

A Theology of Secularism: It's Broader Than It Sounds
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Introduction

Why are we here, talking about "translating the gospel"?

Because what we are doing now is not changing the world

We are making a difference, but not changing the world

I. Two Kinds of Theology

(1) Biblical Theology

What was the writer trying to say?

What is the Holy Spirit trying to teach us on this subject?

Questions arise from Bible

Move from Bible to today

(2) Systematic or Practical Theology

What is truth?

What should I believe?

What should the church believe?

Questions arise from today

Bible doesn't always answer (women's ordination)

Open to science, history, experience, Ellen White

Theology of Secularism = Systematic or Practical Theology

II. Begin with the Situation: What Is Secularism?

(Issue: How People Approach Truth)

A. Middle Ages (Pre-Modern)

Truth resides in privileged groups

Pope, Roman Catholic Church

They *have* the truth

Want to know the truth, consult them

B. Reformation (Christian Modernism)

Truth resides in logical statements, research, science
Not in church or state (institutional “authorities”)
Bible = ultimate source of truth, not churches or bishops
Find truth for yourself
This perspective dominated 19th Century America
Where Adventism got its start
Connected with mainstream culture
Wherever this view dominates, Adventism is still growing

C. Enlightenment (Secular Modernism)

Intellectual shift in 18th Century (Europe in 19th & US in 1920s)
Apply careful scientific method to all questions
Even religious questions
Truth is not in Bible or church
It is in five senses, scientific method
Science provides “truth”
Technology provides “power” (change the world)
Education spreads this new gospel
Result: A paradise of affluence and security

Then reality got in the way

Relativity and quantum physics (vs. Newton)
Technological paradise?
Pollution, crime
Internet → stress, addiction
World War I, Holocaust, Terrorism, Mass destruction

D. Secular Post-Modernism

Truth is found in relationships, stories
Community before truth (Super Bowl parties)
Science is no longer black and white (gray)
All claims to “Big Picture” are false
Lead to violence (al Qaeda)
“Truth” is elusive (many truths)
No one has it all
We all have a part
Small bits of expertise in a vast array of ignorance

Rejects:

Truth as group (church)
Truth as Bible
Truth as Science

III. Secularism Now Takes Two Forms

(1) Traditional: Life without reference to God (practical)

- Knowledge limited to reality (truth vs. reality)
 - Five senses (no sense of the supernatural)
 - Big picture = science over religion
- Can be a “religious” person
 - Involved in “church”
 - Little reference to God (Sabbath talk)

(2) “Post-Modern”: Spiritual life without reference to institutional religion

- Rejection of “meta-narrative”
 - Anti-authority
 - Religious (institutions, denominations)
 - religion = lies and fantasies
 - Scientific
 - “assured results” now questioned
- Can be a spiritual person
 - Prayer, study, informal fellowship
 - Compartmentalize

Over 65 = modern

Under 40 = post-modern

40-65 = confused

IV. What to Do? A Biblical Theological Approach

(Meet People Where They Are)

1) This is what God does

Koine Greek

Four Gospels

Incarnation

Dan 2 and 7

Seven Churches

Logos

2) This is how God made us

1 Cor 9:19-23, ESV—“ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

DA 31-38: “Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity.” (34)

Rule #1 = Listen first, talk later

Double Exegesis

(Peace Child)

(Toothpaste)

Acts 14:16-17, ESV— “In past generations he allowed [all the nations](#) to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet [he did not leave himself without witness](#), for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

V. Dealing With Secularism

A. Secular Modernism

Contrast with present evangelistic practice

Illustrated by fortress and salt (Matt 5:13-16)

Traditional evangelism = fortress

Post-Modern evangelism = salt

Both are valid, do salt without leaving the other undone!

Fortress	Salt	Biblical Basis
Public	One to One/Relational	Matt 28:19-20
Short Term	Long Term	Jesus' Ministry
Our Agenda	Felt Needs	1 Cor 9:19-23
Church-based	Neighborhood/ Workplace Based	Paul's Tent Making
One Way	Spiritual Gift Based/ Multiplicity of Approaches	1 Cor 12-14
Conversion	Process (Engel Scale)	Peter, Judas

B. Secular Post-Modernism

- 1) Narrative Approach:
Bible is not 28 books, but a narrative approach
Exegetical approach
- 2) Relational Approach:
One on one, belonging before believing
- 3) Spiritual Authenticity
Must be real, Monday morning
Want to know God
- 4) Inclusiveness
More friendly toward other faiths
Teachable spirit, learning attitude

Works equally well with Muslims

Managing SDA Doctrine with Post-Moderns

- 1) Prophecy
Stability, security, God is in control, something to rely on
Answers the three big questions
- 2) Sanctuary
The little things we experience every day are tied to a
much bigger picture
Accountability
- 3) Sabbath
It is OK not to constantly produce
OK to simply “be” to “chill”
- 4) Obedience
Structure in the midst of chaos
- 5) Ecology
Stewardship of resources (God’s creation)
- 6) Wholeness
Balance of physical, spiritual, mental, emotional

This paper was largely drawn from Jon Paulien's books and materials as follows:

Know Your Audience (manual prepared for British Union)

Present Truth in the Real World

Knowing God in the Real World

The Day That Changed the World

Everlasting Gospel, Everchanging World

The Deep Things of God