



Loss of History
Loss of Transcendence
Lesson 1
Dr. James Houston

Summary Notes & Reflection Questions

With the loss of transcendence there is the loss of the past, the lost memory of history. Dr. Houston once stayed across the street in Edinburgh where John Knox lived. He noticed the locals did not have a clue of who was John Knox. He also noticed in the heart of historic Edinburgh, at the centre of Tron Church, there is now a commercial market. His sense of history provoked remembrance of how Jesus reacted to traders in the temple who defiled His Father's house. The evidence of total loss of a sense of the past is overwhelming. It is like people lost their long-term memory from a head injury. They no longer remember who they are and do not know how to defend themselves from being so handicapped.

Session 1, Question 1: In what ways have you noticed a memory loss of the past in your culture?

Our Judeo-Christian faith is a historic faith extending back almost 4000 years. For the benefit of posterity its history has been recorded by scribes, disciples, and monks to preserve the memory of the human experience of God's transcendence. There is no comparable devotion so dedicated to preserve the records of history in any other culture, religion, or civilisation. Perhaps history itself as a discipline was birthed as a science from this preservation of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Today we face the results of a collision between two approaches to study history. One refers to particular points in time of past storied events called *Geschichte* by the Germans, and the other is the German sense of *Historie*, the secular scientific approach to the past. For the secular historian most of the past is irrelevant, because it does not fit the terms of the scientific approach of cause and effect. Therefore, the actual historical events of how God's transcendent interventions were experienced, the very reasons for preserving records of the stories of human experience, are not hermeneutically understood in the

heart and mind of the secular historian. The same impediment occurs with Christian scholars promoting the secular understanding of history.

Session 1, Question 2: How have you experienced tensions between approaches to viewing history? How do you interpret historical events?

Our compensatory behaviours obstruct understanding of the experience of God's presence in history. We deny fear of the abyss in our lack of knowledge of God, so we rush to fill-in the gap with our prejudices and those of our culture. We prefer the instant gratification of the illusion of knowledge, so that we can act as our own redeemer to deny the depth of our own ignorance. God will not compete with such desires. Hence the more we compensate with our prejudices the less we will experience and understand God's presence. Our own view of ourselves looms too large. We eclipse God with the prejudice of our own presence. It is like looking through the wrong end of the telescope and all we see is our own eyebrow. What is seen is not the reality of the wonders of the heavens from the right end of the telescope. This is why for so many of us there is no sense of God's presence in history.

Session 1, Question 3: When have you seen your own self loom too large that blocks your capacity to see and feel compassion for the experience of others?

Secular historians claim there is no reliable record of the history of Israel; it is only records of mythology, or said politely, theology. For them the Israelites' history is not history scientifically evidenced. Secular historians do not realise the reality of God who lived in our past was far greater than the pompous hubris in the reductionism they practice as academics. The history of God's people is a reality that requires a far more profound commitment to understand than they are willing to invest. Every historian is restricted by his or her own ideology and sense of perception. Perceptions are determined by our conceptions, which in turn are determined by our motives. So if you are a greedy builder who wants to make a quick buck building homes, you are not going to be concerned with flood risk occurring every twenty years. Likewise, the secular historian leans backwards to judge past events by the standards of his own

time, criticizing the past as much as possible in order to diminish the reality of past moral experiences to make them fit into his narrow view. He is concerned with what is called historicism. The fallacy of such a method is you do not ground your perception of the past on the moral compass of those you observe. To be a good historian you need to have your own moral compass of what is right and wrong to be able to even begin to understand the moral compass of the past. Only then can you develop a sense of what is accurate or inaccurate in the past. You cannot just ignore all moral intent of past actions.

Session 1, Question 4: How do you determine a right interpretation from a wrong one when you reflect on your past family history?

One basic form of historical reductionism is to reduce all motivations to materialism. An example is to interpret history through the materialistic view of Karl Marx, who sees all actions of the past dictated by motives of profit and money. Such a view becomes devoid of moral meaning and deprives humans of their moral desire to be accountable to ideal obligations. It is a view called the determinist fallacy. Another way in which you can study history is through the rationalist fallacy and the relativist fallacy, in addition to the determinist fallacy. All of these fallacies are interpretive methods that distort the datum of the past.

Session 1, Question 5: What criteria do you use to measure the accuracy of your interpretation of the past?