

The Fatal Embrace? A Critical Reflection on Carl Raschke's Proposal, Why Conservative Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity?

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Abstract: *At the turn of the millennium, recent debates within evangelical Christian circles on 'appropriating' postmodern thinking into evangelical Christian theology raised a number of issues on whether postmodern thinking can provide a suitable standpoint that offers a philosophical critique on modern dualistic thinking, for some, that is imbedded in modern evangelical Christian theology. Carl Raschke, an evangelical scholar, critically contends that evangelical Christian scholars must embrace postmodernity (postmodernism) as a new form of Reformation. At first glance, Raschke ask whether evangelical Christians have such reason to embrace postmodern thinking, eventually, he critically presented why evangelical Christians do have good a reason for 'appropriating' postmodern thinking. In this paper, firstly, I will introduce Carl Raschke as a Christian Evangelical postmodern thinker. Secondly, I will provide an exposition of Raschke's main argument and criticism on evangelical Christian theology from his popular book, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (2004). Lastly, I will provide concluding comments.*

Keywords: *Appropriation, Evangelical Christian, Postmodernity, Postmodern Thinking, Reformation*

Introduction

Postmodern thinking is the threat of the age, or we are told. The threat, in the least in reality, has at times ruined the foundational claims of Christian Theology. Over the decades, there have been many attempts by religious scholars and philosophers to address postmodern thinking (its ontology, epistemology, interpretation, ethics, etc.). In his famous classical

essay, *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?*, Jean-Francois Lyotard attempts to describe and explain the notion of postmodernism. For Lyotard, postmodernism, in general, was a reaction to the failures of modernity (example, end of the grand narrative) and unfulfilled promises of the Enlightenment project, in terms of the moral, philosophical, and scientific challenges.¹ Lyotard writes, "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a strong sense of the unrepresentable."²

Yet, there are still problems and various ways of defining "postmodernism" or "postmodernity." The term has a quite different signification in contemporary philosophical, sociological, and theological discourses.³ There is much disagreement among contemporary thinkers about the hows and whys of postmodern thinking. For example, Jürgen Habermas and Slavoj Žižek, are two important contemporary worldly philosophers who are critical to the postmodern thinking. Habermas, a famous living German social thinker, argues that we should not give up the project of Enlightenment (Modern) in favor of postmodernism. Habermas writes, "...should we try to hold on to the intentions of the Enlightenment, feeble as they may be, or should we declare the entire project of modernity a lost cause?"⁴

Now, the question is why Habermas is not willing to give up the Enlightenment project in favor of postmodernism or postmodern thinking? Robert C. Holub, a leading scholar in the 19th and 20th century German intellectual, provides an executive summary of Habermas' criticism of postmodernists.⁵ *Firstly*, postmodernists are ambivalent about whether they are reconstructing a

¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi Foreword by Fredric Jameson, *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 10, (USA: Manchester University Press, 1984), 71-84.

² Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (1984), 81.

³ Czeslaw Bassara, *Postmodern Hermeneutics and the Evangelical Response*, A Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, From the Evangelical Theological Faculty-Leuven, Belgium. September 2006, 34-47.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," translated by Seyla Ben-Habib, *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism. (Winter, 1981): 9, 3-14.

⁵ Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 158-159.

serious system or literature. Holub argues, via Habermas, that postmodernists' work becomes incomprehensible due to their refusal to engage in the institutionally established vocabularies.⁶ *Secondly*, Habermas is under the impression that postmodernists are inspired by moral sentiments or normative sentiments, however what are those sentiments and why is this hidden from the readers? Holub argues that the reader is unable to understand what postmodernists are really up to. He questions why they are evaluating society from their own intentions. *Thirdly*, Holub argues that Habermas accuses postmodernism of being a totalizing perspective that fails to differentiate phenomenon and practices that occur within modern society.⁷ For example, Habermas contends, postmodern social analysis does not presuppose any concrete answer to sources of the modern oppression. *Lastly*, Habermas accuses postmodernists of ignoring the absolute central---everyday life and its practices.⁸

Slavoj Žižek, another prominent contemporary social thinker, criticises postmodernist philosophy that fits to the ideology of global capitalism. According to Žižek, "The central paradox (and perhaps the most succinct definition) of postmodernity is that the very process of production, the laying-bare of its mechanism, functions as the fetish which conceals the crucial dimension of the form, that is, of the social mode of production."⁹ Similar with Žižek's observation, Hans van Zon cite Jean-Claude Guillebaud, a famous French writer and essayist, succinctly describes what is postmodernity or postmodernism, "Postmodernity fits very well with the cult of authenticity and an attitude of 'anything goes' (in whatever field). Postmodernism lumps together individualism and autonomy and places the 'me' in the centre of its projects. In postmodernism everything normative is experienced as repressive. Each individual should establish for himself what is good or bad."¹⁰

With the rise of postmodern philosophy, new initiatives, both

⁶ Holub, Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere, 158.

⁷ Holub, Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere, 159.

⁸ Deborah Cook, "Symbolic Exchange in Hyperreality." In D. Kellner (ed.), Baudrillard: A Critical Reader, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 150-167.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies, (New York: Verso Publications, 1997), 130, 107-160.

¹⁰ Hans von Zon, "The Unholy Alliance of Neoliberalism and Postmodernism," Poltieke Filosofie, Jaargang 47 Nummer 2 I (Zomer, 2013): 110-114.

Catholics and Protestants (including Evangelicals),¹¹ take up the challenges of postmodern thinking. Just the term, ‘postmodern’ forays fear and abjection in the hearts and minds of pastors, seminary students, and others involved in Christian scholarship.

In the introduction I have highlighted the fact that is unresolved among social thinkers. Also, I observed, Christian theologians appears to perceive and respond differently to postmodern thinking. From varying viewpoints and distinctions, how can postmodern thinking contribute to Christian thinking? This question is long standing and has been addressed by various Christian and non-Christian scholars. Some Christian theologians argue that we could appropriate postmodern themes into our Christian philosophy. For example, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Paul Griffiths, and Stanley Hauerwas; also commonly known as the Postliberal theologians of “Yale School”.¹² Although Postliberal theologies often subsumes differences and diversities, Ronald T. Michener, an associate professor of systematic theology and chair of the Department of Systematic Theology at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, offers succinct descriptions and characteristics of Postliberal theological propositions,

*There are variety of ways to describe and divide these sometimes overlapping and interconnected themes of Postliberal theology. On reflection, we suggest that there are at least five basic themes or characteristics representative of the various expressions of Postliberal theology: (1) it is non-foundationalist (2) it is intra-textual (3) it is socially centered or community first, (4) it respects plurality and diversity (5) it embraced a generous orthodoxy.*¹³

For Michener, however, even though postmodern thinking

¹¹ Although this concept is contested among evangelical Christians, I preferred to use the American descriptions of ‘evangelical Christianity’ based on Grey Matter Research & Consulting Phoenix, Arizona, (2008). Also, it fits to what Carol Raschke tries to address and challenge. According to 2008 survey, evangelical Christian basically describes as the following; who zealously convert others to faith, strong reliance on the Scripture (Gospel), sometime fanatical, they want to impose their belief or standard. See “American’s Definition: What is Evangelical Christian?” http://greymatterresearch.com/index_files/Grey_Matter_Report_Americans_Define_Evangelical.pdf.

¹² Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (UK: Bloomsbury Publication, 2013), 1-11; Hock Siew Lee, “Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: A Critique of Postmodern Epistemology,” A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology at the South African Theological Seminary in May 2009. Also, see James K. A Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, foreword by John Milbank, (US: Baker Publishing, 2004).

¹³ Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (UK: Bloomsbury Publication, 2013), 4-9.

offers numerous critics and useful theological arguments against hardcore secular modernism, many Christian theologians are still not willing to embrace such 'appropriation' model of postmodern thinking into evangelical Christian philosophy. For example, Douglas Groothuis sees its fundamental propositions as intellectually flawed and hostile to Christian belief system and values. Groothuis writes, "Nevertheless, the conclusion that postmodernists draw from these claims are not only hostile to the Christian notion of truth but are seriously intellectually flawed..."¹⁴

For some, they perceived pro and anti-postmodern thinking as polarized positions that led to simplistic arguments against postmodern discourse. To explain the contemporary contradiction of human existence and global crisis, they argue to seek a holistic, integrated, and middle way between extremes. They find pro and anti-postmodernism thinking as two types of exaggeration. As Christian scholars, they argue that we can also benefit from the interaction with postmodern thinking, including modernism. For example, Czeslaw Bassara, a Ph.D. graduate of Evangelical Theological Faculty-Leuven, conducted a critical evaluation of postmodern thinking vis-à-vis Christian thinking in his dissertation project, one of his conclusions, he writes, "We need to acknowledge the holistic and relational aspects of postmodernism as developed by post-critical thinkers."¹⁵

From a balanced point of view, Bassara points out that calling this idea into question does not mean dismissing the valuable contributions of postmodern thinking to Christian philosophy. Carl Raschke, an American Christian postmodern thinker was compelled to address this challenge. Raschke published a book in 2004 entitled, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, and was very provocative and controversial. The book gives an excellent introduction to the challenges and the prospects for debate on Christian postmodern thinking. There is a great deal of serious and technical content in this book for Christian philosophers and systematic theologians.

¹⁴ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, (USA: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16-31.

¹⁵ Czeslaw Bassara, *Postmodern Hermeneutics and the Evangelical Response*, A Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, From the Evangelical Theological Faculty-Leuven, Belgium. September 2006.

In this paper, I will focus on this book, how Raschke deals with postmodern thinking. The main outline of this paper is as follows. First, I will introduce Carl Raschke as a Christian postmodern thinker. Second, I will provide a book review of Raschke's famous publication, entitled: *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (2004). In the final part, is the conclusion.

A Short Biography of Carl Raschke

Carl Raschke is professor of religious studies at the Denver University, Colorado; best known as an active contributor to the Political Theology blog (www.politicaltheology.com/blog) and regular contributor to the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (www.jcrt.org), of which he was instrumental of founding in 1999.¹⁶ Raschke is a prolific author with a distinctive style, direct although sometimes obscure. His research interests include: continental philosophy/philosophy of religion, Political philosophy/political theology, world religions (including Islam), digital culture, and Globalization theory.¹⁷

An Overview Review of The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity

Philosophical, political, sociological, and cultural theories emerged as a new intellectual force in biblical-theological discourse, specifically its relationship with faith and revelation

¹⁶ Victor Taylor, "From Alchemy to Revolution: A Conversation with Carl Raschke," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 12 no. 3 (Spring 2013): 149-160.

¹⁷ Carl Raschke is professor of religious studies at the Denver University, Colorado; best known for an active contributor to the Political Theology blog (www.politicaltheology.com/blog) and regular contributor to the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (www.jcrt.org), which he was instrumental in founding in 1999. Raschke is a prolific author with a distinctive style, direct although sometime obscure. His research interests include: continental philosophy/philosophy of religion, Political philosophy/political theology, world religions (including Islam), digital culture, and Globalization theory. He published numerous books; *Religion and the Human Image* Editor and co-author with Mark C. Taylor and James Kirk (1976), *The Bursting of New Wineskins: Religion and Culture at the End of Affluence* (1978), *Fire and Roses: Postmodernity and the Thought of the Body* (1995), *The Engendering God. Male and Female Faces of God.* Co-authored with Susan D. Raschke (1996), *The End of Theology* (2000), *The Digital Revolution and the Coming of the Postmodern* (2002), *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (2004), *GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn.* *The Church and Postmodern Culture* (2008), *Postmodernism and the Revolution in Religious Theory: Toward a Semiotics of the Event.* *Studies in Religion and Culture* (2012), *Force of God: Political Theology and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy* (2015). Aside from his controversial commentaries on contemporary 'New Age Movement', *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* published in 2004, perhaps his well-known and provocative book especially among evangelical scholarship. See Carl Raschke, Faculty & Staff, University of Denver, <http://www.du.edu/ahss/religiousstudies/facultystaff/raschke.html>. Accessed May 3, 2017.

often marked by mutual distrust, especially among Evangelicals. For typical evangelical Christians, behind the grip of postmodern thinking lies concepts such as, antifoundationalist, nihilism, and relativism. The notion of postmodern thinking as anti-Christian truth has been a colloquialism in evangelical Christians. In his book, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (2004), Raschke provides three main reasons why he wrote this manuscript. His intention were clear and straightforward. Firstly, he challenged and responds to what postmodernism really said, as opposed to what the polemicists are telling us too glibly.¹⁸ He depict it as simplistic and naïve reactionary force against postmodern thinking. Secondly, to offer a historical analysis on how evangelical Christianity made its own unholy alliance with Cartesian rationalism and British evidentialism as far back as the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Lastly, to explore and suggest how embracing, rather than simply vilifying, the postmodern turn in Western thought widens the prospect for evangelical Christianity.²⁰

Raschke starts this book with his personal story, spiritual journey, and ministry (Preface) that led him to engage the postmodern thinking.²¹ The book is divided into nine (9) chapters: *Chapter 1*, Postmodernism and the Crisis of Evangelical Thought; *Chapter 2*, The New French Revolution: Derrida and the Origins of Postmodernism; *Chapter 3*, The Religious Left Bank: Origins of Religious Postmodernism; *Chapter 4*, Sola Fide: Beyond Worldviews; *Chapter 5*, Sola Scriptura: Beyond Inerrancy; *Chapter 6*, The Priesthood of All Worshippers: From Hierarchy to Relationality; *Chapter 7*, Thoroughly Postmodern Ministry: Postmodern Revivalism; *Chapter 8*, Dancing with the Lord: Charismatic Renewal and the Deconstruction of Worship; *Chapter 9*, The End of Theology: The Next Reformation. Raschke's strategy, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, is to first explicate the primary notion of postmodernism, and its impact on the face of academic culture, and the outlook of postmodern thinking to evangelical Christianity,

¹⁸ Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, (USA: Baker Publishing, 2004), 9.

¹⁹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 9.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 7.

and then, crisis of evangelical Christian thought.²²

Carl Raschke Argument and Criticism of Conservative Evangelical Christian Theology

A. The misperceptions of evangelical scholarship about Postmodern Thinking

In a discussion on the possibility of appropriating postmodern thinking in evangelical Christian theology, Raschke examines in detail the main demands of how evangelical Christianity understand postmodern thinking. Chapter 1, 2, and 3, Raschke identifies the challenge of postmodern thinking and discusses those misperceptions of evangelical Christians about postmodern thinking as a kind of agent provocateur (persuades another person to commit an unacceptable and immoral act). Afterward, he discusses the crisis of evangelical Christian thought. Raschke recognized the valuable contributions of postmodern thinkers such as, Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Giles Deleuze, Emmanuel Levinas, Frederic Jameson, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean Baudrillard.

The next section, Raschke strongly criticises Doug Groothuis's popular book, *The Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*. Raschke argues,

The value of Groothuis's book was not that it had anything of substance to say, philosophically or theologically, against postmodernism. Groothuis rarely cited or presented the offending texts of postmodernist writers, preferring instead to use the familiar rhetorical device of associating the term 'postmodernist' with every avant-garde intellectual trend that has come down the pike since Vietnam era...Of course, Groothuis found himself making many of the same arguments against postmodernists that American and British philosophers had been making against the claims of Christianity for generations²³

²² Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 11.

²³ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 15.

Raschke added,

Oddly enough, Groothuis sound a lot like Bertrand Russell in his famous, or infamous essay, Why I am Not a Christian. In this essay, delivered in 1927 to the national Security Society in London, Russell lambasted the history of the church as a record of 'irrational' enthusiasms. Christians are silly and stupid people because they base their belief on emotion rather than 'argumentations,' Russell huffed. Christian beliefs are non-negotiable when it comes to the use of logical analysis and scientific evidence.²⁴

After demonstrating the misperceptions of evangelical scholarship about postmodernism, he advance his arguments by contending that postmodernism is congenial with evangelicalism. Again, Raschke attacks Groothuis' term, 'minimal foundationalism'. According to him, it is actually an updated version of what the Western philosophical tradition has dubbed 'commonsense empiricism' (extreme scepticism by David Hume).²⁵ Aside from this, he also critics the antifoundationalist attacks toward postmodern thinking. By citing Bruce Ellis Benson, he argues that modern evangelical movements committed an act of modern ideology due to arrogant attitude about Christian truth. He called this, 'modernist idolatry'.²⁶ Raschke reiterating his critique against this theological propositions and simplistic vilification of Groothuis toward postmodern thinking. He writes, "The fact that most attacks on postmodernism have aimed at either generalities or caricatures of the movement, rather than at specific writers or the texts representing their arguments, and positions, suggests that the clash is far more one of apparel than substance."²⁷

Raschke's thought here is that postmodern thinking successfully demonstrates failures and arrogances of modern thinking, same as what modern Evangelical Christianity committed, that everything are comprehensible by universal rationalism (subjectivism), modern logic (apologetics), and empiricism--

²⁴ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 16-17.

²⁵ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 22-24.

²⁶ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 23.

²⁷ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*.

-Enlightenment ideology.²⁸ Moreover, Raschke claims that the origins of postmodernism is basically religious, nevertheless, evangelical Christian failed to recognize it and premature criticisms of postmodern thinking. He further argues that the modern evangelical Christianity are shaped and influenced by modern rationalism (propositionalists), in result, they perceive God as logical, however, it does not follow. In response, he argues that the biblical God, the God of Abraham... the God of Jacob..., is relational or even mystical.²⁹ For him, this is exactly what postmodern thinking is trying to establish by prioritizing ‘*theos*’ over ‘*logos*’ and to negate totalizing thoughts built on modern idolatry.³⁰ To conclude this section, Keith C. Sewell succinctly summarise chapter 1, 2, and chapter 3 of Raschke’s proposals, he writes,

Modernism is driven and controlled by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Evangelical anti-liberalism should not fool us here because in their characteristic outlooks, both liberalism and fundamentalism have absorbed more of the assumptions of the Enlightenment, with its rational foundationalism, than most evangelicals appreciate (140f.). Where evangelicals offer critiques of postmodernism, aligning themselves with contemporary neo-conservatism, they tend to unintentionally mimic recent “modernist” liberalism, adopting a pro-objectivist posture (12). Yet, at the same time, the pragmatic and opportunistic side of evangelicalism absorbs the mores of postmodernity, even while criticizing its sidelining of “objective truth” and “rationality” (15, cf. 92-5).³¹

B. Revelation precedes presupposition

In chapters 4 and 5, he discusses the presuppositionalist theologians or theologians of worldview (the scion of Dutch neo-Calvinism). One of the leading Christian scholars, according to Raschke, is evangelist Francis Schaeffer, including Abraham

²⁸ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 27-33.

²⁹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 81.

³⁰ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 57-59.

³¹ Keith C. Sewell, *The Book Review of The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, by Carl A. Raschke, *Pro. Rege*, Volume 34 Number 4 (June, 2006): 32-35.

Kuyper. He critically evaluates Francis Schaeffer's apologetic method---'Christian Socratism'.³² However, he favored and appreciated John Caputo more than 'theologians of worldview' or commonly known as 'presuppositionalist theologians'. Somehow, he was quite adamant to the certitude of presuppositionalist theologians. Similar with Kevin Vanhoozer's argument that faith is a drama,³³ for Raschke, faith is not a presupposition but is before and beyond presupposition. He writes,

*The loss of foundation in postmodernism is a welcome development, because faith itself--not some discursive banner of certitude—is the only sure 'foundation.' Faith is not in itself a superior presupposition that warrants somehow an equally superior worldview. Faith is not a presupposition at all. Faith is prior to all presuppositions, or presuppositionalisms. Faith is presuppositionless. Faith shatters the idol of the age. Faith is open to radical thought, even a radical thought that seems to question the very precept of 'foundationalism,' because it is secure in itself.*³⁴

Contrary to the misperception of some evangelical Christians, Raschke does not mean that we do not have any ontological and epistemological foundations. For Raschke, our present uncritical certitude should not prevent us to correct, reform, and improve by what we learn in some. To simply put, our current Christian presuppositions should be open to possibilities of reforming our religious worldviews and practices. Also, Raschke urges Christians to retreat into the fortress of fixed and immutable doctrine found in the various fundamentalist movements. For Raschke, an unexamined faith is not worth having and living.

C. Dehellenizing evangelical faith

In chapter 5, he addresses the authority of the Scripture. Raschke argues that we need to dehellenize our evangelical faith.³⁵

³² Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 104-105.

³³ See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

³⁴ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 114.

³⁵ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 131-

Furthermore, he contends that the infallible authority of Scripture is derived from what twentieth-century philosophers have been describing as ‘category mistake’.³⁶ In short, it is misapplied, irrelevant, and a modern categorisation (example the higher criticism school of modern interpretation). Raschke added, in the postmodern argot we can say that Scripture is not a system of ‘facts,’ but ‘traces’ of the divine fullness.³⁷ In concluding this chapter, he writes,

*The task of biblical interpretation is not an autonomous human endeavor but a response to God’s command. We can quibble over such terms as ‘inerrant,’ ‘inspired,’ does not rest on whether it is logically and seamlessly consistent and free of ‘errors,’ as the medieval theologians with their appreciation for the rule of aequivocation understood... We can say that the Bible is absolutely and unconditionally true because it is like saying ‘I do’ in our marriage vows---in this case our vows to God.*³⁸

D. Relational God versus hierarchical God

In chapter 6, he attacks hierarchical thinking in ontology and ethics. Raschke explores the significant philosophical and social contributions of Jean Baudrillard and Michael Foucault. He rejected the hierarchical thinking imbedded in our social system and culture.³⁹ He argues that we need to advance the notion of relational ontology.⁴⁰ For example, Stanley Grenz and John Franke developed a relational ontology and coupled it directly with the Christian doctrine of Trinity.⁴¹ He argues that post-Hegelian (postmodern), poststratationalist rule of Christian corporate life could be summed up as follows: the real is relational and the relational is real. On this intuition, the postmodern Christians take

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³⁶ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 134

³⁷ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 135.

³⁸ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 143.

³⁹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 145-

151.

⁴⁰ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 151-

154.

⁴¹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 152.

their stand.⁴² In chapter 7, he critically attacks the authoritarian nature of modern ministry. He claims that the modern concept of authority, as foundations and legalists, in the modern ministry is derived from modern philosophical epistemology, inaugurated by Descartes, and replaced classical authoritarianism with the deal of 'authorship.'⁴³ In contrast, grace is a rather disturbing event fostered by postmodernism like what Martin Luther emphasized during the reformation period, 'sola gratia'. He added, it is a revolution of grace.⁴⁴ Grace is the disturbing event that destabilises and delegitimizes any type of authoritarian regime. Raschke's goal for this chapter is modestly ambitious. He wishes to appropriate postmodern thinking in the pastoral theology. He wants us to widen our understanding of the pastoral ministry.

E. Global Pentecostalism/Charismatic Movement as a New Form of Reformation

In chapter 7, Raschke claims that the global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is a new form of Reformation. As global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is the fastest growing strand of Christianity, Raschke strongly claims, the emergence of global Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christianity is an emblematic form of postmodern evangelicalism. He further argues that global Pentecostal/Charismatic preachers are the best possible example of the appropriation of postmodern thinking in our time.⁴⁵ Despite of mainstream media put forward a different picture entirely about global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, Raschke argues, "...the image of Pentecostal along mainstream Christians, carries a somewhat derogatory connotation or distorted images that should be corrected."⁴⁶ For Raschke, however, the reality about global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is much more complex. Raschke further contends that global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement poses a serious challenge to establish forms of Christianity. They promote, as Raschke argues, non-

⁴² Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 158.

⁴³ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 172-173.

⁴⁴ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 178.

⁴⁵ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 179-205.

⁴⁶ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 187.

traditional form of spirituality and worship (liturgy).⁴⁷ For example, Pentecostals encourage loud music, emotional, and performative worship over traditional forms of Christian liturgy.⁴⁸

Finally, in chapter 9 (The End of Theology), Raschke repeatedly emphasizes that Christian faith is relational and not propositional truths (how the Enlightenment movement views it). Raschke writes, “For faith is the total surrender of one’s heart, mind and body to the infinite and Almighty God, who calls us into relation. Scripture is the voice that calls us into that revelation.”⁴⁹

F. The End of Theology

Next, Raschke clarifies his expression of ‘the end of theology’.⁵⁰ He argues that ‘end of theology’ implies a Copernican revolution in a provisional sense of the word with regard to language--linguistic turn.⁵¹ Nonetheless, he preferred a dialogical turn (Levinas, Hebraic, biblical) to overcome the metaphysics of Greek thought (ontotheology) imbedded in Western philosophical thinking.⁵² He writes,

*The overcoming of metaphysics entails more than the reduction of the representation to the sign and the repudiation of linguistic foundationalism. Iconoclasm only lays the groundwork for true worship. In order to worship and adore God philosophically, we must enter into relationship with him. And to enter into relationship with him we must set aside the dualism of subject and object that has overshadowed the tradition of Western thinking.*⁵³

In the final section (The Matrix and Mystery of Otherness), Raschke once again clarifies his slogan, ‘end of theology’. Generally speaking, Raschke contend that Christian theology should be liberated from artificial dichotomy or dualistic system of thought

⁴⁷ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 179-180.

⁴⁸ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*.

⁴⁹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 210.

⁵⁰ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 211-213.

⁵¹ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 211.

⁵² Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 212.

⁵³ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 212.

and drawing it back 'to God' of 'letting God be God'; it is not saying an invitation to a-theology (opposition to theology). He writes, "The end of theology as saying an adieu to theology is to 'say it like it is' (in French) --- literally, to God." Raschke continues, "It is the power of God liberating evangelical, if not the whole of Christian thought and theology from its long captivity in the Egypt of metaphysics and the Babylon of modernism and drawing it back 'to God,' of 'letting God be God,' in the face-to-face relationship of faith and worship. After theology we must all get on our faces."⁵⁴

Conclusion

The book purport to be a comprehensive overview of postmodern thinking, and its impact and contributions to evangelical Christian philosophy. This book is designed for general readers, particularly evangelical Christians, yet it will appeal also to specialists as an authoritative one-volume resource. For those who would understand all the basic debates and issues about postmodern thinking, this book is more than an introduction to them. Raschke attempts to articulate the broader background or horizon of the specific arrays of theological and moral crisis of Evangelicalism and modern thinking. Essentially, this work is a proposal for the appropriation of postmodern thinking to the present, in fact, Raschke goes beyond 'appropriation', he want us to be more proactive. He writes, "It is time for Christian intellectuals to regain the offensive after more than three hundred years of cravenly throwing incense before the statue of the modernist intellectual Caesar."⁵⁵

Carl Raschke is beyond question one of the most distinctive Christian figures (non) in the landscape of contemporary evangelical theologians. This raises a number of issues about whether postmodern thinking can provide a suitable standpoint from which to give a philosophical critique of modern dualistic thinking. I personally believe that it can, and that in general it can help us rethink our Christian theology (theological system) and make it more relevant to the everyday reality of human beings. Not all ideas covered in this book will be generally accepted, but they

⁵⁴ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 215.

⁵⁵ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*, 9.

do serve to stimulate continued critical reflection and discussion on the contents of evangelical philosophical theology. In my view, Raschke's proposal tries to offer important insights to non-Western discourses and a constructive criticism of fundamentalism among Evangelical Christians. He unmasks the dualistic legacies and the controlling discourse of the colonisation of modern thinking imbedded in modern evangelical theology. Through making use of postmodern thinking and its critics of modern metaphysics generates new terminologies and theoretical tools to explore the relational God in the non-Western discourse, particularly in Asian. With the emergence of contextual or intercultural theology, Raschke's proposal would be able to open up spaces for a dialogue with Asian discourse. For example, why is global Pentecostalism or Charismatic revivalism rapidly growing religious movements in the non-Western context like Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Perhaps, Raschke is right by stating that they are more biblically oriented (postpropositional and posttheological) than many of today's so called Bible churches. To conclude, this book provides a helpful starting point for those interested in the issue of postmodern thinking in relation with evangelical Christian thought. Overall, I agree with the Raschke proposal or invitation, it is not a 'fatal embrace' to appropriate postmodern thinking, in order to call for a new reformation movement that is responding to the challenges of theological dilemmas and moral crisis of the 21th century. As Raschke confidently say, 'Back to the Bible, back to the Mount of Olives, back to Sinai!'

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