

The Christian Worldview and Philosophy According to Orr, Kuyper, and Dooyeweerd:
A Comprehensive Understanding of Reality and Influential Factor on Vocation

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Outline

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In his book *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, Richard J. Naugle argues that, when Christianity is seen as a worldview, “the holistic nature, cosmic dimensions, and universal applications of the faith... [and] the explanatory power, intellectual coherence, and pragmatic effectiveness of the Christian worldview not only make it exceedingly relevant for believers personally, but also establish a solid foundation for vigorous cultural and academic engagement” (5). Essentially, one’s religious faith component influences his or her worldview, his or her “perceptual framework... [or] way of seeing” (Walsh/Middleton 17). This worldview then influences one’s philosophy, one’s “theoretical view of the total reality” (Walsh/Middleton 172). Finally, this philosophy is then applied practically to differing disciplines and vocations. Thus, the Christian faith leads to a Christian worldview, a Christian philosophy, and Christian means of engaging with the world, especially through one’s vocation.

The term *worldview* has become popular in the last 150 years, though the concept is as old as time. In *The Transforming Vision*, Walsh and Middleton explain, “Our worldview determines our values. It helps us interpret the world around us. It sorts out what is important from what is not, what is of highest value from what is least” (31-32). Thus, a worldview is an “inescapable reality,” (Naugle 10) as it is impossible to lack an idea about how the world works; every individual, no matter race, class, gender, time period of existence, etc., must think about and engage with the world, basing those thoughts and interactions off a personal interpretation of the world’s workings. Further, Walsh and Middleton’s definition of worldview proved for the following four, basic questions:

- (1) *Who am I?* Or, what is the nature, task and purpose of human beings?
- (2) *Where am I?* Or, what is the nature of the world and universe I live in?

(3) *What's wrong?* Or, what is the basic problem or obstacle that keeps me from attaining fulfillment? In other words, how do I understand evil?

(4) *What is the remedy?* Or, how is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? In other words how do I find salvation? (35)

Therefore, a worldview is truly an all-encompassing means of understanding reality, playing out in every aspect of existence.

The German word *Weltanschauung* was the first introduced term similar to what is now termed *worldview*. Translated to “the widest view that the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology,” *Weltanschauung* was first used in late 19th century theology textbooks, where Scottish theologian James Orr came across it in his studies (Naugle 7).

During Orr’s lifetime, Europe was changing and moving further away from Christian views regarding religion, philosophy, and science, as both modernism and Darwinism were rising. Christians needed to be able to defend their faith to the scientific community, so when the United Presbyterian Theological College asked Orr to give a presentation during the Kerr Lectures, he focused on just that, presenting Christianity as a comprehensive whole, not merely as a means of attaining salvation; consequently, Orr found the term *weltanschauung* more apt than the term *religion*, as its connotation referred to a unified view of reality which naturally included the steps to salvation while encompassing much more. Thus, Orr argued that Christianity should be viewed as a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview. If Darwinism and modernism are considered worldviews, as they offer answers to Walsh and Middleton’s quartet of questions, Christianity must then be a worldview as well, as it offers a different set of answers to the same four questions.

Further, Orr argued that, while Christianity is certainly a worldview, it is also more than a worldview: Christianity is a “historical religion rooted in divine revelation and concerned with salvation” in addition to interpreting a reality “rooted in a personal, holy, self-revealing God and a doctrine of redemption. As a *Weltanschauung*, it explains the particulars and purposes of life theistically and unites all things into an ordered whole” (Naugle 10). Ultimately, Christianity offers an explanation of how the world works while also accounting for salvation of the broken world, making Christianity both a religious faith commitment and the worldview that stems from that faith commitment. This concept, detailed in Orr’s 1891 speech, was published two years later under the title *The Christian View of God and the World*.

Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch pastor, politician, writer, theologian, and founder of the Free University, was influenced tremendously by Orr’s book. Thus, when Kuyper was asked to speak at Princeton’s Stone Lectures, he also spoke on the Christian *Weltanschauung*, though he didn’t use that term. Rather, Kuyper narrowed his scope and defined the “Calvinist life system,” which is essentially synonymous with a Calvinist worldview (Kuyper 4). Modernism and Christianity were already established as “two life systems [or worldviews] wrestling with one another in mortal combat,” as modernism explains life in terms of data measured in nature while Christianity explains life in terms of Christ’s sovereignty and sacrifice (Kuyper 5). Thus, Kuyper argued that, in order to contest a modernist worldview with a Calvinist one, “principle must be arrayed against principle” (Kuyper 5). Apologetics have no value in the eyes of modernists. Christians must give logical, comprehensive, historical backing for their faith because it is precisely this type of backing that modernists use to rationalize their own belief systems. Kuyper described this conflict between those who have been “spiritually regenerated,” or undergone “palingenesis” and those who haven’t as the “antithesis” (Naugle 22). Those with the God-given

ability to understand the world as God intended it to function are the “regenerate,” and they will constantly be in opposition with those who do not recognize God’s sovereignty over every aspect of life (Naugle 22). Kuyper believed that the best backing, the best principle to defend the Christian worldview of the “regenerate” (22) was Calvinism. Consequently, in his Stone Lectures, later published in *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper explained Calvinism in terms of humanity’s “relation to God, relation to man, [and] relation to the world” (Kuyper 11).

According to Calvinism, God created the Heavens and the Earth and structured all Creation under a specific order of natural laws. In God’s created order, He is above all things, and all things are dependent on God; consequently, “all creation is ‘subjective’ in the sense that it is *subject* to God’s law” (Walsh /Middleton 176). In a simple example, God instituted gravity and continues to sustain that natural law to the present, and no object, no plant, no animal, etc. is exempt to this law. More complex is man’s role in God’s creational structure, as man certainly falls under the category of God’s creation – in fact, man was created “in the image of God” (*English Standard Bible*, Gen. 1.27). Walsh and Middleton echo Kuyper’s philosophy in their eloquent categorization of what it means to be made in God’s image, arguing that, because God is an unlimited Creator who rules over His vast Creation, man is also a creator. Man’s means of creating, though, are limited to what God has already provided, so, as J.R.R. Tolkien describes in his essay “On Fairy Stories,” man is a “sub-creator” of sorts (8). Regardless, man is to be a co-ruler with God, his ruling powers primarily pertaining to the building of culture:

We cultivate relationships, manners and forms of worship. We harness animals and the forces of nature. We formulate and develop ideas and traditions, and we construct not only technological objects but social groupings and institutions as well.

All these activities and their results are cultural; that is, they are humanly developed realities... To be a cultural being is... to be human. (Walsh/Middleton 55)

Therefore, humanity engages with God's creation, God's world through building culture and furthering God's Creation. During the recent Q Commons seminar, Presbyterian theologian Tim Keller explained that culture building is "rearranging the raw materials of lie to express meaning and to say this is good, this is beautiful, this is true." Kuyper termed this concept the "cultural mandate": "Certainly our salvation is of substantial weight, but it cannot be compared with the much greater weight of the glory of our God, who has revealed his majesty in his wondrous creation" (Kuyper 89). It is through building culture and enjoying God's creation that God is honored; this is the primary purpose for those who have undergone "palingenesis" (Naugle 22). Therefore, humanity first engages with God reverently and in submission because of His role as ruling Creator and our roles as "sub-creators" (Tolkien 8).

Humanity also relates to God personally, though, as the Holy Spirit enters our hearts, allowing for "immediate fellowship" with the Creator (Naugle 20). Kuyper divided the world into differing spheres, or "[areas] where interaction takes place, and where some sort of authority is exercised" (Mouw 23). Kuyper believed that the world is divided into spheres, such as the church, the government, the arts, the sciences, etc. According to Kuyper, one sphere cannot claim authority or precedence over another sphere, though all spheres should be cognizant of one another. The existence of such spheres implies that God is sovereign over all Creation, as He is found in separate, un-intertwined spheres. It's the essence of Kuyper's famous "every square inch" philosophy, where God is ruling and sustaining all areas of life. From the most mundane to the most important, God is sovereign and the Holy Spirit is at work. Kuyper believed that God has "deliberately woven many-ness into creation" because differences in "gifts, powers,

aptitudes, and talents” ultimately brings the most glory to God himself, as God is recognized as a supreme, creative being (Mouw 18). However, humans often either “affirm many-ness without seeing any overall coherence to the splendidly complex reality in which we find ourselves” or “get rid of some or all of the many-ness by squeezing things together, in a way that this or that element of the many-ness begins to choke out the others” (Mouw 19). Kuyper rebuked both of these approaches, arguing that the first disregards Christ’s sovereignty over everything and the second, which Walsh and Middleton term “reductionism” (182), tempts us to place something other than God at the center of our supposed unity. Therefore, “by directing our worship toward the true God, we thereby allow the ‘all things’ simply to be what they are – the splendid many-ness in which God takes delight” (Mouw 22). Thus, Kuyper argued in favor of Christians supporting the differing aspects of life, seeking God’s hand in each. Because of God’s control over and presence in the intricacies of human life, humanity can relate to God intimately as well as reverently.

Calvinism also addresses the way man should relate to man: respectfully. Because every man, whether regenerate or not, is created in God’s image, Calvinists should not “rest until both politically and socially every man, simply because he is man, should be recognized, respected and dealt with as a creature created after the Divine likeness” (Kuyper 17). It is important for man to see the intrinsic value in other man. Further, it is important for man to see the value of community. To be made in the image of God is to be made in community, as God exists in the community of the Trinity. Similarly, the Church is meant to be a community of humans relating well to other humans, discerning the messages of the Holy Spirit together: “It is the vocation of the body of Christ to *work together* in a fallen world, seeking to bring the forgiveness, healing, and renewal of God’s rule to bear on every area of life (Walsh/Middleton 88, emphasis added).

Thus, all individual humans should be honored simply because they are human, and these honor-based interactions should lend to larger communities.

This communal call also applies to a Calvinist way of relating to the world; a similar concept was already touched upon when discussing man's reverently intimate relationship to God: in a group, man is called to build culture. However, it is important to understand the need to build culture in terms of man's sinful nature. Since the Fall, man has been unable to perfectly relate to God, to relate to man, or to carry out the cultural mandate in relation to the world. When sin entered the world, all of these relationships were hindered, taken off the course penned by God's own hand, commanded by God's structural laws, and revealed to sinful man in the Scriptures. Thus, as Christians attempt to actualize each relation under God's intended structure, only doing so by the grace of God, they are restoring the world to its pre-Fall state, ultimately joining God in His process of redeeming Creation: man "must in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life" (Naugle 20). This restoration, this redemption of the Fallen world is directly tied into the cultural mandate and a Calvinist's understanding of man's relation to the world.

Succinctly, in relation to God, Calvinism encourages a reverence for God, as He is the Ruler and Sustainer, while also allowing "immediate fellowship" between man and his Creator. In relation to man, Calvinism acknowledges that all have inherent worth and are equal because we have all been made in the image of God. Man should, therefore, bond together to mimic Christ in the world. In relation to the world, Calvinism seeks to build culture and restore God's Creation. Because of these three relationships, Calvinism can be classified into the three primary pillar points of "creation, fall, and redemption" (Naugle 22). God created the world and should, therefore be revered; man entered sin, separation from God, through the Fall, requiring a

redemption of the world. Thus, a Calvinist worldview is all encompassing, pertaining to every sphere of life.

This Calvinist Christian worldview lends to a Calvinist Christian philosophy, a Calvinist Christian “theoretical view of the total reality,” which was articulated by Herman Dooyeweerd, an early 20th century Dutch philosopher and professor at Kuyper’s Free University (Walsh/Middleton 172). Dooyeweerd argued, “the first task of a Christian philosophy... is to expose the religious condition that is determinative of all theoretical activity and cultural endeavor” (Naugle 26). Dooyeweerd defines two primary “ground motives” that stem from the religious orientation of the heart and impact all interaction with the world: “the spirit of holiness,” which leads to an understanding of the primary points of Calvinism (creation, fall, redemption), and “the spirit of apostasy,” which leads away from Christ’s call on Creation (Naugle 28). Thus, Dooyeweerd believed that human thought and interaction with the world was religious based, not worldview based; Dooyeweerd’s concept proves a deviation from Kuyper’s ideology, yet the practical application of both remains the same. For example, both argued that scientific reasoning, though it claims to be purely empirical, cannot be because “all theorizing arises out of a priori faith commitments” (Naugle 24). Therefore, because everyone has an already existing faith commitment and/or a worldview that lends to a philosophy about approaching the world, nothing, not even the sciences, is entirely objective or neutral.

Dooyeweerd also furthered Kuyper’s concept of spheres by differing between 15 “modal aspects of reality... [to explain] multidimensionality not in terms of different kinds of creatures but in terms of how creatures operate, the ways they function” (Walsh/Middleton 181). Dooyeweerd’s fifteen modal aspects are found in each of Kuyper’s spheres of reality, including quantitative, spatial, kinematic, physical, biotic, sensitive, analytical, formative, lingual, social,

economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical, and confessional aspects. If every sphere of reality has 15 modal aspects that influence its basic workings, all spheres remain separate and independent of one another, but they are still related in the sense that they each have a system of government, an aesthetical appeal, an ethical standpoint, etc (Basden). Thus, Dooyeweerd eliminates the possibility of reductionism that Kuyper rebuked.

In fact, Orr, Kuyper, and Dooyeweerd all claim that Christianity should impact every area, every sphere, every modal aspect of life. Christians should understand everything, including their work, their scholarship, their interactions with family and friends, etc., in terms of God's grace and sovereignty. Walsh and Middleton explain that many Christians do not live in light of this truth though, describing this compartmentalization of life, in which God is served in some areas and not in others, the "sacred/secular split" (Walsh/Middleton 67). This view is not only un-Calvinist, but it is also unbiblical: "our service to God is not something we do *alongside* our ordinary human life. The Bible knows no such dichotomy. In the biblical worldview all of life, in all its dimensions, is constituted as religion" (Walsh/Middleton 67). For example, there is a large distinction between "Christians who are students" and "Christian students." The first engage the dualism, the "sacred/secular split" while the latter "develop an integrative perspective in their studies. Jesus is Lord of all. His lordship is integral to all the student thinks and does. In the biblical worldview, the human cultural task (which includes scholarship) is both creationally affirmed and redeemed in Jesus Christ" (Walsh/Middleton 167). Thus, only "Christian students" are genuinely adhering to God's cultural mandate.

Similarly, if one's worldview is a comprehensive view of understanding reality, those who claim a Christian worldview should certainly apply their faith to their vocation. As an aspiring high school English teacher and director of after-school theatrical productions, I

interviewed Sandy Spahr, Frontier Charter Academy's theatre teacher and primary production co-director. Because Spahr was my teacher and director throughout high school, I wanted to better understand how she applies her faith to her occupation in a secular school in hopes of mimicking her in my future occupation.

Obviously, in regard to the ethical modal aspect of directing, Spahr values her leadership position and role in forming her students' minds, taking great care in selecting material to perform: "My faith does impact my thoughts on what shows to choose for drama and what content to use in class. I know sometimes I push those boundaries a little. I personally think it's okay for students to portray non-Christian perspectives on stage because it allows them to think about what they really believe or solidify their thoughts on deeper topics." Production choices also play into the economic modal aspect, as shows must be realistic to perform on a budget, the social/cultural modal aspect, as students must interact with each other regarding performances, and the linguistic modal aspect, as the language used throughout a piece must reflect Spahr's ethical standpoint. Ultimately, Spahr has her students' best interest at heart, believing that theatrical expression can aid in identity and belief formation. Not only is the portrayal of non-Christian perspectives a growing experience for students, but it is also a growing experience for audience members, who must engage their aesthetic, juridical (sense of justice), rational, and emotional modal aspect while evaluating a production.

Further, Spahr truly cares about her students and their families, praying for them often. She explained, "When they tell me struggles they're going through, or just when I hear news about their family situation, or when I notice students are going through a rough season socially and emotionally, I pray. And most of the time, I don't tell the students and I don't see direct outcomes to my prayers. But, I look forward to being in heaven and looking back and seeing

how God used those prayers.” Prayer is a very practical means of applying Christian values to a vocation, as prayer invites God into daily, mundane, seemingly secular situations.

Though Spahr can certainly impact her students silently, one may argue that a genuine Christian should emphasize the confessional modal aspect and prove more vocal. Though Spahr will occasionally mention a faith-based event in her life during a lecture, should it pertain to the subject matter, she must refrain from open evangelism because of state laws. This doesn’t seem to bother Spahr too much, though: “I don't think class time is the best or most effective venue for sharing the actual gospel or bringing students to Christ. If a student asks me a spiritual question or asks me questions about what I believe though, I'll say, ‘I'd love to talk with you about that outside of class time. Let's pick a time where you and I can just talk.’ One-on-one conversations are more effective and it's the student initiating the conversation. When I think about my job as a teacher, most of the ministry I think about is to other teachers and staff. There aren't boundary lines and I can fully share what I believe and have experienced in the teacher's lounge or in conversation before and after school.” Personally, I admire Mrs. Spahr’s position and have witnessed its effectiveness firsthand. Making herself available to both student and staff members for individual discussion prove more intimate and more conducive to genuine, Christian understanding.

Though Mrs. Spahr is a secular teacher of a secular subject by worldly standards, she truly is a Christian teacher, constantly seeking Christ’s hand in her differing spheres of involvement and engaging each modal aspect of those spheres according to Christianity. Her faith commitments impact her worldview, which impacts her teaching philosophy, which is applied practically in her vocation. God willing, I hope to be a teacher and director like Mrs. Spahr someday.

Ultimately, the Christian worldview as developed by Orr, Kuyper, and Dooyeweerd offers means of seeing Creation as a “comprehensive vision of reality” (Naugle 17), understanding God’s control over everything from creation to the fall to the consummation to come. Further, the Christian worldview grants each Christian purpose, as he or she works to restore God’s Creation to its pre-Fall state. This worldview, based on the Christian faith commitment, forms a Christian philosophy to be practically applied to absolutely everything – from art to television watching to science to cooking to parenting to computer programming to directing! There is no sphere of life, no subsequent modal aspect that is outside of God’s reach; thus, to live in a “sacred/secular” dualism proves un-Christian (Walsh/Middleton 67). As cliché as it has become, Kuyper summed up the idea of a Christian worldview best during his 1880 convocation speech for the Free University: “There is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” May all Christians embody Paul’s charge to the church in Corinth, referenced in *The Transforming Vision* on page 167, and “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corin. 10.5). May all Christians throw off any dualism, fully embracing the Christian worldview and all its implications in every sphere of life..

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