

The “Isms” of a Dying Culture

By Nollie Malabuyo, February 5, 2017 (KSYC)

Today, we see an almost total breakdown of our culture. There is rampant lawlessness, violence, sexual immorality, abortion of unborn infants, disregard for all authorities, and radical individualism. Many sociologists have even called our society as a “dying culture.”¹ Theologians are convinced that America is in a post-Christian era, because most Americans no longer have a Christian worldview—a set of Christian values and beliefs. This is not saying that America was founded as a Christian nation, but it was founded on Christian values and beliefs. We call these values and beliefs the “Christian worldview.”

But since the 1960s, there has been a concerted effort to break the Christian worldview of this country and remake it into something else. And that something else is the opposite of the Christian worldview, which is **atheism**—godlessness. “God is dead,” this worldview declared in the 1960s. So today, beginning in kindergarten all the way to college, our children are being taught this godless worldview. What are these sorts of things that are being fed to our children in our educational institutions? I’ll call them “isms” because these ideas are commonly known with the ending “ism.” A worldview is a set of fundamental assumptions that ground the most important things in life.

The first one is *naturalism*, the idea that the only thing that exist is nature. There is no supernatural, so there is no God and no human spirit. Human beings are mere carbon entities, mere material and physical beings. Man evolved from a single-cell organism based purely on chance. The famous philosopher Carl Sagan summarizes this worldview, “The cosmos is all there is, all there ever was, all there ever will be.” This idea began to be popular in the 1700s. An example of how naturalism has invaded America is in our legal system. Before the late 19th century, the culture was more or less theistic—there was a belief in some kind of Supreme Being. But after 1900, Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said that the law is the law, nothing else. The Bible has no place in the legal system. There is no absolute justice, except that which is created by the human mind.

A second “ism” is known as *nihilism*, which comes from the Latin word *nihil*, which means “nothing.” Nothing matters. Similar to naturalism, nihilism proclaims that only the physical exists. But in contrast to naturalism, nihilism teaches that man is just part of a system that operates, and man has no say whatsoever in this operation. So life is meaningless. There is no ethics in life. This is the earlier worldview of the writer of Ecclesiastes, who says at first, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

Nihilism was taught by Friedrich Nietzsche in his writings about the “Superman.” The superman creates his own values, and lives by his own rules in the exercise of his “will to power.” Hitler applied

¹ The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, for example, says, “The purpose of the Alliance’s existence is to call the Church, amidst a dying culture, to repent of its worldliness...”

this “Superman” idea in attempting to wipe out all “unfit” and “lower” human beings in Germany. But today, nihilism is still entrenched in our culture. One nihilist creed states:

I fear no man, I fear no God, I seek no heaven, I fear no hell, I have no heroes, I have no faith, I bow before no one. I am a Nihilist. Death to Philosophy, Death to God, Death to Government, Death to Ideology, Death to Money, Death to Love, Death to Morality. Beyond right and left, beyond right and wrong, Nihilism.

What does this creed remind us of? It reminds us of John Lennon's song, “Imagine”:

Imagine there's no heaven, no hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. Imagine there's no countries, nothing to kill or die for. And no religion, too. Imagine no possessions, no need for greed or hunger.

Nietzsche was especially critical of the Christian worldview because he believed that it prevents the full evolution of humanity into superhuman beings.

Nietzsche predicted that his nihilism would greatly impact the culture from the 20th century onward. It has spawned gloom, anxiety, anger and terror in its wake. So this nihilistic worldview has many offshoots.

While nihilists believe that it is pointless to construct a purpose or meaning in life, others disagree. Many others believe that even when life seems meaningless, they can construct their own meaning or purpose. This is called *existentialism*.

Another consequence of nihilism is the popular notion today that there is no absolute truth. This is called *relativism*. The truth according to one person may not be the truth of another. I can believe something is true, and you may disagree with me, but we both have the truth. This relativism has also spawned the view that there is no absolute morality. One may say abortion or sex outside of marriage is immoral, but another one may disagree with this view. Who's right? Not the Bible, not the law. It all depends on an individual's opinion. So there is this other popular “ism” called *individualism*.

Who's to determine what's right and wrong? No one, except the individual. And this individualism has also resulted in *anti-authoritarianism*, a disrespect and disregard for authority and order. This worldview teaches no submission to any authority, whether the civil government, parents, church, or teachers. This worldview can also be called *anarchy*. We see this today when many say, “Trump is not my President,” and then go on lawless street protests, blocking roads, looting, and burning cars. They even encourage protesters to do violence against law enforcement officers.

Existentialists construct their own meaning and purpose in life, and the most popular purpose is to satisfy one's pleasure. This is called *hedonism*, where the most important thing in one's existence is pleasure and happiness. A hedonist's purpose is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, and he would do everything to accomplish this, even to the pain of others.

Since pleasure is the highest good, a hedonist must accumulate all kinds of things for his utmost pleasure. This is called *consumerism*. He craves for the newest and the most improved, so he's willing to stake his place in a line even the night before to be first to get the newest smartphone or other high-tech gadgets. He always lusts for the newest car, and even for the better-looking partner. He believes that he deserves the best and the most pleasurable of things for all his hard work. And he has to have them *right now!*

Once you accept atheism and nihilism, you lose all meaning and purpose in life. You lose all sense of accountability. And how do you deal with this meaninglessness? You continue your existence in spite of it, making the most out of your life, living in the reckless pursuit of pleasure. And then it all comes to an inglorious end in death, and your existence also comes to an end. Or the other way you can deal with it is to end all this meaninglessness now. What's the use of living?

But there is another—and better, even the best—alternative. When wise King Solomon started his thoughts about life, he said, *“There is nothing new under the sun. Everyone has the same experience. Life is meaningless.”* But in the end, after he has considered all things, he concludes that the meaning and purpose of life is this: *“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man”* (Ecc 12:13). Because life is not meaningless and ugly, but *“God made everything beautiful in its time”* (Ecc 3:11).

Solomon also knew that all humankind is accountable to God, *“For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Ecc 12:14). So dear friends, the Bible says that man's disregard and rebellion against God has eternal consequences. Be forewarned,

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 For 6:9-10).

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (2 Tim 3:2-5).

If you are one of these people, there is but one way out of God's wrathful judgment against you: Repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior and Lord! Not only will you be saved from God's wrath. You will also find meaning, purpose and joy in this life full of temptations and sufferings and hopelessness.

Let us pray: O Merciful Father, we live in a dying culture. We see all around us violence, immorality, disorder, hopelessness and meaninglessness. Help us to respond to all of these evil with loving, but firm rebuke based on the absolute truths of your Word, the Bible. Help us to faithfully proclaim the truth of Christ to a hopeless and godless generation that drifts aimlessly like a ship without a rudder. Help us to give them purpose, meaning and life through the preaching of the truth of your Word. Amen.