

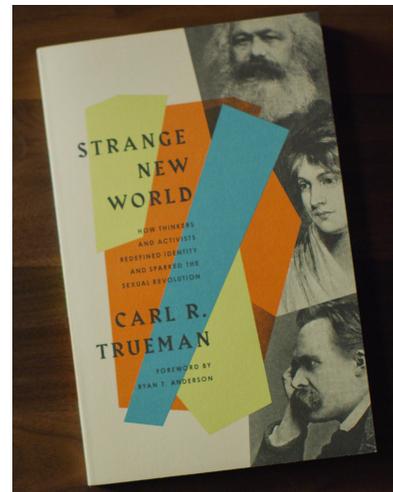
**Trueman, Carl. *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*. Foreword by Ryan T. Anderson. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.**

Reviewed by Preston Pearce, IMB Field Personnel, Europe

Carl Trueman (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College, Pennsylvania.

*Strange New World* is a shorter and more accessible version of Trueman's *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. He describes the world in which we now live: today people find ideas plausible that would have been rejected a generation ago, and what were once virtues are now regarded as more like vices.

Trueman shows this shift is not random by tracing the contributions of various thinkers over the last three centuries. Some captured the spirit of their times; others were more clearly influential in shaping the way people thought. What emerges is a new understanding of the "self": not simply a self-conscious being whose identity is shaped by external factors (e.g., Scripture, community, responsibility to others); it is one's inner feelings, where the "real me" is found. To be authentic, one must act outwardly on those inner feelings and desires. Further, this authenticity is to be celebrated by society in general; therefore, anything can take on political significance.



### **Significance and Value for the Cross-Cultural Worker**

One might question the value of *Strange New World* for cross-cultural ministry since it describes basically a western phenomenon. However, the globalization fueled by technology and social media means that nothing western stays in the west. Cross-cultural workers who read *Strange New World* and look carefully at their host culture are likely to recognize some of the things Trueman describes. The book has much anthropological insight for us, wherever we are and serve.

Further, the expressive individualism that results from the new understanding of “self” is now deeply embedded in the missionary’s home culture, even in their sending churches. The “world” they left in order to serve in missions is not the “world” to which they return, and it is not the world to which their children return as young adults. Readers may also find as their children approach adulthood that this thinking has influenced their worldview much more than they realized.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Trueman says in chapter 1, “Welcome to this strange new world. You may not like it. But it is where you live, and therefore it is important that you try to understand it.” He is very insightful in the way he traces the development of thought over the last three hundred years to help the reader understand how this strange new world came to be the way many people think, almost instinctively.

The book is not just an academic cultural analysis. The strange new world is not just “out there” in the bastions of liberal academia; it is at the family dinner table. The book’s contribution is that it provides not ammunition for battle (i.e., to win an argument) but an understanding of the battlefield (i.e., to understand why people speak the way they do, what they mean, and how to communicate clearly). It equips the reader to understand, engage, and communicate.

The book also models balance in communication. The contemporary context is deeply polarized; it's a reflection of the "politicized self". Trueman models fairness in assessment as he engages with the values of this strange new world. It helps the reader realize the complexity of the times in which we live and provides a model for engaging others wisely and graciously.

Another strength of the book is the final chapter. Trueman observes some ways the church in general, by compromising with the spirit of the age, has been complicit in the cultural shifts discussed in the book. He suggests this should stir us to humility as we engage with others on these issues. He also encourages us to recover the historic strengths of the church – worship, fellowship, community, and teaching the whole counsel of God.

### **For further reading**

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

"Expressive Individualism in the Church," *9 Marks Journal*, March 2022. <https://www.9marks.org/journal/expressive-individualism-in-the-church/>.