

JESUS AND THE “CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW”: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ABRAHAM KUYPER AND KARL BARTH¹

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While Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Karl Barth (1886-1968) may have been the greatest Reformed minds of the nineteenth and the twentieth century respectively, they are also commonly regarded as major antipodes within the contemporary Reformed tradition. What sets them apart? I argue that the essential disagreement between Neo-Calvinists and Barthians does not arise from a dispute about doctrine—not even the doctrine of Scripture—but from conflicting visions about the relation between Christian faith and the concept of worldview. A comparison between Kuyper and Barth on the question of the relation between faith and worldview promises not only to clarify a long-running dispute in Reformed circles but also to illuminate some fundamental social and ethical options for Christian public theology in the twenty-first century.

I.

The adherents of Abraham Kuyper’s “Neo-Calvinist” movement have long clashed with the “dialectical theologians” inspired by Karl Barth. Th. L. Haitjema could already open an essay in 1936 with the remark, “That a state of war exists between the Dutch New-Calvinism and the so-called ‘Barthian’ theology may freely be regarded as a fact”² Many of Karl Barth’s most implacable opponents—such as the Dutchman Klaas Schilder (1890-1952) and the American Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987)—were, broadly speaking, followers of Abraham Kuyper. Van Til practically made a career of attacking the dialectical theology of Karl Barth, which he regarded as a “fifth-column in orthodox circles.”³ And there was no love lost on the other side. Barth himself famously voiced his disdain for Neo-Calvinism in the preface to *Church Dogmatics III/4*. While he had long recognized that “the Neo-Calvinists in the Netherlands and elsewhere are not among my well-wishers,”

1. I would like to thank Dr. Harry Van Dyke and Dr. George Harinck for their comments on a draft of this paper.

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2. Theodorus Lambertus Haitjema, *De strijd van het Nederlandsche nieuw-calvinisme tegen de theologie van Barth* (Wageningen: H. Veenman, 1931), 3. My translation.

3. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947), 4.

Barth considered it intolerable that Neo-Calvinists had also spoken disparagingly of his beloved Mozart. “In so doing they have,” he wrote, “. . . shown themselves to be men of stupid, cold and stony hearts to whom we need not listen.”⁴ The struggle between Neo-Calvinists and Dialectical Theologians was not simply a local affair; it shaped the history of the Reformed churches not only in the Netherlands but also in the United States and South Africa.⁵

What stands at the heart of the conflict between Neo-Calvinists and Barthians? Cornelius Van Til cited a range of *loci* upon which he judged Barth’s theology to differ from “historic Protestantism”—including scripture, revelation, the doctrine of God, anthropology, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, Christian ethics, and eschatology.⁶ On the surface, however, the judgment that Kuyper and Barth held diametrically opposed standpoints within the Reformed tradition seems overdrawn, perhaps even mistaken. After all, numerous parallels—both biographical and theological—link them together. In 1930, Wilhelm Kolfhaus published a comparison of Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth in *Onder Eigen Vaandel*, a theological journal founded by Dutch supporters of Karl Barth.⁷ As Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer noted in one of his early works on the theology of Karl Barth, “Kolfhaus, who is known as a great admirer of Kuyper and tries to make his ideas fruitful for the church and theology in Germany, naturally had to face the question as dialectical theology was emerging about what the relation would be between Kuyper and [this new movement].”⁸ Kolfhaus pointed to several analogies between the Dutch Neo-Calvinist and the Swiss Dialectician. He noted, for example, that both Kuyper and Barth grew up as sons of mildly orthodox pastors, chose in their student days to study with the foremost liberal theologians of their era (Jan Hendrik Scholten and Wilhelm Herrmann, respectively), started their careers as parish pastors (the one in Beesd and the other in Safenwil), and eventually wound up rejecting theological liberalism. Kolfhaus argued that the two shared strong theological similarities as well, pointing to their common affinity for Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge,⁹ as well as an appreciation for central Christian themes such as the doctrine of election and the doctrine of the

4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), xiii. Klaas Schilder was the author of the offending article.

5. On the South African situation, see Jaap Durand, “Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth vs. Abraham Kuyper,” in *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 121-137.

6. Cornelius Van Til, “Christianity and Crisis Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 19 (1948): 618-621.

7. Wilhelm Kolfhaus, “Dr. A. Kuyper and Dr. Karl Barth,” *Onder Eigen Vaandel* 5 (1930): 96-114.

8. Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *Karl Barth* (Kok: Kampen, 1937), 18. My translation.

9. Compare Berkouwer’s caution against ascribing too much significance to this shared affinity in *Karl Barth*, 279-286.

Trinity. He even judged the two not so far apart with respect to the question of natural theology.¹⁰ Significantly, Kolffhaus also held that their respective doctrines of Scripture did not differ fundamentally. "Still, here the objection will be raised against me: but the doctrine of Inspiration! Doesn't the Bible lie between the two men? Doesn't an unbridgeable abyss reveal itself here and doesn't this do in the attempt to name Kuiper and Barth in a single breath?"¹¹ The tone of this imagined interjection makes clear that Kolffhaus knew he was venturing into disputed territory when discussing their respective views on the Bible.

Historically, many have looked upon the doctrine of Scripture as a primary dividing line between the Neo-Calvinist and Barthian camps. For instance, the Neo-Calvinist Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer asserted in *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek* that with respect to their understanding of the divine accommodation in Scripture "a very profound difference exists between Barth and Kuiper."¹² Berkouwer elsewhere remarked upon the criticism leveled by Heiko Miskotte, an enthusiastic Dutch supporter of Karl Barth, that Neo-Calvinism "does not really listen to the Scriptures," preferring a "scriptural theology" rather than genuine engagement with Scripture.¹³

However, is the doctrine of Scripture the dividing line between Barth and Kuiper? The emphasis given to the differences between the Neo-Calvinists and Barth may have arisen more from accident historical events than rigorous textual analysis. In a recent article titled "The Early Reception of the Theology of Karl Barth in The Netherlands (1919-1926)," George Harinck points to the Synod of Assen in 1926 as a critical turning point in the Neo-Calvinist reception of Karl Barth.¹⁴ Whereas the Dutch Neo-Calvinists had been cautiously supportive of Karl Barth prior to 1926, their attitude toward him soured decisively afterwards. What brought about this shift? The Synod of Assen suspended a Neo-Calvinist pastor, J. G. Geelkerken (1879-1960), for apparently calling into question the historical authenticity of the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3.¹⁵ The synod demanded, among other things, that Geelkerken acknowledged that the serpent literally spoke to Eve. The Synod of Assen initiated a shift toward a more conservative doctrine of Scripture among the Neo-Calvinists. It also provided an opportunity for opponents of Abraham Kuiper such as Th. L. Haitjema to contrast the innovative theology of Karl Barth against

10. Kolffhaus, "Dr. A. Kuiper and Dr. Karl Barth," 107f.

11. *Ibid.*, 110. My translation.

12. G. C. Berkouwer, *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek* (Kok: Kampen, 1938), 359. My translation.

13. Berkouwer, *Karl Barth*, 246 f. My translation.

14. George Harinck, "The Early Reception of the Theology of Karl Barth in The Netherlands (1919-1926)," trans. Clifford Anderson, *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 17 (2001): 170-187.

15. For a brief account, see Otto J. De Jong, *Nederlands Kerkgeschiedenis*, 3rd ed. (Nijkerk: Callenhach, 1972), 379 f.

the apparently reactionary trend of Neo-Calvinism. “Haitjema saw his chance here,” argues Harinck. “Whereas the Gereformeerden [i.e., Neo-Calvinists] saw Barth as a spiritual half-brother, he saw him as the antipode of Neo-Calvinist theology. He first introduced Barth as a weapon against the Gereformeerden and he had a splendid target in the sensational Geelkerken-question.”¹⁶ Haitjema succeeded in convincing both sides that Barth’s understanding of scriptural revelation represented an antithesis to Kuiper’s. As J. C. Aalders contended in “Het Theologisch Belang van het Assensch Leergeschied,” the Neo-Calvinists ignored the questions Barth was raising at their peril. “For what has probably most clearly come to light in the conflict of the Gereformeerde churches in Assen . . . is the lack of a firm and satisfactory view of scripture.”¹⁷ Of course, proponents of Neo-Calvinism regarded such remarks as so much confirmation of the chasm dividing them from their Barthian opponents.

The Dutch struggle over the Synod of Assen also had consequences for the reception of Karl Barth among North American evangelicals. In *The New Modernism*, Cornelius Van Til argued that the theology of Karl Barth was incompatible with orthodox Reformed theology. He contended that modern, post-Kantian philosophy rather than the Bible determined the basic categories of Barth’s theology. “Vowing allegiance to the first commandment as his theological axiom, he has nonetheless been operating under the relentless dictates of the Königsberg philosopher.”¹⁸ Near the opening of Van Til’s *The New Modernism*, there is a telling reference to the Synod of Assen. Seeking to make a *prima facie* case for the fundamental disagreement between Barthianism and Reformed orthodoxy with respect to the way the Creator relates to the creation, Van Til singled out Barth’s skepticism about the ‘speaking serpent’ as a case-in-point.

Barth’s attitude toward the question of temporal creation may be illustrated by what he said at Utrecht when he lectured there on the Apostles’ Creed. Certain questions were put to him. Did the serpent really speak in Paradise? Did Barth hold to the historicity of the Genesis account? On the issue of belief or disbelief in the historicity of the Genesis narrative, an ecclesiastical rupture had recently taken place in the Netherlands. Barth dismissed the whole issue as being of no significance. If only “the friends of the speaking serpent” would be less concerned about the reality of the speaking serpent and more concerned about what the speaking serpent said, things would be much

16. Harinck, “Early Reception,” 184 f.

17. J. C. Aalders, “Het Theologisch Belang van het Assensch Leergeschied,” *Onder Eigen Vaandel* 3 (1928): 140. My translation.

18. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, 366.

better. Of course, he could believe in no such thing as a speaking serpent. A real speaking serpent would involve the direct revelation of God in history.¹⁹

If Phillip Thorne is correct that Cornelius Van Til by and large established the "interpretative paradigm" for the reception of Karl Barth among North American evangelicals, then the controversy about the doctrine of scripture arising out of the Synod of Assen indirectly influenced the reception of dialectical theology in the United States as well.²⁰

Ironically, several commentators have recently pointed to the similarities between Abraham Kuyper's and Karl Barth's concept of scriptural authority. Harriet Harris, on the one hand, remarks in "A Diamond in the Dark: Kuyper's Doctrine of Scripture," on "aspects of Barth's theology" which "have parallels in Kuyper's thought"—such as their shared rejection of apologies for scriptural authority—commenting that "it is not surprising that many evangelicals who warm to Kuyper in their understanding of Scripture also warm to Barth."²¹ George Hunsinger, on the other hand, suggests that "the likes of Kuyper and Bavinck" may "emerge as more fruitful dialogue partners" for postliberal theologians such as Hans Frei and George Lindbeck (both influenced in their own way by the theology of Karl Barth) than "the likes of [Carl] Henry."²² Certainly, Kuyper and Barth shared a similar dislike for evidential apologetics, which set their concept of Scriptural authority apart from evangelicals in the "Scottish common sense" tradition developed by the Princeton School.

My point here is not to argue for the similarity or dissimilarity between Abraham Kuyper's and Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture. The burden of my argument in this section was rather to make a *prima facie* case that this commonly-held view misplaces the fundamental difference between Karl Barth and Abraham Kuyper.

19. Ibid., 6. Van Til reported Karl Barth's remarks rather tendentiously. Barth denied both that the speaking serpent was simply a "myth" and that the phenomenon of the speaking serpent was accessible to scientific historians—as with the event of the Virgin Birth, Barth argued that certain events transcend the reach of historical science. He concluded his remarks by stating that our willingness to stand over and against the Word of God "proves very palpably that the serpent has really spoken, yes, indeed!" See Karl Barth, *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creed*, tr. J. Strathearn McNab (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 186-191.

20. See Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1995), Chapter Two.

21. Harriet A. Harris, "A Diamond in the Dark: Kuyper's Doctrine of Scripture," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis Lugo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 141.

22. George Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn from Each Other?" in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 355.

In what follows, I shall argue that the historical conflict over the doctrine of Scripture has masked a deeper and more fundamental disagreement about the relation between faith and worldview. More than anything else, I propose that it is the question whether Christians should self-consciously develop or resist a “Christian worldview” which set Kuyper and Barth at fundamental odds.

II.

The concept of worldview enjoyed increasing popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century. The concept bears a largely German philosophical pedigree. As David K. Naugle reports in his *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, Immanuel Kant first coined the term in 1790, although he used it rather incidentally and without what became its subsequent meaning.²³ The next generation of German intellectuals seized upon the concept to articulate philosophies which addressed the totality of worldly existence, reaching beyond the sciences to include ethics and the arts as well. And, of course, the concept of worldview also had to incorporate religion in some way in order to be truly comprehensive. The speculative idealisms of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling were all in a sense high-minded philosophical attempts at the formulation of a comprehensive worldview. However, the armchair approach to the construction of worldview proved inadequate in face of the rising natural sciences. There are many reasons why speculative idealism had collapsed by the 1840s, but the failure of philosophers adequately to incorporate innovations in the natural sciences was a primary factor. Worldview philosophies flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century in the wake of the breakup of the high-minded idealist systems. The concept of worldview soon became more the province of popular than academic philosophy. Practicing scientists such as Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), professor of zoology at the University of Jena, combined the popular philosophy of scientific materialism with a version of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory to produce “Monism,” a worldview for which he demanded state recognition equivalent to the other religious confessions. The struggle between worldviews increasingly became a religious struggle by the turn of the twentieth century; many modern thinkers were attracted to monism and similar such worldviews by the promise of a religion free from outdated metaphysical constructions.²⁴ Could science (and, in particular, evolutionary biology) provide the framework for a comprehensive view of the modern world, which traditional Christianity seemed no longer able to provide?

23. David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 58 f.

24. See Andreas Meier, “Die Geburt der »Weltanschauung« im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Theologische Rundschau* 62 (1997): 414-420.

Christian theologians in the nineteenth century sought to neutralize the challenge of Monism and other emergent worldviews by embracing the category of worldview itself. Abraham Kuyper presented Calvinism as a worldview in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, but he was not an innovator in his theological embrace of the concept of worldview. In fact, according to Eilert Herms, the trend emerged first among liberal theologians.²⁵

In the history of the problem of worldview within Protestant theology, the positions of Schleiermacher and Ritschl actually constitute the base point and a turning point. Schleiermacher was the very first theology who used the concept of worldview in a theoretically concise setting. And Ritschl then elevated the concept to a central instrument of theological theory construction²⁶

Herms contends that it was Albrecht Ritschl more than any other theologian who set the terms of the discussion between theology and worldview for the next two generations of systematic theologians, at least in the German-speaking world.²⁷ Albrecht Ritschl made the concept of worldview central to the task of systematic theology. He contended in the third volume of *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* that

All religion is equivalent to an explanation of the course of the world—to whatever extent it may be known—in the sense that the sublime spiritual powers (or the spiritual power) which rule in or over it, conserve and confirm to the personal spirit its claims and its independence over-against the restrictions of nature and the natural effects of human society.²⁸

The purpose of Christian systematic theology is to provide a coherent cognitive account of the underlying Christian worldview.

Theology has performed its task when, guided by the Christian idea of God and the conception of men's blessedness in the Kingdom of God, it exhibits completely and clearly, both as a whole and in particular, the Christian view of the world and of human life, together with the neces-

25. Eilert Herms, "»Weltanschauung« bei F. Schleiermacher and A. Ritschl," in *Theorie für die Praxis* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1982), 121-143.

26. *Ibid.*, 123. My translation.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, vol. 3, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), 17.

sity which belongs to the independent relations between its component elements.²⁹

The apologetic function of systematic theology was to demonstrate that only Christianity provides an adequate framework for the unification of our knowledge. As Ritschl put it, “. . . as Kant was the first to show, the Christian view of God and the world enables us comprehensively to unify our knowledge of nature and the spiritual life of man in a way which otherwise is impossible.”³⁰ The concept of worldview allowed Ritschl to describe the conflict between Christianity and its emerging materialistic competitors not as a conflict between science and religion but as a struggle between worldviews constructed according to different understandings of the priority of the natural to the spiritual.³¹

Ritschl's application of the concept of worldview to theology did not go unnoticed in conservative theological circles. James Orr (1844-1913), a Scottish church historian and theologian who contributed several articles to the seminal series *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915) and was “among the first and most important critics of Ritschl in Britain,”³² likewise asserted that Christianity should be construed as a worldview. In *The Christian View of God and the World* (1893), Orr contended that the Christian faith cannot be properly comprehended positivistically as a collection of facts, arguing “the facts of Christianity rightly understood and interpreted, not only yield special doctrines, but compel us to develop out of them a determinate worldview.”³³ His promotion of Christianity as a worldview broke ground in the Anglo-Saxon world, according to David K. Naugle. “If for no other reason,” writes Naugle, “Orr deserves credit for being one of the first English-speaking theologians to undertake this kind of project.”³⁴ However, despite his criticism of Ritschl, Orr's description of his project seems indebted to Ritschl's use of the concept of worldview. Orr's claim that by “binding together the natural and moral worlds in their highest unity, through reference to their ultimate principle, God, [Christianity] involves a ‘Weltanschauung’” is strikingly reminiscent of Ritschl.³⁵ Like Ritschl, Orr also recognized the apologetic potential of the concept of worldview in the face of the distinctly totalizing claims being made by competing worldviews such

29. Ibid., 24.

30. Ibid., 225 f.

31. Ibid., 209 f.

32. Peter Hclslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 230, n. 12.

33. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (New York: Randolph and Co., 1893), 26.

34. Naugle, *Worldview*, 13.

35. Orr, *The Christian View of God*, 10.

as materialism.³⁶ Finally, in a brief appendix on the "Idea of the *Weltanschauung*," Orr devoted the majority of his study to Albrecht Ritschl and his school. "As may be gathered from the remarks in the close of the Lecture, the idea has a large place in the writings of the Ritschlian school," he wrote.³⁷ Admittedly, Orr disagreed with the concept of worldview defended by Ritschl and the Ritschlian School, in which he regarded "truth and error" as "intimately blended."³⁸ In a nutshell, Orr argued that Ritschl located religious truth too exclusively in ethics rather than the sciences, effectively robbing Christianity of its factual basis.³⁹ However, does Orr's critical stance toward Ritschl and his school imply that he did not learn anything from them? Might Orr be interpreted as innovating on a concept, which he borrowed chiefly from the Ritschlians? If so, Orr may not have been the last theologian to grasp both the potentialities and the liabilities of the Ritschlians' manner of connecting Christian faith to worldview philosophy

III.

Abraham Kuyper, more than any other theologian of his era, popularized the concept of worldview. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered as the "Stone Lectures" at Princeton Seminary in 1898, Kuyper contended that Calvinism was not simply a religion, but a worldview, which embraces every sphere of life. His lectures treated the impact of Calvinism in world history, religion, politics, science, and also prognosticated about its future impact. "The chief purpose of my lecturing in this country," he explained,

was to eradicate the wrong idea that Calvinism represented an exclusively dogmatical and ecclesiastical movement. Calvinism *did* not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a *life-system*, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a *life-* and *world-view*, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life.⁴⁰

36. For example, he remarked that "if apologetic is to be spoken of, this surely is the truest and best form of Christian apology—to show that in Christianity as nowhere else, the severed portions of truth found in all other systems are organically united, while it completes the body of truth by discoveries peculiar to itself" (ibid., 13). See also Naugle, *Worldview*, 7 f.

37. Orr, *Christian View of God*, 42.

38. Ibid., 29.

39. See ibid., 29-36.

40. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 171.

Peter Heslam has speculated that Kuyper's presentation of Calvinism as a worldview owed much to James Orr.⁴¹ He notes that although Kuyper had previously argued that Calvinism has implications for every domain of life he had not previously used the category of worldview as an organizational rubric. Among the many similarities which Heslam remarks upon was the common conviction that "Calvinism's only defense against modernism was in the development of an equally comprehensive worldview, in which principle would be arrayed against principle . . ."⁴² Like Orr, Kuyper portrayed Calvinism as engaged in a to-the-death struggle with modernism. "Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat."⁴³ Also like Orr, Kuyper rejected apologetics, arguing that modernity's principled assault on Calvinism rendered any piecemeal defense ineffective. "In this struggle Apologetics have advanced us not one single step."⁴⁴ Heslam goes as far as to state that "the only significant difference between Orr's intention and that of Kuyper in presenting Calvinism as an independent and coherent worldview resistant to modernism, was that Orr pleaded the merits of a Christian worldview while Kuyper pleaded a specifically Calvinistic one—albeit Calvinistic in the broadest possible sense."⁴⁵ This is not the place to judge Heslam's thesis; elsewhere, he does make several qualifications about what exactly Kuyper borrowed conceptually from Orr. The purpose here is to suggest that Kuyper was, like Orr, engaging in a deepening and broadening of the concept of worldview in order to make it serviceable for the defense of Calvinism in the modern world.

Of course, the suggestion that Kuyper may have been dependent in some way on Orr raises the question whether Kuyper may also have been directly or indirectly dependent on the treatment of worldview in the Ritschlian school as well. This question deserves careful historical appraisal, which cannot be offered here. However, it should be noted that the scattered textual references to Ritschl in his corpus⁴⁶ suggest that he did in fact owe an intellectual debt of sorts to theological modernism, despite his otherwise sharp disagreement. For example, after

41. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 88-96. Harry Van Dyke has pointed out to me that Kuyper "may have borrowed 'worldview' from Groen van Prinsterer," who referred in the foreword to the second edition of *Ongeloof en Revolutie* to the "main lines of thought of a Christian-Historical or Anti-Revolutionary worldview [*wereldbeschouwing*]." See G. Groen Van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Een Reeks Historische Voorlezingen*, 3rd edition, ed. H. Smitskamp (Franeker: Wever, 1976), 15. Certainly, the intellectual history of the concept of *wereldbeschouwing* may differ in some respects from that of *Weltanschauung*.

42. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 93 f.

43. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11. The Dutch edition uses "*wereldbeschouwing*" for "life system." See Abraham Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme* (Amsterdam-Pretoria: Hövcker & Wormser, 1899), 3.

44. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11.

45. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 95.

46. Thanks to Dr. J. Zwaan for supplying a list of Kuyper's references to Ritschl.

criticizing the influence of the Kantian turn-to-the-subject on aesthetic theory in *Het Calvinisme en de Kunst*, Kuyper paused to acknowledge the opening which Kant's subject-centered philosophy created for Christians to formulate a theory of art from their distinct perspective. "The high spirits and noble passion with which the confessors of Christ in the Schleiermacherian, theosophical, and Neo-Roman circles—and now again in the school of Ritschl—tried to uphold a Christian worldview each owes in their own way to the forceful grip with which the athlete of Königsberg dared to operate out of the subject."⁴⁷ Kuyper credited Kant with providing a philosophical defense of the Reformers' subject-centered approach to theology, a defense that he evidently prized despite the direction in which modern theologians such as Ritschl had pushed its consequences.⁴⁸ Does this indicate Kuyper's awareness that the philosophical roots of the Neo-Calvinist concept of worldview ultimately lay in Kant's theory of subjectivity? If so, Kuyper clearly saw the negative side of the Critical Philosophy reflected in Ritschl as well. In an excursus in his *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, Kuyper argued that Ritschl broke the connection between nature and spirit in his theology by connecting religion only to ethics and giving over the natural world to the secular sciences. "According to Ritschl, theology is a drop of oil on the waters, without any connection to life in nature and to natural human beings."⁴⁹ Though the concept of worldview is not mentioned here, Kuyper no doubt also perceived the same weakness in Ritschl's construal of worldview. A more adequate concept of worldview would have to push the concept of subjectivity deeper than simply the moral sciences; the differences between Christian and non-Christian worldviews would also have to be mirrored in the sciences as a whole.

The founding of the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* in 1880 represented the institutional embodiment of Abraham Kuyper's belief that the Christian faith had consequences not only for the scholar *qua* individual but for scholarship in general. Although nearly all the students in its early years were preparing for the Christian ministry, Kuyper took pains in his opening address to emphasize that the purpose of the new university was not simply to provide theological education but to develop a distinctively Christian approach to every domain of the sciences.

. . . If you ask whether we want this separate development not only for theology but for all the disciplines, and if you can scarcely control a smile when someone scoffs at "Christian medicine" and "Christian

47. Abraham Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme en de Kunst* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1888), 19 f. My translation.

48. *Ibid.*, 20.

49. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 2nd edition, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst), 11. My translation.

logic,” then listen to our reply to that objection. Do you think that we would confess God’s revelation—reformed, after its deformation—as the starting point of our efforts and draw upon this source only as theologians, scorning it as artists, jurists, and students of letters? Can you think of a science worthy of the name whose knowledge is divided up into cubbyholes?⁵⁰

Every department in the new university would be based on specifically Reformed principles. In his Stone Lectures of 1898, Kuyper reiterated the importance of basing not only theological studies but all disciplines on explicitly Calvinist principles.⁵¹ Of course, the articulation of Calvinist principles proved controversial. Alexander Erederek de Savornin Lohman, a co-founder of the *Vrije Universiteit* and professor in the faculty of law, was accused in 1895 of not teaching jurisprudence in accordance with Reformed principles as required in Article 2 of its statutes.⁵² De Savornin Lohman argued that genuine scholarship could not take place when scholars did not have the freedom to determine the content of those principles in their respective fields whereas Kuyper and his followers argued that it was possible to prescribe a certain methodology in advance for determining Calvinist principles in any field.⁵³ De Savornin Lohman’s resignation from the *Vrije Universiteit* in 1896 underscored the difficulty of defining Calvinist principles with precision in disciplines other than theology. Ultimately, the conflict arose from Kuyper’s dogged insistence that Calvinism was not simply a religious or ethical perspective on otherwise neutral knowledge, but a set of principles, which could be applied across every discipline.

While the founding of the *Vrije Universiteit* was the scholarly culmination of Abraham Kuyper’s Calvinist worldview, Kuyper and his followers did not restrict their organizational energy to the domain of higher scholarship. He enjoyed a particular genius for institutionalizing his religious convictions. He sought to give organized expression to his Calvinist worldview in spheres as diverse as the media

50. Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 487. Kuyper argued in his *Encyclopedia*, however, that sin did not corrupt the human ability to reason logically—see Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, tr. John Hendrik de Vries (New York: Scribner, 1898), 110.

51. “. . . Theology is only one of the many sciences that demand Calvinistic treatment. Philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, the social sciences, literature, and even the medical and natural sciences, each and all of these, when philosophically conceived, go back to principles, and of necessity even the question must be put with much more penetrating seriousness than hitherto, whether the ontological and anthropological principles that reign supreme in the present method of these sciences are in agreement with the principles of Calvinism, or are at variance with their very essence.” Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 194.

52. For a detailed account of this complex story, see J. Stellingwerff, *Dr. Abraham Kuyper en de Vrije Universiteit* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), chapter six.

53. See *ibid.*, 202 ff.

and politics. A short overview of the associations, which he and his followers founded, demonstrates the breadth of his vision. Abraham Kuyper became editor of a Christian weekly in 1871 and the editor-in-chief of *De Standaard*, a Christian political daily newspaper on April 1, 1872. On January 23, 1879, Kuyper participated in the founding of the "Union for 'A School with the Bible,'" an association devoted to the cause of promoting government financial footing for Christian primary and secondary education.⁵⁴ On April 3, 1879, Kuyper and his followers formally established the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the first modern Christian political party in Europe.⁵⁵ After the break with the state church, he fostered the organization of the *Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerken* in 1886.⁵⁶ Kuyper also organized the first Christian Social Congress from November 9-12, 1891.⁵⁷ And this list is by no means exhaustive.

For Abraham Kuyper, conceiving Calvinism as a worldview ultimately implied that there should be associations governed by Calvinist principles in every culturally significant sphere of life, not only the church. In one of his earliest public lectures, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," Kuyper contended that chief among the characteristics of modernity was its flattening out of the diversity within every sphere of existence, including the church. "Under the motto of brotherhood even holy ground has to be made common for the purpose of dissolving all religious differences into a 'Christianity' above confessional division, to 'comfort' all persons equally with the faith that one must strive for virtue and wait to see what comes of it! So must everything become uniform, level, flat, homogeneous, monotonous."⁵⁸ What Kuyper saw was that the imposition of this false uniformity had the effect of excluding the *kleine luyden* or pious working-class Calvinists from active participation in nearly every sphere. His contention in the Stone Lectures and elsewhere was that the contrasts in society cannot simply be paved over by pointing to commonalities—which he happily admitted to exist—between worldviews. Rather, the liberation of the *kleine luyden* to profess and practice a robustly social and activist (neo-) Calvinism required the breakup of this false uniformity and frank acknowledgment that differences between worldviews go to the root of our existence. There is no neutral territory, Kuyper famously argued in his rectorial address of 1880, ". . . and there is not a

54. See de Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper*, 127.

55. *Ibid.*

56. See *ibid.*, 166-183. See also Harry Van Dyke, "How Abraham Kuyper Became a Christian Democrat," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 420-435.

57. de Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper*, 192 f.

58. Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 32. Kuyper delivered this lecture on April 22, 1869.

square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”⁵⁹

IV.

Karl Barth was a steadfast and lifelong opponent of the theological use of the concept of worldview. Barth was educated in the liberal or “modern” school of theology by two of its most prominent representatives, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922), each of whom adhered in his own manner to the theology of Albrecht Ritschl and Eriedrich Schleiermacher. As is well known, Barth broke with his liberal teachers during the Eirst World War and began searching for, in the words of his friend and fellow pastor, Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1977), a “‘wholly other’ theological foundation.”⁶⁰ Bruce McCormack estimates that Barth’s final turn-from-liberalism “came sometime after April 1915.”⁶¹ He notes that once Barth gave up on the “fundamental axiom of Herrmannian theology,” namely, the contention that God reveals himself to the individual in religious experience, “his break with liberalism was . . . complete.”⁶² “Though residual elements would endure for some time,” McCormack writes, “requiring repeated attempts to make his new viewpoint consistent with itself, for all practical purposes, he had broken with the Marburg theology for ever.”⁶³ What makes this chronology significant for our purposes is the fact that Barth had already broken with some elements of the Ritsehlian School’s theology prior to this final turn in 1915. Significantly, one of those elements was the concept of Christianity as a worldview, which he already rejected in 1911. Barth recognized early on the philosophical weaknesses afflicting Schleiermacher and Ritschl’s concept of worldview and, while still operating under Herrmann’s shadow, rejected its theological application as inconsistent with his teacher’s interpretation of the Christian faith. Eater, after his turn-from-liberalism, Barth developed a new theological basis for his opposition to worldview, but retained his fundamental opposition to the concept, if anything opposing faith and worldview even more strongly in the *Church Dogmatics* than anywhere previously. What, then, motivated Barth’s rejection of the theological application of worldview?

The social roots of this rejection can be glimpsed in his early experiences as a Swiss country pastor. When Barth moved from Geneva to the village of Safenwil

59. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 488.

60. Karl Barth, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher,” in *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 264.

61. Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 123.

62. *Ibid.*, 124 and 125.

63. *Ibid.*, 125.

in 1911 to become pastor of a small parish, he quickly became aware of the inequalities dividing the inhabitants. What struck Barth particularly forcefully was the antithetical relation between the church and the budding socialist movement. The church's construction had been financed by one of the two principal industrialist families in the village.⁶⁴ A senior member of this family also served as the president of the session. The majority of the village's residents, most of whom worked as industrial laborers for one of these families, did not attend church services. The alignment between capitalism and the church dismayed Barth. "Class warfare, which was going on in my parish, before my very eyes, introduced me almost for the first time to the real problems of real life."⁶⁵ Barth regarded capitalism as little more than the systematic promotion of self-interest above the interest of one's neighbors, and therefore as an ideology flatly contradicted by the biblical injunction "to love your neighbor as yourself." Scarcely four months after he arrived, Barth began delivering lectures to the local "Workers' Association" about religious and philosophical questions related to the social movement.

In the second of his lectures, "Jesus Christus und die Soziale Bewegung" [Jesus Christ and the Social Movement], delivered during Advent in 1911, Barth discussed his understanding of the relation between Jesus, the church, and the struggle for social justice. The lecture functioned as an apology for his involvement as a Christian pastor in a movement, which was commonly regarded as materialistic and even anti-religious. Barth explained that he did not see any contradiction between Jesus Christ and the social movement because both were essentially striving after the same goal, which Christianity describes as the Kingdom of God. The socialists' struggle to overcome inequality and foster solidarity among their comrades overlapped with the movement Jesus inaugurated during his earthly lifetime to bring about the Kingdom of God. Summing up this point at the conclusion of his talk, Barth remarked, "I said: Jesus wanted what you want. He wanted to help the little people, he wanted to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth, he wanted to abolish egotistical possessions, he wanted to make men into comrades. Your object stands in line with Jesus' object. The *true* socialism is the true Christianity in our time."⁶⁶ If there was a contradiction, it was not between Jesus and socialism; rather, the contradiction was between Jesus and the church.

Barth admitted that some Christian leaders spoke about socialism primarily with the goal of "winning the socialists for the church." "Socialism was the means,

64. For the details about Safenwil in this section, see Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 60-72.

65. Karl Barth as cited by Busch, *ibid.*, 69.

66. Karl Barth, "Jesus Christus und die Soziale Bewegung," in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, ed. Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 408. My translation.

the Christian church and worldview the true end . . .”⁶⁷ Barth, by contrast, contended that he had no intention of indoctrinating the workers in Safenwil into the Christian worldview. He had no plans to turn them into “pious little sheep” again.⁶⁸ Barth essentially argued that the socialists were already more authentic followers of Jesus than most churchgoers. Whether or not one attends church or espouses a Christian worldview has no bearing on whether or not he is a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ—only participation in the movement to establish the Kingdom of God matters.

What Jesus has to bring us are not ideas, but a way of living. It is possible to have Christian ideas about God and the world and humanity and its redemption and in spite of all that to be a complete heathen. And it is possible as an atheist and materialist and Darwinist to be a true disciple and follower of Jesus. Jesus is not the Christian worldview and the Christian worldview is not Jesus.⁶⁹

Barth utterly rejected the idea that the subjective framework which guides action has any bearing on its justification. If materialists and atheists want to accomplish what Jesus also sought to accomplish, then they are his followers in the present. The concept of a Christian worldview functions in this address much like Barth subsequently saw religion as functioning in the *Church Dogmatics*—it covers over an underlying rebellion against Jesus Christ with a self-righteousness ideology about Jesus Christ.⁷⁰

A comparison between Barth and Kuyper is instructive here. Both became country pastors after thoroughly imbibing modern theology at university. Both were struck by the social inequalities in their parishes. Kuyper resented the influence of the local count, who opposed orthodox Calvinism, on the parish. His discovery of a conventicle of pietistic Calvinists who held prayer services apart from the church proved a key-turning point in his life; he would become the advocate of the so-called *kleine luyden*, the “little people,” who were confessionally orthodox but who had no influence in the church, the state, or the culture. Barth resented the influence of the local capitalist families. His discovery of the workers’ association in Safenwil, most of whom never darkened the doors of his parish church, catalyzed him to stand up for their rights in the name of Jesus against the church and the “Christian worldview.” There is a parallel of sorts between their early parish experiences, though Kuyper soon became the advocate of precisely the kind of worldview theology, which Barth would later oppose in the name of Jesus.

67. *Ibid.*, 390. My translation.

68. *Ibid.* My translation.

69. *Ibid.*, 391. My translation.

70. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, tr. G. T. Thompson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 297-324.

Barth carried on his opposition to worldview theology in his magisterial *Church Dogmatics*. He addressed the question of worldview at several points in the third volume, "The Doctrine of Creation." In §42.1, for example, Barth contended that there is a "fundamental difference between the Christian doctrine of creation and every existent or conceivable world-view."⁷¹ What distinguishes the doctrine of creation from worldviews of every stripe is according to Barth that the first presupposes divine revelation whereas the second takes a naturalistic standpoint toward the problem of origin. This makes sense as a distinguishing characteristic when applied to worldviews such as systematic idealism, materialism, and evolutionary monism, but what about the concept of a Christian worldview founded not on reason alone but also on revelation? Hinrich Stoevesandt points out that Barth did passingly refer to the possibility of holding something like a "Christian worldview" in §48.3.⁷² In the passage in question in his doctrine of providence, Barth held that a Christian worldview could not be a product of revelation, but faith's response to revelation. There can be no definitive Christian worldview because God continues to speak the same Word to us today in different forms. "The establishment of a fixed Christian *Weltanschauung*, of a lasting picture of the relationship between Creator and creature, would necessarily mean that in taking to-day the insight given him to-day man hardens himself against receiving a new and better one to-morrow."⁷³ In accordance with this restriction, Barth suggested that a Christian worldview should not provide broad principles or party platforms, which would simply put one generation of believers against the next, but consist of more modest insights into God's providential care for his creation. Stoevesandt also notes, however, that Barth returned to his stinging criticism of the concept of worldview in the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, "The Doctrine of Reconciliation."⁷⁴ There is mutual irreconcilability between Jesus Christ and the concept of worldview, he contended, writing that ". . . worldviews as a whole have no use for Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ In a sense, Barth was returning in 1959 to a criticism, which he leveled against the concept of worldview nearly fifty years previously in Safenwil.

Barth's most extensive discussion of the concept of worldview came in a sub-paragraph of his *Doctrine of Creation* titled "Die Glaube und die Weltanschauungen"

71. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance, tr. J. W. Edwards, et. al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 343.

72. Heinrich Stoevesandt, "Gott und die Götter," in *Gottes Freiheit und die Grenze der Theologie: gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Elisabeth Stoevesandt und Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 197.

73. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, 56, alt.

74. Stoevesandt, "Gott und die Götter," 197.

75. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV/3.1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1959), 296. My translation.

[Faith and the Worldviews], which he delivered as lectures at the University of Basel and edited for publication in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, but subsequently decided not to publish.⁷⁶ Barth titled the paragraph, originally §42, “Der Schöpfer und seine Offenbarung” [The Creator and his Revelation]. The paragraph was composed of two sections: “Gott und die Götter” [God and the gods] and “Der Glaube und die Weltanschauungen” [Faith and the Worldviews]. Barth adapted the lengthy introductory material from the first sub-paragraph, publishing it as §42.2 “Schöpfung als Verwirklichung” [Creation as Actualisation] and §42.3 “Schöpfung als Rechtfertigung” [Creation as Justification] in *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/1*, but discarded the rest—material numbering nearly two hundred and ninety pages.⁷⁷ The structure of the sub-paragraph on faith and worldviews leaves no doubt about his opposition to the concept of worldview. The first section is titled, “Der Gegensatz zwischen dem Glauben und den Weltanschauungen” [The Antagonism between Faith and the Worldviews]. The second section is on faith and the third on worldviews. The fourth section is titled “Die Unvereinbarkeit zwischen dem Glauben und die Weltanschauungen” [The Irreconcilability between Faith and Worldviews]. The title of the concluding section speaks for itself: “Freiheit von den Weltanschauungen als Ziel der Entscheidungen des Glaubens” [Freedom from Worldviews as the Goal of the Decision of Faith]. A scholarly appraisal of the paragraph requires, among other things, conjecturing about the reasons for Barth’s decision not to publish it⁷⁸ and a systematic examination of its contents. Here let us simply note that according to Martin Hailer, among the first to publish on this stricken paragraph, one of the arguments raised against worldviews has to do with the status of the foundational principles at their roots. Barth recognized that the construction of worldviews relies on the formulation of foundational principles, but he argued that such principles function like the law rather than the gospel, enslaving rather than freeing those who abide by them.⁷⁹ Hailer remarks, “In a worldview the living God is demoted to

76. Karl Barth, *Unveröffentlichte Texte zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, Supplemente zur Karl Barth-Gesamtausgabe I, ed. Hans-Anton Drewes, CD-ROM (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005).

77. See Stoevesandt, “Gott und die Götter,” 187, n. 26.

78. Hinrich Stoevesandt suggests that Barth came to regard the material as displaced within the overall structure of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* as a whole and the doctrine of creation in particular. “Im Ganzen der Dogmatik mag ihm die Schöpfungslehre, der dritte Hauptteil des fünfteilig angelegten Werkes, für die Ausarbeitung der Fundamentalunterscheidung ein wenig spät erschienen sein. Oder umgekehrt: sie kam hier zu früh—wie Barth denn tatsächlich das Thema—die Stellung ist bedeutsam!—nunmehr in ironische Distanz gerückt und gleichsam degradiert, viel später im Zusammenhang des *Gebets* wieder aufgenommen hat. Und sie kam speziell innerhalb der Schöpfungslehre hier in deren *Grundlegung*, zwischen der großen Paraphrase der biblischen Schöpfungsberichte und der Anthropologie, zu früh.” See Stoevesandt, “Gott und die Götter,” 187.

79. Martin Hailer, “Gott und die Götter: Zum nachgelassenen §42 KD,” in *Die Unbegreiflichkeit des Reiches Gottes: Studien zur Theologie Karl Barths* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 22. Hailer refers in turn to Barth, *Unveröffentlichte Texte zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, 818 ff. (306 ff.).

a principle and, conversely, also there, where it has absolutely nothing to do with God, a principle . . . is reconstituted as a godlike principle."⁸⁰

One of the practical consequences of Barth's rejection of the concept of worldview was his repudiation of the idea of a Christian political party. He opposed the notion of forming "Christian" organizations alongside the church. In "Christian Community and Civil Community" (1946), he made explicit his critique of Christian political parties (including Abraham Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party). "The thing is only possible—and the suspicious alliance of the Protestants with the Romans in the French M.R.P. and the German C.D.U. shows it becomes successful only where the Kingdom of God is interpreted as a human goal founded on a natural law, where an allegedly Christian law, which is in fact a mere amalgam of humanitarian philosophy and morality, is set alongside the gospel in the political sphere."⁸¹ This sentiment inspired several Dutch followers of Karl Barth, including Heiko Miskotte, to disown Christian political parties and to affiliate instead with newly-forming socialist parties. This so-called "*Doorbraak*"—breakthrough—represented a rejection of "principled" Christian politics in favor of "pragmatic" political engagement guided by faith and the Holy Spirit.⁸² In the end, the Dutch Barthians trod in the footsteps of their Swiss pastor, who had practically started his career by rejecting any identification between the Church and the "Christian worldview," on the one hand, and the movement toward the Kingdom of God and social justice, on the other.⁸³

V.

A fundamental disagreement about the relation between Jesus and worldview, more than any other issue, divides Kuyperians and Barthians. I have argued that both Kuyper and Barth perceived the weakness in the concept of worldview as developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl. However, Kuyper responded by deepening and broadening the concept of worldview while Barth

80. *Ibid.*, 22.

81. Karl Barth, "Christian Community and Civil Community," in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, ed. Will Herberg (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 184.

82. See Martien E. Brinkman, *De Theologie van Karl Barth: Dynamiet of Dynamo voor Christelijk Handelen. De Politieke en Theologische Kontroverse Tussen Nederlandse Barthianen en Neocalvinisten* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1983), 68 ff.

83. The practical upshot of the Dutch Barthian's rejection of the concept of worldview was not lost upon the Neo-Calvinists. "Zij, die een christelijke wetenschap, een christelijke kunst, een christelijke maatschappij en ook een christelijken staat en een christelijke staatkunde verfoeien als afgoden, welke hoe eer hoe beter moeten worden verbrand—in dezen zin hebben veel volgelingen van Karl Barth zich geuit—doen tekort aan de souvereiniteit van God en Zijn Gezalfde." (G. M. Den Hartogh, "Het Woord Gods Blijft," *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde* 16 (1940): 367.)

responded by rejecting its theological relevance. Their different responses led them into nearly antithetical positions. On the one hand, Kuyper strove to break up a false uniformity by organizing Christian associations in every sphere of life. On the other, Barth sought to break down walls of division in every sphere by emphasizing the humanizing effect of the gospel.⁸⁴ Both sides regarded the other's standpoint as having dire consequences for the future of the Christian faith. This conflict over worldview spilled over into disagreements about nearly every point of doctrine—including the doctrine of scripture. While it is perhaps true that the doctrine of scripture was not the dividing line between Kuyper and Barth, the dispute over the concept of worldview certainly played out in that arena as well.⁸⁵

In the end, the struggle between Neo-Calvinists and dialectical theologians arose not from intramural conflict about Reformed doctrine, but from fundamental disagreement about the relation between the Christian faith and modernity. For that reason, the questions raised by this conflict remain with us today. Is the Christian worldview involved in life-or-death struggle with other worldviews—the “modern worldview” (or perhaps now the “Islamic worldview”)? Or does faith in Jesus Christ cut across such ideological disagreements between human beings? Should Christian educators foster distinctively Christian curricula for secondary and higher education? Or should Christians' goal be to promote humanistic education by rooting out all presuppositions about worldview—including putatively Christian worldviews—from education? Finally, should Christians form political parties (or, if that is not feasible under the current political system, public policy organizations, think tanks, and centers)? Or should Christians individually forge alliances with secular parties struggling for economic and political justice? How twenty-first-century Christians in North America settle the question of the relation between faith and worldview will not only have ramifications for our spiritual lives; the side that we take in this dispute will also shape how we engage as Christians in the political, educational, and cultural spheres. What this suggests is that twenty-first-century public theologians ought carefully to study the twentieth-century Dutch debate between Neo-Calvinists and dialectical theologians.

84. I borrow this concept of ‘humanization’ from Paul Louis Metzger. “Barth’s doctrine of the Word enables him to give a critical yet constructive response to culture whereby space is also made for the secular other in relation to the sacred,” writes Metzger in his recent study of Barth’s theology of culture. “That is to say, the *dedivinization* and *deseccularization* of culture leads to its *humanization*, that is, affirmation of the secular.” Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 230.

85. Consider this remark by K. H. Miskotte about the relation between theological exegesis and worldview: “De prediking en de theologische exegese, die haar draagt, begrenzen de geldigheid van elke Christelijke ‘wereldbeschouwing.’ Zij zijn gekomen en komen, om de denk-gewoonten om te wentelen. Dat is één van haar voornaamste functies, want in den drang tot en de verdediging van een wereldbeschouwing ligt het voornaamste motief voor de stelselmatige bestendiging van klaarblijkelijke misverstanden.” (K. H. Miskotte, “Opmerkingen Over Theologische Exegese” in *De Openbaring der Verborgeneheid*, ed. M. C. Slotemaker de Bruïne (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1934), 96.)



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