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# POSTMODERN PILGRIMS

## First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church

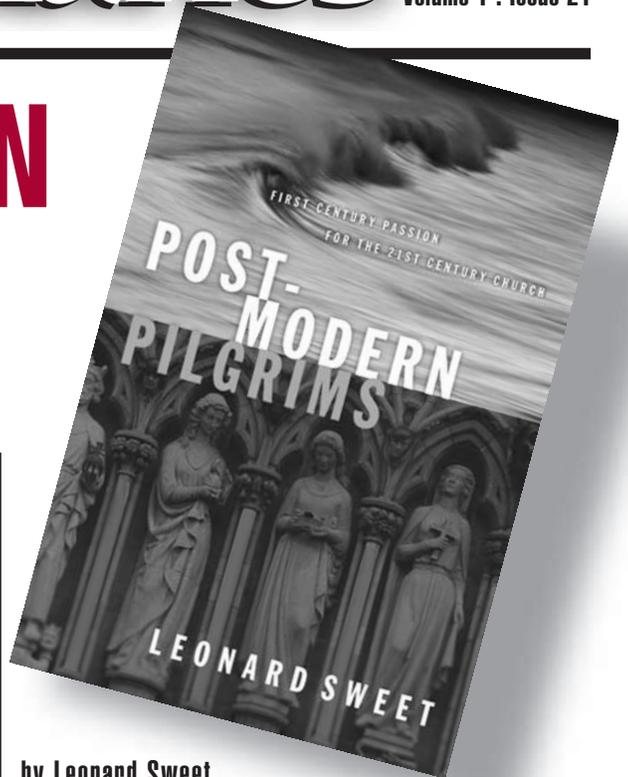
### A Quick Focus The Book's Purpose

- Explain how the Internet is impacting the Church
- Show that postmodern culture is image-driven
- Address the tension that exists between tradition and modern innovation
- Explore why postmodernists are rejecting religion
- Urge the Church to provide a haven where people can practice authentic relationships

### The Book's Message

Postmodern pilgrims must strive to keep the past and the future in perpetual conversation~so every generation will find a fresh, relevant expression of the Gospel that is based on God's unchanging principles.

The old structures of the Church must evolve to reach this new generation; doing the same things the same way will not suffice. Christians must remember that Jesus overturned many



by Leonard Sweet  
Broadman & Holman Publishers  
Nashville

conventions and traditions within Judaism during His earthly ministry. He broke the rules of the religious establishment by healing on the Sabbath, eating with untouchables, speaking to women, touching lepers, and virtually crossing every social boundary of the day. If the 21st century Church desires to make a difference, it must do likewise.

### Six Main Points

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“The institutional Church in the next 20 years will continue more and more to look like the pink Cadillac with the huge tail fins,” says one author. If it does not take pains to reach out to a changing culture, the Church will simply become a symbol of a bygone era.

If Christians truly desire to make a difference in their culture, they must first realize who they are—and the Church needs to grasp what it is as well.

Is the Church paralyzed as it faces the challenges of the 21st century? Why is it more prone to send this postmodern culture hate mail than love letters? Why does the Church struggle so to teach this culture that God is love?

The Church is sitting on the greatest news that was ever transmitted: Jesus loves each person unconditionally. The task before it is to penetrate this culture and “kiss it” with this message.

“Kissing the culture” means engaging in a sacramental function—one that was common in the early church. The earliest liturgies in the first century referred to kissing as a sacred and sacramental sign of love.

**“In Christianity, the kiss had an almost sacramental function from the start. ‘Greet one another with a holy kiss,’ Paul says, making it almost into a liturgical observance (I Corinthians 13:20).”**

According to St. Ambrose, “A kiss conveys the force of love, and where there is no love, no faith, no affection, what sweetness can there be in kisses?”

# “KISSING THE CULTURE”

There were two great “kisses” in the history of Christianity. The first was when God breathed into a human the breath of life: God “kissed” Adam and breathed life into him. The second was when Jesus breathed into the disciples new life in the Holy Spirit; to early Christians, the kiss symbolized the transmission and power of the Holy Spirit.

In the first century, it was unthinkable to greet a person without kissing or touching. The “holy kiss” was an insider sign and seal.

New Testament scholar William Klassen believes the “holy kiss” began as a practice that expressed the closeness of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. As these early Christians recognized their unity in Christ, their kisses transcended class distinctions and gender as well as religious, national, and ethnic divisions.

**“Kiss is not simply a cute metaphor. Nor is kiss defined here as an erotic exercise. Many cultures are unfamiliar with mouth-to-mouth, mucous membrane kissing, also known as the ‘labial kiss.’ It is not a universal cultural phenomenon, and is totally unknown in some Asian countries.”**

Offering a holy kiss was a way of symbolizing to rich and poor, men and women, clean and unclean, that they were loved by Jesus Christ. These kisses showed that they were learning from His example.

Not only did Jesus “kiss” his disciples by breathing new life into them, He was also a person who touched others—to Jesus, touch was a primary carrier of spiritual truths.

Today, researchers are recognizing the importance of touch. Touch, for example, is a powerful stimulant to infant growth and child development. Researchers are learning that if babies aren’t touched, they will die. If a child hasn’t learned to hug and kiss by the age of two, it is an indication that one of two things has happened: neurological damage or autism. *Marasmus* is the term given to the wasting away of infants who are not given sufficient touch. Elderly people and those with physical impairments also benefit from touching.

Our modern culture, however, is becoming increasingly touch-free. Even churches are conducting workshops to warn childcare workers about the risks of touching youngsters. The results are inevitable: The more touch-starved people become, the more touch crimes will be committed.

Alarmingly, one recent study revealed that American parents touch their children only an average of about two times per hour. The same research showed that French parents touch their kids six times per hour.

The Church of Jesus Christ must be a touching Church. Christianity is a contact culture, a tactile religion. In fact, biblical spirituality is a contact sport. Christians cannot reject touching; the healing process requires touch. For Jesus to be a savior of souls, He must first be a toucher of hearts.

There is a new word in the 1999 edition of the *Encarta World English Dictionary*: preloved. It comes from Australia and New Zealand and refers to a second-hand item. More figuratively, however, it refers to embracing and caring for an item in such a way that

its condition proves the care with which the original owner treated it .

Let's put Jesus' principle of "no untouchables" and "preloved" to the test. Can we, as a Church, touch, kiss, or prelove our culture~especially those who seem untouchable? Can we figuratively "kiss" people like Dennis Rodman, Marilyn Manson, and Howard Stern? Can the Church reach out to them?

The first rock opera, "Tommy," tells the story about a deaf, dumb,

and blind boy who plays a pinball machine. In the song, "Christmas," his father talks about his son, who doesn't know what Christmas is. His father sings that Tommy "doesn't know what day it is. He doesn't know who Jesus was or what praying is...Tommy, can you hear me? How can he be saved?"

Tommy then responds: "See me, feel me, touch me, heal me!" There is a culture out there saying the same thing to us. Can we touch them?



## POSTMODERNISTS ARE INTERACTIVE

**With the advent of the Internet, our time in history is coming to be called the "age of participation," or the "horizontal society." Everything that was once fixed has become fluid. Postmodernists are perceiving, interacting and comprehending the world not only as observers, but as participants as well.**

Far from producing a nation of couch potatoes, the Internet is pushing people toward more active and interactive behaviors. "Connexity Kids" and "Net Gens" are the terms used to describe our youngest generations. Interactivity seems hardwired into the brains of this generation. Mouse potatoes or click potatoes do not become couch potatoes~they become karaoke mike-holders, scuba divers, inline skaters, mountain bikers, and wind surfers.

**"The notion that the electronic culture produces 'couch potatoes' has pockmarked the mind of the church for too long. The truth is just the opposite. Electronic culture pushes postmoderns toward more active and interactive behaviors."**

**more bosses, only clients. In this radical democracy, vertical authorities like priests and professors have been replaced by peers throughout the world who share common interests."**

Postmodernists are not going to simply transmit the tradition or culture they've been given~they will be unlikely to even take it unless they can transform and customize it.

The value of multi-media interaction that Christians seem to miss is that the more digital our culture becomes, the more participatory it becomes.

Postmodernists exhibit three levels of engagement with media: fascination, exploration, and integration. Postmodernists have to explore and investigate on their own, then integrate their findings into their experiences.

**"Postmodern people take cues not from those 'above' them, but from others 'around' them. There are no**

We are changing from a representative culture, which was based on the desire of people to have decisions made for them, to a participatory culture, where people want to make their own decisions and have multiple choices available.

In the old system, people wanted and needed to be controlled and to have someone else make decisions for them. They viewed the task of a leader as one who would administer guidance and regulations. Under this view, people would only do things for which they were rewarded. Furthermore, people could not be trusted to use their personal freedom in the service of society or an organization.

In the new system, however, people want to make their own decisions and have multiple choices. They view leadership as emboldening and individuals as empowered to lead.

**"The Internet has put the participation back into participatory government. The Web popped the cork, and there's no stopping it now."**

People will make sacrifices for the good of the whole. Human systems are self-organizing, and people can be trusted to invest of their resources and time wisely.

As a result of this new thinking, masses of people are moving from passivity to interactivity, using the Internet as their point of connection.

This is impacting every aspect of our culture, including education, entertainment, medicine, music, economics, and books. In the book industry, for example, publishers are introducing nonlinear approaches to the presentation of text. This involves placing interactive design

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**POSTMODERNISTS ARE INTERACTIVE**  
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components and small pull quotes in the text. The book "asks" for reader involvement as the reader works through the material. No longer is the reader just a passive recipient of information.

Television producers are discovering the importance of interactivity in their programming. There is hardly a new TV show on the air today that does not have some interactivity built in. Videogames, of course, offer the ultimate in interactivity.

Weddings are becoming interactive as well. The trend is moving away from relying only on professional photographers to capture images at weddings; more and more couples are placing disposable cameras at each table and inviting guests to take the pictures.

In the field of medicine, a revolution is taking place that involves growing patient power. According to Dr. Lynn Hartman with the Mayo Clinic, "Patients have shown over the past decade that they want to become active participants in their care. ...They're on the Internet; they're doing their own research. ...Most patients today want a more interactive style, so that they can be part of the decision."

The Internet is changing the way advertisers are marketing their products to consumers who shop online. Interactive ads engender up to 89 percent viewer participation and boost sales by 21 percent.

Religion is being impacted by the Internet. As an example, after Pat Boone appeared in a heavy-metal outfit with Alice Cooper on the American Music Awards show, the Trinity Broadcasting Network canceled his show and asked him to appear before a panel to justify his actions. At the end of the broadcast, Paul Crouch asked the audience to

call in and vote on whether or not to bring Boone back on the air—the calls were overwhelmingly in favor of Boone. What happened that evening was applauded by *Christianity Today* when it observed that this method of reconciling differences gives us a "glimpse of what Christian television might look like if its purveyors were more willing to engage and grapple constructively with the world outside insulated church walls."

As interactivity relates to preaching, something as simple as monitoring audience reaction can help a pastor better communicate. Whatever technique is used, there should be an interactive segue at least every eight minutes in order to keep interest.

In short, the Church must consider the importance of interactivity in its efforts to reach the world.

**"The body of Christ is a participative community. Not just in the eucharist is everyone a 'participant,' a part of the action not apart from it. There are no more 'professional clergy' and pew-sitting laity. There are only ministers who look to leaders to mobilize and release ministry through them. All 'participants' are full partners."**

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# POSTMODERN CULTURE IS IMAGE-DRIVEN

## The modern world

was once word-based, but no more. Images drive people and influence opinions and attitudes. In fact, images are the closest thing the world has to a universal language. We must understand that cultures are symbol systems—intricate, interwoven webs of metaphors, symbols, and stories. The Church, however, seems to have lost the understanding that pictures and stories are powerful ways of conveying truths. Today, churches too frequently rely on creedal expressions and laws rather than on the kind of parables taught by Jesus.

We must begin to use metaphors in our teaching if we are to reach the postmodern person. The metaphor lodges truth in a person's imagination. Humans think in images, not words; this is why it is so important to use images in worship and in preaching.

Visual language (metaphor evangelism and metaphor preaching) is no longer optional for the Church. We are print-saturated, but technology is creating a whole new visual culture.

**"Propositions are lost on postmodern ears; but metaphor they will hear, images they will see and understand. Image dictionaries are replacing word dictionaries, and image banks are becoming as valuable as money banks."**

We must understand that metaphors are causes, more than consequences, of our reasoning. Icon-parables alter our perception of what is. Icon-parable

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storytelling helps us make decisions we need to make or reverse decisions we have already made.

Postmodern culture is a double-ring culture and metaphors are themselves a double ring. Philosopher Max Black calls them [metaphors] "two ideas in one phrase." This comes from the shaping influence of postmodern thought of chaos theory and complexity sciences, which look at an entire system, rather than dissect the parts. In searching for likenesses and similarities, complexity thinking invites metaphorical thinking and linking.

**"We are the offspring of our outlook. Thoughts are literal 'things.' Especially when they take the form of images, thoughts are missiles you hurl from your head that can help or hurt others. Change your thoughts and you change your life and the lives of those around you."**

While it is important for the Church to use metaphors or images in its preaching, there are also "bad" images and "bad words" in the world. Negative images can harm children. Although we Christians strive to keep pornography out of the hands of our children, we often fail to shield them from violence. We need to be consistent in keeping harmful images out of their minds.

Cognitive theorists say that we have at least 60,000 thoughts a day~that is one thought every 1.44 seconds. These thoughts may be good or bad, true or false, pure or impure. Unless we subject our thoughts to Christ, we will be subjugated by them.

What does violence do to our minds or to the minds of children? Filmmaker Samuel Peckinpah once thought that his violent films would be cathartic and that these films would force society to reduce the levels of real violence in the culture; he eventually realized he was wrong. Movies like *The Wild Bunch* had the opposite effect from what he had intended. These movies "excited and

energized audiences" to act out in real life the violence they had viewed on the screen.

What life lessons are children learning from films or videogames? The evidence linking "GI" to "GO" ("Garbage In" to "Garbage Out") violence in society is compelling. Parents must keep bad images away from children. But Hollywood must do its part as well. Hollywood is the image factory for the world. The producers~either

willingly or unwillingly~must become partners with parents in reducing the levels of bloodshed and violence in films and videogames.

The ultimate solution to post-modern culture's mental and moral pollution, of course, is to fill hearts and minds with the redeeming news of the Gospel.



## POSTMODERNISTS ARE CONNECTED BY CHOICE

The two most popular terms on the Internet are connection and community. These have now been combined into the term "connexity," to describe both. The Web is becoming less of an information source and more of a social medium; it is becoming the new town square of the global village. Paradoxically, those who have pursued individualism are being driven to a hunger for connectedness, for communities of choice, not of blood or nationality.

**"The new cyberfriends and connections one finds in E-life will only stir up the hunger for face-to-face community. The more wired to the world our electronic cottages (castles?) become, the more the church will need to be places that can form authentic community where individuals can be free to be themselves. The words St. Augustine addressed to God ring anew in postmodern ears: 'Where I am most inwardly myself, there You were far more than I.'"**

Relationship issues stand at the heart of the postmodern culture. In order to reach the postmodern individual, the Church must upgrade in four areas of ministry:

- It must put the "salve" in salvation. The Church must reinvent the concept of connection and connectedness to fit the post-modern context. Preachers must be online with preaching, teaching, and healing outreaches.

- It must deal with the complex art of simple living. Churches must decentralize and yet remain complex. Churches can begin by decentralizing worship in cell groups. Churches must also have a global vision. They must be on the Web to reach untold millions of unchurched individuals.

- Churches must be "well storied." Storytelling must become a central part of the message to the lost. We live in a storied world and human cognition is based on storytelling, or as one researcher has put it, stories are "the fundamental instrument of thought." Multi-media presentations should be utilized in churches to reach the post-modernist.

- The Church should get moving. In other words, the Church must be active in transforming the world. Social transformation must be the result of Church involvement in the postmodern culture.



# BREAKING THE RULES~ JUST AS JESUS DID

Two members of the Gallup Organization surveyed more than 80,000 managers in 400 companies and wrote a book, *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. They noted that:

- Fred Smith broke the rule that only the Post Office could deliver mail and founded Federal Express.
- Steve Jobs broke the rule that computers couldn't be designed for home use and founded Apple.
- Anita Roddick said that cosmetics weren't about glamour and fantasy, but about health and well-being. She founded The Body Shop.
- Howard Schultz broke the rules about coffee and founded Starbucks.

Jesus of Nazareth, however, was the greatest of rule breakers. During His life, He:

- Broke the rules of religion by healing on the Sabbath, eating unclean food, and failing to fast when He was supposed to.
- Broke the rules of philosophy at the time when "truth" was found in tradition and custom. He found truth in relationships and people.
- Broke the rules of society: He ate with untouchables, talked to women, touched lepers, welcomed children into the Kingdom, and blessed the poor.
- Broke the rules of propriety: He was accused of eating and drinking too much.
- Broke the rules of sin and death. He broke the ruling powers of the grave and made rebirth possible for all.

**"Jesus broke the rules of philosophy: at a time when truth was found in tradition and custom, Jesus found truth in relationships and people."**

The Church needs to break free of tradition and think in new ways; it must break the rules to reach the new Internet generation.

Christendom is divided into the Old World Churches and the New World Churches. These Churches move at different speeds, prize different values, measure success differently, and think differently. While the Old thinks in terms of big and small, the New thinks in terms of fast and slow.

The Old World Church is book-centric, while the New World Church is Web-centric. The Old refuses to change its culture to become more accessible. It wants to live a separated lifestyle. Old Churches profoundly misunderstand the world in which we are living. They fear change and the unknown, particularly the Internet.

The New World Church, however, wants to live a sanctified lifestyle in the world—not separated from it. It is reverent about the Gospel message, but it is agnostic about the medium. The New centralizes complexity and decentralizes simplicity. The New also understands that the age of print is over and uses the Web to communicate to its modern audience.



## A PARTICIPATIVE MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

The 21st century Church must be **Experiencial, Participative, Image-based, and Communal (EPIC)** in order to become and remain relevant. Unfortunately, the Old Church is trapped in a monocular outlook about the world and God. The New World Church sees, with both eyes, a world that exists and extends beyond itself—a world that is, nevertheless, a creation of itself.

Three schools of thought and culture comprise this EPIC methodology:

- Postmodern hermeneutics
- The hard sciences
- Cognition research

### Postmodern Hermeneutics

In previous times, modernists were trained to use a critical method to analyze the world. The modernist used cold logic and hard facts to view the world or discover truth. The postmodernist uses "participant-observation" (versus arms-length analysis) as the primary means of determining truth. The analytical approach is typically suspect, often viewed in the same way that polls, surveys, and government data are viewed: all can be manipulated to achieve the intended result.

Postmodern theorists are charting new courses as they uncover fresh ways to discover truth. Their techniques tend to be relational, experiential, image-based and celebratory/communal, as opposed to empirical and objective. Objectivity cannot be the sole goal in the pur-

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**A PARTICIPATIVE MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY**  
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suit of truth. Love can be as much a mode of knowledge as the old scientific method's detachment.

There is an imbalance today between the values people attach to modern scientific modes of thought and the cognitive capacities we use in our spiritual and experiential life as ways of "knowing" the truth; truth can be known in more than one way. For example, there is more than one way to "know" a flower. One can know the flower by critiquing it or experimenting with it and tearing it apart to analyze its components. The other way—more biblical and more eastern—is to experience it. It is to enter in rather than stand back from it, and to enjoy its beauty. Knowledge by dissection takes things apart; knowledge by dance (gestures, smell, taste, touch) puts them together.

**“The cultural imbalance is huge between the values attached to modern ‘scientific’ modes of thought, which has often been the only game in town, and the cognitive capacities of our spiritual and experimental life to ‘know’ the truth and to be set free by it .”**

We must realize that God created our minds, even giving us divine capacities. God enabled us to perceive reality, as well as to create new realities. We are both observer and participant at the same time. As this relates to the Church, a worshipper can be both active and reflective, participating and observing.

### **Hard Sciences**

One of the most difficult issues of life is the nature of truth. Here science itself is pioneering a new

"scientific method" and showing how the old scientific method in pursuit of truth was not sound. The implications of this new method for the Church is monumental.

These new methods are coming out of the study of physics. Particle physicist Edwin Schrodinger, for example, states the new scientific paradigm: The world has not been given to us twice—once in spiritual or psychological terms and once in material terms. The world has been given once. The distinction between subjectivity and objectivity has been useful, but specious.

Both Albert Einstein and Karl Popper have stressed that scientific advances do not come through the logic of induction, but through imaginative leaps of faith. A "paradigm shift" is an act of faith that creates new facts and new realities.

Values and faith commitments become rational parts of the scholar's search for truth. Post-modern intellectual integrity implies not methodological atheism, but the belief in the participant-observer. Every scientist plays both object and subject, resident and tourist, participant and observer.

As physicist Fred Alan Wolf has observed of quantum physics: "The universe does not exist independent of the thought of the observer" and "You will see it when you believe it." We both participate in and observe our universe.

This view is also held by philosopher Nancy Murphy who has written, "...changes in philosophical approaches in understanding causation, and changes in science itself, have in effect removed the major obstacles to belief in God's continuing action in the world. At the same time, these changes free us to pray expectantly. As a father is moved to act by the pleas of his children, Jesus tells us, so too is

God moved to act by the pleas of his friends."

## **Cognition Theories**

A third set of influences pushing the Church toward an EPIC model is the postmodern critique of the modern mindset, especially the emergence of a new interdisciplinary matrix dedicated to the study of the mind called "cognitive sciences."

Historian John Lukas calls "the mental intrusion into the structure of events" the most important fact of our time. The field of cognitive sciences involves neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, genetics, computer science, anthropology and philosophy.

While some theologians lament the loss of modernity's fixed foundations and grounded reference points, others are encouraged by this development. We must learn how to live and move in an interdependent, relational mindset, shifting our perspectives from control to flow, from abstract and disembodied reason to embodied and imaginative reason, and from representation to participation.

**Every scientist plays both the object and subject, resident and tourist, participant and observer.**

Barbara McClintock, for example, is a geneticist who won the Nobel Prize in 1983 for her lifetime

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**A PARTICIPATIVE MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY**

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work on the genetics of corn. She dissented from the modern way of knowing and suspended the boundaries between subject and object. She decided to let the experiment tell her what to do. She developed a "feeling for the organism" she was studying. For her, truth was as much hearing~listening to the material~as it was seeing~looking at the hypothesis.

EPIC worship does not need to shelve our Enlightenment inheritance of rational, linear worship. Nor do we need to embrace anti-rationalism and demonize reason, logic and rules of evidence. We do not need to embrace the idea that the mind constructs the world on its own terms. We do need to admit the problems inherent in absolutist thinking without giving up the belief in absolutes. There is no longer "absolute space" or "absolute time," but this doesn't mean we should adopt anarchy or relativism.

In the world of Cheshire-cat absolutes, one absolute remains: Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In EPIC epistemology, one does not negate objectivism with subjectivism. In EPIC epistemology, rationality is expanded to include experience.

We both observe the world and worship the God who created everything in it. At the same time we participate in creating God's world by creatively imaging God's ongoing creation as drivers of social change. God has so structured the universe that we get to participate in His ongoing creation, as drivers of social change.

**In this new way of knowing, freedom and relationship do not cancel each other out; they interpenetrate one another and help create one another.**

The concept of the observer-participant in worship does not give up critical methods, but rather places them within a larger matrix of reality. In the paradoxical harmony of objective and subjective truth, a way of knowing emerges. It is characterized by partnership in knowledge, not mastery of knowledge.

While EPIC can be classified as postmodern, it is still in the biblical tradition. In this, the postmodern takes us "back to the future." For Jesus, "truth" was not propositions, or the property of sentences. Truth is what is revealed through our participation and interaction with Him, others, and the world.



## Coming Next Month:

### THE DISCONNECTED GENERATION

by Josh McDowell  
(Word)

**THE SPIRIT OF REVIVAL:**  
Discovering the Wisdom  
of Jonathan Edwards  
by Archie Parrish  
and R.C. Sproul  
(Crossway)

### JESUS AMONG OTHER GODS

by Ravi Zacharias  
(Word)



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