

## Postmodern relativism and the challenge to overcome the “value-vacuum”

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### Abstract

Making use of hermeneutic phenomenology and constructive interpretivism as methodological apparatus, this article challenges the premise that postmodern relativism supposedly created a “value-vacuum”. We conclude that while postmodernism seems to have deprived the grand narratives of the past of their power to prescribe to people (their adherents) what they should be ascribing or attaching value to, it caused the resultant value-gap to be filled in by the values that individuals obtained by “shopping around” in the current value supermarket, and also by resorting to a post-post-foundationalist orientation in terms of which their value-systems play an inconspicuous role in the background of their thinking. We also illuminate what we consider to be important implications (of this shift from the application of grand narrative value systems to the post-post-foundationalist application of the rather more individualistic value systems of modern-day people) for religious institutions, particularly for the church as a societal institution, and for education as an interpersonal relationship.

### Keywords

*Postmodernism, Postmodern relativism, Post-foundationalism, Post-post-foundationalism, Grand narratives, Value-gap, Value-vacuum*

## 1. Introduction

At a conference of the Forum for Religious Dialogue of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa (7-8 March 2013), the impact of religious values on present-day realities was debated. One of the themes of the conference was postmodern relativism

and the challenge to overcome the “value-vacuum” that it supposedly created. We felt that this theme gave rise to a number of questions that needed scholarly attention:

- What is postmodernism?
- What is postmodern relativism?
- Did this postmodern relativism cause a value-vacuum?
- If there indeed has appeared such a value-vacuum, how can it be overcome?

In the discussion that follows, we explore these questions using hermeneutic phenomenology and constructive interpretivism as our primary scientific methods of investigation. We assume that human beings relate epistemologically with reality through the medium of interpreted experience (Van Huyssteen 2004:27,88). According to Wilber (2000:133), in order to understand and to construct and reconstruct meaning, we should enter into the depths of that which is under investigation, to discover the values concealed in it. This is not, as Wilber remarked, a simple empirical procedure. To truly understand requires an internal harmony or resonance with that of which we strive to discover the depth of meaning. This is where constructivism comes in: reality is not a mere observation or perception; it is experientially grounded interpretation (Wilber 2000: ix; cf. Schults 1999:passim). A balanced constructivist approach furthermore presupposes that an objective world exists apart from ourselves with whom we can interact meaningfully and interpretively (Colson & Pearson 2001:78).

As will be shown, our investigations led us to conclude that postmodernism does not seem to have caused a “value-vacuum” as such. Instead, while it seems to have deprived the grand narratives of the past of their power to prescribe to people (their adherents) what they should be ascribing or attaching value to, it caused the resultant value-gap to be filled in by the values that individuals obtained by “shopping around” in the current value supermarket, and also by resorting to a post-post-foundationalist orientation in terms of which their value-systems play an inconspicuous role in the background of their thinking. We also illuminate what we consider to be two important implications for religious institutions, particularly for the church as a societal institution, and for education as an interpersonal relationship of this shift from the application of grand

narrative value systems to the post-post-foundationalist application of the rather more individualistic value systems of modern-day people.

## **2. Understanding postmodernism**

It has always been difficult to define or circumscribe the phenomenon referred to as postmodernism (Wang 2013:1). This difficulty can be illustrated with reference to the recent debate as to whether A N Whitehead's philosophy could be described as postmodern or not. Some authors such as Griffin (2007:x) on the one hand regards his philosophy as "a version of postmodern philosophy," while on the other seems to regard it as a precursor to the postmodernism of the 1960s and later in view of the fact that his philosophy contains elements of later postmodernism while retaining some of the "clear advances associated with modernity" (Griffin 2007:viii). The safest way to approach Whitehead's philosophy, he avers, is to see it as a species of the genus "postmodernism," because it deals with some of the problems created by "distinctively modern philosophy" and helps to solve some of the ontological and cosmological problems associated with postmodernism (Griffin 2007:ix). Mickey (2008:24) agrees with this view in stating that Whitehead "reconstructs many of the basic presuppositions of modern thinking by emphasizing the prominence of becoming over being, change over permanence, and interrelatedness over individual substances."

As a "constructivist postmodernist" (Mickey 2008:24; De Quincey 2010:49), Whitehead was inclined to be oriented to process and relationality, to difference and openness to others, to turn from substances (substance and simple location) to events in relation, from subjects and objects to subject-object, and from conceptual relativism to correspondence, from simple structures to complexity, and not to regard his philosophy as "a fixed and single truth" (Wang 2013:1,2,4). Whitehead was intent on radically revising the modern ontology and cosmology; he insisted that we needed "a vision of nature in which all parts of the ecological-cosmological system are innately meaningful, in which sentience or experience is all pervasive" (De Quincey 2010:49).

According to Pedraja (1999:68) and De Quincey (2010:49), both deconstructivism and Whitehead's constructivist postmodernism reacted

against the ontological and cosmological shortcomings of modernism. Pedraja is convinced, however, that they are in no way related. They should rather be seen as parallel developments: they are similar in certain respects but there is nothing that intrinsically links them, apart from a few references to certain other philosophers.

The above brief excursion into the debate as to whether AN Whitehead's philosophy should be regarded as postmodern or not, and in which sense it could be construed as postmodern illustrates the difficulties surrounding a depiction of postmodernism. It nevertheless could be averred that postmodernism as a *Zeitgeist* or broad approach to life emphasizes the existence of different worldviews and concepts of reality rather than one "correct" or "true" one<sup>1</sup>. Whereas modernism emphasized a trust in the empirical scientific method, and a distrust and lack of faith in ideologies and religious beliefs that could not be tested using scientific methods, postmodernism emphasizes that a particular reality is a social construction by individuals, a particular group, community, or class of persons (Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish 1998; Cole, Hill, & Rikowski 1997). As a philosophy, postmodernism holds that the traits associated with twentieth-century modernism, such as belief in the possibility of managing social change according to sets of rationally developed and agreed principles, are now in retreat in the face of increasing individualism, pluralism and eclecticism (Lyotard 1984).

In contrast to modernism, postmodernism<sup>2</sup> starts from the assumption that grand utopias are impossible or not viable. Postmodernism can be described as a variety of cultural positions<sup>3</sup> with major features of Cartesian (or allegedly Cartesian), i.e. rationalistic modernistic, thought. Hence, views which, for example, stress the priority of the social to the individual, which

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- 1 During the conference mentioned above, one of the attendees, Martin Prosezky, remarked that postmodernism has given us the grandest of all grand narratives, namely that of the "(values) market".
  - 2 This description or typification of postmodernism may be criticised for being rather individualistic and atomistic. It is difficult to see how it could be otherwise in view of the fact that postmodernists tend to emphasise the disparate, the individual, the fragmented and the diverse, and tend to steer away from over-all pictures that describe totalities.
  - 3 This diversity of positions could be ascribed to the fact that there seem to be "many postmodernisms" or postmodern(istic) views of reality.

reject the universalizing tendencies of philosophy, which prize irony over knowledge and which give the irrational equal footing with the rational in our decision procedures may all be assumed to fall under the so-called postmodern umbrella (Jansen, 2004). It accepts that reality, including modern knowledge, is fragmented and that personal identity is an unstable quantity transmitted by a variety of cultural factors. It favours criticism of modern worldviews, is sceptical of humanity's progress and analyses or deconstructs beliefs, pointing out contradictory worldviews. Radical forms of postmodernism such as ludic (playful) postmodernism even advocate an irreverent, playful treatment of one's own identity, and a more or less unconditionally liberal society (Lather 2006). Postmodernism is, perhaps, not so much a stage after modernism as it may be more of a contemporary impulse to deconstruct totalising systems of knowledge, meaning or belief ("grand narratives" in the terminology of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard<sup>4</sup>). Examples of this typically include many of the major organised religions in the world, as well as grand political theories such as capitalism or communism, nationalisms or humanist theories of identity. The postmodern condition for Lyotard is that of living without such systems or myths (Lyotard 1984); for Derrida this is about celebrating the advent of an open future society (De Cock & Böhm 2007; Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero 2009)<sup>5</sup>.

It is often argued that a value-vacuum has opened up for people and groups as a result of the postmodern *Zeitgeist*<sup>6</sup> (Kourie 2006; Pearce & MacLure 2009; Pelcova 2008; Vox Nova 2010). A value-vacuum or -gap has supposedly been created because of the disappearance or discrediting of consensus about value systems warranted by the grand narratives<sup>7</sup> of modernism. The postmodern *Zeitgeist* is characterised by people who are not only

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4 Lyotard specifically targeted and rejected *rationalistic* grand narratives.

5 The deconstructionism of absolutism probably brought about a value-vacuum or -gap in terms of the adherence to absolute values. In that sense postmodernism created a value-gap that called for filling in.

6 Some postmodernists, such as Richard Rorty, insist that they have no need of any values or foundations and hence regard themselves as post-, anti- or non-foundationalists. This stance can be refuted by pointing out their adherence to certain values, in Rorty's case, his adherence to the values of liberal democracy (Rorty, 1991:64).

7 Some critics of postmodernism argue that there never have been any grand narratives in the true sense of the word (cf. the following argumentation).

inclined to construct and accept their own, individual value systems, but also to live in accordance with such systems (Koelble & Li Puma 2011:2; Standish 2004). For those who come from a modernistic background, i.e. one in which particular grand narratives or systems may determine and predispose the thought patterns of people and groups, it literally feels as if everything has collapsed into chaos since everyone is entitled to think and do as s/he pleases. In severe cases, as with ludic postmodernism, it is argued that we live in a time where “anything goes”, i.e. in a time of absolute relativism where nothing is certain and where everything is in a continuous state of flux – including the values that individual people as well as groups of people may embrace (Lather 2006). This condition has inspired in many people a feeling of living in a value-vacuum.

### 3. What actually is in the process of unfolding

What is in fact in the process of unfolding as a result of the advent of the postmodern *Zeitgeist* is that the propensity to adopt and support the grand narratives (which effectively determine and predispose an individual’s value system from above) is either disappearing, or has already disappeared. It therefore comes as no surprise that many (if not all) of the grand narratives are beginning to wane. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the grandest of these narratives, rationalism, had already begun moving towards its own demise with the advent of various forms of irrationalism<sup>8</sup> such as (Neo) Marxism, neo-positivism and pragmatism. At that time people already started deducing that the project of modernity, i.e. rationalism, has resulted in a value system that had led to devastating wars and violence (cf. Fukagawa 2013). At the same time, the associated rise of existentialism began demonstrating that the individual and his /

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8 Technically, the semantic value of this term suggests that rationalism may still be of considerable import, despite the fact that it had begun playing second fiddle to another principle such as, for example, practical workability as in *pragmatism*. Put differently, postmodernism has dethroned reason; it has put reason in its rightful place (Olthuis 2012:3). The postmodern understanding that there is a limit to knowledge serves as a reminder that wisdom is beyond and different from rational knowledge (Olthuis 2012:5). Life, says postmodernism, is more than logic; there is a limit to knowledge and knowledge is never disinterested, neutral, atemporal or aspatial. There is no such thing as Universal Reason; reason is always in service of wider and broader interests (Olthuis 2012:3).

her personal existence are likely to be increasingly accentuated (Heidegger 1960; Sartre 1957, 1973; Visker 1994, 2004). The steady permeation of this tendency into present-day postmodernism has been gaining momentum. It is presently also having an effect on thought systems that have been far less defined than, for instance, Christianity, Islam or Judaism, such as classical Liberalism (Gray 2009, p 29; Grayling 2010, pp 26, 261, 262). In typical postmodernist fashion, some liberal theorists have recently concluded that Liberalism's only chance of survival would be if it doesn't attempt to focus on the values of the whole developed community but, instead, endeavours to focus on what each individual person may require in order to think and to act with the purpose of ensuring a peaceful coexistence (*modus vivendi*) in this values patchwork (Gray 2009, p 29).

Even the grand monolithic value systems that are founded on and grounded in religious premises and faith statements, such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism have always been carrying inside themselves the seeds of their own fragmentation<sup>9</sup>. They have never been as unambiguously and unanimously monolithic as used to be commonly believed; through the ages, each one of them has been characterised by a multitude of sects and denominations – each with its own parochial value system. From the very beginning it was apparent that none of these grand monoliths has, or will ever have, a single, commonly shared value system. All that the postmodernist *Zeitgeist* has managed to accomplish in recent times was to open up the fault lines that had, in any case, been present in those grand monolithic value systems or grand narratives. It is for this very reason that at present we are witnessing people quitting the mainstream churches and religions. Even though they may still, for example, be referred to as being broadly spiritual, each of them has made a conscious decision to pursue an own, individual spiritual pathway, complete with its own idiosyncratic value system. Much the same phenomenon is playing itself out in, for example, Islam, where miscellaneous splinter groups are forming (cf. Al Qaeda and the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad (Arabic: *جماعة أمم* Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-da'wa wal-Jihād) – better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram). The

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9 This substantiates to a certain extent the argument that there never really have been uncontested grand narratives (see footnote 7).

same applies for Judaism, where we find different denominations, branches or movements: conservative Judaists who locate themselves somewhere between the ultra-conservative Hasidic Judaists and the Orthodox Judaists who regard their religious approach as the most traditional expression of modern Judaism.

The same variety and fragmentation seems to hold true for religions that may never have had rigid value structures, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The postmodern *Zeitgeist* has caused most of these former modernist monoliths to splinter and in some cases totally dissipate into a patchwork of individual spiritualities.

#### **4. What has the new *Zeitgeist* brought about?**

What the new *Zeitgeist* has brought about is that we now recognise the fact that we have to deal with an *mélange* of value systems. These vary from those honoured and recognised by individuals, to those shared by a few people, to those that are still being acknowledged and honoured by relatively large groups of people. Hawking and Mlodinow (2010:23) argue that it is now commonly accepted that every individual is living in his / her own virtual fishbowl; each observing and studying, in his / her own way, the world through its sides – from the inside out. In some instances, the picture that emerges may be distorted.

The lenses through which people view the world, which may be referred to colloquially as a person's worldview, life-view, life-map or life-chart, determines how a particular individual will be looking at his / her world. Peck (2006:33) confirms this. He holds the view that each individual has a life-chart that changes frequently without that individual's knowledge or conscious collaboration. It may (and sometimes even has to), however, be changed by the individual him-/herself, depending on his / her experiences with regard to the world around him / her.

It must be reiterated that post-modernism cannot solve the moral vacuum; it only provides space for personal and group values to gain a foothold. It also provides space or opportunity for discussion about, and accommodation of different views. In itself, as a life-view, it is however also an ultimate commitment or paradigmatic belief subjective to any other approach.



#### **4.1 First provisional conclusion**

In view of the above, it is our contention that postmodernism does not seem to have brought about a value-vacuum. Instead, it seems to have deprived the grand narratives of the past of their power and ability to prescribe to people (their adherents) what they should be attaching value to. People do not need the grand narratives anymore because they regard themselves to be precocious and mature enough to formulate their own personal value narratives and also to live in accordance with those narratives. No value-vacuum, therefore, has ever existed; there exists only an inter-human space-time where a plethora of personal, idiosyncratic and even solipsistic value narratives subsist and interact with one another. Bower (2005:225) argues that these value narratives of individual persons are neither less valid, nor less effective than those which may be emanating from some or other grand narrative; on the contrary, the grand narratives have consistently been disempowering in that they have seduced (and even deceived) their followers to think in accordance with what those grand narratives have been prescribing (Bower 2005:254). Bower avers that people are inherently inclined to maintain moral views and to cast these into their own, personal value systems. They no longer need the grand narratives to think on their behalf or to prescribe to them how they are supposed to be thinking (Bower 2005:231).

From the above, at least the following two implications emerge.

#### **4.2 Two implications**

This new approach with regard to how values play themselves out on the market square of life holds significant implications for mainstream religions and especially for the religious institutions that are usually associated with them, such as churches. Recent debates about the growing number of members that religious institutions (churches) are losing on a daily basis are related to this. Why should people keep on associating themselves with the grand narratives embodied by such institutions if those narratives no longer seem to hold meaning for them? If people increasingly feel empowered and enabled to think for themselves, to construct their own value systems and to construe their own forms of morality (to which they are, in any case, inherently enabled because moral behaviour remains undeniably part of being human – all people have this ability), why would

they consider soliciting guidance from the institution of some or other grand narrative?

When this realization has finally dawned on the mainstream churches they will have no option but to reassess their respective ministries – the ministry of their members will have to be adapted to this trend and need, not only for the construction of individual and personal value narratives, but also for the need to live in accordance with the essential contents and intentions of such miniature value narratives. The so-called “bigger picture” will have to play a more modest role than seems to be the case at present; religious institutions may be required to focus more and more on ways of supporting the many thousands of miniature value systems that their members may be embracing on an individual basis inside themselves. This realisation seems to point to the fact that religious institutions may be expected to play a more prominent socio-religious role in future.

This new trend also holds significant implications for education and the entire education sector. The time is gone for parents, caregivers and educators to live and lead (by proverbial “example”) their children on the basis of some kind of grand narrative that they expect the children to emulate. Besides the fact that children are nowadays starting to construct their own, individual, miniature value systems from the cradle, they are also being exposed – constantly – to other children and to an overabundance of often-conflicting value-related messages on a variety of social media. These influences seem to have a continuous and manipulative control over how each child is constructing his / her own, individual value system.

What then, should be the duty and obligation of educators in these new circumstances? It would appear as if their task has gravitated away from “telling” and “living-by-example” towards accompaniment on the road to the formation (by each individual child) of an own life-chart. The parent or care-giver is obliged to demonstrate through co-existing with the child that s/he is personally working on the continuous development of his / her own life-chart and that the same is expected of the child. In order to accomplish this in our contemporary global society with its many and varied social media and information technologies and innovations will require from parents and care-givers to stay abreast of all these developments and to accompany the child on his / her journey through this dense, new forest.

The time is also gone for parents to claim that they “know better” and to demonstrate this presumed competence to the child by “telling” and “living-by-example”. At the present juncture, both parent and child know relatively little about the new world in which they are living; both are now expected gradually to explore, understand and explain their worlds together. It is during this process of joint discovery and shared sense-making that the value narrative of each of them is allowed to develop and mature.

#### 4.3 Second provisional conclusion

As argued above, there does not seem to have been a “value-vacuum” that needed to be filled by value content as a result of the postmodern attitude towards life. That which may be perceived to have been a value-vacuum or -gap has been and is constantly being filled with a plethora of individual value narratives (even from those who may claim that in spite of everything they still choose to think and act within the framework of some or other grand narrative – at the end of the day each one of us remains in our own, little fishbowl; each with his / her own, personal view on and of the world).

This begs another question: Supposing that such a value-vacuum does indeed exist as a result of the rise of postmodern relativism, whose duty is it then to fill such a vacuum? It is difficult to think of any particular individual or societal relationship that should be made to accept responsibility for filling such a vacuum. Whose values are going to be used to fill the vacuum and why?<sup>10</sup>

### 5. How then has the value-vacuum or -gap in actual fact been filled?

No society can expect to survive in a consistent and outright relativist environment<sup>11</sup> (Constantinou & Margaroni 2009:1, 3, 4, 33, 34; Van der Walt 2007:208), which explains why individual values keep trickling in

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10 Although Olthuis (2012) does not provide answers to questions such as these, he moots a number of interesting points with regard to his thesis of a post-postmodern (Christian) life- and worldview – a solution that also deals with the possibility of a postmodern values vacuum.

11 The search for constancy has expressed itself also in other non-rationalistic forms such as affect (emotion, feeling). One can detect this in the movies and also in the use of the social media.

to fill up any value-gaps that might have been created by the postmodern attitude. People and communities keep searching for constancies, for fixed values, for axiomatic anchor points with which people may associate themselves with and accept as valid for their lives.

In line with our argument above that postmodernism, even in its post-, anti- or non-foundationalist guise (as expounded by Richard Rorty, for instance), has never succeeded in escaping the need for resorting to certain values that play a role in the background of one's thinking, thinkers such as Wilber (2000:ix-x, 37) began arguing that the time has come for a post-post-foundationalist orientation to the world and to values. Wilber's main argument against a postmodern orientation is that it relativizes all claims except its own (i.e. that there are no fixed and final truths or claims). It overlooks the need for people to occasionally make claims that might be universally true or valid (Wilber 2000:36; cf. also Collins 2007:24), but also falsifiable.

Cultural philosopher Frederick Turner (1990a, 1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 1995), following in the footsteps of Immanuel Kant who searched for global principles (Nussbaum 2011:117), came forward with the idea of a firmer value foundation in the current postmodern (post-foundationalist) conditions. He mooted the notion of a radical centre of values. He came up with this idea in reaction to the relativism of postmodernists as well as to the rigid moralism of modernism (foundationalism) (Turner 2000: *passim*; cf. Talin & Ellis 2002:36). Turner (1990a:85, 97) proposed that people of different value orientations should strive for a set of values that all people of different life- and worldview and moral orientations could potentially share or adhere to (Turner 1990b:745; Talin & Ellis 2002:36). Turner's thesis, in our opinion, constituted a first step in the direction of a *post-post*-foundationalist approach to values.

The main difference between what Turner proposed and the post-post-foundationalist orientation propagated from here on in this article, is that Turner's view was an effort at creating or discovering a radical centre of values that might be potentially shared by people of different value orientations, whereas the post-post-foundationalist approach allows each person or group of people to develop for themselves a set of values which operates in the background of their thinking, and which therefore not all

people will necessarily find acceptable. In this manner, any value-gap that postmodernism (post-foundationalism) might have left with regard to, for instance, church life and education can be deliberately and intentionally filled in with values or a set of values deemed important by a particular individual or group. Put differently, post-post-foundationalism represents a qualified return to a firmer philosophical or life-view foundation for church life and education. While it does not represent a return to the notion of a foundationalist (modernistic) foundation for church life and education, it enables church leaders and educators respectively to approach their work against the backdrop of certain firm philosophical and / or life-view principles, convictions and presuppositions – which, it can be argued, have always played certain roles in the background of their thinking.

The post-post-foundationalist approach is not irrational in the sense of being rationally inconsistent or illogical. Schults (1999:2) correctly argues that the human being possesses a rational ability that enables him or her to make statements that purport to be universally valid. Church leaders and educators therefore need not become victims of postmodern relativism. Van Huyssteen (2004:10) agrees: a post-post-foundationalist orientation enables (for instance) church leaders and / or educators to steer clear of all forms of deconstructive postmodernism, relativism and contextualism, and also of all forms of modernist (foundationalist) objectivism and rationalism (with a capital “R”). Olthuis (2012:2) also concurs: it helps us steer clear of modernism (foundationalism), on the one hand, with its faith in reason, science and technology as the singular, linear, inexorable and progressive forces for health, knowledge, continual growth and success and the post-foundationalist (postmodern) tendency to concentrate on the local, parochial, contextual and relative facets of life and human existence.

A post-post-foundationalist approach to human reason (rationality) enables one to understand contextuality, also the formative role of tradition and of interpreted experience, to reach out to others beyond one’s own limited community and culture, and to become subjectively, cross-contextually and cross-disciplinarily involved in conversations. The human being, Van Huyssteen (2004:11) contends, is a rational agent, always socially, culturally and contextually involved. The post-post-foundationalist view of human rationality is neither postmodern nor modernistic. It views rationality as common sense, a faculty that enables us to act purposefully,

to think intelligently, wise and responsible for our decisions and choices. It provides us with reasons for doing certain things, for certain convictions and assumptions, beliefs and presuppositions. It saves us from speaking about our rationality in vague theoretical terms such as “Reason” as if it were the foundation of all our thinking and doing. It also saves us from thinking idiosyncratically, in total independence of what others (in our community) think. It helps us to be reasonable, to be able to live and work with other reasonable and intelligent people, in concrete situations, contexts and frameworks. It enables us to interact with our environment in terms of our interpreted experiences, and always in terms of some or other interpretation framework (Van Huyssteen 2012:46, 118).

In a post-post-foundationalist view, our frameworks are not seen as final and complete (foundationalist) conceptual systems (written with a capital “S”). Olthuis (2012:3-4) correctly regards our life- and world view or framework as a belief oriented sensory expectation filter that largely operates below and behind our awareness, in other words in the background of our consciousness. We look at the world through the lens of this framework that works in the background of our consciousness. This explains why our life- and worldview is never final, finalized, cast in concrete, static, explicit and conceptually complete; it consists of a variety of non-rational, sub-conscious and implicit ways of understanding what goes on around us. Olthuis (2012:4-5) concludes succinctly: “...even if it is implicit, operating largely beneath our conscious awareness, we sense our way through the world as much, if not more, than we think our way through.”

## **6. The demands of *modus vivendi***

We are, all of us, obliged to co-exist peacefully in an ever-shrinking world. We should be striving towards peaceful co-existence that is, on the one hand, grounded in the kind of value-consciousness that is commonly understood to be embodied in a radical value centre or in a post-post-foundationalist orientation, with the proviso that each individual fills his or her values with content which he or she derived from their own life-charts. We will not all be thinking exactly the same or embrace the same value system. All of us are obliged to search for and (in constant cooperation with one another) find the basis for peaceful co-existence in a shared set

of agreed-upon values, a sort of social contract<sup>12</sup>. At this point in time it would appear as if the basis for this may be found in those values that are recorded in particular codes of conduct that individuals as well as groups seem to share with one another. In and of them self, these values remain a number of empty shells, concepts and values that need to be filled with content. We should leave them to each individual to fill with his / her own, personal set of value narratives (Van der Walt 2007, p 172). Since the values that can be regarded as typical of a radical centre of values are essentially minimalistic, they have to be interpreted – in accordance with the post-post-foundationalist approach to values – in terms of an individual’s particular world-view or philosophy of life (Parekh 2000:151; Nieuwenhuis 2010:2, 15).

## 7. The way forward for religious institutions

So, what then about Christianity and Christian religious institutions such as churches? Maybe the best advice that we can offer at this juncture, is for them (a) to search for and find some kind of connection with the different value narratives of their members or sub-groupings, (b) to search for and find some kind of connection with those universal values that have been recorded and included in the values-related documentation of like-minded religious institutions, (c) to ascribe and attribute their own interpretation(s) to such values (based on their own faith-related documents and holy books), (d) to be aware of the need to be less “up front” and “in your face” with the dogmatic aspects of the church as an institution, and to lay more emphasis on the spiritual (less dogmatic) aspects of belief and cultic practice, and (d) to give guidance to their members regarding the practical application realization of such values. In brief, the advice to churches is to adopt a post-post-foundationalist orientation with regard to the dogmatic and doctrinal aspects of church and religious life, in other words, to restrict dogma and doctrine to a rather modest role in the background of believers’ consciousness, and to allow the spiritual aspect of belief, i.e. those aspects of belief and faith that pertain to the relationship between

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12 One of the most recent and stylish formulations of a social contract is captured in the Charter of Human Rights that forms part of Chapter 2 of the South African constitution. This Charter contains basic values that form part of the value narratives of most people (unless, of course, they happen to be pathologically deviant in some way or another).

believer and God, to be more prominent, in the foreground. This advice is based on the observation that modern-day believers tend to be less foundationalistic (modernistic) in their religious reflection and behaviour and to be rather more postmodernist (post-foundationalist) and even post-post-foundationalist.

## 8. The way forward with education

The turn to a post-post-foundationalist orientation towards values and their application implies a shift away from a pedagogy of authoritatively telling and demonstrating, to a pedagogy in and through which the notion of a dialogic and dialogic safe space may be utilized: a safe space of togetherness; a space that may continuously be transformed to a pedagogical practice-ground for sense-making by both educator and child. For educationists, a main concern remains the notion of *paideia* of the soul; i.e. how to educate the organic, whole, noble individual, the person with integrity, who will be an asset to his or her community without imposing the values for such perceived integrity from the outside in an authoritative manner. For this ideal to materialise, the creation of a dialogic and dialogic safe space in which individuals' own, personal value narratives may be openly and post-post-foundationally interrogated and discussed, has to be created. A space has to be created (planned, constructed) where both educator and educand can interact freely and willingly on the basis of a post-post-foundationalist orientation around the issue of personal and societal values for the purpose of leading the latter to higher levels of "educatedness". Irrespective of how individual and / or societal (group) values are understood and defined, and irrespective of how their origins (roots) may have been construed and described by the various parties involved in the dialogic and dialogic safe space, they form part of this safe space, and therefore have to be reckoned with in any and all authentic pedagogical processes.

## 9. Conclusion

As far as we can tell, the advent of postmodernism or post-foundationalism has not left any value-vacuum in our personal and communal lives. Any possible value-gaps that might have arisen as a result of the fragmentation and demise of grand scale narratives have been filled in immediately by



the small-scale post-post-foundational personal narratives of individuals who deem themselves to be sufficiently mature to develop their own value systems and to live by them. Any possible value-gap that might have opened up has also been effectively filled in by social contracts among groups of individuals. The true challenge is now, firstly, to fill in the widely accepted values contained in such social contracts with content from our respective individual life-charts, and, secondly, to apply our newly acquired insight into postmodernism and post-post-foundationalism to the functioning of our religious institutions – our churches – and to our efforts in guiding young people through the postmodern (post-foundationalist) socio-cultural maze that we currently live in.

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