

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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Of Size, Enemies, and Confessional Lutheranism

Two lay delegates and I were sent to our first meeting of the United Lutheran Mission Alliance. I met with the pastors by Zoom other times, and Pastor Brock Abbott has been here to make a presentation.

ULMA started in 2005 with two congregations that left the Missouri Synod for just about the same reasons we did. The only difference is they did it in one year, we took 14. Currently, there are 4 member congregations, 3 besides Trinity; Pilgrim Lutheran, Decatur, IL, Our Redeemer, Forsyth, IL, and Faith Evangelical, Jackson, MI.

On the internet, you'll find mainly derogatory things about ULMA; all of them that I read were connected to how small it is. I tell of the time 2 or 3 students attending a Pentecostal conference in New Orleans purposely came over to where I and three other LCMS pastors were having a beer. This was at a Copeland's. They are a Cajun version of Chili's. They asked us if we could cast out demons; they could. If we performed miracles; they did. We gave as good as we got till they asked, "How big are your churches?" There were crickets. Then we were staring at our shoes. By this time, the discussion had gotten so intense we had stood up.

That's all it took to bumfuzzle, to stupefy, to muzzle, 4 Confessional Lutheran pastors. Just bring up the question of numbers. We were all guilty as charged. We all served small churches- no match for the Calvary Chapel where they came from. Numbers surely didn't cow our Lord. In Luke 13:23-24 we read, "And someone said to Him, 'Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.'" And in Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

A member asked me once about our small numbers. I said that had 80,000 been saved in the Ark rather than just 8 out a world full of people, I might take another look at numbers. Had 13,000 been saved out of Sodom and Gomorrah rather than just 3 people, I might consider that numbers are proof positive of the Lord's Blessing.

Confessional Lutheranism is not going to survive in institutions with a big footprint in society. Not ordaining

women, insisting that there is a God-given order to creation, not inviting all Christians to commune is simply verboten in the Nazified culture of 21st century woke-ism. Already after 911, when then President Gerry Kieschnick was being interviewed about the extremist views of radical Muslims, the host said that didn't Kieschnick believe that people without Christ go to hell? Kieschnick tried to make a politically correct response. He couldn't because there is none. In a blog, I think I mentioned how the bigger the church is, the more sails it will have in the air and so, will catch more of the winds of ever-shifting doctrine.

It's telling that ULMA isn't attacked on the doctrines it believes, teaches, and confesses, but on its size. You can find a discussion on the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau website where several different clergyman enjoy making fun of ULMA. In full disclosure, in the 90s I wrote several articles for *Bride of Christ* published by the ALPB. These dealt with the adoration of Christ in the Sacrament and women's ordination. I knew one of the editors at the time. But if you go to the ALPB Forum Online, [<https://alpb.org/Forum/index.php?topic=7347.0>] you will find David Benke (famed for praying with pagans) as one of ULMA's chief detractors.

That right there sealed the deal for me. Franklin Roosevelt said that he wanted to be judged by the enemies he had made. Me too.

All Those Translations!

by Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

This question comes up all the time. This is a fair, accurate article of the various Bible translations available to you, but only up to 1998 when this was written. (prh)

The question is raised by all kinds of people: seminary students, devout church members, confirmation students, and perhaps every single Christian at one time or another. And the question is, "What is the best translation of the Bible?"

We have, after all, the KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NIVI, JB, NJB, NCV, NAB, NEB, REV, GNB, CEV, ASB, NASB, GWN, LB, NLT, and more! A person could spend all of his or her time just finding out how many translations there are, and none of the time actually reading the Scriptures.

I want to talk about Bible translations, and in doing so, I want to avoid two mistakes while accomplishing two goals.

The first mistake would be to be overly critical of any of the major, established English Bible translations, thereby causing unnecessary concern or doubt in the minds of Christians. All of the major English versions (such as New King James, Revised Standard, New American Standard,

and New International) offer fine scholarship and good translations. Each clearly presents God's truth and especially the Good News that forgiveness and eternal life come through faith alone, because Jesus Christ died to take away our sins and rose to make us innocent in God's sight (Rom. 4:25).

The second mistake, on the other hand, would be to give the impression that there are no differences among these English Bible translations, and that questions of carefully study, precise translation, and deep understanding are not important. The Lord Jesus, after all, did commission His 11 disciples to make other disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching others to observe all things that He had commanded them to observe (Matt. 28:19).

The loving Lord of the church desires all the members of His Bride to grow in their understanding of His Word, their confidence in His mercy, and their ability to know His will and do it. God's desire for our deeper understanding of His Word leads directly to the other two goals I mentioned earlier . . . but I'll wait until the end to tell you what those goals are. That way, you, the reader, can decide if the goals were met!

Translation vs. paraphrase

What are some helpful ways of describing the many different English Bibles available to us today? Perhaps the first distinction involves the difference between a "translation" and a "paraphrase."

A "translation" follows more closely both the wording and the meaning for the Scriptures' original languages (Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament, Greek for the New.) A "paraphrase," meanwhile, actually tries to explain and restate what the Biblical texts "really mean," especially those hard-to-understand passages (2 Peter 3:16).

Now, let me be the first to say that readers can derive great spiritual blessing while reading a Bible paraphrase. Yet, as you can readily imagine, the benefit derived from a paraphrase will depend heavily on how good the paraphraser is, and sometimes they do err! Among English Bibles, the most well-known paraphrases are The Living Bible (and its recent adaption, The New Living Translation) and the older The New Testament in Modern English.

Consider Gen. 6:1–2 as one particularly obvious (and incorrect!) example of an interpretive paraphrase. A "translation," such as the Revised Standard Version, reads, "When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose."

The careful reader naturally asks the question, "Who are these 'sons of God'?" The Living Bible offers a paraphrase (which in my judgment is incorrect), an interpretation of this difficult phrase that has no direct connection with the wording of the Hebrew text: "It was at this time that beings from the spirit world looked upon the beautiful earth women and took any they desired to be their wives."

The advantage of a paraphrase is at the same time its great disadvantage. It is true that some difficult statements in Scripture may receive helpful and accurate paraphrases.

Yet, in other places, the unsuspecting English reader will be helpless because he or she will have no access to a more direct (albeit more difficult to understand) translation. Despite the significant benefit of "readability," a paraphrase should not be the only Bible used for in-depth Bible study. One should also consult, for the sake of a more accurate comparison, a solid translation.

Well, then, if "paraphrases" are not as close as "translations" are to the direct wording of the Biblical text, can we say that all translations are "literal"? Not exactly. Strictly, (or literally) speaking, no English translation is "literal," for the Bible's original languages use different word order and grammar to structure their sentences. Even the use of the same Greek word cannot always result in the same "literal" English translation.

For example, a simple and quick English translation for the word *sarx* is "flesh." But, as is true with virtually any word in any language, *sarx* in Greek does not always refer to the same thing. At times, it refers to literal flesh, that is, to one's body. This is the case in Gal. 4:13, where the NIV accurately translates, "As you know, it was because of an illness (Greek, "weakness of the flesh") that I first preached the Gospel to you."

At other times, however, Paul uses the same term *sarx* to refer to the sinful "old Adam" still present in all believing, justified Christians. When this is the case, the NIV quite adequately renders Greek "flesh" as in Gal. 5:13: "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature." So, no English translation of the Bible can be strictly literal, because the structures of English on the one hand, and the biblical languages on the other hand, prevent it.

However, one can draw a distinction between translations that are, as scholars say, more "formal equivalent" (such as the NKJV and NASB) and those that are more "dynamic equivalent" (such as the NIV). According to Dr. Eugene A. Nida in *Toward a Science of Translating*, a more "formal-equivalent" translation tries to give "as much as possible of the form and content of the original message." If the Greek has a long sentence, the English sentence will be long, too—even if it means having a poorly written English sentence. If the Hebrew uses the same word, then the same English word will be used.

Nida notes that a more "dynamic equivalent" translation, however, will lean not as much on the form of the original language as that of "receptor" language—in our case, English. Long Hebrew sentences will be made into shorter, more coherent English units. Such an approach does not feel so bound to always translate a given Hebrew or Greek word with the same word in English; it will depend much more on the context (remember the NIV example above with the Greek word for "flesh"?).

All modern English translations use, to a greater or lesser extent, the general concept of "dynamic equivalence." But some use it more than others.

Now, the potential problem with more "formal equivalent" translations is their awkwardness. They can end up being English that is harder to read and harder to understand. The more "dynamic equivalent" translation, on

the other hand, can run the risk of losing a bit of the original meaning.

Here is a small example: The NIV is certainly a reliable and accurate translation, but in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), the NIV translates the response of the first slave (the one entrusted by his master with five talents) as, “He went at once and put his money to work and gained five more” (25:16).

The Greek clause is simply, “He worked with them [i.e., the talents].” But one of my students last year, on fire with the Gospel, read the NIV’s dynamic equivalent of “he put his money to work.” He paid close attention to this rendering and concluded that the talents in the parable stood for the Gospel itself, since only the Gospel has the power to work in our lives!

It’s not that the NIV’s dynamic equivalent was a “wrong” translation. But in this case, it opened the door for a misunderstanding that a more formal-equivalent translation (NASB and RSV, “He traded with them”) would not have allowed. The idea that in the parable the talents had some power in themselves for working is found only in the dynamic equivalent, and not at all in the Greek words in Matthew 25. And my student, while desiring to engage in close and deep study of the Scriptures, should have been referring to his Greek text! (By the way, he’s a great student, and I think he’s going to be a fine pastor. I just caught him making one mistake.)

To summarize and repeat, let me say again that all English translations, not matter how “formal” or “dynamic” they tend to be, must make choices of how best to state an original Hebrew or Greek meaning in acceptable English. No translation, “strictly speaking,” can be consistently literal if it is going to make good sense.

‘King James Only’?

When the subject of Bible translations comes up, someone always wants to speak about the King James Version. Let me state clearly that the KJV (as well as the New King James Version) remains an accurate and useful translation, though there is the problem of “old fashioned English” that makes the KJV difficult for modern readers.

Yet, having said this, let me speak to a peculiar idea that circulates in parts of the church, and especially in certain conservative Protestant circles. The idea goes like this: The KJV (and the more recent NKJV) is the English Bible based most closely on the majority of handwritten copies or manuscripts (especially of the New Testament) that have come down to us through the centuries before the advent of modern printing in the 15th century. Therefore, some assert, the KJV is the only true and reliable translation—hence the “King James Only” concept.

These “King James Only” advocates at times go even farther. They admit that the manuscripts on which more recent Bible translations chiefly rely are far older and therefore closer to the time of the New Testament. But they claim that these older manuscripts are affected by “heretical” tendencies and should not be trusted. Even more radical is the claim that there is a modern New Age “conspiracy” afoot to foist “heretical” translations upon

unsuspecting English-speaking Christians. What is one to make of such assertions?

James R. White, in his article “Is Your Modern Translation Corrupt?” (*Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1996), offers an excellent, readable response that shows the half-truths and exaggerations in the claims of the “King James Only” crowd. White points out that the King James Version of 1611 was based upon the best Greek (and Hebrew) manuscripts available at the time—but that even those manuscripts varied from one another at different points!

Thus, White comments, “The King James Version is just as much a result of this process of study and examination [of differing textual readings] as any modern text, and those who assert that it is somehow about such ‘human’ activities are simply ignoring the facts of history.”

White’s point is well taken. All handwritten manuscripts of the Bible have many (usually) minor variations from one another, and the task of scholars has always been to sort through the various readings to discover which are most original, and to use the best manuscripts available.

In this work (known as “textual criticism”), several common-sense rules or “canons” have emerged, and virtually all Biblical scholars (including our own Missouri Synod scholars) work with the same rules.

I’ll mention just two such guidelines. First, older manuscripts are simply much closer to the actual historical events recounted in Scripture, and therefore should receive more weight. The King James Version, as noted above, is based upon manuscripts much farther away from the time when the original human authors of Scripture wrote under God’s inspiration.

Second, it is well known that Christian scribes throughout the centuries have tended to “help out” the Biblical text (whether consciously or not) by supplying phrases and words that make an orthodox and Christian teaching “more clear.” So, when older manuscripts lack an especially “Christian” phrase, and more recent copies have it, the natural and common-sense conclusion is that the shorter reading is the original one. It is much more likely that well-meaning copyists would have added clarifying words than omit them.

Does all this mean that the King James version is to be rejected? Not at all. But it does mean that there will be times when an English reader should compare the KJV or NKJV with a more modern, formal-equivalent translation (such as the NASB). Modern translators simply have older and better manuscripts at their disposal, and the KJV contains phrases and verses that are not originally part of the biblical text.

Let me make one further comment about this whole matter of different manuscript readings, and the need to decide carefully and prayerfully which readings are to be preferred. The simple truth is that the vast majority of such “differences” involve little words that do not change the meaning of the Biblical text in the slightest. A typical variant reading found often in manuscripts of the Gospels, for instance, is the difference between “the disciples” and

“his disciples.” Slightly different readings; no difference in meaning. Moreover, in no case is any doctrine of the Christian faith affected by any of these variant readings.

What about “inclusive language”?

One of the “hottest” issues in Bible translation is the question of “inclusive language,” and at times the debate definitely generates more heat than light. It is important, however, to note the difference between using “inclusive language” to refer to God, and using such language to refer to human beings.

First, the more radical position argues that the language of Holy Scripture is hopelessly bogged down in the culture and time in which it was written. One aspect of the Biblical times and places is the presence of “patriarchy”—values and rules that give a position of prominence and authority to men over against women.

Many modern scholars, influenced by the ideals of feminism and our egalitarian American society, rejected such norms and values. More radically, they go so far as to reject any use of language that refers to God or any of the Persons of the Holy Trinity exclusively or even predominantly with “masculine” language. Thus, in their view, God should not be referred to as “Father,” but as “Parent,” not “King,” but “Monarch.” Jesus, in turn, should not be called God’s “Son,” but God’s “Child.” An Inclusive Language Lectionary used in some churches today translates John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that God gave his only Child, that whoever believes in that child shall not perish but have eternal life.” Such views do not deny that the Hebrew and Greek terms actually means “father,” “king,” or “son.” These views simply reject all use of “patriarchal” language, no matter what an accurate translation might be.

Rather than offer any extensive analysis of this radical and unacceptable view, let me simply refer to the February 1998 document issued by the Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language.

This document is tightly argued and carefully written. It provides an excellent rebuttal and refutation of those who want to jettison all “patriarchal” language when speaking of the Triune God or any of the Persons within the Holy Trinity. The CTCR notes, for example, how the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible removes all references to the term “Son of Man” in the Old Testament. The CRCR report is correct: This more radical use of “inclusive language” for God must have no place in the Christian church, either as translation or as theology. To cite just one of the conclusions from the CTCR document: “The masculine language and imagery which Scriptures use for God is purposeful and therefore must not be neutralized, even to make it more accessible to contemporary interpreters.”

But there is a second way of speaking about this matter of “inclusive language.” What about language that refers to human beings? Christianity Today (June 1997) reported on the hue and cry from American and British evangelicals over a plan to make the NIV a more “gender-accurate”

Bible. Charges and counter-charges filled the air, and soon the plan was dropped. We should not minimize the issues involved. But it should also be said that the proposed changes in the NIV were directed at language that referred to human beings, and to God.

The problem is one of modern English usage. No one would doubt that a generation or two ago, the common and accepted ways that English referred to “humans in general” were the terms “man” and “mankind;” these words had a general, generic meaning as well as more specific references to males. But English, like any living language, changes over time. The question is this: When Hebrew and Greek use their own general, generic terms to refer to human beings, should English translations consistently use terms like “humanity,” “person,” and “people” rather than “mankind” and “man”? Has the English language changed enough to warrant this change in translation of Greek and Hebrew terms? Caution is certainly in order here, for some inclusive-language versions (such as the NRSV) systematically and pervasively use, for example, plural pronouns in place of gender-specific pronouns (such as “their” instead of “his”), which are in the original text.

Now, to state the issue this briefly is to oversimplify, and I am well aware of that. But let me once again refer to the excellent CTCR document regarding the use of inclusive language for human beings. There are several conclusions involved, but the document does recognize rightly that there will be times when more “inclusive” English language for human beings is certainly both faithful to the Bible’s language and meaning and accurate for modern English readers.

Did I accomplish my goals? You decide!

If you remember, I earlier referred to two goals that I had in writing about such an important and complex subject as Bible translations. Now I can tell you what the goals were. The first was that you, the reader, would be interested and motivated to continue your own close, careful reading of God’s Word, the Bible! This is where we learn of what Christ has done for us, and all of what that means! In God’s Word, there is power and comfort and truth and guidance! It is worth all the joyful, disciplined effort we can offer to read, learn, and rejoice in the doctrines and truths of Holy Scripture. That’s the first goal.

The second goal is this: that you, the reader, would treasure your pastor as an irreplaceable and essential resource for understanding Holy Scripture! At times the study of Holy Scripture is a complex business. There are times when no English translation can communicate all of what God’s Word intends to say. I want you to be grateful to God for your pastor and to run to your pastor with your questions about Holy Scripture. That’s why our Missouri Synod seminary training emphasizes the pastor’s use of the Biblical analogues. And I can tell you from my own experience in parish ministry: No words bring more joy to a pastor’s heart than these from one of his members: “you know, Pastor, I was reading my Bible the other day, and I had a question . . .”

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Theses on Justification

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Continued: X)

X. Justification and Renewal

54. Although the term justification may be used interchangeably with regeneration (the bestowal of faith), since faith given in regeneration is the faith through which the sinner is justified (Gal. 3:26–27; Titus 3:3–7; Ap IV, 72, 78, 117; FC SD III, 18–19), the term must never be confused or use interchangeably with renewal (sanctification, love, the keeping of the law), which always follows faith. (Acts 13:38–39; Rom. 3:28; 11:6; Ga. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–10; FC Ep III, 7–8; FC SD III, 30)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That we are justified, or forgiven, by virtue of our “mystical union” with Christ, rather than by God’s verdict or pronouncement of forgiveness in the means of grace; That since faith involves our union with Christ, this union with Christ becomes the basis for our justification before God.

55. Faith, which is worked by the Holy Spirit in the sinner solely through the Gospel, must not be confused with contrition, that is, terror of conscience and fear of God’s wrath, which is worked by the Holy Spirit in the sinner solely through the law. (Ps. 32:3–5; 130:1–8; Rom. 3:19–28; Gal. 3:12; Ap XII, 53–54; SA III, iii, 2; FC SD III, 22)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That true faith can exist in the heart without contrition.

56. Good works and renewal are the result of faith, or the fruit of faith, in the sense that the Holy Spirit, who has quickened us and made us new creatures in Christ, works the fruits of faith in and through us. (Ps. 110:3; Jer. 31:31–34; John 15:1–11; Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; 8:3–4; Gal. 5:22–24; AC VI, 1; XII, 6; XX, 29; Ap II, 35; IV 45, 125, 250, 275; SA III, xiii, 2; LC II, 2, 69)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That good works in the Christian life are to be motivated by the law; That good works are not a necessary result of an individual’s justification.

57. Faith, which alone receives and obtains grace and forgiveness, must not be confused with good works, which are pleasing to God only because of faith in Christ. (John 15:1–11; Acts 13:38–39; Rom. 3:28; 11:6; 14:23; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–10; AC VI, 1–3; Ap XII, 67; FC SD III, 27–28)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That man is saved by faith and works; That good works are pleasing to God for their own sake or because they justify; That is possible for a person to desire to grow spiritually without having already been justified through faith; That challenging Christians to do good works can cause faith to grow.

Brazos Fellowship – Having Church and Doing Worship

Posted: 27 February 2023

Like all the Evangelical churches I have attended, it began with a 7-piece band doing a 3-song set. And the entire service could be summarized in the LCMS’ 1990’s giving campaign: His Love, Our Response. Evangelicalism to some degree is about God’s Love, but it’s ALL about OUR response. When someone indicates to you that they want church or sermon or Bible Class to be more practical, to be more about what they are to do, they are saying they want Evangelicalism. Once Evangelism infected Lutheranism in the 80s, we’ve been forced to deal with the oxymoron Lutheran substance - Evangelical style. Sorry, when these two get into bed, an Evangelical church is spawned.

But back to Brazos Fellowship: The band was great. The three solo singers were tremendous. The woman sounded like Stevie Nicks but looked better. The lead pastor, at least from what I could find on their web site brazosfellowship.com, is self-called: “Brazos Fellowship was born in a living room as Will and Leslie Lewis shared their vision around a small circle: God was calling them to create a church community in the Brazos Valley...” The Senior Pastor obviously has theological training, but I couldn’t find the who, what, where, when on the website. But look at christland.org, the website of the other church I considered attending in College Station, Texas. The Lead Pastor has degrees in ceramic art and industrial design. The first Staff Pastor listed has a bachelor’s in zoology and a master’s in natural science. Staff Pastor number two has a degree in civil engineering. In these two Evangelical churches you have two of the most dangerous theological things: the self-called and the ill-trained.

Some notable differences from other Evangelical churches I’ve attended. This congregation did actually sing two of the songs rather than only spectate. One young woman, in addition to raising her hands, was incorporating the liturgical gesture of bowing and the Hasidic prayer practice of nodding her head rapidly. Also, the offering was prominent, only two-songs in, and done by the Senior Pastor. Here is a truthful summary: God’s joy is to give; you share His joy by giving to Brazos Fellowship or elsewhere. I chose the latter. No joy for the Senior Pastor.

Now here’s where you’re going to think I’m lying. The sermon series they started today (10-17-21) was on the Trinity! Imagine if I had been at Christland? What sort of sermon series would the ceramic artist, the zoologist, and the civil engineer do on the Trinity? But this guy’s wasn’t bad. It was Reformed apologetics mixed with Evangelical personality. It could be summed up in what I presume every confessional Lutheran pastor says: Natural knowledge of God can tell you important things about God, but not the most important. He said that all other world views can speak of the Creator, Ruler God and that’s it. That God saves can only be found in the Triune God in the Person of

Christ. This was his point, but he made it sound more appealing.

He also made the very deep, significant, theological point that I'm betting any of the 90-day -Wonder pastors the LCMS produces in their Specific Ministry Program (Look up 90 day Wonder; you'll get the point.) and all institutionally driven "churches" are producing, won't get. There can be no necessity in the true God. If God needs to create or needs to rule, that makes Him, in some way, dependent on His creation and people.

He does brush, graze, nick the Gospel. He does call on us to, "trust your Father with your sin and guilt" and references the saving nature of Christ for us, but no mention of the active righteousness of Christ or that Christ's passive righteousness was necessary to appease a wrathful God.

There was absolutely no sacramental theology. That is not surprising, you should not expect it from the Evangelicals. They are clear on their website: "We believe baptism is an act of obedience shared in the context of the church to symbolize the change Jesus Christ has made in the new believer's life." "We believe the church is to share a meal of remembrance of Christ as a community. The meal is a symbol of the body and blood of Christ..." No, surprise here either. The surprise is that those once confirmed in sacramental theology can embrace Evangelicalism and not miss the Sacraments.

The message concluded with pointing out the only connecting point to the God of Joy that is revealed in the Person of Christ (I would've added "and work") is your decision; your inviting Him into your heart. He claimed to be ending in prayer, but I dispute that. If you got mood music going on in the background while asking anyone who feels like offering up themselves, their sins, their guilts, to the Father, to raise their hands, you got yourself an Altar Call. And you got one more non-denominational church that is really a Baptist church.

Regardless of the name, whenever you hear the emphasis on your response rather than on God's action (not just one, but His ongoing activity in Word and Sacrament), you are in Reformed Christianity not Lutheran. This theology is so popular today because it connects to every fallen heart. It's called the *opinio legis*. It's endemic to the Old Adam, so it always strikes a chord but not a Gospel note.

The Twisted Self

By Carl R. Truman, August 27, 2022, *WORLD MAGAZINE*

This rather dense article is a must read. It shows that the religious, sexual, and political upheaval that seem to come out of nowhere is the product of wrong science, wrong philosophy, wrong psychology, and wrong technology. He is the only thinker so far, that has seen how Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud and others have impacted our thinking and our technology. It is a must read, but only if you dare (prh)

Many of us are familiar with books and movies in which plots revolve around characters who find themselves trapped in worlds where nothing works in quite the way they expect. Whether it is Alice wandering through

Wonderland or Keanu Reeves trapped in the Matrix, they feel disoriented, confused, and anxious. And that is the way many people feel today in our world, where everything that seemed certain only the day before yesterday—the definition of marriage or the meaning of the word woman, for example—seem now to be in a state of flux.

To understand this chaos, some historical reflection is necessary. Take, for example, the observation of Christian ethicist Oliver O'Donovan on the abortion debates of the 1970s. He noted that he and other pro-life advocates had made a fundamental mistake: They did not anticipate that the weakest argument of the abortion lobby would ultimately prove to be its strongest and most persuasive: that the baby in the womb is merely part of the woman's body. Everyone, whether pro-life or pro-abortion, knows that isn't the case. That's why wombs and their contents arouse so much passion on both sides of the debate. Why then did this obviously weak argument triumph? The answer, according to O'Donovan, was that it appealed to the deepest intuitions of modern men and women who think of themselves as free and autonomous—who conceive of life's purpose as attaining personal psychological happiness, a sense of inner well-being. In short, modern men and women got behind the argument that would give them what they wanted anyway—personal peace and contentment.

Decades on from O'Donovan's reflections, it is more clear than ever that this intuitive understanding of what it means to be human has empowered far more than just the rhetorical arguments of the abortion lobby. Take the transgender issue, for example. Until recently, most people would have scoffed at a man who claimed he is really a woman trapped in the wrong body. And they would have dismissed as nonsense any suggestion that the term gender could have meaning apart from bodily sex. Now such statements and ideas are standard fare in our culture, from sitcoms to human resources departments to elementary schools.

And not only is transgenderism deemed merely plausible in our world, it's become a requirement of the new cultural orthodoxy. An article of faith. So much so that critics of trans ideology, such as author J.K. Rowling, are being digitally drawn and quartered.

All of this indicates that, if we wish to understand the real nature of the remarkable changes that are fracturing our society, we must set them within the broader context of how people think or imagine themselves to be. In the abortion debate, O'Donovan pointed not to the importance of arguments per se, but of the broader moral imagination that made certain arguments—even very weak ones—rhetorically powerful.

How have we become a society where we think of ourselves as autonomous? Where our emotions and inner feelings determine who we think we are? Where personal, individual, psychological happiness has become a basic criterion for deciding what is and is not moral—and even what's real?

How we got here

There is no single, simple answer to these questions as a variety of factors have all played a critical role. There is an intellectual narrative involving key thinkers whose ideas have shaped the view of reality. The play-thing of educational elites, this narrative has trickled down through media and entertainment and into our streets. Meanwhile, technological developments have not simply changed how we behave, but have reshaped how we think about and relate to the world around us. Then there is the rise of a politics predicated on new and often volatile identities: gender, race, and sexuality. No longer just a clash of worldviews, this politics poses a fundamental challenge to the very coherence of our society. And all of these connect to basic transformations of the nature and purpose of the institutions that define our culture.

Many thinkers have helped shape the modern mindset. One particularly influential example: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th-century Genevan philosopher. Few may read Rousseau today, but he still casts a long shadow as arguably one of the key sources for child-centered educational theories. Rousseau's statement that "Man is born free and everywhere is in chains" might well serve as the most concise summary of the modern myth of what it means to be a human being.

Rousseau believed that human beings are born in a fundamentally pristine state. Indeed, despite his - protestations to the contrary, his own autobiography, *Confessions*, reads in part as a response to the great author of a book with the same title: Augustine. Augustine may have thought we human beings are born depraved, but Rousseau disagreed. For him, we emerge from the womb naturally empathetic and moral. It is only the demands of polite society that pervert us, encouraging us to be selfish in our dealings with others and to advance our status by conforming to the expectations society places on us. It is society that has morally ruined us.

Rousseau's approach to selfhood proved a powerful influence on the artistic movement we now call Romanticism. This movement flourished particularly in Germany and England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was to an extent a response to the bloodshed of the French Revolution and to the Cult of Reason that had proved so inadequate as a basis for building a just society. Romanticism saw art as a means of improving humanity, by giving appropriate shape to the emotions. For the poet William Wordsworth, this meant helping the reader of his poems reconnect with nature. For the writer Percy Shelley, this meant helping readers respond with indignation to injustice and desire a more equitable society. Both men believed thoughts and emotions were key to the human condition.

Rousseau and his Romantic heirs championed what modern sociologist Robert Bellah calls expressive individualism. This is the idea that each person has an inner core defined by feelings and intuitions that need to find outward expression in order for the individual to be authentic. Never mind that the human heart is deceitful and wicked above all things. The Romantics wanted it worn on

our sleeves. But there is a key difference between the views of Rousseau and company and the normative kind of selfhood we have today. Rousseau and the Romantics assumed human nature had an intrinsic moral shape. This meant that, for them, the move inward to feelings and sentiments was not a move to pure subjectivity. Rather it was a return to the pristine self—to the built-in moral structure that society had obscured or corrupted. But once the notion that we all share a common, objective, moral human nature is denied, then everything changes. Then the individual will becomes sovereign, and human beings do descend into pure subjectivity, and ideas such as happiness, flourishing, good, and evil become matters of personal preference. That is where we are today.

The designer self

This rejection of human nature as having an intrinsic moral structure and unavoidable authority really emerged as a potent philosophical force in the 19th century. A key source is the German thinker G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel noted that human beings thought differently throughout history. An ancient Athenian, a medieval Tuscan, a Reformation Englishman, and a 19th-century Prussian would each think about themselves, the world, and their place within it in different ways.

Hegel was not pressing for a radical annihilation of the notion of human nature in its entirety, but he did press toward it being understood as a creature of history whose content came from its historical context. Still, this added another layer of subjectivity—and malleability. And in the hands of Hegel's most influential and revolutionary quasi-disciple, Karl Marx, this historicism became so much political clay. Marx took objective definitions of what it means to be human and to live within a common moral framework and molded them to assert bold, new "realities." Thus, for example, a claim that marriage should naturally be between one man and one woman for life was not really "natural" at all. Rather, it was asserting as nonnegotiable a social arrangement that happened to serve the economic interests of the ruling class. If that sounds familiar, it's because it has so many parallels in the modern progressive movement. These days, arguments against the traditional family as patriarchal or racist or homophobic—whatever the diatribe of the month may be—abound.

Other 19th-century thinkers also helped undermine the notion of human nature as possessing an inherent morality. Charles Darwin relativized the difference between humans and other animals, denying that humanity had any special, transcendent purpose or meaning. While his motivation was not political, as with Marx, the implications were very similar: Moral categories of existence were merely mystifications of behaviors really only necessary for the survival of the species. And then the greatest philosophical iconoclast of them all, Friedrich Nietzsche, argued that all moral systems were merely power plays by one person or group designed to manipulate others. In the hands of Nietzsche, the very notion of "human nature" was only an invention, a sly construct used to inhibit the strong and make them weak.

Nietzsche's dark view of human psychology found a scientific counterpart in the work of Sigmund Freud, who saw the inner psychological space of human beings as dark and destructive, characterized above all by sexual desires. Indeed, for Freud, adulthood no longer meant becoming a sexual being but expressing the sexual desires that were always there. From the early 1900's, Freud's work took the world by storm and gave expression to an idea that now grips the popular imagination: Sex is not primarily something we do. It is something we are.

Take, for example, the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and straight. Today, they are intuitively meaningful to us. Yet in conceding that point we concede that desire, not action, defines sex, which defines us. To say "I am straight" is to make an identity claim, but it is not to assert that I have ever had a sexual encounter with someone else. It is a statement of felt desire, not action.

Few today have read Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, or Darwin, let alone reflected deeply upon Hegel and his heirs. So how did their ideas, expressed through sophisticated arguments in lengthy books, become the instincts and intuitions of society at large? A large part of the answer is technology. Technology panders to the myths that fallen human beings want to believe about themselves. First, that we are free, answerable to no one, and masters of our own destinies. Second, that human nature involves no accountability to some set of objective moral standards.

The digital self

So how do technological developments do this? The short answer is: Technology is decisive for the way we interact with the world and, therefore, how we come to imagine who we really are.

First, technology weakens the bonds of community. Take music, for example. Two hundred years ago music was a matter of communal production. To enjoy music, one needed to be either part of a group making it or present at a gathering that witnessed its production. Today most of us experience music most of the time as a matter of individual consumption. We listen in private. We choose what we listen to. We listen when we want to.

You might consider that a trivial matter of entertainment, but it captures in miniature how technology shapes the way we imagine ourselves in the world. We are sovereign. We can bend the world to suit our individual desires. This leads to the second important impact of technology. It gives us a sense that we are all-powerful and the world is so much raw material we can simply bend to our wills. Further, institutional authority is eroded. Using the internet as the bridge to all places, we are no longer tethered to bricks-and-mortar ... or to the institutions therein. The worker can seek work where he wants, the churchgoer can worship where he wants, and the shopper can shop where he wants.

Technology has also fostered a third cultural intuition: Phenomena once regarded as moral problems are now really no more than technical problems. STDs used to be seen as the result of immoral behavior. That was an easy position to maintain in a time when there was no way of addressing prevention other than encouraging celibacy outside of

marriage and monogamous fidelity within it. With the advent of antibiotics, STDs became simply problems to be solved with the right medicine.

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In fact, the technological revolution lies at the heart of the transformation of sex in society. In time past, the idea of sex as recreation was impractical. Before easy access to reliable contraception and abortion, it was hard to imagine sex as mere recreation. The risk of disease or pregnancy meant that sex came with responsibilities. Technology has broken that connection. Further, pornography objectifies the sexual act, repurposes it as entertainment, and severs sexual pleasure from any broader interpersonal relationship. This further fuels the notion that what counts in sex is my desire and my satisfaction—and reinforces the idea of individual happiness and expression as the goal both of living and of modern identity politics.

These three strands of our culture's technological imagination have come together in a potent form in transgenderism. Transgenderism grants huge authority to the desires of the autonomous individual. It assumes that nature is really just raw material. And it sees technology as a key component in determining not only what is right and what is wrong, but indeed what is possible. What is real and what is merely an oppressive ideological imposition. Thus, even our bodies cease to have authority in the face of our minds, our feelings, our inner desires ... and our access to certain medical procedures. It is only because of technological developments that we can even imagine the possibility of changing from a man to a woman.

There is one more notable way in which technology helps to cultivate expressive individualism. That is the central role it allows for public performance. If authenticity is found by giving outward expression to inward feelings, then social media makes all the world a stage. Now we all can present any part of our lives as a public performance to a vast audience. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok all provide platforms for exhibitionism.

In very real terms, such platforms have taken expressive individualism shaped by intellectuals and mainlined it into the larger culture. You do not need to have read Nietzsche to think that nature has no intrinsic authority, that human nature has therefore no intrinsic moral shape, that reality is whatever you might care to make it, and that happiness is to be found by satisfying your inner desires. You do not need to have heard of Freud to believe that sex defines who we are. You need only a steady diet of social media—or even to follow the basic plotlines of myriad mainstream movies or TV shows. Sex is destiny and sexual fulfillment is meaning. That is the not-so-subliminal message.

Future shock

So far, so depressing. But what broader cultural and political transformations is this view of the self bringing in its wake? How is expressive individualism, infused with sex and supercharged by the advent of social media, reshaping

the practical realities of the world in which we live? What new strangeness looks set to further twist our strange new world?

First, the old values of social engagement are being overturned. In an expressive world, where authenticity is found in performance, those things once considered virtues—modesty, reserve, respect for authority, etc.—start to look more like signs of repression. Second, given the central role of sex to modern identity, sexual exhibitionism and the destruction of traditional sexual mores becomes a central part of the modern program of cultural transformation. For the progressive, this must reach ever earlier into childhood. Children will be taught to express themselves sexually because that, according to modern cultural assumptions, is actually who they are. Anyone puzzled by the number of families with young children happily cheering on the ostentatious and explicit sexual flamboyance on display at pride rallies need only reflect on the narrative of the modern self to understand what they are seeing. The modern world does not think it is sexualizing children. It thinks kids are born sexualized. To be truly themselves, they merely need to be helped to realize that.

Third, cultural principles that used to enjoy support across the mainstream political spectrum, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion, will become increasingly implausible—and vulnerable. Once the self becomes psychologized and happiness is identified with an inner sense of contentment, words become weapons. Their use must be regulated as tightly as physical violence. Hence the advent of restrictive speech codes and increasing pressure on the free exercise of religion in the public space. To refuse to use a trans person’s preferred pronouns is to refuse to acknowledge them for who they think they are. Such refusals will be regarded as an assault on their person because it denies the sovereignty of their inner feelings and the legitimacy of their chosen identity.

Of course, this will itself lead to further difficulties because not all identities are compatible—the vocal Christian, for example, and the outspoken drag queen. So somebody will have to decide whom to recognize and whom to silence. Hence that other strangeness we see emerging even now: Radical individual freedom is fostering remarkably intolerant and sometimes totalitarian policies in the workplace and even society at large.

We do indeed live in a strange new world. The good news? It is built on a myth. We are not born free but radically dependent on others and subject to nature and her God. The bad news? We can do a lot of damage trying to deny those basic and obvious truths. Yet, as O’Donovan saw in retrospect with regard to the abortion debate, this strangeness has a logic to it. And while its roots are deep and its foundations well established, grasping that logic is surely the first step to mounting a thoughtful response. —*Carl R. Trueman is a professor of Biblical and religious studies at Grove City College and author of Strange New World. For more from Trueman, read Lynn Vincent’s Q&A with him in this issue.*

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13		15	16	17
18		20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27 VOTERS MEETING 7:00 PM	28 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	29	30	

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2	3	4	5 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	6	7	8
9	10	11 ELDERS MEETING 6:30 PM	12 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	13	14	15
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