

Conservative Humanism and the Fate of the West

By Alexander Rosenthal Pubul

Our Western civilization faces a formidable crisis of confidence. Sir. Roger Scruton spoke of an emergent “culture of repudiation”, the view that the Western tradition is nothing more than a long burden of sin and evil to be cast off. Conservatism must respond to this besetting crisis with a “culture of affirmation”, a clear and compelling account of why our Western tradition is so worthy of conservation. Conservative Humanism endeavors to answer this challenge by providing a clear sense of what the West stands for, and what it stands against. It contains two elements – conservatism and humanism. By *conservatism*, we understand the political and social defense of ancestral cultural traditions, and their organs of transmission - principally religion, family, and education. In *humanism*, we find a specific tradition that is the master key to understanding European civilization in its distinct historical phases and unique destiny. *Classical humanism* is focused on the realization of *humanitas*, the Greco-Roman ideal of human excellence and culture achieved through the right education of the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral faculties. *Christian humanism* is rooted in the spiritual dignity of man, created in God’s image, raised to infinite value by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and destined for eternal life. *Modern humanism* has focused on realizing the rights and freedoms of the individual and the conquest of nature through science, economics, and technology. Yet modern humanism also contains the seeds of our present crisis by producing militantly secular humanism that aims to displace God with man. As Nicholas Berdyaev noted, this radical form of humanism ironically and dialectically undermines itself, for there is no foundation for human dignity on the grounds of a materialist worldview. The resultant spiritual crisis lies at the root of the West’s aimlessness and loss of self-confidence. Conservative humanism aims to reinvigorate the Western tradition with its consciousness of past achievements grounded in an ennobling vision of man’s transcendent value. The West therefore stands today at a crossroads - will we drift into a post-humanist era menaced by materialism, technologism, and the false promise of new malign ideologies? Or will Western civilization renew itself, drawing on the evergreen spiritual fountains of its classical and Christian heritage?