

Revisiting Creation, Fall, and Redemption in the Biblical Worldview

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Abstract: This paper seeks to reshape the traditional worldview model: creation, fall, and redemption (CFR) according to a new model: redemption, creation, fall, and restoration (RCFR). The paradigm shift thus attributes to God's pre-creative activity in redemption rather than to creation a place of prime importance in the Christian worldview and associated research. CFR is the main, accepted position among cultural historians and theorists of the broadly evangelical and Reformed traditions. Nonetheless, once held to the light of Scripture, CFR is found incomplete in several ways. RCFR augments CFR where it is found wanting. In essence, I agree with creation theologians such as Al Wolters and John Frame who use Creation, Fall, Redemption to argue against dualism. But I do so pointing to the fact that the unity of creation is based in God's earlier, pre-creative activity (redemption) and then flesh out how this paradigm shift speaks differently to a few factors, with special concentration on the eschatological profile of our creation mandate.

Introduction

The student of Christianity and culture ought to be familiar with the concept of a biblical world and life view. Attendant to this idea is a theological framework which, for many years, has served as a reference point for explicating the fundamentals of a Christian worldview. This framework is called creation, fall, and redemption (CFR). Often *restoration* is added to the worldview model, even though redemption and restoration are fundamentally synonymous. In this case, the model is creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (CFRR).

Al Wolters provides this helpful chart detailing the traditional worldview model.

Creation: Where do we come from? If God does not exist, everything is permissible but has no ultimate significance. Atheism is not livable.

Fall: What's wrong with the world? The fall is the cause of evil and suffering.

Ignoring sin and evil does not work.

Redemption: What can we do to fix it? All worldviews attempt to offer redemption but fall short except Christianity.

Restoration: How now shall we live? The cultural commission and the believer's role in restoring culture.¹

Richard A. Dryness also embraces and teaches the typical model. He places the creation first in the Christian worldview. Hence, he makes the Lord's obligation to the creation foundational for redemption and for Christian work in culture. In *The Earth is Gods: A Theology of America Culture*, Richard A. Dryness expresses this methodology in crystal terms. "We want to stress the significance not only of the story that God sent Christ to bring about salvation, but the other side of this truth as well: that this sending was expressive of a previous commitment to creation that is inviolable."² Acknowledging God's commitment to creation as a "previous commitment" to the sending of His Son to bring about salvation clearly places such a commitment ahead of redemption. It makes creation initial in a Christian philosophy of life and redemption *ancillary*.³

Not only is CFR a useful referent for Christian worldview studies, but also it has become the standard model for thoughtful reflection on such studies. Herman Bavinck,⁴

¹ This material comes from Al Wolter's syllabus, Session 6: Restoration—How Now Shall We Live? <http://www.derwoodbiblechurch.org/files/ACE/Worldview%20Class/Session%206%20Restoration-How%20Now%20Shall%20We%20Live.pdf> (accessed June 18, 2009).

² William A. Dryness, *The Earth is God's* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 15.

³ By "ancillary" we do not wish to say that redemption is less significant to Dryness. The reference is to the chronological order of creation and redemption in the Christian worldview.

⁴ See Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Baker Academic; reprint, 1999).

Chuck Colson,⁵ John Piper, John M. Frame,⁶ and neo-evangelical Paul K. Jewett⁷ join Wolters and Dryness in their acknowledgement of CFR as regulatory of the Christian worldview.

In his excellent and enduring work, *Creation Regained*, Wolters provides a sustained examination of CFR, in which he also examples the quintessential position of creation. One of the strengths of Wolters' work when it first appeared was to correct dualistic thinking⁸—a flawed view of creation that had largely infiltrated evangelical thinking—and that continues to do so today. In expanding upon the uniqueness of the reformational (integral) worldview over and against the dualistic worldview, he properly observes,

Another way is to say that its characteristic features are organized around the central insight that “grace restores nature”—that is, the redemption in Jesus Christ means the *restoration* of an original good creation. (By nature I mean “created reality” in these contexts.) In other worlds, redemption is re-creation. If we look at this more closely, we can see that this basic affirmation really involves three fundamental dimensions: the original good creation, the preservation of that creation through sin, and the

⁵ Colson's creational views are expressed in *Developing a Christian Worldview of the Problem of Evil* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999).

⁶ John M. Frame also accents to CFR in *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 242, 272.

⁷ See Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1991).

⁸ In the history of theology and philosophy dualism has been expressed in a number of different ways, including Plato's separation between the material thing and the ideal form, the Gnostic depreciation of the material realm in favor of salvation through esoteric knowledge, Thomas Aquinas' nature/grace schema, Martin Luther's “two kingdoms” view, Descartes' mechanical philosophy/theology, the view of Wittgenstein that religious language need not be True truth, and the mental split in post-modern thought between individualism and multiculturalism. The common vernacular in modern evangelicalism is to speak of the “sacred/secular” distinction. In each case the danger is to devalue nature in favor of spiritual or higher things, which leads to neglect of the Cultural Mandate of the Bible (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). For a strong statement contra the sacred/secular distinction, see pages 11-12 of *Creation Regained*.

restoration of that creation in Christ. It is plain how central the doctrine of creation becomes in such a view, since the whole point of salvation is then to salvage a sin-disrupted creation. What must be avoided here is the view that grace includes something in addition to nature, with the result that salvation is basically “noncreational,” supercreational, or even anticreational. In such a view, whatever it is that Christ brings over and above creation belongs to the sacred realm, while the original creation constitutes the secular realm.⁹

We would be bereft not to acknowledge the rather large contributions Wolters’ book does make in helping Christians reconsider long held misconceptions. An additional strength of his work is his excellent distinction between *structure* and *direction*. By this, he distinguishes Christian philosophy and Christian theology. He says that Christian philosophy is a comprehensive scientific discipline that deals with key concepts having to do with the structure of things, while Christian theology is a comprehensive scientific discipline that focuses on the direction of things, including the age-old problem of evil and its cure. He then carefully particularizes what structure and direction are concerned with. “Christian philosophy looks at creation in the light of the basic categories of the Bible; Christian theology looks at the Bible in the light of the basic categories of creation.”¹⁰ According to Wolters, Christian worldview is different from the both philosophy and theology inasmuch as it deals comprehensively with *both* the structure

⁹ Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2nd ed., 2005), 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11. Parenthetically, while I am not adverse to these categorical differences, both Christian philosophy and theology maintain interest in the structure of things and the direction of things; indeed both take into close consideration the categories of the Bible and the categories of creation. The real difference is seen in degrees of emphasis, not in dichotomy.

and the direction of things.¹¹ Since a detailed examination of his ideas on structure and direction would take us too far afield, we simply note that structure and direction are “shorthand notation”¹² for CRF.

Though Wolters reverses the angel from which philosophy and theology pursue knowledge, creation remains the constant object of knowledge. Wolters’ postulation thus solidifies creation in a hierarchical situational position in Christian philosophy and theology.

The didactic prototype of CFR¹³ is in fact so firmly rooted in the literature and in the thought of Christians committed to a world and life view that Dr. John Piper can preach a sermon from John 3:1–10 and find in this recording of Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus a metaphor for creation, fall, redemption, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ One Christian artist has even dedicated a musical composition to CFR.¹⁵ All of this underscores the extent to which CFR is the colored glasses through which the vast majority of culture-minded Christians view their world.

A cursory account of the traditional worldview prototype

An overview description of CFR begins with the fact that God created the earth. But then God’s good creation was disrupted by the fall, after which God cursed the original man, the woman, and also the non-rational creation. Nature, like mankind, is thus in a

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Ibid., 87.

¹³ For the sake of this writing I will use CFR rather than CFRR with the understanding that, biblically, redemption and restoration are so very close in meaning that to press any differences between the two words would be redundant and not within the scope of this paper.

¹⁴ http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1984/424_Creation_Fall_Redemption_and_the_Holy_Spirit (accessed June 30, 2009).

¹⁵ One can hear “Creation, Fall, Redemption: An Oratorio for Orchestra and Choir” by Marko Miladinovich at <http://www.markorama.com/CreationFallRedemption.html> (accessed June 30, 2009).

state of decay, deterioration, pain, and futility. Redemption is a restoration of the elect and eventually of the lower creation. CFR often includes a linear and purposeful view of history—the idea that history is going somewhere—achieving an end that God has ordained and that he is empowering. Hendrikus Berkhof notes the relevance of a teleological view of history in the Christian cultural construct.

Although the Reformers were afraid of sectarian interpretations, they, like the Middle Ages, were convinced that history moves between the fall and completion, that Christ is the centre of this, that we are involved in the struggle between him and evil, and that he will gain the victory in that struggle. This view of history has for centuries been typical for Europe; indeed, it made Europe, and gave seriousness and direction to the actions of Europeans.¹⁶

With this epigrammatic survey before us, CFR helps us to answer three universal questions that extend to all areas of collective, human life. *Creation*—“Where did we come from?” *Fall*—“What went wrong?” *Redemption*—“What is the solution to mankind’s ills?” These questions provide a valuable context for reflection upon our given cultural situations and how we can best arrive at solutions to their malaises. They are particularly valuable insofar as they prompt us to contemplate the reciprocal relationship between the fall and redemption. For if the fall affected the whole of creation, similarly then we can expect redemption to affect the whole of creation. CFR thus encourages us to view redemption not as some vacuous, sibylline spirituality, but as cosmic with the promise of intelligible and tangible results for both man and the concrete realm he

¹⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 23-24.

occupies. The creation theologian therefore wants to frame cultural and social questions like this. If creation is an object of redemption (post-fall), then how can we bring all aspects of creation under the Lordship of Christ?

This last question is summaric of the universal questions posed by CFR. The import of the question is such that we are genuinely indebted to creation theologians, such as Al Wolters, who have drawn our attention to the mutual reciprocity of the completeness of the fall and the cosmic scope of redemption. As a self-proclaimed *redemption theologian*, the implications of the mutuality play a singularly important role in my own deliberations on culture. Thus, there is much that unites me with creation theologians, including a common cause. It is for this reason that this paper is not a total rejection of a wrong-headed approach; a complete departure from Scripture. In fact, nothing in this paper seeks to address the error of dualistic thinking, as creation theologians have answered that challenge so effectively. The following material presents an opportunity to rethink, or better yet, to round out, a familiar paradigm. Whether this demands a restructuring of the paradigm is another question. We contend that a restructuring is needed for the reason that RCFR makes up for those areas where CFR is simply incomplete. Should one be averse to reorganizing the traditional model, one should at least incorporate the following biblical/theological emphases into CFR.

In what ways is CFR incomplete?¹⁷

¹⁷ The following analysis is not exhaustive, but represents a first effort at advancing an older direction in worldview and cultural studies.

Redemption before Creation in the Biblical Worldview

First, the conventional paradigm of CFR is incomplete for the reason that it fails to give adequate attention to God's pre-creation activity. In Scripture redemption is the controlling factor in God's plan for his creation; expressly, between creation and redemption it is redemption that is *primary*. The old paradigmatic exemplification for Christian worldview and cultural studies, CFR, ought therefore to be adjusted to reflect a new model: redemption, creation, fall, and restoration (RCFR).

The biblical witness

That redemption is a matter of first things in the Christian worldview is axiomatic in Scripture.

The Bible expressly states,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the

times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth (Eph. 1:3-10).

It is surprising that creation theologians, especially those of the Reformed faith, overlook the cultural implications of a *prima facie* detail in the passage cited above. Paul places redemption ahead of creation in the economy of salvation. Divine election was planned by and in the Holy Trinity “before the foundation of the world” (v. 4). In keeping with this priority creation is also an *objective* of God’s rich redemption in Christ. Paul notes that redemption has as a last goal “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (v. 10), hence the final “R” in RCFR. The reference to “the things on earth”¹⁸ encompasses all things that constitute the lower creation.

Even the phrase “according to the kind intention of His will” (v. 5) underscores the deferential nature of creation to God’s redemptive purposes. The fact is that God is good and kind to his people. But let us be honest. There are bad things that happen to Christians (the problem of evil will be addressed more fully momentarily). Nonetheless, a point that can be taken from verse 5 is that we ought not to interpret the trials and tribulations of life as if God is capricious with his people. The truth is that he works both directly and contingently in and through difficulties to further his kind intentions for us. People concerned with interpreting the animations and challenges of human existence through the lens of a biblical world and life view can trust that the sovereign Lord always has in view “an administration suitable to the fullness of the times” (v. 10).

¹⁸ Here the transliterated word is *Ge*, which means the earth as a whole rather than the heavens.

Redemption, then, is not as so many creation theologians treat it: an extemporized idea in response to a fallen world. It has always been the Lord's driving aim for his creation. We could say it differently. Not only is the creation the *stage* upon which redemption is now being played out, but from the time of God's pre-creative activity to the consummation of the present age (1 Cor. 15:20-28)¹⁹ he has always intended creation to be a *recipient* of his rich redemption.

The same themes, which herald redemption as the *fons et origo* of God's plan for the present, natural world, find further expression in Paul's address to the Church at Colossae.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace

¹⁹ There is no question that most creation theologians understand the pre-creation economy of salvation in the Godhead. So when I speak of their placement of restoration subsequent to the creation, I take this fact into account. The problem with the syllabus of creation theology is that it pays little attention to the import of the implications of the economic Trinity for cultural theology.

through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Col. 1:13-20).

Here the immediate concern is Christ, the Redeemer. It is the beloved Son in whom we have forgiveness of sins (v. 14). The activity of redemption is centralized in the Redeemer who is the “firstborn of all creation” (v. 15). Creation is an intention of the Redeemer’s creative power, including its physical kingdoms (v. 16). Indeed, he is “before all things” (including creation) such that in him “all things hold together” (v. 17). The section climaxes with the annunciation of cosmic redemption in Christ, which naturally includes the physical world *in actu*, as God intends “to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (v. 20). To this point, the evidentiary power of the New Testament is clear that the cosmic scope of redemption is not merely God’s reaction to the effects of the fall, as creation theologians indicate; rather, God’s had the redemption of the creation in view since *before* the present age. It is thus redemption—not creation—that is of chief significance in the worldview paradigm.

The witness of the Old Testament is no less convincing. It is against the backdrop of the Divine decrees that we must read the pages of the Old Covenant when it speaks of creation. In the Old Testament prophets, we find the prophetic marker of the redemption of the material world from its bondage and vanity into its glorious future. For example, Isaiah, declares, “For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and the trees of the fields will clap their hands” (55:11). It has been argued that the exalted language of nature is merely

a poetical device intended to point to a spiritual truth that applies to people. There is certainly a metaphorical/prophetic constituent to the lively elicitation of nature in the Old Testament.²⁰ Nevertheless, we would be wrong to assume that nature's sole function in these cases is constrained to that of metaphor. Nature's adulation of the Lord is also to be interpreted *literally*. In Genesis 1:2, it is through the sheer act of creation that God redeems the world from darkness, makes life to appear, and causes His temple to dwell in the midst of His creation. In God's covenant with Noah he vows never again to obliterate the earth with a flood, but to postpone judgment by regulating the seasons and maintaining life according to his purposes. God does not covenant with Noah and his family only, but also with "every living creature on earth" (9:10). This covenant, though it infers God's eventual judgment upon the earth in fire, also serves as a redeeming action until the final judgment. In Genesis 3:18, because man fell into transgression, the ground is cursed. Paul says that just as believers eagerly await the redemption of their bodies, so the "anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). The singing bird, the breaking wave, and the breath-taking horizon more than *illustrate* the hope of humankind. Because all of nature *anticipates* its future liberation it too serves its Creator in adulation.

Confessional support

²⁰ Throughout the Old Testament, nature is consistently exploited to teach essential truths about redemption. Isaiah's prophecy of John's ministry is followed by a reference to the creation that in striking terms is also called to get itself ready for the anticipated arrival of the King. "Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley" (Isaiah 40: 4). The psalmist appeals to the workings of the creation to illustrate a myriad of spiritual truths, including his own need for God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1-2).

The validity of RCFR is also supported by The Westminster Confession of Faith. In the section titled, On God's Eternal Decrees, it reads,

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.²¹

According to the Confession, the holy council of God, which held its deliberations prior to the creation of the earth, God did ordain whatsoever comes to pass. "Whatsoever comes to pass" is a reference that includes all that transpires in creation, involving even the decisions of God's moral creatures, yet without doing violence to their wills or making God the author of sin. God is working out his plan in and through the concrete processes of history and human interactions—and upon all the secondary causes that work upon these. In short, all that happens on the world stage is deferential to the grand scheme of God's saving intentions. It is redemption that precedes the creation chronologically and it is redemptive history that governs the movement of history. To embrace this idea is to form the beginning of a truly "reformational worldview."

The Exiguous Nature of CFR

Second, CFR is incomplete in the sense that it is unable to provide an intellectual framework to explore the whole council of God. We must remember that CFR is an abridgment of redemptive history only, as that history is recorded in the narrative

²¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/ (accessed August 2, 2009).

portions of Scripture. In commenting on CFR, John M. Frame, points out, “One subdivision of nature is what we call history, the events of human existence. And one important subdivision of history is redemptive history, the story of creation, fall, and redemption.²² Arguably, the pre-creation plan of redemption is not narrated for us in the Bible, such as is the story of Lazarus, although it is certainly taught (e.g., Ephesians 1:4-14; Romans 8:28-30). This only points to the fact that we have made a great error in limiting the biblical worldview to the flow of redemptive history, as it is only a sector of history. General history also reveals important aspects of God and his thoughts and dealings with the creation, as do other emphases within Scripture. That is to say, we dare not confuse a biblical worldview with redemptive history. Certainly the Christian committed to the study of philosophy would not want to be limited to the plotline of redemptive history.

Our worldview ought to be broad enough as to encompass history, biblical commands, didactic areas of the Bible, wisdom literature, providence, natural law, and the plan of the economic Trinity enacted before the foundations of the world, as well as the biblical narrative of redemptive history. Not to include areas of Christian thought that go beyond the narrow scope of redemptive history is to miss the whole council of God, the very thing a biblical worldview seeks to support and to apply to our world today.

²² John M. Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 272. See his similar comment on 242 of the same book.

CFR and the Problem of Evil

Third, CFR is incomplete inasmuch as it does not provide a rigorous biblical answer to the problem of postmodern social and cultural fragmentation, or what many refer to as the problem of evil. RCFR provides a far more cogent theological context for addressing this problem than does CFR.

We are living in a postmodern age, in which many people have rejected the idea of absolute truth. Truth is now seen as the function of social/political power. The ulterior motive, or subtext, for making a truth claim is said to be the manifestation of the collective desire to control an outcome by the means of language. The postmodern perspective has been widely influential and has affected a broad array of academic areas and fields of business and government. Academicians especially want to argue in favor of the end of the modern era with its concentration on the development of society from the vantage point of scientific advance, urbanism, centralized bureaucracy, and laissez-faire capitalism. The emergent postmodern period, while not wholly rejecting the trends of the past is, nevertheless, far more concerned with identifying, and in most cases manipulating, many areas of social life, including personal relationships, economic forces, and value systems at the micro level, for the purpose of readily restructuring social and cultural hierarchies along the lines of cultural fragmentation, relativism, and globalization at the macro level.

Problematically, the program of social and cultural fragmentation has produced a corrosion of privately and publicly held values, which has left people genuinely unable to interpret the epoch in which they exist. Nowhere is this breakdown more evident than

when the problem of evil enters the public discussion. Even the most theologically astute cannot look upon the blood of innocent victims shed by religious and political extremists and the epidemic levels of AIDS and homeless children in Uganda and not struggle for a satisfactory interpretation. With only a fragmented view of reality to work with many people conclude that either God is in control of human events, but is uncaring in the face of human suffering. Or, he is not in control and is thus powerless to help. Or, he does not exist at all. The result is a decision on the part of many to embrace agnostic or atheist conclusions that only further increase confusion, alienation, and despair globally.²³

The secularist' failure

Identifying the intellectual and empirical forces leading to the present cultural fragmentation and despair is difficult. But beneath these cultural current lays idolatry of the natural world. Paul tells us that the first mark of secularism is the wholesale rejection of the worship of God in exchange for the worship of his creation. “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25). The secularist’ preoccupation with and divinization of the creation enhances in him a materialistic–centered worldview that cannot decipher adequately the reason for natural disasters and human affliction in general.

²³ As I have argued elsewhere, mapping shifts in the philosophical/theological landscape that radically altered people’s view of the world, and identifying the intellectual and empirical forces that have shaped the course of ideas, is always a bit of a subjective analysis. But I would argue that the present malaise finds a source in Kant’s Copernican Revolution, which left mankind with an unknowable, ultimate reality, a noumenal realm. From Kant’s dualism we can trace the idealism of Hegel, the divinized ego of Fichte, the socialism of Karl Marx, the defiance of Nietzsche, the pragmatism of the American philosophers and theologians, the existentialism of the French atheists, the mysticism of Wittgenstein, and the structuralism of Foucault, followed by the deconstructionist program of Lyotard and others, which is largely responsible for the intellectual crisis of fragmentation.

Denying God's sovereign activity in creation, such people look at suffering in the world and it makes no sense to them; hence, they ask the types of questions delineated above. The intellectual dilemma is intensified to the extent that a liberal, humanized conception of God is inculcated into the contemporary *weltanschauung*. When this happens, God is soon called upon to account for the paucity of the creation and the many problems associated with the cultures of the world. In other words, secular thinkers who begin with an inviolable concept of the creation inevitably impugn the omnipotence and goodness of God in the face of natural calamities.²⁴

The biblical answer

Though it is not his principle interest, in Romans, Paul provides immediate relief from the philosophical quandaries stemming from the problem of evil. He begins his letter with a God-centered worldview in which the Redeemer and his full redemption are paramount and inviolable.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:1-4).

²⁴ For this very unfortunate emphasis see William L. Rowe "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335-41.

It is only after Paul establishes the canon of redemption that he then moves to discuss the creation, its purposes according to natural theology, and the immoral manner in which fallen men treat it as an object of worship in the place of God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened (vs. 18-21).

In Romans 8, we gain God's perspective on the inconstant and often dangerous character of the creation. In his wisdom God can cause and/or permit the creation to experience catastrophes to draw his people unto himself. The nexus of this idea occurs in Paul's discussion of the doctrine of the adoption of sons, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (vs. 16-17). Here we see the close relationship between being a child of God and suffering. A proximate cause of human suffering is the unhealthy condition of the creation, which is under a Divine curse, but which also anticipates deliverance. "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in

hope...” (vs. 19-20). The prevailing human condition, though difficult, is presented as purposeful. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (v. 18).²⁵ So then, the Bible reveals a reciprocated function. The creation suffers as a result of the first man’s sin while all men suffer due to the entropic nature of the creation. More importantly; however, our sufferings serve an eternal goal: they make the earth a little dimmer and heaven a little brighter.

The capacity of earthly suffering to create in people a yearning for heaven is echoed elsewhere by Paul.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

In sum, the sections from Romans and 2 Corinthians we have briefly considered further prove not only the viability of RCFR, but also its usefulness as a cogent theological context for interpreting the purported problem of evil.

CFR comes up short

²⁵ God uses suffering to wean us from the world. A nursing mother eventually takes her child from the breast to instill independence and a desire to grow. We nurse at the breast of the world. God uses difficulty to rip us from it so that we might run to Christ. This thought is captured by the Psalmist, who poignantly declares, “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living” (Ps. 27:13).

Quite differently, CFR does not provide us a full enough theological context to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the convulsions of the creation and the tearing of the fabric of cultures—all of which are global, sustained, and endemic. In *Creation Regained*, Wolters offers some hope toward a solution for the problem of evil when he writes that theology is a “scientific discipline which focuses on the direction of things—that is, on the evil that infects the world and the cure that can save it.”²⁶ This statement wets our whistle for thoughtful reflections that can make some sense of the extremely difficult questions raised by evil in view of God’s divine government. However, a fresh consideration of the data is not provided, except for the general ideas that Jesus redeems sinners and that, as previously noted, the creation is an object of redemption (post-fall). In another of his writings, he limits his comments to say that that function of the fall is to “remind us that the fall is the cause of evil and suffering and that ignoring sin and evil does not work.”²⁷ Cursory answers of this sort prompt us to ask why it is important to distinguish theology as a scientific discipline given to deciphering the direction of things, most notably the problem of evil, without more specialized expansion of the subject of evil. Lacking from the creation-centered worldview is proper consideration of God’s pre-creation role in preparing and/or allowing the presence of corruption in the world, and how he is now using it to sanctify his church and to glorify his holy name.²⁸ CFR is

²⁶ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 11.

²⁷ Al Wolter’s syllabus, section titled, “Restoration: How Now Shall We Live?” <http://www.derwoodbiblechurch.org/files/ACE/Worldview%20Class/Session%206%20Restoration-How%20Now%20Shall%20We%20Live.pdf> (accesses June 18, 2009).

²⁸ See James 1:2-4 for this proper emphasis.

defective on these counts for the manifest reason that it says that God's first concern is the creation and his secondary purpose is redemption.

CFR and Eschatology

Finally, the worldview prototype is incomplete inasmuch as it emphasizes the restoration of all things in Christ without ample consideration given to the eschatological profile of the kingdom of God and its related truths. Previously we noted that a teleological view of history often accompanies CFR.²⁹ The problem is that proponents of the paradigm never say enough about this fact, that is, how the coming of the kingdom serves as a prescient marker of the Day when the creation will be set free from its groaning into the full realization of the adoption of sons. Because creation theologians predicate creation first they inexorably speak in terms of redemption returning things to their pre-fall state while minimizing the future benefits of God's saving acts and actions.

Again, we defer to Al Wolters.

God's redemption does not change us into something different so much as it restores into the way we were originally created. Virtually all of the words the Bible uses to describe salvation imply a return to something that originally existed. To *redeem* means to "buy back," and the image invokes a kidnapping: Someone pays the ransom and buys captive back, restoring them to their original freedom. *Reconciliation* implies a relationship torn by conflict, then returned to its original friendship. The New Testament also speaks of *renewal*, implying that something has been battered and torn, then restored to its

²⁹ See the earlier quote by Hendrikus Berkhof for this teleological emphasis.

pristine condition. Regeneration implies something returned to life after having died. As Al Wolters notes, All these terms suggest a *restoration* of some good thing that was spoiled or lost.³⁰

Wolters is right to detect the restorative power of the gospel. Words such as “redeem,” “reconciliation,” “renewal,” and “restoration” do in fact signify God’s restoration of sinners to their God-intended design. Nowhere is this fact more carefully enunciated than in a biblically-based doctrine of man that notes how Adam’s transgression has defaced the *imago Dei*, whereby righteousness, holiness, and truth were lost, but are restored in Christ through the new birth (compare Gen. 1:26-27 with Col. 1:15, 19, and Rom. 8:29 for this very point).

The expectant worldview

Nonetheless, in speaking of God’s grand design of redemption the biblical witness has as much to say about the new and future condition of the Christian as it does about his restoration to a previous condition. In addressing the power of the gospel of the kingdom in human hearts, Paul does not say that God made us the old creatures we were in Adam. He says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creature*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17, italics mine). When addressing the cosmological significance of the gospel, Paul does not look back, but forward. He speaks of it in terms of hope—with a deep and abiding awareness that man and the cosmos will at length be set free from sin, death, and travail into their glorious future (Rom. 8:18-25). Redemption does return things to an earlier state. However, the

³⁰ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 58.

foregoing Scriptures remind us that redemption also conveys *in inceptum finis est* (the beginning foreshadows the end) as well the fact that it is *proleptical* (the end times informing the present). Both the foreshadowing and the informing facets of redemption deserve a significant place in our worldview as the twin ideas draw attention to the prefatory and summary implications of the kingdom of Christ for the present age. Again, CFR regularly lessens these points.

The nineteenth-century theologians of the Dutch Reformed movement in Holland accentuated the frontward tilt of Scripture. In speaking on the relationship of the consummation of history to culture, Klass Schilder, stated,

The real value of culture does not pertain to the things produced as pieces of art and modern inventions, but in preparing, through the fluctuating tension of the process, the arena for Christ and the antichrist. And through it all God is pursuing His purpose in achieving His greatest pieces of art—namely, the triumph of the last one of His elect over the world, in the power of Jesus Christ.³¹

According to Schilder, the most prominent truth in shaping the processes of culture is not painting, architecture, literature, music, and the traditions we produce from age to age. It is the future. God is the Master Artist who, in His providential control over all things, people, and events, is at present sculpting, molding, and bending the world, preparing it for the long-expected reappearance of Jesus Christ. Every progressive movement in art, every government that flounders, every politician that is voted in, one way or another, plays a key role in God's building of a platform for the return of Christ in

³¹ Quoted in Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), 148.

power. This resolute and constructive view of God's sovereignty sees history as radically eschatological as therefore radically expectant, not just for the future but also for the present.

Likewise, Herman Ridderbos reminds us of the great eschatological import the *pleroma* (*fullness of time*) is having upon the worldwide advance of the gospel.

It is here implied therefore that history cannot meet its end before this fullness has been reached. At the same time a very close relation is clearly established between the progress and fruit of the preaching of the gospel on the one hand and the parousia of Christ on the other... Though he does not allude to this in so many words, one may certainly regard such a connection as present also in the Pauline view of history and the future.³²

Ridderbos stresses the future meaning of the "fullness of time" and its affect upon the impending advancement of the gospel, opposed to creation theologians who stress the gospel's power to return things to the way they once were. In Schilder and Ridderbos we find a view of eschatology quite different from that of creation theologians who, although they accept Scripture's eschatological contour, fail to fully estimate its meaning and scope for our current milieu.³³

³² Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 511.

³³ For further resources on the eschatological meaning of the gospel, see George Wolfgang Forell, "Justification and Eschatology in Luther's Thought?" *Church History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun., 1969), 164-174. "Eschatology and History: a Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald A. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), chapter 18.

³³ A standard work in this regard is C.C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," *Church History* 28 (1950), 25-40. This study focused upon the idea of Edwards' post-millennialism has been quite influential to other noteworthy works, which, according to Stephen J. Stein, includes Earnest Lee Tuveson's *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago,

Addressing the Critique of Barthianism

While in a conversation on the subject of this paper with a leading Italian Protestant theologian, he stated that RCFR invites the theological excesses of Karl Barth. The central concern here is that Barth's theology teaches universal redemption i.e., everyone is saved; it is just that most people do not know they are saved. Let us take some time to address this apprehension. Although it is true that redemption occupies a place of prime importance in the theology of Karl Barth, and many errors are woven into the fabric of his theology, these errors do not arise from the prevalent position of redemption in his theology *per se*, but are the result of a two-fold deficiency in Barth's view of the person of the Redeemer and of God's redemption generally.

The first deficiency in Barth's view of redemption emerges in his errant idea of Christ as *Geschichte*. It was Cornelius Van Til who showed that Barth's theology finds fertile soil in the nature–freedom scheme of Kant. In Kant's thought, the nature-freedom scheme is most evident in the realm of *phenomenon*, the world as it appears to us, and the *noumena*, the world as it really is apart from human experience. Although Barth did speak well of Kant,³⁴ he was highly critical of Kant's argument that the postulate of God arises out of morality without direct reference to moral obligation. At the same time,

London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), and Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

³⁴ Barth argues that Kant's critique of the ontological proof for God served theology well in that it made possible the limitations of natural or speculative reason so that God's self-disclosure can become the basis for theology. Barth writes, "Our consciousness of ourselves and the world, i.e. our awareness and conception of ego, and of people and things existing outside ourselves, might well be a matter of mere supposition, of pure appearance, a form of nothingness, and our step from consciousness to being a fellow fiction. It is not true that we have an immediate awareness of our own or any other reality. It is only true that we immediately suppose that we have awareness" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 345).

Barth thought he could do justice to the twin concepts of revelation and grace within a broadly Kantian framework.³⁵

Thus, there evolves the central concept of Barth's theology: Christ as *Geschichte*. The distilled essence of this idea, as Van Til sees it, is that Barth recreates the historic problem of dualism, this time between *Geschichte* (reality in its totality), and *Historie* (actual events in time and space). In Christ as *Geschichte*, the events of redemption are unchained from empirical events: time is swallowed up into eternity, resurrection is a physical event, but is first and foremost *Geschichte*, or what Van Til called an "innerworldly something."³⁶ Redemption therefore takes on a different meaning. "Thus Christ as *Geschichte* is the act of revelation whereby God is wholly revealed and wholly hidden to man. Man's faith in this act becomes participation in God's revelation."³⁷

It is at this point that redemption takes on universal overtones in Barth. He believed that Christ means to save all men, a belief that finds expression in his concept of *indirect identity*. John Frame summarizes Van Til's critique of Barth. "Jesus' being as man in his work, and that work is to save all men. His being is his *Geschichte*. In Christ as *Geschichte*, there is an 'indirect identity' between God and man. In him is revealed the

³⁵ Crucial as a backdrop to Barth's theology as it developed is the work of Immanuel Kant, and especially the neo-Kantians he studied under at Marburg. For Kant, the only basis for knowledge is the phenomena. Consequently, God is not a suitable subject for epistemology; he instead relegated God to the arena of faith. See Julian W. Ward, *A Critical Evaluation of the Epistemology of Michael Polanyi and Comparison with that of Kant* (Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, University of Manchester, 1997), 115. See also the extended discussion in S. Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism: Barth's earliest theology and the Marburg school* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7-122. Marrying this concept with the post-lapsarian noetic ramifications, ensuing in absolute estrangement from God, Barth was able to deduce that humanity is in an impossible quandary in that God is, humanly speaking, a comprehensively non-cognitive entity, and therefore, noumena. There is accordingly no natural knowledge of God (*Church Dogmatics I/2*: 257. See also Trevor Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth: Toward a Reading of His Theology* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1999) 42.

³⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 25.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

full being of God and man. Because of that indirect identity, God's grace is inherently universal."³⁸ Given this, all people's redemption is assured in Christ.

The link between Christ as *Geschichte* and universal redemption is not found in what is present in Barth's theology, but in what is missing. What is missing is the economic Trinity. Barth proceeds from the Godhead and then literally bypasses the historic doctrine to say that all of God's salvific intentions are applicable to humanity. More precisely, Jesus is always, in Barth, the *logos ensarkos* and must therefore always be conceived from eternity as the humanity of God and therefore not in any sense as the Christological economy of transcendent logos who maintains a central role in the divine decrees. Although Barth claims to leave the question of universal salvation open,³⁹ to say that Jesus is from all eternity to be conceived as the "humanity of God" and then to deny the electing purposes of God is to draw a direct connection between God's love and all humankind. In theory, nothing less than universal salvation can result, in which all humanity finds its election in Christ.

Quite clearly, one can sustain the prominence of redemption in the Christian world and life view as and not venture in to the murky waters of unorthodox teaching. One does so by affirming, among other things, the Lord's freedom in election, the central role of the economic Trinity in historical redemption, and by avoiding Barthian philosophical abstractions that lack content and result in epistemic impotency e.g., the Barthian idea

³⁸ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 361.

³⁹ See *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, 477-78.

that God is both “hidden” and “revealed.”⁴⁰ So it is on the basis of these facts that we ought to reject the criticism that a redemption–driven Christian worldview automatically invites Barthianism.

Conclusion

CFR, though it has earned a long–established place in the literature of biblical worldview and in Christian cultural studies is biblically incomplete. CFR is not wrong. It simply does not say enough. RCFR provides a fuller context to discuss and to analyze the relevance of God’s pre-creative activity, the whole council of God, the problem of evil, and the eschatological profile of the kingdom of God vis-à-vis worldview issues—with all the implications those issues brings to the work of the Church in the prevailing cultures of our world.

⁴⁰ Barth says that to claim a direct revelation of God is to place it under our control and ready for our manipulation. So the Bible merely points to the Word of God. Revelation then, in Barth, is a dynamic, unfolding event and not to be construed with a natural phenomenon. In Barth, revelation is communicated in three primary mediums: Jesus Christ, Scripture, and the proclamation of the ecclesia. For more on this idea see Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth*, 28-47.