Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Redux
And Why It Makes a Difference

Adams, Daniel J. (한일장신대학교 교수)

In 1995 I wrote an essay entitled Premodern, Modern, Postmodern—What Is the Difference? which focused on contemporary art found in the sculpture garden of the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts.¹ The main argument of the essay was that the postmodern period gives us, as Christians, one more opportunity to tell the truth. Fifteen years have passed since that original essay was published and much has happened in the interim. Since the events of September 11, 1991 there has been a war in Afghanistan which continues, another war in Iraq which also continues, a global war on terror with an accompanying restriction on civil liberties, and terrorist attacks throughout much of the world including Madrid, London, and Istanbul.

In light of what has taken place during the past fifteen years, a discussion of contemporary art in the sculpture garden of a peaceful art museum seems almost quaint and perhaps even naıve. What in

1995 seemed to be a subject for academic discussion and speculation has now become a matter of life and death. What in 1995 was presented as a possible range of options has now evolved into a deadly clash of cultural values, and some would even say a clash of civilizations.\textsuperscript{2} Telling the truth today is, at times impossible, for such an act can lead to unpredictable outcomes.

One of the reasons for this state of affairs is the difficulty in defining just what the truth is. Another difficulty is the vast array of perceptions that surround the person who is telling the truth. Different people perceive that person and what he or she represents in widely differing ways. And finally there is the postmodern reality of the plurality of truths. What is truth to one person is falsehood to another. Truth claims are no longer considered to be absolute and universal.

The difference between the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern was discovered by none other than Pope Benedict XVI when he gave an academic address at the University of Regensburg in Germany on September 12, 2006. Normally academic addresses given at universities are of little interest outside academia. But within hours this particular address became worldwide news and the political and social repercussions reverberated around the world. Riots broke out, ambassadors were recalled, churches were attacked, a nun was brutally murdered, and a climate of fear settled in among the Christian communities of the Middle East. Clearly the issues of the differences between the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern are back in the first decade of the new millennium in a way that could

\textsuperscript{2} See Samuel P. Huntington, \textit{The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). When Huntington first proposed his clash of civilizations analysis, he was strongly criticized by many religious leaders and theologians as being overly pessimistic. There was the belief that good will on the part of religious leaders could avoid such a clash. Now, in 2006, such a view appears to have been incredibly naïve in the eyes of many observers.