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# The mis-appropriation of Abraham Kuyper's ideas about "worldview" by American Evangelical Christians

## ABSTRACT

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the term "worldview" gradually became popular among evangelical and fundamentalist Christians as a result of the work of Francis A Schaeffer. He popularized the term through his best-selling books and films. This paper argues that in developing his thoughts about worldviews, Schaeffer appropriated earlier, and far more sophisticated, theories from Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. The ideas of these men are explored to enable readers to understand the way evangelicals developed Schaeffer's ideas. It is argued that they moved away from the way both Schaeffer and his mentors used the term. As a result, they lost sight of the fact that understanding worldviews was intended by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and Schaeffer to facilitate discussion between people holding very different views. Instead, worldview was turned into a propaganda device that enable people to avoid engagement with people and ideas they dislike. The paper concludes by suggesting that instead of dismissing Christians who employ worldview thinking for political purposes they ought to be challenged to develop a fuller understanding of worldview and confronted with the insights of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd upon which Schaeffer built his ideas.

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## Introduction

During the 2008 American Presidential Election, Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin regularly invoked the idea of "worldview" to avoid articulating her policies. Faced with hard questions, Palin, and several other candidates, said things like "this is my worldview," or "he only says that because of his worldview" (*New York Times*, 2008B; Gibson 2008). Although the press castigated Palin for not answering questions, no one challenged her to explain what she meant by "worldview", or how it was relevant to the issue under discussion. Instead, it was simply assumed that the idea of "worldview" was somehow connected to her evangelical Christian background (Beliefnet 2008; Brower, 2008; Huffington Post 2008; *New York Times*, 2008).

This assumption was well-grounded because in answer to the question "Who's the major figure behind the election and re-election of George W. Bush?" Marvin Olasky, the man who initiated Faith Based Initiatives and a Bush confidant, said "On one level, the visionary Karl Rove. At a deeper level, a theologian most Americans have never heard of: Francis Schaeffer." Olasky claimed, Schaeffer "pushed many evangelicals into political and cultural involvement" and introduced them to the concept of worldview (Olasky 2005; cf. Schlossberg & Olasky, 1987).

George Marsden confirms that it was Schaeffer who popularized the idea of worldviews among evangelicals after 1976. He explains that Schaeffer simplified the “sophisticated” ideas of Abraham Kuyper (1827-1920) in his immensely popular 1977 film series “*How Should We Then Live?*” (Marsden 1991:108). This series was based on his best-selling book of the same title (Schaeffer and Jackson, 1976). Five years later Schaeffer published another best-seller the *Christian Manifesto* (Schaeffer 1976; 1977,1981; 1982) which accelerated the evangelical lurch towards political involvement.

What follows is a brief description of worldview as Abraham Kuyper and his disciple Herman Dooyeweerd understood the term. Then there is a discussion of the way it was popularized by Schaeffer and later transformed by other evangelical and fundamentalist writers. Thus the article aims at explaining the background to the use of worldview by many evangelical political activists today.

## Abraham Kuyper’s theory of “worldviews”

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a Dutch theologian, philosopher, statesman, and voluminous writer who entered politics in 1869. He founded a daily newspaper, a weekly religious magazine, a labor union, a political party, the Free University of Amsterdam (1880) and became the Prime Minister of the Netherlands (Vandenberg 1969; Mouw 2011).

Relatively late in his career Kuyper adopted the idea of “worldview” from the Scottish theologian James Orr (1844-1913) who deeply influenced him (Heslam, 1998:88-89). Orr in turn borrowed the idea from various German theologians and philosophers and developed it in a Calvinist direction (Scorgie, 1988).

Kuyper outlined his understanding of worldview in his *Stone Lectures* delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of his discussion of “worldviews” are three inter-related questions all of which concern the selfhood of the individual. These questions are: “1. our relation to God, 2. our relation to man, and 3. our relation to the world” (Kuyper 1898:16). These questions, Kuyper makes clear, are intended to help people clarify their own ideas and understand their differences so that communication between people holding very different views is facilitated.

His key ideas are expressed in tantalizingly short sentences with regard to what he calls “Paganism,” “Romanism,” and “Modernism” (Kuyper 1898: 12-19). At the core of human consciousness in “the depths of our hearts,” Kuyper says “all the rays of our life converge as in one focus” (Kuyper 1898:17). This “focus” centres either in a relationship with the true God or an idol (Ibid). This is remarkably similar to what Paul Tillich was later to call “ultimate concern” (Tillich, 1964; 1970).

Thus, “Paganism ... assumes and worships God in the creature” (Ibid).<sup>2</sup> The Roman Catholic Church which Kuyper calls “Romanism,” by which Kuyper argues “God enters into fellowship with the creature by means of a mystic middle link, which is the Church” (Kuyper 1898:18). Hence “the Church stands between God and the world” (Ibid). More recently “Modernism,” emerged from “the French Revolution,” and nineteenth century “German philosophy” (Kuyper 1898:15). It created a worldview “diametrically opposed to” Christianity “in every

1 In his 1898 Stone Lectures on Calvinism, Kuyper referred to worldviews as “life systems.” This, he explains in footnote 1 on page 3, was on the advice of his “American friends” who felt that the term “worldview” would not be understood in America.

2 Between Paganism and Romanism, Kuyper places what he calls “Islamism” which he says “is characterized by its purely anti-pagan ideal” and “is the only absolute antithesis to Paganism” (Kuyper 1898:17-18). Unfortunately, Kuyper does not develop this thought and says nothing more of substance about Islam in the rest of his Stone Lectures. Therefore, his thoughts on the issue are unhelpful in terms of understanding his ideas about “worldviews.”

sphere of human life" (Kuyper 1898:15).

According to Kuyper, modernism "tries to overthrow" Christian traditions in favour of a mix of "Pantheism," Darwinian evolution, and "modern Buddhism" (Kuyper 1898:15-16). In answer to the question "how can Modernism, be described as a worldview"? Kuyper says Modernism "implied a fundamental and special interpretation of our relation to God" where "god was to be considered as a *hostile power* ... dead, if not to the heart, at least to the state, to society and to science" (Kuyper 1898:21-22).

Finally, it "posits no *mediate communion* between God and the creature". Rather it declares that "God enters *into immediate fellowship with the creature*, as God the Holy Spirit (Kuyper 1899:18).

## The Implication of Worldviews for Human Society

After establishing his religious framework Kuyper outlines his understanding of how it affects lives. This he does by arguing that the way humans understand their relationship to God affects the way they related to each other. He writes "I maintain that it is the interpretation of our relation to God which dominates" the whole of life (Kuyper 1898:22). He explains that because Paganism believes God dwells in the creature whenever anyone excels their success is attributed to "a divine superiority" (Kuyper 1898:25). Consequently, Paganism leads to the adoration of "demi-gods," and "hero worship," which creates rulers who are regarded as sacred. On the other hand if people lack great talents, and are low on the social scale, they are seen as lacking in divine attributes. This in turn gives rise to "systems of caste" and the justification of slavery. In this way Paganism ultimately places "one man under a base subjection to his fellow man" (Kuyper 1898:25-26).

"Romanism," Kuyper argues is tempered by biblical Christianity. Therefore, it "overcomes the absolute character of distinction" between individuals found in Paganism (Kuyper 1898:26). Instead, it "renders" such distinctions "relative" "in order to interpret every relation of man to man *hierarchically*." This leads "to an entirely aristocratic interpretation of life" (Ibid). "Finally Modernism ... denies and abolishes every difference" because it is rooted in a monistic evolutionary outlook. Therefore, it "cannot rest until it has made woman man and man woman, and putting every distinction on a common level, kills life by placing it under the ban of uniformity" (Ibid).

Calvinism on the other hand "places our entire human life immediately before God" (Ibid). As a result "all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented" are sinners who "have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another" (Ibid). Therefore, "we stand as equals before God, and consequently equal as man to man" (Ibid). From this theoretical position Kuyper draws the practical conclusion "Calvinism condemns not merely all open slavery and systems of caste. But also all covert slavery of women and of the poor; it is opposed to all hierarchy among men" (Kuyper 1898:27). Thus, Calvinism "was bound to find its utterance in the democratic interpretation of life; to proclaim liberty to nations; and not to rest until both politically and socially every man, simply because he is a man, should be recognized, respected and dealt with as a creature created in the Divine likeness" (Ibid).

From this vision Kuyper moves on to consider the relationship of humans to the world. Paganism, he claims, "places *too high* an estimate upon the world" (Kuyper 1898:29). In "Romanism," he says, "the Church and the World were placed over against each other" (Ibid). Thus the Church was seen as sacred while the world was profane creating a dualism that ran through every aspect of life. The "the entire social life" was under the authority of the Church, at least in theory if not in practice" (Ibid). As a result "art and science had to be placed under ecclesiastical encouragement and censure; trade and commerce had to be bound to the Church by the tie of guilds; and from the cradle to the grave, family life was to be placed under ecclesiastical guardianship" (Kuyper 1898 29-30).

Calvinism, on the other hand, proclaimed that every person and thing stands directly before God. It honours "the Divine image" in humans, as well as "the world as a Divine creation" (Kuyper 1898:30). Importantly, Calvinism recognizes a mediating principle that Kuyper calls "common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse" of sin which rests upon it" (Ibid). The main social consequence of this profound change in thinking, Kuyper argues, is that "the Church receded in order to be neither more nor less than the congregation of believers, and every department of the life of the world was not emancipated from God," as the French Revolutionaries sought to do, "but from the dominance of the Church" (Kuyper 1898:32).<sup>3</sup>

## Antithesis and common grace

Antithesis is a key term in Kuyper's thinking (Kuyper 1898:17; 29; 116; 174; 186; 246; 1968:27, 63; 98). At its core is the idea of what Christians have traditionally called "the Fall." That is, the original human rebellion against God by which sin entered the world (Kuyper 1968:115-117). As a result Kuyper argues there are "Two Kinds of People," sinners and the redeemed (Kuyper 1968:150-154). This implies that there are "Two Kinds of Science," reflecting different worldview orientations (Kuyper 1968:155-176).

The idea of antithesis as developed by Kuyper seems to lead to the conclusion that Christians and non-Christians have nothing in common. But, Kuyper strongly rejected this idea. He says that even though there are two kinds of science, one produced by believers, the other by non-believers, in practice "there is a very broad realm of investigation in which the difference ... exerts *no* influence" (Kuyper 1968:157). As a result the ideas of Christians and non-Christians are "interlaced" (Kuyper 1968:162). Therefore, Christians and non-Christians can work alongside each other in harmony.

This working together, which the idea of antithesis seems to deny, is possible because of what Kuyper calls "common grace." The idea of common grace is based on the Calvinist understanding of the first few chapters of the book of Genesis. In them we are told the story of Adam and Eve and learn that everyone is born a sinner inclined to rebellion against God. Kuyper argues, some people, Christians, have accepted God's special grace and received forgiveness for their sins through the death of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he denies that redemption leads to perfection on earth. Even a redeemed Christian remains a sinner and owes their salvation to the work of the Holy Spirit (Kuyper 1900:252-337; 1998:167-201; cf. Hestlam 1998:40-42).

It is at this point that common grace comes into play. Everyone knows professing Christians who act in very un-Christian ways we also know non-Christians who are exceptionally good and caring. Kuyper explains this phenomenon by arguing that everyone is equally capable of terrible deeds and great goodness. This is not because of anything in the person, but rather because the Holy Spirit works in us all of us restraining evil and promoting good. This restraining action Kuyper calls "common grace." It is common to all and is grace in the sense that it originates with God (Kuyper 1998:165-201).

What is important is that common grace mitigates the antithesis and makes human life bearable. Both Christians and non-Christians are equally sinful, but through common grace can enjoy the world without it becoming a living hell.

3 One of the most interesting conclusions Kuyper draws from his analysis of worldviews is that Calvinism as a religious system sees all humans as equal before God and encourages what he calls "the commingling of blood" (Kuyper 1898:37-38). Thus Calvinism is against all forms of racism. Given the fact that this was said at a time when "scientific racism" was on the rise it is a remarkable statement. Cf. Dubow, Saul. *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; and Barkan, Elazar. *Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

## Herman Dooyeweerd's development of Kuyper's ideas

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) was a Dutch philosopher and legal theorist whose seminal four volume work, the *New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-1957), was written in the tradition of Kuyper as a radical reformation of philosophic thought. Dooyeweerd seeks to go beyond the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) by claiming to discover the ultimate root of human reasoning in what he called religious ground motives. These reflect both individual and communal relationships to God or an idol. Although generally neglected by secular and English speaking philosophers Dooyeweerd's work is remarkable in its anticipation of many of the ideas of thinkers like Thomas Kuhn (1992-1996).

Dooyeweerd's *New Critique* is perhaps best described as an extended commentary on the English nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty." It goes:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the King's horses and all the King's men  
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

(Opie & Opie 1975:25)

If our everyday immediate experiences of life are likened to Humpty Dumpty and scientific, or analytic, thought is the "great fall," then we understand Dooyeweerd's basic problem. In his view people initially experience life with an immediacy that lacks reflective analysis. Then, as they mature and reflect they develop analytic skills that dissect the various components of the initial experience into their component parts. Yet these parts are never quite the same as the original whole (Dooyeweerd 1953:3-7).

For example, we can attend a concert and enjoy the music of Bach. Then we can reflect on the acoustics of the concert hall, the cost of the ticket, or think about the way the musicians are dressed. Thoughts like these separate the experience of the concert from its actuality.

That is our analysis rips parts of the experience from the whole. This ripping is in itself very valuable and an essential part of life. It gives rise to what Dooyeweerd calls the "modal aspects" of reality such as arithmetic, physics, biology, economics, history, etc (Dooyeweerd 1953:1-24). Yet whenever someone lives through an event and then reads, or hears, a description of it something is missing. The analysis that makes a shortened description of the concert possible is both valuable and disappointing. This is because however the concert is described the description is not the same as the concert itself.

This ripping effect, or analytic function of thought, Dooyeweerd argues gives rise to the various sciences which dissect what we normally experience as an living reality. Therefore, Dooyeweerd argues the main challenge to critical thinking is not analysis, which it already does very well, but to show how the separate pieces of experience can be brought together in a synthesis that creates a coherent whole (Dooyeweerd 1953:45-52).

It is this difference between the experienced whole and the analytic parts that Dooyeweerd describes in terms of "naïve experience" and "theoretical thought" both of which, he argues, are created through the ever-present experience of time. In its origin we experience life as a coherent whole. Then as we grow, we begin to differentiate. This differentiation occurs because of what Dooyeweerd calls "cosmic time." The whole of our experience is bounded by cosmic time which acts like a prism that divides white light into the colors of the spectrum. Shine a torch through a prism and the original white light takes on a variety of colors. So too cosmic time divides our otherwise undivided experience of existence into many parts (Dooyeweerd 1953:3; 34; 38-44; Kalsbeek 1975:160-171).

Once the original coherence of experience is splintered, we continually seek to make sense of life. In doing so, we try to recapture life's original untroubled sense of coherence and give it meaning. Therefore, what makes us human is our desire to understand and make sense of experience. Yet, Dooyeweerd argues, to make sense of experience requires a starting point that stands outside experience itself. This he calls the Archimedean point after the Greek philosopher Archimedes (287-212 BC) who is reported to have said "give me a lever long enough and I can move the entire world" (Dooyeweerd 1953: 8-9; 11-12; Kalsbeek 1975:56-61).

Finding such a perspective Dooyeweerd argues presents humans with two choices. Either they look towards the source of all creation, which is itself outside creation, or they utilize one or more aspects of creation to interpret the rest of creation. Therefore, humans either look to God, the creator, as the source or their being and the diversity of our universe, or they elevate part of God's created reality to become the integration point for all things. This latter choice, Dooyeweerd argues, is what the Bible describes as idolatry and he describes as "apostate reasoning" (Dooyeweerd 1953:20-21; 99-107; Conradie 1960:50-51; Brümmer 1961:86-89).

Therefore, our religious orientation shapes our self-understanding. This is because "All self-knowledge is dependent on knowledge on God. In the same way the *apostate selfhood only arrives at self-knowledge through its idols*," which, Dooyeweerd says, it "absolutizes" to create meaning (Dooyeweerd 1955:323).

Therefore, he insists, all of our reasoning is ultimately based on "faith" which is "by its nature related to divine revelation" (Dooyeweerd 1953:33). Therefore, anyone who rejects Christian revelation has to exercise faith in some aspect of created reality if they are to make sense of the world (Dooyeweerd 1955:293-319; Kalsbeek 1975:132-136). What exactly "faith" is, Dooyeweerd refuses to say, except that it is our "highest" function which enables us to create a coherent vision of life (Dooyeweerd 1955:293; 298-299; 302-305).

Returning to the image of Humpty Dumpty, what Dooyeweerd seems to be saying is that the authors of the old nursery rhyme were right. Once Humpty is shattered into pieces he can never be put together again in a way that restores his original wholeness. We may be able to stitch, nail, glue, or graft, Humpty into a whole. We may have photographs or him, or video tapes, films, and sound recording, all of which look and sound like Humpty. We may even make a robot that, like the robots of Isaac Asimov's novel *I Robot* (1957), looks identical to Humpty. Or, perhaps like the scientists in the film *The Boys from Brazil* (Levin 1976), we may create a clone of Humpty. But, none of these things, however close to the original, will be the *real* Humpty Dumpty. All we can do is fuse certain aspects of the original to create a partial representation.

So too, in recreating theoretically the original coherence of naive experience, all we can really do is approximate reality by viewing aspects of reality as though they are the whole. This in itself, according to Dooyeweerd, is not a bad thing. Indeed it is the essence of science (Dooyeweerd 1953:47-48). Behind such thinking, Dooyeweerd argues, is the fact that "All *diversity* of meaning in temporal reality supposes a temporal *coherence* of meaning and the latter in its turn must again be the expression of a deeper *identity*" (Dooyeweerd 1953:79).

Where the search for a basis for theoretical reflection goes wrong, and where all human science goes wrong, is when we mistake the reconstruction for the original. When this happens, people try to reduce the whole of life to a new coherence created by viewing life through the lens of one aspect of reality. To avoid such reductionism, Dooyeweerd argues, we need to recognize that reality is held together by God. This means that the different aspects, or modes, of reality are just that aspects and not the whole (Dooyeweerd 1953:99-104). This for Dooyeweerd is the truth behind Kuyper's three original worldview questions (Dooyeweerd 1953:104-105).

## Worldviews and ground motives

Developing his analysis of naïve experience and theoretical thought, Dooyeweerd slowly began to recognize certain patterns in the history of philosophy. As he did it became clear to him that Greek and later Roman philosophers, despite the differences between them, shared certain assumptions. These assumptions were later abandoned in the West following the conversion of the elites of the Roman Empire to Christianity. Then for a long period, usually called the Middle Ages, philosophers once again shared certain common assumptions that shaped their thinking. This changed once more with the dawn of the modern era beginning with philosophers like Hobbes and Descartes (Dooyeweerd 1948:17-24; 1979:7-11).

As a result of this inquiry Dooyeweerd claims to have isolated four major themes underlying philosophic thought. These are related to, although not restricted to, time periods in Western history and display fundamentally different interests. Consequently, he argues conflicts between philosophers living in different time periods are essentially different in character from the conflicts that occurred between contemporaries (Dooyeweerd 1948:17-24; 1979:7-11). In some ways this argument resembles Thomas S. Kuhn's later reflections on paradigms and revolutions in science (Kuhn 1962).

To clarify his ideas Dooyeweerd appeals to the idea of worldview which German thinkers developed using the term *weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, he argues that the concept of worldview does not capture the full implications of his argument (Dooyeweerd 1953:120-124).

According to Dooyeweerd everyone has a worldview even though most people are unaware of the fact. This is because worldviews are simply the way people see the world. Therefore, a worldview simply reflects our socialization. Once analysed and made explicit worldviews are transformed into philosophies of life. Nevertheless, the two should not be confused (Dooyeweerd 1953:128). Worldviews and philosophies ought to be seen as complementary (Dooyeweerd 1953:124-133; 156-158).

Where Dooyeweerd differs from other thinkers who write about worldviews and philosophies of life is when he argues that both philosophy and worldviews must "understand each other mutually from their common religious root" (Ibid). Thus, he moves behind the analysis of worldviews and philosophies to what he identifies as "religious ground motives" (Dooyeweerd 1953:115). These are the "spiritual force that acts as the absolutely central mainspring of human society" (Dooyeweerd 1979:9) As such ground-motives are always "*communal*." Further they are inspired "either by the spirit of God or that of an idol" (Ibid).

Therefore, even when worldviews are analyzed and shaped into coherent wholes the inability of people to reach agreements remains. This, Dooyeweerd argues, is why we need to become aware of, and analyze critically, ground motives. These he claims are the basic frameworks into which individuals are socialized by the communities into which they are born. Such communal attitudes underpin worldviews and even naïve experience itself (Dooyeweerd 1953:82-83; 164; 1965:32-34).

Explaining his understanding of ground motives Dooyeweerd argues that "western political systems, social structures, sciences, and arts demonstrate time and time again that all public expressions of society depend upon spiritually dominant cultural powers" (Dooyeweerd 1979:11). He reduces these to four dominant forces, or ground motives that he says "have clashed" throughout "western history" (Ibid). Dooyeweerd explains these cultural forces as:

1. The "form-matter" ground motive of Greek antiquity in alliance with the Roman idea of *imperium*.
2. The scriptural ground motive of the Christian religion: creation, fall, and redemption ...

3. The Roman Catholic ground motive of “nature-grace,” which seeks to combine the two mentioned above.
4. The modern humanistic ground motive of “nature-freedom,” in which an attempt is made to bring the three previous motives to a religious synthesis concentrated upon the value of human personality. Greek ground motive of (Dooyeweerd 1979:15-16).

Of these, Dooyeweerd argues, the Greek must be seen as the key because it “continued to operate in both Roman Catholicism and humanism” (Dooyeweerd 1979:16).

Outlining these ideas Dooyeweerd says that Greek thought and society originated among nomads living in physically dangerous forests and plains. Therefore, life was shaped by a nature religion that deified “a formless, cyclical stream of life” in which “the individual form was doomed to disappear” (Dooyeweerd 1979:16). In this situation “the worship of the tribe and its ancestors was thoroughly interwoven with their religious conceptions” where time was “cyclical” (Ibid). Importantly, “Mysterious forces were at work in this life stream” which “did not run their course according to a traceable, rational order, but according to *Anangke*,” or “blind, incalculable fate” (Ibid).

After settling down to a stable lifestyle, in what became Greece, these formally nomadic tribes developed new religious conceptions following the growth of the *polis*, or city state. This “newer cultural religion was a religion of form, measure, and harmony” centred on the Olympian gods (Dooyeweerd 1979:18). Yet, instead of totally abandoning the older nature religion, the poet Homer “tried to incorporate” its major tenants into the new religion (Ibid). As a result the idea of *Moirai* developed as a new expression of *Anangke* within a new framework. Consequently even the Olympian gods were subject to *Moirai*, or ‘fate’, which now became “something of design” or a “principle of order” (Dooyeweerd 1979:15-28).

Dooyeweerd claims that the tension between these two religious traditions led to the development of the ground motive he identifies as “matter-form.” Here “matter” represents the chaos of nomadic life, while “form” represents the ordered life of the *polis* (Dooyeweerd 1979:15-22). As a result both the older and newer religions existed in tension within Greek society. Consequently, the Greeks observed “the ancient rites of nature religions in private but,” worshiped the Olympian gods in public as the gods of the State (Dooyeweerd 1979:21). After the Romans conquered Greece, the ground motive of matter-form spread throughout the Roman world to create new views of law and society (Dooyeweerd 1979:22-25).

Standing in sharp contrast to the Greco-Roman, matter-form, ground motive Dooyeweerd, identifies what he calls a “second ground motive which shaped the development of western culture” (Dooyeweerd 1979:28). This is the biblical one of “creation, fall and redemption.” Unlike the tension ridden matter-form ground motive, Dooyeweerd argues, the biblical one creates a unified view of life because: “No equally original power stands over against” God (Dooyeweerd 1979: 29, see also 28-31).

Thus while people influenced by the matter-form ground motive continually seek to interpret life by creating absolutes out of aspects of created reality, those under the sway of the biblical ground motive recognize that everything has its origin in God. Therefore they accept the diversity of reality and struggle to reduce all of created reality to one or more aspects of creation (Dooyeweerd 1953:61; 1965:41-43).

The third ground motif Dooyeweerd identifies is “nature-grace.” It originated with medieval Roman Catholic philosophers, particularly those who worked with Aristotle’s ideas, who synthesized Greek and Biblical ground motives (Dooyeweerd 1979:111-137). This synthesis keeps the realm of nature, or natural life, essentially distinct from the realm of grace, where Biblical ideas hold sway. Consequently “the Christian idea of creation” was accommodated to Greek ideas about nature freeing secular life from subjection to Biblical thinking (Dooyeweerd 1953:65-66).

This compromise caused the Christian view of life to lose much of its uniqueness. As a result it eventually disintegrated as a universal cultural force in Western Europe to make possible the new humanistic ground motive of “nature-freedom,” or, as Dooyeweerd sometimes calls it, “science-personality” (Dooyeweerd 1953:198-199; 1979:175-178). Thus from the Renaissance onward, and particularly during the Enlightenment, the fourth ground motive of nature-freedom inspired modern Humanism and slowly gained ascendancy in the West. At the same time it caused scholars to either reduce everything to mechanistic mathematical formulas or to emphasize human freedom and personality above all else (Dooyeweerd 1979:148-188). Dooyeweerd argues all of these ground-motives shaped Western society.

## Dooyeweerd and sphere-sovereignty

Dooyeweerd claims his elaborate interpretation of western thought exposes what he calls “the dogma of the autonomy of theoretical thought” (Dooyeweerd 1953:35-36). This is the dogma that asserts reason, and reason alone, is the basis on which philosophers construct their arguments. But, Dooyeweerd claims his transcendental critique shows that it is not reason, but ground motives that shape the thought of reasoning individuals. Therefore, if reason is not king, we can take biblical revelation seriously (Dooyeweerd 1953:37-38; 1965:1-26).

Consequently, he argues that he has provided a philosophical basis for Kuyper’s theory of sphere sovereignty (Dooyeweerd 1979:40-60; Kalsbeek 1975:91-94). This is because once we take biblical revelation seriously the biblical ground motive of creation-fall-redemption only makes sense when ultimate sovereignty is vested in God (Dooyeweerd 1979:40; 48).

Thus Dooyeweerd believes he has shown that the various aspects of life exist in “mutual irreducibility” (Dooyeweerd 1953:101). This means that each “modal aspect of temporal reality has its proper sphere of laws, irreducible to those of other modal aspects, and in this sense it is sovereignty in its own orbit.” In other words both our physical and social world is pluralistic (Dooyeweerd 1953:101-102)..

Members of Dooyeweerd’s philosophical school believe that following Kuyper he provided a basis for social justice and the meaningful involvement of Christians in society. Thus one can develop Christian political theories (Dengerink 1979; Skillen and Hatfield, 1982; Marshall 1983; Skillen 2005), critique contemporary economic theory (Goudzwaard 1979), create penetrating insights into modern art (Rookmaaker 1970), or reflect on the meaning of metaphor (Botha 2007). What is significant is that Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and their followers engage secular thought in a constructive manner (Dooyeweerd 1953:viii-ix).

## Francis Schaeffer and the evangelical transformation of worldview

Francis Schaeffer (1912-1983) was a highly successful evangelist and founder of the L’Abri Community. He proudly proclaimed that he was a fundamentalist and claimed to work in the tradition of nineteenth and early twentieth century Princeton theology (Duriez, 2008). His books, which include *The God Who is There* (1969), *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1970) and *True Spirituality* (1971), played a key role in popularizing the notion of worldview among evangelical Christians.

Long before Schaeffer became a media personality he slowly acquired a reputation as a thinker and honest broker within the evangelical subculture. Beginning in the late 1950’s a trickle of young Americans visited the Swiss L’Abri. This trickle became a stream and then a flood in the 1960’s (Shires 2007:47-49, 227; Hankins 2007:53-63; Duriez 2008:128-155). Then came speaking tours in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and finally, the films, television interviews, large conferences, and widespread recognition (Shires 2007:Hankins 2007:74-

79; 161-165, 175-183, 191; 200-204; Duriez 2008:160-168; 181-204).

At first it was young evangelical students who adopted Schaeffer's ideas. Many of these, like Gene Veith, John W. Whitehead, and Os Guinness, went on to obtain their PhDs and become intellectual and social leaders in the evangelical sub-culture (Schaeffer 1986:27; 177; Guinness 1973). Slowly, others, like Marvin Olasky and Chuck Colson (1931-2012), known to most people because of his role in the Watergate scandal, adopted these ideas as a basis for their political reflections and action (Olasky 2010; Colson 2004:99). For all of these people, and many others, the notion of "worldview" became a central idea (Dennis 1986:31; 181; Colson 2004:xi-xiv).

## The influence of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd

Anyone who has read Kuyper and Dooyeweerd immediately recognizes their ideas in the work of Francis Schaeffer. Yet Schaeffer fails to clearly acknowledge this in his own writings. Colin Duriez observes "Schaeffer has been charged with employing Dooyeweerd's analysis without acknowledgement. However, Schaeffer considered that he owed no debt to Dooyeweerd" (Duriez 2008:173). Duriez then adds that as a student he sent Schaeffer a paper he had written on Dooyeweerd. To this Schaeffer replied: "I am really not sure that I have much relationship to Dooyeweerd. Most of my thought was developed prior to my detailed contacts with Hans Rookmaaker and in our detailed contacts I do not think that what we exchanged had much to do with Dooyeweerd ..." (Ibid).

This statement is far less clear than the interpretation Duriez gives it. In the first place Schaeffer does not say that he did not learn from Dooyeweerd. All he says is that he was "not sure." Then he correctly links Dooyeweerd to Hans Rookmaaker, but dismisses a possible link to his ideas for two reasons. First, he believed that his ideas were already worked out before he met Rookmaaker, and second, their conversations, although intense, did not refer to Dooyeweerd.

The problem here is that throughout his life Schaeffer struggled with dyslexia (Duriez 2008:17). This means that he was primarily an oral learner and it is not clear that Schaeffer's memory was accurate. Certainly, as far as his theology went it was well formulated long before he met Rookmaaker. But, his cultural critique is an entirely different matter. Schaeffer met the art historian Hans Rookmaaker at a conference in Amsterdam in 1948 (Gasque 2005:95-96; Duriez 2008:79). This meeting was a turning point in Schaeffer's life. The two men became close friends and colleagues eventually founding L'Abri together (Schaeffer 1969; Martin 1979:107-108; Gasque 2007:98-99). It was Rookmaaker who helped Schaeffer develop his understanding of Kuyper and from whom he learnt about Dooyeweerd (Martin 1979:108-109; Gasque 2005:97-99). In fact, as Duriez admits, Rookmaaker believed that he helped Schaeffer understand Kuyper and introduced him to Dooyeweerd (Duriez 2008:79; 174-175).

Here it is important to note that in Rookmaaker's English language writings and lectures he barely mentions Kuyper or Dooyeweerd although in other places he clearly admitted their influence on his work. Rookmaaker's explanation for not citing them was that they were virtually unknown in the English-speaking world and their key texts were in Dutch. Therefore, he deliberately popularized their ideas while encouraging serious students to learn Dutch and study their works (Martin 1979:81-82; 125; 144). From this admission it is easy to see how an oral learner, like Schaeffer, would pick up such ideas from his friend without necessarily recognizing the fact.

In fact, the influence of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd can be seen in the discussions of worldview scattered throughout Schaeffer's collected works (Schaeffer 1982). Examining the evidence it is clear that he was decisively influenced by them. Originally, before he met Rookmaaker,

Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898) gave him a perspective on Christianity that moved him away from his narrow fundamentalist background. They introduced him to the idea of worldviews and the importance of culture. This outlook enabled Schaeffer to develop his interest in art without feeling guilty about spending time on what most of his fundamentalist friends considered "worldly" pursuits (Ryle 1952, 1959; Gasque 2005:95).

Apart from learning about worldviews and a Christian justification for art, it appears that three other Kuyperian themes influenced Schaeffer. These are Kuyper's insistence on the idea of "antithesis," his views about "common grace," and the idea of "sphere sovereignty."

Throughout Schaeffer's published works the idea of antithesis takes a prominent place (Schaeffer 1982, 1:6-11; White 1994:67-75; Hankins 2008:81-83; 94-95). This usage corresponds to that of Kuyper and is different from that of Schaeffer's teacher Cornelius van Til (Kuyper 1898:98-142; White 1994:70). Second, as with Kuyper, common grace, which Schaeffer sometimes calls "the maishness of man," is crucially important for his interpretation of worldviews and practical life (Kuyper 1900:252-337; Schaeffer 1982 Vol 1: 24; 180-181; 220-224). Finally, in outlining his views on ecology Schaeffer made a direct appeal to Kuyper's idea of "sphere sovereignty" (Schaeffer 1982 5:35).

Anyone who has attempted to understand Dooyeweerd immediately recognizes an affinity between Schaeffer's overarching interpretive framework and Dooyeweerd's analysis of Western thought. This is clearly seen in key sections of *The God Who is There* (1969) and *He is there and He is not Silent* (1972) where Schaeffer uses a Dooyeweerdian framework. Thus, Schaeffer begins his analysis of Western thought, with the Greeks. He discusses the *polis* and the way the Greeks thought about the gods, who, like men, were subject to "the Fates." This tension between two types of religion based on order and chaos, he claims re-appeared in a new form in the work of Aquinas, attempted to create a synthesis between Greek and Christian ideas. Following Dooyeweerd, he claims, this synthesis, slowly disintegrated to be replaced by the modern one of "nature and freedom" (Schaeffer 1982 Vol. 1:305-344; cf. Dooyeweerd 1953:15-28; 189-199).

Schaeffer, like Dooyeweerd, also argues that everyone has a worldview, even if people are not aware of the fact, and that worldviews are more or less identical with philosophies of life. Then, he says that underlying worldviews, and philosophies of life, one discovers a third more fundamental factor he calls "presuppositions" which are roughly equivalent to ground motives (Schaeffer, 1982, 1:279-280; 324-329; cf. Dooyeweerd 1953:82-83; 124-133; 156-158; 164; 1965:32-34). Finally, like Dooyeweerd, Schaeffer sees the epistemological question of human understanding as a central issue, related to our need to integrate our experiences and knowledge and finds the integration point in the triune God of Christian theology who is the creator of the universe (Schaeffer 1982 Vol. 1:287-289; 334-344; Dooyeweerd 1953: 45-52;101).

Here it is important to recognize that when Schaeffer appropriated ideas about antithesis, common grace, and worldview, from Kuyper and Dooyeweerd he rephrased them in terms of "Christian apologetics." Explaining his position, he wrote: "There are two purposes of Christian apologetics. The first is defence. The second is to communicate Christianity in a way that any given generation can understand" (Schaeffer 1982, Vol 1:151). Thus, Schaeffer explains his understanding of apologetics in the following way: "If a man goes overseas for any length of time, we would expect him to learn the language of the country to which he is going. More than this is needed, however, if he is really to communicate with the people among whom he is living. He must learn another language – that of the thought-forms" (Schaeffer 1982 Vol 1:129-154). Clearly, Schaeffer's intention, like that of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, was to facilitate communication at a deep level although he words things slightly differently to them.

## From worldview evangelism to politics

Today many writers associate Francis Schaeffer with the New Christian Right (Diamond 1989, 1995:246; Goldberg 2006:38; Hodges 2006:13). It comes as a surprise to find that Schaeffer's first recorded foray into the area of politics was a strongly worded sermon attacking anti-Semitism in 1943 which was printed and widely circulated (Schaeffer 1943; Duriez 2008:56). Later, he took an equally strong public stand against all forms of racism and economic exploitation (Hankins 2008:130-135; Schaeffer 1974a, 1974b; Schaeffer 1982:30). Further, there is considerable evidence that throughout their married life the Schaeffers had many Jewish, Black, and Asian friends who frequently stayed at their home (Edith Schaeffer 1981).

The second area where Schaeffer directly commented on politics was that of ecology and the protection of the environment. This came about as a result of the publication of his book *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970) which appeared two years before the groundbreaking *Limits to Growth* (Meadows 1972). In this book Schaeffer argued that Christians have a special responsibility for the environment and that unbridled exploitation was both wrong and, from a theological viewpoint, a sin (Hankins 2008:117-122; Schaeffer 1970/1982:31-36).

Economic exploitation was another problem that troubled Schaeffer and led him to make sharp, and highly political comments about the Christian's responsibility to promote justice. These comments were later published in his book *No Little People* (1974). In this work he argued that "Christians have the important job of meeting men's material needs as well as their personal and spiritual needs" (Schaeffer 1974/1982:186). Consequently, he argued, "private property" ought to be "used with compassion" to aid others in need (Ibid). "Christians," he reminded his readers, "should keep in mind that their works will be judged," therefore they have a responsibility to serve others (Schaeffer 1974/1982:190).

Given these strongly worded positions on race, ecology, and economic justice, the it is seems that before 1974 Schaeffer was on the left of the political spectrum (Fowler 1982:61-76). This impression is confirmed by his son Frank Schaeffer who, in a regretful autobiographical book, says "If it hadn't been for me Dad's reputation as an evangelical scholar ... would have remained intact ..." (Schaeffer 2007:265). He then explains that he "goaded" his "father into taking political positions far more extreme than came to him naturally" (Ibid).

The catalyst for this change was *Roe v Wade* which the younger Schaeffer saw as sanctioning murder. Therefore, after a furious row, his father agreed to include two episodes promoting a pro-life position in the film series *How Should We Then Live?* Although originally conceived as a Christian cultural history modeled on Kenneth Clark's (1903-1983), the films and accompanying book now ended with a political twist (Clark 1969; Schaeffer 2007:265-267). This addition had far reaching and unexpected consequences.

After the initial release of the films, the immediate effect of this decision was to alienate the Schaeffer's from established evangelical leaders, like Billy Graham, who strongly opposed mixing religion and politics (Schaeffer 2007:290). Then, to the surprise of everyone, including the Schaeffer's, the films developed a momentum of their own and became immensely popular in churches. As a result, Schaeffer, who at this time had been diagnosed with cancer, received numerous invitations to speak in American churches and at large conferences (Schaeffer 2007:269-270). They also brought Schaeffer into close contact with Roman Catholic Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979), and C. Everett Koop who later became the [Surgeon General of the United States](#) (Schaeffer 2007:271-274; 283-288). As a result Schaeffer made a second film series with Koop under the title *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (1979) this series, and the accompanying book, were a direct criticism of *Roe and Wade* and attack upon the pro-choice position (Schaeffer 2007:271-273).

These films and the contacts they created led to further contacts with prominent politicians, radio, and television hosts, as well as prominent evangelical leaders. Consequently, in a

relatively short time Schaeffer was transformed from a somewhat obscure writer and speaker, with a niche market for his ideas, into one of the leading figures in the evangelical world. As Frank Schaeffer puts it "Abortion became *the* evangelical issue" and Schaeffer rode the crest of a wave (Schaeffer 2007:289).

Soon, as Olasky observed, Schaeffer's books "were doing the advance work for people like Ronald Reagan and helping to craft Republican victories" (Olasky 2005; Schaeffer 2007:295). By the late seventies a numerous well-known people were courting Schaeffer, including "Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Dobson, James Kennedy" and a host of "other self-appointed 'Christian leaders,'" backed by powerful media empires (Schaeffer 2007:297). This was because Schaeffer's "unique reputation for an intellectual approach to faith," and "reputation for" both "frugal living" and integrity, provided substance to a host of otherwise intellectually bankrupt radio and television programs and their hosts (Ibid).

Popular "Christian" writers like Tim LaHaye also quickly adapted Schaeffer's framework and the term "worldview" to their own needs. For example, LaHaye dedicated his runaway bestseller, *Battle for the Mind* (1980), to "Dr. Francis Schaeffer, the renowned philosopher-prophet of the twentieth century." Later LaHaye's simplified and gutted version of Schaeffer's ideas continued to permeate his best-selling books (Shires 2007:159).

It was from these popular writers, rather than the scholars and activists, like Olasky, Whitehead, or Guinness, that the use of worldview seems to have passed into popular American evangelical and fundamentalist culture. As a result, the term is now very popular as a slogan that the people use to legitimate their blend of Christian and right-wing political and social ideas. The problem is: how many people who use "worldview," in their conversations really understand it?

What most American evangelical and fundamentalist Christians took from Schaeffer, was "less the content of what he wrote than his model of Christian worldview development" (Hankins 2007: xv; cf. Shires 2007:158). In doing so they consistently overlooked the fact that his ideas on this subject were firmly rooted in the work of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. This ignorance of the source of Schaeffer's ideas led to a failure to really understand them and the use of "worldview" as a form of legitimation, rather than an analytic concept.

Thus, instead of concentrating on the hard work of understanding and communicating with people who held different viewpoints popular writers latched onto statements from Schaeffer's works like "We must not forget that historic Christianity stands on a basis of antithesis" (Schaeffer 1982 Vol 1:8). Thus, by stressing antitheses, without common grace, the idea of worldview become a way of signalling difference and maintaining cultural boundaries. Consequently, when Schaeffer argued "two world views," Christianity and Humanism, "stand as totals in complete antithesis to each other" (Schaeffer 1982 Vol 5:424) this was taken as a call to circle the wagons.

Instead of using Schaeffer's insights to engage humanists, many evangelicals simply condemned humanism while retreating behind a verbal wall that invoked with absolute certainty the difference between the Christian and other world views. With this retreat, communication between many evangelicals and people they saw as their opponents came to an end. Schaeffer's son recognizes this when he argues, that leaders of the New Christian Right took his father's ideas and used them for "nakedly political purposes." He also claims, that by the end of his life, his father was "sick of these idiots" (Schaeffer 2007:298-300).

## Conclusion

It is easy to criticize, ridicule, and scorn evangelical and other Christians who invoke the term worldview and rely on writers like Schaeffer (Diamond, 1995:246; Goldberg 2006:38; Hodges, 2006:10.18). But, to do so only reinforces their conviction that they are the victims

of sinister forces bent on destroying Christianity. At this point we begin to understand how Sarah Palin was able to regularly invoke the idea of worldview, to avoid articulating her policies during the 2008 American Presidential Election campaign, without alienating her supporters (*New York Times*, 2008a, 2008b; Gibson 2008). There was nothing surprising in this because all she was saying was what her audiences already knew: you cannot discuss fundamental issues like worldview with non-believers.

This transformation of the concept of worldview, from an analytic tool, into a propaganda weapon and excuse for not engaging people, and ideas, that contradict one's prejudices, is the tragedy of the American evangelical-fundamentalist worldview as it exists today. The idea of worldview as envisioned Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and Schaeffer, as a tool for intellectual engagement is an attractive one. But, the way the American evangelicals and fundamentalists have appropriated the idea to avoid real engagement is not. Hopefully, a rediscovery of Schaeffer's intellectual roots in the works of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd offers a way of reversing this trend and encouraging evangelical, and even fundamentalist, Christians to engage in serious discussions.

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