



Research Article

How Secular Reason Undermines Human Dignity and Values in the West: The Christian Path to Restore Humanity

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Abstract

This article examines the gradual displacement of the Christian doctrine of the imago Dei as the primary ground of human dignity in Western intellectual history. From the seventeenth century onward, successive philosophical movements privileged autonomous reason, empirical sensation, or historical process over divine revelation as the source of epistemological and moral authority. The analysis proceeds chronologically, drawing primarily (though not exclusively) on the historical surveys of John M. Frame (2015) and W. Andrew Hofferger (2007), while noting significant primary texts. The cumulative effect was the removal of a transcendent anchor for objective human value, resulting in various forms of relativism and consequentialist ethics. The article concludes by outlining a constructive approach by which confessional communities may re-articulate the intellectual and institutional resources of Christian anthropology in societies that once held human beings with dignity.

Keywords

Relativism, Empiricism, Idealism, Materialism, Existentialism, Post-structuralism

1. Introduction

Western conceptions of human dignity have long rested on the theological conviction that human beings bear the image of God (Gen 1: 26–27). From the patristic era through the medieval period, this doctrine provided the metaphysical foundation for moral ontology, natural law, and the earliest articulations of human rights. Beginning in the early modern period, however, a series of philosophical transformations relocated ultimate authority from divine revelation to human reason, sensory experience, or historical development. This study traces that trajectory and contends that detaching the concept of dignity from its transcendent grounding has rendered many modern and postmodern accounts conceptually unstable, even when they continue to employ the rhetoric of “inherent worth.”

The analysis examines how rationalism, empiricism, idealism, materialism, existentialism, and post-structuralism collectively displaced the Christian moral vision described by Frame and Hofferger. In place of a theologically rooted anthropology, these intellectual movements elevated human autonomy and, in various forms, endorsed moral relativism, developments that, the essay argues, ultimately undermine robust commitments to human dignity, truth, and neighbor-love. While acknowledging the genuine intellectual contributions of major Western philosophers, the paper maintains that the cumulative effect of their systems has been to produce a civilization in spiritual and moral crisis. It concludes by suggesting that a recovery of the Christian tradition’s transcendent grounding for human worth of-

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fers a coherent path forward for affirming human life, reestablishing moral clarity, and sustaining the pursuit of ultimate truth.

1.1. Definition of Terms

It is essential to define several philosophical terms that recur across this essay in almost every section. Terms such as *rationalism*, *empiricism*, *idealism*, *materialism*, *existentialism*, and *post-structuralism*. These concepts, each representing a distinct lens through which to understand reality, knowledge, and human existence, form the intellectual scaffolding of the discussion and merit clear exposition at the outset. Let us begin with Rationalism.

Rationalism is the epistemic theory that *reason*, rather than *sensory experience*, is the primary and most superior source of certain knowledge. Rationalists argue that some *truths*, especially in logic and mathematics, are innate or can be deduced *a priori* (independent of experience). They are often skeptical of the reliability of the senses, which can be deceptive, and posit that the fundamental structure of reality is accessible through intellectual intuition and deductive reasoning [5].

Empiricism is the epistemological theory that all knowledge originates from sensory experience. It rejects the notion of innate ideas, arguing that the mind at birth is a *tabula rasa* (a "blank slate"). Knowledge is built *a posteriori* (through experience) via processes of observation, experimentation, and induction. For empiricists, a claim is only meaningful if it can be traced back to or verified by empirical evidence [18]. Now that we understand Rationalism and Empiricism, let us move on to the next philosophical term: Idealism. In metaphysics, idealism is the view that reality is fundamentally mental or immaterial. It asserts that the physical, material world is either a manifestation of the mind or is entirely dependent upon it. Idealism often contends that the objects of perception are ideas in the mind of the perceiver or in a universal mind (such as God), and that matter, as an independent substance, does not exist [2]. Going further, to Materialism;

Materialism is the *metaphysical position* that everything that *exists* is *physical* or is dependent upon a physical substrate. It holds that *matter is the fundamental substance of nature*, and all *phenomena*, including mental states and consciousness, are the result of material interactions. In contemporary philosophy, this view is often expressed as *physicalism*, which identifies reality with what is described by physics [13]. Having understood this, the next philosophical term will be:

Existentialism is a philosophical and cultural movement that emphasizes individual *existence*, *freedom*, and *choice*. It is centered on the belief that humans define their own meaning in a world that initially lacks inherent purpose or value. Key themes include the experience of anguish and authenticity in the face of radical freedom, the confrontation with nothingness, and the emphasis on subjective, lived experience over abstract rationalism [25]. Lastly, let us look at the term *post-structuralism*. This is a late 20th-century intellectual movement that emerged as a critical response to the structuralist

claim that human culture and language could be understood through *stable, universal structures*. Post-structuralists argue that *all systems of meaning are unstable, fluid, and inherently shaped by power relations*. They deconstruct binary oppositions such as *speech or writing, male, or female*, to show how they are not natural but constructed, and they emphasize the endless deferral of meaning in language [6].

1.2. Revisiting Bygone Eras

Gazing back upon the rich expanse of Western history, we discern a lineage of men and women whose hearts blazed with fervent devotion to Christ, driven by their innermost yearning to create a harmonious and radiant nation for their descendants. Their love for the Divine and their fellow human beings is seen clearly, casting no shadow of doubt. From the nascent dawn of the Middle Ages to the luminous edge of the Enlightenment, Christianity served as the unyielding foundation of Western identity, a sacred pillar that instilled the soul of a civilization with purpose and unity.

The Church provided a moral framework that shaped not only personal ethics but also law, education, art, and governance. The concept of human dignity, so central to Western political thought, arose directly from the Christian belief that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27). Medieval institutions, such as hospitals and universities, were founded by the Church in response to Christ's command to love one's neighbor [4].

In reflecting on history, we glimpse an era when Western society cherished enduring values. Marriage was revered as a sacred bond, and families flourished with love, joy, peace, and mutual care. Men and women embraced their gender and identity with pride, rooted in a clear sense of purpose. Suicide rates were remarkably low, and reliance on drugs for anxiety was virtually unknown. Abortion was not dismissed as merely "removing clumps of cells"; rather, each pregnancy was honored as a human life bearing the divine image. Substance abuse was rare, and gender dysphoria was not a recognized concept. Elders, regardless of wealth, were respected by youth and children alike. Men and women carried their natural assigned (male/female) gender identity with dignity, grounded in their heritage and genealogy, rejecting notions of descent from apes, *Homo erectus*, or *Homo sapiens* in favor of a belief in purposeful creation. People acknowledged their Creator, free from confusion about their origins or the idea of arising by random chance. Though modern voices may claim superior wisdom, they often lack the common sense to recognize that nothing cannot produce anything, too selfish to start worshipping themselves. Such was the life of Western people in that bygone age. The next section of this essay examines how the Western world became deeply intertwined with *rationalism*, *empiricism*, *idealism*, *materialism*, *existentialism*, and *post-structuralism*, and how these philosophical frameworks collectively contributed to the downfall of morality, virtue, and human dignity in the West.

2. How Did the West Get Here

Western modernity emerged through a gradual departure from the integrative Christian worldview prevalent from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, which unified reason (illuminated by revelation), morality (grounded in divine law), and cosmology (a rational order created by a rational God). This shift, driven by philosophical redefinitions of truth, knowledge, and ethics independent of divine authority, constituted a cultural apostasy.

The Renaissance bridged medieval faith and modern reason by reviving classical learning and emphasizing human potential, paving the way for the Reformation and Enlightenment while fostering anthropocentrism and secular tendencies despite its non-antagonistic stance toward Christianity. By the twentieth century, atheism and materialism dominated public institutions, displacing religious influence in morality, education, and culture, a process viewed alternately as liberation or a crisis of meaning that spurred existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy amid fragmentation, even as Christian thought engaged modernity.

Atheism and secularism, once peripheral, became mainstream as purportedly rational alternatives to faith, transforming Western belief, governance, and ethics. Medieval theology's theocentric focus tempered nascent rationalist and secular impulses in the Renaissance and Enlightenment; as Hoffecker notes, it formed a "dynamic, integrative enterprise" reconciling faith and reason while preserving classical learning and shaping ethical and cultural life [6]. The Reformation and scientific revolution fractured scholastic consensus, redirecting the quest for certainty from revelation to autonomous reason and accelerating secularization.

Frame describes this as "a revolt against traditional wisdom," entailing departure from the biblical "fear of the Lord" as the foundation of knowledge [6]. Hoffecker underscores medieval theology's vitality in seeking "to reconcile faith and reason" within a comprehensive Christian framework [12].

2.1. Early Modern/Enlightenment Era (17th–18th Centuries)

René Descartes (1596–1650), heralded as the father of modern philosophy, shifted epistemology from theocentric to anthropocentric foundations. In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), his *cogito ergo sum* located certainty in self-conscious thought rather than divine revelation [1]. Though a professed Catholic aiming to reconcile faith and reason, his methodological doubt suspending belief in external authorities until validated by the individual intellect inadvertently eroded theological primacy. As Étienne Gilson observes, Descartes modeled metaphysics on mathematics, decreeing "a priori, that the method of one of the sciences of reality was valid for the whole of reality" [10]. Subsequent thinkers, from Spinoza to Kant, would extend this human-centered approach, rendering God peripheral to philosophical inquiry. Thus, Descartes'

legacy, while not atheistic, sowed seeds of secularism that later philosophies would harvest. Building on Descartes' rationalism, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) radicalized this trajectory. In *Ethics* (1677), he advanced pantheism, identifying God with Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) and rejecting a personal, transcendent Creator, miracles, revelation, and personal immortality. His naturalistic monism subsumed theology under deterministic metaphysics, dissolving divine command ethics and anticipating modern atheism; as Nadler notes, Spinoza stripped God of personality and moral authority [26]. This naturalistic monism effectively dissolved the distinction between God and creation, eliminating the foundation for divine command morality. By equating God with nature, Spinoza transformed theology into metaphysics, shifting worship from moral obedience to rational contemplation. His ideas anticipated modern atheism by stripping God of personality and moral authority.

David Hume (1711–1776), the empiricist skeptic, undermined rational supports for theism. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, Sect. X), he argued that "a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature," rendering belief in them irrational given uniform experience. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), he confined knowledge to sensory impressions and their faint copies (ideas), stating that "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" [15]. Metaphysical and theological claims thus became speculative.

Hume's radical empiricism led to philosophical skepticism: if all knowledge depends on sensory experience, then religious truths, which transcend the senses, cannot be known. Hume's ideas deeply influenced later philosophers like Kant and Nietzsche; his influence extends to the logical positivists of the twentieth century. In effect, he helped establish epistemological doubt as the new intellectual virtue of the modern age.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) sought to rescue reason and morality from Human skepticism, yet further secularized both. In *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), he confined theoretical knowledge to phenomena (appearances shaped by sensibility and understanding), rendering the noumenal realm, including God, cognitively inaccessible. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), he recast religion as moral necessity: Christianity reduced to ethical autonomy via the categorical imperative, with God a postulate of practical reason rather than revealed reality (Greene ed., 55–60). Kant thus preserved morality while severing its theological roots, facilitating secular humanism. [16].

2.2. 19th Century: Materialism, Evolution, and Nihilism

Ludwig Feuerbach lived from 1804 to 1872. Feuerbach extended Kant's autonomy into atheism. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), he argued that *God is merely the projection of humanity's idealized nature*. Religion, therefore, is humanity worshipping itself [7]. His thought influenced both

Marx and Freud, transforming apostasy from skepticism into philosophical anthropology [11].

Charles Darwin (1809–1882). The thinker who confused most of the West into dehumanizing human origins from a transcendent creator, “beautifully made in his own image,” to mere apes, transformed over millions of years. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) provided scientific legitimacy to a godless cosmology [1]. Though Darwin himself hesitated to deny God, his theory’s cultural reception replaced creation with evolution as the narrative of human origins. Though he could not prove abiogenesis and cannot answer many questions, many embrace his theory over the biblical account of humanity’s origins from Adam and a sovereign Creator. His ideas appeal to those reluctant to confront their moral failings, as denying a Creator silences the conscience, leaving humanity adrift without purpose or ultimate meaning. Moving to Karl Marx (1818–1883): Marx’s philosophy turned atheism into a social and political doctrine. Deeply influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx viewed religion as an ideological tool used by the ruling classes to maintain economic oppression. In his famous critique, “religion is the opium of the people,” he claimed that faith dulled human awareness of real material suffering [20]. Karl Marx redefined salvation as socio-economic revolution, rejecting any spiritual dimension. His materialist conception of history reduced human existence to class struggle and economic forces, excising God and the soul from historical processes and transforming atheism into a revolutionary ideology. Twentieth-century Marxist regimes, such as the Soviet Union and Maoist China, institutionalized state atheism and suppressed religious understanding of human dignity and value.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): No philosopher captured the spiritual condition of modern unbelief more powerfully than Friedrich Nietzsche. In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche declared, “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” [23]. This was not a statement of triumph but of tragedy. Nietzsche recognized that with the collapse of belief in God, the foundation of morality, meaning, and truth would also collapse. Nietzsche’s philosophy of the *Übermensch* (overman) and the *will to power* sought to replace Christian morality with a new value system created by the strong. He condemned Christianity as a “slave morality” that glorified weakness, humility, and pity virtues he considered life-denying [22]. However, Nietzsche’s proposed alternative self-creation and value invention leads to existential nihilism, where no objective moral order exists. Indeed, we can see the consequence of these views in our days today.

2.3. Early to Mid-20th Century: Psychoanalysis and Existentialism

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the father of psychoanalysis,

introduced a new dimension to atheistic thought: the concept of religion as a neurosis. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud argued that belief in God arises from humanity’s infantile need for a protective father figure [7]. Religion, he claimed, is an illusion born of psychological weakness and fear of the unknown. By reducing faith to a projection of unconscious desires, Freud undermined religion’s claim to truth. In his framework, religious experiences were not revelations from God but expressions of repressed instinct and anxiety. Freud’s theories, though later challenged, had a profound impact on twentieth-century intellectual culture, legitimizing atheism through psychology rather than philosophy. Moving forward, this essay examines the life and work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980). Sartre’s misleading work titled *Being and Nothingness* (1943) declared that “existence precedes essence” [24]. He further claimed that without God, humans must create meaning in an absurd universe [2].

2.4. Postmodern Era (Mid- to Late 20th Century)

Postmodernism, emerging in the mid-20th century, marked the West’s final turn from Christian truth to radical relativism. Building on Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist claim that humans create their own meaning, postmodern thinkers rejected all universal truths, including divine revelation. This era, spanning the 1960s to 1990s, saw philosophers like Michel Foucault (1926–1984) argue that knowledge, truth, and morality are constructs shaped by power dynamics within societal institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools. He posits that “truth” is not objective but produced by those in power to control behavior [8].

Michel Foucault undermined Christian human dignity rooted in the imago Dei by construing truth, knowledge, and morality as products of power relations rather than divine revelation or inherent worth; he contends that “truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint,” thereby reducing persons to objects of disciplinary control.

Jean-François Lyotard eroded the biblical view of human dignity by rejecting all metanarratives, including the Christian story of creation, fall, and redemption, in favor of fragmented “language games”; he defines postmodernity as “incredulity toward metanarratives,” denying any universal framework that affirms transcendent human purpose and value.

Jacques Derrida challenged the dignity conferred by divinely authored Scripture by asserting that texts possess no stable, objective meaning and that interpretation is inherently indeterminate; deconstruction thus dissolves the authority of God’s Word as the foundation for human identity and moral order, contradicting the Christian claim that humanity is sanctified by objective divine truth (John 17: 17).

Richard Rorty subverted Christian anthropology by treating

1 To get more information on the evolution of species, Charles Darwin, *On the*

Origin of Species (John Murray, London: 1859), is one of the good sources

truth and morality as contingent social constructs rather than correspondences to divine reality; he advocates “ironism,” whereby individuals privately invent meaning without universal claims, rendering human dignity a matter of cultural agreement rather than an absolute endowment from the Creator.

Collectively, these postmodern thinkers severed human dignity from its theological grounding in the *imago Dei*, relocating it in power dynamics, linguistic fragmentation, textual instability, or pragmatic consensus, thereby contributing to what Hoffecker describes as a profound “crisis of meaning” in Western culture [1, 3, 11, 23].

3. Consequences for Western Civilization

The trajectory of Western civilization, often celebrated for its unparalleled contributions to human flourishing through advancements in science, individual liberty, the rule of law, and technological mastery, presents a profound paradox when viewed through a philosophical lens. While it has liberated humanity from many ancient constraints and expanded the realm of possibility, it has simultaneously eroded foundational structures of meaning, continuity, and human relatedness, yielding a net deficit in existential and moral well-being.

From Descartes’s elevation of autonomous reason above divine revelation to postmodern relativism’s denial of absolute truth, Western philosophers pursuing knowledge apart from God progressively obscured the very truth they sought, fulfilling the apostolic warning: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (Romans 1: 25, ESV). Hume confined knowledge to the seen, disregarding the unseen eternal realities (2 Corinthians 4: 18, ESV); Kant grounded ethics in human autonomy rather than divine righteousness (Psalm 89: 14, ESV); Marx reduced life to material struggle, forgetting that “man shall not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4: 4, ESV); Nietzsche’s “God is dead” left humanity adrift without the One in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28, ESV); and postmodernism rejected Christ’s declaration that “your word is truth” (John 17: 17, ESV).

At the heart of this ambivalence lies the Enlightenment project itself: the elevation of autonomous reason and subjective freedom above tradition, metaphysical order, and communal obligation. This radical prioritization of the self-creating individual, while emancipating persons from dogmatic authority, has progressively dissolved the anthropological and ontological anchors that once oriented human life toward transcendence and interdependence. The result is a form of existential disorientation characteristic of late modernity.

Consider the proliferation of gender dysphoria and the broader phenomenon of gender confusion. These are not merely clinical or cultural anomalies but symptoms of a deeper metaphysical rupture: the severance of biological sex from ontological significance and the concomitant assertion that identity is an entirely malleable construct of individual will. When the givenness of the embodied self is rejected in

favor of radical self-fashioning, the human person risks alienation from the very conditions of embodied existence.

Similarly, the normalization of widespread abortion measured in hundreds of thousands annually in many Western nations reflects a utilitarian calculus that subordinates the intrinsic dignity of nascent human life to individual autonomy and convenience. This represents a tragic inversion of the classical Western commitment to the sanctity of life, reducing the most vulnerable members of the human community to disposable entities.

The pervasive crises of drug abuse, familial disintegration, evidenced by soaring divorce rates, and the erosion of filial piety and gratitude likewise attest to the disintegration of social bonds under the solvent of hyper-individualism. When duty, sacrifice, and intergenerational obligation are supplanted by the imperative of personal fulfillment, relationships become contingent and provisional, depriving individuals of the stable matrices of meaning that traditionally sustained psychological resilience and moral formation.

Thus, Western civilization, in its triumphant march toward emancipation, has unwittingly fostered a condition of profound anthropological poverty: a world rich in means yet increasingly impoverished in ends. The goods it has bestowed material abundance, technological prowess, and formal equality have come at the cost of a deepening crisis of meaning, belonging, and human wholeness. This paradox invites sustained philosophical reflection on whether a civilization can endure when its greatest achievements simultaneously undermine the very foundations of human flourishing.

Where those who deemed themselves wise “became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” (Romans 1: 22-23, ESV). Autonomous reason, materialism, and relativism eroded shared moral norms, producing emotivism in which ethical judgments express mere preference or power rather than eternal truth [19] and relativism that severs natural right from transcendent order [28]. As Hoffecker and Frame observe, this idolatrous substitution of reason, nature, or power for divine authority has left the West intellectually brilliant yet spiritually adrift, materially prosperous yet metaphysically impoverished having “sown the wind” of self-sufficient wisdom only to “reap the whirlwind” of moral confusion, existential despair, and cultural fragmentation (Hosea 8: 7, ESV; cf. Isaiah 5: 21, ESV). [6, 11].

How Biblical Anthropology and Eschatology Will Fertilize Modern Ideas of Dignity, Equality Before the Law, and Historical Progress

The Christian Scriptures provide the foundational theological and ethical framework for an exalted conception of human dignity, equality, and teleological purpose, which Western secular philosophies have progressively eroded despite drawing upon their conceptual resources. Central to this framework is the doctrine of the *imago Dei*: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1: 26-27, ESV). This affirmation

establishes every human person as intrinsically valuable, bearing irrevocable worth not contingent upon utility, achievement, status, or power. From these flows a radical ethic of love and respect: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22: 39; Leviticus 19: 18), extended even to enemies (Matthew 5: 44), and expressed in the Golden Rule: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7: 12). Such commands ground justice and mercy in divine reality “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8) while prohibiting partiality: “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10: 34; cf. Proverbs 22: 2).

Biblical anthropology further secures equality before God’s law and judgment: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3: 23), yet all are offered mercy without distinction (Romans 11: 32), culminating in the Pauline vision that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one” (Galatians 3: 28). This covenantal equality, reinforced by prophetic denunciations of injustice and by Christ’s identification with “the least of these” (Matthew 25: 40), furnished the moral imagination that later informed albeit in secularized form modern notions of universal rights and human worth during the Reformation and Enlightenment.

In contrast, post-Christian Western philosophies, while often inheriting these concepts, systematically severed them from their transcendent grounding, thereby undermining the very dignity, love, truth, and virtue they purport to advance. Autonomous rationalism (Descartes, Kant) relocated moral authority in the individual subject, displacing divine command; empiricism and materialism (Hume, Marx) reduced persons to sensory data or economic functions, eroding intrinsic worth; nihilism (Nietzsche) and postmodern relativism dissolved objective truth and moral order into power, preference, or discourse. The result is a culture that retains the language of rights and dignity yet lacks the metaphysical foundation to sustain it: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11: 3). As human value is detached from the Creator “You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you” (Isaiah 43: 4) it drifts toward contingency, utility, and eventual devaluation, manifest in widespread practices that treat life as disposable and love as contractual.

Christian ethics, by contrast, insists that authentic human flourishing requires reconnection to its divine source: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). Love, justice, and respect are not social constructs but imperatives rooted in the character of a personal, holy, and merciful God. Recovering this integrated biblical worldview does not demand theocratic imposition but faithful translation into public reason, cooperative institution-building, and humble witness (Matthew 5: 16). It calls believers to courageous nonconformity “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by

the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12: 2) while extending grace-filled invitation to all, affirming that true human dignity, equality, and love are most securely anchored when humanity humbly acknowledges its Creator rather than enthroning itself in His place ^[2, 3]

4. Recovering an Integrated Christian Worldview

Contemporary Christian scholarship, as articulated by Hoffecker and Frame, identifies the recovery of an integrated worldview uniting faith, reason, and culture under the lordship of Christ as the primary intellectual task for addressing modernity’s fragmentation ^[6, 11]. This entails healing the modern rupture between revelation and autonomous reason by reaffirming metaphysical realism and moral objectivity grounded in divine authority.

Central to this project is the rejection of autonomous human reason, which both scholars regard as the root of Western intellectual crisis. Hoffecker describes modernity’s trajectory as a “revolt against theism,” while Frame characterizes it as the pursuit of “autonomous reason,” a form of rebellion that inevitably culminates in relativism or despair ^[6, 11]. The prescribed remedy is intellectual repentance: acknowledging that all human reasoning is creaturely, dependent, and accountable to its Creator.

Recovery, therefore, requires reaffirming Scripture as the epistemological foundation of all knowledge. Frame insists that genuine philosophy cannot proceed from putative neutrality, as every worldview rests on ultimate presuppositions; only submission to biblical revelation provides a coherent basis for truth, morality, and meaning ^[6]. Hoffecker similarly contends that divine revelation constitutes a legitimate and indispensable source of knowledge, citing exemplars such as Barth and Lewis who engaged modern thought without compromising scriptural authority. ^[11]

This renewed epistemology necessitates the comprehensive integration of theology with philosophy and culture. Rather than confining faith to private piety, Hoffecker envisions a Christian worldview that informs every domain, science, politics, ethics, and the arts, harmonizing the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty within a theistic framework. Frame articulates this as “thinking as a Christian in every sphere of life,” uniting intellectual rigor, worship, ethical practice, and cultural engagement under Christ’s lordship ^[6, 11, 27].

Ultimately, the restoration of meaning and coherence in Western thought demands the recentering of Christ Himself as the locus of all knowledge and existence. Only a worldview anchored in the eternal person of Christ, rather than in the shifting constructs of human reason, can withstand the crises of subjectivity and decay that modernity presents. While the

2 Contemporary work on faith-based NGOs and public goods (scholarship in public theology and civil society studies).

3 Modern public theology essays advocating humble apologetics (e.g., recent writings by Wolfgang Huber).

Enlightenment advanced scientific inquiry and individual liberty through its attempt to synthesize faith and reason [9, 21], its elevation of autonomous intellect over divine revelation initiated the secular displacement that has left contemporary culture intellectually sophisticated yet spiritually alienated. Recovering an integrated Christian worldview thus offers not mere nostalgia but the sole coherent alternative to modernity's fragmentation, reestablishing the unity of truth, morality, and human flourishing under divine sovereignty.

Contemporary Secular Philosophers & Historians Who Acknowledge the Judeo-Christian Contribution to Human Rights and to Consequential Conceptions of Time

We begin with Tom Holland, who argues as a historian that Christian moral categories, such as *special concern for the weak*, *ideas of sacrificial service*, left a durable imprint on Western institutions and moral vocabulary that later became secularized [8]. Siedentop contends that the theological idea of the equality of souls before God and related Christian practices helped create the conceptual ground for the modern individual and liberal equality, a genealogy of liberalism that foregrounds Christian roots. Brague emphasizes how Christian metaphysics and the theological framing of personhood and time shaped European self-understanding. Brague often stresses Europe's indebtedness to Christian categories for its moral vocabulary [14].

5. A Realistic and Inclusive Framework for Reclaiming Christian Heritage in a Pluralistic World

The moral and spiritual fragmentation engendered by widespread atheism in the West necessitates a renewed engagement with the Christian intellectual and ethical tradition. Scholars such as C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Pope Benedict XVI have contended that Christianity alone supplies a coherent ontological grounding for objective morality and inviolable human dignity. This reclamation, while theocentric at its core, can proceed inclusively within pluralistic societies by translating biblical convictions into publicly accessible reason, fostering cooperative institutions, and embodying persuasive witness.

Such a framework acknowledges two principal challenges: first, the need to translate metaphysically robust claims e.g., creation in the *imago Dei* and eschatological hope into secular rights discourse without diluting their theological substance; second, the eschatological tension between other-worldly orientation and this-worldly justice, which incarnational and covenantal theologies resolve by rooting temporal commitments in divine purpose.

Practical Steps Toward This Recovery Include

1. Intellectual and educational renewal: Prioritize rigorous education in the Christian worldview encompassing its scriptural, historical, and philosophical contributions from early childhood through higher education. Recognizing that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1: 7, ESV)

reorients inquiry toward divine wisdom as the foundation of coherence and purpose (Jeremiah 9: 23–24; Ephesians 2: 10).

2. Ecclesial cultural re-engagement: Churches must cultivate intellectual depth, compassionate outreach, and faithful witness, heeding the promise that humble repentance and prayer invite divine healing (2 Chronicles 7: 14; Zechariah 1: 3) and abundant life (John 10: 10, ESV).

3. Restoration of the biblical family: Reaffirm marriage and parenthood as covenantal institutions essential for moral formation, countering the loneliness and demographic decline precipitated by decoupling sexuality from procreation and stable familial bonds.

4. Contextual proclamation of the Gospel: Articulate Christianity's relevance to contemporary crises, loneliness, despair, suicide, abortion, and existential meaninglessness, offering forgiveness, purpose, and eschatological hope.

5. Reaffirmation of faith as the ground of progress: Demonstrate that Christian theism, with its theocentric, relational, and historical consciousness, uniquely sustains freedom, reason, and human flourishing against relativism and license.

6. Personal and communal discipleship: Cultivate lives marked by daily prayer (1 Chronicles 16: 11), courageous boldness (Proverbs 28: 1), Spirit-led obedience even at great cost (Esther 4: 16; Daniel 3: 17–18), and sacrificial love (John 15: 13), guided continually by the Spirit of truth (John 16: 13). 10–13. Institutional and missional renewal: Strengthen local churches, families, classical schools, and ministries of mercy as visible embodiments of the Gospel; prioritize discipleship and uncompromised preaching across social strata; and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18–20) by forming communities whose thriving witness naturally commends the common good [12, 17].

6. Conclusion

The apostasy of the modern West stemmed not from malice but from misdirected brilliance, chasing knowledge apart from the Creator who declares, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14: 6, ESV). The secularisation of Western moral ontology has not eliminated the language of human dignity; it has rendered that language increasingly vulnerable to philosophical critique. A recovery of transcendent grounding is not politically practicable in the short term, nor is it democratically required. It is, however, intellectually available and institutionally feasible through the strategies outlined above. Whether such a recovery occurs will depend less on nostalgic lament or cultural conquest than on the patient, rigorous translation of Christian moral insights into forms that can be publicly assessed and, where warranted, appropriated by citizens of varied convictions.

Abbreviations

Matt

Matthew

ESV	English Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
C.S. Lewis	Clive Staples Lewis
e.g.	For Example
G. K. Chesterton	Gilbert Keith Chesterton

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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