



By

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We hear a lot about Postmodernism, but what is it? How does it work? How did we get *here* from *there*?

The new book *Understanding Postmodernism: A Christian Perspective* (IVP Academic, 2017) is a wonderful look into how societies have moved from premodernism to modernism to postmodernism through many centuries. The IVP web page lists the following categories for the book: Cultural Analysis, Ethics, Philosophy, Postmodernism, Worldview. Any or all of those work well for this excellent guide.

Stewart E. Kelly (PhD, Notre Dame) is professor of philosophy at Minot State University. He is also the author of *Truth Considered and Applied* and *Thinking Well: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*.

James K. Dew, Jr. is Dean of the College at Southeastern in Wake Forest, NC, where he is also Associate Professor of Philosophy and the History of Ideas. He is the author of *Science & Theology: Assessing Alister McGrath's Critical Realist Perspective* (Wipf & Stock), *How Do We Know?: A*

Short Introduction to the Issues of Knowledge (with Mark Foreman) and co-editor (with Chad Meister) of *God & Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* (IVP). He lives in Wake Forest, NC with his wife and four children.

“However else postmodern thinkers may differ with each other about various and sundry topics, they are deeply unified in their rejection of modernism’s high view of reason, especially as it relates to their understanding of the self.” *Understanding Postmodernism*, p 130

This new book is important on many levels, including historical and practical. In addition to explaining historical highlights of each era, the authors also present ten basic beliefs of postmodernism. Here are three of them (to whet your appetite):

1. Postmodernism challenges the Enlightenment confidence in human reason.
2. Postmodern thinkers view truth as something that is created/constructed by human beings, rather than

something discovered that is (in some sense) already out there.

3. Postmoderns have come to increasingly see truth as more therapeutic in nature than as static and objective.

The authors are careful to be both accurate and objective in presenting both the historical demise of Enlightenment Modernism and rise of Postmodernism. Philosophical and societal change of this magnitude does not happen overnight and *Understanding Postmodernism* does a wonderful job giving us both the broad overview and important details that led to the change.

I am a child of the mid-20th century, so working with university students in the 21st century means understanding how young people today view their world differently than I did when I was a college student more than 50 years ago.

I like how author Stewart Kelly answered a question about what motivated him, as a Christian and university professor, to want to write a book about postmodernism. Here's how he answered:

“I have grown increasingly convinced that if we as Christians want to win the ear of non-Christians, we must be well informed about history, social issues, the basis and defense of our own beliefs, and the beliefs and values of the non-believing world around us. Our knowledge must have breadth and depth and be managed by careful, analytical thought. Our knowledge and thoughts must honor God by communicating truth (all of which is his) in a respectful, well-informed and accessible manner. Furthermore, a little humor almost always helps.”

I agree wholeheartedly with the professor and highly recommend *Understanding Postmodernism: A Christian Perspective* to you. Whether you are a student, parent, professor or work in a ministry to college students, I believe you will find this guide most helpful.

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From the Publisher

“Postmodernity has matured. But the challenge of navigating our contemporary culture remains. In order for Christians to make wise decisions, we first need to understand the many facets of our postmodern context.

If René Descartes is often identified as the first truly modern philosopher in light of his confidence in human reason, then postmodernism has taken Descartes to the woodshed. Stewart Kelly and James Dew detail the litany of concerns that postmodernism has raised: overconfidence in human reason, the limitations of language, the relativity of truth, the lack of a truly objective view, the inherently oppressive nature of metanarratives, the instability of the human self, and the absence any moral superiority.

With wisdom and care, Kelly and Dew compare these postmodern principles with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. What emerges is neither a rejection of everything postmodernism is concerned with nor a wholesale embrace of all that it affirms. Instead, we are encouraged to understand the postmodern world as we seek to mature spiritually in Christ.”

Reviews

“To my knowledge, this is the most comprehensive and analytically refined exposition and critique of postmodernism.” (Douglas Groothuis, professor of philosophy, Denver Seminary, author of *Truth Decay*)

“Understanding Postmodernism is the best one-stop introduction to postmodernism from a conservative evangelical perspective. It describes and evaluates postmodernism from historical, theological, and philosophical perspectives and does so in a lucid and accessible manner.” (Bruce Riley Ashford, provost, professor of theology and culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary)

“The gospel is never preached in a vacuum. It is always heard against the backdrop of the culture’s collective mindset and mood. Well, the cultural mindset and mood is steeped in postmodern thought that relativizes truth, knowledge, and value. As a result, people today are morally confused and biblically illiterate. Confusion, darkness, and disintegration reign. Kelly and Dew cut through the confusion, ably dissecting postmodernism and demolishing its credibility. As the smoke clears, a vision of shalom emerges where Christianity is seen as true and Jesus is seen as the fount of all wisdom and knowledge. A must-read book for all who need to be reminded of the objective goodness, truth, and beauty of Christianity.” (Paul M. Gould, associate professor of philosophy and Christian apologetics, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)

“Ours is a world of skepticism, irony, and intellectual despair, all of which tempt us away from the kingdom of God. This book is a profoundly Christian antidote: a way to analyze our postmodern context, accept its fresh insights, identify its missteps and downright errors, then move on to a mature, thoughtful grasp of the truth in Christ and actively live out its implications. A profound book in lucid prose!” (James W. Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* and *Apologetics Beyond Reason*)

“Postmodernism is no longer a youthful upstart but has now reached middle age. If we take 1968 as its date of birth, the revolution is now fifty years old, which explains the philosophical paunch and aching cultural joints. *Understanding Postmodernism*, similarly, is a mature evangelical response, more interested in showing charity and asking what we can learn from the postmodern protest to modernity than in knee-jerk reactions. The authors stay calm and carry on reasoning. In particular, they examine ten major themes, including language, rationality, and truth (they’re analytic thinkers, after all), bringing both clarity and

charity to bear on a movement that has affected the academy, society, and church like no other in recent memory.” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

“Critics regularly compare defining postmodernism to ‘trying to nail Jell-O to the wall.’ If this cliché is true, Kelly and Dew have done the inconceivable: they have successfully nailed the postmodern ethos to the cross. *Understanding Postmodernism* is a clear, appreciative exposition and critique of the tenets of postmodernism. This distinctively Christian introduction also provides much-needed historical framing and real-world application for college and seminary students. Highly recommended.” (Rhyne Putman, associate professor of theology and culture, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary)

“Why is the Western world involved in such a monumental collision of ideas today? What about the claims disputed hotly but seriously every day on news broadcasts, heard from college students and even professors alike, assuming, questioning, or denying the presence of any knowable truth in the world? Like the old saying states, ‘ideas have consequences.’ In this volume, philosophers Stewart Kelly and James Dew explain where this trend came from why and when it emerged as well as providing a detailed response to these ideas. Painstakingly documented and carefully reasoned, this volume provides the critique that this generation sorely needs. Highly recommended.” (Gary R. Habermas, distinguished research professor, chair of the department of philosophy, Liberty University and Baptist Theological Seminary)

“Understanding Postmodernism is an important book that helps readers navigate between the extremes concerning truth: taking a completely neutral, unbiased, infallible God’s-eye view of reality or stepping into the destructive quicksand of relativism. In an age in which professing Christians are increasingly embracing postmodern assumptions, this book is a proper corrective in its overview and assessment of the key themes of postmodernism as well as a defense of a gospel-centered understanding of truth.” (Paul Copan, professor, Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University, author of *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* and *A Little Book for New Philosophers*)

Understanding Postmodernism: A Christian Perspective (IVP Academic, 2017, 282 pages)

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