
UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Modern and Postmodern
- 4.3 Shifting Religious Trend and Postmodernism
- 4.4 Multiple Implication of Spirituality
- 4.5 Postmodernism and Religion
- 4.6 Postmodernism and the Decline and Fall of Reason
- 4.7 Ways of Being Religious in the Postmodern World
- 4.8 Postmodern Religion
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Key Words
- 4.11 Further Readings and References
- 4.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Postmodernism is commonly understood to have emerged from a politics of the left. But when the concept was first used, postmodernism had a traditionalist meaning. It was a reaction to political, cultural and artistic movements whose perceived extremes were understood to be symptomatic of the cultural decline of the West. The first reference to postmodernism can be found in the year 1926 in the work of Bernard Iddings Bell entitled *Postmodernism and Other Essays*. Bell's postmodernism embodied ideas he believed to be superior to those associated with the modern era, such as the modern faith in the power of reason to free the human spirit from bondage arising out of ignorance and prejudice. Postmodern ideas would supersede modern ones. And they characterized the era that would follow on from the modern age; they defined the post-modern age. When Bell spoke of postmodernism, he referred to something that was both ideological and historical. It was a body of ideas and a new epoch. Bell considered postmodernism to be an intelligent alternative to the two rival ideologies that dominated Western Societies in the 1920's; ideologies that, regardless of their fundamental differences, shared values that he believed made them quintessentially modern. The main objective of this Unit is to give a feel of postmodern religious trends without going to its intricacies. In this unit we shall try to understand contemporary religious trends from a postmodern point of view. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of postmodern religion
- to differentiate it from traditional understanding
- to relate it with contemporary times
- to understand the postmodern concept of God

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Down through the centuries, there have been different ways of looking at the socio-politico-religious realities of the world. What is imperative is to engage in conversations and discourses that attempt to bring out some sort of a perspective about the contemporary world. On a higher level, these might be discourses, which synthesize sciences as a whole. In the contemporary world, one of the dominant ‘buzzwords’ in operation is ‘postmodernism’. The term ‘postmodernism’ has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to all-embracing systems of thought as Jean-François Lyotard called ‘Les gran récit’ or plainly addressed as meta-narratives or grand-narratives or master-narratives of Western thought. Postmodernism as viewed by Lyotard also stresses on the heterogeneity and fragmented character of socio-political and religious-cultural realities. Postmodernism refers to a paradigm shift in the way of thinking in the contemporary time.

Postmodernism is now a much debated topic, though one with rather fuzzy edges. Associated with so many different cultural phenomena, this fashionable subject seems to lack clear definition to establish precisely what it is. Perhaps it is part of the open-ended, reflexive and deeply doubting nature of the postmodern predicament itself that exact boundaries are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. In Jean François Lyotard’s influential work, *The Postmodern Condition*, originally published in French in 1979, postmodernism represents a radical break with the recent past, a condition which calls in particular the nature of modern knowledge and its effects on contemporary culture and consciousness into question. Lyotard views postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc. The changing status of scientific knowledge, the exponential growth of information, the new means of communication have all led to the dissolution of long-established certainties and thus created a crisis of legitimating and representation.

4.2 MODERN AND POSTMODERN

At one level one can argue that postmodern simply means something that is *no longer modern* but comes after it. It is not all that long ago that sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers focused much of their work on defining the characteristics of modernity in contrast to traditional with its premodern features of society and consciousness. The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word *modo*, meaning ‘just now’. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. It emphasized experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface appearance. The sociologist Peter Berger has been much concerned with understanding

modernity and its challenge for religion, which he has described as the necessity, the imperative, to choose. He has said “in premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation... modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative”.

Philosophically speaking, postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. As a movement of ideas, the postmodern critique is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the rejection of scientism as a narrow, one-sided overrating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of ‘the other’ and of other cultures and traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture. There is a sense in which if one sees modernism as the culture of modernity, postmodernism is the culture of postmodernity.

4.3 SHIFTING RELIGIOUS TRENDS AND POSTMODERNISM

The term postmodernism has been in widespread use for three decades, but the story of its spread through culture is fairly complex. Whatever it may be, postmodernism invites critical reflection and sustained debate. It is probably a specifically Western, rather than a universal global phenomenon, but its effects can be felt around the whole world. Postmodernism has been described as a process involving the fragmentation of modern Western culture. A highly ingenious collage, it is a celebration of a particular, a condition that calls everything into question, a radical challenge that has to be met. However, most writers on postmodernism are primarily concerned with the dominant feature or contemporary culture and public life without considering the relationship of postmodernism to religion. But if postmodernism is such a pervasive condition, what can possibly be its meaning of the faith traditions of the world? And what is the place of faith of large human communities and innumerable individuals related to practical concerns in a world marketed by division, doubt and ever greater uncertainty?

What is the role of religion and faith in contemporary pluralistic society? Does religion or faith make a difference in politics and economics? Does it affect attitudes to the environment? Does everybody need a religion to live by? What difference is there between a human faith, a religious faith, a critical faith, and a deeply spiritual faith? How far does religious faith still provide an important focus for national, ethnic and cultural identities? And is faith different for women and men, is linked to specific sexual identities? Can faith heal and make us whole, strengthen our resolve and responsibility, and help us build a human community of greater peace and justice? Have the different religions the resources for the development of a postmodern ethic for both personal and public life, so much needed today?

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your understanding of postmodernism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) How is modern different from postmodern?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4.4 MULTIPLE IMPLICATION OF
SPIRITUALITY

In our contemporary time, spirituality has become a fashionable word used in widely different contexts, but it is often unclear what is meant by this term. The concept is used in both religious and secular contexts, in debates about religious education in schools, in debates among theologians outside the Western world, in discussions among feminists, ecologists and peace workers, among people of different faiths and of none. Reflecting on ‘ the extraordinary popularity of the idea of spirituality and the proliferation of its use in courses, conferences, discussions, journals and books’, a British scholar of religious studies commented on ‘the widespread and radical differences that exist over the use of the term, its possible meanings and significance. For some it represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion. To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete. To yet others its obscurities and ambiguities render it an empty and misleading slogan’.

Many feel indeed uneasy with references to spirituality or the spiritual, because they interpret it in a dualistic way where the spiritual is conceived of in contrast to the material, the physical, the body and the world. Yet the concept of the spiritual is not always shunned; sometimes it is preferred to the concept of the religious, because it is less clearly linked to specific religious institutions and thus possesses a more diffuse meaning. From yet another perspective, the spiritual is not so much seen as diffuse than as more centered, as the very heart and depth

dimension of religion, especially realized through religious and mystical experience.

The widespread interest in religious conviction today is linked to the modern emphasis placed on the subject, on the discovery of the self and a more differentiated understanding of human psychology. Although many religions do not possess a precise word for 'spirituality', this term is now applied across different religious traditions; inside and outside particular religions as well as in many interfaith and secular contexts. In contemporary secular society spirituality – whatever it's meaning – is being rediscovered as a lost or at least concealed dimension in a largely materialistic world.

In the postmodern culture our approach to human beings is primarily pragmatic. But such an approach denies the need for self-transcendence, for a deeper, more reflective and contemplative awareness, for the discovery and exploration or a revered dimension which a perspective of faith sees as integral to all human beings. How far are our whole cultural ethos and our education able to make us into true human beings? How far are we not *under-humanized* or *de-humanized* in modern society rather than encouraged to develop our human potential to the fullest? a question which the French scientist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asked with great poignancy.

In the earlier age when Western religious ideals still informed the entire culture of the West, the human being was primarily understood in relation to the divine, to God. The naturalistic-scientific approach of modernity tends to relate the human being primarily to the animal and life worlds of the biosphere. These different approaches – to the world of our natural environment, to the depth dimension within us, to the fullness of the Spirit, to the life of God – need to be combined and linked with each other in a way that is new and culturally transformative and creative. How can we develop a wholesome, truly world-affirming and culture-transforming spirituality? Perhaps it is the very questions and problems raised by modernity, and the new possibilities opening up with new, postmodern perspectives, that will also provide us with the opportunities to develop a truly holistic and transformative religion.

Today, when we speak about the postmodern religious trends contemporary spirituality is at the crossroads. The knowledge and presence of eastern religions in the West, the rise of new religious movements, the development of atheistic and agnostic humanisms have all contributed to the questioning of traditional spiritualities in their specifically religious contexts. To achieve a new religious breakthrough, a genuine transformation of both consciousness and society, it is no longer enough to return to the past and revive ancient spiritual ideals and instructions. The increasing process of globalization affects the interchange of virtuous ideals as much as anything else and makes us conscious that humanity possesses a religious and spiritual heritage whose riches are indispensable for the creation of a much needed global virtuous consciousness.

Will the rise of such a consciousness lead to a new flowering of creed in an age of postmodernity? This is a difficult question to answer but one can speculate about it. There are numerous current signs of a growing interest in spirituality, not only at the level of practice, in the growth of retreat houses, the increasing number of spiritual counsellors and spiritual writings, but also at the theoretical

level of critical debate and new understanding. That the topic of spirituality attracts so much attention is part of the postmodern configuration where the previous trust in certainty, rationality and objectivity has broken down and the modern dominance of the rationalist-mechanistic thought patterns governing a positivistic science and technology has come under heavy criticism. The frequently mentioned paradigm shifts which are so characteristic of postmodern thinking are also important in spirituality, for in contemporary society spirituality is reflected upon the practiced in a new context.

4.5 POSTMODERNISM AND RELIGION

Writers on religion, ethics, theology and spirituality have come rather late to a serious consideration of the postmodern predicament and its effects on our world. But even a cursory search soon reveals that, since the early and mid-1990s, publications, conferences and journals have been increasingly concerned with the discussion of postmodernism. While the advent of postmodernism has created much fluidity and decentredness, and also highlighted the disponibility of all culturally created ideas and things, its influence on religion must not be judged only in a negative light, for postmodernism can also be seen positively as a challenging task, an opportunity, even a gift for religion in the modern world. The postmodern view of the self raises fundamental questions about the nature of personal identity and throws light on the process of ‘the decreation of the self’, that is something so important in the human approach to the Divine. The modern and postmodern world seems haunted by the absence of God, and yet in some curious way this absence can at the same time become transparent for a new kind of presence. In criticizing the individualism and dualism of modernity, postmodernism makes room for a more holistic and organic understanding of human existence with its personal, communal and ecological dimensions linked to the inviolability of life.

The creative postmodern approach to language also opens up new possibilities in interpreting the ambiguities of our relational language about God, and in articulating different styles of spirituality. Contrary to the modern assumption of the pervasiveness of nihilism, recent studies illuminate ‘the striking affinity between the most innovative aspects of postmodern thought and religious or mystical discourse’, and thereby open up new religious possibilities. Postmodern religion rejects modernity’s pushing God to a transcendent position outside of our world in a manner that has led to the ultimate atheistic denunciation of God’s very existence. Postmodern God is the presence of the divine in the world and with human beings.

4.6 POSTMODERNISM AND THE DECLINE AND FALL OF REASON

Do we live in a postmodern age? Such an age has been characterized by Lyotard as one in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, no universal foundations of knowledge. As a matter of fact, this age is virtually the first in history in which there is something like a universal foundations of knowledge and metanarratives which covers the whole of the universe. The narrative is the evolutionary history of the universe from the

Big Bang to the catastrophic crunch, and the total explanation is the theory of everything, the grand unified theory, which may be just round the corner.

In contrast, it has become much harder to believe in God and in revelation; a narrative which never succeeded in its aim of conquering the world, and has now settled uneasily into partial dominance in a number of more or less clearly demarcated geographical areas. This is for a number of reasons – the growth of critical history and of scientific knowledge about the universe, the relative lack of overwhelming arguments for the existence of a particular God, and a distrust of claims to exclusive and inerrant revelation. There has certainly been a religious fragmentation, as old structures of authority have broken down, and people have become aware of a bewildering number of alternative views on religious matters. Religious faith has to a large extent been privatized and pluralized. That is, in modern developed and developing countries a person's religious beliefs are very much their own private affair, and they may well be a mixture from a number of oddly assorted traditions, Eastern and Western. Very few would maintain that there is a defensible and widely accepted coherent set of religious doctrines, worthy of acceptance by all rational persons. We are well aware of how flimsy many of our own beliefs on religious topics are, and how disputed all of them seem to be. Even those who do think they possess a coherent and plausible narrative occasionally realize that they are in a tiny minority, which seems a bit strange, if they are right.

But all this is just the obverse side of the development of the grandnarrative of evolutionary science, which seems to have undetermined classical religion bit by bit over the last three centuries. We might well say that the hypothetico-deductive method of natural science has been triumphantly vindicated as the sure road of knowledge, and as for ancient dreams of liberation, we are on the threshold of taking charge of human nature itself, through genetic control, and directing it towards a more hopeful future, free from disease and suffering.

Science does not have its mysteries and puzzles. Perhaps many scientists are now less self-confident about being able to provide an answer to every problem than they were some years ago. But it would, be quite mistaken to think that the scientific narrative is at a closing stage. If science is modernity, then modernity is still very much in cultural control. But a problem has arisen. It is very difficult for the narrative to include an acceptable account of such late arrivals on the evolutionary scene as consciousness, freedom, truth, moral obligation and religious belief.

The tough line to take is that these arrivals are illusory appearances, which can be dispelled by a cold hard scientific stare. Consciousness is a set of brain-states; freedom is lack of constraint by external causes; truth is a matter of the survival value of beliefs that have enabled organism to adapt to their environment; obligation is programmed social behavior which has also passed the test of evolutionary fitness; and religion is a projection founded on psychological needs and insecurities. Human reason itself, on such a scientific account, turns out to be the outcome of change mutations which have had some survival value, but its workings are wholly subject to impersonal and non-purposive laws of nature. Science remains committed to reason, and its exponents often show a quasi-moral commitment to the rigor of its methods and the heroic acceptance of its less palatable truths. But the conclusions of science have undermined the authority

of reason, by showing it to be a pragmatically useful aid to survival in the unending struggle for life in an arena of scarce resources.

A central fault line appears in the scientific narrative. It presents itself as the only rational basis of knowledge and values, the revealer of the truth about the cosmos and the way to human well-being. Yet what it reveals is that there is no purpose, that human life, like everything else, is driven by blind selection pressures and impersonal natural processes. What we call reason and truth are the appearances of brain processes which are as fragile and contingent, as accidental and transient, as all other complex organic events. It is tempting to say that, once we see through the illusion, we are free to vary the conditions of rationality and truth as we will - that is the postmodern option. There are only belief systems, forms of life, without foundation or justification beyond themselves. Even this, however, is a legitimacy claim. There is no escaping from truth, and there is no living it either. That is the unhappy consciousness of the hard scientific narrative.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is postmodern spirituality?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) How can metanarratives be explained in postmodernism?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.7 WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

The purpose of our study is to discuss the impact of the postmodern trends on religion. The arguments of postmodern scholars are difficult to categorize. In general, they question every all-embracing paradigm and frame of reference. They reject the primacy given by modernity to reason and human progress. For postmodern thinkers this project has failed. This is very evident when Jean François Lyotard very emphatically stated in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition* that “I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences”. For him, metanarratives meant the established systems of thought, and established religions.

Consequently, they question the globalization caused by modern science that has produced domination, marginalization and a culture of consumerism. This has *objectified* or commodified human life and relationships. Life is now felt almost like simulated cinematic images and symbols where human identity is defined by exterior appearances and make-up; pretensions are viewed as the *norm-ality*. Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today's society: an inclusive style that appreciated pluralism, differences and multilateralism.

Many snub postmodernism seeing it as 'a mood' that does not deserve scholarly attention. Postmodernism helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernist claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They assert that neither pre-modern belief nor modern reasons are able to achieve the type of progress they propose. Postmodernists, most of them French intellectuals, rebelled against the Enlightenment project that promised universal human emancipation through the application of reason powered by technology, science and democracy. The grand narratives of progress suggested by Marxism, the Enlightenment and established religions remain, in the view of postmodernists, sheer verbosity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.

4.8 POSTMODERN RELIGION

Postmodernism sees religion as an experience which cannot be explained by proposition. It has to be lived in spirit and truth. It is love of God: loving God in spirit and truth. It is not knowledge, not cognitive and epistemic information, but truth that is shared in narratives. Religious truth lies in the question of how it does, not what it is. It is praxis, not an idea. In the postmodern view there is constant change in reality. Every society is in a state of constant flux and no one can claim absolute values: only relative ones. And there are no absolute truths. This privileges the individual religious impulses, but weakness the strength of 'religions' which claim to deal with truths that are presented from 'outside', and given us objective realities, that is 'from above'. In the postmodern world view, there can be no universal religious or ethical laws. Cultural contexts, the particular time, place and community shape everything, not any universal laws. In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. The priest is unemployed and his place of worship is empty. The fact is that religion is an entirely human-made phenomenon.

Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. In a world where there is no objectively existing God “out there” and where the elaborate sociological and psychological theories of religion do not seem to ring true, the idea of religion as the totality of religious experiences has some appeal. Religion in this theory is not given but created, altered, renewed in formal interactions between human beings. Images and ideas of God are manufactured in human activity, and used to give specialness to particular relationships or policies which are valued by a particular group. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ religion – no sanctifying agency. There are as many as there are groups and interaction, and they merge and join, divide and separate over and over again. Some are grouped together under the brand names of major faiths, and they cohere with varying degrees of consistency. Others, although clearly religious in their particular way, reject any such label.

In a postmodern world, religions should function as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Postmodernist let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion. There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions. Different people in their cultures experience the impossible and share that experience with others. They are ‘unique and irreducible repositories of their distinctive ethical practices and religious narratives, representing so many different ways to love God, but without laying claim to an exclusive possession of ‘The Truth’.

For the postmoderns religion is love of the impossible. Despite the advancement achieved by the use of reason and technology, human beings realize time and time again that they are finite, fragile and unfinished. This causes a deep longing for the unlimited within every human being. This longing is temporarily satisfied by the people they love, the positions of power they hold, and the scientific inventions they make. Yet they face limitedness in the form of death and natural disasters. There is a gap between what we are and what we aspire to be. What we are is that we are limited and fragile beings. But we aspire to overcome this by inventing machines and innovation in science and technology. But at the end we fail to overcome. Then we are left with the choice: either to fight for the impossible and unlimited; or to submit to it. The people who fight against the fragile of humanity end up in frustration. The people who surrender to it develop an interior modification that enables them to lead their fragile existence meaningfully. The interior modification is ‘spirituality’. For the postmoderns this is the core of religion.

The faith of a postmodern is love of supernatural being. But when we ‘love God’ what we really love is the Impossible in us. A passion for love is a fundamental experience that every normal human being goes through. For postmoderns this passion for love is equal to passion for God. The pre-modern approach to this basic experience of love was theological and dogmatic. Modernists look at it with secularizing reason and limit the discussion within reason alone. Both looked for knowledge, for the Final Word. But postmoderns looked at the experience of love as a condition of human existence. And they remove the capital letter in knowledge. They see it as truth without Knowledge or Reason. They know that

they do not have any firm foundation or absolute knowledge. They have the conviction that we are not able to gain anything absolute. They see the love of God as love of truth, goodness, and beauty that are fundamentals of life. For as human beings we do not comprehend ourselves fully. Simply, ‘we do not know’. Despite our innovations and inventions we do not know when we die and how we die. There are many mysteries that we face every day. In such unpredictable reality we need conviction and optimism. We can never discover the really Real. We should look for the hyper-real, beyond reality: love for truth (=‘God’). The postmoderns do not see any reason why we should have a definite object for the passions of/for love. That idea belongs to the moderns who seek to totalize and universalize experience.

The postmoderns’ mission is to evolve a new ‘shape of living’, a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. The status of postmodernity is a spiritual status, not philosophical, “in which belief and behaviour come together in the shape of an embodied spirit”. In it there is no pride in human reason and human progress, as modernity had. That pride made them view others who did not fall within their frame of reference as weak, aliens or untouchables. Postmoderns bring them into the fold with an ethical concern that everyone is unique and precious.

Therefore, for postmoderns God is a ‘how’, not a ‘what’. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed. Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God.

By the help of postmoderns we develop openness to the future, realizing the fact that we can never master anything and frame absolute truth. Modernity developed a habit of mastering anything through human manipulation. It put science above love, but ended up longing for love. By relying on reason and science the modern mind commodified life and relegated God (‘love’) to the margin. The postmoderns retrieve the marginalized. They help to turn to the repressed. Religion is not to be repressed inside the ‘totalizing’ system of modernity. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain the religious trends in postmodernism

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What is the objective of postmodern religion?

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give a rough idea about the religious trends in postmodernism. Though postmodernism is an emerging trend in philosophy, in our contemporary time we cannot do away with postmodernism. It is incredulity towards all established systems of thought, ideologies and religions but at the same time they do not rule out the possibility of having a new trend, a new religion. That too in the course of time turns to become another metanarrative. Postmoderns are trying to create a new religion where human beings occupy a predominant place rather than any celestial beings that used to be. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And for them God is not a person but a presence.

4.10 KEY WORDS

- Postmodernism

:

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Whereas modernism was often associated with identity, unity, authority, and certainty, postmodernism is often associated with difference, separation, textuality, and skepticism.
- Metanarrative

:

A metanarrative is a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. It is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.

4.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Andreson, Walter Truett, ed. *The Truth About The Truth*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford : Blackwell, 1993.

Bertens, Hans and Natoli, Joseph, eds. *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

Browning, K. Gary. *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.

Drolet, Michael, ed. *The Postmodernism Reader*. London: Rutledge, 2004.

- Featherstone, Mike, ed. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage, 1991.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Postmodrnism, Reason and Religion*. London: Roulledy, 2001.
- King, Ursula, ed. *Faith and Praxis in Postmodern Age*. London: Cassell, 1998.
- Liotard, Jean François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Trs. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Liotard, Jean François. *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport Sur Le Savoir*. Paris: Les Editions De Minuit, 1979.
- Sarup, Madan. *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Schrag, O., Calvin. *The Self After Postmodernity*. London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.
- Ward, Graham, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

4.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) The term ‘postmodernism’ has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to all-embracing systems of thought. postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc.
- 2) The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word *modo*, meaning ‘just now’. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. Modern gives emphasis to experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind exterior appearance. Postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. It is a movement of ideas. And as a movement of ideas, the postmodern appraisal is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the negation of scientism as a narrow, one-sided over-rating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of ‘the other’ and of other cultures and

traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) For some postmodern spirituality represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion. A genuine transformation of both individual consciousness and society that is the need of the hour. Postmodern spirituality focuses on the betterment of the person in his totality rather than any religion. To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete.
- 2) Jean Francois Lyotard was the first one who used the word 'metanarrative' in his work *The Postmodern Condition*. Any theory claiming to provide universal explanation is a metanarrative. Most religions offer a similarly all-embracing explanation of human history to fit their particular schemes. Lyotard states that in our contemporary time we have lost credibility in the metanarrative. Therefore all the meatnarratives have to be rejected. The established ideologies, religions, cultures etc. all failed to give meaning that it has promised. Therefore they claim that we live in an age in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, and no universal foundations of knowledge only petty narratives.

Answers to Check Your Progress - III

- 1) Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today's society: an inclusive style that appreciates pluralism, differences and multilateralism. It helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernist claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.
- 2) In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' religion. In a postmodern world, religions should functions as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Postmodernist let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion. There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions.

The postmoderns' mission is to evolve a new 'shape of living', a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. For postmoderns God is a 'how', not a 'what'. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed. Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And God is not a person but a presence.