

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Christian Worldview and Cosmic War: Contexts and Origins of a Religious Combat Concept

Simon P. Kennedy

The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
Email: s.kennedy3@uq.edu.au

Abstract

This paper explores the origins of two different emergences of the Christian worldview concept, and their relationship to understandings of cultural conflict. It will offer an analysis of the historical, cultural, and theological context for each emergence. In both cases, worldview was what Ian Hunter has termed a “combat concept.” Section I of the paper will offer an overview of the origins of Christian worldview thinking in the late nineteenth century through the thought of James Orr (1844–1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Section II will deal with the second major emergence of Christian worldview as a combat concept in the 1970s, focusing on figures like Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984), Chuck Colson (1931–2012), and Nancy Pearcey (1951–). Both contexts exhibited increased cultural and religious pluralism, and conservative Christians displayed a heightened sense of ideological conflict. Worldview became a tool for differentiation from, and contention with, the “other.”

Keywords: worldview; Abraham Kuyper; James Orr; Francis Schaeffer; evangelicalism; reformed

In 1999, a former advisor to President Richard Nixon and one of seven aides indicted with regard to the Watergate scandal, wrote the following words with his co-author about the nature of the putative culture war occurring in America and the West: “The real war is a cosmic struggle between worldviews—between the Christian worldview and the various secular and spiritual worldviews arrayed against it.”¹ The former presidential staffer was Charles Colson (1931–2012), who, since his indictment and incarceration, had undergone a dramatic conversion to Christianity and committed himself to defend the faith in public.² Here, with Nancy Pearcey, Colson articulated the potency and importance of the worldview concept within the evangelical Christian ecology in the late twentieth century.³ Indeed, the idea of a Christian worldview has had wide currency since the latter part of the twentieth century in conservative

¹Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Carol Streams, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), 17.

²Charles Colson, *Born Again* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980).

³“Sketches of the Seven Nixon Aides Indicted by the Watergate Grand Jury,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1974, 16.

Christian circles. It remains a staple part of the evangelical and Reformed intellectual scaffolding, with dozens of books published on worldview in the last couple of decades alone.⁴ Parachurch ministries have been founded that are devoted to Christian worldview thinking.⁵ “Christian worldview” is staple evangelical and Reformed Christian fare, regularly deployed in public apologetics, in the pulpit, in theological literature, and in educational contexts. Such examples are not the limits of the use of worldview. The deployment of the worldview concept by bodies like the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, as well as scholars working toward a cohesive framework for education in multicultural societies, show that the idea of a worldview is not parochial to conservative Christianity.⁶

Despite this breadth of use, worldview thinking emerged in response to a very specific set of challenges to conservative Christianity. Worldview language played a key role in the self-identity of Reformed and evangelical Christianity from the late nineteenth century, first in Europe and then in the United States. It was useful for conservative Protestants in two ways. First, thinkers deployed worldview ideas to give themselves and their fellows intellectual and cultural space in a rapidly changing world. The nineteenth century saw Christianity go from holding a central place in western societies, to being a weakened cultural force. Properly situating the rise of worldview discourse helps us understand how evangelical and Reformed thinkers felt as their cultural environment shifted away from one friendly to their creed, and offers historians a fresh lens through which to understand the siege mentality that emerged in conservative Protestantism into the twentieth century. A second aspect relates not to factors external to

⁴A sample: Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, trans. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); David S. Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., *Christian Worldview Handbook* (Philadelphia, PA: B&H, 2019); Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Peter Jones, *The Other Worldview: Exposing Christianity's Greatest Threat* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale, 2015); Brian Harris, *The Big Picture: Building Blocks of a Christian Worldview* (Crownhill: Authentic Media, 2015); James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Douglas S. Huffman, ed., *Christian Contours: How A Biblical Worldview Shapes the Mind and Heart* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011); Tawa J. Anderson, W. Michael Clark and David K. Naugle, *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World* (London: Apollos, 2017).

⁵A sample: Summit Ministries, <https://www.summit.org/>; Center for Biblical Worldview, <https://www.frc.org/worldview/>; Worldview Australia, <https://www.worldviewaustralia.org/>; Worldview Academy, <https://worldview.org/about/>; Ezra Institute, <https://www.ezrainstitute.ca/about/our-work/>.

⁶Tuuli Lipiäinen, Anna Halafoff, Fethi Mansouri and Gary Bouma, “Worldviews and Education in Finland and Australia,” <https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/worldviews-education-in-finland-and-australia/>, accessed February 10, 2022; Anna Halafoff, Kim Lam and Gary Bouma, “Worldviews Education: Cosmopolitan Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 40, no. 3 (2019): 381–395; Siebren Miedema, “From Religious Education to Worldview Education and Beyond: the Strength of a Transformative Pedagogical Paradigm,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (2014): 82–103; Jacomijn C. van der Kooij, Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema, “The Merits of Using ‘Worldview’ in Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 112, no. 2 (2012): 172–184; Céline Benoit, Timothy Hutchings and Rachael Shilltoe, *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* (s.1: Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2020); Raili Keränen-Pantsu and Hannu Heikkinen, “Pedagogical Purposes of Narratives in Worldview Education: Teachers’ Conceptions,” *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 18, no. 5 (2019): 58–72.

Christianity, but rather to internal shifts. The development of liberal theology in response to the Kantian epistemological revolution was led by Friedrich Schleiermacher, primarily in his response to Christianity's "cultured despisers" and his later dogmatics.⁷ As theologians and pastors imbibed this new framework, a chasm opened in the church between the liberal and conservative approaches to the broader cultural shift. Worldview thinking formed a part of the conservative confessional response to this. To summarize these factors, conservative Christians of the nineteenth century not only had to grapple with external threats from a secularizing culture but also responded to Christian thinkers who were agitating for a new, liberal articulation of the faith. Worldview thinking represented one of the responses to these challenges. Worldview helped conservative Christians define themselves against the secularizing world on the one hand, and against what they saw as the compromised liberal expressions of the faith on the other. Simply restating Christian belief in a traditional way was deemed not to be enough to head off these challenges. Worldview thinking was conservative, confessional Christianity asserting itself. It provided conservatives with a set of tools to systematize their beliefs in a way they believed could counter the theological and philosophical challenges the church was facing.

Given the prevalence of worldview language in the past century and a half of Christian thought, it is remarkable that so little scholarly analysis has been dedicated to the historical and cultural origins of the Christian use of the idea. This is despite an increasing interest in the history of evangelicalism and Reformed Christianity, the cultural sites where worldview discourse flourishes most. David K. Naugle has written a broad survey of the worldview concept, mapping the theological and philosophical uses from its German idealist origins through to the early twenty-first century.⁸ Naugle's is a "history of philosophy" approach to the question and is, accordingly, rather sanguine and indifferent about the historical and cultural contexts that he is dealing with. Indeed, he only briefly hints at evangelicalism's adoption of the "objectivism and subjectivism" of "modernity" in its use of worldview thinking.⁹ Michelle C. Sanchez moves towards a cultural and historical explanation for worldview thinking in Reformed Christianity, noting that those who deployed the term posited the Christian worldview "against other putatively world-organizing ideologies."¹⁰ Sanchez further notes that the appeal of this kind of thinking lay in "its claim to epistemic certainty, conceptual stability, and rational integrity." I shall return to these motivations toward the end of this paper, but at this point only note that, as valuable as Sanchez's analysis is, it offers a limited explanation for the historical contexts and cultural drivers behind the emergence of Christian worldview thinking. For that, recent histories of evangelical and Reformed Christianity go some way to filling the gap.

Julie Ingersoll provides contextual analysis along these lines in her study of the links between Christian reconstructionism, a movement that aimed to revitalize society via an instantiation of a biblical legal and political order, and the "New Christian Right." Ingersoll notes that Reconstructionists began using worldview to frame their

⁷Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1799); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1884).

⁸David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁹*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰Michelle C. Sanchez, "Orr and Kant: An analysis of the intellectual encounter behind 'The Christian worldview,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74, no. 2 (2021): 103–122, at 103.

biblically-based vision for society.¹¹ “As early as the 1960s . . . Reconstructionists framed what they termed a ‘biblical worldview,’” which Ingersoll goes on to argue formed a key plank in the Reconstructionist politico-religious ideology.¹² Molly Worthen has shown that the provenance of the Christian worldview concept in the Reformed and evangelical world lies earlier than the 1960s. In her historical account of the intellectual cultures of twentieth century American evangelicalism, Worthen points back to the worldview concept that is threaded through her narrative. “Evangelicals,” she writes, “. . . talk so much of ‘the Christian worldview’ because they believe in it – but also because it is a powerful rhetorical strategy.”¹³ But is it a powerful weapon in the context of cultural conflict, according to Worthen? Not quite. Worthen suggests that the “neo-evangelicals’ timely adaption of ‘worldview speak’ caught on” because of a more general rise of “a presuppositionalist vogue.”¹⁴ In other words, this presuppositionalist trend revealed a tendency for the neo-evangelicals to differentiate themselves at the level of first principles. Worthen places leading worldview thinkers within the context of increased awareness of the need for evangelical engagement in political and social thought.

I want to build on Worthen’s and Ingersoll’s narratives, but in doing so I will extend the historical timeline and specific religious contexts under interrogation. This expanded context will show that the “timely adaption” of worldview language in the middle of the twentieth century was the result of perceived religious and cultural conflict that extended back to the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Further, I show that the deployment of the worldview concept by Reformed and evangelical intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century was much more than a powerful rhetorical strategy. It was a weapon intended for conflict in the face of cultural and theological challenges. According to Worthen, this conflict arose from a wrestle between the “sovereign powers” of secular and sacred intellectual frameworks. I suggest that whilst the language of worldview might be rationalist in its foregrounding of ideas, the motives to use the concept were originally rooted in broader cultural contexts, including conflicts with liberal Christianity, as well as a sense of destabilization and disorientation as the church’s relationship to the secular culture changed.¹⁶ This is not to assess modern evangelical and Reformed Christianity “in a religious vacuum,” but is rather to ensure a proper grasp of the undercurrents and conditions that birthed this dominant element of conservative Christian discourse.¹⁷

¹¹Julie Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

¹²*Ibid.*, 5.

¹³Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 261.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁵On the general intellectual culture of evangelicalism in the twentieth century, see Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). For a more contemporary analysis of the evangelical and Reformed response to cultural crisis, see Crawford Gribben, *Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America: Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Molly Worthen, “The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism,” *Church History* 77, no. 2 (2008): 399–437.

¹⁶Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 2; Matthew S. Hedstrom, “The Evangelical Mind in a Secular Age,” *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 805–817, at 809–810; Molly Worthen, “The Recovery of American Liberal Religion,” *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 2 (2014): 505–518, at 518.

¹⁷David A. Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern Encounter with Diversity,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (2011): 21–48, at 23.

This paper will explore the origins of two different emergences of the Christian worldview concept and their relationship to understandings of cultural conflict. It will offer an analysis of the historical, cultural, and theological contexts for these two emergences of the concept within conservative Christianity. I contend that these two emergences offer us an insight into not only the genesis but also the genius of the Christian worldview idea; it is, to use Ian Hunter's phrase, a combat concept.¹⁸ Worldview was indeed deployed by some Christian thinkers across the twentieth century as a response to a need for cultural and political engagement, and not all of this engagement was framed in combative terms. Nevertheless, I argue that Christian worldview thinking was, and remains at its core, a concept for cultural and intellectual conflict.

Section I will offer an overview of the European origins of Christian worldview thinking in the late nineteenth century through the writings of James Orr (1844–1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), who used worldview as a tool of explanation and differentiation. Section II will deal with the second major emergence, this time of combative Christian worldview thinking in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s led by Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) and carried on by others. Throughout, I will also detail some of the other uses of the Christian worldview concept. But the focus is on these two emergences, which are chosen for their influence on the surrounding religious culture, but also for being exemplars of what Ian Hunter has termed a “combat concept.” In both of these emergences, Christian worldview was a tool used in a cultural space where there were “competing cultural-political programs advanced by factions engaged in . . . struggles to determine the shape of the religious and political order.”¹⁹ In Hunter's original deployment of the idea of a combat concept, he addresses an entirely different issue: the emergence of philosophical histories of secularization. He claims that these “first arose as instruments of rival . . . cultural-political programs” in early nineteenth century Germany.²⁰ Nevertheless, Hunter's idea applies to the history of Christian worldview, as does his description of the historian's task “to provide an account of the emergence” of the combat concept and the “ensuing cultural-political conflicts.”²¹ Indeed, in this examination of the idea of Christian worldview, the combat concept framework reveals the true nature of worldview discourse. I contend that worldview thinking became a tool for differentiation from, and contention with, the “other.” In short, I argue that the discourse of Christian worldview emerged originally as a combat concept in a context of perceived cultural crisis, and re-emerged as a combat concept once again in a similar context. The two emergences examined here both have contexts of increased cultural and religious pluralism. It was in these contexts that Reformed and evangelical Christians displayed a heightened sense of ideological conflict and deployed Christian worldview as a combat concept.

I. Nineteenth Century Origins: Orr and Kuyper

The idea of “worldview,” “world-and-life-view,” or *Weltanschauung*, has a history that stretches back to the German idealists.²² Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) deployed the

¹⁸Ian Hunter, “Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept,” *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 1 (2015): 1–32, at 3–4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3–4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

²¹*Ibid.*, 4–5.

²²For a summary of the early history of the worldview idea, see Naugle, *Worldview*, 68–107. Also cf. Sanchez, “Orr and Kant,” at 104–105.

term *Weltanschauung* in his *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilkraft*, 1790), when he said that the presence of a “supersensible” faculty of the human mind is complemented by a phenomenological appropriation and explanation of the world which he called “the intuition of the world (*Weltanschauung*).”²³ In Martin Heidegger’s words, Kant is referring to “world-intuition in the sense of contemplation of the world given to the senses . . . a beholding of the world as simple apprehension of nature.”²⁴ F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854) reiterated Kant’s idea in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (*System des transcendentalen Idealismus*, 1800), when he attempted to explain how people can see the same world from different perspectives. “I draw the concept of intelligence,” writes Schelling, “solely from myself, an intelligence that I am to recognize as such must stand under the same conditions in intuiting the world (*Weltanschauung*) as I do myself.”²⁵ G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) moved the idea of worldview a step towards what was eventually articulated by the early Christian worldview advocates, using the term to describe particular cultural and religious views. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, delivered between 1822 and 1830), Hegel described, for example, the Indian way of understanding the cosmos, humanity and human nature, and the divine. He says that this description was “a general idea of the Indian world-view.”²⁶ Further, in his framing of the North American understanding of religious pluralism and sectarianism, Hegel characterizes those advocating for religious freedom and plurality as “maintaining that everyone may have his own world view, and thus his own religion as well.”²⁷

This German idealist background is significant for the framing of the worldview concept in conservative Christian circles in the late nineteenth century, as it shaped the intellectual milieu that both Abraham Kuyper and James Orr were speaking into. The nineteenth century saw the foundations of philosophy shift dramatically towards questioning everything. As these questions addressed even the rational foundations of philosophical inquiry, so, too, the foundations of Christian belief were undermined by the same intellectual revolutions. The response, as summed up by John Shand, was for people to find “a radically rethought comprehensive *Weltanschauung*.”²⁸ The

²³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85; Immanuel Kant, *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken Bände und Verknüpfungen zu den Inhaltsverzeichnissen*, vol. 5 (Berlin: G Reimer, 1908), 255: “Denn nur durch dieses und dessen Idee eines Noumenons, welches selbst keine Anschauung verstattet, aber doch der Weltanschauung, als bloßer Erscheinung, zum Substrat untergelegt wird, wird das Unendliche der Sinnenwelt in der reinen intellectuellen Größenschätzung unter einem Begriffe ganz zusammengefaßt, obzwar es in der mathematischen durch Zahlenbegriffe nie ganz gedacht werden kann.”

²⁴Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 4.

²⁵F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 164; F. W. J. Schelling, *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1800), 341: “Da ich den Begriff der Intelligens nur aus mir selbst nehme, so muß eine Intelligenz, welche ich al seine solche anerkennen soll, unter denselben Bedingungen der Weltanschauung mit mir stehen.”

²⁶G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Ruben Alvarado (Aalten: Wordbridge, 2011), 128; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Berlin: Dunkler und Humblot, 1848), 172: “Dies ist im Allgemeinen das Verhältnis der indischen Weltanschauung.”

²⁷Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 78; Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 105–106: “Sagt man von diesem Standpunkte, sönne eine eigen Weltanschauung also auch eine eigene Religion haben.”

²⁸John Shand, “Introduction,” in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. John Shand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

intellectual need of the day was the provision a total framework for reality and lived experience. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who went on to be the most nuanced philosophical exponent of the worldview concept, wrote in 1890 in his *System of Ethics* that, in the face of the undermining of the foundations of natural science and Christianity, “European society” was now searching “for principles which . . . can define its goal.”²⁹ Given this context, it is unsurprising that Orr, whom Michelle Sanchez describes as a “Kant aficionado,” deployed the worldview idea. However, he did so in a different way to Kant and those who followed him in the German idealist school. Sanchez rightly argues that Orr “altered the [worldview] concept to fit his particular apologetic aims.”³⁰ The idealist concept was reshaped to combat the challenges that were thrown at conservative Reformed Christianity by liberal theology and what were perceived to be philosophical systems in competition with traditional Christian belief.

Orr’s significance should not be ignored, given he was, to use Geoffrey Treloar’s phrase, “probably the most extensively published evangelical writer of the era.”³¹ Orr’s ecclesial formation was evangelical, and he was involved in the United Presbyterian Church from his youth. His studies at the University of Glasgow focused on “mental philosophy,” and he came under the influence of the Hegelian idealism of Edward Caird (1835–1908) and John Caird (1820–1898) in both his philosophical and divinity studies.³² However, he was also under the mediating, comparably conservative influence of John Veitch (1829–1894) at Glasgow, and Glenn Scorgie suggests that Orr sided more with Veitch in this early period.³³ Orr’s theology moved from a more conservative base in a liberalizing direction through the 1880s, although this has to be relativized to his conservative denomination.³⁴ His engagement with questions around the connections between Christianity, modernism, and culture was at the core of his work as a theologian.³⁵

Orr would go on to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church and was asked to deliver the Kerr Lectures in the Spring of 1891, having been invited as a leading theologian, historian, and apologist in that denomination.³⁶ The contexts for these lectures, later published as *The Christian View of God and the World*, are somewhat opaque.³⁷

²⁹Wilhelm Dilthey, *Ethical and World-View Philosophy*, Selected Works Volume VI, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 37.

³⁰Sanchez, “Orr and Kant,” 105.

³¹Geoffrey R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson, and Hammond* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 77.

³²Glen G. Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity: The Theological Contribution of James Orr* (Toronto: Regent College, 2004), 20–31.

³³*Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 37–46; cf. Eric G. McKimmon, “The Secession and United Presbyterian Churches,” in *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume II: From the Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era*, eds. David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 386.

³⁵On *The Fundamentals*, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118–123. Orr’s contributions were: James Orr, “The Virgin Birth of Christ,” in *The Fundamentals: Volume I* (Chicago, IL: The Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 7–20; James Orr, “Science and the Christian Faith,” in *The Fundamentals: Volume IV* (Chicago, IL: The Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 91–104; James Orr, “The Early Narratives of Genesis,” in *The Fundamentals: Volume VI* (Chicago, IL: The Testimony Publishing Company, 1911), 85–97; James Orr, “Holy Scripture and Modern Negations,” in *The Fundamentals: Volume IX* (Chicago, IL: The Testimony Publishing Company, 1912), 31–47.

³⁶Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity*, 47.

³⁷James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World: as centring on the Incarnation* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1893).

Idealism, especially the German variety, was prominent in Scottish philosophical circles at the time of Orr's lectures.³⁸ It would be difficult to justify the claim that this turn to idealism was a reaction to Humean empiricism, but Gordon Graham suggests something akin to this was occurring in response to thinkers like the analytic philosopher Alexander Bain (1818–1903).³⁹ Orr's reliance on Kant's idealist critique of Hume comes to the fore in 1903, in *David Hume and His Influence on Philosophy and Theology*, a work that suggests affinities with the broader Scottish return to idealist metaphysics and epistemology.⁴⁰ So, too, it is clear that Orr's desire to present Christianity as a worldview was in tune with philosophical and popular idealism.

This idealism is evident when Orr notes in *The Christian View* that “[e]verywhere . . . we see a straining after a universal point of view – a grouping and grasping of things together in their unity.”⁴¹ People need to bind “together the natural and moral worlds in their highest unity, through reference to their ultimate principle,” which he says “involves a ‘Weltanschauung.’”⁴² This idealist conception of the drive towards the universal is combined with the context of cultural conflict. Orr offers a strong juxtaposition between “modern” views of the world and Christianity. These modern worldviews have a “common feature”: a “thoroughgoing opposition to the supernatural, . . . their refusal to recognize anything in nature, life, or history, outside the lines of natural development.”⁴³ The enemy has been identified, and Orr proceeds to deploy worldview as a weapon in intellectual combat.⁴⁴

The worldview concept is raised in the second paragraph of *The Christian View*. Orr writes that when he uses the phrase “Christian view of the world,” he is using an idea found commonly in German idealism: “It is the word ‘Weltanschauung.’”⁴⁵ This word, according to Orr, denotes “the widest view which the mind can take of things and the effort to grasp them together as a whole” from a particular philosophical or theological viewpoint.⁴⁶ “To speak,” therefore, “of a ‘Christian view of the world’ implies” that Christianity has a viewpoint which “when developed, constitutes an ordered whole.”⁴⁷ There is no question, in Orr's mind, that Christianity has within itself a “view of things, which has a character, coherence, and unity of its own.”⁴⁸ This move to articulate Christianity as a worldview allows Orr to do three things. First, Orr feels

³⁸David Boucher, “The Scottish Contribution to British Idealism and the Reception of Hegel,” in *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Gordon Graham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 154–166; W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42–58; Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity*, 3–17; Paul Guyer, “The Scottish Reception of Kant,” in *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Gordon Graham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 122–136.

³⁹Gordon Graham, “Scottish Philosophy After the Enlightenment,” in *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Gordon Graham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10–12.

⁴⁰James Orr, *David Hume and His Influence on Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1903), 112–121; David Fergusson, “Hume Among the Theologians,” in *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume II: From the Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era*, eds. David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 309–310.

⁴¹Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 8–9.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴A stance evident in his Stone Lectures of 1903, as summarized by McKimmon, “The Secession and United Presbyterian Churches,” 386.

⁴⁵Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 3.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 17–18.

he can systematize Christianity by thinking it through as a *Weltanschauung*; “it enables me to deal with Christianity in its entirety or as a system.”⁴⁹ Second, Orr believes that addressing the Christian faith as a worldview allows him to give reasonable theoretical justifications for the claims of Christianity, both those which are specific and more systematic.⁵⁰ Finally, and most crucially for our purposes, Orr feels he can more readily contrast the Christian worldview with “counter-theories and speculations.” Here, Orr turns the Christian worldview into a combat concept, revealing an intellectual framework of, to use Scorgie’s phrase, “stark, almost Manichaean polarities.”⁵¹

Orr sees Christianity as vulnerable to attack from alien forces, a sentiment shared by Kuyper, as examined below. In a remarkable passage, Orr states that “No one . . . whose eyes are open to the signs of the times, can fail to perceive that if Christianity is to be effectually defended from the attacks made upon it, it is the comprehensive method which is rapidly becoming the more urgent.”⁵² Theological liberalism, moral estheticism, and Darwinism would appear to be prime opponents for someone like Orr, and some have drawn these lines of combat when discussing this period.⁵³ However, Orr asserts that the kinds of opposition that Christianity faces are no longer merely doctrinal or focused on the natural sciences. Rather the conflict “extends to 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. It is no longer an opposition of detail, but of principle.”⁵⁴ The evidence is clear that Orr himself saw his pathbreaking use of worldview as a tool of apologetics, of defense and debate, and as the method by which “the attack [on Christianity] can most successfully be met.”⁵⁵ This early use of Christian worldview sets up the apologetical use of *Weltanschauung* as combative from the very beginning. In *The Christian View*, Orr, to use Scorgie’s colorful characterization, “briefly articulated, and then ponderously vindicated, in the face of contemporary opposition,” the core elements of the Christian *Weltanschauung*.⁵⁶ Worldview was wielded by Orr as a weapon in “the battle between faith and unbelief.”⁵⁷ His use of martial rhetoric reveals that reformed Christians were, from the beginning, using the worldview concept to provide Christians with epistemic certainty and intellectual weaponry in an anxious age of religious and ideological pluralism. This combative method was carried onto the Continent by Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper rode a metaphorical wave that started with the constitutional revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century, a ride that continued until he was the Prime Minister of Holland in 1901. Disenchantment with the overturning of the *Ancien Régime* from the conservative Calvinists, a sentiment powerfully articulated by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) in the mid-nineteenth century, led to the organization of the first mass party in Holland.⁵⁸ This party, the Anti-revolutionary Party (ARP),

⁴⁹Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰Ibid., 18.

⁵¹Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity*, 53.

⁵²Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 4.

⁵³Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 352–398; Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 229–249.

⁵⁴Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 4.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity*, 47.

⁵⁷Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 398.

⁵⁸Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en revolutie. Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847); Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*, trans. Harry Van Dyke

was formalized in 1879, and they formed their first coalition government in 1888, and again in 1901, with Kuyper being the Prime Minister in the latter government.⁵⁹ Kuyper also achieved remarkable things in journalism and education, particularly in his founding of, and professorship at, the *Vrije Universiteit*.⁶⁰ Kuyper was the very definition of Aristotle's active life, and yet he is best known for his ideas. He delivered the 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he articulated a case for Calvinist Christianity as a worldview. As James D. Bratt notes in his biography of Kuyper, there were numerous earlier works where he gestures to the importance of *Weltanschauung*.⁶¹ As early as 1867, Kuyper could write of a "Judeo-Christian, incarnational, ethical and world-and-life-view."⁶² But it was these 1898 lectures that saw Kuyper give a full explication of the concept. In the lectures, Kuyper argued that Calvinism represented a comprehensive system of belief about all aspects of life, from theology proper, to art, to politics, to history.⁶³ This articulation of Calvinism as a "world-and-life-view" has substantially impacted the Anglophone Christian world and the Dutch Reformed world in a myriad of ways. Unlike Orr, who is barely known and rarely read today, advocates of Christian worldview across the twentieth-century evidence Kuyper's legacy explicitly or implicitly.⁶⁴ Kuyper's use of worldview was a response to the ebb of what Matthew Arnold called in his mid-century poem "Dover Beach" the "Sea of Faith," with its "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" that left no "certitude, nor peace, no help for pain."⁶⁵ Like Orr, Kuyper deployed the worldview concept in the face of religious skepticism, and the retreat of traditional, confessional formulations of Christian belief.

Kuyper's project in his Stone Lectures, published as *Lectures on Calvinism*, is to provide a framework for the "consistent defense for Protestant nations against encroaching and overwhelming Modernism."⁶⁶ What is this monolithic Modernism? Kuyper

(Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018). On Groen, see Harry Van Dyke, *Challenging the Spirit of Modernity: A Study of Groen van Prinsterer's Unbelief & Revolution* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019); Gerrit J. Schutte, *Groen van Prinsterer: His Life and Work*, trans. Harry Van Dyke (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 2016).

⁵⁹Kuyper's articulation of the Party's platform is found in *Ons Program*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880); Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015).

⁶⁰The best biography is James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). Also cf. Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); Jan de Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography*, trans. Dagmar Houniet (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁶¹Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 206–207; Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 88–96.

⁶²Abraham Kuyper, *Wat moeten wij doen* (Culemborg: A. J. Blom, 1867), 6: ". . . de Israëlitisch-Christelijke, godmenschelijke, ethische werelden levensbeschouwing."

⁶³See generally, Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*.

⁶⁴Examples are legion, but some prominent ones include: Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967); James M. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020). This footnote could include hundreds of magazine and online articles, as well as other books.

⁶⁵Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43588/dover-beach>, accessed May 16, 2023.

⁶⁶Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered in the Theological Seminary at Princeton* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1899). The version cited here will be Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008). Quote is from *ibid.*, 4.

describes it in familiar terms as an “all-embracing life system” that is “wrestling with” Christianity, and which originated with the French Revolution.⁶⁷ The “life-system” of Modernism is “bound to build a world of its own,” in contrast with those who are “bent on saving the ‘Christian heritage.’”⁶⁸ Two things are notable at this point. The first is that Kuyper is using the phrase of “life-system” rather than worldview or “life- and worldview” advisedly, as he notes in a footnote that “my American friends . . . told me that the shorter phrase *life system* . . . is often used in the same sense” in North America.⁶⁹ The parallel is explicit. So, too, is his use of Orr, whose *Christian View* he credits as “valuable” to his own thinking about worldview.⁷⁰ However, this acknowledgment of Orr is the extent of available evidence of the Scotsman’s influence on Kuyper.⁷¹ However, both men used the worldview concept in a similar way. Regarding the phraseology of life-system or worldview, Kuyper uses them interchangeably throughout his *Lectures*.⁷² The second, and perhaps most significant, point to note is the setting up of a “wrestle,” of two systems in “mortal combat,” of “a struggle for principles.”⁷³ This is a further example of the assertion of a Christian worldview as a combat concept, as Kuyper put forth Calvinism as the life-system equipped to spar with insidious modernism.⁷⁴

However, as he states in his first lecture, Kuyper is not simply talking about Calvinism in a sectarian or confessional sense.⁷⁵ He understands Calvinism to be a comprehensive “form for human life, to furnish human society with a different method of existence, and to populate the world of the human heart with different ideals and conceptions.”⁷⁶ It is “the creator of a world of human life entirely of its own.”⁷⁷ In other words, Calvinism is a *Weltanschauung*, one which is capable of bolstering the “vague conception of Protestantism” with a “unity of starting point, a life system.”⁷⁸ This kind of life-system, or worldview, is necessary, suggests Kuyper, because without it Protestants “must lose the power to maintain our independent position, and our strength for resistance must ebb away” in face of the challenges of modernism.⁷⁹ Christians will not be able to successfully defend their position, “but by placing, in opposition to all of this, *a life and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle.*”⁸⁰ His central claim is, then, that the “Calvinistic principle” provides the grounds for “the defence of Christianity, principle over against principle, and world-view over against world-view.”⁸¹

⁶⁷Kuyper, *Lectures*, 3–4; George Harinck, “Herman Bavinck and the Neo-Calvinist Concept of the French Revolution,” in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, eds. James Eglinton and George Harinck (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13–30.

⁶⁸Kuyper, *Lectures*, 3.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Although cf. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 92–96.

⁷²Something he notes in the footnote in Kuyper, *Lectures*, 3.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 173. Emphasis is original.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 174. Cf. *Ibid.*, 117 for his introduction of the idea of the antithesis between belief and unbelief.

Kuyper is, here, clearly articulating a theory of Christian worldview as a combat concept. There is, according to Kuyper, an opposition that needs to be reckoned with, and a darkening world that Christians are speaking into. There was, too, a need for Christians to find a robust framework to clearly stake out their position and create intellectual certainty. For Kuyper, the Christian, and specifically Calvinist, worldview was the solution.⁸² And while Kuyper does articulate a rich doctrine of common grace, whereby both Christians and non-Christians are equally under God's general grace through his upholding of creation and preventing some sinful tendencies in humankind, his understanding of worldview as a combat concept works its way out in his political theories and practices.⁸³ Kuyper's politics and his worldview philosophy are set against the backdrop of cultural change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, his political and ecclesial activities, along with his writings, are interventions in a context where conservative, traditional Reformed Christianity was becoming marginalized. Kuyper was a key leader in the movement (dubbed the *Doleantie*) out of the *Nederlandse Hervormde kerk* due to its increasing liberalism and its political Erastianism, resulting in the forming the *Gereformeerde Kerk*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, his political action and his political theory represent attempts to both understand and manage increasing religious and ideological diversity. Indeed, the ARP was born out the *Schoolstrijd*, a controversy around the move toward equitable government funding of private confessional schools. The conservative Calvinists desired the capacity to operate their own schools and demanded (and eventually received) government help to do this. The principled argument made by Kuyper and the ARP was that this treatment should carry across to institutions founded on other ideologies and confessions as well.⁸⁵ The context for Kuyper's assertions about the distinctiveness of the Calvinist confession and worldview was one of increasing ideological and religious pluralism, constituting a crisis for traditional, Reformed Christians in Holland.

Abraham Kuyper's colleagues and disciples continued the Dutch line of worldview thought, most significantly Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977).⁸⁶ Bavinck, for instance, penned his own take on Christian worldview in 1904 while he was a Professor at the *Vrije Universiteit*. Originally delivered as a rectorial address at the *Vrije* in 1904, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (*Christian Worldview*) was Bavinck's more academic articulation of the cultural crisis that was descending on traditional Christians and their churches.⁸⁷ He wrote that "everyone feels [that this moment] is an epoch of change" which brings with it "disharmony between our

⁸²Cf. Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and the Neo-Calvinist Concept," 19–20.

⁸³On common grace, see Abraham Kuyper, *De Geme Gratie*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Donner, 1902–1905).

⁸⁴On Kuyper's role, see Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 149–172; more generally, see John Halsey Wood, *Going Dutch in the Modern Age: Abraham Kuyper's Struggle for a Free Church in the Netherlands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). There was, of course, opposition, notably P. J. Hoedemaker, *Artikel XXXVI onzer Nederduitsche Geloofsbelijdenis tegenover Dr. A. Kuyper gehandhaafd: beoordelingen van de opstellen in de "heraut" over kerk en staat* (Amsterdam: Van Dam, 1901).

⁸⁵Simon P. Kennedy, "Abraham Kuyper: Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Politician and Political Thinker," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 61, no. 2 (2015): 174–183; Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 68–70. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, "Speech in the Second Chamber of the *Staten Generaal*," March 8, 1904, in Abraham Kuyper, *On Education*, eds. Wendy Naylor and Harry Van Dyke (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 303.

⁸⁶Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1904). English translation: Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*; Herman Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1953–1958).

⁸⁷James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 219–230.

thinking and feeling, between our willing and acting.”⁸⁸ The solution to this internal “discord,” which expresses itself externally also, is to find a “unified (*einheitliche*) world-and-life view.”⁸⁹ For Bavinck, “worldviews . . . are necessary by virtue of the organization of the human mind.”⁹⁰ It is “by compulsion or necessity” that “the human being forms . . . a world unity,” or a worldview.⁹¹ This is why Bavinck argues that the discord cannot but result in a plurality of worldviews in his own epoch. He further noted that the discord was caused by the emergence of two schools of thought, personified by “Marx and Nietzsche,” who “work together to curry the public’s favor.”⁹² These leading thinkers personify the modern world’s turn away from “historical Christianity,” such that “[w]e, the youth of Zarathustra, know that God is dead and will not be resurrected.”⁹³ The solution to this intellectual and cultural disorder is a return to the Christian worldview, writes Bavinck, because the “idea of Christianity and the meaning of reality belong together like lock and key.”⁹⁴ Further, Christianity is not just a religious truth, but an interpretation of reality for Bavinck, a complete epistemic framework, which separates the faithful from those who have different views. Christians, armed with “this worldview,” ultimately “stand diametrically opposed to the thought and aspiration of this century.”⁹⁵ Bavinck’s rhetoric of worldview is much milder than Kuypers’, but his example is prescient. In it, we see both the power of the worldview idea in the “Neocalvinist” world in the early twentieth century, and the way that the worldview concept was used to juxtapose Christianity with all other positions.

II. Francis Schaeffer and the Re-Emergence of Worldview

The Neo-Calvinist branch of worldview thinking continued in Holland and North America, and this approach became popularized later in the twentieth century through the ministry and writings of Francis Schaeffer.⁹⁶ However, the worldview flag was flying in the decades prior to the 1970s. Dutch thinkers like Dooyeweerd and D. H. Vollenhoven (1892–1978), both of them professors at the *Vrije*, were applying Kuypers’ worldview ideas across philosophy and law in the early and mid-twentieth century, although in a more heuristic and less combative manner.⁹⁷ This Neo-Calvinist influence was carried to North America and embedded at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Leading Kuyparian faculty at the College included William

⁸⁸Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 22.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 127.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁶The following graphs are illuminating, all accessed May 25, 2022. 1. Worldview: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=worldview&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cworldview%3B%2Cc0; 2. World view: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=world+view&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cworld%20view%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Cworld%20view%3B%2Cc0; 3. *weltanschauung*: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=weltanschauung&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3#.

⁹⁷D. H. Vollenhoven, *Het Calvinisme en de Reformatie van de Wijsbegeerte* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933); Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*; Herman Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning. Om het reformatisch grondmotief* (Zutphen: J. P. van den Brink, 1963).

Harry Jellema (1893–1982) and H. Evan Runner (1916–2002), both of whom were professors of philosophy.⁹⁸ Worldview thinking did not take hold of the popular imagination in North American Christianity for some decades, in part due to the prevalence of Scottish common sense realism.⁹⁹ A number of scholars, including Mark Noll and Theodore Bozeman, have shown that the legacy of common sense realism was substantial within and without the church in the United States.¹⁰⁰ The advent of societal pluralism and philosophical postmodernism in the twentieth century meant that the hegemony of common sense epistemology in broader American culture was well-and-truly gone by the 1960s. One of the tools Christians used to fill the resulting epistemic vacuum was worldview. It was the Dutch connection, combined with the decline of these prevailing epistemological assumptions, that undergirded the Reformed and evangelical reversion to worldview thinking. The need for epistemic certainty in a pluralistic age, combined with the broader cultural challenges of the twentieth century, meant that the Reformed and evangelical intellectual classes reached for the weapon wielded by Kuyper and Orr.

The Dutch Reformed influence on evangelical and reformed worldview thinking eventually bore substantial fruit in the 1970s, partly through the influence of Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987). Van Til moved from Holland to the United States as a child and attended Calvin College before going to Princeton for graduate studies. The impact of Kuyper on Van Til is explicit at key points, and he worked out the implications of Kuyper's stark division of worldviews in his method of Christian apologetics (known as "presuppositionalism").¹⁰¹ Van Til took Kuyper's assertion that there are two kinds of science, one Christian and one not, and applied it to theological epistemology.¹⁰² "In the last analysis," asserts Van Til in his influential work *The Defense of the Faith*, "we shall have to choose between two theories of knowledge."¹⁰³ On the one hand, Christians look at God as "the final court of appeal," whereas for unbelievers "man is the final court of appeal."¹⁰⁴ Van Til analyzed all methods of Christian apologetics based on their consistency with this standard, and against the standard of Reformed theology. For Van Til, "the Reformed life and world view" was "Christianity come into its own."¹⁰⁵ Apologetics should only be carried out in a manner consistent with this Reformed worldview, in Van Til's assessment. A person's

⁹⁸On the influence of Jellema, see George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University Revisited: From Protestant to Postsecular* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 374–376; John Bolt, "From Princeton to Wheaton: The Course of Neo-Calvinism in North America," in *Vicissitudes of Reformed Theology in the Twentieth Century*, eds. George Harinck and Dirk van Keulen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 163–184, at 172–173.

⁹⁹Some possible explanations are suggested in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 221–228.

¹⁰⁰Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America 1800–1860* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 5–18. For general background, see Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022), Chapter 4.

¹⁰¹Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 260–266.

¹⁰²Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 167.

¹⁰³Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 34.

¹⁰⁴Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 34.

¹⁰⁵Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 96.

apprehension of truth, facts, and reality, are bound up in their having “accepted the authority of Christ.”¹⁰⁶ For Van Til, an unbeliever “cannot even identify one space-time fact, let alone bring all of them . . . in exhaustive intelligible relation to one another.”¹⁰⁷ Like Orr, Kuyper, and Bavinck, Van Til saw knowledge as a question of unity, one that is bound up in epistemology. For Van Til, the unity of one’s epistemology affects the unity of one’s view of things, a point which Kuyper, Bavinck, and Orr would all have agreed on.

The question of Van Til’s influence on later worldview thinkers is an intriguing one, given his method of dividing epistemologies according to worldview, his drive for intellectual unity, and his deployment of the worldview motif at key points. Indeed, Van Til plays an important role in the context of Francis Schaeffer’s formation in Christian ministry. Schaeffer initially studied at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Westminster was founded as a break-away from Princeton Theological Seminary, defining itself as a conservative, “confessional” institution over-against the “modernism” of Princeton. It was formed under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937).¹⁰⁸ The battlefronts were spread beyond Princeton, though, and spilled over into the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), with Machen leading a push against ecumenism and a broadening of the definition of Christian missions.¹⁰⁹ The end result of the “Presbyterian Controversy” was not merely a new seminary, but also a new denomination. The 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial was another central event in what is now known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. The trial was, at the time, framed as a contest between Christianity and Darwinism, but can be understood as a testing ground for approaches to the problem of Christianity’s relation to the broader secular culture.¹¹⁰ An important outcome of this controversy was the reaction from conservatives and fundamentalists against what were perceived to be hostile intellectual and cultural elements.¹¹¹ Worldview discourse formed a part of this reaction. It is this controversy that provides the cultural and religious backdrop for Westminster’s establishment, for Schaeffer’s intellectual formation, and for his redeployment of worldview as a combat concept.¹¹²

It was in this same context of controversy that Van Til joined Machen as part of the burgeoning faculty of Westminster and would go on to wield a substantial influence over Schaeffer. Other conservative thinkers in the Presbyterian orbit would wield the worldview concept across this period before Schaeffer popularized it, notably Rousas J. Rushdoony (1916–2001). Rushdoony was an admirer of Van Til, going so far as to pen a book on his thought, and he in turn influenced Schaeffer.¹¹³ Rushdoony

¹⁰⁶Cornelius Van Til, *The Apologetic Methodology of Francis A. Schaeffer* (Unpublished syllabus, n.d.), 5.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸On Machen more generally, see D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁹Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁰Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997).

¹¹¹The aftermath is summarised in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 233–245.

¹¹²James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 306–325.

¹¹³Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 193; Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom*, 20–21.

would often compare Christianity with other positions in terms of juxtaposed world-views.¹¹⁴ In Rushdoony and those who came after him, a combination of emphases on epistemological unity and the drive for epistemic stability is evident. In his seminal 1958 study on the thought of Van Til, Rushdoony bemoaned the tendency for Christians to combine alien elements with properly Christian elements that resulted in a “hybrid world-view.”¹¹⁵ Roman Catholicism is idiomatic of this error, according to Rushdoony, taking on so many elements of pagan thought that it is “an essentially Greek world-view.”¹¹⁶ On the question of creation and evolution, Rushdoony saw “two world-views . . . in collision.”¹¹⁷ He looked out at American culture and saw that “a total war was being waged” by “humanistic civil officers” who are working to “replace biblical faith with humanism.”¹¹⁸ Rushdoony was, in short, someone who used the worldview concept in his framing of political and intellectual conflict, a move that was popularized amongst Christians by Schaeffer in the 1970s. This latter context was ripe for worldview combat, with the tensions of the Sexual Revolution, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the general shift away from traditional cultural norms through popular and hippie culture.¹¹⁹ As Worthen points out, figures like “Schaeffer [and] Rushdoony” stimulated “a highly organized and activist strain of conservative evangelicalism” that would end up turning the political tables by 1980 and underwrite the election of Ronald Reagan.¹²⁰

The use of worldview as a combat concept in this context was honed by Schaeffer, who was a Presbyterian minister, missionary, and public intellectual.¹²¹ He founded a Christian study center in Switzerland called *L’Abri* with his wife Edith in 1955 and returned to tour the United States in the late 1960s, to publish his books and speak to packed-out audiences at colleges, universities, and churches.¹²² Schaeffer’s influences

¹¹⁴On Rushdoony, see Michael J. McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 25–43; Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom*, 14–22. A recent assessment of Rusdoony’s influence is in Gribben, *Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America*, 40–76.

¹¹⁵Rousas John Rushdoony, *By What Standard?: An analysis of the philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1995), 1–2.

¹¹⁶Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 4.

¹¹⁷Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1967), 108.

¹¹⁸Rousas J. Rushdoony, “The World’s Second-Oldest Religion,” in *Secular Humanism: Man Striving to Be God*, eds. Ern Baxter, Howard Carter, Robert Grant, R. J. Rusdoony and Bob Sutton (Birmingham, AL: New Wine, 1980), 21.

¹¹⁹Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 414–431; Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 118–124; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012). On the reactions to the sexual revolution, see: Daniel K. Williams, “Sex and the Evangelicals: Gender Issues, the Sexual Revolution, and Abortion in the 1960s,” in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 97–118.

¹²⁰Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 231; cf. the comments by Howard Phillips cited in Julie Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom*, 1–2: “The whole Christian conservative political movement had its genesis in [Rushdoony].”

¹²¹Barry Hankins, “‘I’m Just Making a Point’: Francis Schaeffer and the Irony of Faithful Christian Scholarship,” *Fides et Historia* 39, no. 1 (2007): 15–34, at 15.

¹²²Edith Schaeffer, *L’Abri* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1969), 106–107; Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer*, 74–79.

included Kuyper and the presuppositional apologetics of Van Til.¹²³ Van Til's approach was particularly apposite to his purposes, with his stark division between Christian belief and unbelief, and the impact of the Fall on the intellect.¹²⁴ It is here, with the ideas of Schaeffer, that the completion of the shift from a worldview as a concept for explanation and differentiation to a totalizing combat concept is fully enacted. The two aspects were linked in Schaeffer, with his adoption of Van Til's emphasis on epistemological unity combining with an acute awareness of Christianity's cultural vulnerability. For Schaeffer, the division between belief and unbelief formed the basis of the worldview combat concept, even if there was some disagreement between him and Van Til over the status of the non-believer's knowledge about the world and God.¹²⁵ The idea of different worldviews is found throughout Schaeffer's writings, and provides a framework for his cultural and political analysis, one which pits the Christian worldview against all others.¹²⁶

"[P]eople function," according to Schaeffer, "on the basis of their world-view more consistently than even they themselves may realize."¹²⁷ According to Schaeffer, it is ideas that drive action and the course of history. Therefore, divisions between worldviews are ones founded upon thought. "There is," states Schaeffer in his film *How Should We Then Live* (1976), "a flow to history and culture . . . rooted in what people think, and what they think will determine how they act."¹²⁸ Ideas drive ethics, and ethics drives culture.¹²⁹ Schaeffer constructs this framework for understanding the flow of culture by presenting different ways or systems of thought as "world views." These worldviews are in tension with one another and are painted by Schaeffer as vying for dominance across history. This is the narrative of *How Should We Then Live?*. One example of this is Schaeffer's juxtaposition of the ancient Roman "worldview" which the Apostle Paul spoke into with the "Christian worldview."¹³⁰ This juxtaposition represents another example of using worldview as a combat concept, where different groups vying for cultural dominance are framed as having competing worldviews that are opposed to one another. In the final words of the *How Should We Then Live?* documentary series, Schaeffer says that "the problem is not outward things," by which he means that it is not the material that matters, but rather it is ideas: "the problem is having the right worldview, and acting upon it; the worldview that gives men and women the truth of what is."¹³¹

¹²³Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 210–211.

¹²⁴Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 43–44. Cf. Kuyper's distinction between believing and unbelieving science in Kuyper, *Lectures*, 125–126; Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 167.

¹²⁵Cornelius Van Til, "A Letter from Cornelius Van Til to Francis Schaeffer," March 11, 1969, <https://opc.org/OS/html/V6/4d.html>, accessed November 5, 2021; Van Til, *The Apologetic Methodology of Francis A. Schaeffer*; Cf. Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), I:7–9; William Edgar, "Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 57–80.

¹²⁶For a sample of his uses of worldview, see: Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, I:24, 46; *Ibid.*, IV: 105.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, V:252.

¹²⁸Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, published 1976, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QeOrzGbLkU>, accessed November 5, 2021.

¹²⁹Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, V:209. For a micro-level example, see Schaeffer's comment on divorce in his correspondence: Francis A. Schaeffer, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985).

¹³⁰Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live*, published 1976, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ4sDk4LkAM>, at 21:55. Accessed November 5, 2021.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, at 25:23; cf. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, V:252.

Schaeffer carried on his analysis from *How Should We Then Live?* in his *A Christian Manifesto* (1981). He framed the problem of modern America in terms of a move away from a Christian worldview toward a non-Christian one.¹³² The setting for the *Manifesto* was the rise of the “Moral Majority,” the emergence of a “religious right” in American politics, and a growing sense amongst traditional Christians of a liberalization of society. Mark Noll puts the turning point of this shift in consciousness at the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, although David R. Swartz notes that the shift was relatively slow to occur.¹³³ Schaeffer was in many ways on the leading-edge figure in the evangelical and conservative Christian reaction to *Roe*, pushing back against a pervasive “secular humanism.”¹³⁴ These “world views stand in total and complete antithesis to each other in content but also in their natural results” in society and government, according to Schaeffer.¹³⁵ They are in combat, and society is being dragged away, says Schaeffer, by the pagan, materialist worldview.

What we must understand is that the two world views really do bring forth with inevitable certainty . . . total differences in regard to society, government, and law. There is no way to mix these two total world views. They are separate entities that cannot be synthesized.¹³⁶

This language helped mobilize the conservative evangelical constituency, who looked to Schaeffer as a cultural commentary guru.¹³⁷ His analysis suggested that the “loss of the Christian consensus” had given way to dominance by a pagan, humanist elite.¹³⁸

Elsewhere, in *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* (1983, co-authored with C. Everett Koop), Schaeffer asserts that “humanism has replaced Christianity,” resulting in a “change [to] people’s view of themselves and their attitudes towards other human beings.”¹³⁹ This shift in consensus, in dominant worldviews, resulted in an increase in “personal cruelty” along the lines of immoral genetic research, child abuse, euthanasia, and abortion.¹⁴⁰ Schaeffer argues that all of this is a sign that the Christian worldview has been abandoned and replaced with a worldview that rejects the tenets of the sanctity of human life, and the political freedoms that the Christian culture developed.¹⁴¹ In the final analysis, argued Schaeffer, “there are only two alternatives . . . first, imposed order [by humanist elites] or, second, our society once again affirming . . . God’s revelation in the Bible and His revelation through Christ.”¹⁴² To return to “God’s revelation” would be nothing other than having “the right world view,” a return that would result in a

¹³²Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, V:423.

¹³³David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 224–225.

¹³⁴Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 226; Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 170. Cf. Schaeffer, *Complete Works*, V:220.

¹³⁵Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, V:424.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, V:425.

¹³⁷Daniel Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140–142.

¹³⁸Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, V:224. Cf. *Ibid.*, V:284.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, V:284.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, V:286–308.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, V:245–250.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, V:250.

rejection of the imposed pagan order.¹⁴³ Schaeffer unquestionably deployed worldview, and the idea of a Christian worldview over-against other worldviews, as a combat concept in a heightened atmosphere of culture war. The backdrop of evangelical political realignment away from the Democrats and towards Ronald Reagan in the 1980 Presidential Election shows how this simplistic, yet compelling idea could play out in real political terms. Schaeffer's worldview analysis led the rhetorical charge against Democratic Party's social policy positions which purportedly contradicted the Christian worldview whilst conservative Christians changed their vote in droves.¹⁴⁴

The legacy of Schaeffer's use of worldview as a combat concept is significant, and one need only look at two prominent evangelical writers to see the way this has played out. James Sire (1933–2018) was present at Schaeffer's 1968 lectures at Wheaton College. At this time, Sire was an editor at InterVarsity Press, and convinced Schaeffer to allow him to transcribe the recorded lectures into a book.¹⁴⁵ He had facilitated the publication of some of Schaeffer's previous work, but this particular move began a close working relationship where Sire had input into the prose and shape of Schaeffer's work.¹⁴⁶ Eight years later, Sire penned one of the most widely read books on Christian worldview, *The Universe Next Door* (1976). The book is now into a sixth edition and is an example of how worldview was used as an explanatory device for cultural differences rather than raw combat. In this sense, Sire's approach was more similar to Orr's and Kuyper's than Schaeffer's. In his "Preface" to the fifth edition, Sire explained the purpose of the book was "for Christians in the mid-1970s" and was "designed to help them identify why they felt so 'out of it'" in the college and university context when "their professors assumed the truth of ideas they deemed odd or even false."¹⁴⁷ The study was designed to help people see and understand "the differences between the Christian worldview and the various worldviews that either stemmed from Christianity . . . or countered Christianity at its very intellectual roots."¹⁴⁸ There is an undoubtedly Schaefferian focus on ideas being foundational for the analysis of difference, but also in the assumption that worldviews can be essentially explained by examining answers to intellectual questions.¹⁴⁹

A similar approach, though one more in tune with Schaeffer's cultural and political use of worldview as a combat concept, is that of Nancy Pearcey (1952–). Pearcey studied under Schaeffer at *L'Abri* in Switzerland, studied at the Kuyper-influenced Institute for Christian Studies in Canada, and held a chair in Schaeffer's name at the World Journalism Institute.¹⁵⁰ Pearcey also worked closely with Charles Colson and they together penned the words "The world is divided not so much by geographic

¹⁴³Ibid., V:252.

¹⁴⁴On the rise in "family values" politics at this time, see Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Williams, *God's Own Party*, 139; Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 211–232. McVicar also notes the influence of Rushdoony on the Reagan realignment, in *Christian Reconstruction*, 144–145.

¹⁴⁵Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer*, 109.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 80–81.

¹⁴⁷James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 11.

¹⁴⁸Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 11.

¹⁴⁹An approach he nuanced in James Sire, *Naming the Elephant* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

¹⁵⁰<http://www.pearceyreport.com/about.php>, accessed November 8, 2021.

boundaries as . . . by worldviews.”¹⁵¹ This is found in a book which obviously harkens back to Schaeffer, given the work’s title *How Now Shall We Live?*, and features him in the dedication. “The culture war” is not, according to Colson and Pearcey, just about babies, sex, and drugs. Rather, the “real war is a cosmic struggle between worldviews.”¹⁵² Like Schaeffer, Colson, and Pearcey argue that ideas drive action, and that adopting “a false worldview” has catastrophic results for individuals.¹⁵³ However, the combat at a societal and cultural level is their main interest. For, it is not merely a misunderstanding, but a “clash of worldviews that is changing the face of American society.”¹⁵⁴ Pearcey deepens this in her later work, stating that “the purpose of worldview studies is nothing less than to liberate Christianity from its cultural captivity, unleashing its power to transform the world.”¹⁵⁵ To do this, states Pearcey, “we need to become utterly convinced that, as Francis Schaeffer said, Christianity is not merely religious truth, it is total truth.”¹⁵⁶ Pearcey not only quotes Schaeffer here but also employs worldview as a combat concept like her mentor and hero once did.

III. Conclusion

I have suggested in this paper that the context for the emergence of Christian worldview thinking and rhetoric was cultural conflict and perceived crisis. But what was the motivation for using worldview *in particular*? It is not enough to simply say it was in the air, thanks to German Idealism. As iterated earlier, the German idealists didn’t use *Weltanschauung* as a combat concept. Other dynamics were at play in bringing worldview in as a tool of cultural combat. While the putative cultural crisis partly explains the emergence and continued use of the worldview concept, it does not supply any psychological motivations that might illumine the picture. Sanchez has posited something of a psychological explanation which I have expanded upon here. She suggests that the worldview concept’s promise of “epistemic certainty” provided a grounding for claims of Christianity’s superiority over and against other worldviews. It was “a tool of interpretive conquest” in the midst of a putative culture war.¹⁵⁷ However, as I noted in the introduction, I think there is more to the picture than this narrowly intellectual and psychological explanation, as insightful as it is. This article has demonstrated that worldview thinking emerged to combat the twin challenges of secularization of culture and liberal Christianity.

In particular, I want to suggest that Christians who first used the worldview concept, as well as those who did again in the 1970s and on into today, did so to fill a vacuum left by the de-Christianization of western society. Up until the nineteenth century, a naïve Christianity surrounded every aspect of life, such that even the most undevout were still embraced by a lived experience where Christianity required no justification. When the de-Christianization of society began to impact the church more directly, worldview thinking was part of the response. In his 1939 lectures which became *The Idea of a Christian Society*, T. S. Eliot posited some points that help explain the kind of shift in conditions that evangelicals and other Christians might have been responding to

¹⁵¹Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 19.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 477.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵⁵Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 17.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁷Sanchez, “Orr and Kant,” 121.

during the periods under scrutiny here. Eliot argued that a society ceased to be Christian when Christian “religious practices have been abandoned, when behavior ceases to be regulated by reference to Christian principle, and when in effect prosperity in this world for the individual or the group has become the sole conscious aim.”¹⁵⁸ Eliot also described the tensions of “leading a Christian life in a non-Christian society.”¹⁵⁹ Christians in the early twentieth century were, according to Eliot, implicated “in a network of institutions from which we cannot dissociate ourselves . . . the operation of which appears no longer neutral, but non-Christian.”¹⁶⁰ This results in a pressure to be become “more and more de-Christianised by all sorts of unconscious pressure” because “paganism holds all the most valuable advertising space.”¹⁶¹ Not only that but also in a liberal society, Eliot suggests that Christians are more vulnerable to these cross-pressures due to being a tolerated minority. While I am not suggesting that Eliot’s diagnosis is correct, he seems to be describing the experience of figures like Kuyper and Orr, and then their latter-day American followers. It is the experience of a cultural shift, where all the ground seems to have moved from under one’s feet, and the sudden need arises to explain and justify yourself to others, but also to yourself. The naïve Christian cultural milieu changed, such that Christians needed to provide what they thought was a systematic explanation of their own understanding of life and meaning.

This possibility is developed by Raymond Geuss, who does not describes a worldview as a grand scientific and systematic theory of reality, which is often how Christians and others imagine it. Rather, for Geuss, a worldview is “something that characteristically and actively addresses particular people *by name*, telling them who they are and at the same time imposing on them an identity.”¹⁶² It is, according to Geuss, a boundary marker and a badge that identifies you as either in or out of the community in question. And this is even though members of the same community “do not necessarily share a single determinate, well-defined, explicit set of organized beliefs about the world.”¹⁶³ This is how the figures examined here often imagine worldview can be used. I want to suggest that this is not why the idea was implemented in those communities. Rather, the deployment of worldview as a combat concept is explained by the need for communities to address their sense of siege and decline. Geuss argues that worldviews are wielded by communities:

precisely when genuine communal energies begin to dry up or when disciplinary demands are given priority over all else that the need for a ‘world view’ in a stricter sense becomes keener. Similarly, perhaps it is those whose community is diseased, especially threatened, moribund, or in steep decline at the end of a period of great vitality who need a world view.¹⁶⁴

Geuss’s diagnosis is suggestive. Conservative Christians, particularly evangelical and Reformed Christians, at two key junctures in the last 150 years, felt a sense of crisis

¹⁵⁸T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1960), 9–10.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶²Raymond Geuss, *Who Needs a World View?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 1.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 39.

and decline, and therefore developed a self-consciousness about their diseased state. They felt they needed to combat a secularizing culture, as well as the perceived threat of liberal Christianity to conservative and confessional articulations of the faith. The introduction of worldview thinking was a response to these challenges. Seeing this helps us better understand the mindset and subsequent reactions of evangelical, Reformed, and fundamentalist Christians to the many challenges they faced in the twentieth century. Worldview thinking provided them with a way of them explaining themselves, both to themselves and to the hostile world around them. The worldview combat concept served two roles in reformed and evangelical Christianity. It provided a sense of epistemic certainty and stability in the face of hostility whilst simultaneously arming the faithful with weapons of intellectual and cultural combat. Worldview thinking was a response to the perceived decline, to be sure, but most significantly it was also about warfare. The worldview concept wielded by conservative Christians was not merely a tool of internal analysis but also of cultural combat.

Acknowledgments. This research for this article was supported by a grant from the Australian Research Theology Foundation. I am grateful to Michael Thompson and Ben Myers for their wise feedback on earlier drafts. Further thanks are due to participants at a Religious History Association symposium and a conference of the Australian Christian Higher Education Alliance, both held in 2021, where I presented fledgling versions of this article, as well the readers and editors of this journal.

Simon P. Kennedy is an intellectual historian who focuses on the intersections of politics, law, and Christianity. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Queensland and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Danube Institute.

Cite this article: Kennedy, Simon P. “Christian Worldview and Cosmic War: Contexts and Origins of a Religious Combat Concept.” *Church History* 93, no. 1 (March 2024): 63–84. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640724000064>.