The pursuit of biblical theology, to which this journal is devoted, occurs in a time of deep cultural change. The well-known code number Y2K marks the beginning of a new era, often called the postmodern age. The beginning of this new age, however, cannot be pin-pointed exactly on the calendar at the year 2000, the approach of which seemed to threaten our computer systems and set off outbursts of millennial hope. When Adam and Eve left the garden, they are said to have murmured to each other, as we do, "This is a time of transition!" Transition is not an event but a process of change. Historians say that in the United States postmodernism evolved during the period 1960-1990, but its roots go back much further. Already the new age has had profound effects upon our culture, and has challenged the church to reconsider how to proclaim the gospel in the new cultural situation.

Theologians have responded in various ways to postmodernism. One of the best responses is the book by Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, written from the standpoint of evangelical Christianity. Grenz observes that postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon, evident in architecture, literature, theater, philosophy, art, and music. Indeed, he claims that it is best represented in so-called rock music concerts which feature plurality of styles, mass gatherings, appeals to the imagination, and much more that baffles the older generation. Above all, he observes, postmodernism is an "intellectual outlook," a philosophy of life, a way of understanding our human situation. Therefore it presents a challenge to the church to re-examine its theological statements and to express the Christian faith in new ways and with new accents.

Note: This essay is based on an address given at Haggard School of Theology, Azusa Pacific University, October 1999, during a centennial celebration and specifically in honor of Professor John Hartley for his thirty years of scholarship and service.

The question with which I am wrestling in this essay is the role of the Bible in the postmodern age. As I survey the field from an octogenarian vantage point, that is the basic issue in biblical theology today. Compared to the deep-sea change of postmodernism, all other currents of biblical theology are surface eddies.

Modernism and Beyond

What, then, is postmodernism? Whatever it is, it is "post" (after, beyond) modernism, the cultural atmosphere we have breathed throughout the twentieth century. Modernism prevailed in "the good old days" when I went to college and began my ministry in the United Methodist Church with high idealism. In those halcyon days the great prophet of modernism was Harry Emerson Fosdick, minister of Riverside Church in New York City. He was widely influential through his sermons broadcast on National Vespers every Sunday and through his writings, such as The Modern Use of the Bible or A Guide to Understanding the Bible, which was a recommended text when I studied at Yale Divinity School in the 1940s.

The two cardinal convictions of modernism are: faith in reason as a discriminating and constructive power, and the value and freedom of the individual, the autonomous person. Rationalism and individualism: there you have modernism in a nutshell. Rationalism manifest, for instance, in the role of science, and individualism manifest, for instance, in unrestrained market economy. Modernism finds expression in the "rugged individualism" of American history, typified by the gun-toting John Wayne who overthrows the "bad guys" and establishes law and order so that individuals may exercise their inalienable freedom, guaranteed by the Constitution. And the computer is the great symbol of the power of reason, though the way my computer thinks sometimes baffles my sense of logic. In a recent essay on The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, Roger

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2 New York: Macmillan, 1924.