

## **New Modernism and the Bible**

*Father, we want to thank You for this day, for the beauty of it. We thank You for the wonder of Your creation. Everything You have made demonstrates to us so gloriously Your power, Your divine nature, and Your ability in designing such a marvelous universe. We thank You too, Father, that You have spoken to us in Your Word. You have not left us alone just drifting around in silence and confusion. You have spoken so that we may know who You are, who we are, and what You have done for our salvation. It brings resolution and reconciliation into our lives. We pray, Father, that in what we study together in this hour You will help us to understand the preciousness of Your Word and the truth You have spoken to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our topic for today is Schaeffer's paper, "The New Modernism: Neo-Orthodoxy and the Bible." This was a paper that he gave in 1950 at the Second Plenary Council of the International Council of Christian Churches meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. At this point he had been living in Switzerland for between one and two years. He had more time to reflect about the new theology. He took some of the ideas we saw in the last article we looked at about Karl Barth and Barthian theology and developed them more. One of the fascinating things about this lecture he gave and the article that came from it is the way we see seed thoughts that became much more fully developed in his later teaching and writing. In fact, we could really call this the intellectual climate of the new theology. He tries to summarize some of the points from the philosophical thought of the culture and the social thought, which he sees as the background behind the development of the new modernism of neo-orthodoxy. Later on in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he gave a series of lectures called "The Intellectual Climate of the New Theology." It was developed in much greater detail than it is here. Those lectures were part of what was behind his books *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Was There*, published at the end of the 1960s. Here he began to develop some of these thoughts for the first time. He suggests that it is not right to see neo-orthodoxy theology just as a theology that arose in the minds of theologians who felt like they needed to have something to say. Rather the theology and thinking of the new modernists and neo-orthodox theologians has to be seen, and can only be understood, if one sees it against the context of the intellectual climate of the early part of the twentieth century.

He starts the article by describing his own experience and the experience of many other people like him. Like himself, many other people grew up in liberal churches that no longer taught the supernatural Christianity of the Bible. They did not teach that Jesus is God and died for our sins, but they taught a very watered-down message about human relationships, the universal fatherhood of God, and the universal brotherhood of men. Schaeffer says in his own life, as he grew up going to a liberal church, this had no message that compelled him or interested him at all. It did not strike him as being something that was intellectually attractive or religiously forceful in any way. Like many other people, he drifted from liberalism into a position of agnosticism. This says that we cannot know God at all or that we simply do not know anything about Him, and it is not even worth knowing anything about Him. He was in a state of uncertainty and agnosticism. He says that many people like him drifted from liberalism into that state of agnosticism. From that state of agnosticism, like himself, many people came to know Christ when they heard Him clearly proclaimed for the first time and came across the Christ who is proclaimed in the Scripture.

He suggests that it is against that background of the failure of liberalism to proclaim a Gospel that touched people, drew people, and compelled people's interests that we see the development of the new theology, which he calls transcendental theology. The idea is that transcendental theology, rather than speaking like the liberal theologian from simply within the perspective of human beings, it proclaims that there is indeed a word that comes from outside the human situation and speaks to men to give men the Word of God. It is a transcendent word. It has a strong authority, coming from outside man so that man can escape from agnosticism. He does not have to be driven into a position of uncertainty with no answers to his needs. There was fundamentally a need

against the background of liberalism for a new theology. It was a theology that had an authoritative word for the human condition.

Schaeffer says that as we look at the intellectual climate of the twentieth century and behind the new theology, we fundamentally see a denial of the absoluteness of truth. When we look at twentieth century thinking in one field after another, there is a rejection of the idea that truth can be known and that truth stands in absolute opposition to falsehood. He sets this out in various ways, looking at some of the thinkers and ideas that have shaped the way people think in the twentieth century. He starts with the approach to logic of some twentieth-century thinkers. He suggests that many of them have stepped out of logic.

If we look at the whole history of Western philosophy, going right back to the Greeks, an idea that was always common was that there was truth here, and opposed to it is falsehood. There is fundamentally an antithesis. This was an idea that Schaeffer developed in much greater detail later on. A is opposed to non-A, as he said later on. Truth and falsehood are in absolute opposition to each other, and nothing can ever change that. He suggests, however, that in twentieth-century philosophy, there has been a radical change or revolution in philosophical thinking. Instead of thinking about truth and falsehood, there is now the philosophy of pragmatism, associated in particular with the name of Dewey. In pragmatism there is essentially the idea that it is not a question of what we know that is true as opposed to what is false. Instead, the truth is found in what is useful or valuable to the thinker, philosopher, or scientist. Once you say that, you have completely rejected the idea that there is truth here and falsehood there. Truth may be here or there if it is useful. It could be the opposite of what truth was once seen to be if it is useful. Once one says that the true is useful or “meaningful for me,” the whole notion that some things are true and the opposite of them is false has completely disappeared. Truth is now defined in terms of its value to the individual. Dewey would have tried to defend this total relativism by saying it is actually only the scientist or philosopher who can really say what is useful and therefore true. He tried to say it is not just the man in the street who can say what is useful to him and therefore true. It is the trained scientist or thinker who is able to say what is useful and true. Fundamentally there is a denial of antithesis that truth and falsehood are in opposition to each other. That whole notion has disappeared, and people consider what truth is on completely other grounds. Truth is no longer absolute; it is what is useful, meaningful, and has value. That is one area where our approach to truth or understanding reality has changed in twentieth-century culture.

The second thing he mentions is the logic of the philosopher George Hegel. Schaeffer refers to Hegel’s dialectical thinking, which says that truth is discovered in the process of history. We see at one stage in history what we might call a thesis. Then a reaction to that develops, an antithesis, or its opposite, which is opposed to the thesis. Then as history moves forward, the thesis and the antithesis come together to form a synthesis. History progresses and moves upward. That synthesis becomes a new thesis, generates its own antithesis, and moves onward. That was Hegel’s key to understanding history. This appears to deny that truth and falsehood are opposed to each other. Truth is something that is in the process of becoming and being realized as history unfolds itself. That is a second part of the intellectual climate of the new theology.

The third issue that Schaeffer mentions is some of the changes that have taken place in modern science. He points out that in science up until the end of the nineteenth century there had been a confidence that human beings could totally understand the universe with the power of human reason. As some scientists turned away from God, they saw reason simply as a tool for a complete understanding and comprehension of physical reality. Then he points out that as modern science has developed in the twentieth century, the old rationalistic approach to physical reality has had to give way to a rather different understanding. He mentions several things here. He talks about how physicists have had to come to terms with light being both waves and particles. Ideas that appear to be in antithesis to each other, opposed to each other, and paradoxical, we have to say are complimentary, and both are true. In the area of science, instead of talking about antithesis or paradox, we have to talk about complementarity or two complimentary truths. He mentions as well Einstein’s theory of relativity,

which is that the motion of objects is relative to each other. For example, you could stand on the ground and throw a baseball at a wall at 15 miles an hour. Or you could stand on a moving platform that is moving at five miles an hour toward the wall, throw the baseball, and the baseball would now go at 20 miles an hour. If you have two cars that travel toward each other at 100 miles an hour, their speed relative to each other is 200 miles an hour. That was part of Einstein's theory of relativity. Some thinkers understood that to mean that everything in the universe becomes relative. Because velocity is relative to the observer, other aspects of our understanding of reality become relative as well. It was applied to our thinking about everything. Everything is relative to the position of the observer. People began to think that our understanding of everything is relative to the observer. We may say that is an inappropriate use of the theory of relativity, but in many people's minds that theory appeared to take away the certainty of being able to know anything with any objectivity. Rather it depends on the subject.

Schaeffer mentions as well Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which says there are elements of uncertainty in the basic structure of reality. If we look at the atomic structure of things, we cannot predict absolutely what the various particles in the subatomic structure are going to do. We can only predict with a level of probability what any individual particle will do. We have no absolute certainty. Schaeffer does not develop any of these points in detail here, though he would develop them much later. He simply points out that in the twentieth century, from the time of Einstein in 1905 when he first made his special theory of relativity public, science has changed the way people think. It takes a different approach in recognizing that it does not have certain knowledge about everything, and there is an element of relativity and uncertainty in its knowledge. In some areas, it deals with probability rather than an absolute determinable reality. It has encouraged an attitude of relativity toward all knowledge. What we understand is relative to the observer.

Fourth, Schaeffer looks briefly at the social sciences. This was an area in particular that he developed more fully later. He says in the social sciences they treat human beings just as objects or things to be studied. For example, the sociologist will do a statistical survey and say that 60% of the people do a certain behavior. From that description of what people do, the sociologist will then create an "ought." If 60% of the people think premarital sex is right and that is what they practice, then it is right. Schaeffer developed this idea of sociological law or morality in much more detail later on. He mentions it very briefly in this article. But this was a part of the background of the new theology. There is relativism in ethics and law in our culture.

Fifth and finally, Schaeffer mentions the arts in a short paragraph. In the modern arts, particularly in painting and music, there is a message of the uncertainty and unrelatedness of all things. The arts in particular reflect where the general culture is. It has an uncertainty about what is seen with the eye. Its message begins to become very subjective, so it is hard for me to look at a painting and say what it was intended to be. My response has to be entirely subjective. I do not think any of us would probably agree if we were to say what a particular painting is. The same would be true with many examples of modern art. The response to it is subjective, because one is uncertain what the artist was trying to portray. In addition, there is a lack of relatedness in modern art. Schaeffer does not develop this here, but later we will look at the first article he wrote on art to see what he has to say in more detail.

He gives these five examples, first in relationship to logic, antithesis, and pragmatism. Next he talks about Hegelian dialectic, science and relativity, the social sciences and statistical surveys of people's behavior to determine morals and law, and finally the arts. He suggests this intellectual background is the context in which the new theology is to be understood. One should not look at the new theology and see it as some theologians who have invented out of their own heads a new theology for the twentieth century. The theology has to be understood against this background of where the general culture is. It is simply a reflection of that culture.

He goes on in the article to ask what this will produce. As neo-orthodoxy and the new modernism takes into its bloodstream this intellectual climate, what effect will this produce for its approach to the Christian faith and theology? He makes a series of points here. The first thing it produces is the belief that Christianity can be true religiously even if one might say it is historically false. The Garden of Eden, for example, describes for us man as a sinner, though it is not necessary to regard it as being an historical account of how man became a sinner. It simply describes the human condition. It may have no historical content, but it is religiously true. We may say we are uncertain about the historical events of Jesus' life, but that does not matter for what we may think about the Christ of faith.

This first consequence of the new theology reflecting on its culture is that a thing can be false and true at the same time. History and faith do not necessarily have to accord to be able to hold onto Christian doctrine. The first opposition that is produced is one of history versus faith.

The second thing we find is that theology may be full on contradictions, particularly as you look at Barthian and neo-Barthian theology. It appears to rejoice in contradictions and paradoxes. The more contradictions or paradoxes there are, the better. It is sometimes difficult to tie it down and say exactly what a theologian means. If you look, for example, at the discussion that Buswell, Schaeffer, and one or two others had with Karl Barth, he appears to contradict himself in the discussion when he talks about the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ. He does not seem to mind that at all. It is the same when you read some of Barth's writing. It is very difficult to pin it down and identify what he says. It becomes extremely difficult to understand. The new theology does not require of itself that it be logically meaningful. Paradox does not matter to it, because theology is in a completely different area from rationality or logic.

We may say that the second opposition that the new theology allows is one of logic over against faith. The idea taken from science, which is a misapplication, is that you can have complimentary truths that appear to be in opposition to each other. They may appear to be logically false, but they will be true anyway. That is a misunderstanding of science, because whenever science faces something like that it just means it does not have a big enough picture of the particular thing to understand why it is the way it is. There is a higher resolution to a problem like light consisting of both waves and particles. What appears to be a paradox or contradiction is not so when we have more knowledge. Neo-orthodox theology rejoices in paradoxes and contradictions. It sees no necessity whatsoever of having logic and faith standing together.

The third area that Schaeffer mentions is that the new theology, as it reflects on and is shaped by the intellectual climate, says that it is impossible for us ever to possess truth. The theologian Bruner says, "Truth might possess us, but we can never possess truth." That sounds like a wonderful statement, and one might say as a Christian there is a sense in which that is true. Christ is the truth, and He possesses me far more completely than I possess Him. We might put it another way if we think about ideas and say that we do not know or understand God or any aspect of His revelation perfectly or completely. We do not possess it in the sense of having a total grasp on it. That is not quite what the neo-orthodox theologian meant by that statement. Really he dismissed the possibility of having certain knowledge at all.

Schaeffer later on made the distinction between having truth but not having exhaustive truth. He does not make that distinction at this point, but it became one of his favorite statements later on. Because God has spoken to us, it is possible for us to have true understanding even though it is not exhaustive understanding. Propositional statements in Scripture, as he called them later, are really true though they are not exhaustive. In neo-orthodox thinking, this meant that apologetics were dismissed altogether. In Karl Barth's teaching, it is seen almost as sacrilegious to seek to reason about God, to argue about God, or to seek to persuade people that Christianity is true. Rationality and faith are seen to have nothing to do with each other. I cannot reason with someone, but there is simply the response or leap of faith. That was an expression Schaeffer used later. He speaks about this

here, though not in those terms. The individual is called simply to respond without necessarily being given any reason whatsoever on which to respond. There is no rationality where faith is concerned. We may say that reason and faith are set over against each other. There are no reasons as to why we should believe. We are simply compelled to believe by our own encounter with God and with His Word. Truth cannot be possessed, apologetics are dismissed, and one cannot rationally discuss God or the evidences for His existence. There is simply the response of faith.

One of the fascinating things in all this is how all these ideas have become a part of so much evangelical Christianity today without people even being aware of it. That is something we can talk about on another occasion. As most people in our culture think of Christianity as religion rather than truth, and even most people in our churches think this way, it is just an indication of how deeply we are affected by these ideas. People in our churches think this way without being aware of it, and everyone would want to deny that they are neo-orthodox or a neo-modernist. But, in fact, this is very deeply a part of what Christianity in this culture has become.

Fourth, he says this produces the denial of biblical authority. The Bible is said to contain the Word of God rather than being the Word of God. It becomes very difficult in neo-orthodox thinking to identify a particular passage of Scripture with the Word of God. The Word of God is when I encounter God in reading Scripture. The Word of God cannot be identified with the text itself. It is rather with what happens as I read Scripture, but it is almost as if I were struck by lightning. Schaeffer uses the expression, "A crisis takes place as I hear the Word preached or as I read the Word in Scripture, and then I encounter the Word of God." He carefully points out, and this became a much bigger theme in his writing later on, that the essential word is the word "existential." On page eight of the article, he quotes the theologian H. T. Kerr, who says, "The crisis at the moment is evidenced by the transition from old traditional authority in terms of inerrancy and verbal infallibility to the current existential view that the Word of God is somehow written yet apart from the words of the Bible." Schaeffer says, "This last quotation is especially important, because the term existential is that which the pure subjectivists in art and music also apply to themselves." He recognizes that the word existential is used in philosophy, art, and music for the artists and philosophers to describe their own thinking. It is not what is objectively true that matters; it is my existential response this moment in time that matters."

Schaeffer points out that this view of Scripture may be made to sound wonderful. Often people will say, "We are interested in worshipping the Bible. That is a kind of bibliolatry, an idolatry of the Bible. It is not the text that matters to us. It is the message that comes to us from God through the text." That is another way of saying the same thing. It can sound very wonderful. We are all interested in the message that God communicates to us. But it very carefully denies that the text as it is written is actually the authoritative Word of God. Schaeffer points out that inevitably this leads to a subject approach to Scripture and authority. He quotes Bruner and says that you end up with a position that says what becomes authoritative is what feels to me to be in accord with the Spirit of Christ. That is one determiner of what has authority. As I read Scripture and I am struck that some part of Scripture is in accord with the Spirit of Christ, then that is the Word of God to me. This is a totally subjective position.

You will see how that has crept today increasingly into evangelical thinking. When you think of much of what is read about the whole discussion of men and women in the family and in the church, up comes this position. It is almost exactly the words of Paul Jewett in his book *Man is Male and Female*. He writes, "The teaching of Paul on the structure and authority is not in accord with the Spirit of Christ. Therefore we dismiss it and see at this point that Paul was not in tune with the Spirit of Christ." That is a completely subjective interpretation. "It is dependent either on my own individual response to decide what is the Spirit of Christ, or it is dependent on where our culture stands at the moment. If our culture says any view of structure in marriage or in the church is something that is not possibly right, then the twentieth-century Christian will read Scripture and say it is not in

accord with the Spirit of Christ.” He is saying that it is out of tune with the spirit of the age, but that has nothing to do with understanding the authority of Scripture. It is a completely subjective, relativistic approach to Scripture. Schaeffer points out that in the end the neo-orthodox theologian is bound to accept current thinking as also being God’s Word. He quotes from Neibuhr on page 8 and 9 where he says that secular idealism speaks the Word of God on occasion. Once you deny the biblical text as having authority, you are driven necessarily into a subjective position and allowing the culture to have insights that you will regard as God’s Word today. The fourth point is that neo-orthodox thinking sets the subjective over against the objective. Instead of an objective Word from God, which is open to all and to which all must submit, we have a subjective Word of God where we have to determine which Scripture, if any, speaks God’s Word to us today. Our thinking will be very much shaped by our culture.

The fifth point Schaeffer makes is that the new theology, against the background of the culture, inevitably becomes relativistic. Ecumenism will necessarily overlook theological differences. Once you have said truth cannot be known or that truth appears in the process of history’s development, you are no longer in a position where you can say what theological positions are true or false. It becomes possible to synthesize all theological positions. Schaeffer says this is exactly what you see in the World Council of Churches’ ecumenical movement. The truth becomes unimportant. Unity, bringing people together, is seen as more important than truth. The opposition here is that unity stands over against truth.

The sixth point Schaeffer makes is that in practice any kind of neo-orthodox theology or neo-modernism is almost bound to become centered on political involvement and action rather than the Gospel that is proclaimed in the New Testament. Once you have abandoned the biblical Gospel and the Bible as God’s Word, you are driven toward seeing some particular purpose here and now in the transformation of society as the primary calling of the Christian. In this context, he points out that inevitably people who are shaped by these ideas will lose their perspective. Their political thinking will become relative as well. He points out how Karl Barth was equally critical of the Soviet Union and the United States. There is a loss of perspective there. He did not look at the appalling brutalities of Stalin’s regime in which 60 million people were killed and say it was a form of government and a dealing with society that was totalitarian and unbelievably wicked. He did not see that the United States, for all of its faults and weaknesses, has a better political system. He had a loss of perspective so that the Soviet Union and the United States were seen as being equally bad. He suggests that one will find in most people in neo-orthodoxy a drift to the left. The left feels that it can create human programs to solve the problems of society to create a new utopia. In this sixth area, Schaeffer suggests that there will be a loss of perspective in terms of political and social thinking.

The seventh result of influence of the climate of neo-orthodoxy is that we will be driven to confusion morally. You will no longer be able to speak a clear word from God that says, for example, adultery is wrong, homosexual practice is against the commandment of God, or abortion is wrong. Once neo-modernism has forsaken the Bible as an authoritative Word, all it will do is add to the moral confusion of society. That is most certainly what has happened in the last 40 years since Schaeffer wrote this paper. Many of the churches, particularly those on the liberal side, have not helped at all in the moral confusion of our culture. They have simply increased it. I have met hundreds of young people who have said that their pastors have been totally unhelpful to them when they faced moral dilemmas and challenges in their own lives. They have had no sure word to give them. There is simply relativism. So the seventh point is that there is a rejection of moral absolutes in favor of relativism as the new theology is influenced by the culture of the twentieth century.

Finally, the eighth point that Schaeffer makes as he thinks about the new theology is that it will have no final ground to stand on in dismissing the subjectivism of old modernism. One of Barth’s own major contributions was to look at the liberal theology of the nineteenth century and dismiss it as being completely subjective. It was he who made the famous statement that the nineteenth-century liberal theologians looked down the well of

history at Jesus and saw their own faces looking back up from the bottom. They all remodeled Jesus in their own image. If you go to any theological- or used-book store and pick up *The Lives of Jesus in the Nineteenth Century*, Barth reflects the political and social commitments of the individual who wrote the book. The Jesus they found in the New Testament was the Jesus they wanted to find, the Jesus who reflected their own priorities. Barth makes a tremendously powerful criticism of nineteenth-century liberalism in its quest for the historical Jesus at that point. It became totally subjective in its approach to Scripture and the person of Christ. Schaeffer says that the new modernism has gone down exactly the same path, even though it appears to reject that subjectivism by saying there is a transcendent word from God. In the end it is equally subjective. It may stand in the pulpit and thunder, "This is the voice of God," but the voice of God is just a babble of different voices, depending on the theologian who speaks. That is what we have found in the years that followed.

There was another quest of the historical Jesus, and there were a whole new series of theologies that varied quite radically from each other as we look at the different voices of neo-orthodox theology. Each of them has a different encounter with the Word. Each of them presents a different voice of God thundering to the church. Schaeffer says even though it rejects subjectivism of the old liberalism, it ends up in the same position because it has no objective authority. It may claim to have an objective authority, but in the end it is subjective. It depends on the individual recognizing God speaking to him rather than being able to say, "This is the Word of God written in Scripture." This is Schaeffer's final criticism. Having been shaped by the intellectual climate of the twentieth century, neo-orthodoxy descends into subjectivism.

He finishes his article with a plea to evangelical Christians to have a consistency in thinking and living. He wants them to have a worldview that is conformed to God's revelation in Scripture, not conformed to the intellectual climate of the twentieth century. It should be conformed to God's revelation of Himself in Scripture. He challenges us to develop a Christian mind and to have a consistency of living as well. It is not enough for us just to say no to neo-orthodoxy, but we have to give ourselves in self-sacrifice for other people, including those caught in neo-orthodox theology. We must commit ourselves to the unreserved giving of ourselves to other people.

Schaeffer met many young people in Europe who were not simply in the position of saying, "I have a dogmatic commitment to atheism. I am sure there is no God, and I am sure that the universe is simply a material universe. It arose by evolution, and this is where it is going, and this is what it means for my life." I would say there is an increasing number of such people in our society here in the United States as well at the present time. It has come here a little bit later than it came to Europe. He suggests that he met many people who are beyond that stage and who feel that knowledge of or belief in anything is impossible. Everything we know is uncertain. He describes young people who are deeply influenced by the existentialist position. This position does not start off with a series of positive statements such as "I believe in man. I believe in freedom. I believe in science." These are humanistic statements that are fundamentally optimistic. We do not have God, but now we have man. We do not have a word from God, therefore we have morals developed from man. We are not created by a divine determiner, but we are completely free. You do not have that kind of optimistic belief in a universe without God. Instead you have existentialism, which goes one step further and says, "If there is not a God, then we have nothing left to believe in. We do not even know if we know anything at all." One is in a position of complete uncertainty and becomes uncertain whether one can know anything at all. It is not necessary to have read existentialist literature to come to that position. That was the position I came to myself as a non-Christian at university before I had read a great deal of existentialist literature or anything like that. It is simply part of the air we breathe in this culture. We are in a situation where there is a lack of certainty and a feeling that true knowledge about who we are and why we are here is really impossible. One does not simply know anything, therefore you are unsure about everything. You do not make positive statements (there is no God, I am man, I am free), because that is a very optimistic view of reality and the older humanism. Instead, one is in a position of being uncertain.

Many of the more extreme forms of modern popular music have to be understood that way. Punk rock is one illustration. You do not have a positive belief in anything; you simply have a series of negative statements. It is rage, despair, distress, and uncertainty about life. That has become an increasingly greater part of the culture in which we live. It is one of the reasons why so many young people are open to taking cocaine, for example. This is an enormous problem. My boys at school yesterday had a talk on cocaine where the doctor who works with drug addicts said that he believes it is the greatest single problem that the United States has faced in the several hundred years of its history. It is going to become very much greater. He said there were several hundred thousand babies last year who were born here as cocaine addicts because their mothers had been taking cocaine. He was talking about the tremendous problems of it in terms of coming off cocaine. It creates a total lack of interest in anything once you have taken cocaine and become addicted to it. As you look at a phenomenon like that, simply telling people not to take drugs does not do anything. Telling them how dangerous drugs are does nothing, because we are in a situation where people no longer have anything to believe in or any reason why they should do anything.

Schaeffer says you are “adrift on a black sea in a black night.” That is the heart of what existentialism says. Existentialism does not try to say that it is a philosophy for people to follow, but it simply articulates where people are in a world that has said God does not exist. It is not an optimistic world; it is a desperate world. The existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus did not feel that they were trying to lead people in the direction of existentialism. They simply felt that they articulated where society already was in its state of uncertainty. That is where I was without reading those things. For any of you who have ever been in a situation like that, it really is desperate. You feel like you are on a black sea in a black night. Nothing seems worth doing. There is nothing that you can get up the energy to feel strongly enough about to pursue. You are just left with the feeling of alienation from fellow human beings, your studies at university, your teachers, and from life itself. It is a complete uncertainty about who one is and whether one has any value at all. It is a very desperate feeling.

Schaeffer uses the expression, “To them the world is a mass of flying, unrelated particles, and they feel upon them necessity of running away and standing still at the same time.” He sums it up perfectly, and he says it in these stock terms because he met a lot of young people who spoke this way. That is exactly how I felt. I would find myself sometimes on the street just feeling like running away. But what would I run away from? The people around me did not know me, so they were not people to run away from. You get a desperate sense that you have to run somewhere, but there is not anywhere to run. You have nothing to run to, and in a way you do not know what you are running from. You run from life itself, but you stand still at the same time, because you know you have nowhere to go. He simply articulates what was true of many young people he met in Europe. In Europe this was already true in the 1940s, and it has now become an increasingly major part of Western culture. It is true in Eastern Europe as well.

The whole foundation of our civilization has been a view of a universe in which God exists, which God has created, and into which God acts. As a result, there are moral foundations. We are created to live for certain reasons, to live in a certain way, with a purpose that is not even discussed. It is taken for granted. This was true for people whether they were Christians individually or not. At any period in time, not everyone was individually a Christian, but there was a structure, meaning, and purpose to people’s lives. It was not even thought about. It was part of the context in which people lived. In our society, increasingly today for more and more people, and it has already been that way for 50 years in Europe, there is not the meaning, order, purpose, or background. You do not have to be an intellectual, go to university, or read existentialist literature to end up in that position. You simply end up there because you have nothing else. That is where the culture is, and it is really important to know that.

Sometimes people will read Schaeffer and think he writes about a tiny minority of intellectual students who have had the misfortune of studying under existentialist professors at university. That simply is not true, though. Schaeffer describes the state of desperation of our society, and it manifests itself in all sorts of forms. People try desperately to make some meaning for their lives by drugs, alcohol, sex, or material goods. It is a feeling of complete uncertainty about who we are, what we are doing here, and what we are for. It is a modern disease in the literal sense of the term; it is a dis-ease with one's existence. People do not know who they are because the whole roots of the culture have gone.

Schaeffer pinpoints the cause of existentialism in the article by saying it is because people in our society no longer believe in God. He lays the fault at the door of the churches. This happened in Europe in a much greater way than here. The churches in England, West Germany, France, and Scandinavia became dominated by liberal teaching much earlier than in the United States. Already in the eighteenth century in England, much of the church was deistic in its teaching. It did not believe in the supernatural God who is declared in the Bible. It simply believed in a creator who then left the universe to run alone. It rejected many of the supernatural elements of Christianity. The effects of that on the culture were delayed by the evangelical revival under Wesley and Whitefield in the eighteenth century. At that time, masses of people turned back to genuine Christianity. But by the 1850s, liberal teaching began to become more and more dominant in the churches all over Western Europe. It was a gospel that had nothing to say to people and denied all the supernatural elements of Christianity. People were left with nothing to live for in terms of what Christianity really has to offer. It did not offer a God who gives meaning and purpose to our lives, salvation, or any kind of moral foundation. Increasingly, people just stopped going to church.

In England, for example, the greatest part of the Methodist church had almost ceased to exist by 1900. There were still Methodist churches, but it became over 90% liberal by the end of the nineteenth century. When I grew up as a little boy in the late 1940s and early 1950s, there were already two or three generations of people in England who had not been going to church. There was nothing to go to church for. Some people might still go at Christmas and Easter out of habit, but all over Western Europe, the great majority of people did not go to church. Today the number is climbing to five% of the people who go to church. In the village where I worked in England, we had a project in the summer to which 100 kids came. One could assume that most of the children we tried to reach knew absolutely nothing about the Bible, their parents knew nothing about it, and their grandparents knew nothing about it. You had three generations of people who were totally ignorant. Our society does not have anything to put in its place. It may offer material well being, education, or science, but those do not fill a person's heart. It does not give them a sense that life is worth living for.

For example, in England there was somewhat of an economic resurgence under Mrs. Thatcher's leadership. There was a survey in Britain in one of our popular Sunday newspapers, *The Observer*, that asked people a lot of questions like "Are you better off under Mrs. Thatcher's government?" The majority of people responded that they were better off: they had more money, and their lives were more secure. They were asked another series of questions. "Are you any happier? Are you more selfish?" They answered that they were not happier, but they were more selfish instead. People really understand where they are. They do not have anything, finally, to live for. They do not know who they are. They are at sea in a universe in which there is no ultimate meaning. They are not just one generation away from biblical Christianity, but they are three or four generations away from biblical Christianity. Even the memory of it has disappeared completely for most people in Western Europe. If you go to France to work, the great majority of people you meet are completely cynical people. They are existentialist in the deepest possible way. They do not trust themselves, and they do not trust other people. They are alienated people at a very deep level. They may have never read existentialist literature, but it is what the existentialists try to say.

If you read William Barrett, Sartre, Camus, Carl Jaspers, or any of those other writers, in their writings they try to describe what has happened in our culture. They are not the founders of a philosophy that says it is something new to believe in and to be followed. They describe the human condition. That is why the most accessible works of theirs are plays, paintings, music, novels, and short stories that were incredibly popular. They rang a bell in people's minds. When I started reading existentialist literature, it was after I had already come to that position. I remember going to see the films *Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolfe*, *Blowup*, and *The Silence*, and I found them personally overwhelming, because they expressed where I already was. The universe is silent, like the film said. Nothing one does has any meaning. In the film *Blowup*, there is a wonderful image of what human life is really like. It is a film worth seeing, because it describes what existentialism is. There are two people playing tennis on a tennis court, and another man is watching them. He realizes that they do not have a ball. They play back and forth without a ball. They hit the non-ball out of the court. He walks past, shrugs his shoulders, picks up the ball that is not there, and throws it back in. It is a tremendously profound statement that life is nothing more than a meaningless game. There are rules for playing tennis and rules for life, and you might as well shrug your shoulders and carry on. There is nothing really happening, though. There was not even a ball there.

The film was advertised as murder without guilt and love without meaning. There is a murder in the film, but you are never sure whether the murder really took place. You do not know what happened and whether it happened or not. There is no guilt connected with it, and in the relationship between a man and a woman there is no love. There is just sex without any meaning. I remember seeing those films, and I was already in a state of despair and feeling like my life was completely meaningless. I was adrift, and when I saw those films, they had an incredible effect on me. They articulated really brilliantly what I had not been able to articulate myself about where I was. They were devastating, and I knew many people who had the same response to them. They were driven even deeper into the position where they were. Those films were so popular because they reflected where people are. It is the same with some of the wilder forms of modern music that are extremely bizarre.

Schaeffer says that fundamentally the church stopped preaching Christianity. In this article he suggests that the new modernism will not help because it is not based on biblical truth. It is just faith in an upper story, as he came to call it later. It does not have any roots in history, reality, or reason. While it may seem to offer something, after a while it will prove to be an equal dead end. It has been this way. Go to churches today in Europe that teach neo-orthodox theology, and they are just as empty as the old liberal churches. It gave the appearance of life for a while, but it did not have a gospel that would save people.

In the United States, it all came a bit later, because the evangelical church was very much stronger when liberalism came into the theological schools and universities. There was a much greater resistance by the evangelicals to liberalism when it came. There was an attempt to stand up and teach against it. There were not people in Britain or anywhere else in Western Europe like Warfield, Machen, or others like them who stood up and said what was true. They gave reasons not to believe in existentialism. They said that biblical faith was still acceptable, and you could believe in God's Word. There were not people like that in stature in Western Europe. The church in the United States remained stronger, but gradually the same thing has happened to many in the United States. Those who are without any solid biblical teaching end up in the same position of being uncertain about who we are as human persons.

Schaeffer is striking in that he saw these things so much earlier than many other Christians did. He saw where it was leading, probably because he had the sensitivity to individuals outside the church. He always had a tremendous and very deep commitment to evangelism. He had never been a Christian who was shut up in the church with no contacts outside. As you look back through any stage of his ministry, he was a person who constantly had relationships with people outside, reaching out to his neighbors and the people around him. He kept in touch with ordinary people where they were. When he went to Europe, he discovered that the ordinary

people he met there were several stages further down the road than here in the United States and in a position of real hopelessness. Things have gotten worse since that time. There is a superficial prosperity in Western Europe at the present time, but it rests on a void in terms of where people are.