

Secularism and the Church



Catholic Cemeteries
Archdiocese of Vancouver

Purpose:

To explore the origins of secular humanism, and the threat that it poses to human dignity (in life and at death).

Lesson Focus:

It is intended that students will...

- Connect present-day offences to human dignity with their philosophical roots in the Age of Enlightenment.
- Discover that a culture's funeral rituals reveal the essence of a culture's worldview.

Lesson Plan		Duration: 60 minutes
Introduction (15 min)	Video hook: <i>Scattered Ashes Prank</i> (5 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ An entertaining video that presents a fruit of the philosophy of secular humanism: with the loss of our sense of spirituality and religious devotion comes a corresponding loss of our sense of human dignity (in this case, a flippant treatment of cremated remains). Stimulate thinking: <i>Transitioning Into Eternal Life</i> quiz <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wait until the end of the lesson to use the answer key 	
Guided Learning Steps (30 min)	Read <i>From Sacred to Soulless?</i> article. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss in small groups or as a whole class Handout: <i>Five Truths and a Lie?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Read and discuss in small groups 	
Closure (15 min)	<i>Transitioning Into Eternal Life ANSWER KEY</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss student responses, use answer key to fill in the gaps 	

Materials (provided at rccav.org/educators)

1. Video: *Scattered Ashes Prank*
2. Class set of each handout: *Transitioning Into Eternal Life* quiz; *From Sacred to Soulless?* article; *Five Truths and a Lie?* handout.
3. *Transitioning Into Eternal Life* answer key

Connections to CISVA Prescribed Learning Outcomes

- Define secularism (G1)
- Critique secularism and its challenges to the Church (G2)

Teacher's Guide



Introduction

- After watching the video, explain: if you want to understand a culture's beliefs about humanity, study its treatment of the deceased. In doing so, we encounter beliefs about: the afterlife, man's relationship with the divine, and the spiritual nature of man. All of this has ramifications on the ethical/moral dimensions of our conduct in the present.
 - "We must remember that what we believe happens next is very much going to define what is happening to us right now"¹

Guided Learning Steps

From Sacred to Soulless? article

- Be sure to check for student understanding. If reading as a whole class, periodically pause to reiterate what was read, or ask students to do so. If reading in small groups, have students report back to the whole class about things that struck them, or to seek clarification on any areas that confused or baffled them.
- After reading the second last paragraph of the article, consider including this relevant addition: *"This may not seem too bad on the surface, but in its subtleties, such a worldview is in direct opposition to Christianity. In fact, it forms the backbone philosophy of many contemporary sects of the occult. Marco Dimitri, for example, is president of a cult named Bambini di Satana ("Children of Satan"), and in an interview he said this: 'We don't have a cult of devil-worship; that would be absurd, because the cult of the devil would be the cult of evil – but for us, good and evil are subjective to each individual. True Satanism puts man at the centre of the universe, and is a noble expression.'"*²
 - Compare with the story of Adam and Eve from Genesis: Satan's logic of temptation exalts humanity, over and above God's goodness and authority.

Five Truths and a Lie? handout

- If students have an electronic device that can access the internet, direct them to this website for a more interactive and detailed exercise (they can click on the links to see the actual organizations that provide these services): www.usurnsonline.com/oddbits/27-things-to-do-with-cremated-remains

Closure:

Transitioning Into Eternal Life ANSWER KEY

- Instead of reading off the answer key, try having students share their answers with the person next to them before divulging "the answer." This may generate follow up questions, and possibly a lively discussion related to the topic.
- This lesson is intended to leave students with some questions and curiosities regarding what Catholics actually do at the time of death and burial (which is the focus of the next lesson). If

¹ Fr. Benedict Groeschel, *After This Life: What Catholics Believe About What Happens Next*, p. 15.

² Retrieved July 26, 2015, from www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2005/s1496896.htm

students have questions that are hard to answer, encourage them to hold onto those questions for the next lesson.

Extra Resources:

- **Free local video series:** www.rccav.org/stories (see “The Understanding Death Series”)
- **Catholic funeral mass explained (video):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXceaNZupSA>
- **Book:** Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R. (2009). *After this life: What Catholics believe about what happens next*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor.