



Rapture and the Impact of Postmodernism on the 21st Century Christian

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Abstract

Rapture is the desire of Christian believers to return with Christ to heaven at the second coming. But many scholars are of the opinion that postmodernism has become a negative force capable of blurring the true perception of rapture thereby hindering the readiness for it, particularly in the postmodern age and its deconstructionist theories. Thus, several scholars have dwelled on these negative aspects of postmodernism but few have considered its positive tendencies. The paper examines rapture and the impact of postmodernism on the 21st Century Christian, harping on the concept and salient features. Based on this, the paper interrogates the 21st Century malady and carefully outlines and delineates the peculiarities of both the positive and negative impacts towards rapture. The paper concludes that postmodernism is a force, worldview and movement with negative and positive effects on believers and the impending rapture. It recommends that 21st century Christians should retain their Christian virtues despite the negative features of postmodernism.

Keywords: 21st Century Christians, Postmodernism, Rapture, Salvation, Tribulation

Introduction

There are established negative views about postmodernism, nevertheless, it has its positive side. No wonder Isaias Catorce is of the opinion that, although, postmodernism proposes harmony and community it, is done at the expense of deconstructing established texts, structures, arts and systems (Catorce, 2013, p.2). This view is instructive, and points to the point that postmodernism is not as bad as some authorities paint it. If this is true, then it is expected that its impact on the 21st Century Christian will likely be positive or negative. The focus of this paper therefore is to assess the impact of postmodernism on the 21st Century Christians and its likely repercussion on rapture. The deep disappointment with modernity's promises and the awareness of the double-edged nature of science and history, led many thinkers to question the

certainties on which the modern period was built. This sense of un-ease with the unquestioned certainties of modernity is one of the marks of postmodernism, which, as it were, is not a fixed doctrine or a set of doctrine, nor an organization or dogma. Postmodern thinkers would take a conscious distance from the modern mental make-up in a number of ways. Rather than accept the ways of the modern period as universal norms valid for all times and places, more and more people began to embrace previously unaccepted paths. This they did in art, in architecture, in philosophy, in social science, in politics, in mass media and religion.

This great cultural force, called postmodernism falls within the 21st century, the century which commenced on 1 January 2001 and will continue through 31 December 2100. The basic features of the force can be found as early as the 1940s (20th Century) but its presence is still evident till today (Robert, Williams & Paton, 2012). Thus, the postmodern era is within the 21st Century. As such, it is normal for postmodern features to have impact on the 21st century people, including Christians. Thus, this article examines the impact of this 21st century cultural force on Christians.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the effects of postmodernism, making adequate preparation for rapture, seems to be a daunting challenge for the postmodern Christians. Strong opinions exist that postmodernism is a negative and powerful force that is capable of blurring the 21st Century Christians' perception of rapture thereby hindering them from getting ready for it. It is viewed as a negative force because it is anti-truth, anti-logic, anti-reason, anti-reality, anti-morality, anti-human and above all, anti-christianity; and by extension, anti-rapture. Several scholars have worked on the negative aspects of postmodernism but few have considered its positive tendencies. But of a truth, it has its positive influence. One example of the scholars with a negative perspective of postmodernism is Isaias Catorce, in his article, "Postmodernism and its Influence in the Church" (2013). Stanley Hauerwas, in "The Christian difference Surviving postmodernism" also argued that postmodernism is not a friend but an enemy to Christianity (Hauerwas, 1999). However, drawing attention to the positive tendencies of postmodernism and how this can be maximized to assist postmodern Christians' readiness for rapture is the lacuna that this paper seeks to close.

Clarification of Concepts

Two concepts are essential in this paper. These are the concepts of postmodernism and rapture as explained below:

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a philosophy that affirms no objective or absolute truth, especially in matters of religion and spirituality. When confronted with a truth claim regarding the reality of God and religious practice, postmodernism's

viewpoint is exemplified in the statement “that may be true for you, but not for me.” While such a response may be completely appropriate when discussing favorite foods or preferences toward art, such a mindset is dangerous when it is applied to reality because it confuses matters of opinion with matters of truth. The term literally means after modernism and is used to philosophically describe the era which came after the age of modernism. Postmodernism is a frequently-used and even overused term today in various disciplines. It is hard to define, since it is not really a doctrine, but rather a particular type of sensitivity, a way of looking at things that has influenced styles in literature, in art, in architecture, in religious writings and even in moral and social practices and preferences. Terry Eagleton defines it as a form of contemporary culture, a specific historical period and a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity (Eagleton, 1996, p. 23).

According to an article titled, Postmodernism, postmodernists are different from modernists in their thought patterns in so many ways (Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, India 2017, p. 1). The article further says that their sharp responses that are poles apart from the perspectives of the modernists are expressed in various fields like: art, architecture, philosophy, social science, politics, mass media and of course, religion (IGNOU, 2017, p. 1). The features of this new age, according to this article, especially, those that are relevant to this study are presented below:

- i. There is Awareness of Pluralism: This simply refers to viewing one’s own manner of speaking, living and judging as one among many ways of being human, a situation that occurs as a result of travel, studies and exposure to other cultures and nations .
- ii. Truth is Historically and Culturally Conditioned: This trait simply nullifies universal truth with the claim that values and ethics are culturally conditioned.
- iii. Reality is Evolving: This emphasizes the fact that everything changes: the world, nature and our knowledge of it.
- iv. New Meanings and Sources of Knowledge have Emerged: In this new age, the Internet has emerged as the greatest means of information. This has greatly influenced meanings and sources of knowledge (IGNOU, 2017, p. 12).

The Concept of Rapture

According to Stewart, the rapture of the church is a term that is commonly used for the “catching up” of the church, the genuine believers in Jesus Christ, to meet their Lord in the air (Stewart, 2020, p. 12). Explicating further, he says that at some point in the future, those Christians who are alive will have their mortal bodies transformed into incorruptible, immortal bodies as taught in 1 Cor. 15. Immediately before this happens, the believers who have died will be raised from the dead and will also receive a new body as they meet Christ in the air. According to Scripture all of this will occur in a moment, in a twinkling, or in a blink, of an eye.

Wenstrom, Jr, in his own definition and explanation of the term rapture, says it is taken from the Latin term *rapio*, “caught up (Wenstrom, 2003, p. 54)” that is used to translate the Greek verb *harpazō* (ἁρπάζω), (Wenstrom, p. 54) which appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In this verse, according to him, the word means to “snatch, seize, forcibly remove something, to seize by force with the purpose of removing and is translated “will be caught up” by the English Standard Version and New American Standard Bible, 95 and “will be suddenly caught up” by the NET Bible (Wenstrom, 2003, p. 55).

Clarifying the rapture further, Stewart says that the doctrine of the rapture of the church is mainly for the genuine believers in Jesus Christ, and not merely people who have a church membership or affiliation (Stewart, p. 13) Using 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as its major force, the Valley Bible Church says the term rapture comes from the Latin term *rapturo*, which is a translation of the Greek term *harpazo*, “caught up” (www.valleybible.net). It emphasizes a snatching, stealing or tearing something away quickly and forcefully. The term is often used in the context of stealing or plundering (www.valleybible.net). However, in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4, it carries the sense of catching away speedily, seizing by force, claiming for oneself, rescuing from danger and removing to a new place (www.valleybible.net).

The 21st Century

The 21st century has its peculiarities. These peculiar features, with their negative and positive implications, are stated below:

i. Secularism

The most conspicuous feature of the 21st Century is secularism. The word, “Secular”, is derived from the Latin word “*Saeculum*” which means “world” (Emeka, 2004, p. 4). There is no doubt that the church is becoming worldlier than ever before. Sometimes, secularism is used in the sense of a force that excludes God, living without God in the world. Hence, in Eric’s article on “The Challenges Facing Christians in the Present Century,” secularization is described as “a movement away from the church to the world” (Anozie, 2004, p. 4).

ii. The Influence of Science and Technology

Another prominent feature of the 21st Century is dependence on to science and technology for decision making. According to Odunze, science has done a lot to improve the lots of mankind, Christians inclusive. Science has given credence to most sophisticated modern inventions (1983, 13). However, there is need to say now that science belongs to the modern era and as such, it is target of the attack of the postmodernists.

iii. Ease of Communication and Transportation

The 21st Century people, including Christians, can travel wider and faster than the people of any other age before now. Hence, Kung argues that “the 21st century has provided increasingly rapid means of communication and transportation; there is an explosion of new instruments, tremendous achievements have been made in various discipline including Theology, all of which have brought Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the whole earth at the doorsteps of the church to reach with the gospel” (1967, 3). All of these have

culminated into a wider spread of the gospel. On the other side of the coin, this ease of communication and transportation has also led to the proliferation of fake churches and multiples of strange faiths.

iv. *Unhealthy Competition*

It is true that the 21st century has recorded a heartwarming progress because the highly industrialized nations of the global north have spread their knowledge throughout the world as peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have come to life. The world is becoming one with a single economic unit, a single civilization, and a single culture is fast emerging (Kung, 1967, 3). One would expect that this global unity and proximity would dip the entire globe in the knowledge of Christ, but like Augustine of Hippo used to say, "Walls do not make Christians" so our connection to each other has brought destruction instead. This is because of our irreversible desire for cutthroat competition and comparison (Kung, 1967, 3).

v. *Enlightenment*

It is apparent that the 21st Century is characterized by great enlightenment. The reasons behind this enlightenment include: availability and translation of Bible into several local languages, emergence of several theological training schools (physical and online), easy access to Bible study tools, easy access to record messages on CDs, VCDs and so on. Technology has engendered the availability and translation of the Bible into the local languages of receivers; it has also provided Bible windows and means of interpretation at the door steps of the laity thereby bridging the old hierarchical and water-tight gap between clergy and laity. Thus, today, students can access information before lecturers come for lecturing; and this facilitates the teaching-learning process.

Theories about Rapture

Discussion about the rapture has been a controversial issue among theologians over the years. This debate is summarized by James F. Stitzinger. Five premillennial views of the rapture include two major views—pretribulationism and posttribulation-ism—and three minor views—partial, midtribulational, and pre-wrath rapturism (Stitzinger, 2021, p. 169). They are further expatiated thus:

i. *The Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory*

There are many who believe the rapture will take place before the beginning of the great tribulation; the final seven-year period before the coming of Christ. This theory is known as the "Pre-Tribulation" rapture view. According to this position, believers will escape the unprecedented time of God's wrath which will come upon the earth. These Christians will return with the Lord in triumph at the end of the seven-year period. As earlier mentioned, this is the principal viewpoint.

ii. *The Mid-Tribulation Rapture Theory*

Presbyterian J. Oliver Busnell, a former president at Wheaton College (1926-40), a professor and an author of a systematic theology work, and Dean of graduate studies at Covenant College and Seminary, was one of the primary proponents of the mid-tribulational rapture theory. He and others believe the rapture will take place in the middle of the final seven-year period before Jesus

Christ returns to the earth (Busnell, 1999, 5). Before the wrath of God is poured out upon the people living on the earth, the church will be taken away to meet the Lord in the rapture. This is known as the "Mid-Tribulation" view.

iii. *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View*

There is a recent view that believes the rapture will take place three-fourths of the way through the final seven-year period. However, it will occur before the wrath of God comes to the earth. This is known as the "PreWrath" rapture view. It differs from the Mid-Tribulation rapture in that it occurs later in time. It also differs from the Post-Tribulation view in that the rapture does not occur at the very end of the seventieth week of Daniel. Thus, the Pre-Wrath rapture has the rapture occurring some five and one-half years into the seven-year tribulation period.

iv. *The Post-Tribulation Rapture Theory*

There are Christians who believe the rapture will take place at the very end of the seven-year great tribulation. Immediately before the Lord returns to set up His kingdom upon the earth, the church will be caught up to meet Him. They will join Christ as He returns to judge the wicked. This is known as the "Post-Tribulation" rapture view. This is the only theory which does not see a long interval between the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ.

v. *Partial Tribulation*

There are several individuals who have popularized this theory. They are Robert Govett who first wrote about the theory in 1853 in his work, *Entrance into the Kingdom*; G. H. Lang Williams was an able advocate of the theory; and D. M. Paton (1935) used his position as editor of *The Dawn* to popularize the theory by using the writings of authors who supported the theory. The theory was never widely accepted.

The basis of translation [rapture] must be grace or reward. The frequent exhortations in the Scriptures to watch, to be faithful, to be ready for Christ's coming, to live Spirit-filled lives, all suggest that translation is a reward. The theory includes the concept that only the faithful saints will be resurrected at the first resurrection. Walvoord reports that one of the partial rapture theorists said, "this theory is rejected immediately because it is based on works. Admission to the church of the Living God, which will be raptured, is based on faith alone. All of the church will be raptured (Jn. 14:1-3, 1 Cor. 15:51-52)." (Walvoord, 1955, 193).

Postmodernism and Rapture

That postmodernism is one of the powerful cultural forces that has a great influence on the 21st Century and its people is not a mere gainsay. As an influential cultural force of this age, postmodernism has greatly affected Christianity and all its tenets, including the rapture. What are these effects? Are they positive or negative? All these questions shall be attended to in an intermixed manner. In actual fact, some of these questions have been attended to already in the preceding discussion but there is need to answer the questions at this juncture in a more appropriate manner. Foremost, in this postmodern era, the idea of a truth that must be globally accepted has been flawed and punctured. Today, there is a line of demarcation between 'I have the truth' and

oppression. Claims to truth are regarded as nothing but attempts to exert power. From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that three major points are essential about a postmodern worldview.

The first is philosophical pluralism. This does not mean the multicultural nature of society, but the idea that all ideas and truth claims must be treated with equal respect, because there is no way to evaluate their respective merits. In the area of religion, according to Marcus Honeysett, this leads to claims that all religions and none must have roughly equal access to truth and salvation because the world would be unfair otherwise. The second essential point in postmodernism is relativism. As a result of this second point, all religions must be considered equal. Relativism is the idea that no claim to truth can appeal to anything objective to determine its validity (Honeysett, 2008, 32). Hence, there is no God who says true or false. Therefore, all truth claims are only relative to other truth claims. The biggest implication of this is that there is no such thing as authority in life which means no author can authoritatively communicate meaning; nobody can arbitrate for what is true or right; if we try to make a text speak to other people or other cultures authoritatively, then we are unethically trying to impose power (Honeysett, 2008, 33).

The third, related factor is that people are now suspicious of metanarratives (a story beyond story which imposes meaning and ideas) (Honeysett, 2008, 33). This leads to the rather bizarre situation in which a claim that something is true can be dismissed simply because it claims to be true. The Western culture has reached a situation where truth itself is viewed with such suspicion that people may automatically assume that truth claims are nothing more than power-plays (Honeysett, 2008, 33).

All these developments are pointing to the fact that the superiority of the Christian religion is now challengeable in the postmodern era and indirectly, in the 21st century. Also, these postmodern views indicate that the Biblical teachings are no longer regarded as the ultimate truth. Thus, to the postmodern cum 21st Century believer, the concept of rapture and other biblical concepts have to be dissected by individuals before the truth can be established (Ayomide, 2023, p. 91-92). Should postmodernism be totally condemned and discarded? Four submission by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, 2017, p. 16) gives reasons not to. These new ways of thinking can be credited with the following merits or contributions to the world of thought, culture and Christianity:

- i. Postmodernism frees each discipline, religion inclusive, to be itself, rather than compare itself to experimental science and be treated as inferior. Thus, the Bible, belonging to the field of religion, cannot be judged by the canons of science. Each field is unique and independent. This is in line with an online article on postmodernism.
- ii. Since each field is unique and independent, it then follows that postmodernism invites us to look at the background of doctrines that claim to be universally valid. This calls to mind the need to scrutinize various ungodly doctrines about resurrection, trinity, the deity of Christ and the rapture itself.

iii. As postmodernism encourages a scrutiny of different doctrines, it makes the role of the non-rational a possible option in regards to reaching the truth. Reason, the queen in modernity, is seen as just one of the paths for reaching the truth. Postmodernism gives an important place to the role of the non-rational. Reason alone does not seem to be a reliable guide and teacher in human affairs. We need to listen to other areas, such as, our emotions, our aesthetic sense, our traditions, our dreams, and our faith in God. Thus, postmodernism has opened door to our faith in God as the most reliable teacher and guide for a proper comprehension of spiritual issues like rapture.

iv. It promotes equality of all men and races. As far as postmodernism is concerned, no culture has the right to propose itself as superior or as the norm to judge others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my major concern based on the opinion expressed by Honeysett, earlier mentioned (Honeysett, 2008, p. 35), is that the individualistic and pluralistic approaches to the interpretation of the Bible are clear indications that a biblical concept like rapture will definitely be variedly understood by various Christians and this of course, reflects in the numerous views that have been expressed about the concept thus far. The issue of relativism compounds the challenge. My rational conclusion based on available literature considered so far is that with postmodern culture, biblical believers of this age may find it difficult to properly understand and 21st century Christians and rapture. On the other side of the coin, postmodernism has its positive effects on the 21st Century Christians and their understanding of rapture. In addition to this conclusion, a previous study on the subject concluded that:

1. Postmodernism has a positive impact on Christians' readiness for rapture.
2. Postmodern believers have both positive and negative attitudes towards rapture.
3. Postmodernism, by nature, obstructs Christians in so many ways from getting ready for rapture.
4. Postmodernism must be rebranded so as to that it can be absolutely rapture-compliant

Recommendations

In order to enhance Christians of postmodern age to better understand rapture and be really ready for it, certain steps must be taken. What are these steps in question? According to a study carried out by Ayomide (2023), the steps include:

1. Postmodern Christians must embark on an in-depth study of the Word of God so as to know God's mind about rapture
2. They must use Bible study tools like Bible dictionaries, concordance and encyclopedia so as to receive correct information about rapture.

3. Postmodern Christians must also consult the Holy Spirit for divine instructions, enlightenment and assistance on rapture;
4. Postmodern Christians must equally live a persistent biblical life as people who are expecting rapture
5. Also, they must constantly mix up with fellow Christians who are rapture-conscious.
6. Regular participation in Bible seminars and workshops can also be of great assistance.
7. Constant self-examination in the light of the gospel is highly necessary.
8. Perpetual obedience to God's Word must not be joked with.
9. Emphasis must be laid on revival by the religious leaders.
10. Postmodern Christians must avoid misleading postmodern cultures like individualism, pluralism and relativism.
11. Postmodern pastors must be well-informed about rapture so as to correctly guide and impact their congregations on the issue.
12. Postmodern Christians must regard the Bible as the final authority irrespective of the postmodern culture in which they are operating.
13. For the sake of emphasis, they must live above postmodern culture that can hinder them from being rapturable when Christ appears to take away the saints of all ages.
14. They must not totally discard postmodern views, they should embrace its positive traits.

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