

God's Design, Our Bodies, and this Cultural Moment

A 5-Session Discussion Guide
By Rev. Dr. Jason Carter

Interacting with
*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self:
Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism,
and the Road to Sexual Revolution*
By Carl R. Trueman

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*The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.
John Milton, Paradise Lost*

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Session 1

Expressive Individualism and the Road to the New Sexual Revolution: How Did We Get Here?

I. **Carl Trueman** begins his book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* thus:

“The origins of this book lie in my curiosity about how and why a particular statement has come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful. ‘I am a woman trapped in a man’s body.’ My grandfather died in 1994, less than 30 years ago, and yet, had he ever heard that sentence uttered in his presence, I have little doubt that he would have burst out laughing and considered it a piece of incoherent gibberish. And yet today it is a sentence that many in our society regard as not only meaningful but so significant that to deny it or question it in some way is to reveal oneself as stupid, immoral, or subject to yet another irrational phobia. And those who think of it as meaningful are not restricted to the veterans of college seminars on queer theory or French poststructuralism. They are ordinary people with little or no direct knowledge of the critical postmodern philosophies whose advocates swagger along the corridors of our most hallowed centers of learning.”¹

II. **Philip Rieff** – *Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966). Rieff was a professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania who used psychological categories to analyze cultural change.

Five Different Cultural Types Historically²:

1. Traditional Man – *culture directs the individual outward*. The True Self in traditional cultures are given and learned, not something that the individual creates for himself. (The blacksmith becomes a blacksmith, the prince becomes the king, etc.)
2. Political Man – *Ideal found in Plato and Aristotle*. Political man finds his identity in the activities in which he engages in the public life of the polis (city-state). He is engaged in civic community life and finds his true self there.
3. Religious Man – *Middle Ages*. Religious man attended the mass, celebrated the feast days, went on pilgrimages. The church was dominant for culture as even the church calendar impinged on individual existence throughout the year.
4. Economic Man – *Industrial Revolution*. Economic man finds his sense of self in economic activity: trade, production, making of money.
5. Psychological Man. Psychological man is different in that it is a “type characterized not so much by finding identity in *outward* directed activities...but rather in the inward quest for personal psychological happiness.”³ “Psychological categories and an inward focus are the hallmarks of being a modern person”.⁴

One outworking of this has been called “expressive individualism”, the idea that *truth lies within* so that I alone have the ability to determine my authentic self and, with all the raw material of my life, I fashion and create my life after my own inner image. The purpose of life is to find one’s deepest self and then express that to the world. The highest ideal of expressive individualism is that ***I live authentically according to who I am***

¹ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 19.

² Rieff gives four. I think we can add “traditional man”.

³ Trueman, 45.

⁴ Trueman, 46.

as opposed to surrendering to a model imposed from the outside (whether by society or previous generations or religious traditions or political authority).⁵ To have a completely full life, expressive individualism has a deep-seated need to be affirmed by others because a denial of affirmation by society when I intentionally live out my authentic self is thought to be a form of oppression.

In essence, Christians need to understand two big ideas with respect to expressive individualism and psychological man: (1) *this is the world we all live in*, like a fish that never recognizes its existence in water because that's all the fish has ever known. Expressive individualism can be viewed in ideas as diverse as religious consumerism to a yearning for self-actualization. (2) The only era where "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" arises as a 'cogent' response to life and/or explaining reality occurs within the last category – that of Psychological Man and his radical embrace of expressive individualism's therapeutic self.

III. A Thought Experiment

- 100 years ago, you go to a doctor: "I am a woman trapped in a man's body." What does your doctor say? "You have a problem. The problem is with your mind."
- Today, you go to a doctor: "I am a woman trapped in a man's body." What does your doctor say: "You have a problem. The problem is with your body."
- How did we get to the place where our feelings and our psychology has taken on a unique and absolutely authoritative role in our lives that not even our bodies can override?
- Christian response: *The culture urges people to change their bodies to align with their psychology. The Christian recognizes that we must change our psychology to reflect the reality of our God-given bodies.*

IV. A Three-Step Process towards Understanding the New Sexual Revolution

"The rise of the sexual revolution was predicted on fundamental changes in how the self is understood: The self must first be psychologized; psychology must then be sexualized; and sex must be politicized."⁶

1. Psychologize the Self: "I am what I feel."

- a. My identity is not primarily what my family or culture or profession says about me. Or even what contributions that I make to my community. (And surely not that I am a son or daughter of God.) My identity is rooted most deeply in my own psychologically constructed identity.

2. Sexualize the Psychology: "I am what I feel sexually."

- a. My sexual desires are at the core of my personhood and how I construct my identity. Sex is not a behavior that you engage in but an identity that defines you.

3. Politicize the Sexuality: "I will cancel you if you don't celebrate my sexualized identity."

- a. In the last 20 years, the ideology has 'progressed' from (social) tolerance to (political) equality to (cultural) celebration.
- b. Companies now virtue signal their political leanings in this highly psychologized world because not to participate *in the celebration* is to fail to affirm the basic personhood of people.

⁵ Charles Taylor in *The Secular Age* brought the term "expressive individualism" into the popular consciousness. See also Trevin Wax, "Expressive Individualism: What is It?", <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/expressive-individualism-what-is-it/>.

⁶ Trueman, 221.

V. Emotivism as The New Ethics of the Sexual Revolution: How Right & Wrong Become Relative

What is emotivism? Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* argues that:

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.⁷

Do you get where this is going? The new ethics and morality of contemporary culture now boils down to the language of personal preferences which are based on feelings, emotions, and sentiments (and not upon rational argumentation or even upon objective reality). As Trueman argues, “It is a way of granting those attitudes or values that we happen to prefer a kind of transcendent, objective authority...emotivism presents preferences as if they were truth claims.”

The familiar cultural phrases -- “It just feels right” or “I know in my heart it is a good thing” or “I’m just living my truth” or “You be you” or “Follow your heart” – all reflect the idea that ethics and morality in the contemporary world have undergone a seismic shift towards prioritizing an emotional and subjective basis for moral and ethical categories.

Within this setting, once morality and ethics are de-centered from a transcendent and coherent metanarrative (like the Christian worldview), according to Trueman, morality is “doomed to degenerate into nothing more than the assertion of incommensurable opinions and preferences.”⁸

Yet, emotivism packs a useful and damaging rhetorical punch and strategy in today’s world:

When it comes to moral arguments, the tendency of the present age is to assert *our* moral convictions as normative and correct by rejecting those with which we disagree as irrational prejudice rooted in personal, emotional preference. That is precisely what underlies the ever-increasing number of words ending in *-phobia* by which society automatically assigns moral positions out of accord with the dominant [cultural worldview] to the category of neurotic bigotry.⁹

VI. Deathworks: Why the New Moral Revolution is Often Directed Against Religion

How does enormous cultural change come about? Philip Rieff’s answer comes via what he calls “deathworks,” which he defines as:

an all-out assault upon something vital to the established culture. Every deathwork represents an admiring final assault on the objects of its admiration: the sacred orders of which their arts are some expression in the repressive mode.

Rieff parrots Freud in the belief that civilization and culture is constituted by what it forbids. Thus, for a new morality to become the “new normal”, it must direct an all-out assault on ‘traditional values’ or ‘religious values’ (which often overlap).

A key example of *deathworks* that Rieff alludes to is Andres Serrano’s infamous artistic work *Piss Christ*.

⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11-12 as cited in Trueman 85.

⁸ Trueman, 87.

⁹ Trueman, 87. “The good” (which has a long history in philosophy) is increasingly being defined as “what makes me happy” in a way that is increasingly being defined in today’s age in sexualized terms. Trueman writes: “Human beings may still like to think they believe in good and bad, but these concepts are unhitched from any transcendent framework and merely reflect personal, emotional, and psychological preferences....Any greater sense of purpose, any transcendent teleology, is now dead and buried. More negatively, we are all then tempted to use the rhetoric of emotivism to dismiss views with which we disagree as arbitrary prejudices,” 88.

Here's what Wikipedia says about *Piss Christ*:



Immersion (Piss Christ) is a 1987 photograph by the American artist and photographer Andres Serrano. It depicts a small plastic crucifix submerged in a small glass tank of the artist's urine. The piece was a winner of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's "Awards in the Visual Arts" competition, which was sponsored in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a United States Government agency that offers support and funding for artistic projects.

Serrano has turned the sacred into the excremental, and thus turned a classic portrayal of Christ's sacred moment on the cross into an idea that is dirty and despicable. As Trueman notes, "Religion is not rendered untrue. It is made distasteful and disgusting."¹⁰ This new morality not only seeks that you celebrate its various sexual expressions as legitimate and good but seeks to vilify you and cast you as a ".....phobia" for wanting to maintain historic Christian orthodoxy based upon an objective framework (the scriptures) which is transcendent and benevolent in nature (God-given and for the good of humanity).

For Reiff, *deathworks* can sometimes produce a state of *barbarism* wherein segments of the population, in the name of victimhood, engages in vandalism that seeks to erase the past whether physically (in the destruction of artifacts of the past) or symbolically (in the erasure of the ideas, customs, and practices of the past).

Discussion:

- (1) Can you recognize elements of Expressive Individualism in the way you think about yourself? **Read Genesis 1:27-28.** What is the difference between expressive individual (the idea that you create with the raw material of your life your own authentic self) and the idea that Christians are called to live as the image of God (*imago dei*) in the world?
- (2) At the core of the idea of expressive individualism is the idea of a pursuit of personal happiness. Culturally, this search is a godless search for joy. How does the Bible direct you in your pursuit for joy? **Read Psalm 37:4 | John 15:11 | Psalm 16:11 | Matthew 13:44 | Psalm 90:14.**
- (3) John Calvin connected our knowledge of self intimately with the knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God, there could be no knowledge of self. Calvin writes: "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself." Agree or disagree with Calvin? Much of our contemporary self-knowledge seeks to place the self as the **first thing** to be loved. How does the Great Commandment of Jesus (**read Matthew 22:36-40**) re-orientate THE PROPER ORDER of our affections? How is this different than our cultural moment?
- (4) Has emotivism crept into the church? If so, in what way?
- (5) Where else do you see "deathworks" dismantling traditional societal norms or Christian values in contemporary culture?

¹⁰ Trueman, 97.

Session 2

Psychologize the Self: "I am what I feel."

We are living in an era of the triumph of the therapeutic. How did we get here? How did "what I feel" begin to constitute the most profound epicenter of my identity? How did psychological feelings become the most significant component of the modern self? Carl Trueman explores two birthplaces which helped psychologize the self: the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Romantic poets.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778, Genevan philosopher)

1. What does it mean to be human? The Goodness of Humanity in Rousseau

Interestingly, both Rousseau and St. Augustine wrote a book entitled *Confessions*. In Rousseau's *Confessions*, he recounts the stealing of asparagus; Augustine also tells a story of a famous pear theft in his *Confessions*. Rousseau argues that his theft arises primarily from the society which he finds himself living in – his master treated him badly, he started lying and became lazy, his father punished him too harshly, and all of these conditions made him both manipulative and prone to covet.¹¹

Trueman highlights the contrast between the two thinkers: "For Augustine, the moral flaw is ultimately intrinsic to him. He is by nature wicked, a sinner...For Rousseau, by way of contrast, his natural humanity is fundamentally sound, and the sinful act comes from social pressures and conditioning. He becomes depraved by the pressures society places on him...Augustine blames himself for his sin because he is basically wicked from birth; Rousseau blames society for his sin because he is basically good at birth and then perverted by external forces."¹²

The goodness of humanity, particularly the validation of all internalized (sexual) desires, lies at the heart of the new sexual revolution.

2. What is Society? Repressive Culture is at the Heart of Civilization-Building

Rousseau believed that humanity basically builds a society "where the need to belong and to conform requires individuals to be false to who they really are".¹³ In his *Confessions*, he discusses his relationship to the prostitute Zuleika which he admits was formative for his personhood and his thinking. For Rousseau, society essentially creates ethical rules which are antithetical to unchecked sexual expressions as found in the state of nature.

A worldview informed by Rousseau, then, is one that views the history of the world as a long, checkered story of sexual repression that must be overthrown for people to live their most authentic lives. Progress is viewed through the lens of destroying aspects of the past, especially traditional cultural ethics and institutions like the church.

¹¹ See Trueman summary, 110.

¹² Trueman, 111.

¹³ Trueman, 115.

3. **What is Freedom? True Freedom is Freedom to be the Most Authentic Expression of Yourself.**

If human nature is good and society is repressive, then several axioms follow in the wake of Rousseau's philosophy which have germinated in our day:

- a. Following your internally good human nature becomes the source and standard of ethics and moral decision-making -- and a key component of your identity.
- b. The inner voice of human nature, which longs to be set free from cultural repression, deserves to live authentically and should primarily shape your identity, even if it means casting aside chromosomes and biological characteristics of the human body. "The authentic individual is one who behaves outwardly in accordance with this inner psychological nature."¹⁴

Discussion: (1) Read Romans 3:10-18 and Jeremiah 17:9. How do these scriptures contribute to a Christian understanding of the human person? What do they add to the polemical gender debate that our society is currently having right now?

The Romantic Poets & the Authority of Feelings: Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake

Trueman does a deep dive on all three poets who cumulatively were reacting against the early rationalism of the Enlightenment. Here's his short pithy summary:

"In short, *the Romantics grant an authority to feelings*, to that inner psychological space, that all human beings possess. And those feelings are first and foremost genuine, pristine, and true guides to who human beings are."¹⁵

Here we will focus on a few main points from Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) as his views on religion and sex help plant the later seeds of the new sexual revolution.

For Shelley, religion is simply the means whereby the powerful keep others subjugated for their own self-interest in order to gain (and keep) the power they enjoy:

God himself is the very prototype of human tyranny, a willful, arbitrary, unaccountable despot....there is a clear connection in Shelley's mind between religion, political oppression, and restrictions on sexual activity (i.e. the maintenance of chastity as an ideal and the promotion of monogamy as a binding and normative institution).¹⁶

Shelley's father-in-law idealized a quasi-sexualized utopia where "no man would be joined exclusively to one woman, but all would share in each other in sexual community".¹⁷ Therefore, the seeds of the modern sexual revolution were being planted whereby monogamy and chastity in marriage are conceived as simply social constructs that tread against the grain of our *natural* human instincts.¹⁸

¹⁴ Trueman, 129.

¹⁵ Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*, 46.

¹⁶ Trueman, 149.

¹⁷ Trueman, 149.

¹⁸ See Trueman, 152.

Hear Shelley in his own words: “Religion and morality, as they now stand, compose a practical code of misery and servitude: the genius of human happiness must tear every leaf from the accursed book of God ere man can read the inscription on his heart.”¹⁹

For Shelley, Christianity was not simply mistaken: Christianity did not simply espouse teachings which one could disagree with or not practice. Rather, Christianity is essentially evil because it does not allow for the true flourishing of one’s inner (sexualized) feelings.

The Christian moral codes are thus viewed through the lens of moral reprehensibility.

As Trueman wryly notes, “The idea that Christian sexual codes prevent people from living free and happy lives – from being true to themselves – is not of recent vintage.”²⁰

Discussion: (2) Read Psalm 19:7 and Psalm 119:1-8. How do the Psalmists understand the purpose of God’s law? How is that different than what our culture thinks of Christian teaching and Christian scripture?

(3) What is your understanding of freedom? What is it? How can you get it? What is it like to live freely?

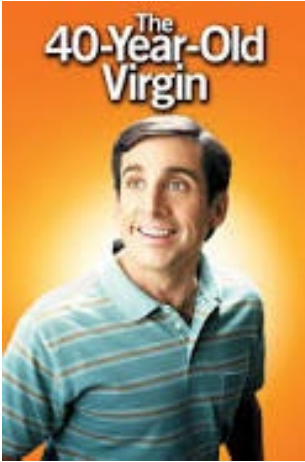
¹⁹ Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 808 as cited in Trueman, 155.

²⁰ Trueman, 155.

Session 3

Sexualize the Psychology: "I am what I feel sexually."

What does a Movie Say about our Sexualized Culture?



Everybody was in on the joke. The whole premise of the movie revolved around the idea that a 40-year virgin was quasi-ridiculous. How can it be? How unfulfilled must such a person be? Why does our culture think like this? Because sex is now considered a large part of one's very identity. Whereas historically sex was thought of as an activity or a behavior, it is now thought of as an identity: moderns think of sex not as something we *do*, but as something that we *are*.

Trueman writes: "To be sexually inactive is to be less-than-a whole person, to be obviously unfilled or weird. The sexual codes of celibacy outside marriage and chastity within it are considered ridiculous and oppressive, and their advocates wicked or stupid or both. The sexual revolution is truly a revolution in that it has turned the moral world upside down."²¹

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and the Goal of Human Existence

Like thinkers and philosophers before him, Freud believed that the goal of human existence was happiness. Yet, "Freud gave this idea of happiness a specifically sexual turn in identifying it with genital pleasure. This move is obviously of huge consequences for the understanding of key aspects of our present-day culture, where sexual satisfaction is promoted as one of the key components of what it means to be living."²²

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes:

Man's discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness, must have suggested to him that he should continue to seek the satisfaction of happiness in his life along the path of sexual relations and that he should make genital eroticism the central point of this life.²³

For Freud, personal sexual satisfaction is made the chief end of man and to glorify one's sexuality is considered wholly virtuous. Freud is making a staggering claim: "true happiness is sexual satisfaction."²⁴ For Freud, to deprive oneself of sexual satisfaction (in whatever form) is to be less than human and live a deeply unhappy life. What a far cry from the Westminster Confession of Faith that "man's chief end is to enjoy God and glorify him forever."

Moreover, if it is civilization that is ultimately preventing humans from engaging in sexual fulfillment (due to "traditional" values or the morality of religion), then it stands to reason that a revolution to overthrow these restrictions on personal happiness will eventually be necessary.

²¹ Trueman, 22.

²² Trueman, 203-204

²³ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 56 as cited by Trueman, 205.

²⁴ Trueman, 205.

Discussion: *Ponder these scriptures:*

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen. 1:28)

"Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love." (Proverbs 5:18-19)

"If a man is newly married, he must not be sent to war or be pressed into any duty. For one year he is free to stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married." (Deuteronomy 24:5)

- (1) In the Scriptures, sex within the confines of a marital union between a man and a woman is described as beautiful and good. How is the goodness of sex, in the Scriptures, different than Freud's view of sex?

- (2) What other films or stories in culture echo Freud's notion that sexual eroticism leads to the greatest happiness possible?

Session 4

The Politicalization of Sex: The Wedding of Freud and Marx

Essentially, we are still asking the question: how did we get here? What are the major seeds which lay at the root of the tree of the sexual revolution? Three cultural movements have been identified. First, psychologize the self (“I am what I feel”). Second, sexualize the psychology (“I am what I feel sexually”). Sex is not a behavior that you engage in but an identity that defines you. Third, politicize the sexuality (“You better celebrate my sexualized identity”).

How did our society manage to politicize sexuality? The question itself is significant. In earlier eras, sexuality was envisioned to be a wholly private activity. Marriage was thought to have a threefold purpose: lifelong companionship, mutual sexual satisfaction, and procreation.²⁵ To politicize sexuality, four movements can be identified which ultimately center upon a convenient marriage between Marxist and Freudian thought.

First, let’s define an overused but often little-understood term in today’s world - **Critical theory**.

“Critical theory today is a diverse phenomenon that draws deeply and variously on strands of Marxist thought, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, queer theory, and deconstructionism.

Yet at the core of critical theory lies a relatively simple set of convictions: *the world is to be divided up between those who have power and those who do not*; the dominant Western narrative of truth is really an ideological construct designed to preserve the power structure of the status quo; and the goal of critical theory is therefore to destabilize this power structure by destabilizing the dominant narratives that are used to justify -- to ‘naturalize’ – it.”²⁶

Second, our cultural moment on the road to the new sexual revolution is helpfully explained by the marriage of ideas between Marx and Freud. The critical theory of **Freudian Marxism** divides the world into heterosexuals (the oppressors) and the LGBTQ+ community (the victims).

Yet there was a rub between the two: Marxism afforded a fundamentally *optimistic* view of the world because the proletariat would eventually rise up against their bourgeoisie oppressors to enact a worker’s economic paradise. Yet for Freud, civilization represented a *pessimistic* view of history since civilization was mostly viewed as an instrument of sexual repression.

Third: enter onto the scene – **the Frankfurt School**²⁷ which combined the oppression of Marxist thought with the repression of Freudian psychology. The Frankfurt school picked up on particular aspects of Freud’s work: (1) Freud sexualized infancy and childhood, (2) Freud discovered that sexual repression was central to the authority that existed between parent and child, and (3) Freud realized that adult morality was basically derived from the educational measures taken by previous generations (rather than rooted in an absolute, transcendent reality like that which the Christian church had maintained for centuries).²⁸

The Frankfurt School conjectured that civilization-level sexual repression basically “began with the rise of authoritarian patriarchy” which was then “subsequently reinforced by the rise of a sex-negating church”.²⁹

²⁵ As viewed in the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer*; see Truman, 84.

²⁶ Trueman, 226.

²⁷ Most notably Wilhem Reich and Herbert Marcuse.

²⁸ Trueman, 233. As Trueman asks: “Why is it so important to educate even elementary school children in the taxonomy of sexual preferences? It has not always been that way,” 74. Yet, it is absolutely in line with the ideology of the Frankfurt School and its marriage between Marx and Freud. (Note: Trueman published in 2020, before the cultural wars of parents and school boards of 2021 and 2022.)

²⁹ Trueman, 234.

This wedding of Marx and Freud has helped lead to the common idea nowadays that “the traditional patriarchal family is a unit of oppression” and that “those who argue for the traditional family as a societal good are really lackeys, witting or unwittingly, of the current oppressive status quo.”³⁰ The nuclear family essentially stands in the way of various sexual identities and a fully-developed ethic of sexual freedom.

Fourth, **Marxist oppression was transferred to the psychological realm.** Historically, Marxist oppression was linked to the economic hardship of the proletariat. Yet, through this marriage of Marx and Freud, modern forms of ‘oppression’ are now thought to be primarily psychological in nature. As such, victimhood now becomes much broader and much more subjective than the classic Marxist categories of the exploitation of the poor by the rich.³¹ Essentially, victimhood has been expanded to those who have been repressed in subjective ways: those called by the wrong pronoun or to those college students who believe they should not be “subjected” (subjugated?) to viewpoints different than their own (e.g. the rise of cancel culture on major universities which, 40 years ago, were bastions of free speech).³²

Nowadays, it is the church and the nuclear patriarchal family which is thought to play the role of the oppressor against the victims of sexual categories.

Trueman writes, “Today, those basic economic categories of oppression still exist, but they are generally eclipsed in the media by discussions of psychologically oppressive actions: the refusal to bake a cake for a gay wedding, for example, does not push the gay couple into starvation or any form of economic hardship; rather, it offends against their dignity and inflicts psychological harm by refusing to recognize them on their own terms. And that is regarded as very serious because it is politically oppressive in a world in which psychological categories have come to dominate discussion.”³³

In summary, these four moves helped birth the modern sexual revolution and the particular shape it has taken in today’s western world. Trueman offers this summary:

To follow Rousseau is to make identity psychological. To follow Freud is to make psychology, and thus identity, sexual. To mesh this combination with Marx is to make identity – and therefore sex – political....To transform society politically, then, one must transform society sexually and psychologically, a point that places psychological categories at the heart of revolutionary political discourse. Where once oppression was seen in terms of economic realities (e.g., poverty, lack of property) or legal categories (e.g. slavery, lack of freedom), now the matter is more subtle because it relates to issues of psychology and self-consciousness. The political sphere is internalized and subjectivized.³⁴

³⁰ Trueman, 234. The original BLM manifesto (with tenets against the nuclear family) is really a descendent of the Frankfurt School since the nuclear family must necessarily be dismantled if the full scope of Freudian Marxism is to be achieved.

³¹ See Trueman, 238.

³² See the excellent book *The Coddling of the American Mind*.

³³ Trueman, 239.

³⁴ Trueman, 250.

Living in the World of Freudian Marxism: What are the Consequences?

Now we are in a position to ask: what are the present-day consequences of Freudian Marxism, of this politicalization of sex? Three consequences can be highlighted.

First, the Frankfort School understood that Freud sexualized infancy and children and that sexual repression was at the heart of the kind of authority that exists between parents and children. Therefore, for the new sexual revolution to fully flourish, **the nuclear family** which historically has acted as a conservatizing principle for society in general on issues of gender and sexuality (though the Frankfort school would label it as a 'repressive institution' and 'psychologically damaging' to authentic identity) must necessarily take a back seat to the state because, as the thinking goes, only a powerful state can fully ensure human dignity for all expressions of sexuality.³⁵ As Philip Reich pointed out in his 1936 book, *The Sexual Revolution*, "any adult who hinders the development of the child's sexuality should be severely dealt with".³⁶ Political freedom is sexual freedom. Therefore, one can see why the cultural wars have shifted to a power struggle between parents and school boards.³⁷ Trueman explains the reasoning of the sexual revolutionaries: "The sexual education of the child is simply of too much social and political consequence to be left to the parents. After all, it is the parents as those in authority who actually constitute the problem."³⁸

Second, Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfort School of critical theory in his essay "**Repressive Tolerance**" (1965) championed that a true sexual revolution "may require apparently undemocratic means. They would include the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements" which oppose the new ideology.³⁹ The point is that Marcuse believed that it would "become necessary to make sure that good words and ideas are not simply promoted but are, if possible, enforced and given a monopoly in public discourse".⁴⁰ Cancel culture stands neck deep in critical theory.⁴¹

Third, if psychology is now the principal source from which identity is socially constructed, then biological facts can be subordinated to the inner psychological life. In *The Second Sex* (1949), French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir argues that "The female is a woman, insofar as she feels herself as such". Even within the confines of French philosophy, contending that both biological sexes might reproduce with future technological advances must have sounded as plausible as landing a spaceship on Mars. Yet, here we are 70 years later with the idea that **biology is tyranny**:

"Biology is ultimately regarded as a form of tyranny, a potentially alienating form of external authority....The body is something to be overcome; its authority is to be rejected; biology is to be transcended by the use of technology".⁴²

Discussion: (1) The whole point of transgenderism is that the biological body is not important to gender identity because gender is a social construct. To re-phrase Descartes' famous axiom for transgender ideology: "I am not what my body says I am; I am what I think I am".⁴³ How might you respond to this ideology from the Christian scriptures?

(2) How does Freudian Marxism help you understand the new sexual revolution?

³⁵ 261

³⁶ Reich, *Sexual Revolution*, 23 as cited by Trueman, 237.

³⁷ "If sex is politics and children are sexual, then children's sexuality is political too," Trueman, 377.

³⁸ Trueman, 239.

³⁹ Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 100-101 as cited by Trueman 251.

⁴⁰ Trueman, 252.

⁴¹ With Marxism, history is one long story of oppression. Therefore, the beneficial value of history is not viewed as a source of wisdom but only as warnings for how people were exploited and victimized.

⁴² Trueman, 259.

⁴³ Trueman, 352, fn. 24. One might also ask: if gender is merely a social construct, then why is there a need for physical treatment?

(3) Victimhood is a key virtue in a psychologized culture. How do you respond to the following idea:

The Christian vision urges judgment toward ourselves and charity toward others. Victimhood morality inverts this, urging judgment toward others, while presuming our own righteousness. Being aware of the poor and underprivileged, and awarding them a special status, is a very Christian idea. But being overly concerned with whether *you* are the poor, and seeking that status, is not. A fundamental problem with both honor and victimhood moral cultures is that moral worth is relative, dependent upon something external. A dignity culture, in contrast, asserts an inherent moral worth that “cannot be destroyed.”⁴⁴

(4) What should be a full-orbed Christian response to victims? To the degree that LGBTQ+ persons have been victims of abuse or hate, how should the church respond?

⁴⁴ Abigail Favale, Dignity or Victimhood?, *Church Life Journal*, Nov. 16, 2018: <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/dignity-or-victimhood/#:~:text=The%20Christian%20vision%20urges%20judgment,is%20a%20very%20Christian%20idea>.

Session 5: The Triumph of the T & Our Cultural Engagement

Big Question: How are Christians to respond to this cultural moment and the triumph of transgenderism as part of the new sexual revolution?

A Warning about our Cultural Engagement: “It should be the Christian’s natural state to feel that the times are out of joint and that we do not truly belong here. Yet lamentation can too often become just another form of worldliness, and polemic simply a means of making ourselves feel righteous.”⁴⁵

If decrying the state of the world is our *only* posture, then Christians can easily become caricatures of the very portrait that the world loves to paint of the church (e.g. homophobic, transphobic, bigoted, and racist).

Four Ways to Engage with this Cultural Moment

1. Think Carefully about Identity from a Christian Perspective

This present cultural moment is supremely obsessed with questions of identity. One’s sexual identity has become magnified out of bounds relative to the witness of Scripture. In the end, I am more than the sum of my sexual feelings. They are part of who I am but not constitutive of me. Furthermore, my true humanity excludes any behaviors or desires that are sinful.

Remember the apostle’s Paul reasoning in Romans 7: “Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (vs. 20). What is going on here? Is Paul avoiding personal responsibility for his sin? No! Paul recognizes that his “I”, the deepest part of his identity – his true humanity – is to be found in union with Christ (Col. 3:3). His sin is excluded from the deepest place of his identity.

Sexual sin should never be considered part of one’s true humanity or personal identity. Trueman makes a point that deserves to be quoted at length:

An Irish teacher at my grammar school used to tell this joke: A rabbi was wandering the streets of Belfast one night and was confronted by an armed member of one of the local paramilitary organizations. Are you a Catholic or a Protestant?” the armed man demanded. “I’m a Jew,” the rabbi replied. “Well, are you a Catholic Jew or a Protestant Jew?” came the response. Now, this may not be that amusing as a joke, but it makes an important point: *societies have categories for thinking about people and identity, and a real problem occurs when those categories are simply not adequate or appropriate.*

That is the question that the church needs to ask about sexual identity: are the categories that society now prioritizes actually ones that are appropriate? If the post-Freud taxonomy represented by the acronym LGBTQ+ rests on a basic category mistake (that sex is identity), should Christians not engage in a thoroughgoing critique of such and refuse to define themselves within its framework? Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that conceding the categories leads to unfortunate confusion.

For example, in June 2019, Christian publisher Zondervan released a book with the title *Costly Obedience: What We Can Learn from the Celibate Gay Community*. Setting aside the questions that currently cluster around the legitimacy or otherwise of the notion of “celibate gay Christian,” what is most interesting is the language of “cost” that is being used. Only in a world in which selves are typically recognized or validated by their sexuality and their sexual fulfillment—in which these things

⁴⁵ Trueman, 383.

define who people are at a deep level—can celibacy really be considered costly. Further, only in a world in which sexual identities—and specifically nonheterosexual sexual identities—enjoy particular cultural cachet will the celibacy of one particular group be designated as somehow especially hard or sacrificial.

Traditional Christian sexual morality calls for celibacy for all who are not married and chastity for those who are. It is, strictly speaking, no more costly or sacrificial for a single person not to have sex with someone than it is for a married person to be faithful or not to visit strip clubs and prostitutes—or, for that matter, for a person not to steal another’s property or slander someone’s good name. But that does not appear to be the case precisely because...our culture has been so shaped by the triumph of the erotic and the correlative overturning of traditional sexual mores. To abstain from sex in today’s world is to sacrifice true self-hood as the world around understands it. It is to pay the price of not being able to be who one really is. And that is therefore costly—but only from a perspective shaped by an uncritical and unreflective acceptance of the categories of sexualized identity stemming from Freud.⁴⁶

Should Christians refuse to participate in the modern game of sexualized identities because to do so is basically a capitulation to a Freudian worldview (sex = identity)? How can the church do a better job at addressing questions of one’s true humanity and identity from a biblical worldview? These are questions that are at the heart of a winsome cultural engagement with this cultural moment.

2. The church needs to recover a theology of embodiment.

The Triumph of the T tears identity away from physical embodiment which is the ground of creation and incarnation. Christians believe that we are not simply walking heads on awkward sticks called legs. Nor are we purely spiritual beings simply awaiting death in order to get rid of our evil flesh.⁴⁷

God’s creation of Adam and Eve was a gift of embodiment to humanity. Jesus Christ came in the flesh; the human body was given a sacred place within the created world so dignified by God as to be united to the divine nature. How amazing! God bestowed upon the body a sacredness of astonishing proportions! Yet, how much of our Christian teaching on sex boils down to shaming the body? One might imagine many youth groups in evangelical churches hammering home the message “no sex before marriage” without equally highlighting the beauty and goodness of sex within the marriage covenant.

Recovering a theology of embodiment as rooted in creation and incarnation is vital to restoring a healthy Christian sense of the body.

3. This cultural moment demands that the church model a strong community where transparent dialogue about difficult issues takes place.

It is interesting to note that some thinkers have identified the transgender community as sociologically very similar to that of a religious cult. The recruitment strategy is similar: *nobody understands you but us*. The relational costs are similar: *you will probably have to leave your family (they won’t understand)*. The promises are similar: *we know what you are going through and we alone can help you find yourself*. Transgenderism, like a religious cult, essentially cuts people off from their previous community while promising them a completely new identity. A complete rupture with “the old self” is necessary.

⁴⁶ Trueman, 391-2.

⁴⁷ This is the ancient heresy called gnosticism.

At the same time, Trueman makes the point that the LGBTQ+ community is a place where people experience acceptance and understanding. It is a community where real needs are often met. Trueman writes: “Communities shape consciousness....Our moral consciousness is very much shaped by our community.”⁴⁸

In this era of divisiveness, the church must model a strong community where traits like acceptance, empathy, and listening are the norm in a culture which has forgotten how to truly listen to one another. This community must be built on love, where transparent dialogue about difficult issues can legitimately take place. Truth-telling in our era is increasingly becoming difficult and even costly to personal relationships. This need not be the case. Where true Christian community is practiced, such conversations can strengthen relationships and sharpen the body of Christ instead of splintering it (like what happens in the world).

4. The church must recover the authority and the sufficiency of the Word of God as the sole basis of its ethics and morality.

The Bible must have the first and last word on everything we teach. This cultural moment is not unlike other challenges the church has faced throughout her 2,000 history. The authority of the Word of God must be the deciding barometer and our tower of refuge to which Christians retreat when moral and ethical questions are raised by our contemporary world.

Authority in our age has become almost a dirty word. Yet, the beauty of God’s authoritative word to you is that it is authoritative without being authoritarian. Authoritarian regimes beat people into submission, often governing in ways that are not in the best interests of the people. God’s authoritative word is never like that. God’s authoritative word to you is always for your good because it’s a word from your perfect and loving Father. As Christians, we long to understand and obey God’s Word even with hard ethical decisions because we know that God sees further, knows better, and loves stronger than our feeble attempts to cobble together our own moral vision of life. God gives us words to live by – but we often prefer death.

The authority of scripture speaks to how we create our worldview. What is the ultimate source -- the first word and last word – as you piece together how you view the world? How do you make decisions? What do you embrace and what do you reject? Coming under the authority of Scripture means that we receive the Word of God with a certain posture: with humility and meekness rather than with pride and self-conceit.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once indicated that the message of the scriptures is often sifted “**through the sieve of one’s experience, despising and shaking out what will not pass through; and one prunes and clips the biblical message until it will fit in a given space, until the eagle can no longer fly in its true element but with clipped wings is exhibited as a special showpiece among the usual domesticated animals**”. In other words, Bonhoeffer is instructing us that we often filter the Word of God through our personal experiences to such a degree as to make the majestic eagle that was meant to soar high in the clouds a simple earth-bound chicken. When our experiences effectively muzzle or silence the scriptures, the same can be said of our own lives.

Discussion: (1) Is the Word of God just one word among many words or is it the final and authoritative word? Read 1 Timothy 3:16-17. What do you think Paul’s word to Timothy means for us as we engage this cultural moment?

(2) Agree or disagree: A cultural engagement only steeped in lamentation ultimately misses the mark in today’s world because it often sounds like the very caricature of the church that the world loves to champion (judgmental, bigoted, racist, etc.)

⁴⁸ Trueman, 405.

(3) How is being an embodied creature a blessing? Why is it difficult to come to peace with the shape and form of our bodies? How does that become possible without becoming narcissistic?

(4) If arguing better than someone isn't going to win them to your side, how might you redefine "winning" when it comes to interactions on these controversial issues? What should be the goal of these conversations?

