



SHORT ITEM SERIES- CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Short item series- Contemporary culture: Part 1- The 60's counter-culture

- **How did we get here? Not you! I mean society.**

Did you know culture has not always been this way.

- In fact in the last 60 years western society has undergone a massive change. And do you know who the guinea pigs are? The youth- your age.

- Here's an extremely brief overview of contemporary culture and the philosophy that it springs from.

Subject 1

- **The 60's counter culture.**

Various things collided:

- The invention of the contraceptive pill
- The legalization of abortion.
- Great increase in the influence of TV, pop culture- music, movies, advertising etc.

- Decline of sound Christianity. Churches adopt hippie culture, with it's music style, and informality came in worship.
- Evolutionary ideas gained a foothold.
- Existentialism and eastern philosophical ideas become popular.(Life is to be understood subjectively. Life has no objective meaning. Make it have any meaning yourself- or maybe just just say "What's the point" and give up!)

Result:

- People didn't seem to have to be so responsible for their actions (especially sexually). Informality and even anarchy was advocated.
- A 'Counter culture' came in (a push back against the previous moral constraints and authority)
- There was a 'Sexual revolution' "I want to be free to do what I want to do". Promiscuity became acceptable and people lost their shame at sexual sin.
-Before this most people got married before having children within stable family units. Even in non Christian society, the view was that sex was to be reserved for marriage. Many didn't obey, but it was still seen as sinful.
-The new attitude was characterized as "free love" but it was just unrestrained lust.
- A 'Permissive society' came in.- social norms became increasingly liberal. Practically anything goes, just as long as you don't harm anyone. (Emotional, social or spiritual harms are just ignored)
- This was 'freedom' in sex, drugs, and general attitudes. (But it was a freedom to enslave yourself. The freedom of playing a game without rules, or jumping out of an airplane without a parachute! A fake freedom!)

Hedonism

- The philosophy of the permissive society was Hedonism.
- This is the type of philosophy you arrive at without thinking much.
- The point of life is to pursue personal selfish pleasure. Seems a good idea to many?
- The assumption is that this will make you happy. But the assumption was wrong.
- The idea, is to stimulate the senses by any means. Things like alcohol and drugs and sexual experimentation. Or even just loud music and bright lights. Anything to give a thrill and heighten excitement, or affect the senses.
- The results of this were multitudes of broken relationships, families and hearts, because of a pursuit of excess.
- The problem is that this is like eating too many sweets- you get sick of it. Or shining a bright light in your eyes- you become blind and desensitized.
- You have to go to more extreme lengths in order to feel normal.
- This ends in it being harder to feel happy.
- It's short term pleasure, long term depression.
- In the music culture the abuse of alcohol and drugs led to an explosion of young suicide.

- The problem was, Hedonism didn't take you where you wanted to go.

It was the use of various activities and substances that were like vehicles you become locked into.

That got faster and faster and didn't go in the direction you wanted. Just downhill!

Until in the end you'd crash and burn.

- We'll look at how things moved on into Postmodernism and The culture wars in subsequent weeks.
- But suffice to say that the abandonment of the old Christian values has not gone well.

- Here's some statistics I heard this week.

-Now, the leading cause of death in men under 35 is what?

Suicide! (Recently overtaking accidents)

-In 2018-19, 24% of 17-year-olds reported having self-harmed in the previous year, and seven per cent reported having self-harmed with suicidal intent at some point in their lives.

16% reported high levels of psychological distress

-Now (2023) nearly half of 17-19 year-olds with a diagnosable mental health disorder has self-harmed or attempted suicide at some point, rising to 52.7% for young women

- -This just wasn't the case before the 60's counter cultural sexual revolution.
- -There was mental illness and depression, but not on such a massive scale.
- What's changed?

The abandonment of a Christian worldview.

- There must be something terribly wrong with our culture for this to have happened.

- Don't follow the world. It's being led downhill.
- And they have no idea where they're going.

Don't assume they do.

2 Verses to end

2 Tim 3 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"

Matt 15.14 "they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch"

Short item series - Contemporary culture: part 2- **Postmodernism**

John 18.37,38 "Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, **What is truth**"

- This is a key verse with relation to our subject.

- Following on from our look at the 60's counter culture, we're going to look at the cultural change in ideology after this time.
- In the 60's and 70's a movement emerged in continental philosophy after the death of an influential existential philosopher called Jean Paul Satre (and with him the popularity of that movement).

But the main foundation remained, that of an individualistic approach to finding truth. What we call *subjective* (from the subject, or 'inner' individual), not *objective* (from the object, or 'outer' fixed reality).

- This new movement was called structuralism.
- This looks at the overall structure of things, rather than the internal function of them. (For example, looking at the structure of a school, not what is taught. Or how language is structured, not what is said).

It applies this to culture, behaviour, experience, existence etc.

- People like Roland Barthes looked at the structure of 'meta language'- or how it is possible to decode the 'signs' of society.

He developed a complex system of doing this.

For example, he looked at adverts, commerce and popular culture.

- It is true that there is more language and structure behind mere words.
- For him, there was a big system behind everything manipulating us.
- So, for example, look at the idea of the anti-establishment 'rebel'. The famous picture of Che Guevara, that is often seen in popular culture.



- This can be seen as identifying with this Marxist view of politics, which is very anti-capitalist (that is against big business and corporate greed etc)

-The ironic thing Barthes identifies in such things is that the structure behind this uses the idea for the very opposite ends.

-It sticks the picture of Guevara and puts it on t-shirts to sell to the unsuspecting young 'rebel' so it can make money to feed corporate greed!

- He also saw that people can interpret this wider language subjectively, but according to a sort of 'grammar'. He tried to find the 'rules' people use for this.

- But such overarching structural ideas didn't really succeed in being able to explain everything adequately.

And so the structuralists gave way to the post-structuralists.

- One of these called Jean-Francois Lyotard coined the term "**Postmodernism**".

• You may think that the word 'modern' means anything right up to date. But in this context, the word means anything from the 'modern age' in philosophy, which ran from the late 17th century to the 20th century.

- So the 'post (which means after) -modern' age, would be after this.

- This is the age we live in now.

And it played out in art and wider culture.

- What Lyotard meant by 'postmodern' is the rejection of all 'meta-narratives' or overarching explanations of how everything is.

- This is rejected because philosophy had failed to be able to adequately determine a way to find objective truth.

-Not

with rationalism (deductive reasoning)

-or

with science (inductive reasoning).

Both of these things were found to be questionable, or at least provisional.

- "What do you mean sir?"

I thought today everyone thinks science determines truth!

- You may think that, but that's not what an honest scientist would claim now.

- They would have, over optimistically, thought that in the 17th century, but they soon realized that science cannot 'prove' anything because another experiment could be done, or discovery could be made that changes everything.

- (This is what is currently happening with the JWS telescope incidentally! They keep finding massive 'old' galaxies which shouldn't have had time to form according to the big bang theory!)

- You actually can't even prove the sun will rise tomorrow with science! It has done in the past, but how could you prove it would in the future? (Unless you believe in the God of the Bible who upholds everything and promises the continuation and uniformity of natural laws)

- This is a problem because logic (which is deductive reasoning- like maths, that seems to give certainty) relies upon inductive (scientific) reasoning for its premises (the facts you feed into the logical reasoning in the first place)

-So you can say with certainty - if so and so is true then it follows so and so is therefore true.

-BUT you need some absolute facts to put into the equation in the first place! And it turns out these can't be provided with absolute certainty!

This is called the problem of induction.

- Not to mention problems found with the scientific method, theories that are **non falsifiable (they just keep changing them when they run into a problem)**, and the fact that the **theory of relativity** and **quantum mechanics** put man at the centre of his own experiments!
- So, we found ourselves in an age where truth was subjective (you find your own), and society was pluralistic (each culture has their own truth relative to everything else).
- This one big rule is that no one can say what is actually true- because, according to philosophy, it can't be found with rationalism(logic) or empiricism(science).

You cannot have one meta-narrative (overall explanation) above everything- like say Christianity, because it was thought (wrongly, as it turns out) that you can't know.

- Other philosophers came along and applied this to history, to the 'self', and to language and society.
- This would have far reaching impacts upon our culture today. And we can see it in what has been called the 'culture wars'.
- This we shall look at in my next short item on Critical Theory.
- The key thing is that human rationalism and empiricism do have serious limits, but there is another way to KNOW objective truth.

That is by **faith** in God revealing it to us.

- But if you discount that, then you are indeed in a mess! You can't know anything for sure.

This is why belief in the Bible is so crucial.

- Faith is *not* belief in something without evidence (as the philosopher's think), it is trust in a trustworthy testimony from a trustworthy God, and the ability to recognise this.

This ability is God given.

- That's why we encourage you to go to God in prayer so He can open your eyes to the ultimate Truth (with a capital T!).
- I'll end with the words of Jesus in *John 8.31,32* "*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And **ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***"

Short item series - Contemporary culture: part 3- **Critical Theory**

- Following on from our look at the permissive society (sexual revolution), and then postmodernism, I will attempt to briefly summarise how we got to the present ideas in culture.
- As most often what starts in the minds of a few key philosophical thinkers,
-moves to the universities,
-then to the students,
-then out into the next generation of voters,
-then the politicians take note, because they want the votes.
- So in this way policies change and societies change, and even laws come in to reinforce these ideas.
- We can see this today with ideas about gender and sexuality and all manner of things that have been understood by generations for millennia.
- But this generation thinks they know more than any other, and can change all that's gone before.
- I said it started with the philosophers, but it actually starts even before then.

- Who influences the minds of the 'thinkers'?
- As always, we know from Scripture, that Satan is at work in his pernicious ways, seeking to bring down society and especially Christianity.
- This is his latest attempt, and it has been very successful.
- Let's go back to French Neo-Marxist intellectuals called 'post-structuralists'.
- They had become interested in the philosophy of the great structures behind things.
- Especially language (including symbols and signs)
- I touched upon this when I talked about Roland Barthes and his ideas of how to decode the 'signs' we see in contemporary culture - for example the picture of the rebel- (I showed you the famous image of Che Guevara).
- But, as time went on, other philosophers lost faith in any idea that such structures could be deciphered and that there was One structure of things to rule them all.
- There were specifically 2 notable philosophers who are key influencers here.
- One is Michel Foucault.
- The other is Jaques Derrida.
- Foucault sought to apply these postmodern ideas to history in a very loose way.
- While relatively young he had turned to sexual sins, which became more extreme, with homosexual ideas and even violence.
- He had a lot of problems as a result and even attempted suicide.
- His dad was a doctor and tried to help his depressed son with professional medical care.
- Foucault hated this- and thought he was being treated like a lab experiment by people in power.
He didn't like the way he was looked at
- These problems found their way into his philosophical ideas in later life.
- He became convinced that the problems with society were about the abuse of power.

- Over and over again he applies these ideas to all manner of things.
- The main idea is that those who have positions in society that are dominant, like say doctors over patients, can oppress those who are a marginalised group.
- Dominant Knowledge has been used to oppress people.
- But with the postmodern idea of knowledge, no one has a monopoly on what is true or not (because they discount the Bible as objective truth and therefore everything is relative)
- Everyone can think what they want.
- Who is to say what is true?
- Foucault says, just because 'science', for example, is a dominant intellectual idea, it shouldn't be used to oppress groups of people who feel different.
 - And this, according to Foucault's rather poor reading of history, has been done in many ways in the past.
- You can see how his troubles when young influenced things.
 - He felt different and oppressed by doctors looking at him a certain way.
 - So he tried to make a philosophy which allows him and anyone else to be whatever they want to be.
 - His problem was moral and spiritual, but he was ignorant of, and hardened to this.
 - His answer was to blame society, not himself.
- He even said that in the past people who were mad (mentally ill) were looked at as having a problem.
 - But he said they were just a different type of group and should be left alone.
 - Treating them as a medical problem is a 'modern' way of dealing with them and it was done better in the past when they were just left to their own devices! (really?)
 - He does the same with the justice system.
- These ideas found their way into American universities and applied, especially to identity, sexuality and gender, but also 'race' and any number of other things.
 - Science, for example, could no longer 'oppress' us by telling us we're a biological male for example.
- People loved his ideas because it appeals to people who want to justify their alternative lifestyle, and their self-righteousness.
 - Sin can be explained away.

- I turn to Derrida now, whose ideas were also adopted.
- He did a similar thing with language, that Foucault had done with history.
(He calls it deconstruction)
- Derrida realised that there was a postmodern problem with the way we look at language.
- 2 specific things
 - 1). You can always add more information to what is said, and this could change the meaning of things completely -
so that being the case, you can't be sure what is said is the full meaning of anything.
 - 2). What is said by a person you may interpret as meaning something by the words used,
but people can understand the same thing in many ways -
how do you know you are getting what they thought from the words they use?

- For example I could say hedgehogs have spines like us.
- Someone else might say, but we don't have spines like hedgehogs?
- The other person is thinking of the spikey things on hedgehogs,
- but I was thinking of the thing that runs down our back!

You see, people can talk at cross purposes.

- So then Derrida opens this out and applies this to society like Foucault, and says that, because of this, no group can say that their particular view of things is right, because everyone has their own perspective and who's to say what is right!
- Various weaker groups have been misunderstood and oppressed by ones with dominant ideas
- But there are always two sides.
(This is true, but that doesn't mean the middle is always correct- that's committing the logical fallacy of the false middle!)
- Many people certainly HAVE unjustly been oppressed, and this has been rightly recognised.
- BUT to use this idea to justify *doing*, and *being* whatever you want is quite another thing altogether!
- But this is what has happened.
- This is how we get to people self identifying as anything they want and no-one can challenge it!

- This is how we get people having trouble defining what a woman is.
- This is how we get children being encouraged to have irreversible medical procedures to try (always unsuccessfully) to change them from male to female or visa versa.
 - Causing terrible damage to them physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Because they have been told that however you experience things is true, and there is no Objective truth.
- The only wrong is to say you know a great overall TRUTH, that is true for all.
- This is of course is what Christianity claims.
 - And, in this way, Satan has made Christian thought wrong, and all other manner of things (especially sinful things) right.
- Of course, if God Himself reveals the Truth to people then **they can know what is true.**
- These philosophical ideas come under the name 'Critical Theory' - or you may hear it called the social justice movement, woke culture, the culture wars etc.
- It is postmodernism applied socially and politically to culture, in the same way Marxism did it to economics (the rich oppressing the poor).
- It has all come from the philosophers' study into culture.
- It is all based upon the idea that you cannot know Truth.
- But this is a wrong assumption, and those who push these ideas think they have been proved right.
- Of course - If there is no Truth, how can they Know that!
- It IS true that (**without God**) one man cannot say to another what is true. And **without God** you cannot Know truth.
- BUT WE ARE **NOT WITHOUT GOD**, UNLESS WE CHOOSE TO BE, BY CLOSING OUR EYES TO HIS WORD.
- "But Sir does Derrida's ideas about literature apply to the Bible?"

-Ah, well there's a key difference with the Bible.

- But even just commonly, Derrida assumes you must either fully understand something or not at all.

And since we can't fully then we can't at all.

- This is the either/or fallacy.
- There are more than two options.
- There is a middle ground of 'some understanding'.

- But, when it comes to the Bible it is unique because it is what we call a closed Canon.

-Nothing must be added to it to change it- so that solves one of Derrida's objections.

- The other objection is that we may interpret it differently from the Author.

-This *can* happen with ordinary books.

-But the Bible is different because God promises to help you understand it if you read it sincerely with faith.

- This is by the help of the Holy Spirit.
- As well as it being perspicacious (that is - clearly expressed).
- In this sense it is a living book, not a dead text.
- This solves Derrida's second objection.

- God Himself can say, and has said, to Man what is True.

-Therefore Men and Women are under an obligation to recognize this!