Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion. D. Stephen Long.
Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008. X + 114 pp.

The Modern Theologians, Second Edition. David F. Ford.
Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. Xviii + 772 pp.

Witness. James William McClendon, Jr.
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000. 466 pp.

Reflections on the Definition of Modernism

I admit that I was surprised, perhaps disbelieving, when I read long's definition of *modernism*. He seems to group modernity under the caption of "the need to be new" or "the need to be current." I had expected it to include, even culminate with what I believe is at the heart of the modernist question: *authority*. Livingston, Fiorenza, et al, wrote: "The entire nineteenth century can be viewed as an effort to resolve the increasingly problematic issue of authority."[1] Kant wrote,

> "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another."[2]

As I continue my own study of the Enlightenment and modernism, I cannot escape the sense that the issue is epistemological, particularly surrounding the question of the possibility of God's divine self-revelation. (To be fair to Long, I believe his definition fell victim to the brevity of his introductory book and to a perhaps too cute attempt to give a contemporary analogy.)

Giving what he calls the "standard account of modernity,"[3] McClendon refers to Descartes and Newton having "broken the bars of the premodern intellectual prison." McClendon catalogues three waves of modernity—the Renaissance, the Enlightenment period, and the Romantic reaction. (221) Both Long and McClendon spend time framing various ways in which theologians have adjusted to modernism and to realities after modernism.

Long refers to David Ford's Niebuhr-like typology of theological responses to modernity, even listing first the two extremes (the first essentially ignoring modernism ever happened and the opposite extreme a complete capitulation to modernism), then listing the three that bridge the gap (privileging the self-description of the Christian community, the *correlation* of modernity to theology, and integration of Christian theology into a "modern Christian framework"). (Long, 88-90) I would summarize Ford's five types (for which he credits Hans Frei) differently.

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[1] James C. Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Sarah Coakley, James H. Evanns, Jr., *Modern Christian Thought: the Twentieth Century*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 2. See also, Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints, James K. A. Smith, *101 Key Terms In Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology*, (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 54.

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959), 85.

[3] James William McClendon, Jr., *Witness*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 199.

Type 1 completely privileges "a traditional theology or version of Christianity" seeing "all reality in its own terms."[4]

Type 2 privileges Christianity, construes "all other reality" in relation to itself, but continually rethinks Christianity in an effort to engage with "the modern world."[5]

Type 3, according to Ford, "comes exactly at the middle of the line," is a "theology of correlation," and seeks to "bring traditional Christian faith and understanding into dialogue with modernity," correlating the two "in a wide variety of ways."[6] While Ford refers to Tillich as the "classic modern representative" of this approach, it seems to me that Tillich fits better into the fourth type.

Type 4 seeks to reinterpret Christianity in light of modernity.

Type 5 completely privileges modernity and Christianity is valid if it fits in with a particular "secular philosophy or worldview."[7]

McClendon's treatment of modernity is helpful but it is his search for the genuinely postmodern theologian, culminating in Ludwig Wittgenstein, that interests and inspires him. McClendon's search for the genuine postmodern thinker leads him past Lyotard (considering him to be possibly "mostmodern" or at best aware of the postmodern condition but actually only part of a "fourth wave" of modernity.[8] Of Wittenstein, McClendon writes,

"At the end of his life . . . Ludwig Wittgenstein thus explicitly departed from modernity's foundational theory of knowledge, replacing it with a web of understanding, interdependence, and shared practice that marked his invention of the post-modern world."[9]

McClendon also credits Wittgenstein with an "anthropological turn" in which he withdraws from modern individualism and a "linguistic turn" in which he discards modern theories of language.[10]

The three chapters of this section of McClendon's book are perhaps the most helpful and interesting of the whole book in their defining of modernity, postmodernity, and in their treatment of the linguistic aspect of postmodernism.

Finally, beginning with his discussion of "defusing relativism" (296, iii), McClendon begins to outline the possibilities of "communication" and "mutual understanding" across "lines of convictional

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[4] David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, Second Edition, (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 2.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] McClendon, *Witness*, 224.

[9] Ibid., 259.

[10] Ibid.

division." Further, he shows how Christian mission can be possible and legitimate." He may very well have defused relativism in this section of his book with his description of relativism trying to occupy "the view from nowhere" (300)