

OPEN CHRISTIAN PRESS

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE AGE

*Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's
Captivity to the Spirit of the Age*

PART I

THE SPIRIT AND INTELLECTUAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE AGE

CHAPTER 2

The Ancient Rebellion and the Genealogy of Modernism

Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

Open Christian University | Center for Faith and Work
ORCID 0000-0001-8650-1444 | ssangwa@openchristian.education

Edited by Prof. Dr. Placide Mutabazi

First Open Christian Press edition, 2026

Open Christian Press, an Open Christian University imprint
books.openchristian.education

CHAPTER PUBLICATION METADATA

Abstract

This chapter traces the spiritual and intellectual genealogy of modernism from the primal revolt in Eden and the organised autonomy of Babel through the major philosophical, theological, political, psychological, and cultural developments that increasingly relocated final authority from God and His revelation to the human subject. It argues that modernism did not begin as a single eighteenth-century doctrine, nor did it arise inevitably from scientific discovery. It is better understood as a historically developing family of projects in which reason, sense experience, material history, political revolution, psychological desire, self-created meaning, language, power, and digital performance assume functions once ordered beneath the Creator. Through exegesis of Genesis 3 and 11, Psalm 2, Jeremiah 17, and 1 Corinthians 1, the chapter identifies the recurring grammar of rebellion: God is misrepresented, limits are recast as oppression, desire becomes evidence, judgment is denied, and autonomy is advertised as maturity. It then examines classical antecedents, Renaissance humanism, the Reformation's recovery of scriptural authority and its later misappropriation, the Scientific Revolution, rationalism, empiricism, the Enlightenment, secularisation, theological liberalism, Feuerbach, Marx, Darwinian naturalism, Nietzsche, Freud, existentialism, postmodernism, expressive individualism, and digital subjectivity. The chapter grants modernity's genuine achievements and the church's grave historical failures, while demonstrating that human accomplishment does not establish moral or theological autonomy. It concludes with a differentiated pastoral appeal, a biblical alternative centred in Christ crucified, and an urgent call to repentance, intellectual humility, holiness, and readiness for the Lord's return.

Keywords: genealogy of modernism; human autonomy; Enlightenment; secular humanism; expressive individualism; Tower of Babel; biblical worldview

Publication details

Book: *The Gospel According to the Age: Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age*

Chapter: Chapter 2: The Ancient Rebellion and the Genealogy of Modernism

Author: Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

Book editor: Prof. Dr. Placide Mutabazi

Publisher: Open Christian Press, an Open Christian University imprint

Edition: First edition

Publication year: 2026

Language: English

Suggested citation

Sangwa, S. (2026). The ancient rebellion and the genealogy of modernism. In P. Mutabazi (Ed.), *The Gospel According to the Age: Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age* (Chapter 2). Open Christian Press.

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Publisher: books.openchristian.education | editor@openchristian.education

The First Lecture Hall Was a Garden

Modern rebellion did not begin in a lecture hall. It began in a garden where the creature accepted the possibility that reality might be interpreted more truthfully apart from the Creator. Before there was a university faculty, a political manifesto, a scientific academy, a therapeutic industry, a digital platform, or a global institution, there was a question: "Did God really say?" (Genesis 3:1). That question was not an innocent request for textual clarification. It opened a rival court of appeal. God had spoken, but His Word was placed under review by desire, suspicion, and the promise of autonomous wisdom.

The history of modernism is therefore older than the word *modern*. Its intellectual forms are recent, but its spiritual architecture is ancient. The serpent did not initially ask humanity to deny God's existence. He offered a different account of God's character, of the boundary He had established, of the meaning of freedom, and of the consequences of disobedience. The first temptation was not crude atheism. It was revisionist theology. The Creator was recast as restrictive, His command as deprivation, desire as reliable moral testimony, and seizure of divine jurisdiction as enlightenment.

Chapter 1 established the controlling thesis of this book: the modern age increasingly functions as a rival gospel because it relocates final authority from God and His revelation to autonomous humanity. It identified the counterfeit's main doctrines, including autonomous reason, self-created identity, therapeutic salvation, political redemption, technological transcendence, and progress without providence. It also distinguished modernism as a worldview from modernisation as the development of tools, institutions, knowledge, and social capacities. The present chapter does not repeat that architecture. It asks how the transfer of authority acquired historical depth, philosophical vocabulary, institutional power, and psychological intimacy.

The answer cannot be reduced to a parade of villains. Intellectual history is not a chain in which one thinker pushes the next into unbelief. Philosophers often disagree sharply with one another. Movements contain internal conflicts. Ideas develop through inheritance, reaction, appropriation, unintended consequence, political struggle, economic change, religious failure, technological possibility, and genuine attempts to correct injustice. Some thinkers examined here defended belief in God. Others attacked Christianity directly. Some exposed weaknesses in previous systems without supplying a faithful alternative. Many perceived genuine problems that churches had ignored or helped create.

A genealogy therefore differs from a conspiracy narrative. It does not claim that a hidden committee designed modernity, that every philosopher consciously served a demonic programme, or that all later developments were inevitable. It traces recurring questions of authority and shows how different intellectual streams, sometimes mutually hostile, helped normalise the assumption that humanity may determine truth, morality, identity, and destiny without receiving them from God. It distinguishes deliberate rejection from sincere mistake, moral rebellion from intellectual limitation, spiritual deception from historical complexity, and legitimate discovery from philosophical overreach.

This distinction matters because falsehood often travels with partial truth. Rationalism honours coherence but can enthrone reason. Empiricism honours observation but can imprison knowledge within the measurable. Political revolution may expose exploitation but can relocate salvation to power. Psychology may illuminate trauma and hidden motives but can turn inward desire into a final revelation. Postmodern criticism may uncover concealed interests but leave no stable truth by which power itself can be judged. Digital platforms may connect people while converting the self into a continuous performance measured by other people's reactions.

The genealogy resembles a river system rather than a railway line. Tributaries begin in different places, cross different terrains, and sometimes flow against one another before entering a wider current. The common current is not identical doctrine but displaced authority. The throne is left vacant by revelation and occupied successively by the rational subject, the senses, history, class, instinct, authenticity, discourse, identity, or the platform-mediated self. The names change. The ancient invitation remains: become your own interpreter of good and evil.

The church must understand this history because ideas that once appeared in difficult books now arrive as ordinary instincts. Kant's call to intellectual maturity becomes the assumption that submission to revelation is childish. Feuerbach's projection theory becomes the casual claim that people invented God to satisfy emotional needs. Marx's critique of religion becomes the suspicion that doctrine mainly protects power. Freud's account of repression becomes the belief that moral restraint is psychologically damaging. Sartre's self-creation becomes the command to invent oneself. Foucault's analysis of power becomes the reflex that every truth claim is a strategy of control. Expressive individualism becomes the conviction that the deepest self is found within desire and that society owes that self recognition. The smartphone then places a portable Babel in the hand, allowing each person to construct a name, gather a crowd, curate a reality, and seek transcendence through visibility.

We are not studying dead philosophies. We are studying the air modern people breathe, including many who sing Christian songs while interpreting God through assumptions inherited from the age. The task is not to curse the air but to recognise it, test it, and learn again to breathe the truth.

What a Genealogy Can and Cannot Prove

A historically responsible genealogy must avoid three temptations. The first is presentism, which judges every past thinker by contemporary categories and ignores the problems he was trying to solve. The second is reductionism, which treats complex movements as disguises for one motive. The third is triumphalism, which imagines that Christians stood outside the errors under examination.

Premodern churches sometimes confused divine authority with clerical power, inherited custom, imperial policy, ethnic privilege, or philosophical convention. Some silenced honest questions rather than answering them. Some defended coercion, protected abuse, resisted correction, or invoked Scripture to preserve institutions that contradicted Scripture. Modern scepticism did not arise only because unbelievers loved darkness. It also gained credibility because

religious authorities sometimes behaved as though the light belonged to them rather than to Christ.

That confession does not concede that human failure invalidates revelation. It establishes the opposite. Precisely because pastors, councils, traditions, states, scholars, and reformers are fallible, all must remain accountable to the written Word. *Sola Scriptura* is not the enthronement of private opinion. It is the dethronement of every human authority that claims immunity from God's judgment. Individualism says, "My interpretation is final because it is mine." *Sola Scriptura* says, "Neither my interpretation nor yours is final; the God-breathed text judges us both, and we must labour humbly to understand it in context, in fellowship with the church, and under the whole counsel of God."

A genealogy also cannot prove guilt by association. The fact that a concept appears in an unbelieving system does not make every use of that concept sinful. Reason, evidence, freedom, dignity, conscience, rights, psychological care, political accountability, and technological skill may all serve neighbour-love. Christian discernment asks not merely where a term appeared but what it means, what authority it assumes, what ends it serves, and what fruits it bears.

Finally, a genealogy cannot substitute for exegesis. Historical explanation may show how an idea became plausible. It cannot decide whether the idea is true. Scripture remains the final authority. The historical journey that follows is therefore framed by five biblical scenes: Eden, Babel, the rebellion of nations in Psalm 2, the deceptive heart in Jeremiah 17, and the humiliation of worldly wisdom at the cross in 1 Corinthians 1. These passages do not provide a textbook of European philosophy. They reveal the spiritual grammar by which every culture, ancient or modern, may resist its Maker.

Eden: The Grammar of Autonomous Interpretation

Genesis 3:1-19 records more than the first act of disobedience. It reveals how rebellion persuades the mind before it captures the will. The serpent's strategy unfolds in a sequence that repeats throughout intellectual and cultural history.

First, he destabilises confidence in revelation: "Did God really say?" The question isolates the command from the character of the One who gave it. God had created abundantly, blessed humanity, provided food, fellowship, vocation, and marriage, and prohibited one tree. The serpent enlarges the prohibition until generosity disappears behind restriction. This is how deception often begins. It does not disprove God's goodness. It reframes the evidence so that obedience appears unreasonable.

Second, he distorts the command. "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" exaggerates the boundary. False interpretations frequently make biblical faith appear harsher than the text itself, then condemn the caricature. A command concerning one tree becomes hostility to all pleasure. Chastity becomes hatred of the body. Church discipline becomes hatred of sinners. Doctrinal exclusivity becomes hatred of neighbours. The distortion prepares moral revolt by making God appear morally suspect.

Third, the serpent denies judgment: "No! You will certainly not die" (Genesis 3:4). The denial is not merely about physical death. It challenges the moral

structure of creation. If judgment can be dismissed, the command becomes advice, sin becomes experimentation, and consequences become instruments of religious control. Much modern unbelief retains this move. Eternal judgment is treated as primitive, guilt as pathology, and divine wrath as incompatible with love. Once accountability is removed, desire can present itself as destiny.

Fourth, the serpent attributes a corrupt motive to God: "God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened" (*Genesis 3:5*). The Creator is portrayed as withholding maturity. The boundary is not protection but oppression. This inversion is decisive. Humanity does not merely reject a rule. It adopts an alternative theology in which God is threatened by human flourishing.

Fifth, desire becomes evidence. The woman sees that the tree is good for food, delightful to look at, and desirable for obtaining wisdom. Sensory attraction and promised self-expansion interpret reality. The fruit appears good because the meaning of God has already been altered. Desire is not simply present. It becomes a witness against revelation.

Sixth, autonomy is offered as enlightenment: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Adam and Eve were already made in God's image and called to exercise delegated dominion. The temptation was not to become more truly human but to seize a divine prerogative, the authority to determine moral reality independently. The Hebrew expression concerning knowing good and evil carries the weight of judgment and moral discernment. The creature seeks not merely information but jurisdiction.

Seventh, the harvest is concealed. Their eyes are opened, but not into sovereign freedom. Shame enters embodiment. Hiding enters worship. Blame enters marriage. Fear enters fellowship with God. Toil enters vocation. Pain enters fruitfulness. Death enters history. The counterfeit gospel advertises the first taste and hides the final field.

This pattern governs more than explicit atheism. It appears whenever revelation is placed beneath another final authority. "Did God really say?" becomes: Is the text compatible with contemporary moral intuition? Does it satisfy present psychological expectations? Can it be verified by the methods of natural science? Does it advance the approved political programme? Does it affirm my inward identity? Will it preserve institutional reputation? The question may be asked with scholarly courtesy, pastoral concern, or therapeutic warmth. Its spiritual force depends on which authority is permitted the last word.

The author's earlier work has repeatedly returned to this grammar. *When the Serpent Learns to Whisper Wellness* argues that New Age spirituality relocates authority from God's Word to the awakened self, replacing repentance with alignment and the cross with technique (Sangwa, 2026c). *When the Mirror Becomes a Throne* distinguishes lawful self-knowledge from the sovereignty of self in which the person becomes author, judge, and saviour (Sangwa, 2026b). The earlier article on rationalism and empiricism similarly warns that reason and observation are valuable but cannot become sole arbiters of spiritual truth (Sangwa, 2024b). These are not separate anxieties. They are later forms of the original interpretive revolt.

The garden is therefore the first classroom of autonomy. Its curriculum teaches that God's Word is questionable, His limits are oppressive, desire is

trustworthy, judgment is exaggerated, and self-rule is maturity. Every generation changes the illustrations. The lesson remains.

Babel: Autonomy Translated into Architecture

If Eden displays autonomy in the heart, [Genesis 11:1-9](#) displays autonomy organised into civilisation. The builders possess common language, technical knowledge, collective purpose, and political imagination. None of these capacities is evil in itself. Human cooperation, architecture, urban planning, communication, and cultural achievement belong to the possibilities of image-bearing dominion. The sin lies in the direction of the project.

The people settle in the land of Shinar despite the post-flood command to multiply and fill the earth ([Genesis 9:1](#)). They learn to manufacture bricks and use asphalt for mortar. Technological innovation increases the scale of collective intention. They say, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth" ([Genesis 11:4](#)). The project combines concentration, security, fame, and resistance to divine commission.

The tower is often imagined merely as a tall structure, but the text's moral centre lies in the people's speech. "Let us" replaces receptive obedience with self-authorised construction. "For ourselves" defines the beneficiary. "A name for ourselves" reveals the liturgy. "Otherwise, we will be scattered" names the fear. Babel is not cooperation as such. It is unity ordered toward self-preservation and self-exaltation apart from God.

Humanity seeks a name instead of receiving one. In the next chapter of [Genesis](#), God calls Abram and promises, "I will make your name great" ([Genesis 12:2](#)). The contrast is profound. Babel manufactures significance through scale. Abraham receives significance through promise and obedience. Babel builds upward to secure itself. Abraham leaves security because God has spoken. Babel gathers the many around a human project. Through Abraham, God intends to bless all families of the earth.

The Lord's descent in [Genesis 11:5](#) carries divine irony. The tower imagined to reach heaven remains so small that God "comes down" to inspect it. Human grandeur looks different from above. The Lord's concern that "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" does not imply fear that creatures might rival His omnipotence. It recognises the destructive potential of concentrated fallen capacity. Technical power does not purify intention. Unity can multiply good, but it can also remove restraints on collective evil.

The confusion of languages is therefore judgment and mercy. It frustrates rebellion, limits centralised power, and disperses humanity according to God's purpose. Scripture does not portray diversity as an accident to be erased by one human empire. At Pentecost, the Spirit does not abolish languages into a single imperial tongue. He enables the mighty acts of God to be heard across them ([Acts 2:5-11](#)). The gospel creates unity in Christ without demanding the death of creaturely distinction.

This is why political and civilisational unity is morally ambiguous. Peaceful cooperation can serve justice, trade, health, learning, disaster response, and

protection of the vulnerable. Christians should not condemn international coordination merely because it crosses borders. Yet unity is not self-authenticating. The same word can describe the communion of saints or the concentration of rebellious power. The question is always unity under whom, according to which truth, for what end, with what limits, and accountable to what judgment.

The author's earlier parabolic treatment, *When Babel Becomes Beautiful*, warned that modern culture can market confusion as harmony and dissolve holy distinctions under the language of blend (Sangwa, 2025). That exhortation should not be misread as hostility to cultural exchange or the dignity of nations. The deeper issue is syncretism and self-exaltation. Babel becomes beautiful whenever the human project is decorated so persuasively that rebellion appears compassionate, sophisticated, inclusive, or inevitable.

Modern Babel rarely uses fired brick alone. It builds with data, credentials, markets, bureaucracies, satellites, algorithms, brands, therapeutic vocabularies, and political ideals. Its tower may be a state, a university, a corporation, a ministry empire, a global movement, or an individual profile. The ancient declaration "let us make a name" now appears in personal branding, national greatness, institutional rankings, celebrity ministry, and quantified influence. Sangwa's *The Velvet Ladder* rightly identifies the hunger for titles and recognition as a baptised form of Babel when public significance competes with hidden obedience (Sangwa, 2026e).

The smartphone can become Babel carried in the pocket. It allows a person to gather followers, construct an image, measure attention, and inhabit a personalised world. Yet the device is not the sin. It may distribute Scripture, sustain relationships, enable education, and serve the gospel. The Babel principle appears when capability, visibility, and control become ends in themselves, when the platform gives the self a tower from which to seek a name.

Rebellion Presented as Liberation

Psalms 2:1-6 interprets collective resistance to God as political and moral emancipation. The nations rage, rulers conspire against the Lord and His Anointed, and they say, "Let's tear off their chains and throw their ropes off of us." Divine rule is experienced as bondage. The language is striking because the Lord's kingship is not oppressive. The One enthroned in heaven is the Creator who gives life, order, justice, and blessing. Yet rebellion must redescribe righteous authority as captivity in order to justify revolt.

This rhetorical reversal remains central to modern moral change. A created boundary is renamed a chain. Obedience becomes immaturity. Chastity becomes repression. Creaturely dependence becomes humiliation. Doctrinal exclusivity becomes violence. Parental authority becomes domination. Pastoral correction becomes psychological harm. National sovereignty becomes an obstacle to global management, or, in the opposite idolatry, national power becomes the only defence against evil. The content varies, but liberation language often hides a dispute over which authority may command.

Psalm 2 also relativises human power. The One enthroned in heaven laughs, not because suffering is amusing, but because creaturely rebellion cannot dethrone Him. The kings of the earth can persecute, legislate, propagandise, educate, censor, and mobilise. They cannot annul God's decree. Modern systems can rename sin, but they cannot change judgment. They can reward conformity, but they cannot grant eternal life. They can gather a majority, but they cannot vote Christ out of His kingdom.

The church must hear this without turning it into partisan triumphalism. The psalm judges progressive and conservative rebellion alike. A revolutionary movement may seek freedom from God's moral order. A nationalist movement may use God's name to sanctify pride, exclusion, violence, or the worship of power. The issue is not whether a movement speaks the vocabulary of liberation or tradition. It is whether it bows to the Son.

The Heart Is Not an Infallible Oracle

Jeremiah 17:5-10 confronts two modern dogmas at once: trust in autonomous humanity and trust in inward authenticity. "Cursed is the person who trusts in mankind. He makes human flesh his strength, and his heart turns from the Lord." The prophet does not forbid ordinary reliance on human skill, covenant, testimony, or community. Scripture commands mutual dependence and honours wise counsel. The curse falls on ultimate trust, on making human power the root from which life is expected.

The passage then turns inward: "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable - who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). In contemporary culture, sincerity often functions as proof. A desire is treated as true because it is deep, persistent, painful, or central to self-understanding. The biblical doctrine of the heart refuses both cynicism and naivety. The heart contains real longing, grief, love, memory, and moral awareness. It is also fallen, divided, self-protective, and capable of baptising appetite as identity.

Authenticity cannot therefore mean unfiltered obedience to inward experience. A compass may be sincerely misaligned. The traveller's intensity does not correct its direction. The Lord searches the heart and tests the mind because neither private certainty nor public approval can render the self innocent.

This does not justify abusive authority. A pastor, parent, state, or tradition may also be wrong. The alternative to the deceptive heart is not the infallible institution. It is the God who knows the heart, reveals truth, judges impartially, and gives a new heart through covenant grace (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The Cross and the Humiliation of Autonomous Wisdom

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 is sometimes misused to praise ignorance. The apostle does not oppose reasoning. He reasons intensely, cites evidence, interprets Scripture, debates opponents, and commands believers to mature in understanding. He opposes wisdom organised around human boasting and unwilling to receive God's saving act in the crucified Christ.

Corinth admired status, rhetoric, patronage, and social distinction. The message of a crucified Messiah contradicted Jewish expectations of signs and Greek expectations of wisdom. Crucifixion signified shame and weakness. Yet God chose what the world called foolish to expose the spiritual blindness of its criteria. The cross does not merely add religious information to an existing system of wisdom. It judges the system's account of power, glory, righteousness, and salvation.

Autonomous wisdom asks God to appear before a tribunal whose standards have been established without Him. The cross reverses the courtroom. The question is not whether God can be acquitted by the age, but whether the age will repent before the crucified and risen Lord. "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age?" (1 Corinthians 1:20). The question does not deny intellectual vocation. It denies intellectual self-salvation.

The author has previously emphasised that rationalism, empiricism, academic prestige, and claims of enlightenment cannot by themselves lead humanity to saving knowledge of God (Sangwa, 2024a). That warning is strongest when paired with intellectual discipline rather than anti-intellectual suspicion. The Christian must study primary sources, test claims, welcome correction, and refuse false witness. Yet the scholar remains a creature. Reason is a lamp. It becomes destructive when it claims to be the sun.

The wisdom of the cross also prevents cultural nostalgia. No civilisation, denomination, ethnicity, political party, or philosophical tradition may boast before God. The same Word that exposes modern autonomy exposes ecclesiastical pride. If this chapter becomes ammunition for Christians to condemn philosophers while protecting greed, abuse, racism, sexual immorality, or authoritarian leadership inside the church, it has missed Paul's point. "The one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Ancient Tributaries: Reason, Relativism, Matter, and Secret Knowledge

The modern revolt did not emerge from an intellectual vacuum. Ancient Mediterranean cultures already contained rival accounts of knowledge, nature, virtue, pleasure, politics, and the divine. These traditions must be handled with care. Greek philosophy was not one system, and Christian theology did not merely baptise pagan thought. The apostles could recognise partial insight while rejecting idolatry. Paul quoted pagan poets in Athens but summoned their hearers to repent before the risen Judge (Acts 17:22–31).

The pre-Socratic search for the underlying principle of reality helped direct inquiry from mythic genealogy toward rational explanation. That shift could cultivate disciplined thought, but it could also encourage the assumption that reality is intelligible without reference to the Creator. Materialist lines associated with Democritus and later Epicurean and Lucretian traditions interpreted nature through atoms, motion, and natural causes, minimising providence and denying fear of divine judgment. Epicureanism did not simply teach vulgar indulgence. It sought tranquillity through modest pleasure, friendship, and freedom from fear.

Yet its practical peace depended upon a cosmos in which the gods did not judge human beings and death ended sensation (Epicurus, 1994; Lucretius, 2001). The structure is recognisably modern: salvation through correcting religious fear and accepting a self-contained nature.

Sophistic traditions raised difficult questions about rhetoric, convention, and power. Protagoras's famous statement that the human being is the measure of all things became an enduring symbol of relativism, although the historical meaning of the fragment remains debated. The deeper temptation is clear: measure moves from the Creator to the perceiving subject or the civic community. What appears just, true, or useful may then depend upon perspective, persuasion, or political success.

Stoicism offered a noble discipline of self-command, duty, courage, and cosmopolitan moral concern. Christians have sometimes recognised formal parallels with biblical endurance. Yet the Stoic ideal of inner self-sufficiency differs from dependence upon grace. The believer does not conquer suffering by making the self invulnerable. He entrusts himself to the Father, laments honestly, receives help from the body of Christ, and hopes in resurrection.

Plato's distinction between appearance and enduring reality challenged crude materialism and provided conceptual resources later used by Christian thinkers. Aristotle's realism, logic, ethics, and account of causality profoundly shaped medieval theology and science. These achievements should not be erased. Still, biblical faith differs at decisive points. Creation is not eternal matter formed by a lesser artisan, nor is salvation escape from embodied creaturehood. God is not merely the highest being within a hierarchy of being. He is the sovereign Creator who speaks all things into existence and will redeem embodied life.

Gnostic movements intensified a different form of autonomy by promising saving knowledge available to the enlightened. Matter was often treated as defective, the body as a prison, and salvation as awakening to concealed spiritual identity. The details varied considerably, but the pattern has survived: ordinary revelation is insufficient, the initiated possess deeper insight, and deliverance comes through knowledge that discloses a divine self hidden beneath embodied limitation. Contemporary claims of spiritual awakening, inner divinity, energy, ascension, and secret consciousness often wear new vocabulary while repeating old ambitions.

The point is not that modernity is simply ancient philosophy revived. The institutional conditions, scientific methods, political forms, technologies, and social imaginaries of the modern world are distinct. Yet the older tributaries reveal that autonomous reason, relativism, materialism, therapeutic tranquillity, cosmopolitan politics, and secret enlightenment are not inventions of recent centuries. They are recurrent attempts to answer the human condition without receiving God's diagnosis and cure.

Renaissance Humanism: Recovery, Dignity, and the Expanding Human Horizon

Renaissance humanism is frequently treated as the opening act of secular modernity. That account is too simple. Humanists recovered classical languages,

edited ancient texts, renewed rhetoric, expanded historical consciousness, and challenged corrupt scholastic habits. Many were devout Christians who believed better philology would serve Scripture and reform the church. Erasmus's Greek New Testament and concern for moral renewal cannot honestly be reduced to secular revolt. The humanist cry *ad fontes*, back to the sources, helped equip the Reformation's return to the biblical text.

At the same time, Renaissance culture enlarged confidence in human agency, artistic creativity, education, and self-fashioning. Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* famously imagined humanity as possessing an unusually open place in creation, capable of descending toward brutality or ascending toward the angelic through choice and cultivation (Pico della Mirandola, 1486/1998). Pico's framework remained religious and metaphysical, but later readers could detach human dignity from creaturely vocation and reinterpret openness as self-creation.

This distinction is essential. Biblical dignity is not humiliation. Humanity is made in God's image, crowned with glory and honour, and entrusted with dominion (Genesis 1:26–28; Psalm 8:3–8). Christians should resist accounts of piety that treat intellect, art, scientific curiosity, craftsmanship, political responsibility, or cultural achievement as threats. The error begins when dignity is detached from dependence, vocation from obedience, and creativity from moral limits.

The Renaissance also contributed to a more historical consciousness. Texts had contexts. Languages changed. Institutions developed. This awareness could correct anachronism and expose forged claims. It could also prepare the assumption that doctrines are only products of their age. Historical explanation then becomes historical reduction: because a belief developed in time, it is treated as having no transcendent truth.

Humanism therefore supplied resources for both reform and autonomy. It could kneel before the Word with better tools, or it could gradually place the cultivated human subject at the centre. The difference was not learning itself but lordship.

The Reformation: Authority Recovered and Later Misappropriated

The Protestant Reformation must not be blamed for modern individualism. Its central recovery was not the sovereign self but the sovereign Word. Luther's protest against indulgence, ecclesial corruption, and doctrines lacking biblical warrant was an appeal from fallible human authority to divine revelation. Calvin's theological vision centred on the majesty of God, the corruption of sin, salvation by grace, and the church's submission to Scripture. The Reformers did not teach that every private opinion was equal. They produced confessions, catechisms, church orders, disciplined communities, and rigorous exegesis.

Sola Scriptura means that Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. It does not mean *solo scriptura*, the isolated individual with a Bible and no need for teachers, history, languages, or the communion of saints. The Bereans were commended for examining the Scriptures to test apostolic

preaching (*Acts 17:11*), but the same New Testament appoints elders, commands sound teaching, and warns against private distortion.

The Reformation's challenge to corrupt authority nevertheless had consequences that later movements could detach from its theological foundation. Once an institution could be judged, the question arose: by what standard? For the Reformers, the answer was God's Word. For later rationalists, it increasingly became universal reason. For empiricists, experience. For political liberals, conscience and consent. For Romantics, authentic feeling. For postmodern critics, the exposure of power. The right to test human authority was retained while submission to revelation was removed.

Brad Gregory (2012) argues that the Reformation's fragmentation contributed unintentionally to modern pluralism and the privatisation of religion. His thesis is important but contested. It can overstate continuity between confessional disagreement and secular modernity, and it may understate the prior corruption and theological divergence that made reform necessary. The more balanced conclusion is that religious fragmentation changed the conditions of authority without making secular autonomy inevitable. Political rulers, confessional conflict, print culture, economic change, scientific development, and philosophical innovation all contributed to the new landscape.

The church should learn a double lesson. First, resistance to corrupt religious power may be an act of faithfulness. Second, protest can become autonomous if it no longer submits to a truthful standard beyond the protester. The Reformation's proper legacy is not "I decide" but "God has spoken, and every pope, pastor, prince, scholar, tradition, and conscience must be tested by His Word."

The Scientific Revolution: Creation Investigated, Method Enlarged

The Scientific Revolution transformed humanity's understanding of the physical world. Copernican astronomy displaced the Ptolemaic arrangement. Kepler described planetary motion mathematically. Galileo's telescopic observations challenged inherited cosmology. Bacon promoted organised observation and experiment. Boyle investigated matter while defending Christian belief. Newton's mathematical physics joined terrestrial and celestial motion under general laws.

The familiar story of an inevitable war between science and Christianity is historically misleading. Many early modern scientists understood nature as God's creation and investigation as a religious vocation. Kepler spoke of thinking God's thoughts after Him. Boyle funded Christian apologetics. Newton wrote extensively on theology, although some of his doctrines departed from Nicene orthodoxy. The categories "science" and "religion" themselves acquired their present meanings gradually. Historians have therefore replaced the simple warfare thesis with accounts of complex, changing interactions involving cooperation, conflict, patronage, institutional rivalry, biblical interpretation, and different theological traditions (Brooke, 1991; Dixon et al., 2010; Harrison, 2015; Numbers, 2009).

The Galileo affair remains a warning. Ecclesiastical authority, politics, personality, scientific evidence, and biblical interpretation became entangled.

The church's failure was not belief in revelation but the premature attachment of revelation to a contested cosmological model and the coercive handling of disagreement. When Christians make a human interpretation immune to evidence, they do not defend Scripture. They risk confusing the authority of God with the prestige of their present understanding.

Bacon's programme is especially important. He opposed sterile speculation and called for knowledge built through disciplined engagement with nature. This helped free inquiry from inherited errors. Yet his language also contributed to an increasingly instrumental vision of knowledge as power over nature (Bacon, 1620/2000). The biblical mandate of dominion can include cultivation, medicine, engineering, and the relief of suffering. It is not permission to treat creation as morally neutral material available for limitless manipulation.

The decisive transition was not the use of observation but the expansion of method into metaphysics. Methodological naturalism brackets supernatural causes when studying regular physical processes. Within proper limits, this can be a practical research discipline. Metaphysical naturalism claims that nature is all that exists and that divine agency is impossible or irrelevant. The first is a method. The second is a worldview. The success of the method does not prove the worldview.

A microscope may reveal cellular structure. It cannot decide whether human beings bear God's image. A telescope may measure distant galaxies. It cannot determine whether the heavens declare God's glory. A clinical trial may assess a treatment. It cannot define the meaning of suffering, the moral limits of intervention, or the hope of resurrection. Science is powerful precisely because it asks disciplined questions of created regularities. It becomes scientism when it demands jurisdiction over every question.

The Scientific Revolution therefore did not force the abandonment of God. It provided new knowledge and new habits of inquiry. Modernism emerged when those habits were interpreted within an autonomous philosophy that treated measurable explanation as sufficient explanation.

Rationalism and the Turn Toward the Thinking Subject

René Descartes sought certainty amid inherited disagreement and scepticism. His method of doubt attempted to identify a foundation that could not be questioned. The famous *cogito*, "I think, therefore I am," located immediate certainty in the act of thinking (Descartes, 1637/1998). Descartes did not deny God. He argued for God's existence and believed divine goodness secured the reliability of clear and distinct perception. Nevertheless, his philosophical starting point helped reorient modern thought toward the knowing subject.

The change was subtle but momentous. Premodern Christian thought ordinarily began with God, creation, and an objective order in which the human knower participated. Cartesian method begins with the self-conscious subject seeking to reconstruct knowledge from indubitable foundations. God remains in the system, but the route to God passes through the certainty of consciousness.

Rationalism contributed important achievements. It demanded conceptual clarity, exposed contradiction, developed mathematics, and resisted unexamined appeal to authority. Christianity does not fear logic. The doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious, not contradictory. The incarnation exceeds comprehension, but it does not license nonsense. Christians are commanded to demolish arguments raised against the knowledge of God and to take thoughts captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

The danger appears when reason becomes self-grounding and universal in a way that excludes creaturely dependence, moral corruption, and revelation. Fallen reason is not destroyed, but neither is it neutral. Human beings can construct elegant arguments in defence of desired conclusions. Intelligence may refine self-deception. The serpent in Genesis 3 does not appeal to irrationality. He offers an alternative argument.

Later rationalists differed from Descartes. Spinoza identified God with the single infinite substance and treated biblical miracles and prophecy through a naturalistic and historical lens. Leibniz defended theism and sought rational harmony. Their disagreements demonstrate why "rationalism" is not one doctrine. Yet the family resemblance lies in confidence that reason can generate or adjudicate foundational knowledge independently of sensory experience and, increasingly, independently of authoritative revelation.

Sangwa's earlier reflection on rationalism correctly insists that reason is a gift but not the supreme court of spiritual truth (Sangwa, 2024b). That claim should be sharpened rather than weakened. Christianity does not ask believers to accept contradiction or despise evidence. It asks reason to remember that it is created, finite, morally situated, and accountable to the God whose reality it did not invent.

Empiricism, Scepticism, and the Narrowing of Public Knowledge

British empiricism shifted emphasis from innate ideas and deductive foundations toward sensory experience. Locke described the mind as lacking innate speculative principles and developed an account of knowledge grounded in experience (Locke, 1689/1975). His political thought defended natural rights, consent, toleration, and limits on government. These ideas helped restrain arbitrary rule and contributed to constitutional traditions. They also strengthened the modern image of the individual as a bearer of rights prior to political community.

Berkeley used empiricist arguments to defend an immaterialist metaphysics in which perceived reality depends upon mind and ultimately upon God's perception. Hume pressed empiricism toward sceptical conclusions. He analysed causation as habitual expectation rather than directly perceived necessary connection, questioned rational proofs of religion, and argued that testimony for miracles must be weighed against established experience (Hume, 1748/2000).

Hume's critique of miracle claims is often caricatured. He did not merely say, "Miracles cannot happen because miracles cannot happen." He examined the evidential relationship between testimony and regular experience, emphasising

human credulity, love of wonder, and the weakness of many reports. Christians should accept the need to test testimony. Scripture itself warns against false signs and commands discernment. The problem lies in defining a miracle as a violation weighed against a closed account of natural regularity, then treating prior uniform experience as decisive even when the event in question is claimed to be unique.

The resurrection of Christ is not a repeatable laboratory event. It is a public historical claim supported by testimony, the empty tomb, transformed witnesses, early proclamation, and the emergence of the church. Its uniqueness is part of its meaning. If God exists and created the world, divine action is not an intrusion by an alien force into an autonomous machine. It is the Creator acting within His creation.

Empiricism helped cultivate intellectual humility. Claims should meet evidence. Observations can correct speculation. Theories must be accountable to reality. These are Christian goods. The narrowing occurs when only sensory or experimentally reproducible claims are granted public legitimacy. Metaphysics, morality, theology, beauty, purpose, and spiritual reality are then relegated to private preference because they do not fit the authorised method.

This shift still governs contemporary institutions. A university may say it is neutral because it does not adjudicate revelation, yet that exclusion already privileges an account of knowledge. A hospital can measure pain but cannot derive human dignity from the measurement. A court can examine conduct but cannot create moral truth. A survey can record belief but cannot determine whether the belief is true.

Empirical evidence is indispensable within its competence. Empiricism becomes reductionist when the window is declared to be the whole sky.

The Enlightenment: Maturity, Critique, and Human Autonomy

The Enlightenment was not one movement with one creed. French, Scottish, German, English, American, and other Enlightenments differed in relation to religion, politics, economics, and metaphysics. Some thinkers were deists, some sceptics, some Christians, some materialists. The era challenged inherited privilege, promoted toleration, advanced scientific and historical inquiry, and contributed to constitutionalism, public education, and reform. It also intensified suspicion toward revelation, miracle, ecclesial authority, and tradition.

Kant's 1784 essay defined enlightenment as humanity's emergence from self-incurred immaturity and issued the summons: "Have courage to use your own understanding" (Kant, 1784/1996). The target included intellectual laziness and dependence upon guardians who thought on behalf of others. That critique has moral force. Religious leaders can cultivate dependence, suppress questions, and protect power by keeping people ignorant. A pastor who fears an informed congregation is not defending biblical authority.

Yet Kant's account of autonomy places reason in a new position. Moral maturity increasingly means self-legislation by rational agents rather than obedient reception of divine command. Kant retained God, freedom, and immortality as postulates of practical reason, but reason established the conditions under which religious belief could be admitted. Religion was expected to appear within the boundaries of reason.

The biblical alternative is not heteronomy under arbitrary human control. God's law is not foreign violence imposed upon creatures. It is the wise command of the One who made them. Human maturity does not consist in becoming independent of the Father but in growing into willing, discerning obedience. The Son, the perfect human being, did not define freedom as self-legislation. He delighted to do the Father's will (*John 4:34; John 8:28-29*).

Rousseau deepened another modern current. His critique of civilisation argued that social institutions corrupt natural human goodness and produce inequality, dependence, and artificial desire. He valued freedom and authenticity, while his political theory located legitimate authority in the general will (*Rousseau, 1755/1997, 1762/2012*). Rousseau's diagnosis captured real forms of social corruption, but it shifted the biblical account of sin. The central problem became alienating institutions rather than the fallen heart expressed through individuals and structures alike.

Voltaire's attacks on fanaticism and religious intolerance exposed genuine cruelty. His wit punctured clerical hypocrisy, superstition, and coercion. Yet critique can become selective. Religious violence is evil, but secular ideologies have also justified terror, empire, eugenics, racial domination, and mass killing. The problem is not religion as a category. It is fallen worship and power.

Diderot and the Encyclopedists sought to collect and disseminate human knowledge beyond clerical control. Public access to learning was a genuine achievement. The *Encyclopédie* also represented confidence that organised knowledge could emancipate humanity. Education increasingly acquired a salvific aura. Ignorance became the fundamental sin and enlightenment the cure.

The Enlightenment's strongest moral case should be granted. Arbitrary authority needed restraint. Conscience needed protection. Torture, censorship, inherited privilege, and religious coercion deserved criticism. Yet emancipation from abusive human guardians does not entail emancipation from God. The tragedy of modern autonomy is that it took a necessary protest against fallible rulers and extended it into a declaration of independence from the Creator.

Progress, Revolution, and the Secularisation of Hope

Enlightenment confidence helped transform the Christian doctrine of providence into a secular narrative of progress. Biblical history moves toward God's appointed consummation through judgment, resurrection, and the kingdom of Christ. Modern progress increasingly imagined humanity advancing through reason, education, science, markets, political reform, or revolution.

The idea was not entirely false. Societies can improve sanitation, literacy, medicine, legal accountability, and material provision. Slavery can be abolished

in law. Child mortality can fall. Knowledge can accumulate. Institutions can learn. Christians should thank God for such goods and work for them.

The error lies in converting partial improvement into an eschatology. Technical capacity does not regenerate desire. A more educated sinner may become a more efficient exploiter. A bureaucracy can distribute medicine or organise persecution. A communications network can spread the gospel or industrialise pornography and propaganda. Progress in means does not determine the righteousness of ends.

The French Revolution exposed both the moral energy and danger of secularised redemption. Appeals to liberty, equality, and fraternity confronted real injustice. The Revolution also produced terror, ideological purification, political religion, and the reorganisation of social life around a humanly defined new order. Revolution easily becomes an imitation of judgment: the old world is condemned, enemies are identified, sacrifice is demanded, and a purified future is promised.

Christian eschatology refuses both complacency and utopianism. It commands justice now while denying that history can save itself. The kingdom is received from the returning King. Human action matters, but no party, class, nation, market, technology, or global institution can accomplish resurrection.

Secularisation: Decline, Differentiation, Privatisation, and Pluralisation

Secularisation is often narrated as the inevitable decline of religion under modernisation. Contemporary scholarship has complicated that story. In parts of Western Europe, institutional participation and traditional belief have declined substantially. In other regions, religion remains vibrant or has grown. Modern states differentiate law, education, economics, and science from ecclesial control, yet religious conviction persists. Pluralism makes belief one option among others rather than an unquestioned social inheritance. Public religion may reappear even where formal secularisation has advanced (Berger, 1999; Casanova, 1994; Stolz, 2020; Taylor, 2007).

Charles Taylor's account is especially useful. A secular age is not simply an age without belief. It is an age in which belief and unbelief exist under the pressure of alternatives, within what he calls an immanent frame (Taylor, 2007). People may remain religious while interpreting ordinary life as though natural and social processes form a self-sufficient order. God becomes an optional addition rather than the One in whom all things live.

This helps explain why secularisation can enter the church without producing explicit atheism. A congregation may affirm God verbally while organising ministry around techniques, markets, personalities, and metrics. Prayer becomes ceremonial, while strategy is treated as the real power. Providence is confessed, but anxiety is governed by data. The supernatural remains in doctrine while practical life proceeds within an immanent frame.

Talal Asad (2003) and other postcolonial scholars have also shown that "the secular" is not a neutral absence of religion. Modern states define religion,

regulate its public expression, and determine which claims count as private belief or public reason. Secularism can therefore function as a governing project rather than a simple truce among convictions.

The church should neither deny secularisation nor repeat an obsolete linear theory. Modernity does not automatically erase religion. It changes the social conditions under which religion is believed, practised, regulated, marketed, and contested. It may weaken churches while strengthening new spiritualities, political faiths, national myths, therapeutic rituals, and identity movements.

Humanity does not cease worship when it leaves the sanctuary. It relocates the sacred.

Theological Liberalism: Christianity Reconstructed for Modern Consciousness

Theological liberalism emerged partly from an apologetic concern: how could Christianity remain intellectually credible after historical criticism, modern science, moral development, religious pluralism, and the Enlightenment's critique of authority? The question was not frivolous. Churches had sometimes defended weak arguments, confused interpretation with revelation, and ignored genuine knowledge. The liberal project often sought to preserve faith by translating it into categories acceptable to modern consciousness.

Friedrich Schleiermacher relocated religion from doctrinal propositions and metaphysical proofs toward the immediate consciousness of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher, 1799/1996). He did not intend to destroy Christianity. He addressed its "cultured despisers" and sought to show that religion was a distinctive dimension of human life. Yet when religious experience becomes the primary foundation, revelation risks being interpreted through consciousness rather than consciousness being judged by revelation.

Albrecht Ritschl emphasised the moral kingdom of God and value judgments, while Adolf von Harnack sought the enduring essence of Christianity beneath what he regarded as later dogmatic accretions. Harnack's summary of the gospel around the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of humanity, and the infinite value of the soul possessed moral appeal, but it thinned the apostolic proclamation of Christ's deity, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, judgment, and exclusive lordship (Harnack, 1901/1957).

In the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann's programme of demythologisation attempted to interpret New Testament proclamation for people formed by modern scientific consciousness. Mythological language concerning miracles, spirits, cosmic realms, and resurrection was to be translated existentially (Bultmann, 1953/1984). Again, the motive included communication. The consequence was that modern assumptions concerning what could happen became the filter through which the apostolic witness was permitted to speak.

The decisive problem is not contextualisation. Every preacher must explain ancient texts in present language. The problem is jurisdiction. Does modern consciousness stand beneath the event of revelation, ready to be converted, or does revelation stand before modern consciousness, ready to be revised? Once the

latter principle is accepted, Christianity survives by surrendering whatever the age finds incredible or immoral.

The pattern continues in progressive Christianity. The resurrection becomes a symbol of hope, the cross a protest against violence, sin a failure of inclusion, salvation social liberation, and Jesus a teacher whose authority is measured by contemporary ethics. Biblical vocabulary remains, but the referent changes. This is the linguistic camouflage of captivity.

Chapter 8 will examine liberal and progressive hermeneutics in detail. The genealogical point here is that theological liberalism did not merely absorb individual modern conclusions. It adopted a modern structure of authority. Human religious experience, moral consciousness, historical criticism governed by anti-supernatural assumptions, or cultural credibility became the tribunal before which Scripture appeared.

Conservative churches should not congratulate themselves too quickly. A church may affirm inerrancy while practising functional liberalism. It does so whenever Scripture is obeyed only where obedience is affordable. If texts against sexual immorality are preached but texts against greed, partiality, abusive authority, ethnic pride, or love of money are neutralised by practice, the self remains the final editor. Formal orthodoxy cannot compensate for selective lordship.

Feuerbach: God as Human Projection

Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* argued that theology is ultimately anthropology. Human beings project their highest qualities, desires, and ideals outward, then worship them as God (Feuerbach, 1841/1989). Divine love, wisdom, power, and goodness become alienated human essence. Religion is overcome when humanity recognises that what it attributed to God belonged to itself.

Feuerbach's critique remains culturally powerful because it offers a psychologically plausible explanation of belief without needing to engage whether God exists. Religion becomes wish fulfilment, idealisation, or dependence projected onto the heavens. The believer is invited to reclaim what faith has surrendered.

Scripture agrees that people manufacture gods in their own image. Idolatry is projection. Nations shape deities according to fear, fertility, war, prosperity, ethnicity, or political need. Modern Christians can construct a therapeutic god who never contradicts desire, a nationalist god who blesses one people, or a prosperity god who guarantees success. Feuerbach's accusation therefore strikes false religion with force.

Yet he mistakes the idol for the living God. The God of Scripture is not a magnified human wish. He repeatedly contradicts human projection. He is holy when humanity wants indulgence, sovereign when humanity wants control, just when humanity wants immunity, merciful when the self-righteous demand exclusion, and crucified when the world seeks domination. The gospel does not flatter human essence. It exposes sin and announces rescue that humanity could neither imagine nor achieve.

Projection theory also cuts both ways. Unbelief may project a desired universe without judgment, command, or ultimate accountability. The fact that a belief satisfies a wish does not prove it false, and the fact that unbelief relieves a person of divine obligation does not prove it true. Psychological genealogy cannot replace ontological argument.

The deeper significance of Feuerbach is the transfer of divine attributes to humanity. What theology once said about God is increasingly said about the species, the state, history, consciousness, or the autonomous self. Humanity becomes creator of meaning, judge of good and evil, and saviour of its future. The throne is not abolished. It is occupied by the image in the mirror.

Marx: Material History and Revolutionary Redemption

Karl Marx inherited Feuerbach's suspicion of religion but rejected a merely contemplative humanism. Ideas, including religious ideas, had to be interpreted within material relations, labour, class, property, and power. His critique of capitalism identified alienated labour, exploitation, commodification, and the capacity of ruling classes to present their interests as universal. These concerns should not be dismissed. Scripture condemns withheld wages, predatory wealth, partial courts, and rulers who devour the poor (*James* 5:1-6; *Isaiah* 10:1-4).

Marx's account becomes a rival gospel when material history replaces creation, class domination replaces the universality of sin, revolutionary consciousness replaces repentance, and transformed economic relations replace reconciliation with God. Religion is famously described as the "opium of the people," but the fuller passage presents it as both the expression of suffering and a protest against suffering (Marx, 1844/1978). Marx perceived that religion can console people within unjust conditions and may be used to discourage change.

Churches have sometimes deserved this criticism. Pastors have promised heaven while protecting exploiters, demanded patience from the oppressed while dining with those who caused the oppression, and preached submission selectively to preserve political order. Biblical hope must never be used to anaesthetise justice. The prophets did not tell the poor to accept theft quietly.

Yet Marxism misdiagnoses the depth of evil. Oppression is real, but the oppressed are not sinless. Class position does not confer righteousness. Revolution can replace one elite with another because the will to dominate survives structural change. Property arrangements matter, but envy, pride, lust, violence, deceit, and idolatry do not disappear when ownership changes.

Historical materialism also tends to subordinate truth to social location and function. Ideas may be interpreted as expressions of class interest. This insight can expose propaganda, but if universalised it becomes self-defeating. Marxist claims are themselves produced within history. On what basis do they escape the reduction applied to opponents?

The revolutionary imagination secularises biblical eschatology. History moves through conflict toward a reconciled society. A chosen class carries redemptive potential. The old order must be judged and overcome. Yet the

promised future arrives through human struggle rather than the return of Christ. Sacrifice is demanded, but there is no sinless Lamb. Judgment is enacted, but no omniscient Judge guarantees justice.

Concern for workers, fair wages, access to land, protection from exploitation, and accountable institutions does not require Marxist anthropology. Christians should be among the first to expose economic injustice and among the last to make class conflict a substitute for the gospel. The cross judges exploiters and revolutionaries alike, then creates a people whose generosity flows from grace rather than coercive utopia.

Darwinian Developments and the Naturalisation of Humanity

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection profoundly altered biological explanation and the modern imagination. This chapter does not adjudicate the scientific and exegetical debates concerning origins; Chapter 4 will address naturalism, creation, Adam, death, and human uniqueness. The genealogical issue is narrower: how were biological theories interpreted within wider philosophies of humanity and progress?

Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* proposed natural selection as a mechanism by which populations change over generations (Darwin, 1859/2009). Later works extended evolutionary analysis to human descent. Darwin did not create materialism, atheism, racism, or competition. Nor did every social application of evolutionary language follow from his biology. Social Darwinist ideologies mixed evolutionary concepts with prior commitments concerning race, empire, economics, heredity, and progress. Herbert Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest" entered public thought, and evolutionary narratives were used both to justify ruthless competition and to imagine social development.

Christians must avoid careless history. Disputed deathbed recantation stories should not be repeated as fact without reliable evidence. A weak apologetic damages a strong gospel. The truth does not need fabricated witnesses.

The cultural significance of Darwinism lies partly in the possibility of narrating apparent design, human origins, morality, and religion within a self-contained natural history. Once humanity is interpreted only as the product of impersonal processes, the image of God, the historical fall, moral accountability, and providence appear unnecessary. This conclusion is not identical to the biological theory. It is a metaphysical interpretation of it.

Naturalistic evolution also supplied an alternative creation story with moral and political uses. Humanity could imagine itself rising from primitive conditions through struggle toward civilisation. Colonial powers often placed peoples on evolutionary scales, presenting domination as development. Later progress narratives secularised the ascent. The modern person became the advanced human who had outgrown religious childhood.

The biblical doctrine of creation does not compete with science as a rival mechanism. It identifies the ultimate source, order, purpose, and moral meaning of reality. Scientific description can investigate processes. It cannot decide that

process is all there is. The theological danger arises when a theory about change within nature becomes a total anthropology in which humanity has no received nature, no divine vocation, and no judgment beyond survival or social preference.

Nietzsche: After the Death of God

Friedrich Nietzsche understood more clearly than many optimistic secularists that abandoning God would destabilise inherited morality. His proclamation "God is dead" was not a simple boast that atheism had won. It was a diagnosis of European culture. People continued using Christian moral language after undermining the metaphysical world that had sustained it (Nietzsche, 1882/1974).

Nietzsche exposed hypocrisy, herd conformity, resentment, and moral systems that conceal the will to power. He criticised a Christianity he interpreted as hostility toward strength and life. His genealogical method asked which psychological and historical forces produced moral values. This suspicion influenced later critiques of ideology and power.

Some of Nietzsche's diagnoses are penetrating. Moral language can conceal envy. Public compassion can become a weapon of status. Weakness can demand immunity from correction. Institutions can preserve themselves through sanctified vocabulary. Churches can preach humility while leaders hunger for domination. A biblical response should not deny these possibilities. Scripture already exposes religious hypocrisy more fiercely than Nietzsche did (*Matthew 23:1-36*).

Yet Nietzsche's proposed revaluation cannot escape the problem he exposes. If values are created through power, why should the strong respect the weak? If there is no truth beyond interpretation and no Judge above history, moral protest risks becoming one will against another. Nietzsche was honest enough to see the abyss. Contemporary culture often borrows his self-creation while retaining Christian conclusions about dignity, equality, and compassion as though their foundation were secure.

The overman becomes an image of self-transcendence without redemption. Humanity must overcome inherited morality and create values. The serpent's promise appears again, now with philosophical courage: seize the authority to name good and evil.

Nietzsche's critique of pity also reveals the beauty of the cross. Christianity does not worship weakness for its own sake. Christ's apparent weakness is divine self-giving power. He lays down His life freely, defeats death, and will judge the nations. Christian humility is not resentment disguised as virtue. It is strength submitted to love. The gospel neither flatters the powerful nor romanticises victimhood. It calls both to repentance.

Freud: The Unconscious, Repression, and the Psychological Self

Sigmund Freud relocated conflict within the psyche. Human behaviour was shaped by unconscious desire, repression, childhood experience, sexuality, and the tension between instinct and civilisation. Religion was interpreted as illusion,

wish fulfilment, and a collective response to helplessness (Freud, 1927/1961). Civilisation required restraint, but restraint generated guilt and discontent (Freud, 1930/1961).

Freud's legacy is complex. He helped modern culture attend to hidden motives, early experience, psychological conflict, and the possibility that conscious explanations conceal deeper drives. Scripture also teaches that motives may be hidden, the heart can deceive itself, and sin operates beneath public respectability. Pastoral care should not fear careful psychological observation.

The conflict arises in anthropology and salvation. Freud's framework tended to treat religious belief as an expression of dependency and moral prohibition as a source of repression. Guilt could be interpreted primarily as psychological burden rather than truthful response to sin. Liberation then required insight, integration, or managed desire rather than forgiveness and transformation.

Later therapeutic culture did not simply preserve classical psychoanalysis. It softened Freud's tragic account and combined inwardness with self-esteem, wellbeing, trauma language, and expressive authenticity. The self became a psychological project. Institutions and relationships were judged by whether they affirmed personal flourishing.

This development contained legitimate gains. Trauma is real. Mental illness is not always a sign of weak faith. Abuse can deform self-perception. Qualified care may serve mercy. Churches have sinned by reducing complex suffering to demonic possession, personal blame, or simplistic spiritual advice.

Yet therapy becomes a rival gospel when discomfort is treated as harm, guilt only as pathology, boundaries as repression, and affirmation as the highest form of love. Sangwa's *When the Mirror Becomes a Throne* traces how self-esteem and self-awareness can move from helpful vocabulary into a civic and ecclesial liturgy of autonomy (Sangwa, 2026b). The answer is not contempt for the wounded. It is a fuller anthropology in which persons are embodied, relational, morally accountable, spiritually contested, capable of suffering they did not choose, and in need of grace they cannot manufacture.

Freud taught modernity to suspect the surface. The gospel goes deeper. It does not merely uncover desire. It crucifies the old self and creates a new one in Christ.

Existentialism: Meaning After the Collapse of Given Order

Existentialism gathered diverse thinkers around questions of freedom, anxiety, finitude, authenticity, responsibility, and meaning. Søren Kierkegaard must be distinguished from later atheistic existentialists. His Christian writings attacked nominal Christendom, emphasised personal appropriation, exposed despair, and called the individual to faith before God. His "individual" was not the sovereign author of truth but the sinner summoned into responsible relation to Christ (Kierkegaard, 1849/1980).

Martin Heidegger analysed human existence in relation to temporality, care, thrownness, and being-toward-death. His project was not Christian theology, and his political association with National Socialism remains morally grave. His

account influenced later thought about authenticity and the conditions of human existence.

Jean-Paul Sartre radicalised freedom in a godless universe. If there is no Creator, there is no divinely given human essence. "Existence precedes essence": the person first exists and then defines himself through choice (Sartre, 1946/2007). This freedom is accompanied by anguish because no transcendent law can remove responsibility.

Sartre's honesty is instructive. Self-creation is not effortless affirmation. It is a terrifying burden. The person must choose without a divine script, and in choosing proposes an image of humanity. Contemporary expressive culture often retains the attractive half of existentialism, the permission to define oneself, while muting its anguish, responsibility, and absence of guaranteed meaning.

Albert Camus confronted the absurd, the tension between humanity's longing for meaning and a silent universe. He rejected both religious consolation and nihilistic surrender, advocating revolt, solidarity, and courageous living (Camus, 1942/1991). Such moral courage deserves respect. Yet solidarity remains difficult to ground if the universe is indifferent and moral obligation has no transcendent source.

Existentialism diagnosed a world in which inherited meanings had lost authority. Its call to responsibility resisted passive conformity. But authenticity without a Creator cannot tell the self which desires deserve obedience. A murderer can act authentically. A tyrant can embrace his project sincerely. Authenticity is morally empty until the good is defined.

The biblical answer is not that human beings lack personal responsibility. It is that freedom is creaturely and covenantal. We are not blank projects. We are made by God, fallen in Adam, embodied as male and female, situated in relationships, and summoned by Christ. Identity is received before it is expressed. Calling does not erase individuality. It rescues individuality from the impossible task of self-creation.

Postmodernism: Critique Without a Return to Revelation

Postmodernism emerged partly as a reaction against modern confidence in universal reason, neutral method, inevitable progress, stable meaning, and comprehensive narratives. It is not one school. Michel Foucault analysed relations among knowledge, institutions, discipline, normalisation, and power. Jacques Derrida examined textual difference, instability, and the assumptions governing conceptual oppositions. Jean-François Lyotard described the postmodern condition as incredulity toward metanarratives (Foucault, 1975/1995; Derrida, 1967/1997; Lyotard, 1979/1984).

These thinkers did not all deny truth in the crude sense often attributed to them. Their analyses are more difficult and internally diverse. Foucault investigated how institutions produce categories of normality and how regimes of knowledge regulate bodies. Derrida exposed exclusions and unresolved tensions

within texts. Lyotard questioned the grand stories by which modern institutions legitimised knowledge.

Such criticism can serve truth. Claims of neutrality have concealed colonial interest, professional self-protection, racial hierarchy, male domination, economic power, and state control. Churches have also used doctrine selectively to protect leaders and silence victims. A Christian should not fear questions about who benefits, who defines categories, whose testimony is excluded, and how institutions reward conformity.

The crisis appears when critique lacks a transcendent standard. If truth claims are inseparable from power, the critique of power is itself another exercise of power. If meaning is endlessly deferred, clear moral judgment becomes difficult. If all metanarratives are suspect, the narrative of emancipation from metanarratives must also be suspect.

Postmodernism frequently removes modernity's confidence without restoring revelation. The rational subject is dethroned, but the throne does not return to God. It fragments among communities, identities, discourses, and institutions. Truth becomes perspectival, while political demands can become increasingly absolute. The culture may declare that no universal account of humanity is neutral and then require universal recognition of selected identities.

This produces a distinctive contradiction: radical subjectivity in self-definition combined with institutional moralism in public affirmation. The individual may define inward truth, but schools, workplaces, courts, churches, and families are expected to ratify it. The old modern subject sought mastery through reason. The postmodern expressive subject seeks recognition through power.

Chapter 3 will examine truth, language, propaganda, censorship, and institutional gatekeeping in detail. The genealogical point is that postmodernism criticises modern autonomy while often preserving the deeper refusal to receive final truth from God.

Expressive Individualism: The Inner Voice Becomes a Moral Authority

The phrase *expressive individualism* describes a cultural condition in which identity is discovered through inward feeling, expressed outwardly, and validated through social recognition. Robert Bellah and colleagues used the term to describe an American moral language of self-realisation and personal choice (Bellah et al., 1985). Charles Taylor traced the modern ideal of authenticity, while Philip Rieff described the rise of therapeutic culture and Alasdair MacIntyre diagnosed the fragmentation of moral discourse after shared accounts of human purpose weakened (MacIntyre, 2007; Rieff, 1966; Taylor, 1989, 1991).

In older moral worlds, identity was largely received through family, place, faith, vocation, sex, and inherited obligation. These orders could be unjust and suffocating. A person could be imprisoned by caste, abusive patriarchy, racial hierarchy, or family expectation. Modern individualism rightly insisted that institutions do not possess absolute authority over the person.

The expressive turn goes further. The deepest truth of the person is located within psychological experience. External institutions become legitimate insofar as they enable expression. The body, tradition, family, and Scripture may be treated as raw materials to be interpreted through the inner self.

Carl Trueman (2020), drawing upon Taylor, Rieff, and MacIntyre, shows how this psychological account of identity prepared the cultural intelligibility of the sexual revolution. The connection is not that every person consciously read philosophers. It is that institutions, media, education, law, and popular psychology translated complex ideas into moral intuitions.

The author's work on self-awareness and rights recognised an important pastoral tension. Language developed to protect dignity and address despair can cultivate self-centredness when detached from patience, humility, and sacrificial love (Sangwa, 2024c). The same distinction applies here. Self-examination is biblical. Naming abuse can be necessary. Lawful boundaries protect life. Personal vocation matters. The error is not having a self but enthroning it.

Expressive individualism also makes identity fragile. The sovereign self depends heavily upon recognition. If inward identity requires external validation, disagreement feels like erasure. Institutions are pressured not merely to permit conduct but to affirm the person's account of reality. The language of harm expands because contradiction threatens the constructed self.

The biblical gospel offers a more stable identity. The person is known before he understands himself, created before he chooses, loved while sinful, and redeemed into union with Christ. This identity permits confession because worth does not depend upon self-perfection. It permits correction because truth does not annihilate personhood. It permits sacrifice because life is hidden with Christ (Colossians 3:1-4).

The mirror can serve honest examination. It becomes a throne when the reflection issues law.

Digital Subjectivity: Babel Carried in the Pocket

Digital culture did not create pride, comparison, self-presentation, tribalism, or deception. It industrialised their scale, speed, persistence, intimacy, and reward. The person is no longer merely an inward expressive self. He becomes a networked profile, continuously curated, measured, compared, archived, and interpreted by algorithms.

Social media invite strategic self-presentation through visibility, persistence, audience collapse, comments, likes, tags, and shares (Hollenbaugh, 2021). A recent systematic review of adolescent identity development found that what young people do on social media matters more than time alone. Active participation was associated with identity exploration, while social comparison was related to identity distress and reduced clarity; authentic rather than idealised presentation was associated with greater self-concept clarity (Avci et al., 2025). These findings resist simplistic claims that every use is harmful. They also confirm that digital environments have become formative sites of identity.

The platform does not simply display the self. It teaches the self what deserves display. Attention becomes a market. Outrage, beauty, novelty, confession, envy, fear, and tribal loyalty produce engagement. The user appears free while moving through systems designed to predict and influence behaviour. Zuboff (2019) describes an economic logic in which behavioural data are extracted for prediction and modification. The digital self is both worshipper and product.

Personal branding brings Babel's name-making into ordinary life. Professionals, pastors, scholars, students, and children are taught to cultivate visibility. A public identity may be necessary for legitimate communication, publishing, employment, or ministry. The danger begins when being seen becomes evidence of being valuable, and the audience becomes the hidden judge of faithfulness.

Digital subjectivity also dissolves the line between memory and performance. Experiences are selected for future display. Grief becomes content. Worship becomes footage. Charity becomes proof. The person may begin to live before an imagined audience even when no camera is present.

The author has warned that technology can erode privacy, intellect, and moral restraint when convenience and display become governing values (Sangwa, 2024d). That warning should remain precise. Technology is not inherently demonic. Digital tools can distribute Bibles, train leaders, support remote learners, connect families, expose abuse, and strengthen scholarship. The question is whether the tool remains a servant or becomes an environment whose incentives disciple the heart.

Modernism trusted the rational subject. Postmodernism fragmented truth among perspectives and powers. Expressive individualism enthroned inward identity. Digital subjectivity turns that identity into a performance supervised by metrics. The ancient project "let us make a name" now receives real-time analytics.

One Revolt, Different Authorities

Modernism, postmodernism, expressive individualism, and digital subjectivity should neither be collapsed into one doctrine nor treated as unrelated eras. Their differences are real.

Classical modernism trusts the rational subject, universal method, progress, mastery, and the possibility of organising knowledge from a stable centre. Its ideal figure is the mature knower who frees himself from superstition and inherited guardianship. Nature becomes an object of investigation and control. Society becomes a project capable of rational reconstruction.

Postmodernism questions the innocence of that confidence. It asks whose reason was declared universal, whose experience was excluded, which interests were hidden within neutral categories, and how language and institutions create the realities they claim merely to describe. Its ideal figure is the critic who unmasks power and destabilises totalising claims.

Expressive individualism shifts the centre from universal reason to psychological identity. The self's inward experience becomes morally

authoritative. Authenticity requires outward expression, and justice increasingly requires social recognition of that expression.

Digital subjectivity makes the expressive self networked and measurable. Identity is mediated through platforms, shaped by feedback, and commodified through attention. The person curates himself while algorithms curate the world he sees.

These forms often conflict. Enlightenment universalism and postmodern suspicion cannot be reconciled easily. Scientific objectivity and radical social construction pull in different directions. Individual self-definition can collide with ideological programmes that classify people by group identity. Digital systems promise personalisation while concentrating unprecedented power in corporations and states.

The continuity lies beneath these conflicts. Final authority does not return to God. It moves among human faculties, experiences, communities, and systems. Modernism says reason may judge revelation. Postmodernism says communities and power shape what counts as reason. Expressive individualism says inward experience discloses identity. Digital culture says identity is performed and validated through networks. Each may expose the weakness of the previous form while retaining autonomy from the Creator.

The result is not liberation from authority but multiplication of authorities. The self is told to be sovereign while being governed by markets, experts, therapeutic norms, political movements, platform incentives, and peer recognition. The modern person resembles a king whose crown is rented from institutions that can withdraw it.

Biblical creaturehood offers a more coherent freedom. The person is not self-created, but neither is he the property of the state, market, tribe, church leader, or algorithm. He belongs to God. Because God alone is Lord, every earthly authority is limited. Submission to the Creator becomes the ground of resistance to human tyranny.

The Strongest Defence of Modernity

A serious Christian critique must allow modernity to present its strongest case. The last several centuries have produced real goods. Scientific inquiry has expanded knowledge of the physical world. Medicine, sanitation, nutrition, surgery, obstetric care, vaccination, and public health have prevented suffering and prolonged millions of lives. Mass literacy and education have widened access to knowledge. Printing and digital communication have enabled Scripture, scholarship, and human testimony to cross borders.

Constitutional government, legal equality, freedom of inquiry, religious toleration, and institutional accountability have restrained some forms of arbitrary power. Abolitionist movements confronted slavery. Reformers challenged child labour, racial discrimination, domestic violence, colonial exploitation, exclusion from education, and inherited privilege. Historical criticism exposed forged documents, propaganda, and abuses protected by tradition. Psychological knowledge improved recognition of trauma, mental illness, and coercive relationships.

Modern critics can also point to the sins of Christian societies. Churches have persecuted dissenters, defended slavery, baptised empire, protected abusive leaders, marginalised truthful witnesses, opposed sound evidence, confused cultural convention with biblical command, enriched clergy among the poor, and silenced victims in the name of unity. Appeals to revelation have sometimes ended inquiry rather than guided it.

The defence therefore argues that humanity's emergence from religious guardianship enabled self-correction. No institution should be beyond criticism. Evidence should challenge inherited belief. Citizens should possess rights against rulers, families, churches, and communities. Public reason should not depend upon one institution's revelation. Scientific and political progress demonstrates that human beings can improve their condition by thinking freely.

This defence is morally serious. Christians should not answer it by inventing a premodern golden age. The fall preceded the Enlightenment. Ancient and medieval societies contained idolatry, war, slavery, sexual exploitation, superstition, tyranny, corruption, and unjust hierarchy. Religious vocabulary did not guarantee righteousness.

Nor should Christians deny modern achievements because they fear the philosophy attached to them. A child saved by antibiotics is a good. A victim protected by law is a good. A false teacher exposed through investigative evidence is a good. A woman taught to read is a good. A government restrained from arbitrary imprisonment is a good. Empirical dishonesty cannot defend biblical truth.

The strongest challenge remains: if religious authorities are fallible and sometimes abusive, why should revelation be preferred to autonomous reason and modern institutions?

Why Achievement Does Not Establish Autonomy

The first answer is logical. Competence in one domain does not confer authority in every domain. The ability to treat infection does not define marriage. The ability to split the atom does not determine whether it should be used against a city. The ability to measure neural activity does not prove that consciousness is only matter. The ability to analyse public opinion does not turn preference into moral truth. The ability to extend life does not reconcile a person to God.

Modern achievement demonstrates human capacity, not human divinity. Scripture explains that capacity through creation and common grace. Fallen people remain image-bearers. They can reason, discover, cultivate, cooperate, make art, restrain evil, and build institutions. God gives gifts and providential goods even where He is not acknowledged. Christians can therefore learn from unbelieving physicians, historians, engineers, jurists, and psychologists without accepting materialism, relativism, or therapeutic salvation.

Second, modern institutions are also fallible. Scientific communities can be distorted by funding, prestige, publication incentives, ideological conformity, and error. Courts can protect rights or redefine moral order. Media can expose wrongdoing or manufacture outrage. Universities can cultivate inquiry or enforce fashionable orthodoxies. Corporations can innovate or exploit. Governments can

provide public goods or expand surveillance. Churches can preach salvation or build systems of control.

The Christian claim is not that secular institutions are uniquely corrupt. It is that every human institution requires truth, moral limits, transparency, correction, and judgment because every institution is inhabited by sinners.

Third, many modern moral goods depend upon an account of the person that autonomy struggles to secure. Universal dignity, equality before the law, protection of the weak, and duties toward strangers require more than preference or power. If human beings are only accidental biological organisms or autonomous choosers, why is every person inviolable, including the unborn, disabled, poor, elderly, or socially unwanted?

This does not mean unbelievers cannot recognise or practise moral goods. They plainly do. The question concerns grounding. Christianity locates dignity in God's image, justice in His character, obligation in His command, and neighbour-love in creation and the cross. Modern discourse often retains these moral conclusions while making their foundation increasingly uncertain.

Fourth, progress is morally mixed. The same technologies that reduce disease can enable biological manipulation. The same data systems that improve services can intensify surveillance. The same media that expose injustice can spread pornography and falsehood. The same rights language that protects conscience can be used to compel affirmation of disputed moral claims. Capability magnifies the moral quality of the user.

Fifth, criticism of corrupt human authority does not disprove divine authority. A judge who misuses law does not prove that justice is unreal. A counterfeit note does not prove that currency never existed. A pastor who manipulates Scripture demonstrates the need to test him by Scripture. *Sola Scriptura* does not ask people to trust a religious elite blindly. It places the elite under judgment.

The biblical alternative is therefore neither clerical tyranny nor autonomous humanity. It is ordered accountability beneath God. Reason, evidence, tradition, conscience, science, law, and experience are real but subordinate witnesses. None is the Lord.

Legitimate Modernisation Is Not Philosophical Modernism

Chronology is not causation. A development that occurred during the modern period should not automatically be credited to philosophical modernism, nor should every modern tool be condemned because it emerged in a secularising society.

Scientific method is not scientism. The first is disciplined investigation of created processes. The second is the claim that scientific method exhausts knowledge.

Political accountability is not political messianism. The first limits rulers and protects citizens. The second expects the state, revolution, or party to redeem humanity.

Individual dignity is not individual autonomy. The first recognises the person as God's image-bearer who must not be absorbed by tribe, state, church, or market. The second treats the self as the source of moral law.

Freedom of conscience is not relativism. The first limits coercion and recognises that faith cannot be manufactured by force. The second denies objective truth or treats contradictory beliefs as equally valid.

Literacy is not secularisation. Reading can equip people to understand Scripture, history, law, and science. It becomes secularising only when education forms knowledge as though God were irrelevant or unknowable.

Technological capability is not technological salvation. A tool can serve vocation and mercy. It becomes idolatrous when it promises transcendence, control, identity, or immortality apart from God.

Critique of corrupt church authority is not rejection of revelation. The prophets, apostles, and Reformers exposed religious corruption precisely because God had spoken.

Human agency is not self-deification. God commands cultivation, justice, wisdom, and courageous action. Dependence upon providence is not passivity. It is action without the illusion that the creature is sovereign.

This distinction protects the church from reactionary error. Some Christians oppose whatever is recent, foreign, technical, academic, or institutional. They confuse fear with discernment. Such refusal can leave communities vulnerable to disease, manipulation, poverty, misinformation, and dependence upon others' expertise. Holiness does not increase as competence decreases.

The task is stewardship. Receive what is true. Test assumptions. Refuse idolatrous ends. Establish moral limits. Give thanks to God.

The Church's Complicity in the Rise of Autonomous Suspicion

The church did not create the ancient rebellion, but its failures have sometimes made the serpent's interpretation of God appear believable. Whenever religious authority misrepresents God's character, portrays human control as divine command, or hides corruption behind sacred language, it teaches people to associate revelation with oppression.

Churches prepared the ground for modern suspicion when they substituted tradition for Scripture and treated inherited practice as unchangeable revelation. They did so when they punished questions instead of answering them, used civil force to manage conscience, or defended leaders because institutional reputation mattered more than truth.

They prepared the ground when they aligned Christ with empire, race, ethnicity, class, or party. A colonised people may reasonably distrust a gospel presented as the chaplain of conquest. A worker may distrust preaching that

condemns theft by the poor but excuses withheld wages by the rich. A woman may distrust submission language when churches protect violent men. A young scholar may distrust biblical authority when a teacher answers evidence with ridicule.

The church also prepared the ground through hypocrisy. The age hears sermons against sexual revolution while discovering secret clerical immorality. It hears warnings against greed from leaders who display luxury among the poor. It hears defence of family from fathers who abandon responsibility. It hears denunciations of relativism from communities that change moral standards when an ally is accused.

This hypocrisy does not justify unbelief, but it requires repentance. *Romans 2:21-24* warns that God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of religious disobedience. Apologetics without repentance becomes noise.

The church must also confess anti-intellectualism. Some believers treat scholarship as spiritual danger, repeat false stories because they support a preferred conclusion, and call every correction persecution. This trains thoughtful people to choose between honesty and faith. The choice is false. God is the author of truth. A Christian should be the first to correct a mistaken statistic, withdraw an unsupported claim, or distinguish fact from speculation.

Yet repentance must not become surrender. The sins of Christians do not authorise the age to redefine Christ. An abusive father does not abolish fatherhood. A corrupt court does not abolish justice. A false church does not abolish the Word. The church must repent of violating truth while refusing the demand to abandon it.

Africa and the Imported, Hybrid, and Indigenous Forms of Autonomy

Modernism is not merely a European problem exported intact to the rest of the world. African societies encounter multiple modernities shaped by colonial history, missionary movements, nationalism, urbanisation, education, markets, digital platforms, indigenous traditions, global development institutions, and Pentecostal-Charismatic expansion. The result is often hybrid rather than simply secular.

Colonial education frequently treated European knowledge as universal and African knowledge as primitive. Languages, institutions, and professional standards were reorganised around foreign categories. Postcolonial universities inherited structures that could expand opportunity while also teaching that credible knowledge must appear detached from revelation. The educated African Christian may therefore learn to compartmentalise: biblical faith for worship, secular assumptions for public reason, imported management theories for institutions, and ancestral expectations for family or crisis.

Development discourse can function similarly. External funding may carry definitions of progress, rights, family, sexuality, governance, and acceptable religion. Not every international partnership is coercive, and many have supported health, education, infrastructure, peace, and poverty reduction. A

biblical analysis must examine documented conditions rather than assume conspiracy. Yet money is never culturally weightless. Institutions dependent upon donors may gradually adopt the moral vocabulary required for legitimacy.

African churches may publicly resist Western secularism while absorbing other forms of the modern self. Prosperity teaching baptises consumer aspiration. Celebrity pastors reproduce brand culture. "Spiritual fathers" can imitate authoritarian power. Deliverance markets turn fear into revenue. Nationalist preaching sanctifies political ambition. Therapeutic language transforms repentance into self-fulfilment. Social media turns ministry into performance. Academic rationalism can empty theology of the supernatural, while occult syncretism imports ancestral divination into Christian vocabulary.

The alternative is not an uncritical return to ancestral tradition. Precolonial societies were not Eden. They contained wisdom, communal responsibility, respect for elders, rich language, art, memory, and forms of solidarity that modern individualism often weakens. They also contained idolatry, divination, oppressive hierarchies, ethnic hostility, fear of spirits, sexual sin, violence, and unjust customs. Every culture stands beneath Scripture.

This protects African Christianity from two captivities. The first is mimicry, the assumption that Western secular categories define maturity. The second is romanticism, the assumption that whatever is indigenous is spiritually authentic. Christ is not European, and truth is not ancestral merely because it is old. The gospel judges coloniser and colonised, modern and traditional, global institution and village custom.

African believers should therefore practise epistemic stewardship. They may learn from global scholarship without surrendering to secular naturalism, honour community without worshipping ancestors, use technology without becoming products of platforms, pursue development without redefining humanity according to donors, and defend sovereignty without turning nation into an idol. The goal is not isolation. It is faithful discernment.

The Genealogy in Ordinary Life

The history traced above now appears as instinct.

"Did God really say?" becomes the claim that Scripture is outdated, patriarchal, psychologically harmful, scientifically impossible, politically dangerous, or morally inferior to contemporary insight.

"Let us make a name" becomes institutional rankings, personal branding, celebrity leadership, national glory, ministry empires, and the fear of becoming invisible.

Rationalist autonomy appears when revelation is admitted only after contemporary reason has approved it. A doctrine may be retained if it can be translated into concepts the age already accepts.

Empiricist reduction appears when only the measurable is treated as real. Prayer, providence, demonic deception, moral guilt, and resurrection are permitted as private beliefs but excluded from serious public knowledge.

Enlightenment autonomy appears in the assumption that maturity means freedom from received authority. Children are taught to question every inherited identity except those currently certified by institutions.

Rousseau's legacy appears when society is blamed for every disordered desire and the inward self is treated as naturally innocent.

Marxist analysis appears when moral reality is reduced to structures, power, oppressor and oppressed classes, and political liberation. Personal sin becomes secondary to group location.

Freudian inwardness appears when restraint is presumed repressive and guilt is treated only as psychological injury.

Nietzschean value creation appears when the courageous person is celebrated for rejecting inherited morality and naming his own good.

Existential self-creation appears in the command to invent meaning, construct identity, and live authentically without receiving a created purpose.

Postmodern suspicion appears when every truth claim is first interpreted as a bid for power and evidence matters less than the speaker's social location.

Expressive individualism appears when inward desire defines the true self and external disagreement is interpreted as harm.

Digital subjectivity appears when a person experiences life through anticipated reaction, edits the self for an audience, and accepts quantified attention as a measure of worth.

These currents also enter the church. Sermons become motivational therapy. Worship becomes experience design. Doctrine is adjusted to preserve market share. Political ideology becomes prophetic interpretation. Professional credentials become spiritual authority. Online visibility becomes anointing. A congregation may reject secular humanism in its statement of faith while practising autonomy in its decisions.

Spiritual Warfare Through Plausible Ideas

The genealogy of modernism must be interpreted spiritually without becoming superstitious. Scripture teaches that deception can operate through doctrines, desires, institutions, persecution, false signs, and worldly wisdom. Satan is a liar, but he often lies through partial truth. He does not need every philosopher to sign a covenant with darkness. He needs human pride, wounded desire, institutional reward, and credible language to move in the same direction.

An idea can be sincerely held and spiritually dangerous. A movement can identify a real injustice and propose a remedy that creates another bondage. A scholar can make a valuable discovery while drawing false metaphysical conclusions. A church can adopt a practice for efficiency and discover that the practice has reshaped its doctrine.

Christians must therefore distinguish levels of responsibility. Intellectual error may require patient correction. Cultural inheritance may require education. Trauma may require protection and care. Institutional incentives may require structural reform. Wilful deception may require public rebuke and discipline.

Spiritual bondage may require prayer, renunciation, and pastoral ministry. These categories should not be collapsed.

Nor should human opponents be demonised. *Ephesians 6:12* says the struggle is not against flesh and blood. That does not remove human accountability. It forbids hatred. The philosopher, activist, technologist, or wounded believer remains an image-bearer for whom Christ died.

Discernment is neither blind institutional trust nor reflexive belief in every counter-narrative. It asks what is known, how it is known, which interests are present, what remains uncertain, and how Scripture judges the whole. A false accusation does not become holy because it targets a powerful institution. Unsupported conspiracy claims injure neighbours and weaken genuine warnings.

The serpent is subtle. The church must not answer subtlety with carelessness.

What the Transfer of Authority Produces

The genealogy can be summarised as a movement of jurisdiction. God becomes optional. Revelation becomes negotiable. Reason becomes autonomous. Experience becomes self-authenticating. History becomes material conflict. Desire becomes revelatory. Identity becomes self-created. Politics becomes redemptive. Technology becomes eschatological. The church is then tempted to translate each substitution into Christian vocabulary.

The doctrine of God changes first. He becomes a hypothesis, projection, moral symbol, provider, therapist, national mascot, or impersonal spiritual energy. A God who commands repentance is judged less credible than a god who affirms the self.

Revelation becomes a record of human religious experience rather than God's authoritative speech. Difficult texts are not interpreted carefully but placed on trial. The authority of Scripture survives only where it agrees with the age.

Human identity becomes unstable. If the self must create meaning, it carries a burden no creature can bear. Recognition becomes necessary for existence. Contradiction feels annihilating. The person becomes both sovereign and dependent, declaring autonomy while seeking continuous affirmation.

Morality becomes fragmented. Rights, utility, consent, authenticity, equality, wellbeing, and power compete without a shared account of the good. Public debate intensifies because participants use the same moral words with incompatible meanings.

Sexuality is detached from creation, covenant, procreation, and holiness. Desire becomes identity, the body becomes material, and consent is asked to carry the entire meaning of sexual ethics.

Family obligations become negotiable according to personal fulfilment. Marriage becomes a revocable contract, children projects of adult choice, and the elderly or disabled vulnerable to measures of utility.

Education becomes formation into an immanent worldview even when it claims neutrality. Students learn which explanations count as knowledge, which identities deserve recognition, and which moral claims are permitted.

Politics becomes a contest among rival salvations. Progressive movements promise liberation through structural transformation. Conservative movements promise restoration through national power. Both can turn opponents into embodiments of evil and recruit the church as chaplain.

Economics becomes either market providence or revolutionary conflict. The consumer is taught to find identity through purchase, while the worker is valued by productivity. Greed and envy become rival engines.

Psychology becomes a total anthropology. Trauma explains all conduct, wellbeing becomes the highest end, and moral responsibility appears cruel. In the opposite error, churches deny legitimate mental illness and blame sufferers.

Technology becomes more than tool. It promises mastery of limitation, endless connection, simulated presence, and eventual transcendence. The body appears obsolete, death a technical problem, and dependence a defect.

Worship becomes experience, leadership performance, evangelism marketing, and discipleship content consumption. The congregation remains religious while its operating assumptions are modernist.

The eternal consequence is most serious. When judgment disappears, the cross loses necessity. When sin becomes ignorance, repression, or exclusion, salvation becomes education, therapy, liberation, or affirmation. People may be helped temporally while remaining unreconciled to God.

A gospel that cannot say "repent" cannot prepare anyone to meet the King.

A Pastoral Word to Different Hearers

The same genealogy should not be preached in the same tone to every person. Scripture distinguishes the arrogant from the wounded, the deceiver from the confused, and the teacher from the learner.

To the Intellectual Who Regards Revelation as Immaturity

Your questions are not the enemy. God is not threatened by evidence, logic, history, or scrutiny. The Christian faith makes public claims about creation, incarnation, resurrection, judgment, and history. Examine them seriously.

But examine the examiner too. Reason does not stand nowhere. It operates through assumptions, moral interests, language, memory, and institutions. The demand that revelation justify itself before autonomous reason already assumes that reason possesses jurisdiction it did not create.

Intellectual maturity is not the refusal to kneel. It is knowing before whom one must kneel. Pride can wear academic robes as easily as religious vestments. The mind was made for truth, but it was not made to be God.

To the Scholar Who Confuses Consensus with Final Authority

Consensus matters. Expertise should be respected. Disciplines develop methods that novices should not dismiss casually. Yet consensus is not infallibility. Scientific, historical, legal, and moral judgments can change. Institutions reward some questions, methods, and conclusions more readily than others.

Do not become an anti-intellectual merely because experts can err. Do not become a captive merely because they possess credentials. Read primary sources. Understand methods. Identify what the evidence establishes and what interpretation adds. Admit uncertainty. Refuse the vanity of certainty performed for status.

Your scholarship is ministry when it serves reality under Christ. It becomes idolatry when professional acceptance determines what you are allowed to see.

To the Pastor Who Fears Appearing Outdated

The pressure is real. Members compare sermons with global platforms. Donors prefer positive messages. Educated congregants may regard biblical boundaries as embarrassing. The temptation is to preserve the church by softening the Word.

You cannot save Christ's church through disobedience. Relevance without truth is a beautifully painted exit sign pointing into the fire. Explain difficult texts carefully. Correct abusive interpretations. Admit where Christians have sinned. But do not revise God's command to avoid cultural shame.

Preach as one who will give account. The applause of the age expires quickly. The judgment seat does not.

To the Believer Who Inherited Modern Assumptions Unknowingly

You may never have read Kant, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Foucault, or Sartre. Their questions may still shape your instincts through education, entertainment, therapy, politics, advertising, and social media. Do not be ashamed of what you inherited unknowingly. Bring it into the light.

Ask where your definitions came from. What do you mean by freedom, dignity, harm, authenticity, progress, justice, identity, and love? Which authority fills those words? Let Scripture renew not only your conclusions but your categories.

Repentance is not merely turning from visible misconduct. It is allowing God to correct the mind that made misconduct appear reasonable.

To the Young Christian Formed by the Digital Self

You have been asked to perform before you finished becoming. Your face, friendships, opinions, achievements, and pain can be measured by reaction. The platform tells you to express yourself while quietly teaching you which self receives attention.

You do not need to disappear from the digital world, but you must refuse its priesthood. Learn to do good that no audience sees. Pray without posting. Serve without documenting. Read slowly. Keep some joys private. Let mature believers know you beyond your profile.

Your identity is not the sum of reactions. You were known by God before an algorithm learned your preferences. In Christ, you are not a brand seeking an audience. You are a member of a body awaiting a King.

To the African Christian Torn Between Western Modernism and Ancestral Return

You do not have to choose between secular imitation and uncritical traditionalism. The West is not the measure of maturity, and ancestry is not the measure of truth. Both modern institutions and inherited customs contain wisdom and sin.

Receive what accords with Scripture. Reject what contradicts it. Honour elders without treating them as infallible. Preserve language and community without invoking ancestral spirits. Pursue education without surrendering revelation. Use international partnerships without selling moral conscience. Defend African dignity without turning culture or nation into an idol.

Christ does not ask Africa to become Western. He commands every people to become obedient.

To the Wounded Person Who Distrusts Authority

Perhaps "God said" was used to silence you. Perhaps a leader protected himself with Scripture, a family demanded submission while practising violence, or a church valued its reputation above your safety. Your suspicion did not begin in a philosophy seminar. It began in pain.

The church must not demand quick trust. Truth requires evidence, accountability, protection, and sometimes civil reporting. Forgiveness must never be used to return a victim to danger. Human authority has limits.

Yet the abuser is not the image of God. Jesus is not the leader who used His name. The Chief Shepherd exposes wolves and binds the wounded. Do not let a counterfeit authority steal the true Lord from you.

To the Political Activist Seeking Redemption Through Power

Justice matters. Laws shape life. Institutions can oppress. Silence before evil can be sin. Yet no revolution, election, party, nation, or global programme can regenerate the heart.

Do not baptise hatred as courage. Do not excuse falsehood because it serves your side. Do not treat opponents as beyond redemption. The movement that promises paradise through power will eventually need enemies to explain why paradise has not arrived.

Serve justice, but worship Christ. The state is a servant, not a saviour.

To the Church Leader Who Condemns Modernism While Embodying It

You denounce the sovereign self, but do you demand unquestioned loyalty? You condemn celebrity culture, but is your face the centre of every ministry product? You preach against materialism, but do the poor finance your luxury? You oppose progressive revision, but do you revise texts concerning humility, accountability, and money?

Modernism is not defeated by conservative slogans. The autonomous self can wear a clerical collar and quote an inerrant Bible. Repentance begins when the Word is allowed to judge the judge.

If you have manipulated people, confess. If you have silenced correction, open the record. If you have benefited from falsehood, make restitution where possible. Restoration to fellowship may be offered through genuine repentance, but restoration to office is not automatic.

To the Sincere Seeker Who Fears Religious Manipulation

Your fear is understandable. Religion has been used to control people. But autonomy does not remove manipulation. Markets, states, movements, therapists, influencers, and platforms also form desire and regulate belonging.

The question is not whether you will live under authority. The question is which authority tells the truth, bears your sin, defeats death, and remains good when every institution fails.

Jesus does not invite you into human tyranny. He calls you to Himself. He was crucified by an alliance of religious and political power, rose bodily, and now commands all people to repent. His yoke is not the absence of lordship. It is the lordship under which the soul finds rest ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)).

Correction, Rebuke, Exhortation, and Restoration

The church's response to modernism must perform four distinct ministries.

Correction replaces caricature with truth. Christians should stop describing modernity as though every philosopher taught the same doctrine, every scientist opposed God, or every social reform arose from rebellion. Accurate history strengthens discernment. It shows precisely where legitimate inquiry crossed into autonomous authority.

Rebuke confronts pride. The human mind did not create the reality it studies. Desire does not become law because it is intense. Institutions do not become righteous because they are powerful. Technology does not become salvation because it is impressive. The creature has no authority to summon the Creator for moral examination.

Rebuke must also enter the sanctuary. Churches that defended corruption, silenced victims, punished honest questions, or used Scripture to protect human power helped autonomy present itself as liberation. The Lord does not need lies to defend His truth.

Exhortation calls believers to intellectual discipleship. Read Scripture as whole books. Learn history. Study philosophy beyond slogans. Understand scientific methods. Test media claims. Distinguish fact, interpretation, inference, and speculation. Teach children not merely what Christians believe but why, how rival worldviews reason, and where their promises fail.

Restoration returns created goods to their proper order. Reason becomes a servant of truth. Science becomes study of creation. politics becomes limited service. Psychology becomes compassionate description rather than salvation.

Technology becomes stewardship. Identity becomes received in creation and renewed in Christ. Culture becomes vocation rather than idol.

Repentance does not require burning the library or smashing the computer. It requires removing them from the altar.

The Biblical Alternative: Wisdom Received in Christ

The answer to autonomy is not irrationality. It is creaturely wisdom.

Reason is a created gift. It observes, compares, infers, interprets, and judges. Because God is truthful and creation ordered, rational inquiry is possible. Because humanity is finite and fallen, reason requires revelation, community, correction, and humility.

Knowledge is receptive stewardship. The world is already there, spoken into being by God. The knower does not manufacture reality. He receives, investigates, names, cultivates, and gives account.

Freedom is not the absence of all externally given limits. It is liberation from slavery to sin for joyful obedience. Jesus says that the one who sins is a slave of sin and that the Son sets free indeed (John 8:34-36). The autonomous will is not free when appetite rules it.

Identity is received before it is expressed. Humanity is created in God's image, embodied, male and female, relational, fallen, and accountable. In Christ, believers receive adoption, justification, a new creation, spiritual gifts, and a future resurrection. They do not invent themselves. They are named by grace.

Dignity is grounded in the Creator, not capacity, usefulness, recognition, or self-definition. The unborn child, disabled person, poor labourer, elderly widow, imprisoned sinner, and ideological opponent possess dignity that society did not grant and cannot revoke.

Morality is grounded in God's holy character. Divine commands are not arbitrary chains. They express the wisdom of the One who made life. Love seeks the true and eternal good of the neighbour, which may require comfort, warning, discipline, sacrifice, patience, and forgiveness.

Social cooperation is good when ordered toward righteousness. Babel is not condemned because people cooperated. It is judged because cooperation served self-exaltation and resistance to God. Pentecost reveals unity through truth, not uniformity through control.

Political authority is real and limited. Government should restrain evil, protect the vulnerable, and administer justice, but it cannot save. Because Christ is Lord, rulers may be obeyed in lawful matters and resisted when they command sin (Acts 5:29).

Science is disciplined investigation of God's creation. Christians should pursue it excellently, welcome correction, and refuse false claims. Science cannot become a total metaphysics or moral sovereign.

Psychological understanding may identify trauma, illness, development, and relational patterns. It should serve persons without erasing sin, spiritual conflict, responsibility, forgiveness, and the need for competent pastoral care.

Technology is a tool of dominion under moral law. It should be evaluated by purpose, design, incentives, distribution of power, effects on character, and treatment of the vulnerable. What can be built is not therefore permitted.

Progress is provisional improvement under providence. Christians can build hospitals, schools, just laws, honest businesses, and useful technologies while knowing that the final future comes through resurrection. Hope is not confidence that history improves automatically. It is confidence that Christ will return.

The centre of wisdom is Christ crucified. The world's genealogy ascends from creaturely limitation toward autonomy. The gospel descends. The eternal Son takes flesh, assumes the form of a servant, obeys unto death, bears judgment, rises bodily, and is exalted by the Father ([Philippians 2:5-11](#)). Salvation comes not through self-creation but self-surrender to the One who gave Himself.

The Last Second: Readiness Without Panic

We are living in an hour when ancient ideas move at machine speed. Philosophies that once required years of study are translated into videos, slogans, school curricula, corporate policies, therapeutic advice, and platform design. A child can encounter a total anthropology before learning the word *anthropology*. A church can import a rival gospel through a leadership seminar, a worship trend, a political campaign, or an algorithmic feed.

This convergence should awaken the saints. It does not authorise date-setting. Scripture does not reveal the day or hour of the Lord's coming ([Matthew 24:36](#)). The "last second" is a moral and spiritual image, not a calculated timetable. It names the urgency of obedience when deception accelerates, death remains near, and Christ has commanded watchfulness.

Rapture readiness is not fascination with rumours. It is repentance, faith, holiness, love of truth, oil in the lamp, faithful service, and hope fixed on Christ. A person can identify every political development and remain unready because pride, greed, sexual sin, bitterness, falsehood, or unforgiveness rules the heart.

The history in this chapter exposes a long rebellion. Do not assume that its length means judgment is distant. God's patience is salvation, not permission ([2 Peter 3:9-14](#)). Every generation is one breath from eternity. Even if the Lord delays beyond our lifetime, death will close the age for each of us.

To the unbeliever: do not wait for philosophy to solve the guilt it cannot forgive. Christ died for sinners and rose again. Repent and believe.

To the compromised Christian: do not comfort yourself because your doctrine remains orthodox on paper. Return to your first love. Tear down the private Babel. Bring desire, ambition, secret sin, and intellectual pride beneath the cross.

To the faithful but weary believer: do not mistake the noise of the age for sovereignty. The nations rage, but the King is enthroned. Your hidden obedience is not wasted. The Lord knows those who are His.

To the church: this is not the hour to become louder than the world and emptier than the Word. It is the hour to become holy, truthful, compassionate, intellectually awake, and unafraid.

The Bride is not prepared by panic. She is prepared by truth, righteousness, endurance, and love for the Bridegroom.

Conclusion: The Machinery Is New, the Voice Is Not

Modernism is not a single philosophy born fully formed in the Enlightenment. It is a historically developing family of attempts to relocate authority from God to humanity. Renaissance confidence enlarged the human horizon. The Reformation recovered scriptural judgment over corrupt institutions, while later movements detached critique from revelation. The Scientific Revolution investigated creation, while scientism later expanded method into metaphysics. Rationalism centred the thinking subject. Empiricism narrowed knowledge toward experience. Enlightenment autonomy made maturity self-legislation. Secularisation transferred sacred functions into public institutions and private selves. Liberal theology reconstructed Christianity for modern consciousness. Feuerbach returned divine attributes to humanity. Marx located redemption in material history. Naturalism placed humanity within a self-contained process. Nietzsche demanded value creation after the death of God. Freud turned inward toward desire and repression. Existentialism made meaning a project. Postmodernism unmasked power without restoring revelation. Expressive individualism enthroned inward identity. Digital culture placed that identity upon a measurable tower.

These streams differ and often condemn one another. Their common spiritual danger is the ancient possibility that the creature may interpret reality without obedient dependence upon the Creator.

The church must not answer this genealogy with nostalgia, ignorance, hatred, or fabricated evidence. It must acknowledge modernity's goods, repent of its own corruption, and recover the intellectual confidence of a faith that does not fear truth. Reason, science, rights, political accountability, psychological care, and technology are not enemies when they remain servants. They become rival gospels when they claim to define the human person, diagnose sin, promise salvation, or determine the future apart from God.

The modern revolt did not begin when a philosopher doubted revelation. It began when the serpent made doubt appear mature, desire appear wise, and disobedience appear liberating. Babel then translated the inward revolt into architecture, technology, unity, and name-making. The contemporary world has refined the materials, but it has not changed the project.

The answer is not a stronger human tower. It is the stone the builders rejected, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. In Him, wisdom is received, guilt forgiven, identity restored, power disciplined, and hope anchored beyond history.

Once authority has been transferred from revelation to humanity, the next battle is inevitable. Who may define truth? Who controls the language by which reality is named? Which institutions decide what counts as knowledge, harm, justice, and credible testimony? Chapter 3, "The War Against Truth, Revelation,

and Meaning," turns to that conflict. The throne has been contested. Now the words themselves will be contested.

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