

Truth or Consequences

By David Feddes

Some years ago a young man named Brian Warner decided to change his name to Marilyn Manson. Brian created his new name by combining the names of suicidal sex symbol Marilyn Monroe and savage serial slayer Charles Manson. Marilyn Manson became a shock rock millionaire, singing like a Satanist, dressing like a corpse, proclaiming himself Antichrist Superstar, praising suicide and homicide and death in every form, peddling slogans like “We hate love, we love hate” and “Kill God, Kill Your Mom and Dad, Kill Yourself.” Manson succeeded in grabbing money from the wallets of millions of teenagers fascinated with the occult, rebellion and death, but lately his popularity had been fading. Marilyn Manson has sent lots of bad messages, but once in a while he has said something true. He once said, “I’m the biggest fake in the world, but I’m *telling* you I’m a fake, so if you buy it, it’s your fault, not mine.” Another time he challenged parents: “Raise your kids better or I’ll raise them for you.”

Not many parents want Marilyn Manson to raise their kids for them. But strange as it may sound, many parents pay big bucks to send their children to schools and universities that have more in common with Marilyn Manson than most people realize. The classrooms may not be as loud as a Manson concert, and the teachers may not wear weird clothes and makeup, but many soft-spoken, well-dressed professors join the shock rocker in denying objective truth and moral absolutes. Marilyn Manson has said, “I try to show people that everything is a lie—pick the lie you like best, and I hope mine is the best.”

That’s a blunt way of saying something that professors and intellectuals have been saying for years: there is no ultimate truth, no unchanging standard of right and wrong. Our beliefs and moral codes are not based on anything divine or eternal. They’re merely human inventions aimed at pushing an agenda and controlling others.

If you want to train young people to reject God, to refuse the beliefs of Christian parents, and to pick their own lie, you don’t need shock rockers like Marilyn Manson. You just need professors like Richard Rorty. Rorty has been a professor at elite universities such as Yale, Princeton, Virginia, and Stanford. Rorty thinks that college professors should “arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own” and “escape the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents.” Rorty warns parents, “We are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable.” Belief in God and loyalty to family are to be ridiculed, not rationally discussed. The approach is not to prove that Christianity is untrue but to deny that there is any such thing as truth. Rorty has been the leading American intellectual in pushing the notion that truth is merely what other people will let you get away with saying.

Education Against Truth

This trend among intellectuals is sometimes called postmodernism. Postmodernism can refer to various things, and not all are entirely bad. But the kind of postmodernism I’m talking about here says that there’s no reliable link between language and reality, between a word and the thing the word signifies. There’s no such thing as objective truth; or, if there is, human thinking can’t connect with it and human language can’t communicate it. Nothing is true and nothing is false; nothing is right and nothing is wrong; words refer only to other words, not to reality.

In such an approach, there are no facts, only opinions. When you encounter an idea, don't bother checking whether it's the truth—there is no such thing. Instead, ask yourself whether you find the idea appealing. If you do, that's good enough. In the words of Marilyn Manson, "Everything is a lie—pick the lie you like best." If you insist on defining some standard for "truth" besides your own personal preference, then define truth as whatever adds to your power and whatever you can get away with telling the people around you. The important thing about any statement is not whether it's true (since there is no such thing as truth) but only whose power it increases.

When a four-year-old gobbles a handful of cookies and then tells his mother he never went near the cookie jar (even though he's got crumbs all over his face), a deconstructionist might say that the boy isn't really lying. He's just speaking his own personal truth as a powerless, oppressed person. When his mother insists that he did indeed steal the cookies without her permission and that he shouldn't lie to her, she isn't really stating an objective fact. She's reinforcing her own privileged position of power as the adult oppressor. Whether the boy actually stole his mother's cookies, and whether stealing violates a moral standard, is beside the point. According to deconstructionism, language serves not to advance understanding but to advance an agenda, not to communicate but to manipulate.

Belief in the reality of God is not the only casualty of such a view. It also attacks confidence in scientific discovery. The idea is that scientific discoveries and theories are only ways to impose power and advance someone's social agenda. The anti-truth brand of postmodernism opposes any unified view of truth, whether science or Christianity or anything else.

Here is a case where science and Christianity stand together against a common adversary. Maybe you've had the impression that science clashes with religion, but in reality scientists are about as likely to hold religious convictions and go to church as anyone else. A survey of 60,000 professors found that scholars in mathematics, the physical sciences, and biology were quite likely to call themselves religious and to attend church regularly. In fact, they were three times as likely to attend church as professors of anthropology, and four times as likely to call themselves religious conservatives. Many scientists still believe in a reality that is there, and they seek to understand it accurately. But many scholars in the humanities and in the so-called social sciences—anthropology and psychology in particular—are far less religious and far less likely to believe in objective truth and universal standards of right and wrong. A big part of the reason is that they assume an unbridgeable gap between thought and reality, and they consider all beliefs to be constructed by societies or individuals, based not on fact but only on social or personal preference.

Now, there's no denying that science is not pure and true at all times. Scientists are humans with their own faults and agendas. Likewise, there's no denying that churches are not pure and true at all times. Preachers and churchgoers can be self-serving and hypocritical, pushing their own agenda rather than the reality of God. Sometimes the idea of objective, universal truth can be used to stifle discussion or to smother all ideas other than their own. But the fact that we sometimes are hypocritical or power-hungry or just plain mistaken does not mean that truth is not real or that right and wrong is just relative. We need to be more aware of our own flaws, not be less confident that truth is worth seeking. The postmodern trend, however, despairs of finding truth at all.

This has infected many of our educational institutions and has affected our entire culture. It burst on the scene among the general population in the 60's and early 70's, and it continues to

affect millions. It goes like this: There's no objective standard for truth, so believe what you like. There's no divine definition of right and wrong, so do what you please.

Imagine

Back in 1971 the late John Lennon sang, "I don't believe in Bible... I don't believe in Hitler, I don't believe in Jesus... I don't believe in Buddha ... I don't believe in Beatles. I just believe in me, Yoko and me, that's reality." Lennon believed in nothing but himself and suggested that this approach would make everybody peaceful and happy. Lennon didn't appeal to any facts. Instead, he called us to get rid of our beliefs and simply "Imagine."

Imagine there's no Heaven. It's easy if you try. No Hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people living for today...

Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for and no religion too. Imagine all the people living life in peace...

Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people, sharing all the world. You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one.

That song has a powerful attraction, and the tune is one that people all around the world can hum along with. But let's stop humming and stop imagining long enough to look at the facts.

John Lennon was so busy imagining that he ignored how deeply sin is rooted in every human heart, including his own. Lennon sang of peace and harmony in a world without religion or government, but meanwhile he broke up with his fellow Beatles over things that had nothing to do with religion or politics. Lennon asked us to imagine no possessions, but even as he sang those words, he was one of the world's richest men.

But let's not dwell on John Lennon's failure to practice what he preached. Let's look at the bigger picture and ask where this philosophy leads. Many have chosen to imagine there's no heaven or hell, to ignore religion, to forget about the laws of the country, and to live "only for today." Today they may feel like seeking peace and harmony, but then again, today they may feel like doing drugs. Today they may feel like sex with a new partner. Today they may feel like shooting someone.

"Imagine *all* the people living for today." Imagine if nobody had any religious convictions. Imagine if there were no countries to make laws and uphold them. Imagine all the people living for today, doing whatever they feel like. Thanks, but no thanks. I'm afraid the world already has too many people "living for today." We can't afford any more. We've got more than our share of addiction and teen pregnancy and abortion and divorce and crime and greed. And if this philosophy involves such problems here on earth, what becomes of all the people who live for today until they finally die and find out too late that hell didn't go away just because they imagined it had?

Let's face it: we can't imagine our way to a better life and a better world. Despite what anyone might say, imagining is not enough. Picking your own lie is not the way to thrive. We can't sidestep the facts. We must build our lives on truth. If we ignore truth, there's a price to pay.

Many people probably wouldn't connect John Lennon's tender dream of peace and harmony with Marilyn Manson's slogan "We hate love, we love hate" or his advice "Kill God, Kill Your Mom and Dad, Kill Yourself." But whatever their differences, Lennon and Manson have this much in common: rejection of divine truth, rejection of moral absolutes, rejection of

faith in Jesus, rejection of what the Bible says about heaven and hell, and as a result, freedom to imagine one's own version of how he wants the world to be. Lennon tried to imagine heaven on earth without Christ. Manson shrieks that it would be more fun to create hell on earth. Lennon once claimed to be more popular than Jesus Christ. Marilyn Manson went further and declared himself Antichrist Superstar. Some middle-aged baby boomers may think John Lennon's dream was wonderful and Marilyn Manson is awful, but the fact is that once you accept Lennon's approach—once you believe in nothing but yourself and claim that truth can be whatever you imagine—you have no basis for saying that Marilyn Manson's view is wrong. If all we're doing is dreaming up our own world as we go along, there is no objective standard to show that love is better than hate and no God to hold anyone accountable.

Deadly Freedom

This rejection of unchanging truth and absolute moral standards is not only a problem among singers, but, as we've seen, it's also prevalent among intellectuals and educators who say that there is no such thing as objective truth. If we pay close attention to this philosophy, we can't help asking, "If there's no such thing as right and wrong, doesn't that mean that anything goes? Maybe Hitler wasn't a monster, after all; maybe he just saw things from a different perspective and was properly asserting his will to power." You may think I'm using an extreme example, but the issue isn't just academic, to say the least.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher who lived from 1844 to 1900. He attacked Christianity, dismissed all ideas of objective truth, emphasized the individual's will to power, and eventually went insane. A few decades later, Adolph Hitler and his Nazi propagandists were fond of quoting Nietzsche.

And what about Martin Heidegger, an existentialist forerunner of deconstruction and perhaps the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century? Heidegger harbored strong sympathies for the Nazis. He signed his correspondence, "Heil Hitler." Heidegger said, "The Fuhrer, and he alone, is the sole German reality and law, today and in the future." Obviously, if the Fuhrer is the only reality and law, if there is no objective reality or higher law, then there's no reason Hitler shouldn't be a law unto himself.

And that's not all. It turns out that Paul de Man, a Yale professor known as the godfather of deconstruction, once wrote pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic articles for several years during the early 1940's in a Belgian newspaper. De Man called for Jews to be deported, and he praised French collaboration with Hitler.

When I ask whether a person who believes there are no objective standards has moral grounds to condemn even something as horrible as the Holocaust, I'm not being sensationalistic. If you know anything about universities and postmodern philosophy, you know that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and de Man aren't just obscure names that I dug up from some dusty book somewhere. These men continue to exert an enormous influence in prestigious universities and among many who produce movies and music.

The basic philosophy goes by different names: nihilism, existentialism, deconstructionism, and postmodernism, among others. The "believe what you want, do what you please" approach to life is supposed to set a person free, and indeed it does: it sets the mind free from the pursuit of truth; it sets the conscience free from the pursuit of goodness; it sets the soul free from the pursuit of God; it sets society free from the pursuit of decency.

When you live in this new liberty, you have absolute freedom. You're free to indulge any sexual appetite whatever. You're free to enjoy whatever drug gives you the most exotic

hallucinations. You're free to destroy another person if that's what you want. You're free to commit genocide. You're free to do absolutely anything. Without God, everything is permitted.

But if this is freedom, who needs bondage? Frenchman Michel Foucault, perhaps the most prominent among recent postmodern intellectuals, made quite an impression among scholars worldwide with his writings. Foucault claimed that all morality is just a social fiction, including any distinction between male and female and any claim that sex belongs only in the context of lifelong heterosexual marriage. Foucault wrote learned books and lived out his philosophy by indulging in sex with many other people, mostly other men. His words impressed many scholars, but clever words couldn't prevent Foucault from dying of AIDS. How sad! Deconstructionism talks a lot about freedom, but an individual or society with this kind of freedom is like a fish that has finally managed to be free of the water. All it can do is thrash about until it dies.

Whether you're listening to a professor who can make immorality sound impressive, or John Lennon sweetly singing "Imagine," or your own inner voice telling you to do your own thing, the message that there is no such thing as absolute truth or divinely given moral standards is really the hissing of that old serpent, the devil. Satan says that if you ignore God and make up your own standards of right and wrong, you will be like a god yourself. But God says that if you do that, you will end up like Satan—in hell.

I had an email exchange with a woman who is involved in Wicca, a religion of nature worship and fascination with occult powers. She liked to put witchcraft in a positive light and prayed to what she called "the goddess." But even as this Wiccan did these things, she said that she didn't claim her religion was more true than any other. "Religion is a choice," she said. "There is no such thing as a true religion. I will say there is no true religion; we each have our own views and needs as far as religion is concerned." Isn't that just another way of echoing Marilyn Manson? "Everything is a lie—pick the lie you like best, and I hope mine is the best."

Facing Facts

Picking your favorite lie doesn't bring freedom. Jesus says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The truth! Christianity is a faith that deals in facts, not just fantasies or feelings. One thing you can't say about Christianity is that facts don't matter. There's more to being a Christian than just knowing the facts, but there certainly isn't less. Christianity stands or falls with the facts.

The Bible says that sin is a deadly reality, that profanity and greed and lying and stealing and sex outside of marriage and murder and worship of false gods are all evil. If that's a fact, we must repent; but if there are no moral absolutes and no such thing as sin, then do as you please, and don't let anybody send you on a guilt trip.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Now, either that's a fact, or else Mary was cheating on the man she was engaged to and there was nothing special about Jesus' birth. It's one or the other, and you can't pretend the facts don't matter. You have to make up your mind.

The Bible says that Jesus claimed to be equal with God. Either Jesus was right, in which case we must trust and worship him as Lord; or else he was a lunatic with delusions of grandeur (as some of his relatives feared) or a liar under the direction of the devil himself (as some of his enemies charged).

The Bible says that Jesus was resurrected bodily, that his tomb was empty, that he appeared to many of his followers, and that he ascended to heaven. If that really happened, Jesus is alive today, and he can raise us, too. But if the body of Jesus is now a handful of dust in some Judean grave, then Christianity is the biggest hoax ever perpetrated.

The Bible tells us that those who belong to God will live with him forever in heaven, and that those who reject the Lord will spend an eternity of torment in hell. If that's not so, if heaven is just a fantasy and hell is just a crude scare tactic, then don't just "imagine" there's no heaven or hell—believe it, and don't bother yourself wondering about life after death. But if heaven and hell are real, you'd better find out how to get into the one and avoid the other.

Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He doesn't say, "I am one alternative among many, and all roads lead to God." You must either accept Jesus as the way, or reject him as no way at all.

You must make up your mind. If biblical Christianity is indeed true, then put your faith in Jesus and follow him. If the claims of Christianity are false, then forget about it and follow another religion or become an atheist. Whatever you do, don't waste your time on the nonsense that there is no such thing as objective truth. Don't pretend that Christianity can be true for one person and not for another. That's ridiculous. Facts are facts. Truth is truth even if nobody believes it, and error is error even if everybody believes it.

The Lord never said, "I am whatever you think I am." The Lord said, "I AM WHO I AM." God doesn't change who he is to fit our beliefs—so we'd better change our beliefs to fit who he is. Whether we like it or not, the Lord is who he is, and there are no other options. In Isaiah 45 God says,

"I am the Lord, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness... I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right...

There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:19, 21-22).

If you're tempted to think there's no such thing as truth, remember that God says, "I, the Lord, speak the truth." If you're tempted to think there's no standard for right and wrong, remember that God says, "I declare what is right." Truth is real, and it is available to us. God's truth is written in the Bible and embodied in Jesus Christ.

This truth has consequences. Ignore this truth, and the consequences are deadly. Embrace this truth, and the consequences are salvation and eternal life. "Turn to me and be saved," says the Lord, "for I am God, and there is no other." Put your faith in Jesus, and hold to his teaching. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

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