

## **Reaching Today's Students with the One Message that Matters**

**By Nathan Raddatz**

Today's society is becoming increasingly scary for Christian parents who send their kids off to college for the first time. Yes, postmodernism is taking effect ever so quickly on college campuses throughout America. Although postmodernism is not entirely a bad thing, many reverberations have taken place that are. Society has evolved into something which twenty or thirty years ago was seen as liberal. Christian values are no longer held up on a pedestal, but are frequently attacked as close-minded. Secularization is in full swing, and as of now, there is no looking back.

Postmodernism is a growing problem throughout all of American society, but this paper will focus on its alarming effects on college kids and how to reach these kids through campus ministry. First, different aspects of Postmodernism will be discussed, that cause Christians to question their beliefs. Secondly, how important it is for pastors or staff ministers along with kids to be well instructed for rebuttals of Postmodernism beliefs. The next section will detail how to evangelize to kids who frequently are brainwashed by ideas from Postmodernism through professors and friends. Also, in the paper there will be suggestions as how to get kids to attend campus ministry meetings and activities. Finally, how to keep faith at the center stage during the college years in lieu of Postmodernism will conclude the paper. After I sent questionnaires out to campus pastors, I gained a better understanding of real problems on secular universities resulting from Postmodernism.

The same old problems at universities still exist, which question biblical beliefs, like: creation, evolution, atheism, ignorance of Christian faith, and the push to accept

professors' opinions as yours. Moreover, other problems haunt kids like: abortion, dating, sex, alcohol, drugs, cheating, stress, suicide, future plans, and dealing with unbelievers. These problems have been around for years and people are well informed about them. However, in recent years, new problems have crept into universities, and are being widely accepted. The scary thing about this, is how quickly Postmodern ideas are now surfacing and being accepted by professors and students alike. The push has gone from some sort of belief in God to an ultra-liberal society where God has no place. Any belief now stands as the correct belief.

To understand Postmodernism, is to understand three prominent persons who basically fueled this period. These men borrowed ideas from the periods of the Enlightenment and Modernism, but then turned them in entirely new directions. One such new direction is the rejection of all metanarratives. The following description is what Jean-Francois Lyotard described as a metanarrative or grand narrative. "A metanarrative is a big story of mythic proportions that claims to be able to account for, explain and subordinate all lesser, little, local narratives." (Powell, 29) Also a metanarrative can be a story that has been carried from one person (generation) to another. One example of a metanarrative is the biblical story our salvation. However, Lyotard did not accept these grand narratives but rather the little, or local narratives. In recent time people no longer believe these stories, but use the local or little narrative. "Narrative is thus for Lyotard the inevitable source of all legitimation in its own avant-gardist strategies." (Bertens, 126) Nothing is wrong with narratives, but the metanarrative or the salvation history of Christ is the main point of the Bible. The Bible has many narratives itself, such as parables. Narratives are stories that can be applied to

our life today. He believes no one narrative dominates. Lyotard had a very strong disbelief in metanarratives.

Jean Baudrillard made famous semiotics, which Saussure had first talked about. Semiotics is when some word takes on definition only when associated with another. “The term ‘devil’ for instance has no meaning by itself. It only takes on meaning as an element in a system of Christian theology/myth, where ‘devil’ is related to other concepts such as ‘God.’ ‘angel,’ etc.” (Powell, 43) Baudrillard also gives new meaning to simulacra. It had meant simply an image or representation of reality. Baudrillard said that in Postmodernism, simulacra is a “model or a code.” He used digitality and DNA as examples. Simulacra did refer to a true copy of something. Now, the real is suddenly turning into hyperreal according to Baudrillard. T.V. has taken over everything. Baudrillard questions whether what you hear today, like on commercials, is actually something you need or not. “...so Baudrillard would have us believe- in a world where ‘false’ appearances go all the way down, and where the only available measure of ‘truth’ is the capacity to put one’s ideas across to maximum suasive effect. (Norris, 24)

A third prominent figure in postmodern thought is Jacques Derrida. Derrida came on to the scene in America when he delivered a speech at John Hopkins University in 1966. It was entitled “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida immediately became famous for his concept called deconstruction. Derrida believed two things: 1) “truth is somehow a matter of the strong overcoming the weaker.” 2) “Western science, modern technology and American pragmatism are all outgrowths of a power-hungry way of thinking-a way of thinking which a true “thinker” most constantly strive to overcome.” These two thoughts formed the core of

deconstruction. We are warned of something, “The reason these thinkers take deconstruction seriously is that they believe that Western metaphysical philosophy (what Derrida call “ontotheology”) has a deep and terrible influence on everything else in Western culture.” (Linn, 41) So it is easy to see why this is such a dangerous concept. Derrida had a problem with a person or group being excluded. Christ is looked upon as excluding Muslims, Buddhists, and Jesus.

Structuralism is the term given to study of linguistics by Saussure. What he decided is that language is the “function of a system.” Saussure determined how to separate a closely related object of language from other confusing usages. He studied the grammar not usage, rules not expressions, and models rather than data. “ Structuralism examines the synchronic (existing now) rather than the diachronic (existing and changing over time).” (Appignonesi & Garratt, 57) Structuralism takes into consideration no deep meaning of words on the page, but only what the words directly say. What this means, is that any particular word may have a different meaning to each person. Reason then is relied on to work through the meanings. Structuralism meant that a word no longer had a common meaning to all, but had a unique meaning according to each person’s use. Structuralism has no concern for anything historical. The rules of structuralism preside over the present time, not anything carried forward through time carries any weight.

As Christians, we can immediately see how structuralism affects our Biblical principles. One example is the Triune God. Though the words “Triune God” are never mentioned, different sections of scripture talk about all three persons as one. Without reading various sections of the Bible, the truth of three-in-one is unclear to many people. Structuralism requires the reader to understand the words as they appear on the page. If a

person were to take one passage as being different than another parallel one, the Triune God would seem utterly unclear.

Structuralism then transformed into Post-Structuralism through the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes caused an emotional outbreak when he proclaimed “the death of the author.” He meant that the readers come up with their own meanings of the words in front of them. This means that books always will have multiple meanings and never ending questions. How frustrating for Christians to always have to defend the Bible due to people’s questions of what God really meant. People are and will continue to construe God’s words into acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, and women serving as pastors, creation, and other important beliefs.

Deconstruction remains the scariest aspect of Postmodernism that Christians have to deal with. Although the champion of deconstruction Jacques Derrida lived in the 1930’s, the idea is prevalent today. Deconstruction is the belief that rational thought has no basis, especially reason. Derrida has targeted “logocentrism.” Logocentrism derived from the Greek word “logos”-reason itself. “Logocentrism desires a perfectly rational language that perfectly represents the real world. Such a language of reason would absolutely guarantee that the presence of the world, the essence of everything in the world would be transparently represented to an observing subject who could speak of it with complete certainty. Words would literally be the Truth of things-the ‘Word made flesh’, As St. John puts it.” (Appignonesi & Garratt, 78) The problem for Derrida lies in the fact that reason does not explain everything in the world. Deconstruction as defined by Derrida includes “revealing the under layers of meanings ‘in’ a text that were suppressed or assumed in order for it to take its actual form.” Derrida also said that there

is never just one meaning for something. We see how deconstruction is so damaging to scripture. Never can there be one meaning to our God, salvation, and other biblical truths.

Relativism is yet another problem that Christians today face more often. Relativism is the belief that truth and morality are relative. “According to a recent poll, 66 percent of Americans believe that ‘there is no such thing as absolute truth. Among young adults, the percentage is even higher: 72 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-five do not believe absolutes exist.” (Veith, Jr., 16) That same poll goes on to say 53 percent of evangelical Christians believe there are no absolutes. As Christians we see how relativism has taken its effects on issues such as abortion, and premarital sex. A chilling thought has been written about relativism. “While people have always committed sins, they at least acknowledged these were sins. A century ago a person may have committed adultery flagrantly and in defiance of God and man, but he would have admitted that what he was doing was a sin. What we have today is not only immoral behavior, but also a loss of moral criteria. This is true even in the church. We face not only a moral collapse but also a collapse of meaning. There are no absolutes.” (Veith, Jr., 18)

Pluralism is the final problem this paper will detail. Pluralism is the idea that there can be many truths not just one. “Postmodern truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths. Most postmodern make the leap of believing that this plurality of truths can exist alongside one another. The postmodern consciousness, therefore, entails a radical kind of pluralism.” (Grenz, 18) Pluralism has been around for

years, but in the postmodern age it has differed. “Postmoderns live in self-contained social groups, each of which has its own language, belief, and values. As a result, postmodern pluralism seeks to give place to the “local” nature of truth. Beliefs are held to be true within the context of the communities that espouse them.” (Grenz, 15) So it is not hard to understand why people always think “what is right for you, may not for me.” People begin to accept any belief that suits them and make it their personal scripture. There is no longer one God, but another god or gods. Ultimately, this attitude sets in: “If I am a good person, even though I don’t believe in God, I will still go somewhere good.”

As negative effects of Postmodernism stack up, it becomes vitally important to combat them somehow. Unbelieving college kids are not going to see the light of the Law and Gospel without others telling them. The only true motivation for kids to realize their erroneous ways is through Scripture. Since Postmodernism consistently creeps into college life, it is only logical to be well informed as to what things are wrong and why. Our college kids need knowledge of the negative postmodern ideas to first do anything.

Throughout the beginning of this paper I highlighted just a few problems prevalent during college years. These problems are not all that exist, by any means, but are the ones at the tip of the iceberg. Several pastors have seen that many of today’s challenges facing kids stem directly from Postmodernism. Campus pastors dealing with the kids who are experiencing these attacks are beginning to find out about these problems. So as these pastors are confronted more and more, they begin to understand just how scary these postmodern beliefs are to the well-being of God’s children.

If pastors are still learning how Postmodern thought has application in the classroom, dorm, and throughout college life, how can they combat specific problems?

All of the campus pastors begin their meetings with students by either having devotion, Bible Study or an interacting period. The easiest way for pastors and kids to learn of problems and the Scripture passages useful for refuting is during these times. Pastors are well trained in the Scripture for various counseling opportunities when people question the validity of scripture. Pastors also have been well trained to deal with pluralism, relativism, and deconstruction, which have taken over college classrooms and young adults' mentalities.

Everything about Postmodernism attempts to take Christ out of the center of our lives. Young kids face problems directly with the terms mentioned and problems like: Christian freedom, decision theology, or nihilism that are little parts of the whole. The best way to be well informed Christians, is to share problems. A couple of positives come from sharing problems. First, others can discuss them with the questioner and secure their base as to what Scripture says. Secondly, students and the pastor alike clear up any doubts they may have. This is referring to what the real problems consist of and what someone may have thought Scripture said. Finally from searching scripture, all involved are reassured of salvation, which was graciously won for us.

What better way to start a meeting off than have an interesting devotion? Each meeting the pastor speaks about a topic that deals with Postmodernism, which a student has questions about. A devotion like this stimulates the students minds and interest. This type of devotion serves several purposes. One, a topic can be covered in depth each time. This topic covers practical application and at the same time studies Scripture to formulate a base for a rebuttal the kids can use. Secondly, pastors are forced to learn as they

investigate the topic of the week or month. They learn the term well, what scripture applies, useful information to counsel kids.

Campus ministry programs function for college kids away from home to have fellowship with other believers. Students active in the campus program encourage others to attend and share in the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christ said in Matthew 29:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Besides telling us to spread the word to others, Christ comforts our fears by telling us he will watch our efforts. The motivating factor for me is that the world may end at any moment and I want to see everyone in heaven with me. Therefore go out and spread the word with confidence!

Campus pastors have both common and unusual ways to advise kids as they do outreach in the face of postmodern thinking. The most obvious and effective way is to have kids invite their friends to a meeting or worship. This is not a take it or leave it way of approaching but rather a way to ease into contact with the life-changing Word of God. Another way is to be open and friendly. Listen to unbelievers and their thoughts and be friendly, not mocking them. Smile, as you speak with a passion and concern. Thirdly, keep the message simple and cut to the chase, so as to stress Christ and salvation. To many of today’s college kids this will be foreign or unacceptable.

Ministers may have kids put up flyers. Also, tell the kids to tell friends or others that an interesting topic of Postmodernism is being discussed. Students can be the best witness for the Lord when they do not partake in common sins like drunkenness, but get

up for church rather than sleeping in on Saturday or Sunday mornings. Another suggestion is to speak up when Postmodern ideas of pluralism, relativism, post-structuralism, and meta-narratives gets thrown around by friends or even professors. Pastor Mike Otterstatter reminds his kids “ of the treasure we have in the WELS as we hold the truth of the Scripture and the plan of salvation.” Meanwhile Pastor Phil Hirsch says, “I tell them the no strings attached gospel is what matters.” In addition, Pastor Glenn Schwanke replies, “ We have done Bible studies on evangelism (including Life-style evangelism). I noticed that getting into the Scriptures and then planning group outreach activities has had a great effect on our group here.” Pastor Robert Hoepner has kids who bring in international students. Finally, Pastor Michael Biedenbender suggests three very helpful tips:

1. Encourage students to live for Christ, resisting common sins. Thus people will ask where they get the power to stand up;
2. Once a kid has taken a stand, against sins, his friends seek further information and can be led into Bible study;
3. Let students run the Bible study. Just be there as a pastor to answer questions. Many people think only the pastor can lead stuff.

How to get kids involved in activities takes a little imagination on the pastor’s part. Also, students need to give helpful input. Today, especially, getting kids to take time out of their busy schedules is hard. Even harder is how to get unbelieving kids to catch sight of an opportunity to get in touch with the Word. Kids are under the belief that they do not need Christ, but rather they are fine with beliefs that stem from

Postmodernism. Young people say, “Why do I need God? I can believe in whatever I want. How do you know there is only one God? Why is what I am doing wrong? You do what you want and I will do what I want! You don’t accept homosexuality, you homophobe! God can’t tell me what I can do with my body.”

Once again, several pastors have suggested various ways to get kids involved in activities. Involvement is the key to winning souls over solely through the work of the Holy Spirit. Imagination is the key to involvement. One way to get kids involved is through bonfires. Another is by placing ads in the campus newspaper, or the “letter-to-the-editor” column in the campus newspaper. Pastors need to set a fun atmosphere on campuses and at church, says one pastor. Posters are also useful when hung up around campus. Make flyers and give them out to interested people. Promise to serve food! Let the students organize meetings and activities. Have a picnic at the beginnings of the year. Invite your friends to the next meeting if they just attended an activity. This shows that you care about them. Promote free pizza and coke at your meeting. Pastor Schwanke lists several creative ideas: group emails, chalk announcements on the sidewalk, table tents in the union building, ads in student newspaper, tables at organizational days, giving away “Smarties” a favorite candy and telling the students we have a way for them to get really smart. The most important way is to promote on a one-to-one basis. Let the students promote the group, keep the campus pastor out of the primary role. Pastor Biedenbender says to attract kids to your group you “must define it yourself.” His group meets for fellowship, encouragement, prayer, and Bible study. They offer free food too. “Give them love and they will come back.” “Make it open for them to bring friends and they will.” “You present a good program and never be

discontent with how many come.” Over the last 11 years his group has had a profession of 79 kids who were led to faith once they attended the campus ministry program. An important passage to remember when getting the word out is Isaiah 55:11 which is talking about the importance of the Word. “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

The important thing to remember when leading a campus ministry program is what the ultimate goal of the group is. The Word of God needs to be the center of everything. Incorporating interesting devotion topics is helpful to keep kids active, but in the end, the Word is what guides these devotions and Bible Studies. When Christ tells us to “make disciples of all nations,” it includes the objective of discipling the souls already attending. The most obvious way to attract unbelievers to meeting or activities still remains in each person’s God given responsibility. Friends inviting friends still remains the most successful method to help win souls over. Moreover, part of mission work is to get the Word out any way possible. Like one pastor said, if the Holy Spirit converts just one soul, the mission is a success. Is there anything else better in the world than to see a sinner brought to Christ? According to Luke 15:10, God’s angels agree. “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” The more ideas that are carried out to reach sinners, the more chance for souls to be won over. The key to any program is getting the believing kids involved and to stay involved in doing mission work.

As campuses and kids are swept over by more liberal ideas, especially postmodernism, meetings serve an even bigger meaning. Meetings are very comforting to kids who are surrounded by false ideas. Scripture can comfort and reassure believers’

minds. Moreover, unbelievers can find peace in a fast-paced world, where anything and everything is accepted. Unbelievers need someone to talk to and fall back on when life's troubles haunt them. What better way to help them than by bringing them to a place where Scripture is present and the Holy Spirit will continue to work in them? Frequently, the Bible speaks of a sure place of comfort for souls. One such example is Psalm 23:4 where the writer proclaims, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me." Can there be any place more comforting than to be in the presence of God?

One thing I miss because I am on a campus like Martin Luther College, is some sort of challenge from kids or professors alike about my beliefs, especially the attacks today resulting from the Postmodern Age. Attacks that are very hard to counter because of the complexity and carefulness, to which Biblical answers need to be formulated, are the ones that require all of us to dig deeper into Scripture. Now the question remains, as to how to keep kids active in the local church or campus program during the college years. It was hard enough for kids to deal with professors' evolutionist or atheist beliefs, but at least those beliefs were clear-cut. Today questions arise from professors and students who question or attack beliefs of any kind and from all angles. Postmodernism questions everything and undermines foundations of truth.

The most common sense way to counter erroneous postmodern beliefs is to keep kids involved in church. "How is this possible?" one might ask. Students and pastors alike need to constantly encourage one another that they can never get enough of the Word. Attend the meetings and church services as often as possible. Tell the students to pray for constant spiritual help from the Lord. Also, pastors and students should also

pray for those that do not realize how important it is to seek the Lord in the face of our world's views. Encourage young people to partake of the Sacraments. One way a pastor can help is by calling his student(s) occasionally to see how college life is and express an interest in any concerns. Talk to each person individually, but lend to each one the same encouragement. Every kid is different so do not treat each one the same, but give the same message to all. Speak both law and gospel. Take it for granted that all need to be in the presence of the Word, even if they claim a "firm grasp" in the Word. It is very important for kids to feel at home when they go to a nearby church, so do everything possible to accomplish this. Pastors could preach on some problem that applies practically to the college kids. Other important things include getting church members to come to campus meetings. Let the church members form friendships with the kids. Encourage members to invite a kid or two to their house for supper, snacks, or anything. Get church members involved. Send care packages to students. Let students get involved in church opportunities. The more kids feel comfortable with members the more they are likely to come back to church. Make students comfortable enough to be able to call up members or the pastor with problems or when they need comfort. Pastors are not the only ones that can help kids at college who thirst for the word. All of the previously listed items are suggested as ways to get kids to church, so that through Word and Sacrament, they may realize how valuable faith is during the college years and throughout life.

Throughout this paper I have highlighted beliefs that stem from Postmodernism. These beliefs have become rampant and constantly cause believing kids to be questioned and to question themselves. Secondly, I have stated why it is important for kids and

pastors to be well informed. These beliefs are very complex in some cases and kids and pastors need to counter them with portions of Scripture. I also explained how to evangelize to unbelievers in the face of all these beliefs that require us to constantly explain our position and conclusion. Next, we looked at how to get kids involved in activities whether it is a believer or unbeliever. Church activities are important because the Word is at the forefront of all of them. Doubts and questions from postmodern beliefs can be calmed and answered at these activities and meetings. Finally, I listed some suggestions to keep college kids involved in the Word.

For some believing kids, campus ministry is the only contact with the Word they have during the week. Think how scary college life is for many kids when everyone around them easily accepts all these radical ideas. Although some campus ministry programs are small, yet they are valuable. They do not exist only for the sake of believers but are a shelter for unbelievers to turn to. With all these postmodern ideas running wild, no wonder many kids lose their faith while at college. Our synod understands the importance of these safe havens and therefore has almost doubled its budget for campus ministry in the last five years. Even with this spending increase though, much more could be done between our synod and congregations. Our synod relies on nearby churches to support and be active in campus ministry. When a congregation is shown the importance for the campus program they will gladly support it financially or in other ways. Members can even enjoy company by visiting students and forming friendships. College kids need support as many tough days lie ahead!