**The Integration of Christian Worldview: A Guide to Substance and Method**

Introduction

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually slaves of some defunct economist.”

John Maynard Keynes

“The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.”

John Maynard Keynes

Ideas have power. Academics know this, politicians know this, pastors know this. Few would deny it and those who have denied it, proclaimed their own powerful ideas.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition, it is evident that bad ideas have a powerful influence for evil or at least for bad practices. From the fourth century AD until the nineteenth century, Christian ideas predominated in the West. Even when not every individual was personally a believer, the influence of Christian thought pervaded the culture—in political thought, economic thought, law, science, philosophy and of course theology. This is not to say that Christian thought as applied was always correctly interpreted. Examples abound of poorly understood and interpreted special revelation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nevertheless, it was ideas inspired by Christianity that dominated.

Moreover, the Christian ideas were mainly derived from the Christian Bible, the Old and New Testaments as accepted in the fourth century, and sometimes too, the Old Testament Apocryphal books until the Protestant movement dropped them.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Bible then was the ultimate source of truth for thought and practice. To put it another way, the Bible provided, even for all the sometimes unfortunate hermeneutical results, a worldview that permeated Western society. This book is about the concept of worldview, and, more specifically, the integration of that concept into the ideas that make up any and every discipline or theoretical construct, or even govern practice.

The idea of worldview as a subject of interest to Christian thinkers seems to have fallen on hard times. After a flurry of writing about it from the late 1970s to the 1990s, worldview as a concept has either been ignored or new terms introduced that may give a better, more scholarly impression. I would not argue that discussion and interest in worldview has altogether disappeared from the scene. Integration is still frequently debated in Christian circles. Home schoolers have not abandoned the worldview label. Many churchmen also still use it. But in general, among academics the word and often the idea have gone missing.

In fact, recent historical examinations of twentieth century Evangelicalism have alleged that the entire concept of worldview was a kind of ideological weapon by which to address the conservative opposition. In other words, worldview became a shibboleth used to filter friends from enemies and that the idea was borrowed but over-simplified.[[4]](#footnote-4) I do not assume this about worldview, but am compelled to take its development as a concept at face value and to recognize its value for thinking about the scope of knowledge from a Christian viewpoint. After all, shouldn’t Christians think like Christians? Or are we to be bullied into accepting the alleged truths of the non-Christian world without any critical questioning?

In this book I intend to address both the concept of world view and its related notion of integration. I will define those terms in detail below. My goal is to resurrect the concept of worldview for renewed use in the twentieth century especially among intellectuals and particularly Christian intellectuals in the academy. I perceive a problem that runs deeper than merely the elimination of a term from use. I will assert that the academy has stopped using the term because, for the most part, the very idea of worldview is seen increasingly as archaic. The reasons for this will be discussed later. But the fact of its disappearance, in light of the reasons I will discuss, ought to be disturbing to thinking Christians.

In this chapter I will begin by defining the most important terms and concepts used in this book, “worldview” and “integration.” Neither of the terms has an exclusively Christian provenance, but both have come to be used widely by Christian thinkers. Afterward, I will also trace briefly the modern use of the concepts among Christians, drawing first on the extremely valuable work of David Naugle entitled *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, as well as other works. That section will then be both a historical and bibliographical survey.[[5]](#footnote-5) Chapter One will address in detail the basic elements of any worldview. Chapter Two will begin to classify worldviews using a novel approach that includes the elements from Chapter One. Chapter Three will develop the classification and will examine the non-Christian worldviews in detail. Chapter Four will then introduce the Christian worldview and will contrast it with non-Christian views. In Chapter Five, which will begin Section Two of the book, I will engage in the process of constructing a Christian worldview, whose results can then be applied to any discipline or subject area. This entire section illuminates the process of integration. Chapter Five will include the crucial question of the respective roles of special revelation (the Bible) and general revelation (knowledge obtained from any other source or method) and the relationship between the two. This is the age-old issue of faith and reason. I will also make clear my reliance upon a presuppositional approach, derived from thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper, Cornelius van Til and Gregory Bahnsen, among others. Chapter Six continues this worldview construction process by examining the hermeneutical basis of appropriate worldview construction and its related issue of how to collate and correlate texts so as to arrive at “theological” conclusions for any subject area.[[6]](#footnote-6) This chapter also includes an important discussion of the place of logic in deducing conclusions from Biblical texts that can be used in framing a Christian worldview. Finally, Chapter Seven will conclude by addressing some problem areas in thinking about Christian worldview and in integrating that worldview into a discipline. Here I will deal with anticipated objections.

This book makes no pretensions to complete comprehensiveness. So many issues and problems could be covered in any work on worldview, but such a work would become unmanageable and unreadable. My aim is to choose from among the many important topics the most relevant and important ones that bear directly on one’s worldview. This work then is a guide, not a treatise. The reader may be dissatisfied by that approach, but it is the best I can offer without taking years to complete. In fact, I a sense it has taken me years to write this book. I first developed what I had then hoped would be a published book about twenty years ago. I did not pursue publication aggressively, sending the manuscript to only one small publisher. But in the intervening years I have continued to read and think about worldview, to incorporate worldview thinking into my teaching, and even continued to speak and write on the subject from time to time. For me, even though worldview has been somewhat marginalized, the time seemed right to attempt to bring it back to mind. Hence I offer this work.

Assumptions and Foundations

This work makes certain assumptions both about content and about method. I will deal with each of these in order. My assumptions regarding content are rooted in traditional Christian theology. I begin there for one simple reason: The only written source for the Christian faith and practice is special revelation, the Bible. That being the case, it follows that the Bible ought to form the basis of everything we know, either directly or indirectly.[[7]](#footnote-7)

But even before I examine the priority of the Bible in more detail, it is imperative to go back one step further to God Himself, or, as one theologian/philosopher put it, to the “ontological Trinity,” God in His fullness in three persons.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Trinity is the ultimate grounding of all truth about all reality. If God did not exist, and if He were not presupposed, no truth would even be possible.[[9]](#footnote-9) If God does exist, as we presuppose, His revelation of Himself would be expected to mirror precisely His nature and would also be expected to be able to actually communicate with humans. We ought to be able to “think God’s thoughts after Him,“ in an analogical manner.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Bible is this revelation, not merely containing that revelation, but *the* only absolutely trustworthy source of truth.[[11]](#footnote-11)

This is not to say that the Bible says something directly or explicitly about every aspect of thought and life. For example, the Bible does not give us any direct answers regarding mathematics, physics, or engineering. Most of our knowledge about those disciplines comes from general revelation, either observation or experimentation. On the other hand, the Bible does sometimes provide very explicit information about some of “reality,” for example, some aspects of politics, economics, psychology, and the social sciences generally. But even there the Bible is not so comprehensive that it directly or explicitly offers all we need to know about our world. Moreover there is a danger in supposing that everything we need to know can be found simply by opening our Bibles and looking for a verse that corresponds expressly to that issue.

The Scriptures do however contain general principles which are crucial for the proper construction of knowledge. As we will see, one can deduce more specific principles from the more general ones, the latter serving as parameters of truth, though not direct. At any rate, I assume Scripture as the priority source for all truth.[[12]](#footnote-12) Moreover, I also assume certain things about Scripture itself, as these are asserted by Scripture or are deduced from it.[[13]](#footnote-13)

First, Scripture is inspired by God. This means simply that what God intended to be written in fact was recorded and committed to writing. Its source is God Himself and it is man only indirectly in terms of particular human personalities and modes of rhetoric and grammar. This assumption also lends authority to my acceptance of Scripture as the priority source of truth. Second, the Bible as we have it—the Old and New Testaments—is inerrant. Inerrancy follows logically from inspiration. If God is perfect and He gave the Scriptures, then it follows that a perfect God would not cause error to be recorded. But here we do have to be careful. By inerrant I do not mean that every word recorded is true. Some expressions and statements are false, for example, when Satan tells Eve that she will not die if she eats of the fruit. What inerrancy means then is that every word recorded was recorded in a completely accurate fashion. If a text states something, then that is what was said or done, without doubt. But moreover, this inerrancy only technically applies to the original autographs and not to copies, of which there are thousands.[[14]](#footnote-14) Finally, since the Bible is both inspired and inerrant, it must be authoritative. We again encounter the idea that the Christian Bible is the sole written source of truth for faith and life and for all truth, whether expressly or implicitly. The Bible is then the priority source when seeking truth about any facet of intellectual endeavor. These assumptions of course do not absolve us from a correct interpretation of the texts of the Bible, but that is a subject for a later chapter.

Moreover, I have begged the question of the meaning of any given biblical text even if I do accept its inspiration, inerrancy and authority. It is important not to conflate the basic assumptions with the issue of proper interpretation. One can accept unequivocally the assumptions of inspiration, inerrancy and authority and yet encounter legitimate disagreements on the meaning of a given text. However I also assume that the vast majority of biblical texts are clear, the doctrine of perspicuity, and should not present any or much diversity of interpretation.

Another methodological assumption that will prove crucial for any discussion of worldview has to do with the epistemological use of Scripture. Knowledge, traditionally defined as justified, true, belief, can be attained in several ways, none of which are condemned by Scripture itself. However the fact that they may be legitimate says nothing about their relative status. This is where my approach, known as presuppositionalism, comes into the picture. Though this approach to knowing is not unknown to any discipline, it has been especially critical in evaluating the status of the Bible as truth-bearing. But it has also been somewhat controversial as presuppositional approaches to epistemology are frequently seen as threatening empirical approaches.

I will begin the explanation of presuppositional epistemology this way: I take the truth claims offered both in and structured by Scripture as indubitable. That is, any claim made in the Bible, because it is the very Word of (from) God, is, by direct application or by deduction, is by definition taken to have truth value that is certain in a metaphysical sense.[[15]](#footnote-15) The truth value is objectively certain. In contrast, one finds tentative, conditional or contingent truth in general revelation, that is, in the application of reason alone to the data of the world.

By making this assumption I am not rejecting the attainment of genuine knowledge through an empirical epistemology. To the extent empiricism is the basis for an appeal to truth, that appeal suffers from the problem of uncertainty, even radical uncertainty, not to mention inaccuracy and distortion. Van Til writes about the “absolute antithesis in which the ‘natural man’ stands before God.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Van Til’s reference to the natural man (the non-believer), when it also refers to the empirical approach, extends as well to believers who use that epistemological method. It is not just the non-believer himself who has an epistemological problem, but the particular epistemological method used is also problematic, though less so for believers properly grounded. The unbeliever does not know anything as he should, due to the noetic effects of sin. But even the believer must contend with the noetic effects of sin, and when the empirical epistemology is added, even believers have a double problem to overcome. Their assumptions and conclusions about anything may still be distorted (even non-believing scholars recognize the “theory-ladenness” associated with empiricism[[17]](#footnote-17)) *and* empiricism can give no or little truth value because it is by its very nature rooted in probabilities. The latter is the problem of induction, first raised by David Hume, which is often explained using a simple example of counting crows. Suppose the hypothesis is that “all crows are black.” Using a traditional inductive method one begins looking for crows and counts the various colors of crows one sees. How is it that one is justified in asserting that all crows are black? One keeps counting at some point, having seen no non-black crows, one concludes that all crows are black. We have made a generalization about the color of crows, but can we ever have metaphysical certainty that all crows are black? Hume (and many others after him) would answer no.[[18]](#footnote-18) This in a nutshell is the problem of empiricism. Efforts have been made to preserve the epistemology by adjusting the theory, for example Karl Popper’s falsification idea.[[19]](#footnote-19) But even those efforts cannot ultimately save empiricism as an epistemological method. We need some “bedrock” foundation on which to build knowledge that does have certainty.

Presuppositionalism seems to be the only viable answer. The Bible can then be applied at least as a boundary condition for any alleged knowledge. Its principles establish the necessary bedrock. We are not then forced into some sort of skepticism, infinite regress or fideism. Empiricism as autonomous method is unviable for the Christian worldview. But empiricism may be useful within the boundaries of the presuppositions established by the Bible. The upshot of all this is that I am not rejecting epistemological empiricism, that is, general revelation as a source of knowledge. But its truth value is related inseparably to its fidelity to the parameters established by Scripture. Empirical truth claims are not self-validating, only Scripture, an external judge, is.

It is important also to clarify that presuppositionalism is not the same as the idea of the sufficiency of Scripture, though the concepts do overlap. Usually, one who argues for the sufficiency of Scripture is saying that the Bible contains everything we need to know for life and godliness, that is, for living the Christian faith and knowing about explicitly theological issues. In that case, the Bible is also necessary for the same life in Christ. What I argue here is that the Bible is not sufficient for worldview, but it is necessary as the foundation and boundary framework for worldview. Scripture does contain, either explicitly or by inference from texts, everything one needs to begin the process of thinking about worldview properly and to construct a true worldview. But since general revelation also produces knowledge, it is also part of worldview. However, general revelation then must be subservient to Scripture as the Scripture evaluates and judges what general revelation alleges to be true, but which might or might not be true. General revelation yields truth, making Scripture the main, but not only, source of truth. But there is an epistemological hierarchy that places Scripture above general revelation.

One more very important point of clarification needs to be made. The question can be raised: Even if a proposition derived from general revelation is found to be consistent with Scripture, is that proposition or assertion necessarily true? One example is the common assumption that atoms are like “mini solar systems,” that is, they “look like” such a construct? To put it another way, suppose scientists assert that the atom’s basic structure corresponds with the reality of a shape and configuration resembling a little solar system. There is no reason to sat such an assertion is false, and it certainly is consistent with anything we might find in Scripture. But is it true of necessity? The obvious answer is no. We might find in the future that in reality atoms have a different configuration, making our current assumption of truth about atoms provisional. This provisional or potential truth situation does not apply to every truth claim. Some truth claims are taken directly from Scripture in such a way that only a slight “translation” of them into modern vernacular is necessary.

This issue also ought to make us pause to ask whether Scripture itself contains different kinds of statements, some declarative and some not, some imperative and some not. In fact, Scripture can be said to contain several types of words or phrases: (1) those that declare something to be true (propositional or capable of translation into a proposition); (2) those that ask questions; (3) those that are expressions of emotion or opinion; (4) those that give commands. Numbers (2) and (3) we may dismiss as not propositional, that is, not conveying truth claims, unless the question is rhetorical. Number (4), commands, may contain truth value depending on context. Number (1) is generally more likely to assert truth (though some statements in Scripture are lies, non-truths—these are easy to identify). If we take all the statements in Scripture that are translatable into a proposition or are propositions, and reject all those that are non-truths (for example, spoken by Satan, etc.), then we have the total of all truth claims that are in fact true, correspond with what is actually the case. From these we select those, as applicable, that help us understand a particular problem we may encounter in the world or in like or in thinking of those in the world. They may not exhaust all possible truth, as general revelation also contributes its share of truth. But they do at least establish the “frontier” beyond which a proposition of general revelation cannot be accepted as true. Within the “frontier” however, there may well be different ways to understand a reality, as in my atom example above.

Definitions

Worldview

Definitions are especially important for any discussion of worldview and integration. Some terms will be defined as we come to them, but since these too play such a central role and appear throughout this book, we will be well-advised to get these two clear at the start.

Worldview comes from the German *Weltanschauung*, and connotes a set of ideas that form a comprehensive “lens” through which to understand or filter the “buzz” from the data of reality. James Sire defines worldview as

“a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently of inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

This definition is helpful but needs filling out. Sire seems to indicate that a worldview is about one’s idea about reality, which is true. But worldview addresses more than ontology. It also provides framework for ones epistemology, ethics, idea of human nature, etc. Perhaps however Sire was only using the word “reality” in a more popular sense. In another book, Sire defined worldview almost exactly the same except for the omission of the word “reality” and the addition in its place of the phrase “the basic makeup of our world.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Arthur Holmes has defined worldview as a unifying vision of life, including a view of our highest purpose, of God Himself, of how to know, of what is right and wrong.[[22]](#footnote-22) In turn, Albert Wolters says a worldview is “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.”[[23]](#footnote-23) For Wolters, “things” means anything about which one might hold beliefs which may be true or false.[[24]](#footnote-24) Further, W. Andrew Hoffecker writes that “Underlying all that we think, say, or do are basic assumptions that form what we call a ‘world view.’”[[25]](#footnote-25) Finally, one of the first of the recent wave of worldview writers of the 1970s to 1990s, Herbert Schlossberg, did not actually use the term worldview, but instead wrote about the subject in terms of “idols” of the mind that should be destroyed in the light of Christian principles in relation to every area of human thought and action.[[26]](#footnote-26) Schlossberg was a pioneer in worldview thinking even though he seldom used the term. Other scholars have defined the concept, but this group should suffice to give us an idea.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Together the definitions above have much in common. A worldview consists of (1) beliefs; (2) that are held closely, even emotionally; (3) about “reality,” meaning all of thought and life. Moreover these beliefs are foundational, that is bedrock starting points on which other ideas may be built. The writers also acknowledge that not all worldviews are “created equal,” as beliefs may be wrong. Nor does every (or any) individual possess a worldview that is completely consistent. Finally, the authors cited see a worldview as in substance a cognitive construct, something of and related to the mind, but also believed as one exercises faith. There are in other words intellectual, voluntarist (willful) and affectational elements involved in worldview thinking. I will have more to say about all this later. But first, I will propose my own definition.

Let me first say that the other definitions above are perfectly legitimate. However I believe my own may be more comprehensive and descriptive. I will define a worldview as the answers to the crucial questions of life. The answers therefore form the total worldview held by any individual or objectively constructed by someone. Almost everyone would acknowledge that there are crucial questions about life, whose answers define what we believe and how we will act. The crucial questions may be debated, that is, someone might argue that I have included too many or omitted some that are crucial. I accept responsibility for any mistakes here. But tentatively the crucial questions are, in no priority order:

1. Does God exists and if so what is He like? (Theology)
2. How do we know anything? (Epistemology)
3. What is right and wrong? (Ethics)
4. What is real? Or what is reality like? (Ontology)
5. What is my life purpose or *summum bonum*?
6. What is the pattern (if any) of history? Does it have purpose?
7. What is human nature like Do humans have a nature)? (Anthropology)

I will propose that when these questions are answered one has a worldview, no matter how incorrect (by objective standards) or inconsistent it might be. Once answered, those answers may then be used to answer further, secondary questions about various subjects or disciplines. The following chapter will elaborate on these questions and answers. We next will define what is meant by integration.

Two clarifications are in order. Worldview is not the same thing as theology. Theology constitutes a foundation, since its precepts are (hopefully) properly derived from special revelation. However, subjects such as the Bible, sin, salvation, sanctification, and eschatology are prolegomena. It is important to keep this in mind, since some who engage in worldview believe that they must stop at theology proper. In fact, what worldview does is construct a “theology” of each discipline or intellectual endeavor as well as practice. In addition, worldview is not merely prayer and love of others, as important as those are. Worldview integration is an intellectual activity using ideas as the object of study. Second worldview is not equivalent to prayer and love of others. Again, those elements of the Christian life are certainly important. The study of Christian worldview is explicitly an exercise of the mind. This does not at all mean that other aspects are inferior.

But besides the clarifications above an important question arises as to whether one may possess an inchoate worldview, not knowing what one’s worldview is, either partly of wholly. The answer begins to emerge if we are reminded that all worldviews result in action (as nearly all ideas are not confined to the mind but result in actions expressing those ideas). Worldviews tend to manifest themselves in words and behavior. Now behavior is not always consistent with ones worldview. No one could assert with integrity that their actions are always rigidly and logically consistent with ones worldview. One reason for this is that an individual may not always be aware fully of their belief system at the conscious level. An alternative and attractive explanation is that because of sin, humans always to some extent engage in self-deception.[[28]](#footnote-28) At any rate, individuals may possess a fully developed worldview but be unaware of parts or all of it. Their worldview might even be some syncretistic combination of non-Christian and Christian elements. Still, in the end, we all have some worldview, even if every single inhabitant of the planet has a unique worldview because of inconsistencies, no matter how small.

Having qualified the discussion of worldview to account for individual idiosyncracies as well as for the effects of sin, I would still contend that ideally worldviews ought to be internally consistent and externally correspondent with the “way things really are” in terms of truth, good, etc. Ronald Nash has provided a helpful set of criteria by which one may test his or her worldview.[[29]](#footnote-29) Nash’s tests are normative in nature, used to choose among competing worldviews by helping one recognize how the tenets of some worldviews fail certain fundamental standards of reason. These criteria do address the empirical questions of how people actually do think or fail to think.

Nash’s first test of validity he calls the test of reason. A world view ought to be logically consistent, both in its parts and as a whole. The test applied is the classic law of Non-Contradiction.[[30]](#footnote-30) Something cannot be true and not true at the same time in the same place. A leaf cannot be all brown and all green at the same time, though part of it can be brown and part green. Worldviews likewise ought to be internally consistent.

But a worldview may be consistent and wrong, so another test is necessary. Logic does not guarantee truth, since the truth value of the propositions is also crucial.[[31]](#footnote-31) The second test then is that of experience. As Nash puts it, “We have the right to expect worldviews to touch base with human experience.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Nash is not a pure empiricist. Nor does he believe humans are capable of approaching all sense data “in an impersonal detached way.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Basically Nash is asserting that our experience through sense data is presumptively valid but always subject to rebuttal on account of human limitation and the noetic effects of sin. If a worldview is completely incongruous with human experience then at the least it should be subject to further scrutiny. An example will suffice: If we assert that all humans are innately good, but find in our general experience (which we will) that they do not appear to be so, then that proposition must be revised or rejected. Nash calls this “the test of the outer world.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Nash goes on further to assert that a worldview should “fit what we know about ourselves.” This he calls the “test of the inner world.”[[35]](#footnote-35) An example of the use of this test involves the worldview of an ethical relativist, a particularly relevant example since ethical relativism is a part of several worldviews. The relativist asserts that all ethical standards are relative, that there are no objective and universal standards of ethics. Yet he finds, as we all do, that he too makes ethical value judgments, he distinguishes between right and wrong. Furthermore he will often act contrary to his own worldview when he himself is wronged in his eyes. Thus his worldview has failed the test of the inner world because it does not fit with what the relativist knows about himself. Again, this is not the sole test of a worldview, but can be useful in conjunction with others.

Finally, Nash posits the test of practice, which essentially asserts that a person lives consistently with the system he professes to believe.[[36]](#footnote-36) If the individual cannot live out consistently his worldview, but is forced to adopt some components of another worldview, his worldview has failed the test of practice, which we may also call the “existential test.” I have already addressed this problem as one many or most individuals face.

Nash admits his tests are not deductive but inductive. As a result the conclusions lack logical certainty. He notes that the kind of reasoning he uses to evaluate worldviews is similar to the way one approaches and interprets a written text or historical events.[[37]](#footnote-37) But we can have a genuine and indubitable certainty in the presuppositional approach I have elaborated earlier. This evaluative assumption forces an individual to evaluate his or her worldview by a fixed, universal and timeless standard that is external to himself and is given by God in the form of special revelation. Nash’s tests can be helpful but only if used together with an ultimate test that is itself grounded in truth that is bedrock.

Integration

The term “integration” was not used often until very recently, when it became the word of choice to describe what Christian colleges and universities were trying to do with their faculties.[[38]](#footnote-38) Though the term is easy to define, it can be exceedingly difficult to do integration. That will be a topic of later chapters. Integration can be defined as the process by which one moves from the answers to the crucial questions of life to their application and use in each knowledge area or discipline (or practice). When one speaks therefore of the integration of faith and learning, one generally means the incorporation of the content of one’s faith into the substance of “learning,” that is, the subject being taught. Integration is what we do after we have constructed our worldview. We apply it.

We will see that integration requires several moves from worldview elements to proper application to any given subject matter. The above-listed constituent elements of a worldview are general or more abstract precepts that will not yet have been made contextually applicable to some core of knowledge like, politics, economics, biology, psychology, etc. A logical connection must be shown to exist between the more abstract elements and the specific knowledge base of some subject matter. The analogy is to a court case to which a judge wishes to find a precedent in case law that will enable him to render a decision. He will be required first to extract the general principles from the precedent that could be useful for the present case. We do that already as we answer the crucial questions of life. Then the judge must show how the facts and principles of that precedent are similar in real way to those of the present case. Likewise we must be able to show how the principles of the answers to crucial questions are timeless, absolute and relevant in relation to the problems posed by the existing knowledge base of that subject matter. Do some or all of the answers to the crucial questions apply to the existing knowledge content in a non-artificial way? In other words, is the analogy real or merely assumed and suspect? We shall address these problems in due time.

The Variety of Worldviews

Using the elements of any worldview that I sketched above, it is fairly easy to develop a kind of catalog of worldviews. This has been done by many scholars, and some have even called the classification a catalog.[[39]](#footnote-39) In addition, there are many ways to classify worldviews. No one way can claim exclusive authority. Likewise mu classification is simply a convenient way to understand the basic scope of worldviews at present. I hope that my classification is both comprehensive and that the types of worldviews do not overlap so that the reader can get an idea of the variety and the substance of different worldviews. At the same time, it has been emphasized frequently that almost no one holds a completely “pure” or coherent worldview. Still, I believe the method of classification by type, can be helpful.[[40]](#footnote-40) It is simple and covers the relevant range of worldviews.

I have classified worldviews under five categories. The categories or types are sometimes, but not in every case, connected to a particular historical development. They are: (1) Enlightenment or Humanist; (2) Secular; (3) Postmodern or Post-Christian; (4) Neo-Pagan; (5) Pragmatism and (6) Christian. Again, there are other ways to classify worldviews, but I believe this one may be very helpful. Each worldview has a single “governing principle” which gives that worldview its substance and distinctiveness from the others. Those governing principles themselves do contain more specificity and will be unpacked in this book.

The Significance of Worldview  
 The reader has the right to ask why this subject of worldview ought to be studied at all. After all, isn’t all truth God’s truth and don’t we have adequate ways of discovering truth without this this elaborate process? If humans were perfect, the answer to that question would be affirmative. If we could be assured that what we call God’s truth was in fact God’s truth, we would have no problem and this book would be superfluous. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and this requires a short, but important, digression.

The Nature of Man and the Fall

We will pick up the topic of man’s nature again in Chapter One. But it is also necessary to address it here before we have even examined any particular discipline. This is because it is impossible to understand fully the significance of studying worldview without first knowing where man stands in terms of his capacity to know truth. Therefore one of the elements of worldview itself must be applied to what we are attempting to do to inform us what we do and to what extent we can do it.

Man and woman were both created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) (Genesis 1: 26-31). Whatever else that might mean, it means essentially that in some way humans were like God. Humans were without sin and their reason worked well, even perfectly, though it was not infinite.[[41]](#footnote-41) Genesis 3 then reports the sin of Adam and Eve that brought their condemnation and the Fall. It is the effects of the Fall that we have a special interest in. Not only were the two condemned spiritually, bringing spiritual and physical death, but they each and their posterity were affected in other ways. In particular, the mind of humans was “darkened.” Our state at birth already predisposes us to sin and ignorance because we not only have no salvific knowledge of God but because we suppress what truth about God that we do know from general revelation.[[42]](#footnote-42) Thus the mind cannot function as it should to attain truth. Theologians have labeled this the noetic effects of sin. To be sure, common grace is able to restore some measure of knowledge, and regenerative grace also begins the lifelong process of restoration of reason. But sin still plays its part in continuing the inability of humans to obtain unaided knowledge.

Given the severe effects of the fall on the mind, it is impossible for humans to grasp and to desire to live out a Christian worldview. Assumptions and conclusions about what is true, good, right, real, etc. will all be distorted without the external aid of God’s Word, the Bible, operative together with grace. The study of worldview by Christians is therefore of crucial importance, since we need the framework of the Christian worldview in order to think and live in a way that pleases God and is of genuine help to others.

The History of the Concept

David Naugle has shown that the concept of worldview in its modern sense appeared as early as the eighteenth century, first coined by Immanuel Kant.[[43]](#footnote-43) But the use of the term in the way Protestant thinkers conceived it did not occur until the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Scottish theologian James Orr is sometimes thought to be the first Evangelical to use the term to describe a comprehensive set of ideas about the world. Orr was familiar with German theology and philosophy which had, as mentioned been using the term *Weltanschauung*. Orr devoted a good part of his book, *The Christian View of God and the World*, to an examination of both the concept and the term.[[44]](#footnote-44) He used worldview to define “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.”[[45]](#footnote-45) By using the phrase “manner of conceiving,” Orr was referring to a cognitive construct, a way of thinking about something. Thus for him a worldview is an intellectual construct, but, as we will see, may be embraced almost in an emotional manner. To put it another way, the content itself of a worldview is a mental event, but it can be believed in a more than merely mental aspect, just as one can believe about Christ and also believe in Him as savior and Lord. According to Naugle, Gordon Clark and Carl F. H. Henry followed as intellectual heirs of Orr.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Following on the heels of Orr was the Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper, who may be the most well-known of the first generation of the modern worldview tradition thinking. Kuyper’s notion of worldview is encapsulated best in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered in the United States in 1898.[[47]](#footnote-47) Naugle notes that Kuyper’s views on worldview are nearly identical to James Orr’s, with who he was acquainted and whom he had read and quotes. So we can place the origins on modern worldview in the Calvinist tradition.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The first generation of worldview thinkers spawned a second generation, represented by scholars such as Herman Dooyeweerd in the Netherlands.[[49]](#footnote-49) Dooyeweerd followed essentially in the tradition laid out by Kuyper and expanded on the latter’s idea of sphere sovereignty. But Dooyeweerd’s influence tended to follow a separate trajectory, reflected today especially in the work of the Neo-Calvinist Institute for Christian Studies. Orr’s work on the other hand seems to have been more or less lost for decades, except for its influence on a few Reformed scholars in the United States. But in the 1940s the Christian philosopher/theologians Gordon Clark and Carl F. H. Henry were both attracted to Orr’s total life-view idea and sought to apply it to every facet of life and thought. Abraham Kuyper on the other hand, never quite lost his intellectual hold on Reformed Evangelicals and began to see a renaissance in the writings of Cornelius van Til in the 1930s. Van Til receives little attention as a comprehensive worldview thinker, known rather for his presuppositional approach to epistemology and apologetics. But he implicitly contributed to renewed discussions of worldview in the 1960s.

In fact, the period from roughly the later 1960s to the late 1990s marked a heyday for the worldview tradition as well as for publication of works addressing worldview. Not only Henry and Clark, but especially, at the more popular level, Francis Schaeffer, and many more, exerted a huge influence among Evangelicals. Schaeffer’s name came for a time to be the representative of the worldview tradition. His works, compiled under the title *The Christian Worldview*, have influenced countless believers to think Chtistianly about every aspect of the world.[[50]](#footnote-50) While Schaeffer may have been an inspiration, he was not the only one writing during this term. A spate of works was published by scholars and popularizers such as Charles Colson, Ronald Nash, W, Andrew Hoffecker and Gary Scot Smith, Gordon Clark, James Sire, Albert Wolters, Arthur F. Holmes, Brian Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, and Herbert Schlossberg, to mention only a few.[[51]](#footnote-51) The very idea of worldview was “in the air” among Evangelicals. InterVarsity Press, Eerdmans, Crossway, and others published numerous works on worldview.

During this era also we see the work of a number of Reformed thinkers who went under the name of Christian Reconstruction.[[52]](#footnote-52) This is not the place to detail the full scope of their activities or to critique them.[[53]](#footnote-53) The point in mentioning the reconstructionists is their obsession with worldview thinking, beginning with the cultural critiques of Rousas Rushdoony in the late 1950s and continuing through the works of Gary North, Greg Bahsen, and others in the 1980s and early 1990s. Though they have not ceased their productive activity on worldview, the movement itself has dwindled since the later 1990s. In one sense however, the Reconstructionists, as their name might suggest, could claim a place as one of the major, though unrecognized, contributors of the third generation of the worldview tradition.

Sometime around the beginning of the new millennium, the number of works on worldview began to diminish, and the interest in worldview also seems to have declined. Academic institutions too appear to have lost interest in the concept and some even encountered resistance to talk about the subject. The reasons for this diminishing interest are difficult to assess. Perhaps a measure of secularization in Christian colleges set in. Perhaps a new generation of academics who were not theologically trained and whose doctoral degrees were earned at secular universities failed to be inspired by worldview thinking or were hostile to it. And perhaps outside pressures led to a stifling of the worldview tradition. I am not arguing that the tradition is dead. One still sees it in some institutions. One also sees it among more Reformed Christian churches and homes. It also shows up in home school curriculum and at related conventions. But I have seen much less interest in worldview in general in recent years.

This is the present state of affairs. This also brings us to the end of the introductory chapter. Much of the material only introduced here will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Worldview is a crucial topic, worthy of much more attention than it has been receiving. In the following chapter we will begin this attention with a detailed look at the elements of any worldview.

1. I am thinking of Marx, who denied ideas as having any real power, and that rather economic forces governed the world. But his own ideas gained a powerful influence. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For some interesting examples in the political realm, see Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, editors, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 325-1625*. Eerdmans, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*. Oxford University, 2014, 15-17, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The conclusions of worldview construction are not themselves theology proper, though traditional theological topics form the foundation for much or all of any worldview. In other words, a worldview is not the same as a systematic theology text containing topics such as man, sin, salvation, etc. But those topics, especially man and sin, form a foundational part or worldview thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This proposition of course is contested to some extent by those who rely on natural law and by those who do not share my confidence in the veracity of Scripture. I will have more to say on that later. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Cornelius van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is why it is argued that the unbeliever, who does not presuppose God, can have no coherent worldview. See Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As we will see, general revelation contains truth, but contingently and imperfectly. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The reasons for this are elaborated below. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Again I am assuming the Bible is self-attesting and needs no further empirical justification. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. However, scholars have found such a miniscule difference between and among the many textual copies that inerrancy is practically the rule even for them, with only a small number of differences, mostly “scribal errors” and a few deliberate and obvious variants. See F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Stellar, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This does not mean of course that humans always understand the meaning perfectly, as all humans are fallible. But the Holy Spirit and a sanctified reason are capable of overcoming at least some of the noetic effects of sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Quoted in Gregory Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See for example, Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford University, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See W. Wade Hands, *Reflection Without Rules*, 85ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A basic Worldview Catalog*, Fifth edition. IVP Academic, 2009, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. IVP Academic, 2004, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview* (Studies In a Christian Worldview). Eerdmans, 1983, 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. Eerdmans, 1985, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. W. Andrew Hoffecker and Gary Scott Smith, editors, *Building a Christian Worldview, Volume I, God, Man and Knowledge*. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian faith and Its Confrontation with American Society*. Thomas Nelson, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Francis Schaeffer, Ronald Nash, Glen Martin, Glen Sunshine and others have also contributed. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See Gregory Bahnsen, *The Apologetic Implications of Self-Deception*. Covenant Media Press, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*. Academie Books, 1988, Chapter 4, and Idem, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. Zondervan, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. We will have more to say about the proper use of logic in constructing worldviews. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., 62-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. One example is Robert A. Harris, *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach*. Wipf and Stock, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Catalog of Worldviews*, Fifth edition. IVP Academic, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Max Weber first introduced the type as a way to classify movements and ideas in his sociological, religious and economic analyses. See [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*. Eerdmans Reprint, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Eerdmans, 2002. See Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), translated with introduction by Werner Pluhar. Hackett, 1987, part one, book two, section 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*. Scribner, 1887. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, quoted in Naugle, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 14-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Eerdmans, 1994 reprint. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Naugle, *Worldview*, 16ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See his *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-1958), translated by David H. Freeman, William S. Young and H. DeJongste, 4 volumes. Paideia Press, 1984 reprint. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, Second edition, 4 volumes. Crossway, 1982. These volumes contain many separate books written by Schaeffer, almost all dealing with some aspect of worldview. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Naugle, *Worldview*, for mention of these writers and for a fairly comprehensive bibliography of worldview writers. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The name itself implies the goal of reconstructing society and the church along explicitly Christian-biblical lines. The movement is often also labeled Theonomy. But the latter term is a bit narrower, as sub-set of Reconstructionism. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. For a complete historical and theological analysis of this movement, see Marc A. Clauson, *A History of the Idea of “God’s Law” (Theonomy): Its Origins, Development and Place in Political and Legal Thought*. Edwin Mellen, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)