

## THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Engagement

Topic: Rival Worldviews, Part 3

4<sup>th</sup> Semester I Spring 2025

### Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topics this week are consumerism, expressive individualism, and tribalism

### Worldview Analysis: Consumerism

Consumerism as a worldview is the assumption that life is defined to a significant degree by the buying and owning of material goods. Consumerism has been a tendency among Americans since the postwar economic boom of the 1950s. By the 1980s, it had become a dominant feature in much of the West. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expansion of global markets has exported consumerism to most nations, including some that remain politically totalitarian (e.g. China).

(4) Why is the world so messed up?

One of the most important problems with the world is that people don't have everything they need to flourish. There are many different reasons why people's needs are not met.

(5) Can things ever get better?

The solution to our problem is increased access to material goods. For some people, this means basic necessities like food, clothing, and housing. For others, this means healthy food, better clothing, and more reliable housing. For many, this means modern conveniences—the more technologically advanced, the better. Wherever your starting point in terms of needs and wants, the direction is the same: greater accumulation and consumption.

(6) What is the good life?

The good life is largely defined by material prosperity—however that is conceived. For the poor, it might be middle class financial stability. For the middle class, it

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Expressive individualism is primarily concerned with self-expression, self-discovery, and personal autonomy. We each craft our own unique identities based upon our deeply held beliefs, desires, and values. The seeds of expressive individualism go back to the Enlightenment, but it's more recent roots are found in existentialism and postmodernism. It often overlaps with consumerism. Another major influence is the widespread prevalence of therapeutic and behaviorist assumptions of modern psychology. Expressive individualism has become an important part of the baseline view of personal identity for most people in the Western world, and thus has an outsized influence on anthropology.

Too many people aren't able to be who they really are. This might be due to social convention. It might be due to some form of oppressive injustice. It might be due to bad choices some people make. It might be due to a lack of access to the means to fully realize your sense of personal identity. Whatever the cause(s), the outcome is the same: people aren't able to be who they know they really are deep down. Their identity is being squelched, perhaps coercively.

The solution to our problem is removing obstacles to personal freedom of expression as a matter of social justice. Nobody should feel like they are trapped in an identity not of their choosing. Nobody should be defined by external authorities that they do not wish to acknowledge. As many people as possible should have the ability to decide who they want to be and how they want to be known. This should be a basic human right.

The good life is being your authentic self, so long as it doesn't do any harm to someone else. If your authentic self is a woman, you should not allow your male genitalia or societal conventions about gender to define you as a man. If your authentic self loves to collect various types of guns and ammunition, no progressive politician should have the power to create any obstacles to your Second

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Tribalism is in some ways the communal form of expressive individualism. Humans are drawn to community, and we naturally gravitate toward others with whom we share a common identity. Some of our tribes are chosen for us: our family, our schools as children and adolescents, our state and nation of birth and upbringing, etc. To varying degrees, we choose other tribes: religious affiliations, hobbies, political parties, occupations, fandoms. Tribalism is when our identity is defined to a large degree by our tribe, and our tribal loyalty significantly influences other parts of our lives. In more theological terms, tribalism is making an idol out of one's tribe and resenting other tribes. Tribalism expresses itself in many ways, ranging from fanatical fandom of your favorite team, to nationalism, to racism, to uncritical loyalty to a union, to identity politics.

The problem is really that your tribe is not given the place it deserves in the world, or one or more less-deserving tribes are elevated. The wrong sort of people seem to be winning, however that is understood.

The solution is to be right the wrong. For the nationalist, it means elevating the status of your nation at the expense of all others, because they are lesser nations. For the white supremacist, it means ordering society so that white people are always at the top, where they belong, and keeping ethnic and racial minorities in their place. For the critical race theorist, it means eliminating all influence of whiteness because of its inherently oppressive tendencies. For the LGBTQ activist, it means pursuing a society where all people celebrate every form of sexual identity. For the tribal Republican, it means defeating every Democratic politician or Democratic policy proposal because of the inherent moral inferiority of Democrats. For the tribal secularist, it means eliminating the influence of religious truth claims from society.

The good life is the flourishing of your tribe, often at the expense of other tribes that are seen as being in competition. You want to be part of the winning team.

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