

The Christian Mind and the Crisis of Culture

Osprey Point Leadership Center

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Regaining Integrity:
A Christian Worldview and Public Life

Introduction:

Religious compartmentalization — or the deeply ingrained human tendency to distinguish rather sharply between the sacred and secular aspects of life — has provided the Western mind with a fundamental, operative category governing its understanding for better or worse throughout much of its history. Keeping that which is spiritual and that which is worldly in their respective realms or spheres has been a tacit assumption and way of life for countless numbers of people who have never thought of looking at things differently or living in world in any other way. It results in the privatization of personal faith and relinquishes cultural life to secularizing forces unaffected by substantive religious influence. The causes and consequences of this “dualism” or split-vision of reality are multiple, and one contemporary writer believes that it may provide a clue to understanding the religious motivation of radical Islamic terrorism.

According to Paul Berman in his recent book, *Terror and Liberalism*,¹ the spiritually arid, dehumanizing conditions of modern secular life have been generated by its divorce from sacred, transcendent realities which radical terrorists are trying to rectify by the violent imposition of the Islamic worldview and way of life on all peoples that will bring all things under the rule of Allah and create new social ordered based on ancient Koranic principles.

Berman bases this thesis on the writings of an Egyptian Muslim thinker named Sayyid Qutb (pronounced KUH-tabh) who in the mid-twentieth century became Islamism’s chief theoretician and philosopher of Islamic terrorism

(Ayman al Zawahiri who is the man behind Osama bin Laden and the brains of Al-Qaeda was one of Qutb's students). Qutb's *magnum opus* is a fifteen-volume work *In the Shade of the Koran* whose title suggests that the divine revelation in the Koran provides a refreshing spiritual oasis amidst the spiritually destitute conditions of modern, secular life.

Qutb argues that because Judaism as a comprehensive system of laws degenerated into a rigid and lifeless ritual, God sent another prophet in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Under Greek influence, however, the religion of Jesus was thoroughly spiritualized and had little to say about bodily existence, social organization, human action, and temporal life. Because Christianity erroneously separated the sacred and secular, the spiritual and physical, the religious and profane, and the church and state, or in short, succumbed to compartmentalization, God raised up the prophet Mohammed to proclaim a reunifying religious message that brought the totality of human life under the authority of Allah and the Koran. As the renowned Middle Eastern historian Bernard Lewis states, "The very notion of something that is separate or even separable from religious authority, expressed in Christian languages by terms such as *lay*, *temporal*, or *secular*, is totally alien to Islamic thought and practice."² And so in Qutb's thinking, if necessary, and more or less it always was, this totalizing Islamic religious vision must be proclaimed and obeyed even at the point of a bloody sword, that is, through jihad.

Greco-Christian dualism eventually triumphed in Europe where God and spirituality were compartmentalized and sharply separated from the growing autonomy of science, commerce, politics and military power. Imperialistically, Europe spread its "hideous schizophrenia" throughout the world. This kind of

¹ Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003).

² Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 10. In a "Letter to America," presumably authored by Osama Bin Laden, he outlines seven offenses committed not just by the government but also by the people of the United States. Most offensive is the separation of church and state. He writes: "You are the nation who, rather than ruling by the Shariah of Allah in its Constitution and Laws, choose to invent your own laws as you will and desire. You separate religion from your policies, contradicting the pure nature which affirms Absolute Authority to the Lord and your Creator." Quoted in Lewis, p. 159.

religious compartmentalization eventually became the source of liberal, secular societies that were devoid of substantive spirituality and insubordinate to divine authority, a derelict condition ultimately rooted in Christian error.

Qutb's analysis eventually inspired Mohammed Atta and the suicide warriors of September 11th, who along with others like them are seeking through violent means to spread Islamic civilization throughout the world. From this perspective, therefore, radical Islamic terrorism is a religiously motivated crusade, and its goals and methods, however misdirected, are aimed at overcoming the defects of Western religious compartmentalization and restoring the whole of life under Koranic principles and the rule of Allah.³

This very same truncated and compartmentalized perspective on the faith that may, indeed, be an explanation for radical Islamic terrorism, was also of great concern to two noted European theologians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it was this concern that prompted them both to understand and promote the Christian faith as a holistic, comprehensive world and life view.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant had coined the term "worldview" in his book *The Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790. Kant's disciples, other German intellectuals, and leading scholars throughout the continent of Europe picked up on this notion rather quickly, gave it its standard definition as an essential perspective on the basic make up of reality, and it soon became a popular notion used along side the term and discipline of philosophy. It wasn't long before worldview made its way across the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean, taking up residence in the Anglo-American context within about 70 years of its coinage. As a term that keenly expressed the deeply held aspiration to apprehend the character of the universe and the nature of life within it, it struck a vital chord of human interest and has been a celebrated notion ever since. As a result, in the last two hundred or so years since its inception, worldview has become a central conception in Western intellectual and ecclesiastical discourse.

The first of the two theologians that I mentioned a moment ago to make significant use of worldview as a concept and who introduced it into the vocabulary of the church was the Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Orr (1844-1913). During Orr's lifetime, the Western world was undergoing its most catastrophic cultural transition, passing through what C. S. Lewis in his Cambridge inaugural address referred to aptly as "the un-christening of Europe," leading to the loss of the "Old European" or "Old Western Culture," and to the advent of a "post-Christian" age.⁴ At this pivotal moment when Western Christendom was unraveling, the burden that weighed heavily on Orr's mind focused upon a comprehensive presentation and defense of the Christian faith, and the strategy he chose to accomplish this task was the strategy of *worldview*.

The opportunity to articulate the Christian faith as a total worldview arose when Orr was invited to present the first of the Kerr Lectures at the United Presbyterian Theological College in Edinburgh, Scotland. These addresses took Orr three years to prepare, were delivered in 1891, and published in 1893 as *The Christian View of God and the World*.⁵

According to Orr, the notion of worldview referred to "the widest view which 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."⁶ In Orr's opinion, the Christian faith provides such a standpoint, developing its loftiest principle and view of life into "an ordered whole."⁷ Over against religious compartmentalists and those who defended the faith in a piecemeal fashion, Orr believed that the

³ I have based this discussion on a letter written by Ken Myers on behalf of Mars Hill Audio, May 2003.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, "De Descriptione Temporum," in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969), 4-5, 12.

⁵ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World As Centering in the Incarnation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Andrew Elliot, 1893). This book has undergone many editions and reprints, the most recent being *The Christian View of God and the World*, foreword Vernon C. Grounds (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1989).

⁶ Orr, *The Christian View*, 3.

⁷ Orr, *The Christian View*, 3.

'worldview' concept enabled him to deal with Christianity in its entirety as a coherent, satisfying system.

Furthermore, given the increasingly anti-Christian *Zeitgeist* (that is, the growing secular spirit of the age) of the late nineteenth century, he perceived "that if Christianity is to be effectually defended from the attacks made upon it, it is the comprehensive method which is rapidly becoming the more urgent."⁸ Nothing less than a fresh, coherent presentation of a total Christian definition of reality in all its fullness would be adequate for the times. He explains his method in these terms.

The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural sciences, . . . *but extends to the whole manner of conceiving of the world, and of man's place in it, the manner of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part.* It is no longer an opposition of detail, but of principle. This circumstance necessitates an equal extension of the line of the defence. It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can most successfully be met.⁹

This conviction generated the purpose of Orr's book. If Christianity was to be proclaimed and defended in a way that engaged the contemporary anti-religious mind effectively, it could not be presented in either a compartmentalized or typical bits and pieces fashion. Rather, the radical shift in the metaphysical underpinnings of the West called for a new strategy, and the fashionable German conception of *Weltanschauung* provided the key. Thus as Orr's book title indicates, his goal was to present in a systematic way *A Christian View of God and the World*.

Furthermore, according to Orr, this Christian vision of reality had a focus: it was rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is indicated in the

⁸ Orr, *The Christian View*, 4.

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second part of his title, *As Centering in the Incarnation*. An entire worldview was bound up in an historic, orthodox Christology. Believing and following the biblical teachings about Jesus entailed a host of additional convictions, forming an overall view of things.

He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a “*Weltanschauung*,” or “Christian view of the world,” which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint.¹⁰

Indeed, Jesus held to a particular conception of the universe, one grounded in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Himself, and distinguished fully in multiple ways from contemporary humanistic perspectives. Belief in Jesus Christ therefore logically entailed a commitment to His *Weltanschauung*. For Orr, then, Christianity was a christocentric ‘worldview,’ a revolutionary and apologetically expedient approach to the faith necessitated by the challenges of modernity at its apex. As he put it by way of a final summary,

There is a definite Christian view of things, which has a character, coherence, and unity of its own, and stands in sharp contrast with counter theories and speculations, and that this world-view has the stamp of reason and reality upon itself, and can amply justify itself at the bar both of history and of experience.¹¹

The second leading theologian who made extensive use of the worldview concept as a way of presenting Christian faith in all its cosmological and cultural fullness was the Dutch polymath Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). His enemies described him as “an opponent of ten heads and a hundred hands,” but his

¹⁰ Orr, *The Christian View*, 4.

¹¹ Orr, *The Christian View*, 16.

friends called him “a gift of God” to their age¹² Undoubtedly, Kuyper was a veritable genius in both intellectual and practical affairs. He is well remembered as a noted journalist, politician, educator, and theologian with mosaic vigor, and is especially known as the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, and as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901-1905.

The source of this man’s remarkable contributions is found in a powerful spiritual vision derived from the theology of the protestant reformers, primarily John Calvin, that centered upon the sovereignty of the biblical God over all aspects of reality, life, thought, and culture. Indeed, as he thundered in the climax to his inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University, “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”¹³

Over the course of time, Kuyper realized that both obedience and disobedience to God were closely bound up if not identified with a particular persuasion or pattern of life, that is, a worldview. If non-Christian worldviews characterized by idolatry and religious insubordination are worked out across the whole spectrum of life (as in an all pervading secularism), then likewise Christianity must also be articulated in terms of a comprehensive vision of reality engendering the worship of God and submission to his will in all things.¹⁴

Thus for Kuyper, a worldview was a total “life system.” He illustrates it botanically: “As truly as every plant has a root, so truly does a principle hide under every manifestation of life. These principles are interconnected, and have their common root in a fundamental principle; and from the latter is developed logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life [system] and world-view.”

¹² John Hendrick de Vries, biographical note to *Lectures on Calvinism*, by Abraham Kuyper (1931; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), iii.

¹³ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

¹⁴ R. D. Henderson, “How Abraham Kuyper Became a Kuyperian,” *Christian Scholars Review* 22 (1992): 22, 34-35.

Thus, when Kuyper was at the height of his powers, he had the opportunity to demonstrate that his beloved Calvinism was more than a just church polity or doctrinaire religion but an all encompassing life system or worldview when he was invited to deliver the prestigious Stone Lectures at Princeton University in 1898. These addresses and the book that resulted from them, *Lectures on Calvinism*, became a second influential source for conceiving of Christianity in a way that undermines compartmentalization and fosters a comprehensive view of things.¹⁵

In this book, Kuyper begins by highlighting the common cultural and religious heritage that Europe and America share. Yet as he points out, “the storm of Modernism has arisen with violent intensity” against their revered Christian tradition on both continents, especially in the form of the malevolent influences of the French revolution, Darwinian evolution, and German pantheism. Like Orr before him, Kuyper sees the present cultural moment defined in both Europe and America by a life and death struggle between two antithetical “life-systems.”

Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God Himself, are bent upon saving the “Christian Heritage.” This is *the* struggle in Europe, this is *the* struggle in America¹⁶

In this battle for the soul of the West, therefore, Kuyper was convinced that religious compartmentalization was a cop out and that a piecemeal apologetic approach was thoroughly inadequate. Both must be replaced with a

¹⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). For an excellent study of Kuyper’s Stone Lectures, see Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11.

strategy that countered an all-encompassing modernism with a comprehensive and consistently worked through Christian worldview.

With such a coherent world and life-view, firmly resting on its principle and self-consistent in its splendid structure, Modernism now confronts Christianity; and against this deadly danger, ye, Christians, cannot successfully defend your sanctuary, but by placing in opposition to all this, *a life-and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency.*¹⁷

So, like James Orr shortly before him, Abraham Kuyper was convinced that the overwhelming challenges of his particular cultural context could be met only by a vision and version of the Christian faith that went beyond traditional understandings that relegated it to personal affairs and enfeebled it culturally.

So, what are the lessons we learn from all this. First, we must realize that it is the nature of an authentic religious or philosophic perspective to be comprehensive in scope and to have implications across the whole spectrum of human existence. Terrorists certainly recognize this to be true about Islam as we have seen, however much we may disagree with their methods of implementation. It was certainly characteristic of modernism and its variants as it of postmodernism with its pervasive cultural influence.

This leads to a second point, and that is that Christianity is not only a religion of salvation but also a religion of creation, not just a soteriology, but also a cosmology, and that natively it, too, is comprehensive in its implications and applications to every aspect of our lives, callings and activities as human beings. Christianity is not just a church view or a God view or a religion view or a personal view, but is indeed, a comprehensive, all-embracing, wholistic worldview! As such it has the power to deliver benighted Christians, by God's grace, from a fishbowl sized Christianity to an oceanic perspective on the faith.

Third, Christians who take Christ's cosmic Lordship seriously must cast aside compartmentalized, privatized and pietistic interpretations of Christian faith

¹⁷ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 189-190 (emphasis his).

and rigorously seek to understand the glorious content of this larger Christian vision and learn how to apply it in a transformative way in both personal and public life. In our own cultural contexts, dominated as they are by secularist worldview perspectives and powers that are inimical to faith, our only hope of redemptive influence is found, to borrow the language of Abraham Kuyper, “by placing in opposition to all this, *a life-and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency.*”

What exactly does this vision consist of? It begins with an enlarged understanding of God the Trinity whose existence, nature, and sovereignty constitutes the explanatory and unifying principle of the universe.

It involves the recognition of the overall narrative pattern of the Scriptures consisting of the unmitigated goodness of creation, God’s original purposes for humanity, the catastrophe of the fall, and the history of redemption culminating in person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the agent of new creation.

It entails a profound Christian humanism based on an understanding of the dignity of men and women created as the image and likeness of God who possess a fundamental spirituality, a unique set of cognitive powers, and a distinctive cultural calling to be the stewards of creation which is to be developed for human blessing and God’s glory.

It shatters a multitude of malicious dualisms and reductionisms and replaces them with a biblically-based wholeness that appropriately unifies time and eternity, body and soul, faith and reason, sacred and secular, earth and heaven resulting in an inner psychological coherence, spiritual freedom, and ability to delight in creation and enjoy the totality of life.

These themes, and others, are at the heart of a biblical worldview and constitute the basis for significant personal, ecclesiastical, and cultural transformation.

Since spiritual warfare is also a part of this biblical view of things, we must always remember that we are engaged in a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, God and satan. If there is one thing that the powers of darkness

would wish to keep you from discovering, or having discovered it, from applying it, it would be the discovery and application of a biblical world and life view to every area of your life, including your vocation in government. One of the devil's chief strategies historically to thwart the influence of the kingdom of God is the strategy of compartmentalization, to limit the scope of biblical faith to personal life. This demonic methodology needs to be exposed and destroyed.

To this end, in imitation of the inimitable C. S. Lewis, I have written a new screwtape letter that I think may put the matter in perspective. Here we have Screwtape as the veteran demonic tempter admonishing his pupil Wormwood on how to make sure his patient is kept in the dark regarding the true scope of the faith and its relevance for the whole of life. I have put it in the context of this weekend here at OP and specifically with each of you and your role in our government in mind.

A new screwtape letter.