

LOST IN CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Like a Lodge in a Cucumber Field

Isaiah 1:8

A sorrowful litany of our intellectual defection

“These are, certainly, troubled times.
The tectonics of culture are suddenly active,
and all the old rifts and stresses and pressures
that seemed to have fallen dormant have awakened at once,
with a great deal of portentous rumbling and spouting.”

(Harper's Magazine - Review of Richard Dawkins *The God Delusion*,
Marilynne Robinson 10.23.06)

We live in troubled times – the tectonic plates of our culture are shifting massively.

As we came toward the close of the 20thC, we see a pessimistic picture.

If you were in a four-seater Cessna and 4,000 feet in the air, and the pilot turns around and tells you that the plane-spotter has just died, it seems that there need be no cause for alarm for it would simply mean that from that point on, no one can tell where you are.

The evangelical philosopher-theologian Carl F.H. Henry who gave the above example, tells us that this is an apt description of our current cultural condition for we live at a time when no one can tell where you are.

He tells us that we live in a time when no one can tell where we are. He makes the following points to explicate his reflections.

(Carl F.H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief: The Rutherford Lectures*. Crossway Books, 1990)

- + We've lost our moral and social and spiritual bearings. We've no shared criterion for determining where we are and to where we are heading.
- + For many centuries the Western world recognised the absolute norm in the Holy Scriptures. It served as our bearing for a comprehensive vision of order. That is all but gone now.
- + Once the West built a spiritual and moral society unmatched in the history of

humankind. Today we see a society marked by a spiritual and moral confusion unmatched in the history of mankind.

The early church had a kind of vitality we've not seen for generations. It ushered in the Christian era and put Greco-Roman paganism on the defensive. And the Christian worldview became the dominant world-view.

+ It propagated the idea:

- that the universe was purposeful
- that human life was sacred
- that history moved to a goal
- that humanity is the caretaker of nature
- that righteousness will triumph over evil
- that earthly life does not exhaust human existence but looks ahead to the resurrection of the dead

That was the then prevailing worldview. It was a kind of a game-plan for the running of society. It was a set of commonly-agreed-upon rules, a social contract. Everybody knew the rules and kept by it.

But the forces were already at work gnawing at the foundation.

+ Different philosophies pitted themselves against the Christian worldview. And slowly, the foundation began to crumble.

+ And by the middle of the last century secular humanism had succeeded in repudiating all revealed truths.

+ Once the Christian conception of truth served as the rubrics for faith and learning, but gradually secular humanism took its place, and it became the moulding conceptuality that shaped all liberal arts learning.

+ Secular humanism emphasises:

1. that all reality (including the universe) is reducible to impersonal processes and energy events (quantum events). In other words nature alone is the ultimate reality
2. that all life is transient and its final destiny is death (B. Russell: "When I die the worms take over")
3. that truth and goodness are culture-conditioned distinctions which the human race projects upon itself

The secular mind questions the propriety or impropriety of a role of transcendence.

+ There are two dangers here

- 1) they have their eloquent exponents to perpetrate their ideologies.
- 2) they now have the platform to do so.

The enemy is no longer contented in making little skirmishes here and there

- they've actually penetrated the cultural mainstream
- they've got a comprehensive agenda for our culture, which includes concern for universal justice, the preservation of human rights, the ecological crisis, the compassion for the poor and weak

AUTUMNAL CHILL

Langdon Gilkey made a comment that has now become memorable.

"An autumnal chill is in the air, its similarity to the chill in other periods of cultural decline is undeniable."

(Langdon Gilkey, *Society and the Sacred: Toward a Theology of Culture in Decline* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981)

Note: Brian Walsh has written a theology of Gilkey. (Brian Walsh, *Langdon Gilkey: Theologian for a Culture in Decline*, Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1991)

Using Gilkey's metaphor, we may affirm that we all sense an autumnal chill in the air

- + It's the kind of chill that is felt whenever a civilization reaches the end of its lifespan. Historians of thought have been able to document the same feeling in other periods of cultural decline .
- + We hear a cry that was once heard by the weeping prophet Jeremiah: "My people have forsaken me the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (2:13)

This chill may be felt on many fronts.

1. *Eccentricity Eccentric Paganism*

- + Human people become not less religious but more so.
 - + It sounds paradoxical but the loss of social order give rise not to disbelief but belief - to new eccentric faiths.
 - + We see this evidenced in everything from feminist bookshops to advanced

graduate classes in voodoo to documented cases of Satanism.

- + People are now dabbling with witchcraft, necromancy and astrology. The cult of Satan replaces belief in God. It now dominates other mainstream areas of cultural expression as in some extreme rock music.
- + Peter Berger observes that the intellectuals "are notoriously haunted by boredom" and that "there is no telling what outlandish religiosity even one dripping with savage supernaturalism may yet arise in these groups"

(Peter L. Berger *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Recovery of the Supernatural*, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Anchor Edition 1970, p.24)

- + Carl Henry made the point that with the contemporary forfeiture of the public significance of the Scripture, the prospect of neo-paganism looms on every front. It is a paganism that is so raw and fierce. it suffocates every last vestige of anything that smacks of the transcendence. It's a paganism that is unparalleled.
- + C.S. Lewis in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge University, made the point that even the paganism in the New Testament times had more in common with Christianity than ancient paganism has with the crass neo-paganism we see emerging in our own day.

(Carl F.H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief: The Rutherford Lectures*. Crossway Books, 1990)

So the West has succeeded in ushering in a neo-pagan world.

- + The word "infidel" may be an offensive word. But if the word may be narrowly defined as "one without faith" or "one who doubts or rejects central tenets of a religion or has no religious beliefs", then we may say that the West has succeeded in ushering in a world inhabited by infidels.
- + It is a paganism that proudly believes that it has successfully choreographed the dance of death upon the tomb of God.

(The Arabic word kafir is an Islamic term for an infidel. Literally kafir means the one who "covers", in the sense of hiding. The term technically applies only to atheists and polytheists and to those who subscribe to faiths other than Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. In common use, however, the term is also applied to Christians, especially in English fiction and poetry.)

2. *Despair*

Bertrand Russell in *The Free Man's Worship* writes what has now come to be some of the most memorable lines written of western philosophy.

"Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs,

are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

(first published as "*The Free Man's Worship*" in Dec. 1903)

- + White mice were once used to detect poisonous gases in the mine shafts. Today's white mice are the prophetic artists who through their music and arts scrawl their warnings of impending danger.
- + A casual visitor to Western Europe today will not fail to sense the weariness and melancholy in the place. Adoration of culture turns into disdain. Pessimism takes the place of hope.
- + As Leslie Newbigin observes, "The East or Africa may lack the basic necessities but we find "Euro-pessimism" and "the disappearance of hope" only in the old countries."

(Newbigin, Leslie 1984 (2nd) *The Other Side of 1984. Questions for the Churches*. Geneva: WCC.)

- + People speak of themselves as a "no-future generation". Only 15% of new parents in the 80's believe that their children will have a better life than they did compared with 85% of young parents in the 1950's

3. *Anxiety*

No longer do the enlightened hold to the inherent goodness of human people and surety of the coming utopia. "One theologian observed: "Fear of God has died but a new fear replaces it, the fear of everything". This is due in part to the loss of meaningful commitment

4. *Loss of Creativity*

Admittedly this is a debatable point, but a case may be made of a cultural lethargy which in turn has led to the demise of the creative output we saw in times past.

Except in reproductions there has been very little creative outflow. Can we honestly speak of any sizable creation in art in the second half of this century?

5. Lawlessness (anomie)

- + It is remarkable that modern sociology beginning from Emile Durkheim, should have chosen the term "*anomie*" for the secular disintegration of social bonds, because this is the very word that figures prominently in the eschatology of the gospel:

"Because *anomia* (lawlessness) will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12)

- + Christianity once provided both identity and the bonding for society
 - this is fast becoming undone
 - a recent as 15-20 years ago sociologists still thought that the family will remain highly resilient to the acids of secularization
 - today we see a mounting disintegration of the family unit, another manifestation of *anomie* (lawlessness).
- + Lawlessness is one of the social-structural consequences of secularism
 - it expresses itself in the abolition of a moral consensus
 - but if there are no absolute moral values all behaviour is arbitrary and each person good or bad is simply expressing their own individual preferences to how other people are to be treated (not "ought").
- + Friedrich Nietzsche postulated that not only religion but morality as well is the opiate of the people designed only to stifle genius. Nietzsche saw Christianity as little more than an opiate, a weak religion of the herd.
 - + It should not come as a surprise to us that Hitler read Nietzsche.
 - + John Start Mill believed that the abolition of a moral consensus will only allow for more individual freedom. He suggested that individuals must and can be trusted to hold himself responsible for his morality.

6. Education without God

- + Walk through the corridors of learning, pass the rooms of psychology, philosophy, science and the humanities and even into the departments of ethics and morality, and you will not hear so much as a whisper that God might possibly have a bearing on these disciplines.

The idea of God is simply not keyed in into vital issues of life. Except for negative remarks about God there seems to have been a conspiracy of silence.

Instead, our prestigious centres of learning have been infiltrated by an unbelievable irrationalism.

Failure to Deliver

Secular humanism for all its claims has failed to order public human life.

For a belief-system (world-view) to order public life

- it must impart them with a sense of identity and purpose
- it must offer a framework for culture forming
- it must place life in the context of hope

+ The promises have not been delivered. For the big sacrifice we placed upon the altar of the secular gods these gods have not deliver the goods.

+ For we see ours is a culture fast becoming undone and we sense that anarchy and pandemonium may break in any day we see people everywhere losing faith and hope.

We seem to be reaching the end of our civilization. Evidences all around us seem to indicate that we're reaching then end of the life of our culture that we're a culture in decline.

The secular gods have failed.

The result is that it's worshippers, devotees find themselves in the throes of a world-view crisis. Our unholy covenant with the secular god cannot continue because human society cannot afford to pay these sacrifices that these gods demand

As a result of the above problems, each individual has made a world for herself.

Sociologists of religion have come up with a name for it - the "privatization" of the world.

+ The world needs some kind of mutually-agreed-upon contract

As Peter Berger observes rightly we human beings must have a set of "*nomoi*" or "meaning-systems" through which, as humans, we may collectively order our lives in our community

Berger writes: "It may now be understandable if the proposition is made that the socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience. A meaningful order, or *nomos*, is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals"

(Berger, Peter L. *The Social Reality of Religion*. New York: Faber and Faber; 1967. p.19)

+ The opposite of *nomos* is *anomy*. The absence of *nomos* brings with it not just

confusion or puzzlement, but a fear and terror. *Nomos* is vital to the life of a community.

Basil Mitchell made the point that for centuries the church has played her role as a purveyor of ready-made "*nomoi*". The church has been able to imbue our everyday experiences with meaning as people collectively of one mind observe those "*nomoi*".

(Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping Pong: Collected Essays on Faith and Reason*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, p.32, See also Berger, P. L. and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966

+ But the church has lost that role now. She no longer has the monopoly on judging value-systems as the world becomes increasingly pluralistic. The support-system she used to provide for society has largely eroded. The result is that ours has become a fragmented society

+ We are left with only fragments of the belief-system, and these are now narrowly confined only to the marginal situations of life birth, grief, death, loss, and crisis.

But for most of the time the individual is alone with the task of making sense of the world and of his place in it

He is left alone to try to piece things together out of the scraps and oddments culled from here and there. And for most of the time he can't make sense of birth, death, meaning and purpose. This disintegration of belief-system leaves the ordinary people, particularly the young people quite happy to adopt a pragmatic, utilitarian attitude to society at large and to meet the crisis of personal life with scraps of "philosophies" picked up from anywhere.

(Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping Pong*, p.33)

But the trouble is that these scraps of "philosophies" claim no universal truth or even relevance.

Note: It is interesting that when the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers saw Paul approaching them at Athens, they asked one another: "What is this babbler trying to say?" (Acts 17:18). The word "babbler" is literally translated "seed picker" and it referred to scavenger birds such as gutter-snipe, who peck at seed and food scraps that had fallen on the streets of the market. It is an Athenian slang, σπερμολόγος (*spermologo*) meaning a philosophical scavenger or a scrap-monger; a pejorative imagery of persons whose philosophy lacks sophistication and who scrapmongers in scraps of information picked from here and there.

Where is the Church

The present health of the church isn't such that it can provide a durable strategy for a way out of this quandary.

+ Christian Smith and Melinda Denton coined a phrase "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Their research with the National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studied the religious beliefs held by American teenagers.

+ Smith & Denton describe Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to consist of beliefs like:

1. "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth."
2. "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."
3. "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself."
4. "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem."
5. "Good people go to heaven when they die."

Even these secular researchers recognized that this creed is a far cry from the central tenets of Christianity.

- There is no consideration for sin, judgment, salvation, or Christ
- Most teenagers believe in a combination of works righteousness, religion as psychological well-being, and a distant non-interfering god.

+ But the point is this. it is not just teenagers who are moralistic therapeutic deists. MTD describes the beliefs of many evangelical adults too.

Amusing Ourselves to Death

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* Neil Postman argued well before the internet became a full-blown culture that the West had become a silly culture.

- entertainment has destroyed our ability to think.
- we lack discernment
- we care about irrelevant things and ignore what really counts.

In the short Forward to his book, Postman is rather prophetic. He writes:

"We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn't, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not

been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell's dark vision, there was another - slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions". In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right."

(Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin books Ltd, London, 1985, vii-viii.)

How serious is the Problem we are facing today?

- 60% of professing Christians believe co-habitation outside of marriage is acceptable (George Barna at barna.org)
- 70-88% of students from "Christian" homes deny their faith before graduation from college (barna.org)
- One symptom of Bible illiteracy is the runaway trend to reject biblical theology in favor of syncretism—professing Christians are combining views from different faith perspectives including Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, and eastern religions (*"Americans draw Theological Beliefs from Diverse Points of View,"* 10/8/02, barna.org)
- Only 9% of Evangelicals have a biblical worldview (*"A Biblical Worldview has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life,"* 12/1/03, barna.org)

- Instead of preparing their children for life, the vast majority of parents are waiting for social institutions to train their kids (*"Americans Agree: Kids are not being Prepared for Life,"* 10/26/04, barna.org)
- 62 % of Americans consider themselves to be deeply spiritual, and 88% feel accepted by God (*"Most Adults feel accepted by God, but Lack a Biblical Worldview,"* 8/9/05, barna.org)
- Only 9% of young people under the age 24 base their moral choices on the Bible (ibid.)
- Only 1 in 20 Evangelical dads have ever led their families in devotions (barna.org)
- In 2006, 91% of Evangelical kids said, "There is no truth apart from myself"—that's up from 52% in 1994 (barna.org)
- Only 33% of church youth say the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home (Josh McDowell, 2006)
- In our media-saturated culture promiscuity is cast as freedom—our 'highly sexualized culture is at war with parents' (James Dobson)
- In the 1970's only 5% of 15 year old girls had sexual intercourse; by 1997 it was 38% (Columbia University Report, 1997)
- It is estimated that 1 of every 2 churchgoers is caught up with Internet pornography (*World Net Daily, "Killer Culture,"* 12/8/03)

Not "Getting it"

A huge number of Christian students jettison Christianity during their university years. Many of them have unwittingly privatized their faith considering it as something personally meaningful but which is not publicly true or culturally significant.

We do them great disfavor when we try to make the faith more palatable to them.

John Stonestreet, executive director of Summit Ministries says:

"Unfortunately, the Christian community often responds by heaping "Christian" noise on the rest of the noise. Attempting to be "relevant" to students, we instead contribute to their appetites for distraction. Entertainment has made us silly and Christian entertainment has made our students silly Christians." (BreakPoint article *Why*

They Don't Get It, John Stonestreet - 2/20/2009)

- + We fail our students in a number of ways. First, we imagine that they have no interest about the substance of their beliefs. Secondly, We imagine that they want only to be entertained. We missed out the fact that they will quite readily pick up the challenge with issues of Scriptures, culture, worldview, philosophy and theology.
- + Stonestreet: "If students accept or reject Christianity, that's one thing. If they don't "get it," that's another." He makes the point that Proverbs says that without vision, the people "cast off restraint." "

The Optimistic Picture

Not too many years ago, scholars thought apologetics is passé as an enterprise because the postmodern mindset isn't interested in exploring subjects like the existence of God or the historical Jesus.

But as Lee Strobel says.

"The biggest shock is that among people who communicated to me that they had found faith in Christ through apologetics, the single biggest group was 16- to 24-year-olds."

- + In 2008, hundreds of young people were turned away from an apologetic conference for teenagers, sponsored by Focus on the Family. It drew an overflow crowd of 1,500.
- + Today, such hotbeds of apologetics education as Biola University, Talbot School of Theology Southern Evangelical Seminary, and Liberty University, are crammed with students pursuing graduate degrees in philosophy and apologetics.
- + And debates between evangelical apologists and principal atheist philosophers in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. are drawing thousands of college students. Last year more than 2,000 students packed Central Hall in London to hear Craig debate biologist Louis Wolpert on the topic, "*Is God a Delusion?*"

HOW DO WORLDVIEWS COME IN

We begin with the meaning of the gospel.

Jesus did not come to inaugurate yet one more religion amongst many.

- +The gospel asserts that it is inaugurating a kingdom of God on earth. This narrative

begins with the creation of the universe and comes to a historical terminus in the renewal of a new heaven and a new earth.

+ As such the gospel does not simply promote a system of religious beliefs of interest only to a particular ethnic group.

+ And Jesus is not just another rabbi with a new ethical teaching to offer.

+ Instead, the gospel makes a normative claim that it is “public truth”

+ It purports to paint a realistic picture of the world as it factually is

+ It is not a local tribal saga woven around a Jewish people group.

+ When we read a novel, or a story, watch a play or a movie, we partly forget about the real world we are in and become immersed in the story-line of what we read or watch. When the movie or book ends we return to the real world we live in.

This is not what happens when we read the Bible. We are not leaving the real world to become immersed in a fictitious world of Bible stories.

The Bible claims to be the real world.

The Bible story claims to **be** a story about the way our world really factually is.

It is to be in the Bible story we find the meaning, purpose and significance for our lives or we find it nowhere else.

The story of the Bible is universally true for all people at all times. It is never intended to be a private story for only a particular group of people.

What is the Mission of the Church?

+ The Church makes up a community of people who have embraced the truth and validity of the Gospel message.

Christians endeavour to live their lives by the gospel narrative.

Together, as a Church, they are to be missional in declaring the gospel story to be public truth.

The mission of the Church is defined by the gospel.

+ Christians are to incarnate the gospel story in a multiethnic and multicultural environment.

This is the greatest challenge of the Church.

Every culture has their own meta-narrative by which they live.

- each has its own creation account (cosmology)
- each has its own understanding what humans truly are (ontology)
- each has its own take on what is good (ethics)
- each has its own spiritual destination (eschatology)

+ The main Western story spins out a radically different tale from the Gospel story.

It narrates a story of the progressive maturing of the human race.

Humans are becoming more free.

Humans will come of age. In time.

Human ingenuity, especially through science and technology will bring the human race to materialistic prosperous future

Goheen and Bartholomew make three points about this Western story.

(Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads An Introduction to Christian Worldview*, Baker Book House, 2008, p. 7)

1. Like the biblical story, the Western story purports to be the true story of the world.

“In fact, it often simply assumes this distinction, masking its own grand claim to truth by relegating all other such stories to secondary status, as being merely “religious”.

(Goheen & Bartholomew, p.7)

2. Like the biblical story, the cultural story is all-embracing, with claims on every aspect of human life.

3. The Western story is radically, although not totally, incompatible with the gospel story.

As Christians we find ourselves at a crossroads of two stories

- + If the Church were to be faithful to the Gospel, she will find itself on an inevitable collision course with our present Western cultural story.
- + This, primarily because
 1. Both stories are comprehensive.
 2. Both claim to be true.
- + The mission of the Church is to call people to be converted to the Gospel story.

The “Darker Possibility”

Thinkers like Leslie Newbigin believe that the Church has in some measure sold out to the modern Western world.

- + By either consciously or unconsciously imbibing the world-story surrounding our culture, we have failed to be faithful to the Gospel.
- + Newbigin believed the Church has compromised by “allowing the biblical story to be subsumed within the modern scientific story”. He described the Western Church as being “an advanced case of syncretism”, marrying two impossible bedfellows.

(Leslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984, Questions for the Churches*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983, p.23 – Cited by Goheen & Bartholomew, p.7)

WHAT THEN, IS A WORLDVIEW

The English word worldview translates the German word *Weltanschauung*. Emmanuel Kant first used it in his well-known work *Critique of Judgement* (1790).

- + The term worldview *Weltanschauung* has had a long and fascinating history ever since Kant. It has been and is used not only in philosophy, but in theology, anthropology, education and many other fields.
- + David Naugle, who has written extensively on this concept reveals the importance of worldview studies when he writes:

After all, what could be more important or influential than the way an individual, a family, a community, a nation, or an entire culture conceptualizes reality? Is there anything more profound or powerful than the shape and content of human consciousness and its primary interpretation of the nature of things? When it comes to the deepest questions about human life and existence, does anything surpass the final implications of the answers supplied by one's essential *Weltanschauung*?

(D. K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, p 345)

- + In the 20th century two men were chiefly responsible for relating the idea of worldview specifically to Christian thought. There were James Orr (1844 -1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837 – 1920).

James Orr

Orr rightly thought that it was wrongheaded to respond to the then prevailing post-Enlightenment worldview in any piece-meal fashion. He wanted to be able to present Christianity as a comprehensive full-orbed view of life.

- + Orr writes:

"No one, I think, whose eyes are open to the signs of the times, can fail to perceive that if Christianity is to be effectually defended from the attacks made upon it, it is the comprehensive method that is rapidly becoming the more urgent. The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines but extends to the whole manner of conceiving the world. It is no longer an opposition of detail, but of principle. The circumstance necessitates an equal extension of the line of 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".

(James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 1893; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947, p.4 cited by Goheen & Bartholomew, p. 14)

- + Orr preferred a Christocentric approach to worldview, locating Christ as the centre of and purpose for human history. The meaning of both creation and human history hinges ultimately on the life of Christ and His work. He believes that this approach will in turn help Christians see more clearly the anti-supernatural bases of the Post-Enlightenment modernist perspective.

Abraham Kuyper

Kuyper hailed from Holland. He went further than

- + Orr. He was not content simply to regard Christianity as a comprehensive vision of life. He actively promoted that view in practical terms with his own personal involvement in journalism, theology and politics. He served as prime minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905.
- + He studied literature, philosophy and theology at Leiden University. He received a diploma in literature in and in philosophy. He also took classes in Arabic, Armenian, and physics. Truly a well-learned man. He was the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam.

- + David Naugle rightly describes Kuyper as “a *homo universale*, a veritable genius in both intellectual and practical affairs... A noted journalist, politician, educator, and theologian with mosaic vigor..”
- + Along with Calvin, Kuyper affirms the sovereignty of God over all aspects of reality, life, thought, and culture. In his inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University, he said these now famous words: “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!’”

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

- + He agreed with Orr that modernity had spawned a worldview that is antithetical to Christianity. And only a comprehensive biblical worldview is able to confront such a worldview.
- + He writes:

“In Modernism the vast energy of an all-embracing life system assail us, [thus] we have to take our stand in a life system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching powers.”

(Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11; cited by Goheen and Bartholomew, p.15)
- + He traces the lynch-pin of the conflict between modernism and Christianity to the element of culture the Germans called *Wissenschaft* (which we loosely translates as “science” but with the understanding that it carries a much wider aspect of thinking and theorizing in general).
- + Kuyper identifies two kinds of “science”. That which is produced by people who argued from the basis of belief in God, and that which is produced by people who do not. People who do not speak from the basis of belief in God will always produced a science that contradicts the teaching of Scripture.
- + And upon this, Kuyper frowns, for a Calvinist, he is consistent in his rejection of the autonomy of human reason.

More Contemporary Worldview Proponents

Following Orr and Kuyper, others Christian thinkers have picked up the gauntlet and engaged in worldview combat. Some of them include Alasdair MacIntyre, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, James Sire and Arthur Holmes.