

The Pilgrim's Pathway

**The Bible, the Church, and the World:  
A Third Way (20)**

**Worldview Christianity**

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Last time we presented a reprint of David Naugle's contemporary rendering of C. S. Lewis's technique enshrined in *The Screwtape Letters*, a classic that was published in book form for the first time in 1942. Naugle has applied this technique to the subject of Christian worldview.

In his excellent book, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans, 2002), Naugle observes that the worldview tradition can be traced back to two sources, both of which flow from the writings of John Calvin. The first source is Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Orr (1844-1913), and the second is Dutch Reformed theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Taking the insights of historic Calvinism, both of these thinkers sought to present the Christian faith as a robust, comprehensive vision of reality that would help Christians meet the challenges of the modern world. Other familiar names associated with worldview-Calvinist thinking include Herman Bavinck, Gordon Clark, Cornelius Van Til, Carl Henry, Herman Dooyeweerd, Francis Schaeffer, Charles Colson, and Os Guinness.

***The integrated life v. the compartmentalized life***

As creator of the universe, God has stamped his triune nature on all that he has made, so that everything reflects the unity and diversity of his own triune person. From the Bible we may learn this coherent vision of reality, a world and life view, what the Germans term *Weltanschauung*. Perhaps the most important feature of the Christian worldview is captured by the word "integration." Recall from Naugle's Screwtape letter how Satan rejoices in disintegration within creation, among people, and especially between God and his creatures. By contrast, the Bible presents a portrait of living the integrated life, the kind of life where our thoughts, words, and actions are integrated by a faith-loyalty to God, wrought by the Holy Spirit,

seated in the human heart, emanating into every expression and aspect of human existence. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,” we read in 1 Corinthians 10:31. This exhortation must be joined to the apostle’s encouragement in Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Surely exhortations like “do all to the glory of God” and “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” permit no segregation, no separation in the believer’s life between sacred and secular, between faith and reason, or between the spiritual and the natural. In this regard, all of life is one, and believers are called to express unified, integrated, harmonious living before the face of God.

Throughout history, various philosophies have fostered worldviews marked by the disintegration arising from dualism. One of the most pernicious and prominent dualistic philosophies segregates nature and grace, a dualism in which one of the pair is usually championed at the expense of the other. This dualism between nature and grace has seriously infected the Christian church, so that many Christians have a difficult time living all of life as an integrated reality before the face of God. As Naugle put it, Christians in the grip of this dualist worldview promote heaven over earth, whereas with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God’s precise intention is to unite—even now—heaven and earth. Christians in the grip of this dualism believe the spiritual and the physical are not just different, but essentially unrelated. This dualism underlies many “two level” views of the universe, where reality is construed in terms of an upper and a lower realm, or a spiritual and a natural realm.

The fragmentation and disintegration brought into the world by sin have resulted in the compartmentalizing of life on many levels.

On the personal level, sin has alienated people in so many ways. On the inside persons are split into multiple identities, requiring them to wear various masks on the outside, each of them expressing values that compete with and contradict those of another persona. Christians also suffer personal fragmentation when they quarantine their faith from areas of living in the world, establishing “No Trespassing” zones in life where the Lord and his Word are refused entrance, or their relevance and authority are denied. For some, the zone is their sexual activity, for others, their business life, for still others, their recreational pleasures.

{35} On the cultural level, the alienation brought about by sin has resulted in vicious competition among various groups to be identified as the source of power, status, and happiness.

Disintegration and fragmentation have turned various cultural spheres into competitors. Many Christians have come to view the church, then, as the only group or institution where the Word of God exercises authority. For if outside the church, it happens that many reject the authority of God and his Word, then (so it is argued) Christians should not presume to press God's claims for justice, holiness, and piety upon those who do not believe in Jesus Christ and who refuse God's claims as these claims have become instantiated in the person of Jesus Christ.

This living of life in compartments represents, according to Screwtape, one of the most profound and destructive victories of the evil one in the world. If Christians can be persuaded that one or more areas of living truly lie beyond the reach of Christ's Word and authority, then the stage is set for the triumph of wickedness in the world.

### ***Worldview Christianity as the Third Way***

Perceptive readers will notice the subtle alteration of language here, from "worldview Calvinism" to "worldview Christianity."

Here are several reasons for adopting this change.

First, simply stated, the comprehensive teaching known as the Reformed faith is the most coherent, faithful, and penetrating expression of biblical Christianity known to humanity. This feature marks the Reformed faith known as Calvinism as biblically and genuinely ecumenical, and therefore makes it unnecessary for us to pit "being Reformed" against "being Christian."

Second, in our generation, the Lord seems to be surprising and humbling Calvinists with the reality that worldview Christianity is being championed by non-Calvinists around the world. These are Christians who are coming to see that the Christian faith provides an integrative-comprehensive understanding for all of living in the world. Among the inducements leading to this interest in worldview Christianity, the Lord is confronting the church in the West with the challenges and opportunities of post-modernism. We do not have adequate space to explain post-modernism fully, but can identify it as the wholesale questioning of modernity's reliance on reason and the scientific method to explain all of reality. Post-modernism provides Christians today with wide-ranging opportunities to explain and demonstrate how the Christian worldview supplies a unified, comprehensive, and integrative explanation of all of reality.

A third reason for speaking of worldview Christianity is to suggest that the Christian mission in the world must include a clear witness to the "so what?" of the gospel. Belonging to

this witness are a biblical apologetic or defense of the Christian faith, and a Christian biblical ethic that applies the principles for Christian living revealed in Scripture to concrete life in today's world. No one can responsibly deny that non-Christian world religions offer a worldview alternative—think of Hinduism, or Buddhism, or more importantly today, Islam. None of these is a merely private religion, but each operates with an understanding of created reality, of history, of eschatology, on the basis of which each proposes a lifestyle consistent with these understandings. In the face of such enormous global contemporary religious challenges, why would Christian thinkers and leaders among us deride worldview Christianity as being inherently and necessarily arrogant or triumphalist? Admittedly, “worldview Christianity” seems to be a hot topic in today's evangelical vernacular (a Google search of the phrase turns up 13,200,000 hits in 0.41 seconds!). One could interpret this to be one more in a long string of fads (purpose-driven life, seeker-sensitive worship, and the like), or one could welcome such phenomenal interest as an opportunity for Reformed and Presbyterian Christians to make a solid evangelistic contribution to public religious discourse in North America.

With regard to explaining and applying worldview Christianity, we are blessed with access to the writings of numerous spiritual ancestors and contemporary exponents. In order to prepare for subsequent columns, consider exploring two resources as helps for developing your understanding of worldview Christianity. The first is the website of an organization perhaps familiar to our Canadian readers, namely, The Paideia Center for Public Theology (<http://www.paideiacentre.ca/>). The second resource is an affordable paperback that is as well-written as it is challenging, namely, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview*, by Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew (Baker Academic, 2008).