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AMCL PUBLIC Lecture

# modern identity in crisis

‘I believe that with the loss of God, [humans] lost a kind of absolute and universal system of coordinates, to which they could always relate everything, chiefly [themselves].’ (Vaclav, Havel)

## What happens when God’s choice of Jesus confronts the Choosing Self?

### The Modern identity is like a syndrome: ‘a group of signs and symptoms that occur together and characterize a particular abnormality or condition.’ (Webster)

# The Modern Self as a ‘Choosing Self.’

The Choosing Self has three main clusters of symptoms and signs:

## The Choosing Self is Romantic

### “The world needs to be romanticized. So you can find the original meaning again. Romanticizing is nothing but a qualitative potentiation. The lower self is identified with a better self in this operation. (...) By giving the common a high meaning, the ordinary a mysterious reputation, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an infinite appearance, I romanticize it. " (The German Poet known as Novalis)

### Beginning Anew…*viva la revolution*!

#### Between the middle of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries, Europe changed so rapidly and radically that one can reasonably speak of a watershed in world history. Those who lived through it were constantly using the word revolution to express their awareness that they were living in exciting times as in “the American revolution,” “the French revolution,” or “the Industrial revolution.” To these historians have added several others, notably “the agrarian revolution,” the commercial revolution,” “the communications revolution,” and the “consumer revolution.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

#### Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) on history and traditions.

### Self-determination through self-actualisation

#### The Genius

##### What for the most part, mean we by Genius, but the power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end? A Genius differs from a good Understanding, as a magician from a good Architect; That raises his structure by means invisible; This by the skilful use of common tools. Hence Genius has ever been supposed to partake of something Divine.[[2]](#footnote-2)

##### Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the cult of genius

###### Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive ability of the artist, itself belongs to nature, we can also express it thus: genius is the inborn mental trait (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.[[3]](#footnote-3)

#### Meine Bildung as the foundation for public education

##### Bildung was the culture of an emerging group that did not conceive of itself as bourgeois so much as it thought of itself as cultivated, learned, and most importantly of all, self-directing…a man or woman of Bildung was not merely learned, but was also a person of good taste, who had an overall educated grasp of the world around him or her and was thus capable of ‘self-direction’ that was at odds with the prevailing pressure for conformity.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### Art & Irony

#### Through aesthetic experience, [the Romantics] believed, we perceive the infinite in the finite, the super-sensible in the sensible, the absolute in its appearances. Since art alone has the power to fathom the absolute, it is superior to philosophy, which now becomes the mere handmaiden of art.[[5]](#footnote-5)

#### Knowledge from Natural Reason vs Artistic Intuition

##### Kant vs Schelling

#### The individual learner as a work of art…

#### Truth through aesthetic judgements

##### Mimetic or Poietic judgements?

#### Sex, drugs and the artistic soul!

### The Living Force of Things

##### ‘Spinoza rationalises religion for the Romantics because by making God and nature the same thing, science is divinised and religion becomes scientific – faith and reason no longer need be in conflict.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

### Returning to the Everyday

### Romanticism, Expressivism or Authenticity

#### [By authenticity] I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own., as against the surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.[[7]](#footnote-7)

## The Choosing Self is Capitalist

### Adam Smith, Scottish Economist (1723-1790)

#### ‘It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love.’ (The Wealth of Nations, 1776)

#### More than mere selfishness?

#### ‘Instead of asking, “Does Capitalism work?” We ought to ask, “What work does it do?” This is the case because capitalism’s moral problems do not reside merely in its failure to work but in the kind of work it does when it works, where it succeeds.’[[8]](#footnote-8)

#### ‘…freedom is defined negatively, that is, as freedom from the interference of others..’

### The Choosing Self as Consumer

##### Freedom of choice and the common Good

##### Spinoza, Bernays and the manufacture of desire

###### The selling power of hidden desires, emotion and images

###### No matter how sophisticated, how cynical the public may become about publicity methods, it must respond to the basic appeals, because it will always need food, crave amusement, long for beauty, respond to leadership (Bernays, 2005 [1928], p. 168).

### The Choosing Self as Commodity

#### Affluenza and buying an identity

#### Social Media and curating a self-image

## The Choosing Self is Suspicious

### From Skepticism to Suspicion

#### The Masters

### Karl Marx 1818-1883

#### Suspicion towards history

### Friedrich Nietzsche 1844-1900

#### Suspicion towards morality

### Sigmund Freud 1856-1939

#### Suspicion towards personal history

# God’s Choice of Jesus as image and firstborn

The gospel of Christ Jesus the Lord announces a different narrative for the modern identity, one where all things are held together, in heaven and on earth, in the Father’s choice of Jesus before us, and yet for us.

## God’s chosen saviour and God with us.

### In His resurrection, all things begin anew

#### The history of the world is His-Story

### His self-determination was through self-sacrifice

### The resurrected Jesus is the Living Lord of the Spirit

### The King for the everyday giving the gift of self.

### He is the head of a body constituted in the Spirit.

## In Him All Things Hold Together

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1. Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*, *Modern Library Chronicles* (New York: Modern Library, 2012), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Edward Young cited in ibid., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From Kant’s Critique of Judgement cited in Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: Uinversity of Chicago Press, 2002), 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Peter Watson, *The German Genius* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Fredrick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Uni Press, 2003), 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MT: Harvard University Press, 2007), 475. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Daniel M. (Jr) Bell, *The Economy of Desire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)