

PGT

The Pillar and Ground of Truth



SECOND ISSUE



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FIRST EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH

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CHURCH THAT LIVES FOR CHRIST!

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The PGT Editorial Committee is heartened at the warm reception of the re-launch of the PGT. There are many plans still in development, such as the development of a website to host the magazine, and as such the committee continues to welcome all to contribute. For the magazine to establish itself as an institution of our church, our members must be willing to build it up.

Many have also reached out to contribute their articles, and in this edition is only a curated selection. We start off with Pastor Mark giving us a theological overview of the book of Hebrews, as a recap of what we have gone through during morning service for the past few months. Next, we have a polemical exposition of the biblical doctrines of sexuality, providing us with the theological foundation and pastoral wisdom to minister to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Then, Brother Ezra hopes to encourage us to greater missionary zeal with a biographical sketch of the life of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, who gave his life for the gospel ministry, which all of us – church leaders or not – have been called by Christ to participate in. Thereafter, Brother Manoj gives us a thought-provoking and hopefully laugh-inducing satirical article that uses humour to spur self-examination. We have also republished a devotional by the late Reverend Cheah, and closing off the issue, Brother Asaph provides a review on a book which tackles (post-)modernity through a Christian lens.

May this issue spur you to a greater love for Christ and His church.

The PGT Editorial Committee

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Photograph by Elizabeth Chong

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THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP IN HEBREWS

The Theological Ideas of Worship as Presented by the Author of the Book of Hebrews



Written by

MARK C. CHEN

Introduction

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians. While they had not seen Christ, they had heard from those who had. The church was undergoing persecution and some in the church were thinking of returning to the religion and practices of Old Covenant Judaism. While Christianity was persecuted, Judaism was not. The author of the epistle was therefore attempting to dissuade his Jewish Christian readers from relapsing into Judaism, which they believed would give them more stability and spare them from the persecution they faced.^[1]

However, the author wrote to persuade them that they could not return back to the Old Covenant without putting Christ aside. And they could not trade Christ for a better life in the Old Covenant because the Old Covenant was abrogated and Christ and the New Covenant were better. The author does this by comparing and contrasting the worship systems of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, with the aim of showing the superiority of the New Covenant - its message, its mediator, and its results.

This article aims to summarize the theological ideas of worship as presented by the author, explore their similarities and dissimilarities, the physical and metaphysical aspects of worship, and discuss the principles of acceptable worship under the New Covenant.

The Theological Ideas of Worship as Presented by the Author of the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews compares and contrasts 2 covenants. This is depicted and summarized in Hebrews 12:18-29 as two mountains - Sinai and Zion, with two mediators - Moses and Jesus, with two systems of sacrifice - that of the blood of animals (Abel) and the blood of Jesus, and two revelations. It has been said that "Sinai and Zion are understood as theological symbols embracing all the theological subjects discussed in the epistle especially the issues relating to the theological significance of the person and ministry of Jesus such as revelation, the high priesthood, the new covenant, and the heavenly temple."^[1] Hence, there will be a comparison and contrasting of these two systems throughout this section.

The Need for Revelation in Drawing Near to God and the Superiority of Christ's Revelation

Divine revelation revealed the need to worship God in both covenants. When Moses brought Israel to Sinai, God revealed himself and called his people to worship him. In the New Testament, Christ was revealed to be God on another mountain and God told the disciples to obey him (Matthew 17).

In the First or Old Covenant, God spoke through the prophets (1:1). Moses was a prophet of the Old Covenant - in fact he was the mediator. Moses was faithful and a servant (3:5) whose job was to testify of things that would come (3:6). Angels were also associated with the giving of God's Word. They were present at the giving of the law on Sinai (2:2, Acts 7:38). The law was given in a spectacular manner (12:18-21). This law revealed the means by which the Israelites could approach God - through the tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices.

Revelation was also needed in the New Covenant. While God spoke by prophets and angels in the past, God had now spoken through his Son (1:2). Jesus is called the Word and those who received him through faith became the sons of God (John 1:1,

¹David L. Allen, *Hebrews, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 79.

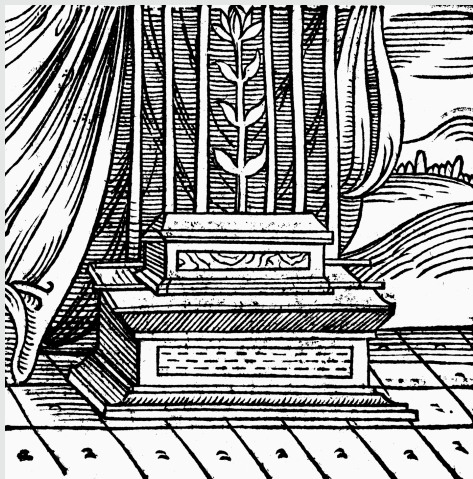
²Kiwoong Son, *Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 200.

The word “son” is anarthrous and serves to highlight the uniqueness and superiority of the Son over the prophets and angels (1:2-3).^[3]

This is why even the angels worship and serve him (1:4-7, 14). He is the object of worship, not just a revelator but the one who is revealed to be worshiped. He is worshiped because of what he did - he was made lower than the angels (1:6,7,9) to taste death for sinners and bring them to glory as the captain of their salvation (2:9-10). All things are now subjected to him (1:8). He calls those he saves from God’s wrath (2:13-18) his brethren and worships together with them (2:11-12). And Jesus was better than Moses because he was the builder of the house (3:3,4), a son (3:6), and mediator of a better covenant (3:6).

The Need for Priests and Sacrifices in Drawing Near to God

In the worship of God, both covenants required priests to perform sacrifices in the temple to make the worshiper acceptable to and able to approach God. In the Old Covenant, God revealed a system of atonement for those who had broken the laws revealed at Sinai. These included the priesthood, the sacrifices offered at the tabernacle. The New Covenant also requires a priest who offers a sacrifice that would enable the people to approach God in worship (4:14,16).



Drawing of how a tabernacle is assumed to look like

The Priesthood

In the Old Covenant, there were many priests. They only served God until their deaths (7:23). Their work involved making animal sacrifices daily for the people and themselves because they were sinners (7:27, 5:3). They were imperfect (7:11). They

ministered in a man-made tent and could only have fellowship in the presence of God by means of these bloody sacrifices (9:11-12).

High priests were selected from the people and chosen by God to offer sacrifices for them. He was their mediator (5:1). Their effectiveness as priests were dependent on them knowing the weaknesses of the people (5:2). The reason for this intimate knowledge was because he himself knew his own limitations (7:28).^[4]

The priests could only go into the Holy Place (9:6) but only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies to atone for the errors or sins committed in ignorance of the people (9:7). But the fact that these sacrifices had to be done daily and yearly meant that they were not effective in cleansing the conscience (10:2). And the priests stood to do the work because the work was never completed (10:11). So how could the people draw near?

For this reason, God vowed to (6:13-20) and did appoint Christ as a priest to perform atonement so that his people can draw near to God (4:14-16). This is the priesthood in the New Covenant.

How God’s people can draw near is based on Christ’s better priesthood. Contrary to the human priests, Jesus was not many but one (7:24). He became a priest on the basis of his indestructible life (7:16). His priesthood was permanent, and he was without sin, only offering sacrifices for others (5:8, 7:26-27). The one time sacrifice he offered was himself (7:26-27, 8:3, 9:11-14).

His was no ordinary human priesthood, but he was a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 7:4-11). Melchizedek existed to foreshadow Christ (7:3). Like him, Christ was a king and a priest (7:3). While others were priests because of their family line, Christ was appointed and did not glorify himself to be high priest (5:5). He was called by God to be high priest (5:10) and he cannot fail because he was God’s Son (5:5). While he experienced weakness and struggled (5:7), he was obedient (5:8). He became a source of salvation to those who come to God by him, the ones who heed the gospel in obedience (7:25, 5:9). And in particular, because he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted - not because he had limits, but precisely because he did not have limits like the human priests.^[5]

³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, vol. 47A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 11.

⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 116.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 89.

After he offered himself, he passed into the heavens to the presence of God (4:14). He entered into a greater and more perfect tabernacle by his own blood (9:11-12) and sat down at God's right hand because he had accomplished his work (8:1-2). There, he makes intercession for his people like a high priest who is fit (7:25-26). Because Christ has gone to heaven to represent his people, they can go boldly to the throne of God (4:16).

The Tabernacle and Sacrifices

Both covenants required a sanctuary for the priest(s) to minister. The Old Covenant priests ministered in the earthly tabernacle (9:11-12) by offering sacrifices. The earthly tabernacle was very elaborate with furnishings made of gold like the lamp stand, table of shewbread, altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant (9:2-5), that the author could not elaborate on every detail (9:5).

They offered bloody sacrifices of bulls and goats (10:4). These sacrifices could only atone for the errors of the people (9:7), or as Numbers 15 repeatedly identifies, sins committed in ignorance. And they were only good for outward ceremonial purification (9:10) like the use of the ashes of the heifer which could only cleanse the flesh (9:13) and the blood of bulls and goats could only purify the temple (9:23). The efficacy was no more for that which was ceremonial and outward. As F.F. Bruce said, "The blood of slaughtered animals under the old order did possess a certain efficacy, but it was an outward efficacy for the removal of ceremonial pollution."^[6] But these sacrifices were inwardly insufficient - the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin (10:4) nor cleanse the conscience (9:14). Why?

This is because God designed these sacrifices to be inadequate because they only foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. They were never meant to be the means of atonement (9:9-10). But the sacrifice of the New Covenant cleanses all kinds of sin (9:11). Christ was a high priest of good things to come. While the blood of animals could only purify outwardly (9:13), Christ's blood could purge the conscience of sin (9:14). This is why by his blood can obtain an eternal redemption for his people (9:12).

Furthermore, the temple on earth was only a copy and shadow (8:5). Jesus could not have served there (8:4). Rather, he came to serve in the true tabernacle, which is heaven - a tabernacle not made by human hands (9:11). Christ entered the real

temple with his blood and appeared before God to appease him (9:24). And because the workplace was better, the work was also better (8:2).

The Change in Covenants

Why was there a change in these institutions? Why did God institute the New Covenant? This was because God found fault with the Old Covenant (8:7-8). It was weak (7:18). The ceremonial laws made no one perfect (7:19). They had to be continually offered (10:2). They were only shadows (10:1). The priesthood was not perfect (7:11). And the annual sacrifice by the High Priest at the Day of Atonement was a continual reminder that the worshiper was not cleansed (10:3). The people of the Old Covenant were also disobedient (8:9) despite him redeeming them from Egypt. They could not draw near. Furthermore, they did not want to draw near because it was foreboding (12:18-21).

So God would make a New Covenant (8:8,10) with a change in the priesthood (7:12). Through this covenant, God would reveal himself completely to the people and would cleanse them in their heart and put his laws therein (8:10), making them perfect so they can draw near to him (7:19). It promised an exclusive and loving relationship with God (8:6,10), where he would forgive their sins and be merciful to them (8:12). Those who are God's people will know him (8:11). They will have an internal religion - not an outward one (8:10). This results in service to the living God (9:14). And Christ will come again for the people he has sanctified (9:28).

But this New Covenant was not entirely new. It was planned from the beginning - it was an everlasting covenant (13:20). This type of covenant was a testament, which means that for the benefits to accrue to the beneficiaries, the benefactor (Christ) had to die (9:22). So God had to prepare Christ's body for sacrifice and Christ willingly obeyed God's will (10:5-7). This means that the faultiness of the Old Covenant, its weakness, the New Covenant, and Christ's death were all planned by God from the eternity past.

And what it means, too, is that those in the Old Covenant, who were called, could have their sins and conscience purged not by the system of the Old Covenant, but by the New (9:15). Because of Christ's inauguration of the New Covenant, he has abolished the Old Covenant (10:9). It is no longer effective because it is now obsolete (8:13).

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 214.

The Danger of Unbelief and the Need for Faith and Obedience in Keeping Near to God Through Fellowship and Corporate Worship

God brought his people into covenant with him to obey him faithfully because he had delivered them. This is why unbelief and disobedience result in severe judgment from God in both covenants. In the Old Covenant, after God had redeemed them and given them his revelation on how they should worship him, the people failed to do so.

Unbelief and Judgment in the Old Covenant

This was especially so in Numbers 13-14 when they refused to enter the Promised Land because they failed to believe that God would give them the land. They hardened their hearts (3:8), challenged God (3:9), went astray in their hearts (3:10), disbelieved (3:12), and rebelled (3:16). And it was because of this sinful unbelief that God disallowed them from entering it (3:11,17-19). This is despite the fact that they had seen them seeing the miracles and heard the word by angels; their sin and disbelief led to judgment (2:2).

Those that came out of Egypt were a mixed multitude (Exodus 12:38, Leviticus 24:10). Not all joined themselves to Israel's God by faith. This is no different to the New Covenant community. The author exhorted his readers not to harden their hearts (3:8). They were called holy brethren (3:1) in the sense that the unbelieving spouse and children of a believer is set apart (1 Corinthians 7:14). These identified with the covenant community but had not joined themselves with God through faith. Only those who hold firmly to their faith belong to Christ (3:6). In other words, in the Old Covenant, there were those who were among the redeemed from Egypt, but Egypt but did not truly believe. And there are those who identify as Christians, who also do not truly believe (4:2).

Unbelief and Judgment in the New Covenant

There were those who had already rejected Jesus. They did not have genuine faith. Hebrews 6:4-5 speaks of them being enlightened, but does not say they believed. They tasted, but did not eat. They partook in spiritual things but did not possess the Spirit. They tasted the good word, but did not believe it. They even tasted the powers of the world to come and saw miracles, but they did not believe. Because of their unbelief, they are called enemies (10:27), as they have trampled on Christ and insulted the Spirit (10:29). For such a person, there was no more hope of salvation (10:26) because they are willfully rejecting and disbelieving Christ (6:4-6), who is the only way of

salvation. What awaits them is a fiery judgment (6:7-8, 10:27). Those who rebelled in the Old Covenant died without mercy (10:28). But those who reject Christ under the New Covenant have a worse judgment than those in the Old Covenant (2:3,10:29) because they fall spiritually into the hands of the living God (10:31), rather than the bodily penalties of the Old Covenant (12:20).

The Need to Encourage Faith and Obedience in the Covenant Community

What is the exhortation of the author? The author exhorts faith (3:1) and diligence in seeking salvation (4:11). Those who identify as believers in Jesus must seek out rest. Those that believe have rest (4:3). They have Sabbath rest now (4:4) and a future heavenly rest (4:7-9).

“
*Those who identify as believers
 in Jesus must seek out rest.
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 (4:3). They have Sabbath rest
 now (4:4) and a future
 heavenly rest (4:7-9).*”

How does the believer continue in faith? He is to take heed to the Word of God, believe it, and exercise themselves to obedience (2:1, 5:12-14). The Word of God will judge you right to the motives (4:12-13). Through the Word will one come to faith or know if he is not truly a believer. True faith is to take God at his Word and obey it, like Noah who obeyed, Abel who trusted in God's way of atonement, and Enoch who walked with God (11:1-7).

Believers are also to press on in their faith (6:9) by loving Christ through their faithful service to one another (6:11-12). They are to delight in worship because they have been forgiven (10:22) and are exhorted to help other believers to do the same - not to leave Christ by meeting often and inciting them to loving service, obedience, and care (10:24-25,32-36, 12:12-13). Believers are not to fall back into Judaism which would bring much trouble to the church (6:1-3, 12:14-17) because the just shall live by faith (10:38-39).

The Way to Encourage Faith Is to Look at Examples of Endurance

One of the ways to draw near to God is to look at

the examples of those who persevered in their faith. This means that faith in God was the required in both the Old and New Covenants. Abraham trusted God's promises and obeyed God even when some of those promises were not fulfilled in his lifetime (11:8-9) and others were fulfilled because he waited (11:11), and yet he obeyed when his faith was tested (11:17-19). And the reason he was able to do this was because his hope was in heaven (11:10,16). Other saints in the Old Covenant and New Covenant endured and trusted in God (11:20-31).

But the way to press on in drawing near to God is by looking at God himself. Christ was very patient with sinners (12:3) and he did not give up in his fight against sin (12:4). Toward his people, he is patient with their failures, chastening them because he loves them (12:5-8) so they might produce obedience (12:11).

Responsibilities Under the New Covenant

The Christian Is Part of the New Covenant Assembly

The Christian does not belong to the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was a terrifying covenant. The people were terrified at the giving of the covenant at Sinai (12:18-19). It was so threatening in its cosmic and legal conditions that the people asked Moses to represent them and he too, was afraid (12:20-21). While both covenants had mediators, the Old Covenant's was afraid while the New Covenant's was more worthy than Moses (3:3) and was faithful as a son who would have had no fear (2:5-6).

But the Christian belongs to the New Covenant - not Sinai, but Zion (12:22). While the living God and innumerable angels were at both Sinai and Zion, Zion appears to be more welcoming. At Sinai, the angels numbered in the thousands and were on chariots. They were fighting angels (Psalm 68). But Zion was a joyous community because the believers had ascended that mount and their names were written in heaven (12:23). It is also a holy community because God the judge had made their spirits perfect by Christ's sacrifice as mediator of the New Covenant, which was better than Abel's animal sacrifice (12:23-24).

The Duty to Fear God and Serve Him

The God that is worshiped in the Old and New Covenants is the same. In the New, he is a consuming fire (12:29). In the Old, he is also a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). Therefore, the Christian has the duty to fear God. We are not to resist God (12:25). He who shook the earth at Sinai will one day shake the earth and heaven (12:26-27, 2 Peter 3:10). Everything will be burned up except for

this kingdom (12:28). Therefore, the believer is exhorted to be grateful and to worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (12:29).



Photo of an uncontrolled fire

There are also requirements to serve God. In the Old Covenant there were commandments given concerning vertical and horizontal responsibilities in the covenant document. In the New there are also vertical and horizontal responsibilities. The believer serves God through his obedience in these areas: in loving the brethren (13:1-3,18-19), in keeping marriage and sex pure (13:4), in being content (13:5-6), in obeying the officers of the church (13:7,17), in maintaining right beliefs and right New Covenant living (13:8-13), and in continual worship and obedience (13:15).

And believers can persevere in these things because God himself will draw near to them who draw near to him by equipping them to live the Christian life by perfecting them and guiding them through Christ (13:20-21).

The Physical and Metaphysical in Worship

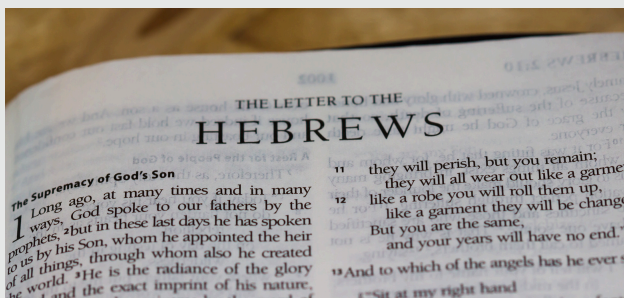
As Seen in the Institutions of the Two Covenants

The Old Covenant institutions of worship are essentially physical. Mount Sinai on which the covenant was made was a physical mountain. It was cordoned off, and no one could approach it until they were sanctified by blood. The emanations off the mountain could be sensed such as the burning fire, the darkness, the blackness, the sound of a trumpet, the voice of God speaking. The tabernacle was also physical, its furnishings constructed by wood and gold, its smoke could be smelled. The priests were adorned with linen clothing. The animals could be touched and slaughtered and their blood poured out. This worship could be seen, heard, felt, and smelt.

But these physical institutions were shadows of a

metaphysical reality. In heaven there is the throne of God surrounded by angels. Isaiah's vision described the smoke that surrounded the throne and the angel holding a live coal which he took off the altar with tongs. These are reflected by the ark of the covenant. Other allusions may be made of the other temple furnishings. Even the works of the priests were physical symbols and shadows of a better metaphysical fulfillment. And while they could not atone for sins to bring anyone into the presence of God, Christ's single work of atonement cut through the heavenly veil, gaining access to all who come to God through him.

On the other hand, the New Covenant institutions of worship are essentially metaphysical. While Christ did die and rise physically and enter heaven with his body; yet the work he does there by interceding for his people is not physical. The true temple in heaven is not physical, even the seat of God is mere figurative for God is a Spirit. However, when the New Covenant believer worships, he is a participant of heavenly worship having come to the assembly of Christ and to the spirits of those who are saved. Christians do not worship physically in heaven, but they are positionally there. In the same way, Christ is not present in body with his people, but when the gathered church comes together in praise, Jesus worships together with them. And so because of Jesus' mediatorial work, believers can draw near to God and approach him spiritually and not physically.



A picture of the chapter of Hebrews from the Bible

As Seen in the Chapter on Faith

In order to institute the New Covenant and to provide an atonement, God had to prepare a body (10:5) for Christ, who then was incarnated and made a little lower than the angels (2:9) so that he could be made like those he would represent (2:14,17). And when he died, he could thereafter bring many sons to glory (2:10). This is why, the believer who is yet on earth physically, is able to draw near to God, having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh (10:19-20).

Principles of Acceptable Worship for New Covenant Believers

From the above theological ideas on worship from the Book of Hebrews, the following would be the principles of acceptable worship for New Covenant believers:

1. They worship God with the help of a mediator - who is their Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. They are to draw near to God boldly because a perfect atonement has been made for them by the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood has forgiven them of all sin - ceremonial uncleanness, sins of ignorance, and high-handed sins.
3. They do not worship in a physical temple nor offer animal sacrifices because the Old Covenant institution has been abrogated and made obsolete.
4. They draw near in worship by the sacrifice of their lips and by prayers.
5. When they worship they are to fear God because they are in his very powerful and awesome presence.
6. When they sing, Christ sings with them.
7. They are to live lives of obedience to Christ's commandments and persevere in their faith.
8. They are to encourage others by the Word to live obediently and by faith.

Conclusion

The Book of Hebrews compares and contrasts the worship systems of the Old and New Covenants. The purpose was to show the superiority of the New Covenant - its message, its mediator, and its results. While the Old Covenant could not expiate sin or propitiate the wrath of God toward sinners, these New Covenant's benefits of salvation and access to God flow to all who are recipients through faith of Christ's redemption and atonement. And while the two covenants have many similarities, many of the Old Covenant institutions were fulfilled in Christ. Now, when believers worship, they worship in the presence of God, fulfilling duties required of them and worshiping God acceptably under the New Covenant.

A BRIEF TREATISE CONCERNING HUMAN SEXUALITY AND THE REFUTATION OF THE ABHORRENT ERRORS OF THOSE COMMONLY CALLED “SIDE A CHRISTIANS”, FOR THE HEALTH OF THE CHURCH AND THE GLORY OF HER LORD

Articles of Doctrine

Article 1: God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth

Together with the Scriptural witness according to an unbroken catholic faith, we *affirm* that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, having created all things invisible and visible ex nihilo (Gen 1:1).¹ We *therefore affirm* His right as the most dread Sovereign over the world and His most absolute lordship over all the spheres of creation.

Article 2: Man is created in the image and likeness of God

The God who created the heavens and the earth did also create Man in His image, male and female created He them (Gen 1:28). We *therefore affirm* that all humanity is created in God's image and likeness,¹ and that God's image unfolds itself fully across the whole humanity gathered under a single head.² We *also affirm* that both male and female are in the image of God, whose chief end is to glorify and enjoy Him forever.³

Despite the Fall, the image of God in the broad sense is not entire lost (Psa 8:4-5; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 11:7).⁴ Therefore, we *affirm* that all sinners, insofar as they are human, are to be treated with sanctity, dignity, and honour (Gen 9:6; James 3:17; 1 Pet 2:17). We *deny however*, following the example of our Lord and His apostles, that treating sinners with such honour requires us to affirm them in their sin (John 4:17-18; 8:11; 1 Cor 6:7-11, 18-20; Phil 4:2; James 4:8).

We call sinners to repentance of their sin and obedience to God because we *deny* that we can find any joy or flourishing outside of the chief end for which God has made us. Rather, to live outside as such is to not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Article 3: Man is created to be sexually binary and complementary

That God created Man male and female (Gen 1:28) means that His intended design was for Man to be sexually binary. We *therefore affirm* that there are

Exposition by

MARCUS GRATIUS



only two valid sexes that the majority of humanity is made in. We also affirm that the only valid expression of our sexuality is according to the biological sex we are made in.

We *further affirm* that by uniting the man and the woman in marriage, God was demonstrating that the binary sexuality is meant to be complementary to each other, with each meant to perform his unique functions in exercising dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26-28). We *therefore deny* that male and female are interchangeable categories, or that there exists no meaningful differences between them both. We *further deny* that biological sex can be changed, for it would be an act of rebellion against God's design for us (Lev 18:21-19:28; Deut 23:1; Psa 51:3-6).

Article 4: The complementary sexuality of Man is to be ordinarily expressed in the institution of matrimony

Since God instituted marriage as a creation ordinance (Gen 2:23-24), we *affirm* that the complementary sexuality of Man is to be ordinarily expressed in the marital union of one man and one woman. We *affirm* that God instituted marriage for at least six reasons:⁶

1. That a man and his wife might live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things (Eph 2:18; Eph 5:21-25);
2. That a man and his wife might properly enjoy sexual relations with each other (Gen 2:23; 1 Cor 7:2; Heb 13:4);
3. For the propagation of the human race (Gen 1:22, 28; 8:17);

¹Apostles' Creed

Belgic Confession, Article 14.

³Herman Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics* (John Vriend trans) (Baker Academic, 2008), 2:576-579.

⁴Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q1.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Henry Beveridge trans) (Hendrickson, 2008), 1.15.4.

⁶The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality, Q11.

4. For the enrichment of society and its orderly function (Gen 1:26-28);

5. For the propagation of a godly seed nurtured in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Gen 1:28; Eph 5:22-6:4); and

6. To represent the mystery of Christ and the Church that He loves (Eph 5:25).

Since it is God's institution, we deny that we can redefine marriage to include unions of any other sort. *We also deny* that marriage can be lightly dissolved, for what God has joined together, we must not put asunder without legitimate grounds (Matt 19:6-9; 1 Cor 7:15).

Article 5: Sexual activity is legitimised only within the context of the marital covenant

When Adam and Eve were described as naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25) and the author of Hebrews called the marital bed undefiled (Heb 13:4), *we affirm* that we are taught that sexual activity is only legitimate within the marital union of a man and his wife. *We affirm* that God detests all manner of unchastity and commands us to live chaste lives, whether in marriage or not (Exo 20:14; 1 Cor 6:18-20). *We further affirm* that this thus excludes all forms of homosexual activity, for it cannot exist within the marital union by definition.

Article 6: Sinful desires are themselves truly and properly sin

Since each man is drawn away and enticed by his own desires (James 1:14), *we affirm* that the sinful desires we have, as motions of our corruption of nature, are truly and properly sin.⁷ *We therefore affirm* that homosexual desires, whether they be called same-sex attraction or orientation, are truly and properly sin. *We deny* the teaching that these desires are not sinful, so long as they are not acted upon.

Article 7: Union with Christ by the gospel is incompatible with all forms of sexual immorality

Since we as believers have become one with Christ in body and soul, *we affirm* that any form of sexual immorality profanes our union with Christ (1 Cor 6:15-20). *We further affirm* that believers are obliged to flee all forms of sexual immorality because we are not our own, but belong to Christ (1 Cor 6:18).

We therefore deny that it is helpful or legitimate to use the category of "homosexual Christian", for it

unites two identities that are fundamentally incompatible.

Article 8: There is no condemnation for sexual immorality for those who are in Christ Jesus

According to the holy gospel, *we affirm* that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). Therefore, there is forgiveness for sins available in Christ, whether heterosexual unchastity or homosexual activity (Col 2:13). *We therefore affirm* that though sinful desires are themselves truly and properly sin, those who strive and struggle to mortify them receive God's mercy and grace, for a bruised reed shall He not break and a smoking flax shall He not quench (Isa 42:3; Rom 4:6-8; 1 John 1:9). *We affirm* that the gospel is freely given to every sinner and Christ's work is offered to them if they come (Matt 11:28-30).

We deny that there being no condemnation means that God accepts us without intending that we repent of our sins. Rather, God's will is our sanctification (1 Thess 4:3) and our union to Christ means that we must flee all sins and sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18-20). *We further deny* that the hope of the gospel may be used to offer a false hope to unrepentant sinners, for that is a pernicious evil (Matt 18:6). We also deny that this hope of justification can be found anywhere else than in Christ Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Article 9: Parents and children have duties to each other in the matter of sexuality

We affirm that God's will for parents is to train their children in proper sexuality in at least three ways:⁹

1. That parents should model before their children a loving relationship, esteeming and honouring marriage (Eph 5:21-25);
2. That parents should speak to their children appropriately and sufficiently about proper sexuality and sexual conduct as God designed them (Prov 5; 7; 22:6, 15); and
3. That parents should guard their children from all forms of sexual immorality and pornography, improper sexual ethics, or other forms of dangerous media (Deut 6:6-9; 1 Thess 4:3).

We deny that parents are allowed to abdicate these duties to others in the training of their children in proper sexuality.

We further affirm that God's will for children is to

⁷Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.5.

⁸The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality, Q26.

⁹The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality, Q39.

honour their parents in sexual conduct in at least three ways:¹⁰

1. That children honour their parents by maintaining sexual purity and chastity (Exo 22:16; 1 Cor 6:18-20; 7; Heb 13:4);
2. That children refrain from adopting and pushing upon their parents improper sexuality or sexual conduct (Deut 21:18-21; Prov 29:15; 30:17; Col 3:20; 1 Tim 3:1-4); and
3. That children take delight in God as singles, waiting patiently for the spouse that God has prepared for them (Gen 2:22-23; Prov 18:22).

We *deny* that the honour that children must render to their parents takes priority over the honour they are to render to God (Mark 12:17).

“ *We deny that the honour that children must render to their parents takes priority over the honour they are to render to God (Mark 12:17).* ”

Refutation of Errors

Error 1: Neither Scripture nor the Christian tradition addresses the concept of same-sex attraction or orientation

Elaboration of the error: At the time when the Scriptures were written, especially the Pauline epistles, there was no concept of sexual attraction or orientation. Rather, such a concept “only emerged in the 19th century. Prior to that, sexual morality was concerned with behaviour rather than attraction”.¹¹

Ancient authors have said that homosexual sex is a result of disordered or frenzied lust,¹² which shows that they had no category for same-sex attractions. In all likelihood, this was the context that Paul

wrote Romans 1:26-27 – he was operating in the same antiquity and saw homosexual sex as a product of “unnatural heterosexual excess”.¹³ Scripture and the Christian tradition it spawned therefore did not have the category of same-sex attraction or orientation. In any event, the Scriptures were written by flawed humans “working within their own limitations and understandings of their time”.¹⁴ Furthermore, the compilation of the canonical writings “demonstrate the gradual evolution and increasing moral sophistication of God’s people”.¹⁵ There is thus no need to insist that the biblical authors were referring to same-sex attractions in their writings against homosexuality – they simply did not consider it in their writings.

Refutation: This error rests on a more fundamental problem: a wrong doctrine of Scripture. Contrary to this erroneous view of Scripture, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ While it is true that the biblical authors were men and wrote in their own contexts, their activity was “comforted, empowered, and purified” by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ It is therefore an incorrect conclusion that the biblical authors brought their flaws and limited perspectives into their writings, as all they wrote was inspired by the Spirit.

Furthermore, the reason why Scripture does not expressly address same-sex orientation in such terms is because it is fundamentally a pagan idea pioneered by Sigmund Freud;¹⁸ it was Freud who made sexuality the central part of human identity.¹⁹ In any event, Scripture does talk about these concepts with a different term: desire (ἐπιθυμία).²⁰ James 1:14-15 makes clear that temptation arises from within a person, when a person is “enticed by his own evil desire” (CSB).²¹ Our desires are therefore never neutral; “if a desire is oriented to that which is sinful, we must treat the desire itself as sin” (Matt 5:27-28).²² After all, it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matt 12:34).

¹⁰The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality, Q40

¹¹Davian Aw, *Whatever Commandment There May Be: A Christian response to homosexuality* (2025 Online Edition), p 18.

¹²The Reformation Project website, “The Christian tradition does not address sexual orientation” <<https://reformationproject.org/case/tradition/>> (accessed 9 September 2025).

¹³Aw, *Commandment*, p 18.

¹⁴Aw, *Commandment*, pp 20-21.

¹⁵Aw, *Commandment*, p 22.

¹⁶Belgic Confession, Article 3.

¹⁷Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (Gregory Parker Jr. & Cameron Clausing trans) (Hendrickson Academic, 2022), p 44.

¹⁸Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Crossway, 2023), pp 65-73.

¹⁹Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020), p 205.

²⁰Aw makes the argument that the word ἐπιθυμία refers to excessive sexual passion, by asserting that the prefix “ἐπι” means “over” or “above” (Aw, *Commandment*, p 19). Lexicons indicate that the word itself refers to inordinate desires. Aw is making an etymological fallacy.

²¹Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Christian Focus, 2019), pp 194-196.

²²Strachan, p 199.

Various Christian commentators have made the same conclusion. Augustine calls the lust of the flesh the origin of actual sins.²³ Calvin describes the inclination to sin as being inwards.²⁴ The Reformed tradition has always understood concupiscence as being sin itself.²⁵

It is therefore incorrect to conclude that Scripture nor the Christian tradition addresses same-sex attractions or orientations. Scripture is clear that desires towards sinful things are sin themselves. As such, if homosexuality is sinful, desires for homosexuality (whether they be called attractions or orientations) are sinful.

Error 2: Scripture does not condemn loving and committed same-sex relationships, only exploitative and harmful sex

Elaboration of the error: In every instance of Scripture condemning homosexual behaviour, it is condemning only exploitative and harmful homosexual sex.

1. The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality per se, but attempted gang rape and a lack of hospitality. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah were trying to forcibly have sex with Lot's visitors. That was the sin, and not that they wanted to have homosexual sex. Lot's response of offering his daughters was because the visitors had come under the protection of his roof (Gen 19:8, NIV). The men were therefore not seeking consensual gay sex.

2. The Levitical prohibitions against lying with another man pertain to cult prostitution and do not provide a blanket prohibition against homosexuality. Leviticus 18 reads as a condemnation of practices associated with ancient pagan worship, such as incest, child sacrifice, and cult prostitution (which included homosexual acts). It is thus not a prohibition of two homosexuals who wish to consummate their love.

3. Paul's use of the words μαλακοί (malakoi; effeminate) and ἀρσενοκοῖται (arsenokoitai homosexuals); in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB) do not refer to the passive and active participants of gay anal sex. Rather, they refer to the practice of

pederasty, which was a sexual relationship between men and male youth based on exploitation and abuse. It is therefore not a condemnation of loving same-sex relationships.²⁸

Refutation: This error is based on a false dichotomy. Just because Scripture condemns exploitative homosexual sex does not mean that it permits loving homosexual sex. While Scripture indeed condemns exploitative homosexual sex (and any kind of exploitative sex as a matter of fact), it does so because it condemns homosexual sex in toto.

This in turn is grounded in the overarching affirmation that God's design for Man is for a man and his wife to be joined in heterosexual union. There is no biblical warrant whatsoever for straining such a distinction between loving and exploitative homosexual sex.

1. In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is again a false dichotomy to insist that their sin was a lack of hospitality over against homosexuality. Jude 7 makes clear that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah had given themselves over to fornication and after strange flesh.²⁹ Sodom and Gomorrah were indeed punished for rape, but they were also judged for their homosexual sins. As DeYoung puts it, "Sodom and Gomorrah were guilty of a great many sins; we don't have to prove that homosexual practice was the only sin to show that it was one of them."³⁰

2. It is a dishonest reading of Leviticus 18 to restrict it solely to prohibitions of cult prostitution. Rather, the entire text is a prohibition against unlawful sexual relations.³¹ It would be ridiculous to say that Leviticus 18 allowed incest, as long as it was consensual or not in the context of cult prostitution.

3. It is senseless for Paul to coin the term ἀρσενοκοῖται if he wanted to address the issue of pederasty, since there already existed a Greek term for it: παιδεραστία (paiderastia). In fact, he coined the term from words that originate in Leviticus 18: ἀρσενο (arseno) and κοῖται (koitai).³²

Error 3: Marriage is fundamentally about covenant and commitment, which homosexual couples can

²³ Augustine, *A Treatise on Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 1.27.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (John Owen trans) (Calvin Translation Society, 1855).

²⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 3:143. See also the Presbyterian Church of America Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality, p 8.

²⁶ Aw, *Commandment*, pp 4-6.

²⁷ Aw, *Commandment*, pp 10-14.

²⁸ Aw, *Commandment*, pp 23-29.

²⁹ Aw points out that "strange flesh" in the KJV is translated from the Greek words ἑτέρας σαρκός (heteras sarkos). He then argues that if Jude had intended to refer to homosexual sex, he would have used ὁμοῦς σαρκός (Aw, *Commandment*, p 6). This is a strained argument. Jude's intention is to use the word "strange" to refer to the unnaturalness of going after other men – "strange" or "different" in this case does not mean difference from one's own sex, but difference from nature. Again, Aw commits an etymological fallacy.

³⁰ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), p 38.

³¹ De Young, *Homosexuality*, pp 63-67.

³² De Young, *Homosexuality*, p 40.

also undertake

Elaboration of the error: Contrary to popular objections to homosexuality, marriage is not fundamentally about procreation. Scripture does not make procreation the essence of marriage. Rather, marriage is about covenant and commitment to another person. Homosexual couples are able to so undertake, and thus they should not be barred from being married.³³

Refutation: Marriage is not fundamentally about covenant nor commitment, but about imaging Christ and His Church (Eph 6:32). In fact, Scripture provides us countless examples of human covenants outside the marital context: eg Abraham and Abimelech; Isaac and Abimelech; David and Jonathan etc.³⁴ Marriage is a covenant, only because it reflects Christ's covenant to His Bride. As early as Genesis, God intended for his son and his bride to point towards His Son and His Bride – marriage was instituted so that the glory of the Bridegroom would come to light in the multitude of His subjects that are together His Bride.³⁵ Divorced from this Christological perspective, there is nothing significant about marriage as covenant.

If so, then it is wholly wrongheaded to allow marriage to include homosexual couples. For marriage images the Christ-Church relation, not the Christ-Christ nor Church-Church relations. In fact, Scripture does not even allow us to call those “relations” in the first place – they simply do not exist.

But no one is prohibiting those who struggle with homosexuality from getting married. Marriage is open to them. In the Corinthian church, it would not be unreasonable that those who practised homosexuality as unbelievers got married as believers to the opposite sex (1 Corinthians 6:9). Dr Rosaria Butterfield, as a pastor's wife, still struggles with her homosexual desires.³⁶

Further, while procreation is not of the essence of marriage, it is still an integral part of it. An integral part of God's command to Adam and Eve pertained to childbearing (Gen 1:28). Homosexual couples are disqualified from the definition of marriage not because they do not have children, but because

they cannot by sheer fact of their biology. Infertility is not the same as impotence.

Error 4: The Levitical prohibitions against homosexual behaviour do not apply to Christians

Elaboration of the error: While Leviticus does prohibit male same-sex activity, Christians do not live under the Levitical laws. There is no division between the “moral law” or the “ceremonial law”. These Levitical prohibitions of male homosexual sex were given to enforce the patriarchal gender norms of ancient society. Given that Christ has pointed beyond these patriarchal norms, these Levitical laws do not apply any more.³⁷

Refutation: Contrary to what is asserted, the distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws has good ground. The giving of the moral law (Ten Commandments) was a distinct event from the legislation of the rest of the Mosaic laws. Those particularly called the ceremonial laws have a distinct function concerning worship and prefiguring Christ, which for good reason have been abrogated.³⁸

It is therefore correct that the Levitical prohibitions per se no longer bind Christians.³⁹ But one cannot miss the inescapable force of the Levitical prohibitions: that sexual immorality is abhorred amongst the people because their God is holy. This is simply an expression of the seventh commandment, which commands chastity and prohibits unchastity.⁴⁰ “When the Gentiles entered the church centuries later, they did not have to become Jews, but in keeping with God's moral law, they did have to leave sexual immorality behind”.⁴¹

Error 5: Gender complementarity is not a universally normative scriptural teaching.

Elaboration of the error: Gender complementarity is not a normative scriptural teaching. The Genesis account does not mandate a male and female union, but a union of two people. When the Genesis account speaks of the “one flesh” union, it refers not to physical complementarity, but a “new primary kinship bond”. Therefore, the Genesis account of God creating male and female does not set a universal norm of gender complementarity and allows for homosexual couples to be

³³The Reformation Project website, “Marriage is about covenant” <<https://reformationproject.org/case/marriage/>> (accessed 9 September 2025).

³⁴Many revisionist scholars have in fact considered them to be homosexual lovers. But it is 0230 hours and I will not deal with this shoddy argument.

³⁵Bavinck, *The Christian Family* (Nelson Kloosterman trans) (Christian's Library Press, 2012), p 161.

³⁶Rosaria Butterfield Interview with Greg Koukl <<https://www.str.org/w/rosaria-butterfield-interview-with-greg-koukl>> (accessed 12 September 2025).

³⁷The Reformation Project website “The prohibitions in Leviticus don't apply to Christians” <<https://reformationproject.org/case/levitical-prohibitions/>> (accessed 10 September 2025). It is interesting to note that in this article, the authors state that Leviticus only prohibits male homosexual sex and not any other kinds of homosexual sex. This is easily replied by pointing to how Scripture consistently comprehends women in its addresses to men.

³⁸Westminster Confession of Faith, 19.3.

³⁹De Young provides some helpful principles for handling the applicability and non-applicability of the Levitical laws in *Homosexuality*, pp 42-47.

⁴⁰Heidelberg Catechism, Q108.

⁴¹De Young, *Homosexuality*, p 47.

legitimised.⁴²

Refutation: This is a spurious argument that grasps at straws. Only a thoroughly dishonest reading of the Genesis account will allow for the abovementioned conclusion. All throughout the account, the complementariness of the woman to the man is highlighted; in fact, she was created because she was a help meet (Gen 2:18). The argument fails to consider the fundamental sexual dimorphism that is inbuilt into the human race – the history of the human race began with a wedding,⁴³ a wedding of a man and a woman.

The complementarity of the man and the woman is therefore “central” to God’s vision for humanity. God’s blessing of the couple (Gen 1:28) consists of the ability to procreate, which requires fertile complementarity to begin with. Without this complementarity, the blessing is simply not present.⁴⁴

Error 6: Celibacy is a gift, not a mandate, and homosexuals should not be made to become celibate as a blanket rule

Elaboration of the error: Since Scripture states that celibacy is a gift and not a mandate (1 Cor 7:7-9), it is wrong for the Church to call homosexuals to celibacy when they do not have the gift. By so doing, the Church is calling homosexuals to deny their sexuality. Homosexuals should therefore be allowed to pursue relationships with people of the same sex.⁴⁵

Refutation: This error is founded on several unspoken premises. The first is that one’s homosexuality can never be changed. This is patently false, since God can do all things (Luke 1:37).⁴⁶ The second is that one’s sexuality is the fundamental part of one’s identity. As mentioned above, this is a Freudian, not a biblical idea. The third is that one’s experience should dictate the doctrines of the faith. This cannot be the case: just because one is homosexual does not change the Scriptural prohibition of homosexuality.

Further, the reason Scripture imposes celibacy on homosexuals is not for celibacy’s sake, but for

holiness’ sake. The man whom Paul envisions in 1 Cor 7:7-9 is giving up things he can legitimately possess: a wife, children, a family life. A homosexual who is called to abstain from homosexual sex is being called to not indulge his sexual proclivities. One has made himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom; the other is afflicted by unnatural passions. These two are not the same.⁴⁷ It is a gross misunderstanding of what celibacy is, when it is equated with homosexuals being exhorted to mortify their sins.

Error 7: God did not make Man to be alone, so homosexuals should be allowed to be with someone

Elaboration of the error: God said that it is not good for the man to be alone (Gen 2:18). This was said in the time where Adam had God’s undivided attention. As such, it is insufficient to encourage homosexuals to develop a deeper relationship with God as a substitute for romantic relationships. Rather, homosexuals should be allowed to have relationships with someone they love.⁴⁸

Refutation: God’s comment was made in the context of the man needing the woman to fulfil the mandate that God gave to him. While it certainly included aspects of romance and companionship, it is not exclusively restricted to those. It is therefore not legitimate to surrender procreativity, complementarity, and the Christ-Church image for the sake of companionship.

Error 8: The arc of Scripture is one of inclusion, not exclusion

Elaboration of the error: The narrative arc of Scripture is one of greater inclusion and not exclusion. Scripture shows that the covenant community moves towards including more people, such as slaves, foreigners, and barren women. Therefore, we should be more inclusive of homosexuals.⁴⁹

Refutation: While there is indeed a sense where Scripture traces a more inclusive arc, it is not an unqualified one. Gentiles are brought into the covenant and women have no distinction from men in having access to God through Christ. But Christ

⁴² Bavink, *Christian Family*, p 1.

⁴³ Joshua R. Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Baker Academic, 2020), pp 215-217.

⁴⁴ Bavink, *The Christian Family* (Nelson Kloosterman trans) (Christian’s Library Press, 2012), p 161.

⁴⁵ The Reformation Project website, “Celibacy is a gift, not a mandate” <<https://reformationproject.org/case/celibacy/>> (accessed 10 September 2025).

⁴⁶ See the various stories of former homosexuals who went on to have heterosexual marriages, eg Rosaria Butterfield.

⁴⁷ J. F. Y Solis Bernard, “Gay and Celibate: A Contradiction in Terms” *Nox Venit* (23 July 2022) <<https://noxvenit.substack.com/plgay-and-celibate/>> (accessed 10 September 2025).

⁴⁸ De Young provides some helpful principles for handling the applicability and non-applicability of the Levitical laws in *Homosexuality*, pp 42-47.

⁴⁹ Aw, *Commandment*, p 38.

⁴⁹ The Reformation Bible Project, “The arc of Scripture points toward inclusion, not exclusion” <<https://reformationproject.org/case/arc-of-scripture/>> (accessed 10 September 2025). Interestingly, the article makes the argument that the Church opposed promiscuity, not homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world, ie the Christians favoured monogamy over promiscuity, not heterosexuality over homosexuality. In fact, many non-Christians today would not accept many Greco-Roman practices. This argument fails to consider that the reason why non-Christians today think differently from the Greco-Roman world is precisely Christianity’s global influence: see Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Abacus, 2020). It is worth noting that the return to paganism (at least in Western society) coincided with the increased sexual anarchy: see Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Eerdmans, 2018).

has also come to bring a sword and set a man at variance against his father, the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Matt 10:34-35). His scandalous welcome of the adulteress still contained the imperative to go and sin no more (John 8:11).

By demanding our total allegiance over any other commitment, Christ unequivocally calls us to obedience to His truths, even if that obedience causes us to divide from others (Luke 12:46). We may therefore not let sin enter the camp under the guise of inclusion.

“*By demanding our total allegiance over any other commitment, Christ unequivocally calls us to obedience to His truths, even if that obedience causes us to divide from others (Luke 12:46). We may therefore not let sin enter the camp under the guise of inclusion.*”

Error 9: Not affirming homosexual Christians will result in greater harm to them

Elaboration of the error: Studies have shown that non-affirmation will result in higher rates of suicide and depression among homosexuals. To help homosexuals flourish, we should affirm them and allow them to live their best life now.

Refutation: No amount of harm they suffer in this life compares to the eternal suffering that awaits the unrepentant (Matt 10:28; Luke 16). Affirmation of homosexuals in their sin will not lead them to repentance. Therefore, it is not true that non-affirmation will result in greater harm. On the contrary, affirmation is precisely that which will visit the greatest harm upon them.

THE LIFE OF ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE

Original biography by Andrew Bonar (1844)



Biographical sketch by

EZRA EIO

“

*Lord, make me as holy as a
pardoned sinner can be.*

”

“Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be.”

This was one of the prayers uttered by Robert Murray M'Cheyne. He was a young Scottish pastor, whose life and ministry is a great example to all children of God who desire to dwell closer to God, advance in holiness and be gainfully employed as an instrument in God's service.

His personal diaries recorded his desire for communion with the Lord above all - “O for closest communion with God, till soul and body shine with divine brilliancy”; as well as his strivings for holiness and wrestling against besetting sin.

His letters to fellow ministers and members of his congregation revealed his compassionate heart for his flock and for the lost. It also showed wise counsel provided on a host of issues including guidance from God, work and study, fellowship, and difficulties in prayer.

The biography starts from his birth in May 21 1813, Edinburgh, as the youngest of his family; to his conversion in the days of youth, sparked by the death of his eldest brother David in 1831 when

M'Cheyne began to ‘seek a Brother who cannot die’. It touches on his early labours in the vineyard at Larbert and Dunipace, his ordination as a minister in St.Peter's, Dundee; his mission to the Palestine and the Jews for 6 months in 1839; the Scottish revival in his absence, and the latter days of his ministry before his death on 25th March, 1843.

His mission to the Jews was motivated by a belief in the importance of the Jews in the eyes of God, as having a peculiar love to them. Along with Andrew Bonar, his close friend, brother and fellow minister of the Word, he ventured to key areas in Judea, Samaria, Galilee.

Walking the ground where the Lord Jesus walked, he was especially moved at Gethsemane, where he meditated on Christ's love and determination to undergo divine wrath for us. With his Hebrew Bible in hand, he sought to leave at least a few words of Scripture with the Jews he met, no matter how short the time. He remembered the faces of the Jews he witnessed to before the Judgement-seat of Christ.

He was deeply convinced that God can make the simplest statement of the gospel, if it was the true gospel, the good tidings, the message that God so loved the world, effectual to save souls. His heart was stirred with grief at the sight of cities engulfed in **idoltry** and superstition, “veiling the glorious Object of faith”. He was truly “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”, and yearned very much that there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David” (Zech 13.1).



Sketch of Andrew Murray adapted from book
“Disruption Worthies” by Rev. James A. Wylie L.L.D.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of M'Cheyne's mission to the Jews was what occurred in his home congregation at St. Peter's Dundee and Kilsyth, Scotland, while he was away.

In all his years of ministry, M'Cheyne laboured fervently for his flock in prayer, feeling very much the need of an outpouring of the Spirit to convert them. Mr William C. Burns, who was supplying the pulpit in M'Cheyne's absence, had a sense of the deeper attention and real anxiety in those who were previously careless.

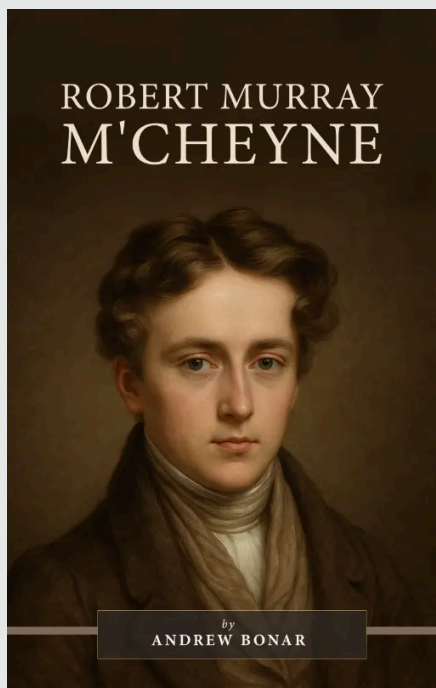
As he preached and pressed upon the congregation the need for acceptance of Christ, there was much melting of heart, and intense desire after God. The Word of God grew mightily and prevailed.

Far from being envious, M'Cheyne praised the Lord that another instrument had been honoured in the place where he himself had laboured with many tears and temptations. Lest he would say, "My own hand and eloquence had done this", he rejoiced that souls were led to the Saviour, and if he were to be given a crown, he would cast it at the feet of Christ.

course. Perhaps that was the Lord's way of impressing upon our remembrance M'Cheyne's character and example more than ever.

In Bonar's words – "He dwelt at the Mercy-seat as if it were his home – preached the uncertainties of eternal life with an undoubting mind – and spent his nights and days in ceaseless breathings after holiness, and the salvation of sinners." Perhaps, never was the death of one, whose sole occupation had been preaching the everlasting gospel, more felt by all the saints of God in Scotland.

Come and learn from his example, by the Spirit's help, to be drawn to greater heights of communion with the Lord, and usefulness for His name.



A version of a book cover which features the assumed portrait of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

He did not complete more than 29 years of life before God took him – even before the age at which a priest in Israel would have started on his

55 TELLTALE SIGNS YOU'RE REFORMED

A Satirical Guide to Our Quirks, Convictions & Rarely Challenged Treasures

Written by

R MANOJ



This satire caricatures Reformed culture – a provocative mirror reflecting what we'd rather not see. It's part confession, part ribbing, but entirely family business from inside the TULIP patch. It invites us to laugh at ourselves – not to tear us down, but to remind us that our quirks don't define us. What defines us is the saving gift of faith, which Christ Himself grows and perfects in His people.

As you read on, you'll notice a deliberate lack of nuance. There is no "on the one hand / on the other hand" type of balancing act that so often dilutes a message with a thousand deadly qualifications. So, a caution is in order: if your skull is eggshell-thin, proceed prayerfully – or wear a helmet. I accept no liability for theological concussions, or bruised sensibilities. Having issued that warning, here are 55 ways to say you're Reformed (without actually saying it), in no order of good, bad, and quirky.

A. Pious Postures & Sanctified Snobbery

Of external pieties.

1. I proudly hold an undoubted orthodoxy, guarding it like the Crown Jewels – watching over the sovereignty of God, authority of Scriptures, and Christ's glory more tightly than elders guarding the pulpit from a rogue PowerPoint slide.
2. Though I drip with doctrine as naturally as others sweat, I'm better known for my frozen-chosen vibe – wearing a solemn face from Geneva's Reformation Wall.
3. My unspoken maxim is simple: smiles optional, correct doctrine compulsory. Freedom in Christ may be proclaimed from the pulpit, but my facial muscles remain in bondage. Emotion boils over only when Romans 9 is misquoted.
4. From the way I speak, you'd think I was sanctified by Calvin's Institutes rather than the Spirit.

5. I can lecture all day about Election, Reprobation, or Judgment ... without a single affectionate word about the Triune God.

6. I'm a heresy-hunter who champions the Doctrines of Grace, with hardly a trace of grace. I hate heretics with a perfect Psalm 139 hatred but quickly claim Psalm 51 mercy for my own sins.

7. When grace is preached, I give a stiff, dignified nod. Outward signs of redeemed joy are conspicuously absent.

8. I quote Owen, Spurgeon, Edwards, and Bavinck more than Scripture, treating these fallible ancients as infallible authorities. Newer theological contributions are ignored (unless they're autographed by a Reformed celebrity).

9. At the end of an orderly and reverent worship service, I can critique the sermon for an hour. But I never ask how my neighbour is doing.

10. When a believer shares a personal testimony, I can't rest till I've technically clarified their soteriology ... and slipped in some pious lifestyle advice (e.g., quiet time – yes, scrolling Shopee – no).

11. My prayers carry a whiff of snobbery. I insist on the reverent tense when addressing God, chiding newcomers who address the Most High as "You". While waxing verbose, I silently judge their single-sentence cry to God. Surely our Heavenly Father prefers my 1,000-word theological essays.

B. The TULIP Tune

The inner life of doctrinal obsession.

12. I don't exhale during a sermon until all five TULIP petals are ticked off. If my pastor misses even one, don't expect me to shake his hand on the way out.

13. If you dare say, "God helps those who help themselves," I bristle. The Gospel is not self-help but outside help: Christ does for us what we never could.

14. I hold fast to Limited Atonement but keep unlimited opinions ranging from lapsarianism to Adam's belly button.

15. I pride myself on spotting indicative and imperative statements in Scripture. "Leave out the imperative, and you get truth without transformation! Leave out the indicative, and you end up with graceless moralism!" Ironically, my life illustrates both failures at once.

16. I believe in Total Depravity. Yet, as a true-blue Singaporean (with a secondary Confucian identity), I have aced every exam since PSLE. I need constant reminders that exam mastery does not exempt me from the cross, and that building my identity on moral self-cultivation is as futile as placing tissue packets to 'chope' a hawker-centre table in the middle of a thunderstorm.

17. I champion "Soli Deo Gloria" yet secretly measure spiritual life and service in KPIs. Faithfulness is supposed to be its own fruit, but I still demand numbers on a spreadsheet.

18. My Bible margins resemble a theological battlefield of Greek grammar, cross-references, and historical citations. Yet a prayer journal is nowhere to be found within 5 kilometres of me.

19. I will never ask anyone to "accept Christ as Saviour". Those converted at a mass evangelistic rally get my side-eye.

20. To feed my debate addiction, I patrol the Puritan Board. I use my theological knowledge to spar with opponents on such forums, thereby and thus nourishing (or policing) orthodoxy.

21. I don't speak in tongues or claim epiphanies, but quote from the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechisms as if they were the 67th book of the Bible. I wield these historic confessions like a hedge to fit God into my denominational measurements.

22. I initiate haute theology discussions on subjects like equal ultimacy, double predestination and compatibilism ... especially with strangers.

23. I scan the church leadership for any trace of Arminianism but turn a blind eye when it seeps into Sunday School or casual water-cooler chatter.

24. If you even hint at deviating from our traditions, my labeller-instinct kicks in and you're pigeonholed for perpetuity: Antinomian, Liberal, Radical, Progressive, etc. But some dare to slap me with the label 'Corporatist'—as though I were sneaking secular corporate ethos into church life.

C. Rules & Righteous Rigidity

Order, tradition, and a dash of elitism.

25. God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth. Yet I still expect worshippers to don the "Sunday Best" of Western respectability. If you turn up in tropical picnic attire on the Lord's Day, prepare for the blush of brotherly admonition.

26. To keep corporate worship pure, we invoke the Regulative Principle of Worship (i.e., if Scripture didn't command it, we won't sing it, strum it, or stream it). But we carve out exceptions such as creeds, confessions, bulletins, and fixed service times. Thank the Westminster Divines for that elastic clause - "circumstances concerning the worship of God ... ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence" (1.6). Undefined phrases like this let us have our cake and eat it too.

27. I ardently champion the solemn beauty of exclusive Psalmody. In the spirit of New Testament liberty, I give hymns and pianos a reluctant nod. But let the strange fire of wild guitars be anathema!

28. If I stray outside Psalmody, it can only be for 17th-19th century hymns. The chronological snob in me rejects newer songs for their stylistic heresy and questionable theology.

29. Even if it sends others tumbling into a Eutychus-grade coma, my gold-standard sermon is a 45-minute exposition delivered in a cerebral, didactic manner, sans emotion.

30. Though the Bible mandates no specific translation, I insist on the KJV exclusively, purring over its "majestic" language. Complaints about linguistic traditionalism and archaisms are just

equatorial rain pelting zinc roofs — loud, but easily ignored.

31. I'm all for Closed (Fenced) Communion. Weighty warnings about unworthy participation and gentle exhortations for self-examination are far too laissez-faire. Let the elders — like the maître d' at Raffles Hotel — politely but firmly decline entry to guests with the wrong doctrinal booking. While this may keep out true believers from the Lord's Table, the whiff of 'us-only' is strangely comforting.

32. Our tradition typically attracts the educated middle-class. While our city is cosmopolitan, our pews remain near-homogeneous — hardly the Revelation 7 vision of saints from every tribe and tongue. If this monochrome reality is challenged, our stock reply would be, "We just preach. God brings whom He wills" (translation: "We won't change a thing or examine ourselves, but we'll dub our stubbornness 'God's sovereignty'").

33. Nothing says "called by God" like a seminary seal. By precedent, churches in our echo chamber draw our pastors from a seminary-only pipeline: only MDiv-stamped preachers from approved Western Reformed seminaries may enter the pulpit. Doctrinal fidelity, quality control, and network continuity outweigh any qualms about in-groupism. Biblically qualified men without the right parchment can simply marinate for four years until they graduate.

34. Male headship and strict complementarianism will be defended vigorously. Even nuanced discussions on women's roles must be avoided. I will not suffer a woman to teach, nor usurp authority over the man. Why complicate things?

35. Christian parents who choose secular schooling (over homeschooling) are outsourcing discipleship to Caesar. They're gambling with their children's souls. They might as well wear the 'beasty' mark of "Compromised" on their foreheads.

36. Our holy tradition has long seen the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath, drawing from both biblical principles and confession. My Sabbath strictness spectrum stretches from "no unnecessary commerce" all the way to "no Milo dinosaur". And no, that's not legalism — it's simply a sanctified talent for multiplying rules.

37. Screens, streams, and slides shall never upstage

Scripture. The only projection that matters is the unamplified proclamation of God's Word. Though the Bible is silent on technological intermediaries between the Word and the congregation, I champion limiting such tools even if it helps the elderly or hearing-impaired — because in my book, blessings must always yield to principle.

38. I resist even minor redesigns to church furniture. Pews over chairs. Always.

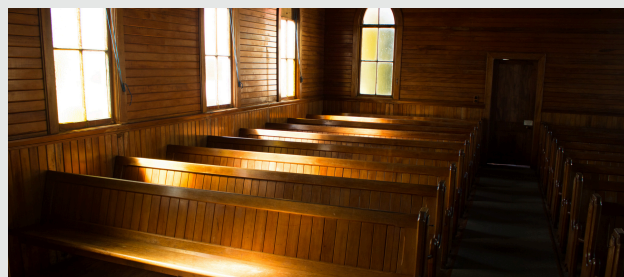


Photo of church pews

D. Fellowship Frowns

Our relational dynamics are largely insular.

39. I hug theology, not non-Reformed Christians. While I affirm the universal church, I keep a safe distance from other denominations. Cooperate with broad evangelicalism? Never, not even in relief work or pro-life efforts.

40. The doctrine of "Perseverance of The Saints" (i.e., once saved, always saved) only applies to saints who persevere in our denomination!

41. I would fall off my high horse if asked to consider that an Arminian church might have been used by the Holy Spirit to bring people to Christ.

42. While I mock 'heathen' customs at full volume, I've never told my unbelieving neighbours that Christ came to save sinners. Street evangelism is unthinkable. I sneer at the Arminian's efforts from a safe distance. If there are no new adult converts, I shrug, "the Lord has shut the windows of heaven". Evangelism is someone else's job. Nothing says 'Go ye therefore' like outsourcing, preferably by wiring funds to someone on the other side of the globe.

43. Though my theology is hardly eclectic, I can be uncommitted to the local church. Yet I'll always attend some Reformed conference — even in another country.

44. In tone-deaf fashion, I recommend 17th-century

Puritan tomes to the barely literate as if such books were God's only ordained means of grace. But everyday illustrations – as the Lord Jesus used – are resisted in deference to highfalutin, propositional forms.

45. I can recite every Puritan writer in alphabetical and chronological order ... but can't name three widows in my own church.

46. Like many of my worldwide theological kin, I suffer from Conference Pilgrim Syndrome. Symptoms include spending more on flights and theology conferences than on missionaries I'll never fly to visit.

E. Reform & Resistance

The ongoing tension between head knowledge and heart practice.

47. I subscribe to “semper reformanda” – the principle that the church is always reforming, continually examining itself, and correcting anything that drifts from Scripture. In reality, I guard my inherited traditions like treasured antiques. I am quick to decry Roman Catholic customs, but sluggish to discern the cultural crusts on mine. Any attempt to chip away our oldcrusty habits will fail to breach our wide ecclesiastical moats.

48. Occasionally, I'm convicted to measure our customs against Scripture. But conviction rarely survives first contact with convenience. I simply eventually succumb to the safety (or tyranny) of “this is how we've always done it.” Why stir the proverbial pot and risk another painful schism?

49. I affirm sola Scriptura, though in practice I navigate Scripture through the filter of Reformed confessions, commentaries, and cross-references — because who really reads the Bible alone?

50. God's saving grace is Irresistible. However, mine is highly resistible when a needy neighbour comes a-knocking at my door. I play the Providence Excuse Card (“God is sovereign”) and sprinkle a “Be warmed and filled”, before shutting the door.

51. Am I eschatologically indifferent? I treat the return of Christ like a doctrinal footnote: fascinating on paper, but without any real longing for Christ.

52. I imbibe finely aged and intellectually intoxicating Reformed classics but sip only with the

mind. The heart stays locked in the cellar. Sovereign grace rarely makes it from my bookshelf into my bloodstream. Slowly, a coldness creeps in. The tone hardens. The spirit grows harsh. Before long, I'm theologically precise but affectionately comatose.

53. Orthodoxy trumps orthopraxy! While I rightly proclaim the Solas, I act as if theological precision alone matters. Why should good theology humble me? (Given such scholarly pride, I need self-correcting whispers reminding that: if Unconditional Election is true, even my correct understanding is God's gift – no boasting allowed. One more reason for humility.

54. At my best, I am a biblically anchored lover of truth, humbled by grace, a historically rooted pilgrim still learning and longing for God's glory in all I do, eager to keep testing both doctrine and life against God's Word.

55. At my worst, I canonize comfort zones, use theology as a password instead of a bridge, speak fluent theology but broken charity, treat reform as a museum exhibit rather than an ongoing summons, and act as though synods and study committees carry more weight than prophets and apostles.

More could be added to this manifesto, but fifty-five points are plenty — after all, five symbolizes God's grace, so fifty-five is grace upon grace. And so, with all five TULIP petals plucked, this Reformed satire takes its final bow.

Now, the obligatory fine print: these sketches are neither exhaustive nor universally true of all Reformed folk. They are aggregated, anonymized, and amplified for satirical effect. Any resemblance to actual Reformed church members (living or deceased), or to any specific congregation (local or abroad), is unintentional. But if you happen to recognize yourself here, well then ... welcome to your unofficial biography!

The contents are mine, and I accept full responsibility; the sober-minded men of the FERC Session are blameless — at least on this occasion. AI assisted me in polishing the phrasing and organizing the 55 points under five neat headings — which confirms that algorithms can be conscripted into Reformed service.

Soli Deo Gloria (even for satire).

THAT MY FOOTSTEPS SLIP NOT

A devotional written by the late Pastor Cheah Fook Meng for Covenant, a daily devotional publication.



Written by

CHEAH FOOK MENG

Psalm 17:1 - 5

¹ *Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.*

² *Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.*

³ *Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.*

⁴ *Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.*

⁵ *Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*

The old year has passed, a new one is here. Today is the first Lord's Day in the new calendar year. Are you excited to meet the Lord again in this first Lord's Day? Did you spend the early hours of the New Year contemplating upon Jehovah's steadfast love and tender mercies? The words in the first part of v3 are words that may describe some of you in the past year. The Lord has tested you. He has visited you in the night when you were kept awake by tears, pains and anxieties. But what about the latter part of the verse. Did you also purpose in your heart not to sin against God? Or were you stubbornly insisting on your own ways, preferring your own paths, thus slipping away from God? The New year has come and by the mercies of God, you are not consumed. This should make you thankful and desire to undo and redo your life. Begin the new Lord's Day with an urgent prayer from this text. Call upon your Lord to hold up your goings in His path. His path is always better than ours. The Lord's path brings happiness and prosperity.

Application

Have you set down to consider about what things you want to achieve in this new year? Planning for your life is important. A common proverb says, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail." But we must never plan our life without God. Even before we set out to design a path for ourselves, God has already a path and a plan for us. He is the Sovereign God who is in control of everything, including our life's destiny and details. However, this does not remove our responsibility to plan for our lives. But we must begin and end, and work out our plans with God. Proverbs 16:3 says "Commit thy works unto the LORD and thy thoughts shall be established." When we are not God conscious in our plans and paths, we will soon begin to slip away from God.

BOOK REVIEW

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

Written by

ASAPH HO



"I am a woman trapped in a man's body." Whether you believe such a statement makes sense, it cannot be denied that it does to a lot of people today. Yet, if you made this statement a few decades ago, people would have looked at you like you had two heads. The cultural climate of today is dramatically different from the past as we see the dominance of the effects of the sexual revolution, the LGBTQ+ movement, and "woke" ideology that has shaped the thinking of many today.

How did we get here? This is where Trueman's book comes in. His book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, argues that the sexual revolution is really part of a larger revolution in the West about how the self is understood: Who am I? What is my identity? The foundations for this revolution were laid by thinkers in the past and culminated in the modern self. Trueman traces this history in his book.

While this is not a work primarily about responding to the sexual revolution, Trueman believes that his book gives the necessary groundwork for Christians to understand it. He does this in four parts: In the first part, he introduces the conceptual tools that will help frame the discussion. In the second part, he discusses the rise of the psychological self. In the third part, he deals with how the psychological self is sexualized and how this sexualized self is then politicized. In the fourth part, he discusses how these intellectual revolutions broke into popular culture. Finally, he offers some reflections on what the church can do in this current cultural climate.

This first helpful concept is that of the social imaginary. This refers to the way people intuitively think about the world and themselves without

necessarily having come to these conclusions through a conscious process of rationalization. The social imaginary of today sees biological sex and a person's real gender as separate, but few who confess as much can articulate why. The ideas of thinkers shape the social imaginary without having been read by everyone.

Another crucial concept is that of expressive individualism, which refers to the modern idea that one's core identity is found by looking inward, and the expression of that inner self is essential to being who one is. Probably something most of us intuitively believe.

With these helpful concepts, Trueman discusses Rousseau, Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin in the second part. Rousseau lays the foundation for expressive individualism with his idea that man is born good but corrupted and forced to live inauthentically by society (sound familiar?), while Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin assault the sacred order (Christianity) which undergirded societal norms. What is left is a psychological self, untethered from the moral codes imposed by a sacred order.



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