young people become increasingly uninvolved in youth activities as they age and that many ‘churched’ young people simply leave the

¹ George Barna. *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001.

faith entirely in their college years. Smith and Denton's groundbreaking study, *Soul Searching*, shows that instead of rearing Bible believing young Christians, today's youth groups are frequently filled with a nuanced variety of 'moralistic therapeutic deists.'² Although this study indicates that spirituality and religion are still of high importance to a majority of young people, Ovaida and Schneider/Stevenson demonstrate both an undercurrent of changing meta truth values and an increase in personal alienation.³ This is a dangerous combination on the road to mature Christian adulthood.

Rising to the top of these disquieting statistics is the question: why are so many young people falling away from their faith after spending significant time in a ministry tailored to their needs? Are young people in the 21st century so different, their needs so unique, that even specialized programs fail? One major factor in this issue pertains to the mind-formation of a young person who is raised in the midst of postmodern ideology. Another factor is linked with the variety of ways evangelicals have reacted and responded to this secular dilemma in late 20th century. As a solution, I will argue that effective youth ministry in this postmodern age must be in constant critical submission to a biblical-covenantal worldview contextualized in culture. This assertion will prove that the biblical gospel message, lived out in a body-life atmosphere, is the best answer to both the critiques of postmodernism as well as the predominant evangelical responses.

A. The Argument Stated

² Christian Smith w/ Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Chapter 4 moves beyond their survey work to show the startling conclusions reached in personal interviews. This information is enough to shock any minister to young people.

³ Seth Ovaia, "Suggestions of the Postmodern Self: Value Changes in American High School students" (*Sociological Perspectives* 46:2 (Summer, 2003) 239-256) and Barbara Schneider & David Stevenson, *The Ambitious Generation: American's Teenagers, Motivated but Directionless*.

The predicament of ministry to youth, or any other part of the body, in the postmodern milieu must be addressed biblically and in the context of the local church. Malan Nel argues this brilliantly in his defense of the ‘inclusive-congregational’ model for ministry by showing that the ultimate problem is not the youth subculture but the intergenerational workings of the church.⁴ Both the social programs of secular postmodernism and the late 20th century reactions of evangelicalism have failed the youth of the 21st century. One enemy has overtly challenged the foundations of the reality of the Christian worldview. The other has responded to these attacks on the misguided terms of capitulation, segregation, and synchronization. There is a need for a response to postmodernism as a secular philosophy that builds upon the church and incorporates its youth, not separates them.⁵

We shall deal with postmodern philosophy, with its effects on the American psyche and the ethos of youth culture, from the standpoint of secular and atheistic presuppositions. This is not to say that the church cannot use the arguments, ideas, or expressions of postmodern thought from a biblical worldview.⁶ But, that the form of postmodernism which pervades the minds of young people in the late 21st century is unashamedly godless. To Christian postmodern theorists we say thank you, but

⁴Mark H. Senter III, ed. *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church: Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. p 2

⁵ For a variety of helpful working definitions of ‘Postmodernism’ see Stanley Grenz in *A Primer on Postmodernism*, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, or Kevin Vanhoozer in *Postmodern Theology*. The distinguishing marks of postmodernism, that intellectual period in popular culture from 1950 to present (adopting Grenz’s framework), are notoriously hard to pin down. It is a critique of the reigning paradigms of modernism (optimism, idealism, autonomy) while also providing variant structures of it’s own (deconstruction, post-structuralism, transcendental dissolution). We shall spend more time on this working definition throughout this paper.

⁶ James K.A. Smith’s work, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, does a fine job of showing how postmodern theory, framed with Christian presuppositions, can in many ways be more helpful than modern thought.

concerning the atheistic presuppositions of secular postmodern thought we must be ready to defend the faith, for ourselves, and especially our children.

Therefore, a biblical-covenantal model, building on the insights of history and systematized reformed theology, is an advantageous tool for the local church in the present environment. The assumptions of 21st century thought have leaked into the minds of many. Particularly in the philosophical sphere, the last century has challenged the foundations of all objective truth, even as a possibility, in a way previously unprecedented.⁷ But hope remains. God's word is fully capable of sorting through the chaff of contemporary thought and providing proper nourishment for the young people of today.⁸ The goal of the local church, then, is not to flee from the difficult questions raised by certain aspects of postmodern thought, but to respond in an orthodox manner.

Within the call and response dialectic of secular philosophy and evangelical reaction, I will argue for a scripture-based, service-saturated, and inclusive intergenerational approach to youth ministry in the 21st century cultural context. My aim will be to expose the non-biblical underpinnings of both secular and evangelical philosophical methodologies while providing a biblical-covenantal solution to the major problems of both postmodern thought and reactionary ministry to youth in the church. I will contend that scriptural reform is needed in 21st century youth ministry while offering solutions to that end, which strengthen the local church, both young and old. We shall see that God's word brilliantly answers the hardest claims of postmodernism and that the local church is still the locus of putting the gospel into action, whether it be by the word and sacrament, the whole family together in worship, or serving the world with joy.

⁷ Clark, *Thales to Dewey*. Chapter 11 discusses how the scales have shifted toward irrationalism.

⁸ Hebrews 4:12 speaks to both the mental and emotional sufficiency of God's revealed word.

B. Assumptions and Goals

In this section of the introduction it is imperative that I explain my assumptions and goals for this thesis. The problem has already been stated: youth in the postmodern context need a thoroughly biblical approach to any ministry that is geared toward them, and this should occur in the local church. Now I will further explain my convictions and the specific direction I plan to take on this topic.

One of the first potential problems I face is the breadth of my assertion. I will be intentional in limiting this discussion to three key aspects of postmodern thought, three key responses of evangelicalism in the past century, and three key solutions from a reformed perspective. To do this, I will exemplify some of the main ideas using three philosophers to archetypally represent the most influential parts of postmodern thought as it relates to young people. One of the hurdles in even discussing postmodernism is that the very ideology itself is difficult to define. Its nature is that of critique and not necessarily a system of coherent thought for understanding the world. Postmodernism is, as its name implies, an attempt at moving beyond the limits and structures of the modern mind. To that end, it's a vast array of complex thought evidenced in a variety of disciplines. Perhaps central to its thesis is the reconstitution of modern ideals and presuppositions.⁹ My goal will not be to provide an exact explanation of all postmodern theory, but to look at three of its major tenants and determine how the 21st century church has either successfully or unsuccessfully responded to its major teachings for young people. I will also assume that these teachings have thoroughly infiltrated the sphere of

⁹ See Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*.

youth education in the secular realm.¹⁰ The implication of this is that anyone doing ministry to youth, youth not raised in a bubble, should be acutely aware of the differing influences of postmodern thought wrought by both the media and the academy.

Smith notes that recent sociological research often treats young people as alien to adult constructs, gravely different from adults and often inarticulate. He debunks this notion by illuminating the keen ability of many young people to wax eloquently on subjects that interest them.¹¹ As such, I intend to treat young people (adolescents) as covenant members in transition. They are not adults, nor are they a different species all together. As we shall see, closing the generation gap is a sanctifying process of the church that takes work. When I mention young people or youth in the 21st century, I am referring to the age group that now falls between 10-18 years of age, from 6th-12th grade.¹² The reason I have chosen this specific age as a target for my research is because the late 20th century church has isolated adolescence as a time of age specificity. My research will focus on both the underlying secular philosophies that often persuade philosophy of ministry, and the broad evangelical response to this age group within the last 50 years of church history. The question of whether the church's main role in youth ministry is that of nurture or mission is important when we examine how the church has dealt with young people. My contention is that youth need to become integrated members of a local church, not seen as periphery projects.

The third part of my thesis will discuss possible solutions to postmodern ideology from a biblical-covenantal perspective. I will do this in an apologetic format as I interact with both postmodern ideologies and evangelical responses, examining their strengths

¹⁰ See Jim Powell, *Deconstruction for Beginners*. P 2-9

¹¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 2005.

¹² What has commonly, since the institution of state funded public schools, been referred to as Adolescence

and weaknesses. The bulk of the reform, I propose, centers on 3 main elements: (1) preaching the pure word and administering the sacraments in a way that young people can understand (without watering down or entertaining), (2) bringing families, and the church family as a whole, together while teaching and equipping parents, who are the primary pastoral contacts in their homes, and (3) living out the gospel together in an attitude of service and evangelism.

The overarching goal of this paper is to offer Bible-based hope to youth ministers in defensive response to a climate of relative truth claims and anthro-centric presuppositions by showing how these three positive biblical solutions (word/sacrament, family, and service) answer the root questions of postmodern thought; am I my own God, does experience dictate reality, is there anything stable? My prayer is that we can ask the hard questions about ministering to our youth together while formulating answers driven by God's word.

C. Definitions

At this point we shall turn to look at the dilemma square in the face and examine three introductory aspects to the issue: secular philosophical culture, broad evangelical forms of response (both positive and negative), and what I see as a biblical-covenantal response. The next sections will help to frame the argument throughout the rest of the thesis. The reason we must examine not only 'youth ministries' proper, but also the climate of 21st century culture, is because both have and influence on religious young people.¹³ My hope is to define what I consider to be postmodernism as well as the 21st

¹³ Bert Roebben, "Shaping a Playground for Transcendence: Postmodern Youth Ministry as a Radical Challenge." *Religious Education* 93:3 (Summer 1997) : 332-347.

century response so that I can build upon these definitions with solutions that are biblical. Let me also add that certainly not every aspect of postmodern thought is negative for the church, nor was every evangelical reaction. The intention of this thesis is not to answer every question about postmodernism or 21st century youth ministry, nor is it an attempt to provide a complete biblical solution. The goal instead will be to look at what intellectual trends are most influential upon young minds, how the church has responded thus far, and how we can respond better in the future.

Regarding the major intellectual trends of postmodernism, I will examine three in order: Nietzsche's philosophy of 'will to power', Foucault's 'limiting experiences' and Derrida's 'deconstruction.' The former three were selected not only based on the influence of their academic work but because larger portions of their teaching have filtered down into the 'lengua franca' of the masses. It is not rare at all to hear all of their names, or buzz words associated with their teachings, in any variety the social sciences or humanities.¹⁴ All three of these major players in postmodern thought will be examined in light of their implications on the 'self,' both corporate and individual. I want to show that postmodern ideology presents a certain self-identity for young people, a mold of cognitive adherence. Thus, when I refer to postmodernism, these three main teachings are my point of reference. There is much more we could discuss, but for the purpose of this thesis, and in light of the evangelical response, these three are most suited for our apologetic response.

To better define the 'evangelical response' we shall investigate three major trends in youth ministry over the last 50-100 years. They are: the parachurch ministry model, the

¹⁴ Both Grenz and Smith catch on to this, using all three rather extensively in their writings. It may also be noteworthy that most of the respectable 'Intro to Philosophy' texts contain large portions on all three and always with reference to how their views have influenced larger culture. See, Osborne and Palmer.

entertainment-driven youth ministry, and the pedagogical choice of age-based segregation. The parachurch shall describe any entity which exists outside the confessional marks of a true church and seeks to minister to and evangelize young people. This is not to say that parachurch is explicitly unbiblical, but rather that it is a youth ministry outside of the covering of elders, sacraments, and discipline.

Entertainment driven youth groups and age segregation can happen in both parachurch and local church settings. These marks of 20th century youth ministry are defined by their foundational identification as entertainment based and age appropriation. The entertainment model seeks to acquire and retain young people through the primary use of fun and experience. The age-segregated model seeks to be more relevant for young people by providing an atmosphere that is structured around the supposed needs of a niche group in the church, in this case, adolescents.

These influences, both postmodern and evangelical, are not just light and momentary but often serve to establish a young person's long-term worldview.¹⁵ If this is the case then the urgency to put all of this under the authority of Christ in scripture and his church is even more obvious. From the standpoint of definition, we are dealing with the church as defined in sum by the Westminster standards. Although there is much room for interpretation here, the principal elements of the word/sacrament, age-inclusivity and accountability, as well as service and non-negotiable. We are not simply dealing with lofty philosophical whims or trying to throw stones and youth ministers with good intentions. On the contrary, we are defending the biblical worldview, and a biblical view of youth in the church, from the perils of this world and the dangers of becoming like it.

¹⁵ Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, shows how young people tend to carry values attained at this stage in life into all other stages forthcoming.

D. Sources and Literature Review

As it concerns primary sources, the following are broken down into the three main categories: postmodern thought, evangelical reactions of the late 20th century, and a reforming biblical-covenantal perspective.

On the study of postmodern thought, I will draw from several sources. First, I will attempt to formulate a definition surrounding my goals by using various dictionaries and encyclopedias. Specifically, the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, and the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* will help us get a general overview of the main concepts that encircle postmodern thought. Several other ‘History of Philosophy’ texts will help me orient myself, including books by Palmer, Copleston, Clark, and Srumpf.¹⁶

Perhaps the most helpful will be primary sources for all three authors. For Nietzsche, I will be referring to his most famous work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. These two books by the German author are perhaps best representative of his views on the anti-religious self, ‘will to power’, and the dissolution of objective truth. Nietzsche was a great frontrunner for what would later be developed by philosophers like Michel Foucault. To dig deeper into the thinking of Michel Foucault I’ll be using his work, *The History of Sexuality*. I chose this work because it expressly challenges the structures of how we view sexuality and provides a place to discuss his views on experience, existentialism, and limits. In studying the ‘deconstruction’ of Jacques Derrida, I’ll be drawing from *The Gift of Death*, debatably his most assertive work on religions, as well as *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. Again, my intention is not to

¹⁶ For a detailed list of sources, please see the bibliography under the above surnames.

give a full biography or report of each author, but to isolate certain major trends in thinking that have greatly affected young people in the last 50 years.

As I examine youth ministry in the late late 20th century, a task that will be historical for the most part, I will use five main sources geared toward discussing youth ministry in the historio-theological context. These sources are, Mark Senter's *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* and *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, Smith and Denton's *Soul Searching*, Devries' *Family Based Youth Ministry*, and *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* edited by Dean, Clark and Rahn. All of these books discuss the history of ministry to youth, especially in the late 20th century. Each book takes a different approach, but as a whole they project a realistic picture of how the church has largely responded to the undercurrents of postmodern philosophical thought. Especially important will be Senter's book on the cycles of ministry to youth and Smith and Denton's survey on the attitudes of American teenagers to religion.

To tie together solutions for postmodernism and the evangelical reactions, I'll be going back to the basics of ecclesiology. Although this paper is not designed to present a full reformed ecclesiology for young people, my answer to postmodern ideology is formed apologetically by a reformed view of the church. To accomplish this I will be using three main sources. First I will reference Edmund Clowney and his *The Church*. This is a great starting point for understanding the holistic outworking of the church, including both youth and parents. Dr. Clowney does an excellent job of explaining reformed ecclesiology and how it relates to the world that surrounds it. Secondly, I will draw from the apologetic writings of John Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* and *Apologetics to the Glory of God*. From Dr. Greg Bahnsen I will use *Van Til's*

Apologetic: Readings and Analysis and *Pushing the Antithesis*, as well as several live debates in which he participated, especially *The Great Debate* with Dr. Gordon Stein. Lastly, I refer to Michael Horton's *Covenant and Eschatology, A Better Way*, and class notes on postmodernism to show how the answers that solve the questions of postmodernity are no different then they ever were. Frame and Bahnsen do a superb job of undoing postmodern logic and Horton develops a covenantal hermeneutic as a positive response.

I should add that other various journal articles and books relevant to the subject matter shall be incorporated as well. The Bible (NIV) will also be quoted extensively in this paper. This is, admitting my bias, the single most important source I have. Considering the degradation of absolute truth offered by postmodernity, the revealed word of God is the ultimate authority around which I admittedly reason. Logically speaking, I concede that my reasoning is circular around this ultimate authority. I hope to show that the postmodern mind has no stable point of reference to reason around at all.

At this point, we are ready to look more deeply into the philosophies of Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida. Examining some of their key contributions to postmodern thought will help us better understand the formation of the young 21st century mind. My desire is that this information will help ministers to youth and local churches in wading through the intellectual assumptions of this present evil age without fear. Instead, as we study postmodernity at a glimpse, we should rejoice at the fact that where the world would leave us, by faith in it's own unsustainable presuppositions and without any objective answer at all for the preconditions of knowledge, the God of the Bible gives the answer of faith, hope, and love.

II. Three Archetypes of Postmodernism: Forming Young Minds

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” 1 Corinthians 1:20

The social and intellectual landscape of cognitive development is more interconnected than ever before in human history. This is a blessing and a curse to young minds. From Internet chat-rooms and personal profiles, sharing music and media, to the raw ability to consume, young people are bombarded by a host of differing messages about life, truth, and reality.¹⁷ If the church is to nurture such diversified beings, we must seek to understand the motives and methods of a secular culture that seeks to do the same. This is a central point in our discussion. We cannot assume that postmodern thought is merely engrained into young minds passively. Those in power, both educators and business people, who do not submit to God, are intentional in their methodology. They eagerly seek to shape the ideas of reality, truth, and what is culturally acceptable. The messages they send are intended to design an imminent consumer generation—that is largely our impressionable youth.

¹⁷ This is painfully obvious, but for a good academic discussion see Andersen & Strate, eds. *Critical studies in media commercialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Just as the church desires to raise up young people in the way of the Lord, part of our apologetic and pedagogical task is to realize that the world solicits another way of life; one that opposes the church's ultimate goals to make disciples and expand the kingdom of God. In the secular world, the myths of total independence and the ability to be a 'freethinking' individual, coupled with the desire for consumption and immediate self-gratification are perceived as viable goals. Where do these worldly teachings come from? That is what we shall consider as we begin with the dominating worldviews and philosophies of our three proponents of postmodernism.

Our first task is to examine and isolate the major factors that influence the thinking of young people in the 21st century context. This is a critical endeavor because it allows us to better understand toward whom our biblical response should be. This is the work of contextualizing the gospel in culture. It is by no means an attempt to alter the metanarrative of redemptive history in any way. On the contrary, the work of understanding the influence upon young minds assists us in better telling the story to new generations, retaining the message while contextualizing the means.

From the onset, we will note the benefit of this exercise as it relates to evangelism, but I suspect that it also plays a role in the covenant community. When we decipher how young minds are conditioned by non-biblical presuppositions we can better reach those in the world as well as nurture those in the church.

We must know our enemy. That is why this research is important, because young people are especially susceptible to false teaching, whether it is from the world or inside our own borders. Ministers to youth and churches as a whole must be willing to investigate the teachings of the world so that the God of the Bible may bring answers

through his word. Although the three worldviews we will examine are powerful in their persuasions, in the end, they fail by the same measure with which they began: the secular autonomy of man void of any absolute to anchor himself down.

A. Nietzsche: The Autonomous Self's 'Will to Power'

To trace the philosophical lineage of postmodern thinking among young people, it is arguable that one must study the entire history of philosophy.¹⁸ It is only through this more encompassing approach that one can fully understand the roots and rebellious implications for the postmodern project. However, recent trends which are a complete undoing of theism, absolutes, and the traditional preconditions of knowledge, should be studied specifically to gain an understanding of what intellectual trends are most absorbed by today's youth.

We do not need to venture back, for the purpose of this thesis, to Plato and Aristotle to get an overview of the current climate. This is perhaps most true in light of the fact that the assumptions made by those pre-modern thinkers were founded on the basis of an absolute reality, whether in form or in essence, which the postmodern critique has sought to undo. The trends that are of current interest are those that undermine the foundations of the Christian worldview, that is, they deny even the possibility of the existence of God and put in its place the sovereignty of man.

As a springboard to this discussion we will examine some key contributions of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) that have taken shape and formed

¹⁸ For a superb introduction read Palmer's *The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*. And for a wonderful introduction from a Christian perspective see John Frame's *The History of Philosophy and Christian Thought* class. For an introduction in primary sources see Allen and Springsted *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*.

an undeniable stronghold in 21st century society. The dimension of Nietzsche's thought that I find most insightful for modern youth is the idea of 'will to power'. That is, the ultimate exaltation of the individual, the subject, and the human in limited form and unlimited potential. Nietzsche's 'will to power' is perhaps the final toppling of enlightenment ideals as well as accepted deism. His new 'Übermensch' is a super-human example of a man who completes the task of 'will to power' and is uninhibited by 'self' or the constraints of moral society. Zarathustra, Nietzsche's quintessential superhuman model, descends from his place of meditation to declare his supremacy. He has overcome the gap between his limits and his own identity.¹⁹ This happens through the process of willing himself to power by asserting direct control over others and his own values. There is no longer a need for structure, religion, or even language, just the momentary exertion of power and control, the one exalted over the many.

How did the Übermensch reach this conclusion? He was tired of the constraints placed upon him by the institutional structures of his day. The man who would overcome must be willing to throw off of himself all things real: morality, law, even his own self identity. There is no real hope in his 'will to power' beyond what is found in man with immediacy and action. The eschatology of this skepticism is human potential, lived out in a quest for self-assertion and dominance. The great over-comer, a self-authenticating messiah, holds fast to the existential desires of his own flesh, and here's the good news: the value of these desires, explicated in Dionysian idealism, are the only good.²⁰ There is an assumed ethical positivity in this existentialism. The man, (and I use the gender specific pronoun intentionally), who conquers by exploring the boundaries of his own

¹⁹ From Kaufmann's *Nietzsche, The Viking Portable Reader*.

²⁰ See especially Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* for a more conclusive explanation.

sensual lusts is victorious over any and all systems that would keep him down. This man who is stronger (stronger than all women, stronger than most other men), is a standard of truth unto himself.²¹ He is, for all intensive purposes, his own god. He is the true god of the moment, the self-god, the god who replaces what shambles remain of an ancient God who died in weakness and pain.

I will not suggest that many young people are conscious of the influence of such paradigms. It is improbable that most 21st century youth could articulate Nietzsche's worldview with accuracy. However, we are able to see by the way many people choose to live that this system of belief has penetrated far into our own ethos. Perfect examples of this are in the profound findings of Smith and Denton. They show convincingly, and with the utmost empirical penetration, that most young religious American's are 'Therapeutic Moralistic Deists.'²² We shall come back to this assertion later. At this point we need only see that the average American young person, usually following in the footsteps of their parents and often claiming to be 'Christian,' essentially wills their own religion. Therapeutic moralistic deism is not at all orthodox Christianity. The result is something that looks little like the historic faith. Although this may not be a conscientious choice, many young people seem to get by on the presuppositions of postmodernism while still claiming to 'believe.'

A young person need not, in this system, even realize their objective, 'will to power.' This is a grand part of the issue. Nietzsche's proposal does not call its adherents to question their own motives but merely to live the 'fruitful' life of Dionysian self-

²¹ For an interesting look at Nietzsche's views on gender, see Fritzsche *Nietzsche and the Death of God*.

²² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 2005. See the conclusion of Chapter 4 as well as the end summary.

indulgence.²³ Those who question remain begging for answers at the table of those who have already conquered. The most important thing is not to think but to live, to exist in the moment for its own sake. This can be true in such radical forms of existentialism because there is nothing that precedes or postdates the moment except other moments.

I am not intimating that thinking is bad in Nietzsche's world, but that its value as good is found in the preservation and enjoyment of self, free in the immediate. Thinking is valuable as it moves an individual forward in the 'will to power'. It is bad if it incarcerates the man by imposing ideas. This, as we shall see, is contradictory to the biblical view. However, to the shame of many, it is the exact assumption that has often been used in reaching modern young people. The reality of these teachings is seen often in modern youth culture. Young people are fragmented, individualized, and segregated into experiential age-appropriate communities of development. Much of this is an implicit result of Nietzsche's rethinking the concept of self, its purpose and application, and its centrality.²⁴

The current assumption among many youth is that they are the subjective center of their own universe. This is perhaps the most popularly important logical conclusion of Nietzsche's system, that man is the center of things. This is not the same as the modern optimism of humans working together for the common good, but a breaking free from those very ethical implications to allow the individual his own definition of good. There are times when this turns into what is perceived as achievement. Other times it leads to despair. Regardless, Nietzsche's metaphysical skepticism ultimately leads one down a

²³ Nietzsche made a moral distinction between the repression of Apollo and the freedom of Dionysus.

²⁴ Horton in *Covenant and Eschatology* does well at uncovering the eschatology of self after Nietzsche

path away from God and into self; self as god. But as we shall continue to see, the self is no god. Not even for a moment.

For those who are working with and raising young people, these deep-rooted modes of thought must be identified and expunged. This is why I continue to argue that understanding the underpinnings of modern philosophy increases our ability to minister the gospel to modern youth. We must truly know what it is that by God's grace we are seeking to boldly challenge. Why don't young people care to get involved? Why does church seem boring? The list goes on, but could it have something to do with the fact that many of them have grown up in a socio-philosophical environment that has taught them that their subjective appraisal of personal happiness is the core value of their universe?

Nietzsche's worldview is deeply embedded in the postmodern psyche. It does lead to personal and societal skepticism in the end by providing no answers for humanity outside of finite experience. The question that we must pose to our young people is not one of evidence and experience, but of total demonstration that God's world cannot allow the logical conclusions of secular existentialism. There is an emotionally measurable existential experience to be had from both perspectives, but only one can logically account for their reality.

Although the *Übermensch* was optimistic in his victorious march, it eventually led him in circles. If man is god, than the 'eternally recurring' game of 'says who' leads to eventual despair.²⁵ There is no comparison that can help man overcome his finite security and certainly none to rescue him from death. In this first philosopher we've seen how the denial of absolute possibilities and law limits the scope of human existence to the self. If

²⁵ The 'says who' referred to is that of morality specifically. Who can say that X or Y is wrong? This is example is taken directly from an Ethics class with Dr. Mark Ross.

the self is a momentary and hopelessly finite end, then it must be considered, for lack of a linguistic alternative, god. In the next part we will investigate the logical conclusions of such limitations, the dissolving of the self and truth altogether.

B. Foucault: The Limits of Experience and the Relative Self

Once more we shall use a key philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and his intellectual contribution, as a stepping-stone to understanding the postmodern mind of young people. I will examine and analyze several main ideas and attempt to explain their implications in light of work with young people in the local church. Anyone who works with youth must be fully aware of the human tendency toward blame. This has roots as far back as The Fall.²⁶

What stands out in our current context is the ability to blame another without any sense of personal responsibility or consequence. There are, in a postmodern secular universe, no absolutes, no God, and no objective truth. Truth is a concept confined to the presumptuous halls of modernism and its precursors. There are no invariant universal absolutes and thus no true measure by which to judge either culpability or blame. In fact, as Nietzsche demonstrated, the only truth is the subjective self and his or her, but mostly his, 'will to power' in a diverse and pluralistic existence.

This is not the self of modernism with its lofty ideals of reaching true knowledge for the corporate good. The 'self' of Nietzsche, and later Foucault, is one that is dissolved into limited (or limit) experience while seeking to overcome the historical structures of social power and identity. But what if the 'will to power' itself is merely a convention of

²⁶ Genesis 3:12 is a prime example of this.

self-indulgence among many? What if this outlook on life, a nihilistic optimism, is eventually untrue to its own assumptions of being *the* way to live?

When Nietzsche declared the death of God, (the absolute of absolutes), he set into motion a denial of truth that could only be stopped by the will of the self. Foucault helps us understand to an even greater degree that the human self does not wish to be stopped in such an ‘empowering’ pursuit. The power that the ‘archeologist of knowledge,’ Michel Foucault, dug up was that of going beyond objective knowledge to demonstrate that all knowing is a convention of control and an act of violence.²⁷ These findings did not actually equip the philosopher to offer a more stable system, but continued in the tradition of critique by undermining man’s ability to actually know anything. Once more, this stands in direct contrast to the biblical picture of humanity revealed throughout the history of redemption, and most fully in Christ. If our goal is to see Disciples of Christ forged from the nurture of the church than we must always consider those teachings that might hinder the process.

Foucault was, as Stanly Grenz puts it, the ‘truest disciple of Nietzsche.’²⁸ In the vein of object-less existentialism, Foucault carried on the tradition of the self in existence as socially constructed. Nietzsche’s ‘will’ was a structure, albeit a better one for secular existentialism, and thus needed to be shown as a mere fractured alternative. The greatest movement forward was that Foucault understood that self in ‘will to power’ would actually dissolve the self into limited and fractured experiences. These experiences, constantly changing the unstable social identity of personality, must therefore be pushed to greater lengths if one desires to actualize the human potential.

²⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*

²⁸ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*. p124

Foucault's point was clear and cutting; that the postmodern self is not based on a set structure or order in the secular sphere, but is merely a collection of existing moments that go beyond any such structure. Where Nietzsche robbed metaphysics of any absolutes beyond the self in the world, Foucault robbed the ontological self of the same rights. Even the self-existing was not a point of reference for human thought or knowledge. In a sense, he continued Nietzsche's tradition by putting the subjective self at the center of existence, but broke from his predecessor by showing that self qua self had no real telos. Thus, the former's strong call toward 'will to power' was lost amidst the non-existence of any real identity or purpose therein. For Foucault the goal of existence was not 'will to power', but to overcome power through experience. This occurs by pushing the limits of the existential as far as they will go, even to the point of death—the ultimate limit.²⁹

It has been observed throughout history that various forms of pleasure seem to drive young people. This takes deep root in today's abundance of media commercialism and for-profit hedonistic exploits. Never before in history have young people had such an opportunity to titillate their senses, and never before have they appeared so bored.³⁰ The difference for young people today, philosophically applied, is the dissolution of any standard by which to correct behavior that may or may not be perceived as wrong. Foucault was a living example of his own methods, traveling from place to place in search of a greater high, a new opportunity to define morality. He was constantly on the look out for a new way to push the limits of his own existence through the moment experience of pushing the limit. As opposed to Nietzsche's solution in Foucault's

²⁹ *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. p320-321

³⁰ Schneider and Stevenson *The Ambitious Generation: America's Teenagers, Motivated but Directionless*.

undoing of the structure there ‘there are not answers, there are not solutions.’³¹ His goal was that of challenging and breaking all structural limits in an attempt to transcend the constructed self.

These limits were imposed, socially constructed by those searching for power, and needed to be overcome by the limited self pushing beyond its constraints, forming its own power, and willing its own way. For Nietzsche there was a structure, albeit self-centered at every turn. Nietzsche’s philosophy has a goal, even if it is grounded in the war torn shambles of modern structure. For Foucault there is no such thing. There is only one moment of pleasure pushing a person to the next and greater moment.

We can see, even from this brief overview, that such teachings undermine a biblical worldview. God’s word, revealing the whole history of redemption, indicates that there is objective truth, a metanarrative that can be known. But is it conceivable that the ideologies of Foucault are actually being taught and handed down to our youth? Whether you merely flip through the channels that cater to young people or visit websites that allow them to create and manicure their own identity, it is not difficult to see that the legacy of Foucault lives on.³² Young people in the 21st century frequently appear to indulge in pushing the limit. There are extreme forms of everything from sports to psychedelic narcotics—things unimaginable to those only a few generations prior.³³

Certainly not all young people do drugs and not all engage in extreme activity. However, with the amount of youth ministries using the word ‘extreme’ as a socio-cultural mantra, one notes a strong point of relationship. This legacy, and its aftermath, is

³¹ Os Guinness, *The Long Journey Home*, p33-37

³² In *Postmodernism for Beginners* Jim Powell argues that information technology is public space that these paradigms are being worked out.

³³ Note for example the insurgence of extreme lifestyles, the increase of social hard-drug use, cyber-identities and the ‘Jackass’ phenomenon.

one more reason why we must understand where and how the minds of our youth are shaped when we seek to reach them with the pure biblical gospel. The suggestion that postmodernity has leaked into the minds of a generation does not necessitate the watering down of truth. In fact, it is this exact gospel truth that can bring actual, tangible hope to young people whose worldview fosters confusion.

The gospel message does not need alteration, nor do the methods of word and sacrament need a face-lift, but our conversation and consideration of youth must be seasoned with context. At this point we will examine the central teachings of one more postmodern philosopher. It is in the ‘deconstruction’ of Jacques Derrida that we are confronted with the total annihilation of reality. In Nietzsche, the absolute world is put to the test of autonomy. In Foucault, autonomy is put to the test of experience, and in Derrida, all possibility of coherent meaning is undone, even language, so that the only ‘real’ that remains is critique and opposition.³⁴

C. Derrida: Deconstructing the Structure of Self

From the extreme existential experientialism of Foucault we now turn to French Philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and his method of moving beyond the limits of modernism and structuralism known as ‘deconstruction.’ Derrida is a key player in the postmodern front for several reasons. Like the rest of this philosophical cohort his agenda is to undermine modernism and call into question any claims of absolute truth or existence. Derrida and others have sought to free the mind from the secular scientific and humanistic restraints of modernism by showing the natural end of finitude. Unfortunately an irrational skepticism is all that is left without even language to build upon.

³⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p90

We cannot lambaste Derrida or any other, nor make postmodernism the proverbial scapegoat for the problems of man. Sin is responsible for the latter. It is only that man's desires for freedom and autonomy have found new ways to express themselves. Where the modern project exalted man to the objective reality of a god, postmodernism deconstructs the entire idea of self by showing that the changing nature of the finite can only produce irrationality and subjectivity. In a deconstructed world there is no God, there is no subject willing to power, and there is no positive progression at all. There is demolition. Secular postmodernism, like secular modernism, project two sides of a similar sin.

So how does this method of 'deconstruction' work? To begin with, it exploits its interpretation of the subjectivity and finitude of language. Language does not actually point us to or bring us into contact with absolutes.³⁵ It is finite and momentary, always changing and never capable of actually identifying us with the presence (or intention) of the author.³⁶ Language is a sign and is limited by time and space. As such it can never actually signify what was originally there. The Bible, with its claims of propositional truth, is a main target of Derrida's method.³⁷

The logocentrism, or word-centeredness, of the text is revealed and the highly contradictory binary opposites are exposed. In short, texts are given meaning by the reader not the reverse, this makes for a subjective hermeneutic, putting the reader response, not the actual meaning of language, at the forefront.³⁸ What's more, the reader is changed by the text. Thus reading the same text twice reveals both a different meaning

³⁵ *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*

³⁶ Caputo and Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*.

³⁷ Derrida, *The Gift of death*.

³⁸ Caputo and Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*.

and a different reader. This theory and its derivations are highly suited for a culture of young people emerging from the media wastelands of MTV and Hollywood. There need not be any consistency in message or motive, just the ability to break it apart. Derrida's forthright critique of modernism, if allowed to define the terms of the debate, is essentially beyond critique.

This trend is seen most clearly in the unexamined (and it need not be in a postmodern worldview) pluralism and tolerance of the 21st century. In our current cultural context, it is often seen as an atrocity to harvest the coat of an animal while the extermination of a live, human fetus is nothing more than birth control. The metanarrative, of which Derrida is so suspicious, would perhaps provide an answer, or at best a guideline, to handle moral issues such as these. But the system does not seek to provide new answers in a categorical (modern) way. Upon the declaration of its own rules, it does not need to.

Derrida and his hermeneutic methods of textual 'deconstruction' have ravaged the landscape of the modernist ideals of meaning, proposition, and authorial presence. Juxtaposing the binary opposite can now deconstruct any claim that can be proposed. Derrida has made many contributions to the postmodern project, but perhaps his most important is that of showing that language, and texts that contain language, are not reliable channels of transferring actual (true) information. The skepticism of this worldview and the real time failings of modernity to produce an objectively greater man, run deep in the veins the postmodern mindset. We find this to be true not only in the anti-

institutionalization of 21st century youth and distrust of the government, but also in the religious attitudes of young people toward any sort of ‘organized’ religion.³⁹

In the same way that Derrida deconstructs a text by pointing out, with intra-textual critique, that binary opposites exist within a given linguistic structure, youth and adolescence were viewed as a sort of extra-ecclesial responsibilities. The difference between good and evil was as stark as the difference between young and old. No longer was the unity among generations a possibility in an age of fragmentation and deconstruction. Age was a sign, and it signified the reality of difference. Professionals needed to be hired to do the job of parents. Just as no person, in Derrida’s universe, can assume the myth of neutrality and presence, no parent could reasonably expect to understand their child during the deconstructed years of adolescence.

The problems which Derrida both addresses and creates in his philosophical model have affected the church deeper than perhaps realized. Postmodernity has the potential to bring with it a sort of hopelessness for the older generations still accepting absolutes, but it need not do so. By understanding the ways that postmodern thought has shaped the minds of young people, those still holding on to objective and absolute truth have a wonderful opportunity to share it. With the modern project seen as largely a failure, youth ministers have an open door to show how God’s truth reconstitutes the dissolved self of postmodernity.

D. Summary: The Postmodern World

³⁹ R. Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo. “Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17: 4 (December 1978) : 359-379.

Can we really say, in good conscience and without being unduly fatalistic, that the youth of late 20th and 21st centuries are actually inundated with the philosophical paradigms of Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida? Isn't this a bit overboard? Things still get done in the US, people still work, and the world has hardly fallen from its axis. Using these three philosophers, and one specific aspect of each, was not a scare tactic to illicit fear. The last 50 years of the history of secular philosophy has sought to undermine truths that are essential to the Christian worldview; that God is God, that the self is most actualized in God, and that God has revealed himself in a reliable way through words. So while not every young person may be declaring themselves the next Zarathustra or pushing every conceivable limit of their own existence, the by-products of these worldviews are evident. They are perhaps most evident in the church's reaction.⁴⁰

This overview of philosophical presuppositions, influencing the minds of 21st century young people, is greatly needed if we are to work toward change in our own churches. As it concerns the secular mind, painted with the ambiguity of postmodernism, our greatest enemies may be the relativizing of truth and the epistemological subjectivity of the self. Nietzsche's challenge to the enlightenment thinking of idealism and rationalism left us with the self on a quest for power. Foucault took Nietzsche one-step farther and made even the existential trajectory subjective and beyond recognizable structure. And Derrida ventures even deeper into the abyss by taking away the possibility of anything stable, even language, to describe a coherent base of knowledge.

In this factory of philosophical idols, the autonomous individual is left as the centerpiece of law, truth, and reality. The reality in which this self-creating individual

⁴⁰ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*. In the face of these great divides, Smith and Denton show that the church has largely failed in both addressing these issues with youth and providing biblical solutions.

lives is one not guided by the boundaries of absolute truth, but merely by the feeling of experience and the pushing of limits. The outworking of these worldviews has resulted in a mass of confusion and unexamined conclusions. Young people are, according to Van Tillian categories, operating on the borrowed capital of absolutes while deceiving themselves into living as they please.⁴¹ Our youth are not passively ignorant. However, the current climate of philosophical discovery allows them to be considered rational even if they live irrationally. This is because now there is no such thing as truth by which to subject their actions, inconsistencies or ambiguities.

As Christian educators, we know that there must be a biblical response to this spiral of autonomous thinking. We cannot accept the reasoning or conclusions of this paradigm and still preach the true gospel. However, in our reaction to it we must seek to understand it, recognizing it as a deconstructive critique, and we must ask of it the hard question of whether or not it can actually rebuild anything. This will make us, as Jesus said, both shrewd as vipers and innocent as doves.⁴² As we examine the belief system of postmodernism, we must realize that its teachings are not neutral. They present worldviews—patterns for life that many have subscribed to.

Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida have much to teach the youth worker whose ministry happens among the 21st century mind. Most importantly perhaps, we learn from these three thinkers that young people are now given the excuse to exercise full self-indulgence in a realm of non-self existence. This may be the greatest difference between the modern and postmodern era. It is now commonly acceptable for a young person to do as she pleases and respond to the consequence with a skeptical ‘says who?’

⁴¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*.

⁴² Matthew 10:16, NIV

To this way of thinking we must respond with the gospel. But how? How can we minister to those who reject revelation, objectivity, and absolutes? That is the question that we will go on to consider in the rest of this thesis. To further help us understand the current plane on which we stand, let us take up the last half-century of response to youth among evangelicals in general. Even though this broad stroke contains certain difficulties, it will give us an overview for both the out workings of postmodern thought and the possible biblical solutions that await us.

The truth of Christianity, objective and God-centered, stands in stark contrast to the fully secular aspects of postmodernity—the unbridled worship of self that the secular philosophers have offered us. However, it is in this pursuit, to maintain the message of the true gospel contextualized in culture, that we must be wary of the other side of the slippery slope. We must be aware of our surroundings but also constantly intentional of not falling into them. On that note, let us turn to a variety of the evangelical responses to the problems put forth by postmodern philosophy.

III. Three Reactions in the Late 20th Century: A Short History

“Do not deceive yourselves. If anyone thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise.” 1 Corinthians 3:18

The question for those who, in the last 50 years, have ministered to young people in the local church now remains: how have we answered the self-centered skepticism and the relative truth claims of postmodern ideology?⁴³ If these philosophical trends are as influential as they seem to be on a secular level, what has been our response to them? One would hope that the response would not be reactionary in the negative sense, but a sorting through of the real-time issues while offering orthodox biblical solutions. Although this answer seems straight forward, it is the job of each new generation in the church to confront the most difficult questions in the pervading worldview. There are times when this is done well and others that end in failure.

The late 20th century was a time of great change in both the social and theological sphere. A broad range of reactions, some intentional and some not, to the mental project of postmodernism are to be found. My overall diagnosis as it relates to American

⁴³ I should note that my usage of the 50 year period comes from both Mark Senter and *Youth Education in the Church*, by Zuck and Benson. The time-stamping generations and trends is dubious. My choice was to examine the last 50 years so that I could correlate this cycle with the popularization of postmodernism.

religious youth in postmodern age is not overly positive. I do not wish to decry any one organization or person, but to inspect three widespread reactions of youth ministry to the three overarching philosophical paradigms we've already discussed. I hope that this brief historical analysis will help prevent youth ministers and youth workers from making the same mistakes in the future. The gospel, thanks be to God, is unchanging in its effect. But as the times change, we must always be willing to critically consider the choices we make in presenting this truth to new generations engendered with new ideas.

It can be argued that the institution of youth ministry was not at all an invention of the church, but in its genesis, a reaction to the changing socio-political culture in regards to youth as an individualized subculture.⁴⁴ Prior to the industrial revolution, adolescence, the age from 12-18, was not a defined socio-cultural category, certainly not as its own subcultural standard. A person was first and foremost a valuable and necessary member of a family, even through puberty, and within that unit either considered a child or a young adult.⁴⁵

A seismic shift has occurred in popular culture since that time. This shift, in every sphere of life, is not encapsulated by the occurrence of adolescence and youth culture, nor is it summed up the main doctrines of postmodernity. It is however, better explained in light of both of these cultural phenomena and a helpful starting place for those in ministry to biblically engage the task of contextualizing ministry in culture.

In 1875, the Supreme Court made a decision that changed the landscape of American adolescent identity forever. It was in this year that the high court formally

⁴⁴ Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*

⁴⁵ Creasy-Dean, *Starting Right*, 81-82

ruled on the allocation of tax dollars for public high school education.⁴⁶ Up to this point, for a variety of social and domestic reasons, the majority of American young people in the years of adolescence were either educated at home, in small communal age-inclusive classrooms, or not at all.⁴⁷ At the institution of the high school, teens flocked from both rural areas and urban centers to a location of confined space and age-segregated immersion.

This was the essential beginning of youth culture, as we understand it today. As it concerns the underpinnings of postmodern thought, it is duly noteworthy that the state institution of high school radically transformed the balance of pedagogical power, putting far more weight in the hands of teachers than parents. Parents still remain the paramount influence in the lives of their children, but the advent of the public high school opened up the door to a greater diversity of new ideas, teaching paradigms, and worldviews than ever before. Because parent-child interaction was severely lessened by the length of the school day, an influx of other influences pervaded the developmental sphere.

The reason this change was so important, was that it allowed teenagers, formerly part of the daily activities of the family, to spend a great deal of their time with peers in their same age range. As Mark Senter puts it, ‘the church had no choice but to respond to this dramatic social change.’⁴⁸ What is interesting is that at the same moment that social change was taking place, the overall worldview of the Christian was being challenged as well, on a philosophical level. The public high school was a breeding ground for free thought, and thinking freely is never a neutral enterprise. The debate over evolution and abortion are prime examples of this.

⁴⁶ Mark Senter, *Four Views of Youth Ministry*, 2001.

⁴⁷ Dean, Clark and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 2001. See chapter 4 on historical context of YM

⁴⁸ Mark Senter, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, Introduction xi

Certainly there is nothing wrong with exposing young people to new and differing ideas, but to do so in the segregated context of the public high school came at a cost. Facts are not neutral; they are attached in their presentation to a worldview, a system of belief and understanding.⁴⁹ In decentralizing the intergenerational faith and family community while giving educational control to the state, a mass tool of educational secularization was implemented in youth rearing. Historically, we see that often the lofty ideas of the academy eventually trickle down to become the normative interpretive grid of the masses. The daily segregation of young people in schools was one more step in that process.⁵⁰

During the late 20th century various groups sprouted up in response to this new youth culture. Some of these were existent within the church while others essentially broke free from the local church to begin their own specialized movements. Often, out of desperation, the local church would attempt to copy the model of bigger, more successful ministries. The blanket ideology of the time was: 'If you want more fish use a bigger net.'⁵¹ In the face of rising fall-out rates, the main goal of youth ministry appeared to be preservation instead of confrontation of the ideological worldviews head on.⁵²

It was also during these years that a variety of new methods were used in reaching the ears of this now niche audience. Radio broadcasts and crusades were popular forms of relaying the message of the gospel. As a result of the unifying and galvanizing outcome of crusades and large rallies, school clubs and campus organizations began to

⁴⁹ See Bahnsen's *Pushing the Antithesis*. He has a very helpful chapter on the myth of Neutrality.

⁵⁰ Mark DeVries, in his *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, shows that as a result we must be even more intentional in spending time with young people.

⁵¹ I'm quoting from a Friend and former Youth Minister, Billy Combs.

⁵² I realize these are strong statements, but after reading the overall (generalized) diagnosis of Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, I feel justified in being so bold.

form. A vast majority of this ministry was still taking place in the local church, albeit in a more segregated manner. The influx of new students from these various mass evangelism projects served to foster the creation of what we call ‘parachurch’ ministries. These ministries exist outside the traditional marks of the confessional understanding of church. Their level of separation is essentially a decision each parachurch entity makes on its own; but at the outset, the goal was to outsource the growing need for evangelism to more capable facilitators while leaving the local church as a hub for the work of nurture and discipleship.⁵³

As the parachurch movement began to explode across the US and Britain, Youth for Christ and Young life clubs began appearing on high school campuses. The first Young Life campaign hit the ground around 1941 under the leadership of Jim Rayburn. A few years later, Youth for Christ was officially chartered in 1945 and continued to use the rally and club model as a way of reaching young ears with the message of Jesus.⁵⁴ Sometimes these groups were directly tied to a local church but often their purpose was strictly evangelistic with the hope that a born again believer would soon realize the need to be planted in an intergenerational body.

The late 20th century witnessed a continued growth in parachurch ministry, now from the grassroots level of high school clubs to the corporate structure of international organizations. At the same time, the mass-evangelism methodology of the parachurch ethos seemed to plateau. The old method for reaching the greatest number of youth did not seem to work anymore. Relational evangelism and the locality of ministry to youth began to emerge as the dominant paradigm.

⁵³ Creasy-Dean, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 88

During these same years many local church youth groups struggled to decide to what degree they should or should not partake in the offerings of the parachurch. Sadly, the parachurch often won the day, which in turn provided fertile ground for the professionalizing of youth ministry. The thought was that if lay people were not efficient enough in retaining and nurturing young people in the church, much less doing the full time job of on-site evangelism, than perhaps a professional youth minister would be. This action probably added to the increasing divide, now both cultural and ecclesiological, between youth and parents.⁵⁵

In the 70s and 80s, the culture of young people began to associate more prowess, buying power, and independency than that of adults. It was during this time that an overwhelming number of parents felt the psychological divide between their own perceptions of adulthood and the status of their children. A youth minister, it was thought, could be a bridge between the barriers of communication separating young from old. While a handful of churches refused to lose footing on the biblical category of family ministry the broad evangelical response was that of age specialization.

At the turn of the century, the ideology of youth ministry as self-existing entity, in and out of the local church, was fully formed.⁵⁶ Major seminaries offered degrees in youth ministry. Denominational and National associations of youth ministries were formed, and a whole host of publications and materials was put in print for those specialized in this area of ministry.

Much of what was accomplished in the last 50 years of ministry to youth was productive and well intentioned. However, from a reformed viewpoint, the segregation

⁵⁵ Roy B. Zuck and Warren S. Benson, *Youth Education in the Church*. Chapter 26 on Parachurch.

⁵⁶ Creasy-Dean, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*, 86

and specialization of youth and youth culture have created an abundance of unnecessary barriers between young people and older members of the congregation. This is primarily as a response to the secular cultural milieu; its postmodern undercurrents, and the invention of extra-biblical categories for the church. The question we must now answer is whether or not the broad evangelical church has gone too far in its pursuit for contextualization?

The phenomenon of youth culture and specified youth ministry are relatively new. It is therefore difficult, from a historical perspective, to speculate about what will become of its general emphasis in the future. One thing is certain, the concepts of segregation, entertainment driven, or hyper-cultural ministry to youth do not find their roots in a biblical doctrine of the church.⁵⁷ They are, rather, a response to the categories of secular culture. My contention is that these responses are implicitly related to postmodern trends concerning truth, self, and corporate identity. Regardless, as industrialized, and not technologized, society has changed the way we interrelate, the church must be a stabilizing light on the hill of flux and inconsistency.

While I acknowledge the importance and biblical precedent of contextualizing oneself in the cultural context, youth ministers in particular should be constantly on guard of over-realizing this aim. In the sections that follow, I aim to show that part of the reason the late 20th century youth ministry movement lost steam was as a result of its reactionary nature and often extra-biblical methodology. Rather than build a biblical and counter-cultural theology for young people by including them in congregational life, many

⁵⁷ One need only read a, the confessions, b, Berkhof (or the like) or Clowney to see that these categories are ahistorical and not biblically founded.

churches and organizations simply reacted to those three main components of postmodern thought already discussed.

I do not assume that the connections between, for example, Nietzsche's 'will to power' and parachurch ministry are openly explicit. However, if the reactionary hypothesis is correct, then an implicit correlation is viable as we attempt to build upon what we learned in the last 50 years. Our scope of learning has not only included the influx of postmodern philosophical thought, but for those in the church it includes the way we as a corporate American Christian whole, and individual bodies, have reacted to the climate of social and intellectual change among young people.

With that stated, we will now examine three major reactions to postmodern thought among youth ministers in last century. My goal will be to explain how each of these reactions arose out of the need to answer the questions raised by postmodernism. I also hope to develop the argument that, while there was some apparent success, the best way to minister to young people is not through reaction but through biblical understanding. In comparing the three philosophical worldviews to the evangelical responses they elicited, I hope to emphasize the need for a more biblical answer to the spiritual, social, and intellectual questions of postmodernity.

A. Will to Ministry (Parachurch)

It is in the birth of parachurch that we will see how Nietzsche's model of 'will to power' was translated into the response and life of the evangelical mindset. In the secular existential mindset one is to gain power by creating opportunities for it, do not adhere to structure but do as you will. This paradigm does much for breaking down the strong

pillars of modern thought in the sense that it makes man autonomous by his own standards, not those of reason and enlightenment. Tradition and history as they have been understood through a modern lens are disregarded and a new subjective way is forged.

In the evangelical development of youth ministry, a similar phenomenon occurred. Rather than push for reform within the guardrails of the local church, the idea was born that the church in and of itself would not be sufficient to deal with the changing face of the adolescent landscape.⁵⁸ As a result, the parachurch ministry came into existence. The initial goal of the parachurch was not to replace the church, but to do more effectively, and with more aptitude and relevance, the work of evangelizing young people. However, as time passed, parachurch organizations began to function increasingly as youth churches, actually pulling people away from commitment in an elder led local church.⁵⁹

A central idea behind this method of reaching and retaining 21st century youth is to outsource responsibilities to parachurch ministries. But was this the idea of the church or did it come from another place? From what it seems it stemmed out of the perceived need to tell more young people about God in response to the weakening of the local church by the secularization of society. Although there may have been some talk among denominations, the parachurch movement as a whole is a separatist initiative. It is a ‘will to ministry,’ if you will. I understand that by saying so I paint the parachurch in a bad light, relating it to the postmodern philosophies to which we are attempting to respond. My assumption, however, is not unfounded, and it has been demonstrated that although

⁵⁸ According to an account of family and Church in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, this was never the case in either the OT or NT.

⁵⁹ This can be observed in both Young Life and Wildlife programs. When mid-week meetings were moved to Wednesday nights, an unspoken competition with local Church YM was solidified.

the parachurch was large in number, its long-term affect in postmodernity has come to plateau significantly.⁶⁰ One explanation for this reality is that the movement was birthed out of reaction, and not foundationally from the biblical parameters God has set for doing ministry in the family context. The parachurch boom was indeed an impetus for many to hear God's word, but without a strong intergenerational and confessional foundation, it was in a constant state of flux with each new graduating class. I do not think the motives of the parachurch were ill fated. Rather, if one is only involved in parachurch it is rather like only going to conferences or rallies. Their content may be good, but they do not replace the ordained work of the local church.

The relatively new invention of the parachurch often results in a dichotomy between the church's roles of 'nurture' and 'mission' in the lives of young people, with the parachurch taking up the responsibility to seek out new converts. New converts are found, evangelized, and accepted, but as soon as they leave high school or middle school, they are left without the strong backbone of an intergenerational structure for development. It was thought that the best way to reach those outside the church was to give the work to those who can invest more time in the world, on campuses, and in schools. That young hip youth ministers, in preference to older, more mature, Christians, should do this is a capitulation to social norms. Sadly, the legacy of most parachurches only lasts as long as one remains in the age appropriate category. One of the main differences, therefore, between church and parachurch is that one eventually graduates from the parachurch. This is never the case in an inclusive intergenerational body.

⁶⁰ Mark Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*. Chapter 9. Also, Dean, Clark and Rahn, *Starting Right*, Chapter 4.

The parachurch organizations that popped up in force in later half of the 20th century were considered a success because of the large number of ‘conversions’ that they amassed. However, several studies have shown that long-term growth actually occurs in organizations that do not orphan their members, the home, and the local church.⁶¹ I see this false potential as a correlated reaction to the ‘will to power’ mentality since it happens outside the context of the local church—the primary place God has ordained to build his kingdom.⁶²

That may sound a bit extreme, but the proof is in the fact that parachurches are suffering from the same temporal fate as the philosophies they were reacting to. With a new philosophy comes a new need for reaction, a recreation of mission and method. This is an endless cycle of trying to appease culture as opposed to being in the world and being ‘a light to the world.’⁶³ The only viable option for the Christian minister to youth is to hold fast to the timeless truths of God’s word working through the Church he instituted.

Although the parachurch may have temporarily succeeded in filling a role the church itself should have, the problems associated with this form of contextualization are varied. Young converts often find it hard to ground themselves in the body life of an actual church after spending a prolonged time in a parachurch institution.⁶⁴ If a parachurch has its own student body, and functions much in the same way as a normal church, with meeting times and fellowship opportunities, it is often difficult for a given parachurch to hand a child over to a local congregation. Lastly, because the parachurch

⁵⁴ See Mark, Devries *Family Based Youth Ministry*

⁶² Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, Clowney, *The Church*, Horton *A Better Way*

⁶³ Matthew 5:15

⁶⁴ Creasy Dean, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*.

model assumes the inadequacy of the church in a reactionary separatist manner rather than attempt to strengthen God's bride from inside out, it is bound to a quick fix for a problem that exists in all cultural contexts throughout history.

From the formation of parachurch ministries we shall probe farther the evangelical response to postmodernism by looking at how both local and parachurch entities have answered the existential experiential teachings of Foucault.

B. The limits of Spiritual Experience (Entertainment)

The more freedom that the so-called liberating ideas of postmodernism seemed to offer, the harder many churches tried to contend. If the secular world was offering an environment of self-exploration, entertainment, and experience, it seemed that the church could be a lush place to meet such needs. This is true to some degree, but in the late 20th century youth ministry has witnessed a plunge into methodological synchronism.

I am not saying that using different modes of communication is intrinsically negative. There may be nothing wrong with employing technological advances such as computers, projectors, and sound systems in worship. The question is again one of why and how. In this segment, discussing the reaction to the existential experience and pushing of limits as defined by Foucault, I will examine why many churches began to adopt the same tactic in reaching youth with the gospel.

The old adage is true, what attracts them is what will keep them. The Christian response to culture must enlighten the truth of gospel primarily and then seek to meet human needs. These often happen simultaneously, but if one's motive is merely to entertain, then the sufficiency of the cross is replaced with the ability to stay afloat in a

culture of changing methods. Although not all churches adopted this method, there is a clear correlation between Foucault's post-structural experimentation, and the motive behind making the church as 'cool' as the world.

The core issue with entertainment driven youth ministry is that the whole idea of submitting ourselves to God by his grace puts the 'self' on the cross and not on a pedestal of experience. Young people who grow in their faith are sure to go through times of suffering, questioning, and spiritual dryness. These are a far cry for the postmodern paradigm of constant distraction, the loss of self, and the continual pushing of finite limits in hope for happiness and control. In fact, history shows that ministry is not to be an exercise in ease and entertainment but one that gives a young person the proper tools to deal with difficult situations as well as comfortable ones.

How will we retain our youth groups in light of the luring philosophies of the world, especially the feeling oriented beliefs of Foucault's cohort? This was, and still is, the outcry of many churches—and for a good reason. One of the main methods that was used to accomplish this task was to make church a place as 'cool' as the world. If the world could be fun, so could church. If the world could provide a way to know oneself and experience the fullness of life, than why not the church? Perhaps the church should move away from the old dead assumptions of orthodoxy and make itself as attractive as the mall? Questions like these are not necessarily negative in isolation. However, the trajectory of such questions must be answered in the biblical context. The Bible, as God's central revelation for the understanding of Church, is the greater context for answering

the questions of culture.⁶⁵ Culture, like philosophy, like the limits of our own experience, must always be in submission to God's Word.

The church, as it ministers to its young, should be fun as well as a place to grow, but we must never forgo the difficult work of sanctification for the chance to appear attractive. At the end of the 20th century, droves of churches answered Foucault's question by moving away from the traditional model of intergeneration and holistic youth involvement and into a newer more attractive model. But like all things pretty and attractive in the moment, the entertainment driven youth ministry was superficial in its impact and began to age quickly over time. This is a model for ministry that actually lessens the teachings of the church and heightens points of relationship with young people. The goal of many evangelical churches in reaction to postmodernism was not to disciple the young in contrast to postmodern thinking, but to keep them around in the midst of it. The effort continually ended in disappointment.

One of the main concerns with church forms/functions that find a basis in reaction to a predominant philosophical worldview, and not in the apologetic and progressive worldview of scripture, is that they tend to present a false dichotomy. Is the church a place for serious learning and growth? Or is it a club for disjoined young people wanting to play games and win a free 'Taco Tuesday' surprise? From a biblical worldview, the un-substantive whims of giveaways, pizza, and pony rides, are never nearly as 'fun' as growing in Christ and belonging to the body. The church is not meant, foundationally, to be a place of autonomous existential experimentation.

⁶⁵ Clowney, *The Church*. See his discussion on scripture as a necessary precedent to the Doctrine of the Church. This is true in the face of both tradition, and the changing cultural tides.

On a level of worldly standards, it can never be as ‘fun’ to someone seeking, as in the case of Michel Foucault for example, such things as the uninhibited gay lifestyle.⁶⁶ Most of us would heartily agree that this is the case, but if we treat the church as if it were not good enough, and not attractive enough, we are bound to both disappoint ourselves as much as the would-be pleasure seekers who enter our doors. The best way to have fun, stimulate the whole person, and pursue truth, is to do so with the attractive nature of the gospel. Its message is the greatest attracting experience within the guiding lines of biblical presuppositions.

From this point, we move on to the idea of ‘deconstruction’ and some effects I believe its subtle pull have had on modern youth ministry.

C. Deconstructing the Local Church (Segregation)

Between the local church’s attempt to retain their youth by fabricating experience, and the missional, yet often shallow, approaches of the parachurch, we have two contemporary models that have not proved very successful in integrating young people into the inclusive and intergenerational body life of the church. This is seen first hand in a variety of studies and books which relate the fact that many young people, if not properly grounded in real Body life, will fall away when the parachurch cord is cut.⁶⁷ Because neither programs nor after school clubs were ever meant to replace the church, young

⁶⁶ Os Guinness and Stanley Grenz both make helpful mention of this aspect of Foucault’s theories.

⁶⁷ See Mark DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*, Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, and Christian Smith, “Mapping American Adolescent Subjective Religiosity and Attitudes of Alienation Toward Religion: A Research Report.” *Sociology of Religion* 61:1 (Spring 2003): 111-133.

people often find themselves orphaned as soon as they graduate from their respective age-specific program.⁶⁸

The church, which has historically been a full body (young and old, infant and elderly), has fallen victim to the ‘deconstruction’ of Derrida in the area of youth ministry. This is not to say that anyone intended to reroute a central tenant of the local church family. However, as a response to the growing fragmentation felt among many young people, and the appearance of their own subculture and set of psychological needs, church youth ministries in many regards have deconstructed the text of what the bride of Christ was intended to be, a whole and meaningful unit in and of herself.⁶⁹

What happens to all these young people, steeped in the individualism of postmodernism and nourished by pseudo orthodox traditions, when they leave the biblical confines of a marked church family? How are we to grapple with the fact that the same kids who used to raise hands during worship are now unwilling to even confess the name of Christ, and much less to an adult?

Thankfully, on a systematic level, we have soteriology that can deal with this. If little Johnny suddenly falls away from the Lord then we know that he was never one of God’s children in the first place. But why have so many been afforded the temporary false hope of a church (and faith) all their own? Is it not possible that in an attempt to meet the needs of young people with postmodern minds, we’ve sacrificed the needs of the church to *be* a church—a complete and functioning unit? Is the church to be seen in the model of a ‘one-eared Mickey’ with the larger circle representing the real ‘church’

⁶⁸ DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*.

⁶⁹ See Ephesians 5 specifically, in the context of marriage, there is no fragmentation.

and the small ear a deconstructed pseudo church for young people only? Certainly not. The church—God’s people—are like Christ, undivided.⁷⁰

The church is not a divided entity, splitting itself like a cake so that each need-group can have its only individual share. I do not wish at this point to offer solutions, but as Andy Crouch is astute to point out in *Christianity Today*, the real question is: what are churches going to do about this alienating segregation of their young members?⁷¹ If students graduate from their niched ministries as nothing more than ‘therapeutic moralistic deists’ it’s no wonder they fall away.⁷² They were never confronted with a biblically coherent orthodoxy of the body of Christ to begin with.

This raises concern in our minds and hearts for the biblical orthodoxy of the local church. The laws of God are not a text to be subjectively deconstructed, as Derrida would have it, by the presuppositions of postmodernism.⁷³ Even if young people may think they need their own segregated niche in which to flourish, biblical instruction says otherwise.⁷⁴ This is one of the main effects of the postmodern mind, represented by ‘deconstruction’, on the last 50 years of youth ministry. What was once suitable and sound as doctrine may now be called into question at the whim of one’s feeling or the passing cultural vogue. God’s Word for the church is not merely a suggestion for postmodern young people.

If we are to take Derrida’s philosophy at face value then it is even less than that, at best it can be but a finite and failing attempt at putting into to words that which can

⁷⁰ See 1 Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 4:12

⁷¹ Andy Crouch, review of “Soul Searching” in *Christianity Today*, 2005.

⁷² Smith and Denton, in *Soul Searching*, coined this term to denote the type of students they found to be the majority among those who considered themselves religious.

⁷³ Psalm 119:142

⁷⁴ Joshua 24:15 is one example among many, for a more conclusive study, see “Family”. *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Alexander, Desmond T, and Brian s. Rosner, eds.

never really exist. Contrarily, the word of God is a gift to all whose minds are trapped by the sin of the flesh and pride of life. That includes all members of the church whether they are more modern or postmodern, young or old, relevant or not. The church must, therefore, be on guard of any worldview that would seek to undermine or undo the textual narrative nature of the history of redemption and God's plan for his kingdom.

It may not be our place to put blame on such general entities as 'broad evangelicalism' or 'postmodernism.' Neither of those labels can deify nor demonize. The real question is whether or not young people, according to their own context of understanding, are being presented with the Christian worldview and the answers it brings in each new era, or, one that takes away, even de-constructs, the structure of Christian truth. The most wonderful thing about postmodernity in contrast to the historic Christian faith is that only the former is a finite end in itself. If history has anything to teach about cycles, the postmodern itself will fall victim to its own ambiguity and critique, deconstructing itself from the inside out. This is once more an opportunity for the strength of the church to shine through in the face of Christ.

D. Summary: The late 20th Century Reaction

Those who minister to youth must be aware of the implications of doing ministry in such a time as this. Just as Paul was cognizant of his audience and surroundings in Athens we must allow God's word and unchanging truth to reveal postmodernism for what it is. Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida were all keenly aware, each one taking one step further in the undoing of modernity, knowable truth, and coherent reality, that the system they were building would not stand on its own.

Perhaps, for this reason, each man seems to somehow betray his own thoughts on the eve of life. For Nietzsche it was the unrealized goal of becoming the ‘Übermensch,’ dying insane and without the woman he had so long pursued. For Foucault, it was his deathbed confession to his male lover as he in essence renounced his undoing of the self by lamenting his terminal AIDS. For Derrida it was his mysterious hope in the messiah that never comes.⁷⁵ All three died, in some way, refuting by their own deathbed confessions the very systems they surmised.

This would be a straw-man argument were it not for the fact that postmodernism is exactly that, a straw man in the world of meta-narratives and systems. It does not have to, so it assumes, adhere to the standards of knowledge because it is a critique. But is it a critique that exists outside of the preconditions of reason and logic. Scholars who understand the later as mere modern constructions say that is the case. Of course, this type of nihilistic skepticism always falls prey to its own standards imploding under the weight of such lofty claims. In contrast, those who trust scripture as God’s guide to life by the power of the Holy Spirit, deny the central presupposition of postmodernity, its own self authenticating autonomy, and put it to the apologetic test of not just counting up the ills of modernism, but accounting for the foundations of its own rational conclusions.⁷⁶

In the next sections, we will take the three philosophies we’ve discussed prior, coupled with the three major evangelical responses we’ve seen in the last half century, and offer a biblical-covenantal critique by apologetic method. We have already used our

⁷⁵ See H. Van Riessen, *Nietzsche*, in ‘An International Library of Philosophy and Theology,’ Derrida & Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, and Grenz *A Primer on Postmodernism*.

⁷⁶ According to Bahnsen, in his infamous debate with Gordon Stien, this is exactly what the atheist worldview cannot do (be it modern or postmodern), account for the preconditions of knowledge.

knowledge of reformed theology as a system based on biblical studies to understand the postmodern mind thus far. At this point we shall proceed one step further in the direction of orthodoxy by offering biblical assessment and constructive responses to the problems presented by our three central philosophical arguments. I will also attempt to offer practical methodologies for dealing with these ideologies in the future of youth ministry.

IV. Three Biblical-Covenantal Solutions: An Apologetic

“ All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16

With respect to the present discussion, discouragement seems inevitable. Is postmodern philosophy, with its vast implications, a black hole from which the church cannot emerge? The postmodern project has, in many ways, asked very difficult questions regarding truth, the self, and reality. In seeking to destabilize and deconstruct the foundationalist presuppositions of modernism, postmodern ideology presents a great potential danger for orthodox Christianity. Equally, the undoing of autonomous reality in postmodern thought offers a great opportunity for the Church to fill the void with the infinite constant of Christ. Christianity is neither modern nor postmodern from a secular perspective. It is the pre-modern, and pre-creationary, answer to both systems that dethrones the autonomy of man and asserts the absolute moral/rational/natural authority of creator God.

The challenges of this age, especially relating to the religious rearing of young people, offer both unique dangers and opportunities in comparison and response to the current teachings of the world.⁷⁷ Young people are hungry. Like all moments in history, the eventual breakdown of finite ideologies that make man autonomous offer Christians the chance to answer such rotting rhetoric with a powerful and resurrected hope. In place of lost structures and crumbling foundations, God's people are poised to offer the total sphere sovereignty of a living and loving God. The great and stable response amidst the confusing ambiguity of the postmodern critique is that God's word does have a viable, existential, and total answer, Christ.⁷⁸

This is where a reformed ecclesiology and general theology comes in, properly contextualized, to speak powerfully in a world void of absolutes (yet crying out for them).⁷⁹ It is not the purpose of this paper to outline a reformed ecclesiology for youth ministry in its entirety, but instead to apply reformational thought to the crisis of secular postmodernism as a biblical response. The debate is not whether reformed ecclesiology is the best solution for the current problem, but to see how it may be a solution when applied specifically to the three areas of philosophical advancement we've studied in the postmodern turn⁸⁰. Before we venture into task of offering biblical-covenantal solutions for the issues raised by Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, I shall once more state some basic assumptions regarding ministry to youth.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*. His introduction is acutely poignant in this regard. Postmodernism need not be an insurmountable enemy, but rather a critique that requests a response.

⁷⁸ John 14:6 seems especially relevant here. Jesus is the true answer, truth itself, God in flesh.

⁷⁹ See Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology* for fruitful discussion on how the dissolution of absolute objectivity is in itself the institution of another absolute. For Reformed ecclesiology see, Clowney, *The Church*, and Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, VI. P555-656.

⁸⁰ Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*. Penner, as others, highlights how temporally existentialism, post-structural experimentism, and deconstruction are major church issues today.

First, I would argue that a great deal of the problem, upon which much of the last century youth ministry was built, deals with the issue of misunderstanding the church and its role in the lives of youth. Therefore, when I discuss ministry to youth, as I have in the first part of this thesis, I am assuming that young people do not represent a separated entity in the local church, but a vital part of its membership and visible covenant community.⁸¹ This is why ministry to youth that segregates, entertains, or usurps the authority of God's ordained catholic church is a mere Band-Aid on a flesh wound.

Secondly, it will be my aim in this section to use a presuppositional apologetic in responding to the philosophies investigated above. I will not make full use of the entire Van Tilian system. The desire to give a systematized biblical response will be my starting point.⁸² 'Will to power', 'limit experience' and 'deconstruction,' all contain in them certain challenges to the Christian worldview. My goal will be to identify those challenges, question the presuppositions on which they are based, and demonstrate biblically that God's Word provides a better and more cogent answer to the issue. I assert with the late Greg Bahnsen, that the Christian worldview prevails based on the impossibility of the contrary; without God, nothing makes sense.⁸³

Thirdly, I will gently rejoin to the three main responses to the postmodern project in the last 50 years of youth ministry. I am quite sure there have been other responses, some better than others. But by overview of the history of ministry to youth in the late 20th century, I feel confident that the three large-scale trends I've identified do correlate with both the questions of postmodernism and the answers given. My intention was not to

⁸¹ DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*, or Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*.

⁸² Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics and The Defense of the Faith*. See also, John Frame, *Van Til and Analysis of His Thought* and Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*.

⁸³ Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*. Introduction. Dr. Bahnsen's audio debates are also helpful here.

intimate that the church has failed in guarding her young, but to exemplify certain areas where a reformed theological response may be more necessary than ever. The goal of contrasting postmodern ideology to the late 20th century youth ministry reaction is to demonstrate how both are lacking in biblical foundations, one as a direct challenge and the other as a reaction.

There is much the church can learn from critically and graciously looking back upon its own traditions and those that the world has offered in its place. Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida have, in the end, helped God's people become more sanctified.⁸⁴ Through their rebellion, both subtle and overt, we may learn, grow, and trust God more through the reliability of His Word. At this time, let us move forward and attempt to present a reformed response to the hardest questions of the postmodern age.

A. God's Will as Power (Word and Sacrament)

In place of biblical principals, founded in the community life of the local church, the psychology of self-advancement and 'will to power' is offered to the young. This offering takes place through diverse means of intentional and capital driven media. The legend of the *Übermensch* lives on. In a day when young people are conditioned by intellectual society to create their own identities and grasp for power, how will the church respond? One would assume, for instance, that the last place to find such teaching is in churches, but the last 50 years of ministry to youth suggest otherwise.

Nietzsche and his optimistically existential faction have offered us the ability to move beyond the institution and deify the individual. In response, many churches have

⁸⁴ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*. The book, *5 Views of the Church in Emerging Culture*, is a prime example. Contemporary philosophical whims are always a chance to reexamine what we believe.

likewise sought to move beyond the historic definition of the body and create extra-ecclesial entities to do the difficult work of mission, discipleship, and modeling. Our response to this must be to ask of Nietzsche the same questions he is asking us. Does his system hold water? Can it sustain a person on all levels of life—spiritual, emotional, and mental? Or is it a powerful picture painted on the finite canvas of self-centered idealism?

To start, we shall note that in Nietzsche's worldview, the individual subject is the primary arbiter of truth. This is not a right given to all individuals, as most are mere sheep, but instead to the one who overcomes, the superhuman Dionysian form. Most men, sheep to the status quo, find comfort in the conservative camp of Apollo. It is only those who throw off their constraints of security and dominate the other who achieve this goal.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, this description of greatness, or right living, is tied into the ethical values of goodness. But who is to decide what is good and what is not? There is no moral absolute in Nietzsche's universe, and thus no ability for him to say that his system is the right one, uber-system or not.

This may appear a simplified argument, but the existential worldview cannot even provide the simplest of answers. God's word teaches us the difference between right and wrong, but Nietzsche's paradigm cannot do so.⁸⁶ Just as Nietzsche took Kant's Noumenal Categories one step farther by erasing them, attempting to show there was no knowable transcendental categories, by his own line of reasoning, void of absolutes, we might just skeptically postulate he was wrong and move on.⁸⁷ The question for Nietzsche is: how does he pretend to present his readers the judgment of value when there is no standard but

⁸⁵ This information is general for Nietzschean scholarship, see *Oxford* or *Cambridge Dictionaries*.

⁸⁶ Exodus 20 and Matthew 5-6 are true testimonies to the revealed nature of God's law, it transcends experience and provides an answer when the finite subject cannot.

⁸⁷ Greg Bahnsen vs. Gordon Stein and Lecture notes from *Modern Mind* by Michael Horton

the subject? There is no absolute authority in his universe around which he can reason much less make such grandiose claims. He endeavors to pull from the annals of history, a genealogy of human morals, but his interpretation is equally biased. Again there is no dominant hermeneutic, save the subjective mind, to save him from his own system.

In a similar fashion, without a revealed and absolute foundation, the model for youth ministry that involves the outsourcing of responsibilities to the parachurch (or youth church within church) suffers from the same problems.⁸⁸ It is not connected to a whole and, according to our confession, operating in the place of the church.⁸⁹ In the same way that Nietzsche cannot declare truth apart from revelation (lest he fall victim to the grand ‘says who?’), the parachurch should not separate itself from the revealed vehicle of God’s Kingdom on earth: the local church.⁹⁰ If the individual set forth to ‘will to power’, or the parachurch to ministry, both fall victim to a lack of absolute ethical authority to do so.

Where does this authority come from? What can save the power-hungry individual from the finite end of himself? What will prevent the church from inventing new entities to do its work, but instead be reformed from the inside out? The answer is simple. It is God’s revelatory means of grace: the word and sacrament. The very thing that Nietzsche’s system and the parachurch method is missing. The Church, making use of the means of grace, is a basis for receiving analogical and mediated transcendental truth. Preaching, Baptism and Lord’s supper are God’s elect vessels to give the church, as he established it, the will to powerfully fulfill the work of his kingdom.

⁸⁸ Could God’s word reveal Parachurch, age-segregated and disjointed, as a form of the true church.

⁸⁹ “Westminster Confession of Faith, XXVI.3,” in the *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*.

⁹⁰ Notes from Dr. Ross, *Ethics (says who)*, Vos, *Biblical Theology* and Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* on church

This is exactly what God's word does. It is powerful, active, and the written record of truth itself.⁹¹ To be blunt, Christianity has an answer to Nietzsche's deepest problem; that is the ability to assert the ethical value of a given system. The way this happens in the church is through hearing the pure word of the gospel preached and partaking in the sacraments of baptism and communion.⁹² These things are of equal importance to youth, often driven by experience, who need both repetition and tangibility. Effectively, the believer finds true power in the communal means of grace.

The Word of God is sufficient for dealing with the hardest questions of postmodernity.⁹³ Unlike Nietzsche's caricature and the parachurch capitulation, the Word of God does not provide easy answers to those who are too weak (apollonian) to think for themselves. We need only remember how many of God's people throughout redemptive history have wrestled with the reality of the Divine. Jacob had his name changed to Israel as he discovered his properly placed self-identity in dealing with God. The prophets cried out in despair at the disregard for their message. Even Jesus himself, to whom all of redemptive history points, felt the physical pain of accepting his Father's perfect will.⁹⁴ This is a far cry from the whimsical notion of creating one's own truth and own standard. In Nietzsche's worldview there is no protection for the widow and orphan, no necessary cause for love beyond oneself. This philosophical version of 'survival of the fittest' may seem attractive to some in the moment, but will it be so when there is no protection for them?

⁹¹ John 17:17 "Sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth."

⁹² "Westminster Confession of Faith" in *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*.

⁹³ See Psalm 119 where David asks the hard question of purity. The word, hidden in the Believer's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit is provided as the all sufficient answer.

⁹⁴ Genesis 32:22-32, Matthew 26:36-46.

In the face of the finite instability of existentialism, God's word offers the hope of eternal life, now and forever. This is experienced by faith, as is Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, and lived out real time in the church community and by means of grace. Where Nietzsche offers a grand idea purported by autonomous man, God's Word offers truth and reason. Where Nietzsche's system falls apart by its own devices, God's Word provides stability from the infinite that cannot be overcome. This is the exact hope that young people are looking for—a God who loves them, but allows them to grow into their potential selves, providing boundaries that allow for both creativity of their nature and a path for their nurture.⁹⁵

We have observed the eventual outworking of the parachurch, that it did not sustain the energy with which it began, that it did leave many 'converts' orphaned after high school. Although well intentioned, it succeeded in separating itself in large part from the intergenerational working of the local church. In the same way that Nietzsche had an optimistic view of the subjective individual, the parachurch responded by seeking to meet individual needs outside the marks of a true church.

Thankfully, God through the Spirit working in the Word offers the same method of loving and patient correction. To the parachurch, which has neither roots in tradition nor biblical precedent, the revelation of God's Word offers an answer. God has revealed himself in nature, but as the outcomes of postmodernity suggest, this was not enough to save the hearts of sinful men from themselves. God has revealed himself in his Word, for the church, for young people, and for the individual.

So to both the postmodern ideology and the evangelical reaction we bring the stable corrective truth of God's Word. This very truth is the necessary element that

⁹⁵ MITV Research Study with the Associated Press, 2005..

Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, strong as he may be, cannot account for. It is also the means by which the parachurch can recognize where it has done well in service to the church and where correction is needed. The Word of God and the means of grace He uses are nourishment to the soul, whose feet are tired of walking down a path that leads to confusion and rejection. Whether this is the eventual rejection of the self by another who is more powerful in the existential realm, or the rejection of the self by the finite and transient nature of parachurch, God's word provides hope.

The answer is both biblical and covenantal. It is binding and full of promise. History shows this to be true, as does the existential experience of the moment. As followers of Christ, we are provided with the stable interpretive grid in this unstable world that other systems of thought simply cannot account for. Where other worldviews are left without answer from the infinite, grappling to make sense of the ever changing finite, the Christian worldview speaks loudly. This speech, God's own Word, is the most profound answer to both the existential individual and the responding church accounted for. Where God's Word meets the ethical demands of its logical conclusion, postmodernity is left as a verbose critique, but an impotent system. Of this truth, we must make our young people aware.

Methodologically speaking, this means that we, as adults and ministers to youth truly engaged in our role as such, must preach the word both in an out of season. Certainly we may find interactive, stimulating and fun ways to do so, but the message of the Gospel and the means of grace should not be compromised. For one, this will help young people to see the depth of their religious convictions amidst a world of shallow insecurity. Second, it will give them the proper tools to answer the hard questions are

they are presented, by postmodernism or other wise. Third, making these means of grace central can serve to root young people in the actual body life of the church. There are many benefits to serving young people the word instead of leaving them hooked up to a perpetual IV of ear tickling. The teaching need not be overly long or at a graduate school level, but it should be a part of all the out workings of the church with youth. If young people are grasping for the tangibility of a stable reality, may we realize that it is provided in living out of the gospel through hearing the word and partaking in the sacraments.

B. The Ultimate Experience (Service and Life)

From the initial postmodern foothold of Nietzsche, we progress to the even more grandiose claims of Michel Foucault. We recall that Foucault took the task of the *Übermensch* to the test, not just for the individual, but also for the most basic structures that under gird society. His reinterpretation of reality was as brilliant as it was incoherent, offering at every turn a new experience to grow, be changed, and live out a self-dissolving life in the constant flux of post-structuralism. This spiral of self-indulgence, fueled by the conclusion that the self is a malleable social construct, and that social constructs must be challenged, eventually led him to an early death.

But was Foucault actually true to his own existence by pushing the limits of experience in non-existence? Was he more of a whole person by attempting to live in the realm of the untried, the self only revealed in the newness of experience? This is a question that we shall have to answer, and as before, account for our conclusions. The method of ministry to youth involving the practice of emotion and experience will also

have to reply for the foundations of its basic reactionary assumption. Were those young people who were attracted by an aura of entertained experience actually equipped to run the race and live out the Christian life till death?

There is, of course, much validity in the initial pursuit of Foucault and probably in the responsive offering of the church. Foucault, it seems, desired to live out life as fully as possible and I wager that many churches were only attempting to provide a more total-person experience for young people to do the same. I certainly do not wish to validate his method, but to affirm his asking of the question. To put it in the words of the late Francis Schaffer, 'how then shall we live?'⁹⁶ If life is limited, and it is from the finite perspective, then how shall we as Christians and as young people live in light of death? Jesus said that he came to give us 'life and life to the fullest extent.'⁹⁷ So what does this full life look like? Are the answers found in the ideological teachings of postmodernity, the autonomous self constantly reaching for more of herself? Or are they found in a biblical response to the questions of existential limits and experience?

I aim to reveal that the latter is a more rational answer to the question of Foucault and the encompassing existential picture of reality. If this is true, then once more we have shown that at the deepest level, postmodernism is asking questions that God has already answered through his Word. Whether or not the postmodern project appreciates those answers is a different story. However, as a correctively constructive solution to the issue of experience in church, we must have an ecclesiology that biblically responds to the core issue. By God's grace, through his Word and Spirit, we most certainly do.

⁹⁶ Francis Schaffer, *How Then Shall We Live*, the title of the book but also its central question.

⁹⁷ John 10:10, Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible (NIV)

The first answer to this question assumes our conclusion from the last section. We must look to God's word and its out-working in the church for understanding. The second answer builds upon the first by showing us that although we must live in the 'here and now,' we do so with a perspective of those who affirm the existence of eternity. The debate about which existential trajectory, or life course, would be more rewarding, from a valuistic standpoint, is essential to the postmodern landscape. Is the pure self-centered hedonism of postmodernism or the loving service and joyful pleasure of Christian theism more profitable from an evidential stance? According to God's word, and evidenced by the joyful lives of believers, even in suffering, the latter is the true way to 'push the limits of reason' where the former is a sad end in itself and utterly unfulfilling.

I will show, as I did in the last section, that Foucault's worldview cannot sustain the reality of its own promises. Where he is rational, he is borrowing from the Christian worldview, where he is irrational; he is so for the sake of convenience and self-deception.⁹⁸ This is done by once more questioning the presuppositions of an existential universe without God and making value judgments about it.

Foucault, in his rational assumptions about the structure of sexuality, society, and the 'self,' is using logic. But where does logic proceed from in Foucault's universe? For all the reader can tell, logic is a necessary means to the philosopher's intended end, but by no means inherently necessary. Beyond necessity, it is not sustainable, for logic implies laws, and laws are not arbitrary conventions waiting to be realized by a liberated self. At this point, the atheistic, existential argument is without basis.

Another underlying assumption about Foucault's worldview is that the future of experience will be like the past. Of course, as do the entertainment driven youth

⁹⁸ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*. See also, Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*.

ministries, this rational claim assumes the uniformity of nature, which present events will be like those to come in the future. But Foucault, in an ironic, existential way, disproved his own theory. This occurred by not having a worldview that could overcome the empirical skepticism of the problem of induction (see Hume), and show that things truly are ordered, and secondly by actually living out the difference in the consequences of his own actions, (a death from AIDS). Pleasure, in Foucault's worldview, was only enough to satisfy, but in the moment. As a result, the means of pleasure needed to be ever increased as the limits of experience were pushed. Finally, this ended in reverse of pleasure and existence plummeting down toward pain and death. God's Word says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.⁹⁹ I am sure Foucault would have disagreed, but both his life and worldview speak to the contrary, only proving that God's promises for just judgment and retribution are true.

So exactly how does the Christ of scripture answer the questions of limiting experience? This happens in a variety of ways, but I shall mention three; First, our finite experiences are limited in the flesh, but made new in resurrection bodies after death. This is the future hope of believers in Christ who trust God's covenant promises in his Word. Perhaps the non-believing postmodernist will pass this off as irrational, but in a Christian worldview, a God whose mind provides the very basis for rationality substantiates it. The postmodern skeptic has not the right to use reason since his or her worldview fails and supports the preconditions of such tools: logic and nature's uniform consistency.

Secondly, as we walk by faith we are always engaging in the flux of faith, hope and love in a freeing manner. This is why David delighted in the law of the Lord, for he

⁹⁹ Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1. This is our epistemological prologue for all knowing, to know is revere God.

knew that it was not given to oppress men but to free them.¹⁰⁰ At this point, postmodernity in its critique has no constructive answer. God's Word does, and that structure based on the finite will fail, but God's love endures forever. His purpose in creation, revelation and redemption is not squander man's fun as he pushes the limits, but to provide a framework of limit pushing that actually makes sense of reality.

Thirdly, there is not just future eschatological hope to be in a life surrendered to Christ. Being a disciple of Christ means that one's existence is valuable and richly experienced every day through the Incarnational ministry of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the Temple of God, us.¹⁰¹ One of the main functions of this 'resurrected living', and one which more youth groups would do well to employ, is that of service. The act of self-death and resurrection in serving others may seem like a strange rejoinder to the libertarian cries postmodernity, but God's Word says that if anyone is to follow Christ they must take up their cross and follow him, both in life and in death.¹⁰² To follow Christ is to live like him, and to live in service. As Jesus himself told his disciples, 'I did not come to be served but to serve.'¹⁰³

This is a beautiful answer to any postmodern mind that is searching for meaning and purpose amid a cloud of self. Serve others, help people, and live out life in a way that the self you have constructed (by God's grace) is of direct benefit to those in the same process. Serving as Christ has served is at the heart of the gospel and paradoxically answers both Foucault and any other existential longings of the flesh. Do you wish to truly be and to test the limits of experience and become lost in something greater? Then

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 119:97

¹⁰¹ For more on being the Incarnational temple see G.K. Beale's *Commentary on Revelation*.

¹⁰² Luke 9

¹⁰³ Matthew 20:28 (NIV)

do not attempt the task on a floor made of quicksand as you grasp for temporary pleasures that fade with the finite. Instead, allow yourself to die (which Foucault declared the ultimate limit) and be reborn in the experience of serving others in Christ. This has both a temporal and eternal benefit and extends beyond the self, while constructing the self on biblical principals, to bless others in their quest of existence, and to know the creator of all finite experience more deeply.

This same methodology is vital to a healthy ministry to young people. I say this not on the basis of a specific age oriented command but in light of the biblical theology of Child rearing. Throughout the scriptures young people are seen as serving, helping, and functioning as vital roles in the life of the community. This need not be different today. For the youth minister who is seeking to give his flock something experiential to hold on to, why not forsake the pizza night and instead visit widows and orphans? Is this not the truest form of ‘religion?’¹⁰⁴ Young people are looking for an experience. They are looking, like us all, for something tangible in the covenant community and the world.

By God’s grace, those who minister to the Church’s future have the opportunity to do so. Ours is not a temporary pushing of temporary limits, one quick fix to the next. Instead, God’s Word offers a real way for young people to engage the self, the other, and the divine, through acts of God-centered service. This is an opportunity unlike any other offered to America’s youth in the 21st century. For even the most suspicious postmodern thinker, and answer from God’s Word can be provided as to exactly how, based on a foundation of moral absolutes and accounting for logical reasoning, young people can not only explore the depths of themselves, but do so in a way that impacts eternity.

¹⁰⁴I am referring to James 1 here but there is a superstructure to this statement in support of the family and body supporting one another in need. For further reference see Paul’s illusions to the church as a body in Ephesians and Colossians.

What method shall we take to implement this vision? Again, the answer is simple. One does not need a huge youth ministry budget or 10 years experience on the mission field to serve Christ and others outside the walls of the church. Instead, the living out of the gospel through service can be done in simple and incorporative ways. For example, a minister to youth might integrate acts of service with widows or orphans as a part of the yearly summer camp. The youth group might elect to serve the elementary school children as a part of VBS. There is even the possibility of doing ‘youth parties’ at strategic locations in the city that foster relationship building and serving of non-believers. Regardless of the method, the principal is the same. Young people do want to see ‘if the gospel works.’ Living out their faith, with the covering of loving adults, is one of the most powerful tools to show them that God does work, that the kingdom is expanding, that they can be used.

C. Reconstruction (Inclusion and Integration)

If the statistics offered by Smith & Denton as well as others are correct, then one of the greatest powers and saddest consequences to modern youth ministry is the state of the family.¹⁰⁵ The family, as nuclear, extended and body life (ecclesial) unit, has the greatest ability to positively impact or harm the values, ideals, and worldviews of young people. In the last 50 years, with the advent of high schools and age specific niche ministry, this unity, both at home and at church, has been jeopardized.

Another factor, perhaps driving the whole machine of youth culture, is a false sense of independence and a perception of ‘reality instability’ as a result of postmodern trends. Postmodernity has set out to undo the attempted unity of modern thought. In the

¹⁰⁵ Smith and Denton *Soul Searching*. MTV Study and Journal

process, many churches and institutions have reacted by accepting and adopting the methodological shift. This has resulted in a sense of adolescent fragmentation never before seen in the recorded history of man. Our question must be whether or not the Bible even has categories for such drastic separatism? If not, we shall seek to offer a reformed response to the problem at large.

In the next section I will discuss how the deconstruction of the holistic intergenerational model of youth ministry has resulted, at least in part, from postmodern assumptions (Derrida). These presuppositions and textual (life as a text) suspicions must be put to the test of God's Word and rational discourse. The reaction to this hermeneutical undercurrent has been to take apart the church in age-separated categories as well. Further, the separation of young and old has had an overall negative effect on both age groups. A biblical-covenantal view will be supplanted to answer the question of reconstructing the church in a way that is appropriately contextualized for today's individualized young person.

The deconstructive methodology of Jacques Derrida has attempted to undermine not only the possibility of universal absolute truth, but any truth at all. This is because all truth exists in a binary opposition and thus any thing said to be true can merely be deconstructed and left in shambles. The shambles are then themselves deconstructed until the only reality left is that of eventual nothingness. This supposedly infinite regression is a theme that carries weight in the mind of postmodern youth. Although they may not challenge the process to the extent of its logical conclusions, there is certainly a by-product of the 'hermeneutic of suspicion.'

What shall our response be to Derrida and his band when the sirens of dissonance reach the ears of our youth? To begin with, we must ask this paradigm of deconstructing, at what point does it begin to be constructive? The semantics of opposition to truth may sound romantic, but this is simply not the world we live in. To put it frankly, the deconstructionist, like any irrational skeptic, must fall victim to his own views eventually. The Christian worldview has a swift answer to Derrida and it is simply that his system leads to irrationalism. And yet to even begin to articulate his own views, he must borrow from the Christian capital of accountable, rational thought.¹⁰⁶

Derrida, and the other postmodern naysayers are forced to use logical, rational arguments to state their case. Yet if Derrida claims that all language is merely a set of signs, never reaching an actual thing signified, than his rational arguments are mute. The Christian worldview has an answer to this, showing that language is not as arbitrary as it may appear, but instead an actualizing force, both in creation and reiteration.¹⁰⁷ There has also been much disagreement about this discourse among philosophers themselves, most notable Austin and Searl.¹⁰⁸ Vanhoozer has done a wonderful job of showing how ‘Speech Act theory’ is a helpful linguistic method for demonstrating the actualizing power of speech in scripture.¹⁰⁹ What’s more, the Deconstructionist camp itself does not agree entirely on the extent to which all reality either constitutes a text or can be undone as such. This is to be expected from a philosophical critique that in and of itself does not offer a constructive system of rebuilding what has been destroyed.

¹⁰⁶ AT this point I am leaning heavily on both John Frame’s lecture notes as well as the several debates I’ve listened to with Greg Bahnsen. I only include this because the statement may be too sensational for a research paper, but hearing these men articulate the reformed apologetic is marvelously encouraging. It is so good to know that in a world of philosophical confusion and discord, the God of the bible has an answer.

¹⁰⁷ Genesis 1:1 is where God speaks the world into being.

¹⁰⁸ J.L Austin, *How to do Things With Words*. (Speech Act Theory)

¹⁰⁹ Vanhoozer, *Postmodern Theology*.

The Christian worldview has no place for such destruction and quickly answers Derrida with the hope, not for reconstruction per say, but resurrection.¹¹⁰ This is our offensive apologetic to the issues hermeneutic suspicion of postmodernism and the textual ‘deconstruction’ of Derrida. In place of a worldview which leaves meaning and truth void of any real substance, God’s Word gives hope to the self by demonstrating the power of the self-reborn. The Word of God does the sanctifying task of removing all that is chaff from the heart of the believer while simultaneously replacing it with more evidence of the life of Christ. This is particularly essential as it concerns young people who have been influenced by secular systems of fragmentation.

Youth ministers must recognize this need and meet it with biblical answers. Rather than responding by treating young people as a separate entity, the church must seek to unify and do the work of discipleship in a generationally cyclical way. This allows for both individuation among young and old while showing both the value of learning and growing from the other. Rather than deconstructing the church in a disintegrated fashion, ministers must learn from the cost of such teaching in the last 50 years and seek to replace it with a biblical balance.

The beauty of integration worship extends beyond the forming of young minds. It is a chance for the visible church to actually picture the intertrinitarian relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the holistic model all covenant members are equally valuable. Yet there are different roles throughout. In the same way that the Son of God submits to the father, young people can serve and grow with purpose in the context of obedient learning. This is a beautiful example of hierarchical, yet equally valuable interpersonal relationships in scripture. God is one in three, all the members of the

¹¹⁰ Horton, Class notes and *Covenant and Eschatology*.

Godhead are totally and fully God, but the descriptors that scripture provides (father, son, etc) do demonstrate the differences existing in function between the three. The trinity as both a single and divided mystery of God's existence, provides fertile ground for explaining the one and many questions raised by 'deconstruction'. This doctrine along with others like marriage and family itself provide thoughtful and penetrating answers to Derrida and hope for regeneration of the deconstructed self.

Intergenerational and inclusive ministry contextualized in culture also implies that adults will need to do the ever self-mortifying work of listening to and spending time with young people. The myth that children do not want their parents around has been debunked on several levels.¹¹¹ Most young people want to learn, want structure, and want their parents around. There is no better place for this to happen than in the Church. The prayer of the youth minister should always be that the church is a place not to deconstruct young people by age, ability, or interest, but is rather a venue for honest sanctification among the generations.

In the study of community throughout scripture this appears rather obvious: how will young men and women learn what it means to be men and women if they are separated, or deconstructed, from all available examples? Is not our desire for the young to grow into involved Christian maturity by learning from both young adults and parents?¹¹² Thankfully, the church is a perfect place to reconstruct what the world would take from our young through the means of consumerism, alternate worldviews, and self-absorption. The local church is a beacon of light for young people steeped in the irrational worldview of postmodern 'deconstruction'. It should not be a place that

¹¹¹ DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry*, is helpful here.

¹¹² Titus 2 comes to mind, but his issues is holistically biblical theological.

solidifies those assumptions but one that challenges them with God's word. Rather than react by capitulating to divisionary presuppositions, the church must be a place that is unified in its effort. The Bible cannot conceive of separating parishioners on the basis of age, socio-economic status, or ethnicity. This is because the church is a bride. She belongs to Jesus, and one of her primary functions is to show in diversity that His love and strength transcend the finite to form an infinite unity.

Practically, this paradigm may be the most difficult to implement in the postmodern milieu. Many parents feel as if they cannot relate to their kids and many youth feel alienated or misunderstood by their parents. The task of intergenerational growth and community development is substantial. However, there is much hope for God's Word and the body of Christ actually working together. For starters, if there is a 'professional' youth minister, he must take a stand on the importance of adult and parental interaction. If it is difficult for a young person to understand a parent, the same is also true of a young adult. Youth look up to young adults in our culture. Christian young adults, on the other hand, look up to parents. Therefore, in a truly intergenerational community, the organic seed of discipleship is already planted with youth looking upward and their college age leaders doing the same. Another method is to invite parents to retreats, camps, and mid-week meetings. If a student feels uncomfortable with this, allow the parent to lead a group without any of his/her own kids.

Most importantly, students and parents must be communicated to on the need for holistic ministry. This must be demonstrated by scripture and put into place from the top down. Like the first two critiques and solutions, this will not be easy, but church was not intended to be easy. Parents will need to be active pastoral contacts in their student's

lives, listening and being patient with error. Young adults will need to understand their place as leader, not just best friend, and humbly submit their discipleship to the will of moms and dads. Students will catch on, and eventually, the bar of maturity will be raised for all without compromising any fun. The main task is to implement methods and ideas that counteract the false teaching of postmodern deconstruction and segregation. I am not suggesting, contra Titus two, that there is no room for divisional instruction. It is ok for youth to have some time by themselves. On the contrary, involving adults and parents in a holistic way is a biblical counteraction to the current climate of generational affairs. If we desire to see our young become mature Christian adults, then adults must take the initiative, in a relational way, to lovingly show them what that looks like.

D. Summary: The Transcendental Response

To summarize the biblical-covenantal response, we must note, as do Grenz and Olson, the theological shift from immanence to transcendence that parallels that of modernism to postmodernism in the late 20th century.¹¹³ Rather than examine the underlying assumptions of their argument, I wish to cite them on their overarching theme: fluctuation. Culture has changed, society has ‘evolved,’ and with it have emerged new worldviews and ways of dealing with traditional philosophical categories like truth and reality. But are life’s ultimate questions really that altered in the postmodern mind? Regardless of where one places their system on the scales of difference, all assumptions must ultimately be able to explain, not just tally, their logical conclusions.

This is why I have used Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida as starting points for a response to the deeply rooted ideologies of postmodernism. Although much of what I

¹¹³ Grenz and Olsen, *20th Century Philosophy*.

have strived to address relates to all ages, my course of action has been to investigate major intellectual trends and responses in regards to the forming of young minds and lives in the local church framework. Each thinker is asking a profoundly important and well thought out question. Each question, as its whisper has sunk deeper into the psychological fabric of society, beckons a response from the church. Several responses have been supplied, each with attributes that we can learn from.

The best response, however, is not one that merely reacts to the popular mindset and submits to its standards, but one derived from the Word of God.¹¹⁴ This can be said without fideistic insinuations because God's Word provides a truly transcendental answer to the problems of both postmodernity and evangelicalism. The God of the Bible accounts for, from a Christian worldview, the very ideologies that postmodernism often seeks to undo. While there is much to learn from the postmodern eagerness to challenge the structural autonomous self of modernism, we must be sure to do such investigation from the standpoint of biblical authority.

From this place of understanding and overcoming, it is the duty of the church to hand down to its youth the doctrines that the historical cycles of cultural and intellectual change galvanize. In response to Nietzsche's individually subjective 'will to power' and a reactionary 'will to ministry' we have presented the power and revelatory will through the word and sacrament. In response to Foucault's 'limiting experiences,' we present the ultimate limit of service by expanding the self, the other, and uniting with the kingdom purpose of the infinite. This was contrasted to the entertainment view of ministry as something more fulfilling and interesting in regards to the inquisitive desires of youth. To Derrida's deconstructive method and the church's segregational model we bring the hope

¹¹⁴ Proverbs 30:5 "Every Word of God is flawless..."

of reconstructing a church with intergenerational, inclusive, and integrated forms of ministry.

The biblical-covenantal response is driven by promise. This promise, revealed in God's word most fully in the word of Christ, is both our apologetic and our overarching hermeneutic. It is God who speaks, sorts out the confusing details of finite reality, and provides his people with an existential purpose beyond all others. Simultaneously, it is founded on the systematic apology of scripture and capable of apologetically confronting and debunking any opposing worldview. This is because God's Word doesn't merely critique the structure of a worldview, but demonstrates its very possibility; the preconditions of intelligible experience (the laws of logics, the uniformity of nature, and moral absolutes). In the face of philosophies that would seek to undo propositional truth, the Christian worldview steps back and reclaims the ability to reason in the first place. In a world where young people are asking more questions than ever, the biblical truth of God's Word and covenant promise has never been more valuable. Or has it always been?

V. Conclusion: Unshakeable Foundations

“ Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5: 21-22

A. The Problem Rejoined

Each generation that passes leaves a whole host of artifacts, both tangible and cognitive, to those who come after. These are not only artifacts of their own; they are specimens of an entire history of learning and growth. Young people, those whose age falls between the years of 12-18 (adolescence as defined loosely by our society), are in need of a biblical heritage that will help them to answer the questions of any era and allow them the tools to properly handle any artifact. The developmental years of

transition from adolescence to adulthood are often turbulent, yet filled with immense potential for growth of every kind. The majority of young people in the 21st century are smart, eager, and even religious.¹¹⁵ But a guide is needed. For as great as their impulse may be for progression, there is a worldview, a governing system of beliefs, by which they will work it out.

In this thesis, my intention was to put on display and examine several predominant philosophical presuppositions of the secular postmodern age. We have, like biblical anthropologists, put forth our best effort at understanding the implications and reactions to these views. The reason behind this is the need for more research on the contextualization of ministry to youth in postmodern times. Believing that young people can and are a vital part of the local church, with all its marks, leads us to push beyond this study and find more ways that we might become all things to all (young) people that, by God's grace, we might reach a few.¹¹⁶

B. A Summary of Research and Findings

Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida have helped us, and Lord willing, the church, to understand a bit more comprehensively that matrix of difference and change which makes up the postmodern mind. Since postmodernism is itself an openly ambiguous system of critiques to modernism, we have attempted to isolate a few key teachings and deal directly with their presuppositions from a biblical standpoint in relation to youth

¹¹⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching* or Lee, J., Rice G., and V. Bailey Gillespie. "Family Worship Patterns and their Correlation with Adolescent Behavior and Beliefs." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36:3 (1997) : 372-381.

¹¹⁶ Paul's own apologetic for contextualization, not at the expense of the Gospel, but so more might hear it

ministry.¹¹⁷ Examining the ‘will to power,’ ‘limiting experiences,’ and ‘Deconstruction’ of popular postmodern thought has made us more adept at offering biblical-covenantal solutions in a reformed tradition. The analysis did not awaken a desired rebirth of the modern project, but in turn helped us to see the a-theology of both schools while affirming the cogency of the Christian worldview.

In turn, the socio-historical reality of postmodern ideologies provided the opportunity to examine several large-scale responses to the intellectual milieu of the late 20th and early 21st century among youth ministries. Without attacking individuals or organizations, we have noted the apparent capitulatory nature of the church and parachurch in recent history. In attempt to respond, many evangelical entities fell victim to the spirit of reaction, taking up similar underlying methodologies in ministry as those of the postmodern persuasion. The ‘will to ministry,’ ‘entertainment-driven,’ and ‘segregationalist’ retort of many youth ministries proved further the ineffective presuppositions of the postmodern worldview. These efforts, being both extra biblical and often extra-ecclesial, did not offer a final resolution.

C. Biblical-Covenantal Solution Upheld

In response to both the philosophical and ecclesial movements of the late 20th century, especially as they pertain to young people, we elevated the biblical-covenantal view of scripture from a reformed perspective. This response confirmed the biblical worldview in regards to two central questions. First, that the God of the Bible, as presented in a reformed understanding of the scriptures, provides answers to the hardest questions of historical philosophy and postmodern thought. God’s infinite knowledge

¹¹⁷ Definition by *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

was upheld apologetically by demonstrating the futility of the non-believing worldview as a defensive and by providing a richly rewarding biblical alternative on an offensive. Second, we demonstrated that a reformed and orthodox understanding of the church as a unified inclusive body, preaching the word and administering the sacraments, and existing together in service, is the best apologetic for the postmodern question. In a world of questions and confusion, the biblical-covenantal solution is upheld. In closing, it is the author's prayer that he, and the church, would continue to treasure Christ so deeply that they cannot help but take God's message of covenant love and loyalty in Christ to the world, in context, for his glory.

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