

**BOOK REVIEW**  
of  
Douglas Groothuis,  
*Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*,  
InterVarsity Press, 2000.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Groothuis says in the Introduction: “some claim that the whole modernist world has fallen apart and that we are held fast by nothing certain, nothing objective, nothing absolute, nothing universal. . . . We have entered post-modernity . . . Postmodernism, broadly understood, has dispensed with Truth.” It is Groothuis’ burden in this book to (1) critique postmodernism and show that it is sorely wanting and is an impossible position to hold consistently, (2) correct postmodernism and show where it has gone wrong, (3) demonstrate where postmodernism has crept, sometimes unknowingly and sometimes with fanfare, into the Evangelical Church, and (4) teach how to take postmodernism into account when attempting to present Christianity to our contemporary society. What complicates the picture is that there is a broad spectrum of philosophical assumptions in our society, most think extremely inconsistently about such things, and most probably think such things are irrelevant. Nevertheless, Groothuis is convinced that postmodernism has influenced, to one degree or another, just about everyone, and that it presents a significant challenge to the Church in that pre-evangelism is most-often required before Christian truth can even get a hearing.

Douglas Groothuis is professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary. He doesn’t present any summary in the book of his own background, but he definitely presents the subject from an evangelical position and favorably quotes reformed authors. The book is endorsed by David Wells, James Sire, Phillip Johnson and Os Guinness.

“Modernism” has been with us a long time. It is the philosophical position that began with the “Enlightenment,” getting its start perhaps about a century after the Protestant Reformation and continuing still. It has a basic commitment to rationality, scepticism, empiricism, and naturalism. It has contributed significantly to the rise of science and technology, but due to its naturalism has often been hostile to Christianity. A debate between a Christian apologist and a “Modernist” would likely involve historical and other forms of evidence, logic, etc. A Modernist and a Christian may well have similar thought patterns and approaches to reality, but simply differ as to what is true. The Modernist position is the logical one for the agnostic or the atheist.

“Postmodernism” is much more recent. While having its roots in Nietzsche (1844 –1900), it has only grown to prominence in recent years. C.S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and others saw it coming, but it is only now that the walls have fallen and the enemy is within the city. Being oblivious to the menace doesn’t make it any less sinister. Being familiar with it helps significantly in understanding our society, the people in it, and perhaps even ourselves. To the Postmodernist nothing is true in any objective sense. Something may be true for you, and something else may be true for another. And it is of no consequence if those two “trues” are perhaps contradictory. What matters is community, a sense of self worth, and whatever makes us “happy.” Whatever is “true,” is whatever we, as a community (even a community of one), agree to make “true.” As tragic as airplanes being used by terrorists as weapons of destruction may be, the threat of Postmodernism to civilization and Christianity is overwhelmingly greater. This is so in no small part because of the natural appeal of Postmodernism to fallen human nature. It’s the lazy person’s almost obvious choice of philosophy. No need to struggle to understand things correctly! No need to be sure that you have the facts straight! What feels good *is* good! My “truth” is just as good as yours, even if I just made mine up! If we don’t like certain things in our history books, let’s just rewrite them! If I can’t get it straight that two plus two equals four, no matter! If the original intent of the writer’s of the constitution doesn’t please me, why let’s just interpret it to mean something else! No need for school boards, or their advisors, to concern themselves with whether macro evolution has the support of scientific evidence or not, if it is what the community takes as being “true,” then it *is* “true.” How can civilization stand if such things are embraced full scale? At the personal or at the community level, Postmodernism is deathly destructive.

How should a Christian respond to this menace? There is no better starting place than reading this book by Douglas Groothuis. While it contains a good deal of thought provoking material, it is well written and easy to read.