

What is a worldview? By Francois van Deventer

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Introduction

In Acts 14:8-15 we read:

And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.

When we read this text we see that the inhabitants of Lystra had been so captivated by the miracle performed by Paul that they immediately started to view Paul and Barnabas as Greek gods. But the same people were so gullible that only a short time thereafter they were convinced by the Jews to stone Paul to death.

We tend to think that this phenomenon where people are seen as gods is limited to a time long past ... but sadly this is not the case, because even today on the island of Tanna in the South Pacific we find the same kind of idolatry manifesting in their airplanes which cannot fly, and unusable landing strips. You see, the people of Tanna believe the American soldiers to be gods who bring food, refrigerators, vehicles and medicines to their island.

Now we know that the schedules of cargo planes cannot be manipulated by rituals, and for us this behavior of the people of Tanna seem very odd. I mean, they'd imitate soldiers by marching in formation with replicated firearms for hours on end. For them this is only logical, for during World War II they witnessed with their own eyes how the all the goods

were brought to their island when thousands of American soldiers who were fighting the Japanese, were stationed on the island.

Your worldview shapes how you interpret facts

The worldview of the people of Lystra in ancient times and the people of Tanna today causes them to look at the same realities we do, but interpret those realities very differently. This is because a worldview is like glasses you put on in order to see the world. Our glasses function differently from the Tanese people and therefore we see the world differently than they do.

Think of color-blind people who see for the very first time after they have been given EnChroma glasses. For the very first time they can distinguish between red, green and blue. They are baffled. Some of them become overwhelmed by emotion and even start to cry. They make pronouncements like:

- “It is a whole new world!”
- “I have been missing out so much!”
- “It just gives you a totally different view!”ⁱ

The ancient Western world was also blinded in many ways such as the Tanese and the Lustrians. The Ancient Roman Empire which persecuted Christians, also had the most godless and bizarre laws, such as that a father only legally recognized a child as his own after picking it up from the ground. If parents did not want the child, the law allowed for children to be abandoned outside of the city walls to be consumed by wolves. This infanticide is also recorded in Rome’s myths. Romulus and Remus who were regarded as the founders of Rome were abandoned on the banks of the Tiber to die, but a wolf saved and adopted them. This gives us an idea of how evil the world of ancient Rome truly was.

Dr Francis Nigel Lee describes how the emperor Constantine reformed Roman Law in accordance with biblical principles and how this was, during the sixth century, codified by Justinian. These laws:

- Maintained the biblical definition of the nuclear family.
- Criminalized abortion and other forms of infanticide
- Instituted harsher penalties for rape
- Criminalized human sacrifice
- Criminalized polygamy
- Criminalized homosexuality
- Allowed for the just liberation of slaves.ⁱⁱ

The *Santo Spirito* Hospital was founded by Christians in Rome in 1204 in order to provide a safe haven for children abandoned like Romulus and Remus.

The Contemporary West is not so much Different

Looking at Western society today, we see that there are more similarities with these ancient civilizations than some of us may have expected. On 7 January 2022 Fox News reported that an 18-year old Alexis Avila abandoned her baby in a trash can. Two homeless people thereafter heard the baby's screams, saved it, and informed the police. Some might argue that she should have rather abandoned the baby earlier and not have waited for it to be born.

In many Western countries today, babies can after all be aborted right up to birth. In our country abortion is legal but it is a criminal offence to cut off a dog's tail. The tail of dogs now have more value than unborn human lives.ⁱⁱⁱ

In his book, *Epoch—The Rise and Fall of the West*, Kevin Swanson describes the decline of the post-Christian West as follows:

Nothing portrays the Western worldview shift and its destructive effects better (on a societal level) than debt and birth rates. This shift in worldview is evident. Why would the West implode its birth rates, consume all of the capital of previous generations, and mortgage the future of its grandchildren by unprecedented debt? These are the hopeless and hapless ideas of the existentialist Jean-Paul Satre and the homosexual economist, John Maynard Keynes in action. This data points to a loss of the will to continue a civilization ... The de-Christianization of Western culture has resulted in the breakdown of Western civilization itself.^{iv}

Pat Buchanan draws the same conclusion:

But as Christianity began to die in the West, something else occurred: Western peoples began to stop having children. For the correlation between religious faith and large families is absolute. The more devout a people ... the higher its birthrate ... Wherever secularism triumphs, populations begin to shrink.^v

Two billionaires, Elon Musk and Jack Ma, were asked during a video conversation hosted by the World Artificial Intelligence Conference on August 29, 2019 what they considered to be the biggest threat to modern civilization. Musk responded:

The biggest problem civilization will face in the next 20 years is population collapse. Collapse! I want to emphasize this: the biggest issue in 20 years will be population collapse. Not explosion. Collapse.^{vi}

The only continent where women still have enough children to maintain the population is Africa. The rest of the world is facing a population implosion, including India, China, North and South America, Europe and Russia. Even Muslim nations such as Saudi Arabia and Iran face the same problem.

The elites of our day are in love with the ancient Greeks and for this reason parliamentary buildings are often erected to resemble ancient Greek pagan temples. But the same population collapse Musk speaks of destroyed ancient Greeks after their philosophers, including Plato

and Aristotle, pleaded with the state to regulate the number of children each family would be allowed to have. Consequently, the population of the Greeks plummeted. As Swanson notes:

At Eretria only one family in twelve had two sons: hardly any had two daughters. The whole of Greece had been subject to a low birthrate and a general decrease of population, owing to which cities have been deserted and the land had ceased to yield fruit ... men had fallen into such a state of luxury, avarice, and indolence that they did not wish to marry, or, if they married, to rear children born to them, or at most but one or two of them.^{vii}

Today we marvel at the remnants of the pillars of these Greek temples. But the reality is that they actually document the decline and fall of ancient Greece. Is Western civilization today truly different from the Greek civilization which had collapsed thousands of years ago?

Kevin Swanson notes that these population implosions in ancient Greece and in the contemporary West relates to the prevalent worldview and that “nothing portrays the Western worldview shift and its destructive effects better (on a societal level) than debt and birth rates.”^{viii}

Defining a Worldview

Because man is not omniscient, and does not have all the data in the universe at his fingertips, we inevitably have to make certain presuppositions. Christians view the Bible as the Word of God and therefore as a reliable source of information which tells us that God is the Creator of all things. Evolutionists suppress the knowledge of the divine and consequently their first presupposition is that there is no god. This presupposition guides their interpretation of all the information they receive.

Thus, a worldview consists of a number of basic presuppositions that are in relative harmony with one another. These presuppositions can be either consciously or unconsciously held. These presuppositions are normally not questioned and only come to the fore once the worldview is challenged by an opposing view.^{ix}

The philosopher HG Stoker writes the following concerning the purpose and characteristics of a worldview:

Adhering to a worldview is integral to what it means to be human. Without this we would, in actual fact, not be human at all. Being human implies adhering to a worldview. Not only the adult but also the small child adheres to a given worldview. Not only the highly developed nations but even the so-called primitive nations hold to a worldview. As communal beings we form a worldview ... [consequently] the social nature of a worldview is an important characteristic thereof. This worldview is the sum total of the answers to the most fundamental questions concerning God (or whatever occupies the place of God in that worldview), humanity, creation and the relationships between all of these. A worldview encompasses, carries and guides all subsequent knowledge (and consequent action). It therefore necessarily has a universal (or all-encompassing) character, even if some worldviews are characterized

by certain dualisms between religion and culture, church and society, or grace and nature ... A worldview forms a complete whole, which is to say that it is fundamentally based upon a single, overarching principle. Viewed in terms of this principle it must be said that every worldview is always religiously determined.^x

The Components of a Worldview

When we see a society that thinks nothing about aborting children up to a single day prior to their birth, or which legalizes prostitution as they now want to do in this country, or redefines the nuclear family, it shows us something of the worldview of that society.

Your own worldview as well as the worldview of the society you live in will have a tremendous impact upon how you will act and on whether that society will flourish or not.

All worldviews constitute answers to life's big questions. 9 out of 10 philosophers agree as to what the central components of a worldview is.^{xi} The answers to these big questions can be divided into seven main components:

1. Theology (view of God): Who/What is the primary reality?
2. Anthropology (view of man): Is man a complex machine? A dormant god? A developed ape? Or creation in the image of God?
3. Morality: What defines right and wrong conduct? Feelings? Consensus? Scripture?
4. Cosmology: is the universe an open or closed system? Is it created or eternal?
5. Epistemology (view of knowledge): How is knowledge acquired? How can we know anything?
6. Society: What is the relationship between the individual and the community?
7. Chronology (View of time): Is there a beginning and an end to time? Is there a purpose behind time? Is time cyclical?

Contemplating Worldviews from Our Distinct Place in Time

Abraham Kuyper, the Reformed theologian and former prime minister of the Netherlands once noted:

Because the Reformation of the sixteenth century is considered *the Reformation*, many are under the false impression that there are no other Reformations—not in Scripture nor in history. But this is false ... If we were to become accustomed to viewing Luther's Reformation as the sole reformation, then the consequence is this: Reformation becomes a one-time event and that's it. But to the contrary, Reformation is in actual fact a consistent phenomenon in the history of Christ's Church which occurs time and again after mistakes and apostasy has taken place. On many occasions such Reformations have also been successful. Through this understanding Reformation becomes a living idea.^{xii}

Kuyper then continues to list the following Reformations:

- The children of Seth separating from the children of Cain
- The flood by which Noah and his family were separated from the godless world

- Abraham leaving the godless Ur to settle in Canaan
- Jacob separating from Esau
- The exodus of the church from the land Goshen to the desert
- The abolishment of calf worship by Moses
- The Reformations under the Judges
- The prophet Samuel's Reformations
- Reformations under the kings of Israel and Judah
- Zerubbabel leading God's people back from captivity
- Ezra and Nehemiah's reformations
- John the Baptist calling the People to repentance
- Council of Nicaea
- Waldensians
- Hussites
- Protestant Reformation
- Synod of Dordt
- Separation of 1834
- "Doleantie" and the rise of Neo-Calvinism

From a Christian perspective we can therefore divide all of history into the following parts:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Reformations
4. Redemption in Christ
5. Reformations
6. The Second Coming of Christ

Only Two Kinds of Worldviews

In evaluating the different kind of worldviews, one would come to the conclusion that there are only two types of worldviews: 1) A Christian and Biblical Worldview and 2) a non-Christian worldview. Psalm 1 teaches:

Blessed is the man

Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,

Nor stands in the path of sinners,

Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

And in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree

Planted by the rivers of water,

That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

Professor Stoker formulates it as follows:

Because the most radical choice man faces is the choice for or against the living God, our Father in Jesus Christ, worldviews can be divided into Christian and non-Christian.^{xiii}

Hoffecker, in his *Building a Christian Worldview*, likewise divides worldviews into two categories, with the Biblical/Reformational worldview on the one side and the classical Greek/Enlightenment/Renaissance/Humanist worldview on the other side.^{xiv} It is interesting to note that Hoffecker points out how the traditional Christian worldview was mixed with the Greek worldview of Plato and Aristotle in the thought of Aquinas. The Reformers of the sixteenth-century returned to the biblical worldview. In this sense one could view the Roman Catholic worldview as a partially Christian worldview.

RJ Rushdoony, for example, points out how both the ancient worldview of the ancient Greco-Roman world as well as that of the philosophers of the French Enlightenment were underpinned by similar humanistic presuppositions.^{xv}

A Complete, Not a Partial Christian Worldview

When professor Stoker distinguishes partial from complete Christian worldviews, he makes the following comment:

Dr Kuyper rightly distinguished between total and partial Christianity. Total Christianity maintains Christian truth (principle, thought, and idea) universally in that it is applied to all of creation, including all of human life.

With partial Christianity, Christian truth is limited to the ecclesiastical, religious and moral life, but the rest of creation (that is the life of man as it pertains to science, arts, economics, politics, technology, sports etc.) is “neutral,” that is neither Christian nor non-Christian.

Total Christianity includes Calvinism—as shown in this study—but also Eastern and Roman Catholicism which, despite its dualism between nature and grace, in which nature is seen as stepping stone to grace and grace is seen as elevating nature, maintains a all-encompassing ecclesiocentrism—as is evident from its advocacy for subsidiarity in which the church is the overarching sphere of life, from its ecclesiastical state, the Vatican, as well as its ecclesiastical political parties, ecclesiastical trade unions, and ecclesiastical oversight of science and the arts. Other Christian worldviews such as those of the Lutheran and Methodist, the sects as well as Liberal Christianity, are only partial.^{xvi}

Darrow Miller describes this partial Christianity as “evangelic gnosticism,” noting that

[M]any Christians today suffer from ‘split personalities’. Their lives are divided into compartments: the religious, what they do when attending church or a Bible study; and the ‘secular’, their jobs, recreation and education. Millions of believers operate from this worldview, which I call evangelical gnosticism.^{xvii}

Miller is also convinced that non-Christian worldviews can be subdivided into two main categories: Animism and Secularism. Under Animism we find the Hinduism, traditional African religion, New Age and Buddhism, while Marxism, Humanism, Nazism, Fascism and Nihilism can be classified as secular.

Conclusion

Professor Mark Kreitzer writes the following in his *Christian Manifesto*:

Throughout history men have produced recitations of the divine will, humanist manifestos and rights declarations, all reflecting various religious worldviews. Historically, manifestos and declarations are divided into two types: those with a subjective, man-centered worldview based on human reason, and those with an objective, God-centered view based on Scripture. In the first category, one can include Qur’an and the Hadith of Muhammad, and the equally religious revolutionary documents of Western humanism, for example The Declaration of the Rights of Man of the French Revolution (1789), The Communist Manifesto (1848), the three versions of the Humanist Manifesto (1933, 1973, 2003), the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1945), and the humanistic Freedom Charter (1945) of South Africa’s ruling African National Congress. All of these echo a totally man centred worldview ... Each of these humanist movements have been followed by invasion, bloodshed, holocaust, jihad, subversion, terrorism, and inquisition. These included the jihad against the Byzantine Empire, continued through the Roman Catholic crusades against the Germanic tribes, onto the French, Russian, National Socialist German, and Chinese revolutions. They are continuing in the Western cultural revolution with its perversion, pornography, and abortion holocausts of recent decades and modern jihadist movements sweeping the Muslim world. All are based on man’s word and wisdom.^{xviii}

For Christians, the Bible are our primary source of authority. Commentaries on and doctrinal summaries of this source include creeds and confessions. The Apostles Creed provides us with a concise summary of the message of Scripture and this creed contains all seven components of our Biblical worldview. This creed is confessed by not only Protestants, but also Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox. Articles 1-4, 6 and 8 pertain to theology, articles 1, 8 and 10-12 pertain to anthropology, epistemology is implied in the creed’s formula “I believe,” articles 1 and 5 pertain to cosmology, article 9 to society, articles 7 and 10 to ethics and articles 11 and 12 to our view of time.

Sadly there are those who call themselves Christians, yet practice a form of syncretism by trying to combine the truths of the Christian worldview. Ronald Nash describes this as follows:

However it is important to recognize that disagreement over essential Christian beliefs should result in the disputant's being regarded as one who has left the former family of beliefs, however much he or she desires to continue to use the old label. For example, many religious liberals in the West continue to use the Christian label for views that are clearly inconsistent with the beliefs of historic Christianity.^{xix}

One of the best examples of this can be seen in what happened recently in the Dutch Reformed Church, where a female pastor, Rev. Elmarie Dercksen, baptized the adopted daughter of Erna and Liezl van Der Westhuizen, a lesbian couple. This is the result of the so-called "re-interpretation" of the Bible and the creeds within the Dutch Reformed Church which essentially amounts to the kind of syncretism Nash warns against.

We started this lecture by looking at the response of the people of Lystra to the preaching of the gospel, where they viewed the apostles as gods and wanted to sacrifice to them. We saw the blindness of the Tannese people, but we also saw how Western elites, in modeling parliamentary buildings on Greek temples, reveal their own distorted worldview. Our civilization is collapsing right before our eyes, in the words of Pat Buchanan, we are witnessing the "Death of the West." As Elon Musk pointed out, we are facing an immanent population implosion.

We see then, that, as Swanson points out, a worldview shapes how we act in the world—not only as individuals, but as societies. If you don't maintain a Christian worldview, you will be destroyed. In history kingdoms rose and fell, the humanist Greek and Roman empires collapsed, Communism collapsed after 80 years.

With regard to Rome, Rushdoony notes:

There were tens of millions of Romans and a few thousand wandering barbarians destroyed it all because there was nobody to make a stand and fight and too many who 'felt oh let it go, what's the use'. So you can't talk about it as a war in which Rome fell. Just wandering bands of barbarians... There was no meaning, no purpose to life and so Rome fell... Rome with a population going into the millions finally had a population, generations after its fall, as it declined to only five hundred, to only five hundred! That's how radical the breakdown was. And farmers and peasants in the area would move into the palaces and the bathes and the public buildings and dismantled them and took the rocks for fencing and for building barns and corrals. Rome was finished.^{xx}

This inevitably makes one think of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in which the kingdoms of man are all destroyed by the kingdom of God. This divine kingdom then grows to fill the earth, while man-centered kingdoms are destroyed one after another, but only God's kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

Let us then strive for reformation in our own day, starting with our own personal lives, and then our families, our society and our nation. May the coming reformation be even more glorious than those of the past, so that one day when we appear before the throne of Christ, He will also say of us: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things" (Matthew 25:23).

ⁱ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t6_Dwh_aqA; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqHlIRZnF38>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSGcl12jrDs>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfQLKsqW_VO; <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/scientist-accidentally-developed-sunglasses-that-could-correct-color-blindness-180954456/>

ⁱⁱ FN Lee, *Tiny Human Life* p.217.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2021/02/25 <https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/296792/what-does-the-law-say-about-docking-dog-s-tails>

^{iv} Swanson, K, *Epoch – Rise and fall of the West*, p. 26-27.

^v Buchanan, Patrick J, *The Death of the West – How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization*, p 180

^{vi} <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1529193812949614594>

^{vii} Swanson, p. 289.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

^{ix} See Sire, J. *The Universe Next Door*, p18

^x Stoker, HG. *Oorsprong & Rigting Band 1*, 1967, Tafelberg Uitgewers, p13.

^{xi} Van der Walt, B.J. *Understanding & Rebuilding Africa*, 2003, Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa, p110-128, a) a concept of God b) Norms & values c) a view of being human d) ideal community life e) a view of nature f) a concept of time and history; Sire, J. *The Universe Next Door*, 2009, Intervarsity Press, p 22-23; Hoffecker W.A. *Building a Christian Worldview Vol 2*, 1988, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, p. xv; Miller, D.L. *Discipling Nations*, 1998, YWAM Seattle, p38-39.

^{xii} Kuyper, A. *Tractaat van de Reformatie*, 1884, section 63.

^{xiii} Stoker, *Oorsprong*, p. 42.

^{xiv} Hoffecker W.A., *Building a Christian Worldview Vol 1*, 1986, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, p. 8.

^{xv} RJ Rushdoony, *Roman Republic and Empire*, <https://pocketcollege.com/transcript/RR160B4b.html>.

^{xvi} Stoker, *Oorsprong*, 25.

^{xvii} Miller, *Discipling Nations*, 46.

^{xviii} Kreitzer MR, Jordaan CL, *Christian Manifesto for Africa*, 1992, CAA.

^{xix} Nash, R. *Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 32.

^{xx} RJ Rushdoony, *Roman Republic and Empire*, <https://pocketcollege.com/transcript/RR160B4b.html>.