

A Biblical Methodology for Theology and Philosophy and Its Dispensational Outcomes

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Introduction

Theology and philosophy are sometimes considered to be separate disciplines with differing foundational axioms and disparate, often contradictory outcomes. Contrary to that separation of disciplines, this work proposes to show that both have their necessary place within the broader discipline of worldview—and more precisely, *biblical* worldview—and that the two (theology and philosophy) need not, nor should not be in tension with one another. Within a biblical worldview, the biblical philosophy (or the love of wisdom) according to Christ² provides methodology and building blocks resulting in a

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² Colossians 2:8.

generally dispensational (at least) theological system, with many systematic theological propositions fitting within the descriptive philosophical category of metaphysics, and theological outcomes evident in the prescriptive categories of ethics and sociopolitical thought. A biblical methodology for handling philosophical and theological data guides the interlocutor toward a cogent system of worldview that integrates also other disciplines which otherwise might be seen as unrelated or even contradictory.

A Case Study in Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Competing "Life Systems"

Abraham Kuyper referred to the concept of worldview as *life system*, asserting that Calvinism itself provides the ultimate life system—the “manifestation of the Christian principle.”³ Kuyper supposed there to be three particular conditions necessary for a life system: or “three fundamental relations of all human life ... (1) our relation *to God*, (2) our relation *to man*, and (3) our relation *to the world*.”⁴ While Paganism, Islam, and Romanism all address the three conditions, Kuyper was particularly concerned that modernism was seemingly triumphing over Christianity:

Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the ‘Christian Heritage.’⁵

Modernism isn't the only life system competing with Calvinism, according to Kuyper. Romanism and Islam both have thoroughgoing and recognizable systems. Kuyper observes that,

³ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

In the Roman Catholic Church everybody knows what he lives for, because with clear consciousness he enjoys the fruits of Rome's unity of life-system. Even in Islam you find the same power of a conviction of life dominated by one principle. Protestantism alone wanders about in the wilderness without aim or direction, moving hither and thither, without making any progress.⁶

Within Protestantism, Kuyper suggests, Calvinism provides the preeminent explanatory device and the “manifestation of the Christian Principle.”⁷

Kuyper suggests that Calvinism offers major advantages over other systems, in that Calvinism

does not seek God in the creature, as Paganism; it does not *isolate* God *from* the creature, as Islamism; it posits no *mediate communion* between God and the creature, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters *into immediate fellowship with the creature*, as God the Holy Spirit.⁸

At the core of this uniqueness is the Calvinistic confession of predestination, and more specifically Calvinism's assertion of immediate fellowship with God, rather than fellowship as through intermediaries (such as the Romish priesthood).⁹ Thus, Kuyper finds in Calvinism the first condition of a life system—a comprehensive and plausible explanation of human relations with God.

Whereas according to Kuyper, Paganism celebrates the lowest and basest elements of humanity and modernism abolishes every difference between men and between men and women, Calvinism characterizes differences only in accordance with that described by the Creator. In the second condition—human relation to humanity—Kuyper observes that

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 25.

Calvinism finds its fulness in the democratic interpretation of life; to proclaim the liberty of nations; and not to rest until both politically and socially every man, simply because he is man, should be recognized, respected and dealt with as a creature created after the Divine likeness.¹⁰

In the relationship of humanity to the world, Kuyper perceives Paganism to esteem the world too highly; Islam, too lowly; and Calvinism, to recognize that through common grace there is an easing of the curse allowing humanity to effectively exercise the original dominion mandate.¹¹ Kuyper recounts the three conditions and Calvinism's assertions of those conditions as follows:

For our relation *to God*: an immediate fellowship of man with the Eternal, independently of priest or church. For the relation of man *to man*: the recognition in each person of human worth, which is his by virtue of his creation after the Divine likeness, and therefore of the equality of all men before God and his magistrate. And for our relation *to the world*: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.¹²

Addressing these three conditions, Kuyper suggests that Calvinism stands alongside Paganism, Islamism, Romanism, and modernism as thoroughgoing worldviews. He adds that, because of Calvinism's advantages, it alone possesses "a well-defined principle and an all-embracing life-system."¹³

In four "great problems of religion"¹⁴ Calvinism expresses critical explanatory dogmas. In the dogma of God's sovereignty, religion is recognized as for God's sake rather than human or

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 30.

¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

other practical purposes. In the dogma of election, religion escapes intermediaries and establishes direct human connection with God. In the dogma of common and universal grace religion is seen as impartial. Finally, in the dogmas of regeneration and *sola scriptura*, religion is soteriological. In addressing these four great problems, Kuyper views Calvinism as a superior expression and worthy life system.¹⁵

While Kuyper says little of epistemology, it is clear that the metaphysical assertions of fact within Calvinism stem directly from a correctly informed faith, and one that informs every other area of inquiry:

A Calvinist who seeks God, does not for a moment think of limiting himself to theology and contemplation, leaving the other sciences, as of a lower character, in the hands of unbelievers; but on the contrary, looking upon it as his task to know God in *all* his works, he is conscious of having been called to fathom with all the energy of his intellect, things *terrestrial* as well as things *celestial*.¹⁶

For Kuyper, “every science in a certain degree starts *from faith*, and, on the contrary, faith, which does not lead to science, is mistaken faith or superstition, but real, genuine faith it is not.”¹⁷ Rooted in the tenets of Calvinism there is discernible a necessary unity of all inquiries. Kuyper recognizes that

Calvinists have never thought that the idea of the cosmos lay in God's foreordination as an aggregate of loosely conjoined decrees, but they have always maintained that the whole formed one organic programme of the entire creation and the entire history. And as a Calvinist looks upon God's decree as the foundation and origin of the natural laws, in the same manner also he finds in it the firm foundation and the origin of every moral and spiritual law; both these, the natural as well as the spiritual laws, forming together one high order.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

Rooted in these metaphysic premises are key implications for ethics, namely that the law of Moses represents a timeless moral order.

Hence it is that, for the Calvinist, all ethical study is based on the Law of Sinai, not as though at that time the moral world-order began to be fixed, but to honor the Law of Sinai, as the divinely authentic summary of that original moral law which God wrote in the heart of man, at his creation, and which God is re-writing on the tables of every heart at its conversion.¹⁹

Because these principles are timeless and persisting ethical foundations, they also have sociopolitical implications.

...it is one and the same world which once exhibited all the glory of Paradise, which was afterwards smitten with the curse, and which, since the Fall, is upheld by common grace; which has now been redeemed and saved by Christ, in its center, and which shall pass through the horror of the judgment into the state of glory. For this very reason the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate.²⁰

Calvinism, according to Kuyper, presents great social responsibility to believers as participants in government as it should be.

A people therefore which abandons to State Supremacy the rights of the family, or a University which abandons to it the rights of science, is just as guilty before God as a nation which lays its hands upon the rights of the magistrates.²¹

In Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism, the grounding appeal to the metaphysical descriptive (of God's sovereign decree) leads to ethical applications (in contemporary expressions of Sinaitic law) and finally to socio political

¹⁹ Ibid., 72.

²⁰ Ibid., 73.

²¹ Ibid., 98.

responsibility. “In Calvinism lies the origin and guarantee of our constitutional liberties.”²² God’s sovereignty, as expressed in Calvinism, provides the necessary groundwork for Christian engagement in culture, as God intends to bless the world through that very Christian engagement:

But the Calvinistic confession of the Sovereignty of God holds good for *all* the world, is true for all nations, and is of force in all authority, which man exercises over man; even in the authority which parents possess over their children. It is therefore a political faith which may be summarily expressed in these three theses: 1. God only—and never any creature—is possessed of sovereign rights, in the destiny of the nations, because God alone created them, maintains them by His Almighty power, and rules them by His ordinances. 2. Sin has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct government of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy. And 3. In whatever form this authority may reveal itself, man never possesses power over his fellow-man in any other way than by an authority which descends upon him from the majesty of God.²³

The first tenet of Calvinism (God’s sovereignty expressed in decrees) is the metaphysical root system supporting the ethical and sociopolitical prescriptions. Kuyper adds that “the Calvinistic dogma of predestination [is] the strongest motive ... for the cultivation of science in a higher sense.”²⁴

Together, God’s sovereignty and his predestining work provide the impetus for further inquiry and discovery—all within the metaphysical descriptive. These two aspects of God’s character provide more than simply metaphysical description, grounding the entire Calvinistic life system on the epistemological certainty of reliance on God’s character as expressed in his sovereignty and predestining work. In this sense, Calvinism illustrates the necessary relationship of epistemology,

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Ibid., 85.

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

metaphysics, ethics, and sociopolitical thought, and models the sequential progression from one to the other and then back again. Calvinism is not merely abstract nor conceptual, but rather, according to Kuyper, it has far-reaching personal impact as “belief in predestination is nothing but the penetration of God's decree into your own personal life.”²⁵ It is at this nexus that the life system that is Calvinism invites each person to engage and consistently apply the worldview in all aspects of life.

Kuyper perceives Calvinism to be the correct life system Calvinism, suggesting that Calvinism

*did not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a life-system, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a life- and world-view, and such a one as was, and still is. able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life.*²⁶

Calvinism, because it provides the right answers, is in itself the right method for engaging other inquiries beyond the theological. Kuyper recommends that

... theology is only one of the many sciences that demand Calvinistic treatment. Philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, the social sciences, literature, and even the medical and natural sciences, each and all of these, when philosophically conceived, go back to principles, and of necessity even the question must be put with much more penetrating seriousness than hitherto, whether the ontological and anthropological principles that reign supreme in the present method of these sciences are in agreement with the principles of Calvinism, or are at variance with their very essence.²⁷

This praise of Calvinism as *the* life system notwithstanding, after all this Kuyper acknowledges what this writer considers to be a fatal shortcoming, admitting that “not one Reformed

²⁵ Ibid., 113.

²⁶ Ibid., 171.

²⁷ Ibid., 194.

standard, not even the purest, is infallible as was the word of Paul.”²⁸ Kuyper indicates that while he remains immovably convicted of the value and correctness of Calvinism, the system does not offer the highest level of reliability, but is itself an application of principles. Kuyper notes,

As a matter of course, there is inherent in every conviction, in every confession, a motive for absolute and unconditional propagandism, and the word of Paul to Agrippa: “I would to God that with little or with much, not only you, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am,” must remain the heartfelt wish not only of every good Calvinist, but of every one who may glory in a firm immovable conviction. But so ideal a desire of the human heart can never be realized in this our dispensation.²⁹

Kuyper has wisely reckoned that faith is the basis for metaphysical assertions and descriptions of reality, both terrestrial and celestial, and he has asserted a consistency in drawing ethical principles from the metaphysical descriptions. Further, Kuyper acknowledges that sociopolitical descriptions and prescriptions stem also from the metaphysical realities that Calvinism espouses. In this sense, Kuyper argues well that Calvinism is a life system or worldview. However, in Kuyper’s recognition that Calvinism and its Reformed doctrines are not at a Pauline level of authority (and that the ideals will not see fulfillment in the present dispensation), lies a simple invitation to consider whether Calvinism is the irreducible principle of life, or if we can go straight to Paul and the other biblical writers, to find a worldview that actually *is infallible* and needs no further reduction. If the Reformed tenets are not as infallible as Paul, then let’s discard them as the mooring of the life system and go straight to the biblical writers.

²⁸ Ibid., 192.

²⁹ Ibid.

Hermeneutic Method as the Primary Worldview Driver

As Kuyper has shown, Calvinism offers significant advantages over Paganism, Islamism, Romanism, and modernism. The Calvinist system stands where these others fail. Calvinism seems a more consistent expression of its own core principles (especially rooted in the sovereignty and predestining work of God) and is thus worthy of respect as a worldview. However, Kuyper acknowledges that Calvinism and the Reformed principle is not rooted in the very highest authority and is not quite at the level of Pauline authority, for example. This admission of limitation is not surprising. If Kuyper were to assert that Calvin's words (and thus principles) were inspired, that would represent an internal incoherency, striking at the sovereignty of God in his revelation and undermining the metaphysic of inspiration and revelation. Kuyper (and Calvin) recognize well that the system is a philosophical extrapolation based on the theological assertions of God's sovereignty and predestining. In this we discover the relationship of philosophy and theology within Calvinism; the theological assertions come first and provide the epistemological bases for the entire philosophical system. In Kuyper's explanation of Calvinism there is no attention given to hermeneutic method or biblical interpretation (the concepts are not addressed even once in Kuyper's series of lectures). Rather Kuyper's interpretive focus is on the interpretation of life itself³⁰—of the observable phenomena, and the application of the theological tenets (sovereignty and predestination) to the phenomena.

Calvin does not himself comprehensively address hermeneutic method, but he is strongly commended by John Murray for setting "the pattern for the exercise of that sobriety which guards the science of exegesis against those distortions and perversions to which allegorizing methods are ever prone to subject the interpretation and application of Scripture."³¹ Calvin's method is illustrated in his addressing of the

³⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 23–24, 27–36, 40, 140, 160–65, 170, 186.

³¹ John Murray, preface to *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2002), 3.

applications of the law, as he asserts that there is more to the author's intent than the letter of the law, though we should avoid taking excessive liberty with the text:

We must, therefore, if possible, discover some path which may conduct us with direct and firm step to the will of God. We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appending of human glosses is added to the Divine Law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the Lawgiver is faithfully exhibited. It is true that, in almost all the commandments, there are elliptical expressions, and that, therefore, any man would make himself ridiculous by attempting to restrict the spirit of the Law to the strict letter of the words. It is plain that a sober interpretation of the Law must go beyond these, but how far is doubtful, unless some rule be adopted. The best rule, in my opinion, would be, to be guided by the principle of the commandment—viz. to consider in the case of each what the purpose is for which it was given.³²

Calvin advocates a case-by-case interpretive method with the author's motive as the guiding principle to determine *how far beyond the literal approach* one's hermeneutic may extend. The problem evident here is the subjective nature of seeking to assess the author's *motive* rather than in simply assessing the author's *words*. Calvin's interpretive principle is illustrated in his critique of Chiliasts as "triflers,"³³ arguing that

Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary. In short, they are either most

³² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2002), 232.

³³ *Ibid.*, 612.

ignorant of all divine things or they maliciously aim at subverting the whole grace of God and power of Christ....³⁴

While Calvin seeks to elevate God and rebut any who would subvert God's proper authority, Calvin goes beyond Revelation 20:1–5's repeated assertion of a literal one-thousand-year kingdom of Christ based on theological grounds. This method confirms Murray's prefatory assertion that Calvin made great emphasis of the analogy of Scripture in his exegesis³⁵ and Calvin's own assertion that every interpretation of Scripture should be brought to the analogy of faith.³⁶ Because of the supposed theological implications of a literal millennium being incompatible with the author's character, the literal meaning is discarded as theologically abhorrent and untenable. No matter that the thousand years in a literal interpretation is referring to the *inaugural* period of the eternal kingdom—Calvin doesn't seem to even consider that possibility, instead rooting his interpretative method in a theological principle. Whereas Calvin lauded early interpreters (particularly councils up through the fifth century),³⁷ he also acknowledged that later interpreters “gradually degenerated from the purity of that golden age.”³⁸ Despite those later departures from reliability, Calvin still saw value in corporate interpretive dialogue and decision, admitting that “when any doctrine is brought under discussion, there is not a better or surer remedy than for a council of true bishops to meet and discuss the controverted point.”³⁹ Calvin adds that Paul prescribes such methodology

³⁴ Ibid., 611.

³⁵ Murray, preface, 3.

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 809, 852.

³⁷ Ibid., 716.

³⁸ Ibid., 716–17.

³⁹ Ibid., 719.

of determining doctrine. For when he gives the power of deciding to a single church, he shows what the course of procedure should be in more important cases—namely, that the churches together are to take common cognizance [sic].⁴⁰

The irony in Calvin's conclusion here is that he acknowledges severe failures in the methodology even as he espouses the methodology as Pauline (without citation of any such Biblical characterization). Calvin's analogy of faith extends beyond the Scripture to the democratic determinations of ecclesiastical bodies even though there is risk of error. Calvin supposes that if there is error, the truth (by God's preservation) will be restored at some point (seemingly) through further discussion and agreement.⁴¹ It is perhaps for the uncertain conclusions of such methodology that Kuyper recognizes Calvinism and other reformed principles to be less than of inspired authority.

A Biblical Life System Accounting for Philosophy and Theology Rooted in Greater Authority

Hermeneutic method is a critical and foundational agreement in a life system or worldview. Interpretive method provides the needed epistemological content for discerning metaphysical descriptions and deriving requisite ethic and sociopolitical prescriptions. In short, hermeneutic method is the critical pivot point once the source of authority undergirding the life system or worldview has been acknowledged. If the Calvinist life system stands upon God's sovereignty and predestining as core metaphysical principles, those principles are derived from nature itself and not only from the revealed text,⁴² yet nature provides no particular hermeneutic for our interpretation of nature. Consequently, metaphysical concepts and theological suppositions (such as God's sovereignty and predestining) are sometimes read back into epistemology and are employed at times as hermeneutic devices themselves. It is this kind of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 44, 919.

hermeneutic spiral that often places traditional inquiries of theology in too lofty a role as being dispositive in the development of the life system or worldview. If on the other hand, we begin with a hermeneutic method derived exclusively from the pages of Scripture, then the subjectivity and uncertainty inherent in both the democratic method and the analogy of faith ought to be far less influential in the development of the worldview than is evident in Calvinism.

Determining whether or not, then, the Bible prescribes hermeneutic methodology is an important first step once the source of authority is acknowledged. Whereas, for example, Calvinism might assert that God is the source of authority, the hermeneutics of Calvinism are (at times) subjective and uncertain. In order to resolve the uncertainty, the interpreter must occasionally presume to understand the motive of the author. This maneuver inevitably includes the interpreter as determinative, and thus part of the source of authority. In this sense, Calvinism does not escape the Romish tendency that the Scripture should be interpreted according to the “living Tradition of the whole Church”⁴³ (though the degree of authority ascribed to the church is far less in Calvinism than in Catholicism). For Calvinism the hermeneutic spiral means that the interpreter plays a role as *part* of the source of authority. If on the other hand, there is a hermeneutic method that is *only* biblically derived, then the interpreter plays no role as source of authority, but is rather interpreting only that source of authority.

In the early historical accounts of Genesis and Job, spanning roughly two-thousand years, there is a clear hermeneutic method evident in the text. That method has been summarized by this writer as follows:

In examination of the ninety-four passages in Genesis and Job that record Divine speech acts, the evidence is overwhelming ... that God intended for His words to be taken at face value, using a plain-sense interpretive approach. The hermeneutic method that reflects this straightforward methodology has become known as the literal

⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (The Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 32, para. 113.

grammatical historical hermeneutic. This method recognizes that verbal expression has meaning rooted in and inseparable from the grammatical and historical context of the language used, and that these components require that readers be consistent in applying the interpretive method in their study of the Scriptures. Because of the two-thousand-year precedent evident in Genesis and Job, any departure from the simplicity of this method bears a strong exegetical burden of proof, requiring that there be explicit exegetical support for any change one might perceive as necessary in handling later Scriptures. Absent any such exegetical data, we can conclude that (1) hermeneutic methodology for understanding Scripture is not arbitrary but is instead plainly modeled, and that (2) later Scriptures should be understood in light of the hermeneutic precedent provided by Genesis and Job.⁴⁴

If this assessment is correct, and the Bible affirms the normality of the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic, then there ought to be no interpreter-infringement on the source of authority undergirding the worldview. In a biblical approach the source of authority is simply *God as revealed in Scripture*. There is no interpretive authority advocated in Scripture other than that. As in Calvinism, God's sovereignty and his predestining work are certainly in view (though perhaps defined differently), only not as overarching hermeneutic devices but rather simply as outcomes of God's direct revelation in Scripture. Thus, our understanding of metaphysical descriptions comes *not from ascribing motivation* to the divine author, but from the simple understanding of the words he has used to communicate. With this recognition of the source of authority (God as revealed in Scripture), and with the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic as the biblically prescribed method for determining authorial intent, we can move on to the fleshing out of the worldview's metaphysic. In engaging that discipline, we can have confidence that we need not rely on either the analogy of faith nor any consensus driven approach but can (more)

⁴⁴ Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2018), 35.

objectively understand the life system or worldview that the text and its author verbally advocates.

It is in the metaphysics asserted by Scripture that we discover the placement of traditional categories of theology within worldview. The study of metaphysics includes at least ontology (the study of what actually exists), axiology (the study of what is of value), teleology (the study of design and purpose), and eschatology (the study of outcomes and the future). Whereas these categories are traditionally considered *philosophical* fields of study, in their most basic sense, they are ultimately both theological and philosophical. If philosophy is lexically the love of wisdom, and if wisdom is engaged properly through the fear of the Lord,⁴⁵ and if the fear of the Lord is properly revealed by the word of the Lord in Scripture,⁴⁶ then theology (the study of God) cannot be extricated from philosophical inquiry. If they are not entirely interchangeable disciplines, then at the very least there is significant overlap and interdisciplinarity between the two.

To illustrate the relationship and placement of theological topics in worldview, consider these eleven categories of theology:

- (1) Bibliology – the study of God’s communication to humanity
- (2–4) Theology Proper – the study of God
 - Paterology – the study of God the Father
 - Christology – the study of God the Son, the Christ
 - Pneumatology – the study of God the Spirit
- (5) Angelology – the study of Satan, demons, and other angelic beings
- (6) Anthropology – the study of humanity
- (7) Hamartiology – the study of sin
- (8) Soteriology – the study of salvation and redemption
- (9) Israelology – the study of God’s working with Israel
- (10) Ecclesiology – the study of God’s working with the church
- (11) Eschatology – the study of things to come

⁴⁵ Proverbs 1:7.

⁴⁶ Proverbs 2:6.

Each of these serves as a vital component within worldview. Kuyper asserts that a life system handles three major areas of inquiry: (1) our relation to God, (2) our relation to humanity, (3) and our relation to the cosmos. In that matrix, at least bibliology, the three theologies proper, anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, Israelology, ecclesiology, and eschatology inform as to our relationship to God. Elements of anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, Israelology, and ecclesiology explain our relationship with humanity. And (at least) anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and eschatology cover aspects of our relationship to the cosmos. It is worth noting that Kuyper's three questions are problematic at least for their egocentric emphasis; they are perspectival from the self's vantage point. Though that is somewhat understandable as the concept of worldview does demand a *viewer*, and so in fairness, Kuyper is simply using different terms to communicate the idea of worldview. Still, perhaps it would be better to simply view these necessary components in sequential order by how they are derived.

The epistemological principles need to be first established to derive reliable conclusions describing reality. For worldview then, epistemology comes first. Epistemological inquiry demands two important steps: (1) the acknowledgment of the source of authority—the basis for truth and knowledge upon which the entire worldview rests; and (2) the interpretation of that authority—the hermeneutic method for ensuring objectivity and certainty in the handling of the data provided by the source of authority.

Bibliology and aspects of the theologies proper would be included as necessary inquiries of study in epistemology, as we consider the source of authority, how he has communicated himself, and what are the methods for properly understanding what he has said. Once the epistemological questions are answered, we move to the metaphysical inquiry, which provides key assertions regarding what comprises reality. Ontology addresses what actually exists and would include several aspects of theological inquiry including (at least) the theologies proper, angelology, and anthropology. Axiology considers what is of value and would include theological inquiries such as hamartiology and soteriology. Teleology covers design and

purpose in reality and could include aspects of especially theologies proper, soteriology, Israelology, and ecclesiology. Finally, eschatology as a metaphysic category aligns well with the theological category of eschatology as both are concerned with what the future holds within the worldview. These theological categories in context provide much of the descriptive material of the metaphysics of the worldview. Epistemology and metaphysics together encompass the “is” or descriptive aspect of the worldview.

Moving beyond the “is” or the descriptive, ethics and sociopolitical thought comprise the “ought” or the prescriptive aspects of the worldview. It is evident there are two primary ethics contexts: ethics for those who do not hold to the worldview and ethics for adherents of the worldview. Hamartiology and soteriology especially consider ethics responsibilities for individuals in each category (unbelievers and believers). While ethics addresses the individual “ought,” sociopolitical thought considers collective responsibility for communities. From family units to community elements in society, extending even beyond nations in the church community, the Bible has much to say of the makeup and responsibilities of these various communities. Theological disciplines considered in sociopolitical thought would include (at least) anthropology, Israelology, and ecclesiology.

Conclusion

Even a cursory examination of these inquiries and disciplines uncover that there is a great deal of overlap between the theological inquiries and the philosophical categories of worldview. The scope of material within each of the theological disciplines covers often more than any one of the components of worldview (epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, sociopolitical thought). Any system of theology, including Calvinism, covenantalism, and dispensationalism, bears significant explanatory responsibility, and ultimately each is more than simply a theological system. Rather, they are worldviews, with their own unique narratives and propositional assertions of *is* and *ought*. The theologian, then, has the responsibility of a philosopher and must appreciate the theological task as

uncovering and deciphering *worldview*, seeing beyond elementary aspects of the theological system itself. Kuyper recognized this well as he appealed to many of these areas—even if unsystematically—in his assertions of Calvinistic superiority. Kuyper showed the relationship of the categories and ascribed value to Calvinism based on, in part, its efficacy in fleshing out each of these areas of inquiry. Kuyper’s observations provide a helpful illustration of how the theological categories interconnect and how a theological system must in fact constitute a thoroughgoing worldview.

Despite the limitations of Calvinism, including those Kuyper acknowledges, the Calvinist system allows us a helpful point of comparison and contrast for examining how a theological system derived *only biblically* would be valuable as a life system or worldview. If Calvinism excels the other life systems and yet it has undeniable deficiencies, then what if its deficiencies could be overcome? In particular, if the system can be derived exclusively and reliably from only biblical data, then it could appropriately be termed *the biblical worldview*, and would provide a model of the highest value because, as Kuyper would surely admit, the (exclusively) biblical model would uniquely possess the authority of Paul and the other biblical writers, and would thus be free from the inherent and most important deficiency of Calvinism and the other life systems: *human infringement on the source of authority and his right to operate as sovereign over all*.

A biblical methodological model consistently applied leads to conclusions that are derived biblically. To avoid infringement on the Communicator and his communication (the biblical data) is certainly *the* hermeneutic ideal and something to be pursued. Still, perhaps some, in seeking to be realistic, might consider the ideal an impossibility. Like Gadamer, one might perceive that communication and understanding fuses two horizons,⁴⁷ and that coming to an author’s horizon without bringing one’s own is impossible. This writer would direct those “realists” to Peter’s urging that, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourself

⁴⁷ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 390, 397.

in all your behavior” (1 Pet 1:15). Peter’s example of the ethical ideal seems an impossible one to attain in this life yet represents the undeniable standard after which we are to strive. Paul also advocated striving toward a standard which he had not yet achieved. He acknowledged that he was not yet perfected (or complete),⁴⁸ but he nonetheless was pressing on toward the goal.⁴⁹ Paul exhorts his readers to do the same.⁵⁰ No matter the level of difficulty in the task nor the depth of our (current) incapacity, we must continually strive to walk in a manner worthy of our calling—this includes how we handle the Bible. If we truly recognize that God as revealed in Scripture is the source of authority for our worldview, then we must maintain an ongoing, unwavering commitment to consistently applying biblically derived methodology. The root system of biblically derived hermeneutic method, if nurtured by consistent application, undergirds the most fertile green tree of faith and practice that is *the biblical worldview*.

⁴⁸ Philippians 3:12–13.

⁴⁹ Philippians 3:14.

⁵⁰ Philippians 3:16.