

WitnessKit 3 God and Religions

Class 7

The New Way of Thinking in Art, Music, and General Culture, and The Unifying Factor in the Steps Of Despair.

A Verse to Read Together:

Romans 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(We renew our minds through reading God’s word regularly.)

John 8:31b-32

- Jesus said, “If You abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

The Thinking in the West

SHIFTED

From Enlightenment Theism, where the Judeo-Christian
Worldview guided the culture,

to Modernism

And

Postmodernism.

The shift occurred little by little, not all at once.

The God Who Is There by Francis Schaeffer

traces that historic shift in thinking,

moving toward the loss of confidence in objective truth.

He calls that shift **“the line of despair.”**

Step One toward Cultural Despair

- Took place in the philosophy departments.
 - Step two took place in the **arts**.
 - Step three took place in **music**
 - Step four in **general culture**.
 - Step five took place in the **religious world**.
- We covered step one—philosophy—last lesson, looking at the dead-end of logical positivism, leading toward existentialism and postmodernism by way of linguistic analysis.

Today we want to look at steps 2,3,and 4: Art, Music, and General Culture

- In each discipline, the path was from Theism toward seeking universals apart from God, and failing to find them, toward facing meaninglessness and despair.
- Since rationality apart from God could not provide meaning, the only options left were either despair, a return to God, or a quest to find an irrational source for meaning.
- However, seeking an irrational source for meaning is in and of itself a form of despair.

To better understand the despair of our world, we will trace the shift in thinking

The
history
of the
shift in
thinking

Through these disciplines:

1. Art
2. Music
3. General Culture

We can see the descent from belief in universals into the worldviews of modernism and postmodernism

Beliefs
of
Artists

By understanding the beliefs of these artists:

1. **Van Gogh and Gauguin**
2. Cezanne and Picasso
3. Modrian
4. The schools called DADA, the Happenings, the Environments, and also Marcel Duchamp

Van Gogh and Gauguin: The recognition of futility

Van Gogh

He wanted to use light to find the universals, and also to create an artists' religion without God. He eventually committed suicide in despair of both. (Although recent research claims it was an accidental death rather than suicide.)

Gauguin

He looked for the universals by painting the "noble" savage, but he failed to find universals. He realized the futility of life moving toward death. He attempted suicide in despair.

Cezanne and Picasso: The loss of beauty and meaning

Cezanne

He tried to find the universals by reducing the reality he was painting to a sense of geometric forms. In painting these abstractions, he lost the beauty of the objects being painted.

Picasso

Picasso carried the abstraction idea further, still looking for universals, but to the point where the meaning of the picture as a representation was lost.

Modrian: The loss of human significance and meaning

- ❑ Mondrian carried abstraction to extremes, and in the process created rooms of art that had no human significance at all.
- ❑ He was fighting for a universal by painting horizontals and verticals, and creating a balance of line, but the results had no meaning instead of universal meaning.
- ❑ This became an example of the coldness of Modernism. It reflected a loss of the sense of being HUMAN.

DADA, Marcel Duchamp and the Happenings, and the Environments,

The Dada school created art and poetry and even the name of their school by chance.

Marcel Duchamp attempted to create anti-art by incorporating porn, for the purpose of destroying morals and conventions and saying that nothing is important. He introduced the Happenings and the Environments, which bleed over into Postmodernism's view of art. The theme of these temporary works is that all is chance, and people are nothing.

From that point, art went into

Its Postmodern phase, with an emotional goal rather than an intellectual goal. The emotion of the viewer became the focus of the art, not the intention of the artist. Postmodernism assumes each viewer creates his or her own meaning from the language grid of the groups to which he or she belongs.

We can understand the impact of the loss of universals on culture

Changes
brought
to music

By understanding the changes brought to music, and through music to young adults.

1. The impressionists
2. The modernists
3. Musique concrete
4. Popular music, from Swing to Jazz and Rock and Roll, to Punk Rock, and Heavy Metal.

The impressionists

Music followed along with art, and during the same eras.

Impressionists such as Debussy tried to create a sound picture through the hearing and the emotions. “Clair de Lune” was his musical impression of moonlight, for example. He tried to do with music the same thing the artists were attempting with light. He modified the form, but still had reasonable chords and harmonies and resolution.

The modernists

- Such as Dmitri Shostakovich and Bela Bartok began to try to abstract meaning from music while eliminating form altogether. Their work became choppy and capricious, but still tried to give an impression of something, such as in Bartok's "Dawn."

Musique concrete

- “Musique concrete took abstraction further, into chance forms and distorted forms of what they called music. Schaeffer describes it this way, “The effect is overwhelming. The message which comes across from the distortion is the same as in modern painting. All is relative, nothing is sure, nothing is fixed, all is in flux. *Musique concrete* is just one more way of presenting the uniform message of modern man.”—No universals can be found.

Popular music, from Swing to Jazz and Rock and Roll, to Punk Rock, and Heavy Metal.

- Popular music took the same themes and applied them in the moral realm. Swing music generally accepted the moral universals of the Christian culture, and focused on love and commitment. Jazz was less focused on universals and more on emotion. Rock and Roll broke the conventions of popular music and also began breaking the moral conventions of the parents' generation—viewing them as mere conventions rather than universals.

Popular music, from Swing to Jazz and Rock and Roll, to Punk Rock, and Heavy Metal.

- Heavy metal moved toward finding meaning through an emotional but irrational trip, and sometimes advocated drug use for the same purpose. Punk Rock moved on into nihilism, where NOTHING is believed to make sense.
- Popular music brought the ideas of modernism and postmodernism into the youth culture as nothing else did, and popular music was responsible for a tremendous loss of understanding and societal damage for subsequent generations.

Both art and music present the

- Bible believing churches with real opportunities to reach the lost and to redeem the culture. Christian music has been rather successful at bringing young people back to the reality of God's good wishes for their lives.
- Many Christian musicians are bringing redemptive ideas into the sounds of popular music. Styles vary but the message is the essential thing. The sound and the message **should** have some correspondence.
- In these matters we have a responsibility to fill our minds and hearts with what is good, and to reject the bad.

Style and Content

The goal should be to reach hearts

- By incorporating CONTENT or MEANING
- Into the STYLES that attract listeners.
- However, some styles that distort meaning or communicate despair are not suitable to meet that purpose. The style and content must fit together well enough to be understood on both an emotional and intellectual level.

Both art and music offer a further

Opportunity to Christians to use their creative gifts for God's kingdom. Postmodernism has opened the way for appreciating diverse forms, and Christians should step up to the challenge of creating new and beautiful gifts for the culture.

In addition, the education system tends to fail to present systematic learning in a Postmodern era. Learning to play a musical instrument requires systematic learning, and is very good discipline for students. Creative artistic endeavors are an opportunity for good self-expression as well.

Often students love music or art

- But not both, and we are not advocating “cookie cutter” education. Rather we are encouraging each other to use the creative gifts God has given us for His glory and our soul satisfaction.
- In each field, the message matters most.

We can follow the path of intellectual change

Changes in General Culture

By observing changes in **general culture** over the last century.

1. Loss of conventions in literature
2. The loss of conventions in morals
3. The influences in the mass media

Loss of conventions in literature

The Nineteenth Century—before and during the Victorian era—reflected a Judeo-Christian consensus in morals

That century gave us some of the literary giants of the English language, such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain.

Mark Twain rejected God, but retained the moral memory of his time. Jane Austen rejected the severe restrictions on women's opportunities and the arranged marriage pragmatism of the time, yet appreciated the moral universals. Charles Dickens fought oppression with his pen.

Loss of conventions in literature

- They wrote GOOD stories. This is in keeping with the Biblical tradition—God gave us His book with history in story form.
- Some writers of the 19th century began to challenge the conventions—with poetry leading the way—Walt Whitman and Stephen Crane.
- The twentieth century brought authors to prominence who explicitly rejected the morals of the Christian faith—such as Henry James—and who began rejecting ALL rules.

The loss of conventions in morals



Dr. Schaeffer described this as very damaging, because when people lose sight of meaning in other areas of life, they still look for meaning in love and marriage.

Yet Henry James tried to smash all of that.

The television has carried those ideas into everyone's home, via comedies and dramas. How many programs treat marriage with respect? How many do not?

The loss of conventions in morals



We see that the culture presents a monolithic message to our youth

that everything is relative,

- that parental rules are mere conventions,
 - ▣ that students have a right to make their own choices in any direction they please, so long as they play it safe with latex.

The loss of conventions in morals

- **Music,**
- **literature,**
- **science class,**
- **health class,**
- **mass media,**
- **youth oriented tv comedies**
- **all say the same thing.** They all claim that no moral universals exist, that all is relative, and that the goal is to have as much pleasure as possible while avoiding obvious consequences.

The loss of conventions in morals



None of those communication methods addresses the consequences to the heart and soul,

the deadening of the soul

and the deadening of the ability to form lasting emotional bonds that sustain a marriage.

None of these things admit the existence of love or the role that commitment plays in love.

Without commitment, sex is selfishness in disguise.

The loss of conventions in morals

- In addition, the moral relativism taught by the culture at large extends to homosexual activities and to experimentation to discover one's "sexual identity."
- A direct consequence of the move to legalize homosexual "marriage" will be extending homosexual counseling into the public schools, including support groups for gay youth.
- The culture will **lock young people into their fears**. Students with doubts about their orientation will become trapped in the expectation that it is what they are.

The Governor of New Jersey

Is our example for today. As of August 2013, he has signed a law making it illegal in New Jersey for parents to seek reparative therapy for students to help them escape homosexuality.

We are watching Romans chapter 1 become the ongoing trend—the culture abandons the Bible and God as Creator, and the culture becomes locked into homosexuality as a trend: Ancient words predict spiritual cause and effect in the 21st century.

The loss of conventions in morals



- This extension of immorality into the schools is based upon the idea that Judeo-Christian moral universals are mere opinion, and that one group's set of morals is just as good as another's. This assumes that God either does not exist or has not communicated anything about morals to human beings.

The loss of conventions in morals



Because the relativism in morals is based upon group identity, the theory becomes self contradictory.

Iran's form of "group-defined morals" applies the death penalty to homosexuals,

Gay rights group-defined morals claim "anything goes."

The politically correct response is to say both are right.

The influences in the mass media



- The mass media is the main vehicle for societal change, through television, the internet, social networking sites, and radio and music, and to a lesser degree, newspapers and magazines.
- With the exception of specifically Christian broadcasting and alternate media, the remainder proclaim “all relativism all the time.”

The influences in the mass media



- The media glorifies actors and other celebrities whose lives are only lived for self, and who almost always have NO CLUE about how to sustain a marriage.
- The culture at large has lost the criteria for deciding which moral claims are reasonable and which are not. The culture cannot tell right from wrong.

What is the idea that undergirds

All these changes? What basic belief shifted, which allowed all the cultural standards to slide?

The idea is

- **The concept of a divided field of knowledge.**
- “The watershed is the new way of talking about and arriving at truth, not the terms the individual disciplines use to express these ideas.”—Schaeffer.
- The idea is all over the world. American and European universities train the leaders of Africa, Asia, South America. The divided field of knowledge is pervasive among the leaders of the world.

The divided field of knowledge

Assumes several things:

1. *Knowledge of the physical world cannot supply meaning for people's lives.*
2. *The dialectic has replaced classical reason.*
3. *Meaning cannot be found in rational beliefs.*
4. *Meaning is found in an experiential leap of some kind, which is irrational and not able to be communicated to others.*
5. *The dialectic can be applied to group power.*

We need to recognize some dangers from the divided field of knowledge.

Dangers

1. Backlash from Muslims who were taught the divided field of knowledge in our universities.
2. The collapse of enlightenment ideals as the world adopts tribalistic Postmodernism.
3. Elevation of communism and socialism as economic systems in our universities.
4. Loss of truth in our churches.

An added danger in our world

- Is that the young men from the Islamic world **react against** the divided field of knowledge as taught in our universities, and come out of the universities MORE committed to their religion, and less open to secularism.
- They **know** the divided field of knowledge is wrong. They do not know that the Christian view of universals is right, because Christianity is treated with utter disrespect on university campuses.

Enlightenment secularism

- Is an **unstable equilibrium point**, and the freefall into Postmodernism proves it. The young Muslims who come to our colleges cannot reform their world based on enlightenment ideals BECAUSE the whole idea of universals has been trashed. **Postmodernism reinforces their tribalistic beliefs, rather than universal human rights.**
- To find the ideals, you have to find the **True and Good God**. Only the Bible describes Him. God is the source of the universals. Societies based on His universals can be free.

God as explained in Islam

- Is not primarily good, but is primarily POWERFUL. His will is a deterministic will too strong to resist in any way. He makes people do wrong, then punishes them for the wrong. The only sure way to have paradise is to die in *jihad*.
- This negates the moral demands of the Goodness of God and brings in the need to please a **capricious** deity—even by going so far as murderous acts for the purpose of expanding the deity's totalitarian reach.

But even that appears better to

- Someone growing up **with the certainty of God**, than the **divided field of knowledge and meaninglessness of secularism**. An irrational leap does **not** look better than the certainty of God's existence.
- At least with their belief system they can keep logic intact. They don't have to throw away their minds to have meaning.
- Postmodernism **both** reinforces tribalism AND closes the door on enlightenment ideals.

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The attraction of cultural relativism

- is hedonism. But Solomon showed us long ago in Ecclesiastes that hedonism is futility.
- Secularism does not hold enough principle, in its current form of cultural relativism, to be a convincing alternative for those who find meaning in their faith.
- However, Biblical Christianity DOES have principle enough to provide both meaning and real freedom. It is the BEST alternative available. It is the alternative that is true to God's Law written on human hearts.

The attraction of cultural relativism=Hedonism

- Cultural relativism fragments societies by denying the universals that hold them together.
- The hedonism it enables will further fragment societies in the next generation and the next after that, as the family unit becomes less stable. Hedonism fragments families rather than building family ties. The family unit is the basic engine for economic stability, with its shared goals and division of labor. If it is unstable, economic instability follows.

The solution is effective evangelism—**not** in terms of

- ❑ Manipulation or pushiness, but in terms of open dialogue and presentation of Biblical truth in a positive way.
- ❑ Students won't find that in college classrooms. The church must find ways to present it outside the boundaries of the campus, but accessible to young visitors from closed nations.
- ❑ The internet is a good place to start.

The solution is effective evangelism—

- We have to reach our own younger generation as well—so that the students around the visitors can find ways to present the truth.
- The watered-down teaching of the typical church youth group does not prepare young people for dialogue.

Ideas for that purpose:

- Contrast Christianity with the secular message, and talk about God as the source of all that is good.
- Discuss the meaning of Christ's cross—the truth that justice and mercy must be perfect in God's character, and the cross makes that possible. Only a perfectly GOOD God can extend mercy while remaining totally just, since He satisfied the requirements of justice for us on the cross.

Ideas for that purpose:

- Francis Schaeffer's book, **BASIC BIBLE STUDIES**, is a good gift, along with a Bible in readable English—such as the New International Version. If a Muslim offers you a Koran accept graciously and reciprocate with a Bible.
- Prayerfully collect thoughtful gifts for the purpose of reaching others.

Talk about the life and death contrast in the two religions:

- Christianity teaches that God loves us so much, He was willing to die so that we would not have to die eternally. He is on the side of LIFE, not just now, but forever. Yet our choices are real before Him.
- Discuss God's GOODNESS as His source of moral authority—that He is both totally GOOD all the time, and holds all power.
- A Muslim needs to understand some of these basic concepts before he can be ready to ask for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' atonement and then invite the Holy Spirit into his life.

I think they also need to understand that Christ's death on the cross

Was for everybody. He explained it in the Old Testament – that “He has inscribed us on the palms of His hands.” He will never forget us, even if we feel forgotten. We matter to Him. “He was pierced for our transgressions”—Isaiah 49:14-16 and Isaiah 53:5.

- The New Testament explains that the cross of Christ was for both Jews and Non-Jews—and that covers EVERYBODY. Christ brought down the wall between the two groups by fulfilling the law for us, since we were not able to keep it perfectly—Ephesians 2:11-22.
- This means the entire Bible is for EVERYONE.

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The NEXT Danger:

- Postmodernism embraces communism—being immune to facts like the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bloodbath of Mao's Cultural Revolution and the mass murder in EVERY communist regime to date.
- If someone buys into the dialectic and rejects God and universals, socialism sounds like a benevolent and caring system.
- If that person also rejects factual information, the fact that communism NEVER WORKS is no impediment to embracing it.

Dr. Schaeffer points out that

Communism caught the fancy of idealistic communists because of its concern for man. But the source of real care for individuals *as individuals* comes from Biblical Christianity.

Socialistic economic systems have been particularly damaging in Africa, where the desperate poverty has been reinforced by the economic failure of socialist systems, plus widespread corruption. Power is concentrated in the hands of only a few, who harvest the economic aid for themselves.

Socialism makes promises and then fails to keep them. The theory sounds so attractive, nations often choose MORE socialism to try to remedy the failure.

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The last danger: Loss of truth in our churches.

- If we buy into salvation as merely an irrational leap of faith, we trade perfectly lovely, coherent truth for an irrational lie, and we deny the goodness and loving kindness of God, who truly communicates with us through His word.
- We live in a lost world. That world **NEEDS** the truth we have. “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!”
- May God give us an open microphone to communicate His truth!

Homework Discussion

Closing Prayer

Closing Promises to Read Together

Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

Thus says the LORD God,
“I Myself
Will search for My sheep.
I will deliver them
From all the places
Where they were scattered
On a cloudy, gloomy day.

Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

I will bring them out.

I will gather them.

I will bring them home.

I will feed them--

in good pasture

by streams of water.

I will lead them to rest....

Promises From the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:11-31

I will seek the lost.

I will bring back the scattered.

I will bandage the broken.

I will strengthen the sick.

I will feed the wicked--with judgment.

I will remove the trampers who cause harm.

My flock will no longer be in danger.

My Son will be their Shepherd.

I will make them a blessing.

I am with them and they are Mine.

Homework

3 sets

Homework Lesson 7 Day 1

- Let's look at other Old Testament passages about eternal life. Read Psalm 21 and Psalm 133 and Deuteronomy 4:48 and 5:29.
- In Psalm 133, what was the blessing God commanded? The Scriptures in King David's time were not divided into chapters and verses. He poetically identified the passage by the location of the mountain reference. "There" refers to the place in the scrolls.
- In Psalm 21:2 and 4, what request did David make of God that he believed God promised him?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 1

- In verse 6 of that same Psalm, where would that forever-life take place?
- In verse 7 of that same Psalm, what was King David's basis for thinking God would give him life forever in God's presence?
- How does this description compare to the New Testament's directions about having eternal life?
- What role does prayer play in both descriptions? Is this prayer like reading a poem or is it like crying out to God from the heart?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 1

- Read Chapter Three, “The Second Step, Art,” in THE GOD WHO IS THERE.
- In what way did the impressionist painters lead toward the fragmentation and irrational leap of modern art?
- Is it possible to appreciate works of art while disagreeing with their theme? Style in art follows trends, just as style shifts over time in clothing design. Schaeffer makes the point that the style of art carried a message with it in its major shifts since the 1800s.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 1

- In what way was the artistic leap into abstract art similar to the irrational leap of faith of Kierkegaard?
- Because this descent into irrational leaps for meaning was directly related to a rejection of Biblical truth, some of the artists have been deliberately hostile to Christian belief systems, and have created works that target Christianity for disrespect, as described in this chapter. Current movies are similar in message to the artistic exhibits Schaeffer described. What attitude did Schaeffer urge toward those who produced such works?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 1

- What pitfall did Schaeffer point out to the unsuspecting people who are influenced by their works?
- Do you think people are more likely to be so influenced if they have a firm belief in the truth of the Bible, or if they have a faith that is based primarily on emotional experience? If a person finds himself loving what God hates, what should he do?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- Read Psalm 32: 1-11.
- What 3 or 4 elements are required for sins to be forgiven?
- Read Chapter Four, “The Third and Fourth Steps: Music and the General Culture,” in THE GOD WHO IS THERE.
- What was the message of Musique concrete?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- What does Schaeffer mean by philosophic homosexuality?
- How does the idea that “emotional experience gives meaning to life” affect the politics of gay rights?
- Consider recent cultural trends regarding homosexuality. How does the idea of homosexual orientation as an inborn trait affect the discussion? How does the issue of gay rights fragment the culture?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- The world of humankind is divided into male and female spheres, and in some ways men and women are poles apart. Heterosexual marriage is a healing of those differences and creation of a unified whole. It is supposed to last. It is supposed to be a place where love is made real. And in making love real and lasting, the world is replenished with a new generation. Each vulnerable little newborn carries the future on his tiny shoulders. Each vulnerable little newborn is an ambassador for his family in the future of the world.
- What was the theme of Bergman's film, *THE SILENCE*? Why did Schaeffer exclude it from existentialism?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- You will notice that many of these philosophic works have themes relating to sexual immorality. One of the **false promises** of abandoning the idea of God is the false promise of sexual liberation. These works show that instead of finding meaningful relationships out of that supposed freedom, **meaningless futility** is the ultimate result.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- Utilitarian sex is meaningless sex. Love is not love without commitment. God created sexuality for the purpose of sustained, committed love in marriage, as well as for creation of new generations of human beings. Sexual “liberation” undermines all of those purposes.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- Looking for freedom apart from God, modern man found emptiness and callousness. When young adults pile layer upon layer of meaningless sex into their lives prior to marriage, they carry that baggage with them into the marital bedroom and never find the fulfillment they would have found by waiting for God's plan and His good purposes.

True love is worth the wait.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- It is not to say that failure in this arena is utterly catastrophic. Repentance and change is certainly possible with God's help! God loves to restore and rebuild what humans have messed up.
- But the more an individual engages in sexual selfishness and the act of using another for gratification without commitment, the more callous a person becomes.
- God did not design sex for callousness. Quite the opposite! He designed it for real LOVE.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- Marriage is designed by God to last for the seasons of life, and for love to last.
- Marriage in one generation brings the continuity of an intact family for the next two or three generations—the framework of certainty in an uncertain world—a shelter and a place to always find willing help from others. It is SO much more than an emotional construct.
- When people allows themselves to become callous in this part of life, they often leave a trail of abandoned offspring. The lives they hurt go far beyond their own. That is NOT God’s plan. God does not want anyone to be abandoned. He promises to never abandon us. “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Homework Lesson 7 Day 2

- Life has a constantly changing rhythm as a person goes through its seasons, and a solid home-life is a strong help for all those seasons.
- Callousness and brittleness go together.
- It is as important to be faithful to one's future marriage before finding the right person to marry, as it is to be faithful to the spouse after marriage—because marriage is THAT important. That kind of faithfulness will make the marriage last.
- Our culture has so lost sight of all these matters that it no longer understands what marriage IS.

Homework Lesson 7 Day 3

- Read Isaiah 26: 1-21.
- What additional elements related to eternal life are seen in this chapter?
- Read Isaiah 66:1-24. What additional elements related to eternal life are found in this chapter?
- What percentage of human beings will face God's judgment according to Isaiah chapter 66?

Homework Lesson 7 Day 3

- Read Chapter Five in THE GOD WHO IS THERE -- “The Unifying Factor in the Steps of Despair.”
- What is the unifying factor in all the different realms of thought that accept relativism?
- The Bible gives a different reason for the sense of meaninglessness that people have. What is that reason?
- Why does Schaeffer say that we have dishonored God if we accept the dialectical methodology regarding truth?