

# OpenTheo

## How Did Sexual Identity Politics Win?, with Carl Trueman

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Carl Trueman joins Kevin, Justin, and Collin to discuss his latest book, published by Crossway, which analyzes the development of the sexual revolution as a symptom—rather than the cause—of the human search for identity. You'll also learn the benefit for Christians of reading Nietzsche and Freud, and what you can say to someone when there isn't time to debate the philosophy of gender.

Timestamps:

Thirty-second long book title [00:55 - 1:25]

If identity is sexual, then sex is political. [1:25 - 7:37]

Behaviors demand toleration; identity demands recognition. [7:37 - 13:39]

Grappling with the history of ideas [13:39 - 22:26]

Intended audience [22:26 - 24:29]

Why Carl wants to be called a bigot [24:29 - 28:32]

Should pastors read these non-Christian authors? [28:32 - 34:18]

Is Protestantism to blame for sexual identity politics? [34:18 - 44:48]

Natural law will help us communicate to younger generations. [44:48 - 50:55]

What can you say to the other side when there isn't time to debate? [50:55 - 56:16]

Against lament? [56:16 - 57:50]

Family shapes theology. [57:50 - 1:03:00]

Books and Everything:

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

Civilization & Its Discontents, by Sigmund Freud

The Triumph of the Therapeutic, by Philip Rieff

Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture, by David VanDrunen

Hands Across the Aisle

"The Fury of the Fatherless," by Mary Eberstadt, First Things

## **Transcript**

[music] Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life in Books and Everything. I am Kevin D. Jung.

Although my squad cast name is Practical Wires, and I'm with Colin Hanson, who's always good at inputting his real name, and then Justin Taylor, lead singer for The Who. Though, it's all capital letters, so you mean to up their World Health Organization. They could use a lead singer these days.

Good to be with you all, and we are joined today with our special guests, Carl Truman. They have let you out of the Grove City Conservatory to entertain us and let us ply you with questions. Carl, thanks for being here with us.

Oh, it's a pleasure, Kevin. Thanks for having me on. All right, we're going to jump right in.

What we're doing is we are talking about Carl's new book, which is getting a lot of attention, and rightfully so. It's a brilliant book. "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self, Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution." Rodrair wrote a very nice forward, and Crossway, big fan, and sometimes sponsor of this program has published the book, and it's a real achievement.

I'm going to jump in, and I underlined a lot in this book, and this is from page 266, this paragraph, which I think is not a bad launching off place to have you give something of a brief summary of your argument. I'll read it here. "Once identity was understood to be sexual, then it was only a matter of time before sex became political, and in the hands of," and just for our listeners, we're going to scoot by these names right now and not focus on them so much as the idea in the history that Carl is tracing, but I'll read them.

"And in the hands of William Reich," and Herbert Marcuse, that is exactly what happened. "Their genius lay in the way they took the Marxist category of oppression and

refracted it through the Freudian notion of repression. In so doing, they psychologized the notion of oppression, turned sexual repression into something negative, made political liberation essentially dependent on sexual liberation, and thereby established the framework for today's psychosexual politics." That is a dense paragraph, but it's right, and it gives one window into your argument in the book.

So try to unpack that and untangle that for us. Thinking of somebody who's heard of the book hasn't read it yet and wants to understand this turn from identity to sex to politics. Yeah, that's a great question, Kevin, and you're really touching on the spine of the narrative of the book as a whole.

What I argue in the book is that the sexual revolution and the politics that surround the sexual revolution of which LGBTQ stuff is the most obvious contemporary manifestation. This form of politics really depends upon a fundamental change in the way human beings understand the self, what I mean by the self is the way human beings fundamentally understand what our purpose in life is, where our happiness is to be found, what makes us tick, if you like. And I start the story back in the mid-18th century, and I say one of the key moves made in the 18th century is that certain figures, most notably the Geneva philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his cultural successes in what we now call the romantic movement.

I think of William Wordsworth with Samuel Taylor Coleridge figures like that. They psychologize the self. They're the guys who really press the idea that that which makes us truly us is that inner voice inside our heads, that the most authentic me is to be found really in my feelings.

And that's like a lot of ideas that contains a certain amount of truth. Clearly, we can't separate ourselves from our feelings in any clean or neat way, but they really emphasize that. And what happens then in the late 19th, early 20th century is that Freud, who is something of an admirer of the romantics and of Rousseau, Freud gets hold of that idea.

He's sort of probing that inner space that the romantics have opened up and have prioritized in identity. And he says, you know, the key thing about that voice of nature really is its sexual desire, that it's root. It's all about a sexuality, that which we desire sexually.

So the story sort of moved forward a bit at that point. We've had this inner space opened up by the romantics. We have people who think of themselves in terms of their inner lives, their inner feelings, etc, etc.

And Freud just says, yeah, and the most fundamental thing about those inner feelings is sexual desire. What Freud is really doing there is saying that, that who you are at the most basic level is your sexual desire. So when you think about how we routinely use language today, we'll talk about people being straight or gay.

We talk about sex and sexual desire as an identity. And it's really the romantics and Freud that have made that possible. Well, one of the implications of that, of course, is if who I am is fundamentally sexual, is fundamentally determined by my sexual desires, then inevitably, how society deals with treats acts relative to my sexual desires, is how society is treating me as an individual.

And so the stage is set for the politicization of sex, if you like. Sex doesn't become simply something that one does. And so we have sexual codes, if you like, let's say you can do this, but you can't do that.

We might think that those are addressing issues of behavior, but once you imagine the world in sort of Freudian terms, then those rules and regulations actually touch upon who we are as people. And what you have in the 20th century, you mentioned Reich and Mark Kuzur, there are others. These are very sophisticated Marxists thinkers, though I think the idea is spread well beyond the bounds of Marxism.

The idea that, okay, if human beings are to be truly free and to truly flourish, then we need to break down the sexual codes that prevent us from being truly ourselves. If I'm a gay man and my sexual desire is for other men, then for society to stop me acting on those desires, or talking about those desires in public, is actually for society to stop me being myself, to force me to be unauthentic. And so the sexual identity issue is inevitably at some point go to become and has become a political struggle.

I'm gonna, I know Justin has a follow up question. I'm going to interject here before I throw it to you, Justin, because what you said there, Carl, is really important. And I'm thinking of another place I underlined on the bottom of page 68 and 69, you talk about this need for recognition.

So the issue is not one of simply decriminalizing behavior that would certainly mean that homosexual acts were tolerated by society, but the acts are only part of the overall problem. The real issue is one of recognition of recognizing the legitimacy of who the person thinks he actually is. This requires more than mere tolerance.

It requires a quality before the law and recognition by the law and in society. And that is really well put, because I think even within our lifetimes, maybe 25 years ago, all of the buzz was about tolerance, and we just need to tolerate these sorts of behaviors. And once that ship sailed, it became very clear that tolerance wasn't going to be enough.

And there's actually pastoral implications here, as I've talked many times with parents who ask, how do I love my son or daughter who's now identifying as gay or lesbian? And one of the things that inevitably they often find is it's not enough to say, I still love you as my son or daughter. You know, I disagree with this identity. I disagree with you living out this.

I don't think it's biblical or appropriate, but I still love you. And I will do the best I can to treat you as my son and daughter. Most often, that's not enough, because it's not enough to say, I'm going to disagree strongly with this, but still love you.

The very act of disagreeing with that is received as unloving and in fact, as hateful. There was a book, I'm sure you read it a few years ago, sort of a cheeky title, Making Gay Okay, but it was actually a good book, and it made the argument that in law and in schooling and in the academy, it's not enough to simply affirm that such behavior can be tolerated by some. It must have complete societal victory in order to be truly authenticating and affirming.

How did we get to that point where it seemed like a generation ago or even half a generation ago, tolerance was the name of the game. And now that's clearly not enough. Yeah, that's an extremely good point.

And I think you put your finger on what is often the most painful of the pastoral consequences of the sexual revolution certainly is experienced by Christian parents and those in positions of pastoral authority within the church. How we get there, it's a complicated story, but clearly what we're dealing with in this generation that we weren't dealing with in my generation and you're younger than me, but probably your generation as well was a situation where sexual identity had yet come to grip what we might call what Charles Telekors, the social imaginary, it's a rather as typical with Taylor, he uses obscure terms to refer to things that are relatively simple when you explain the but we might say the way people just imagine the world is. Taylor's getting there at the idea that most people don't think about the world in self-consciously theoretical terms.

We imagine the world is a certain way we intuit it. And what's happened in the last 15, 20 years is that the intuitions of the social imaginary have come to place sexual desire very, very firmly at the center of how we think of identity. Freud was doing it in the late 19th, early 20th century.

Reichen Markuso were doing it from the 30s through the 50s and on into the 60s. It takes time for the ideas of elite figures to percolate down really through their appropriation by pop culture. But we're now seeing a generation rise where every message they get from every movie, every sitcom, every soap opera, every pop song, sometimes every commercial they watch.

I have to think we have Christians get very worried about internet pornography. We perhaps should be just as worried about commercials that I can see. Have this idea pressed on them that your sexual desire is fundamental to your identity.

And it comes to be very painful in the kind of pastoral situation that you're describing. Though I think all Christians feel the pinch because that old argument that, well, we hate the sin but love the sinner. That's not plausible anymore because if what we think of as

the sin is actually the identity of the person we're talking to, they cannot make that conceptual distinction.

It's not like saying, well, I hate the fact that you're greedy, but I still love you as a person. That makes sense because nobody sees their greed as fundamental to their identity. But saying to somebody, I hate your sexual orientation, but I love you as a person.

That's a paradox. That's a contradiction. So yeah, how we got there, it's taken a long, slow development.

But I think we can certainly say at this point, pretty much every avenue of influence in the wider culture that shapes how people think is pointing in this direction at this point. And that makes it a very, very hard situation to address and a deeply tragic one when it comes to breaking the relationship between parents and children. Yeah, you cannot begin to quantify the pain that that sort of situation creates.

Justin. Hi, Carl. Thanks for joining us and thanks for writing the book.

And we join you in prayer that God would use it in all sorts of different ways. I guess I have a two-part question. One is a sort of personal, professional, and the second methodological.

So on the former, how did you come to the point where you were interested in writing this? Obviously you have a background as a Reformation historian and interested in medieval Christendom and even patristics. At what point did you become interested enough and feel like you were equipped to write on this? And the second one is perhaps you could give just a little bit of a methodological overview of how does a historian trace out the history of ideas and causation. Imagine somebody walking into a library and there's a huge section on Freud and there's a huge section on Reeve and there's a huge section on Enlightenment thinkers.

How do you put it all together to actually form a narrative and trace out how an idea developed over time? Great, great couple of questions. That's the first one, Justin. Well, first of all, just while we're mutually slapping each other's backs, thanks to you for backing the project and cross-wave for publishing it.

In retrospect, it looked a bit interesting to hire a guy who wasn't competent to write this book, to write it for a publisher that had never published a book like this before. What could possibly go wrong kind of thing? How I came to write it, I think a number of factors. I really felt that to the extent that I've made a contribution to Reformation and Post Reformation studies, by the time my second book on John Owen was published, I'd really beginning to think, "I've probably made my contribution.

I can continue doing the same contribution, but professionally, I've said pretty much

what I want to say at this point." That was both very freeing, but also left me thinking, "Well, life is sure. What else should I do?" I was thinking it would be nice to do something completely different. Round about the same time, David Mills, who was then working at First Things, brought me on to write some things to the magazine and start writing regularly for the blog.

That was an interesting moment for me because I started to address issues that I'd not really thought about before. My mind was very much focused on the internal struggles within Protestantism, Presbyterianism, evangelicalism. Suddenly, I was in a different world addressing bigger issues that were facing the church as a whole, rather than our particular branches of it.

I started to think along the lines of this book, at that point, started to read more widely. I also became aware that I have a very privileged position compared to a lot of academics in the sense that at that point, I was teaching at Westminster Seminary. Now, I teach at Grove City College in Pennsylvania.

There aren't a lot of places in higher education where one can address some of these issues and get away with it. There are certain party lines that have to be maintained. I began to feel that my privileged position gave me some of your responsibility to address them.

If you can address these things, then maybe I should because I can do this with the backing of my administration. Certainly, at Grove, in a way that I couldn't if I was a professor at a secular school of some kind. That was all the stuff that went on in my mind.

Then, when you and Rodra approached me, that was the seal to deal on that front and thought it would be an interesting thing to do. How to go about it? Wow, it was the most difficult book I've ever written. Not because I hadn't got the ideas, but because I had lunch with Gordon Gray and Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary and Old Aberdeen University colleague while I was at Princeton for the year.

I'm sort of outlining to him what I was doing. He made a comment to me, he said, "I have no idea how I begin to address that." He says, "Like an octopus, how on earth do you get hold of all these arms?" I think that the breakthrough for me was getting the structure right. Once I decided, "Okay, let's do some theoretical chapters at the start that will actually set up the framework and then trace out the chronology and the narrative shaped by the psychologizing of the self, the sexualizing of psychology, the politicizing of sex, gave me a framework." There's also my historian's instincts.

I'm aware whenever I write history, whatever I write is limited and provisional. That's very liberating because it means you can leave stuff out and say at the start, "I'm leaving stuff out. I'm going to give you a narrative here which could be expanded and

deepened, but I'm going to give you some kind of road map." What was then the center for vision of value is now the Institute for Faith and Freedom at Grove City College, graciously gave me a research assistant in the summer and the structure for me.

I would send her stuff and say, "Okay, how do we fit this jigsaw together? How do I get hold of all of the arms of the octopus and Kirsten?" If you're out there listening, incredibly grateful for the work you did on the book. Of all the books I've written, this was a huge team effort from conception, to structure, to writing, and now to marketing. I did the reading and the writing.

I did the pleasurable bit, but I couldn't have done it without the crossway team and without the Grove City team and without the Madison Fellowship at Princeton, all helping me get this thing to completion. Let me follow up on that. You cover a lot of figures in history and some that people with a decent Western Civ background, which is fewer and fewer in number, those who have such a background.

You're looking at Rousseau and Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, and you go into other Marxists that we've mentioned already. Did you already know a lot about these people? Is this just the product of a fabulous English education? Or did you really have to figure out, "Okay, I know a little bit about some of these guys, but I've got to do a lot more to figure out what's going on here." Most of them I had some acquaintance with and some I had more acquaintance with than others. I've read Marx and Nietzsche for many years.

I started reading Nietzsche at school just for the fun of it. We're not surprised. I have the attention span of a squirrel, so I just read, I've just always read widely, which was a great help on this.

I was introduced to Marx's theory at college by my history supervisor and maintained an interest in that, particularly as a way of thinking through postmodernism later on. For this book, the areas where I really had to do some some hard mugging up, if you like, gender theory. It's written so abominably, little time for people who can't write well and Judith Butler is.

There's a crime against the English language in every sentence, as far as I've been said. I almost wish she'd been translated into Latin. I might have found it easier to read that way.

I had to do a fair bit on Freud, actually. I'd read some of Freud, but getting familiar with Freud's life and significance and feminist theory. There, a Syria Butterfield was extremely helpful.

I dropped her a note and said, "Okay, I need to mug up on lesbian feminism, but I don't want to Google that. Can you send me a reading list?" She introduced me to some of the



most fascinating stuff, the Adrian Rich stuff. I remember emailing Rosario and saying, "This is a man.

I'm reading this. I'm laughing. I don't agree with it, but wow, it is.

She's a clear thinker and she's carried me along." And Rosario made some comment to the effect of, "Yeah, that's why I was into it for 20 years, because it's so compelling." So the feminist stuff was important as well. And that was something I'd not really bothered with in the past. Who was your intended audience? All of us, Collins written books, Justin.

I've written books. And I usually have in my mind, I write books that are for church people in the pews, somebody going to your proverbial book-nook, church book stall, and pick up something that an educated layman could say, "Hey, this is interesting. I imagine you have maybe that's your target audience, but I think maybe something is different.

Who are you writing for? Who did you imagine in your mind is reading this book that you want to reach?" Right. I was thinking of the kind of people who read first things, Touchstone magazine, that kind of stuff. So what I wanted to do was, there was a kind of twofold approach in my mind.

I wanted the main text to be clear, but challenging. I wanted somebody with no background. My son's fiance's mother's reading my book at the moment and apparently enjoying it.

I wanted the thoughtful, well-read, but not necessarily academic layperson to be able to read the text or pass to be able to read the main text. On the other hand, I wanted the footnotes to be of a decent scholarly standard because I wanted to anticipate those who would come after me and say, "Ah, yes, but Truman's ignorant of this," or, "Ah, yes, but Nietzsche doesn't actually say that. When I do, I'm going to be working on an abridgement of it.

The abridgement will not have footnotes and will be much more straightforward, but I feel I can do that because I've done the spade work this time around. I'm free now not to heavily footnote anything because when the inevitable pushback comes, I can say, "Well, I did do the work. Look at my earlier book." So it was really that sort of twofold, intelligent audience, but I didn't want some queer theory scholar coming after me and saying, "You've not done the work." When, if and when the queer theory scholar comes after me, I want them to say, "Trueman's written this because he's a bigot." That's not an argument.

That's an ad hominem way of getting me dismissed, and I wanted to make sure that that's the only thing they've got. Publishers Weekly sort of did that, actually. In some ways, very gratifying.

Yeah, they say it's meticulously argued, but it's bigoted. Those two things don't quite hold together, but it was very gratifying to know, "Yeah, you can't take down my argument. You have to take me down as a person." Because it does seem like it's not your typical Christian book.

It's not your typical crossway book. That's not an insult. That's just, you say at the beginning and at the end, and I think this is really important, that it's neither a lament nor a polemic, meaning this isn't just going to be, "Look how bad it is." Though people can read between the lines, you think a lot of this is bad, but you don't really land on that a lot.

You could read through most of the book and pick up, you think this is problematic, but it's not a lament and it's not a polemic. You don't go out of your way to say why all of this is wrong. That's underneath the surface.

So, it's not a typical Christian book that we might expect to say, "Here's what's out there, and here's why it's problematic." I don't know if you said it or someone else said about the book. It's more describing this late modernity to the church to say, "I want you to understand it." And I think you also want and are hoping that non-Christians will read it. Have you heard any response from, you mentioned publishers weekly, but from non-Christians who are reading it or even just non-Orthodox evangelical or orthodox Catholic sort of Christians who are reading it and having their, if not their conscience is pricked, then at least their intellectual curiosity is peaked? Certainly getting a lot of good feedback from the Christian audience broadly conceived.

Father Lawrence Farley, whom I know is an orthodox priest in Vancouver, wrote a very positive review last week. I did a podcast last Friday, which is actually a sort of secular podcast. I don't know if the woman who interviewed me has any personal faith herself, but was very, very positive about the book.

In fact, we're going to do an hour and she said, "Can we go for two?" Which was exhausting on a Friday afternoon, but we did two hours together. So, I'm very gratified by that. Of course, part of, in the back of my mind is, I teach at a liberal arts college, and it's Christian liberal arts college, but it's open enrollment.

I have kids in my classes for whom these are their issues. I'll have kids who would identify as gay, who might identify as transgender. I wanted to write a book that I would not be embarrassed to have written when I bump into them in the corridor.

So, I can say to them, "You know, I do disagree with you, and you may find it hard to believe that I hate the sin and love the sinner, but look at my book. My book might help you to understand why you think the way you do and might be an opener of conversations in that front." So, the tone was very specifically honed to make it, as I say, not a polemic or a lament. There's a sense in which both are relatively pointless in some

ways.

I wanted it to be useful, and I wanted it to be the kind of tool that a pastor can use to address issues as they occur in his congregation without being vulnerable to the accusation of, "Well, you know, you just Fred Phelps in a smart suit kind of thing." Yeah. Colin, Justin, I'm doing all the questions, and I have many more, but jump on in. Well, before I take the podcast, Carl, completely off the rails with a question about William of Occam.

I thought I would start first by asking about the sources you cite. Judith Butler, we shouldn't be reading, but are any of these other sources you read, people that we should be reading directly? Would it benefit Christian leaders to be reading Nietzsche directly or Freud? What should we do? Yeah. I think, to an extent, a lot of these authors can be read with great profit by Christians.

I'm just finishing up, it was very ambitious, but I decided to, an undergraduate reading course of Charles Taylor's secular age this semester, and through the kids in at the deep end, and they've all pretty much swung to the other side. One of the things that Taylor does towards the end of that book is he indicates that in modernity, quite often, there's a sort of three-fold battle going on. You've got exclusive humanists, you've got the Neatians, and you've got Christians.

Depending on what the issue is, two of those can gang up against the third one. In other words, there's kind of overlap in odd ways between those three. I would say, Christians can side with Nietzsche because he realizes that the world is a dark place.

There is no utopia. Nietzsche's understanding of the darker side of human nature stands, I think, in very positive relation to the Christian understanding of fallen human nature. When we look at Nietzsche and he calls the bluff on the Enlightenment, I think he's doing something that a Christian can say amen to.

Yes, if you get rid of God, if you kill him, then you leave yourself with all kind of problems about moral discourse, et cetera, et cetera. Nietzsche would certainly be one that I would put on the pile. Freud, civilization is discontent.

It's almost a long essay, really. I think it's an excellent statement of two things. One, the power of sexuality in human existence, but also raises that interesting question of what happens when we start to lift sexual taboos? If sexual taboos are that which maintains civilization, what happens when we start to lift them? That would bring me to my third character that I would say is definitely worth reading, though not an easy read.

Philip Reif. I think Reif's triumph of the therapeutic. Again, it's not an easy read, but Reif's triumph of the therapeutic is a remarkably prescient analysis of culture.

He wrote it in 1966, and it's one of those books. When you read it, you're thinking, wow,

he couldn't possibly have known how much of this was actually going to come true. And Reif was not a believer himself, right? Prophetic is a word that's thrown around very cheaply.

It seems to me relative to books, but Reif's book is truly prophetic. If you want to understand the world we live in, then get hold of Reif and read him secular Jewish thinkers, as far as I know. A little bit like a sort of Roger Scruton figure.

I can't commit to belief in God myself, but I think he's extremely important for maintaining civilization. It's hard for me as a Christian to see why that's coherent, but I think that's very much where Reif was coming from. Carl, how do you think about resources like that? There's a certain mindset that says we read them to understand all of the bad things out there so that we're being fair to them.

There's another mindset that says even though they got things fundamentally wrong, they also offer some insights into the nature of cultures, the world in which we live, human psychology. As a reformed theologian yourself, can we learn positively from people who got the big things so fundamentally wrong? I think so. Again, go back to Nietzsche.

I teach a cool song on shadows of the Antichrist to make it sound exciting. It's not as exciting as it sounds. We look at Marx, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Cardinal Newman, and Herman Bavink.

We read texts from those five. We look at Nietzsche's gay science and trace the arguments such as it is that the gay science up to the madman passage and beyond. I think, as I said, Nietzsche, I think, really does expose the consequences and the price of the rejection of God in a way that one could find in the prophets if you look at the Old Testament, when you look at idolatry in the Old Testament.

Do I want people to become Nietzscheans? No. But I do want them to understand the point that Nietzsche's making, and that is when you reject God, it's all down to you. You can make up any God you want at that point, which he thinks is a great thing.

But I think it's that is the way if you like to address somebody like Richard Dawkins. I would tell you, Nietzsche would say, but Richard Dawkins is not a true atheist at all. He wants to kill God, but then he wants to live off the capital that God has provided him with.

Well, Richard Dawkins is unlikely to listen to me saying that to him, but give him both barrels with Nietzsche, and he might have to take it seriously at that point. Colin, did you really want to ask about Occam's razor? I do. Well, not about Occam's razor, but maybe we'll transition into the Protestant Catholic portion of this discourse.

So, Rod Dreyer does the forward for the book. Rod's convert from mainline Protestantism

to Roman Catholicism and now to orthodoxy. And Rod has picked up over the years on a number of the Catholic anti-Protestant polemic from medieval eras, specifically, which has been, I think, thoroughly debunked and yet persists in Catholic polemic.

The connection between nominalism, William of Occam in the medieval period, through Luther and Calvin, and ultimately then through this whole stream that you pick up on, with Rousseau. When you and I talked for the Gospel Bound podcast, we talked about the sort of tale of two Genivans with Rousseau and with Calvin. How do you respond then to a Catholic apologist who would argue that what you're covering in this book is to a certain extent the outworking of Protestantism.

And it's sort of rumination of the medieval synthesis in building off the problems then of that nominalism introduced. Yeah, and explain it real quickly, Carl, just for people who have no idea what the answer is. I told you guys are going to take this thing off the rails, but yeah, the gist of it is simply a Catholic might read this book and say, yep, see, this is what Luther and Calvin unleashed on the work.

That's the simplest way to point it. I mean, this is a sort of thesis that's been argued at great length through great sophistication by, say, Brad Gregory at Notre Dame. Another course I've taught, I've been teaching the historiography course for the History Department this semester, and we actually read Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation Together*, which the students did not like as much as Lindel, Roper's *Biography of Luther*, which I found very gratifying.

But yeah, I think there's a certain truth to it. One of the things the Reformation ultimately does is it introduces choice in religion. Religion becomes a choice in a way that it wasn't in the Middle Ages, and that fundamentally changes how people think about the role of religion in the world.

Having said that, I would make an argument that, well, first of all, William of Ockermann, if you wanted to push it back a century earlier, Duns Scotus, they're actually Catholics. They're not Protestants. And as I said in a review many years ago, Brad Gregory's book is it really depends on where you want to start.

But one could say that Protestantism and the Reformation was a response to the fact that Protestant Catholicism had already failed at that point. Protestantism may ultimately not have been able to solve the problem, but it certainly didn't cause the problem. These are Catholic theologians who are causing the problem.

I would say, I would also add a strong that, say, you know, I do agree. People contact me about my medieval lectures that I did at Westminster Seminary, and ironically, I've, like on a number of things, I've changed my opinion. So people are saying, how could you possibly believe Duns Scotus was a good thing? And I say, I don't, I was young and stupid and naive, and now I've changed my opinion.

I do think that late medieval nominalism and volunteerism without going into the details of what they mean, essentially what they do to the way people think about the world is get rid of the idea of essences, get rid of the idea that we have built into us a particular end or purpose. We become sort of stuff, if you like, not people who have a particular end and purpose. That's a fatal move, theologically.

I do think that's a problem. But, you know, to go back to my earlier career as a church historian, much of my study of John Owen was an attempt to demonstrate that Thomism, which I think has an emphasis upon essences and ends and teleology, was alive and well in reformed orthodoxy in the 17th century. And I believe it's not my area, but I believe the same could be said for Lutheran orthodoxy as well.

So I would want to counter Catholic criticisms by saying, you know, we're all part of the problem. And in some sense, we're all part of the solution as well. It just depends which particular bits you pick on.

If medieval Catholicism had not done such a hopeless job, the reformation would not have been necessary. Did the reformation further exacerbate certain problems? Possibly. Certainly, it led to the sort of breaking up of the church.

But maybe the printing press was going to do that because we know that as literacy rates increase, people start to think more independently and become more politically revolutionary. So the story that, you know, your book is a story of how Protestantism screwed it all up. Now I would say it's a story of how Western culture got screwed up, of which Catholicism and Protestantism are both partly at fault.

And I do think that one of the dangers for people who like to do intellectual history, which is all of us, is we can neglect the role that technology plays. And you just mentioned it. And you said before, you know, you talk about cars.

I mean, what has had more of an impact on our world in community cars or the pill has been widely discussed. But you talked about the printing press or the ease by which people even in early modern period could begin to travel or that waterways were more navigable. Once you have countries interacting more with other countries, you're unleashing a whole set of new ideas and circumstances.

And how do we have trade with one another if they're enemies and heretics and we can't even trade goods with them? How do we maintain? I mean, this is what Grosius is trying to unpack. So there's lots of other factors at play. I want to piggyback on Colin's question because some, I've heard some people say, Carl, and hopefully you find this gratifying.

I think you could make this case that your book here is maybe the finest analysis, cultural analysis by a Protestant in the last 50 years. So take that as a nice compliment. One of the things I noticed in the book is that you don't rely a lot on Protestant thinkers.

I mean, you have Charles Taylor, you have Rif, you've mentioned, you have Alistair McIntyre, we haven't talked about him yet. So is that indicative of Protestants not being very good at this sort of thing? Is that indicative of your interests or would we have seen more Protestants if you were trying to give a constructive alternative and then you would go into Bovink or whoever from the Reformed tradition? Why is it that Protestants haven't done this well or are we just missing the folks who have? That's a good question. I have wondered about this.

This is the best Protestant book on this for 50 years. If that's like saying, this is like the giantest skyscraper where Justin lives in Iowa or something like that. It's a nice, it's a nice, it's a great thing.

I think there are good Protestants out there who thought about culture. Obviously, I mean, Oz Guinness would be one name that comes to mind. I think James Davis and Hunter is a Protestant.

I think that's the case. David Wells. David Wells or with church culture.

Yeah. And the interesting thing about David was when I was, I actually thought of his work as an example of how the sexual revolution has caught us all by surprise, in that David's books were very influential on me in the 90s, really formative on the way I thought. But from memory, he hardly touches on the sexual revolution.

It's not really something that's going to have an impact on the church. And that's not a criticism of David's scholarship at all. That's simply saying that this whole thing has absolutely blindsided us.

So in terms of Protestants writing on the specific issues I've looked at, know that there aren't many out there. And James Davis and Hunter, of course, is more sociological in many ways than I would be. So there is the has been a lack.

I think Catholicism, for all of, yeah, I'm a Protestant for all of its problems, I would say, does have a vibrant history of social teaching, and a vibrant history of reflection upon the importance of the body, the physical body for what it means to be human. And of course, those are things that are central to my narrative in many ways. And therefore, I found myself drawing on Catholic material quite a lot.

And one of the pleas I make at the end is it's time for Protestants to start thinking about some things that Catholicism has wrestled with for many years, and we're now playing catch up on. We need more Michael Hanby's Michael Hanby does such wonderful work on the role of technology and the understanding of human personhood. I was, of all of the jacket commendations, the one when Michael Hanby's came in, I remember turning to my wife and saying, I think the book must make sense because Michael Hanby liked it.

It was kind of wow. We need more Protestants, I think, addressing these kind of issues.

And I hope my book provides some grounds and material for doing that.

It's very gratifying to see Protestants picking it up and enjoying it. Well, I hope that that is a trigger for more Protestants doing more of this work. Yeah, I think that's true.

And I'll get to a question here at the end of this, but it just got me thinking, you know, when you're in, like when I was in high school and I did cross country in track, and we were always really bad at our school and cross country in track because all of the most of the really good athletes wanted to play football in the fall and they wanted to play baseball in the spring. And I think a similar thing can happen with let's just take reformed evangelicalism. We what's what's prized in our tradition is certainly preaching, reform dogmatics.

We produce a lot of people who can do that well. broader evangelical tribes, certainly biblical scholarship and commentaries, good churchmen and pastors. So all of these things, you know, evangelists, we have people to save.

All of these things are really good. And you know, I'm going to put up our with all the problems we have with preaching. I'm going to put up our preachers with Catholic priests giving homilies any day.

But one of the things that I think we've not been encouraged as much is the sort of, and this gets to my question, Carl, the sort of work that relies on for lack of a better term, natural law or just that natural law thinking. So some of the books that, you know, Robbie George and his crew of people have done, you know, Ryan Anderson on marriage and some of those things, you know, from a Protestant perspective, you say, well, we could use some more Greek exegesis. And that's true.

But that's a different kind of book in the sort of work that they're doing from that natural law tradition. I think is something that Protestants could rightly reclaim as part of our own tradition. I mean, you find Turretin, I mean, the great Turretin talking about the importance of philosophy and natural law as a handmaiden to theology.

So I was interested that at the end of the book, you raised that as one of the things along with the theology of the body. Why do you think that sort of thinking is important, even if as you admit, it's probably not going to convince your opponent? I think it's important because it's going to help us talk to our young people about these issues. Again, my experience of the students at Grove, they grade students, many of them, I'm going to sound, I was going to say horribly evangelical at this point, but I don't mean that at all.

You know what I mean? I'm going to sound uncharacteristic of myself this month. They love Jesus. They love Jesus.

They love the Bible. They want to live their lives for Jesus. We're for all of those things on this podcast.



I'm for all of them too, but you know, behind a stern English demeanor. Yeah, we have this breaking character, breaking serious joy. Yes.

But these kids, they're, they're, they're all this, but of course they have the huge pressures of the world pressing in on them. They've all got gay friends now. Many of them have, you know, transgender people that they know and are friendly with.

And there's a sense in which, just telling them, well, it's wrong because God says so in the Bible. They know that intuitively that yes, that's enough, but it's helpful for them to have a deeper understanding of why, you know, does God say that just because he had a bad day, you know, he's just decided that he wants to be mean to my friends or other reasons deeply embedded within the structure of creation itself that would, that would lead us to make sense for God to say that. And that's what I think natural law comes in.

And you know, Robbie George's book, right, Anderson's book is a great example of that. I, I remain, I've never met, there may be somebody out there. I've never met a proponent of gay marriage who read that book and was persuaded.

You know, and yet I think it's an unanswerable book, but I've never met anyone who, who was persuaded to change their mind by that book. What I have met, a Christian's who will say, it really did confirm me that yeah, the church has got the Bible right. And that's not to say natural reason as an authority alongside or above scripture, but it was pedagogically helpful.

And that's where I think that it's going to be useful to, for, for, for Protestants to, to reflect on natural, I love the work my friend David Van Drune and is doing, and that his work is now getting more widely read and more widely accepted. I think Crossway published his living in, living between two kingdoms or living in the two kingdoms. That's a book I recommend all the time to students who ask me about, about ethics and the relation of the heavenly and the earthly.

And I think that stuff has a hugely positive function for Christians who have faith, but they're seeking understanding. So hopefully more, more Protestants will be doing this kind of work. My friend, Adelene Allen, Trinity Law School in California, is doing great work on surrogacy and the ethics of artificial insemination.

These are things that Protestants need to have an opinion on. As a pastor, I was always glad that I was never faced with a couple in my, you know, my office who desire something good, desire to have a child, but don't know whether it's ethical to have in vitro fertilization. I wouldn't have known where to begin to think about that issue.

It's great that we've got Protestants beginning to wrestle with these issues that I think in vitro fertilization requires some engagement with natural law because it's so far removed from the immediate teaching and vision of the Bible that we need some help in

understanding how general biblical principles play out in terms of the nature, the natural and the advice that we would give to people in that situation. So let me follow up with a practical question. Then we'll get Colin and Justin and then we'll try to wrap things up and not keep you for the second hour though we're tempted to do so.

So let me set the scenario. This is a true scenario from my life, but it could be multiplied and I'm sure many of our listeners lives. I was back when I lived in Michigan.

Our kids went to the public school and you can thank me or hate me for that. But mine did too. Yes.

Not in Michigan, but in yeah, and there we love our Christian school here, but I served on our district's sex education committee. It was I think still is a law in Michigan that you needed to have a clergy member serve on your sex education committee. And as you can imagine, it was the people who signed up for that were always liberal clergy and somehow somebody within the administration, I think he was a Mormon maybe got tipped off and and said, Kevin, would you want to do this? And I foolishly said yes.

And you're at ground zero talking about curriculum and most of the time, you're just trying to be politically savvy enough. Okay, we'll cross our sort of church based group from coming in to talk about abstinence if you cross off Planned Parenthood from coming in and talking about abortion. You're just trying to mitigate your losses.

But I remember very well talking about this new curriculum and somebody on the committee just says, with all the matter of factness, as if they had said, you know that it snows in Michigan, they said, well, everyone knows that sex and gender are completely different things. Everyone knows that you can be assigned one sex at birth and decide to be a different gender. And this was said, because we were looking at a curriculum that wasn't that old.

I mean, it was 15 years old, but it was old enough that it still didn't have that in it. And people wanted this new understanding. So in that moment, I thought, is there anything I can say if I come to this context and say, here, I got a Bible verse, I could do that that let's say, well, that's what we expect from the pastor.

I don't have a two hour seminar to try to walk through Rousseau. Is there anything in that moment if you've got 30 seconds to make somebody even wonder about possibly wanting to think about hearing more to think differently? Do you have any advice? Because Christians are increasingly find themselves in those situations on the spot. What do I say not to convince someone, but maybe as as, oh, now he's losing my trick, a mind who I want to quote here, but says you put a pebble in somebody's shoe and then later they walk off.

That's why I Greg Coco. Thank you. Sorry, Greg.

Any advice? That's a tough one. I would say, the great thing about that particular issue is, of course, you can cite people who are not Christians who clearly think that sex and gender are tightly connected. Germaine Greer would be one.

There is an organization I can give you the link, actually, if you wanted a link to it from this podcast, it's called Hands Across the Isle, which is run by a friend of mine and a radical feminist who was fired for asserting the the necessary connection between sex and gender from the radical feminist newspaper that she worked for that provides material that addresses that clearly not in a specifically Christian way. My friend, the lady is a Roman Catholic, but the feminist lady has no interest in religion whatsoever. There is material out there, but I would say the best way to do that is perhaps just to pull out of the bag a source like that that throws a spanner in the works.

It doesn't just sound like, "Well, I'm quoting a Bible verse." Actually, I'm quoting Germaine Greer here. She's a radical feminist. I'm quoting Hands Across the Isle, and they would tell you that from a secular perspective, this can have some very bad consequences.

That's good. Even if that allows you to say, "might we be able to have time at a future meeting where we could each year even five or ten minutes and talk about this?" Even to make this step to acknowledge there is a debate about it in many contexts is the small win we may need. There are plenty of feminists out there that you could bring in to make that point for you, where it would be clearly not a power play by the two-year-old way back then, a few years ago.

The great thing about her is she's wealthy enough to do it and get away with it. Teachers in the public school system, they don't have the ability to throw their weight around like she does. That's not to belittle what she's done.

All power to her elbow on this one. Colin and then Justin. You got a final question? I'm going to pass.

I think I took up about four questions on the William Vaucom one. Justin, you're cool. Justin.

Carl, I got an email from a friend today that said, "Why is Carl Truman against lament and lament is biblical? Why doesn't he want to lament more? Do you say that it is something good but not sufficient?" Hey, I wrote, "Is it just your Britishness?" The thing I've written that I get more letters about than he else was a little piece called "What Commeasurable Christian?" It's full of lament, Matt. I'm from a Scottish Psalm singing background. We lament all the time.

No, I think I'm not against lament, but I'm against the kind of lamentation that a lot of Christians engage in that ends up being therapeutic. It's a fine line sometimes between

lamenting the situation and saying, "I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like other men." I didn't want this book to be the world's going to hell in a hand cart, but I thank you, Lord, that I get it. That's why I'm lamenting about it so thoroughly.

Clearly, I think there is a definite place for lament in the Christian life. I would say that our attitude towards the sexual revolution, we shouldn't be surprised, but we should be shocked. We shouldn't be saddened by it.

We should be saddened by the toll it's taking on humanity by the damage it's doing to young lives. So, clearly, there's a place for lament. I just didn't think that my book was the place to do that.

I wanted the book to fulfill a different purpose. There are plenty of lamenters out there. I did not want to be one of them.

All right, Carl, in an effort to truly show my expressive individualism. I'm going to give you two thoughts, and you can choose which one of the two you would like to comment on for our final question. They're not major themes in the book, but they're very interesting.

So, I'll let you decide what you want to talk about. One is at the end, and you referenced a book came out last year, "Costly Obedience," what we can learn from the celibate gay community, and you say, "Okay, let's just set aside if that's the right language to use." I don't think it is, but you rightly said, "Okay, that's not what I want to talk about." What you said, only in a world in which selves are typically recognized or validated by their sexuality and their sexual fulfillment, can celibacy be considered costly. And you go on, you're not saying that there's no price of discipleship, but you're saying, "Hey, there's a cost for all of us, and if you're married, you're called to chastity." So, that is a new way of thinking, I think, for many Christians who would instinctively read a title like that.

So, that's one option. Here's a second option, if you want to talk about. Maybe you saw in the latest issue of First Things, Mary Eberstadt has an article about the furies of the fatherless.

She's kind of written about this before in some of her books that we tend to think that our theology shapes our view of the family, and one of her arguments is it's actually our family that is shaping our theology. Or often our family pathologies that are shaping our theology or our philosophy. And she talks about some current leaders in the anti-racist movement and also the alt-right and their dysfunctional backgrounds and what they're about now is maybe filling that void.

But you could even go through enlightenment thinkers and notice how many of these are men who never raise children. John Locke, Adam Smith wasn't married, you point out in the book, Rousseau is, I mean, he's one who had a bunch of kids and he was horrible, he

shipped them all off to orphanages, you could go down. Of course, William Godwin on marriage is awful.

So, that's a theme that I think is worth exploring. Which of those two do you want to talk about for our final few minutes? I mean, I thought the work, I think I'll go for the second because it's tracking with something else I'm thinking about at the moment. Carter Sneed, the Notre Dame ethicist, has a fantastic new book out on what it means to be human.

And the point he makes there is that expressive individualism, which I deal with in my book, but from a different angle, is fundamentally wrong because it teaches us that we are independent beings, that the individual is first. And all of our social ties and connections are kind of contractual and therefore, at some level, adversarial. And he sees that as playing out particularly in the ethics of life, in terms of abortion, in terms of fertility treatments, and in terms of end of term care.

And I think what you're pointing to there is something very, very significant that the notion of expressive individualism grips our imaginations in some ways because so often, all the founders of the notion didn't have those relations of dependency that a lot of us have. And Rousseau is the superb example of that, sending your kids to an orphanage, five of them, that's a death sentence. Sentencing five kids to infanticide, that really speaks deeply of a perverted way of thinking about humanity.

So I haven't, I have only, first things is sitting on my desk. I've been doing so many podcasts. I've not had a chance to read this edition yet.

But I think it sounds like Mary Eberstadt is really onto something there that's the idea of dependency. It isn't just something you read about in books and then develop in your life. It's something you experience.

It's something you experience. And for those abandoned by their parents, etc, etc, those who have a feel and adversarial feel that that most important of human bonds, parents and children, is actually adversarial. That will have a profound effect on how they think about themselves and how they relate to the world.

That's great. I mean, not a great note to end on, but a great thought. And I'd love for maybe, maybe Colin just and I can pick that up or we'll have you on again, Carl.

Thank you. I know you're doing a lot of these podcasts. Always a pleasure to talk.

Thank you for taking the time to do this. Again, the book rise, the rise and triumph of the modern self. It's 407 pages, but you, you won't regret reading it.

And even if you have to skip some of the Freudian kinkiness, you can get to the good stuff. It's really well done. So congratulations, Crossway and Carl on the book.

Thank you for being with us for our regular listeners. This is, we think, the end of season two and Lord willing will be back in the new year. Maybe we'll drop in during the holidays, but no plans as of yet.

I think the world will go on just fine without our podcast for a few weeks. But thank you for listening. Colin, Justin, thank you again.

A pleasure to be with you until we all meet again. Lord, if I got, enjoy him forever and read a good book.

(buzzing)

[buzzing]