

# KeyNote 2024—Sound the Alarm! Understanding the Times Through a Covenantal Worldview

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## Part 2 of 4

In Part 1 we considered the covenantal structure of God's relationship to man; both its political outworking in terms of the state and providential outworking in God's dealings with his people and with nations was considered. We saw that the covenant is the legal basis for God's government over men, moral and political.

We will now overview some recent history to locate where we are and understand how we arrived. In doing so we consider the larger Western context and in particular Germany of the 1930s as a case study. We then look at the landmarks of the Christian worldview and how that plays out socio-politically. This will shed light on our current position.

### Review of Intellectual History

How did we get here? To understand the present cultural crisis, and especially the health dictatorship of COVID-19, we must briefly review recent intellectual history. Only then can we appreciate not only the necessity but also the explanatory power of the Christian worldview.

It has been rightly said that if you mix politics and science, you get politics. Science is compromised. The conflation of these two in our present cultural iteration has muddied the waters. Science is not being harnessed for the stewardship of God's world but for political purposes (i.e. for social engineering).

### National Socialist Germany: a case study

In modern times National Socialist Germany of the 1930s set the precedent and is thus our greatest lesson. But will we learn? Let us consider the backstory. With Darwin's *Origin of Species* published in 1859, the German academy, especially science and medicine, of the late 1800s had been overrun by evolutionary thought. This resulted in the loss of the Judeo-Christian *imago Dei*, man created in the image of God. As the evolutionary product of time plus chance, human life was no longer considered sacred, of *inherent* value. Man was now an animal, and any value he may possess was solely utilitarian. This was undergirded by the contemporaneous (circa 1830-50s) German Higher Critical School of biblical criticism, the Tübingen School of Bauer and Strauss being the most influential. It was higher in the sense that it was beyond the normal discipline of textual criticism as the legitimate pursuit of the most accurate Greek and Hebrew texts. Rejecting the doctrine of inspiration, Higher Criticism presupposed fallible human authorship of the biblical books, rejecting traditional authorship for various hypotheses of redactors and sources and form theories. The Bible, it was claimed, was thus historically errant, marred by inaccuracies and contradictions. It was not written by the traditionally accepted authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

With this loss of biblical authority, animated by the Humanist Enlightenment of the 1700s as a rejection of the Christian narrative, the evolutionary hypothesis became dominant, arising from its roots in pagan philosophy (Anaximander, Empedocles, Lucretius). Rather than the special creation of God, man became the unguided product of natural selection and survival of the fittest. These combined factors transmuted into Social Darwinism (survival of the fittest applied to politics and social policy) and a belief in eugenics, leading to the horrific experimentation upon the mentally and physically disabled, the Nazi breeding farms for propagation of the Aryan race, and the death camps of the final solution (see Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany*).

Greasing the downgrade into modern Western thought was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His ideas produced the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the contemporary cultural zeitgeist. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* signalled a Copernican revolution for epistemology (the study of knowledge: how we know we know).

He divided knowledge into two separate fields: the *phenomenal* and the *noumenal*. For Kant, knowledge did not come from the data of the external world (*phenomenal*) impressing itself on the mind (as per the rationalists and empiricists), but rather from the mind (*noumenal*) impressing itself on the external world. As Schopenhauer, also a German philosopher and champion of Kant, declared, “The world is my idea”. In other words the world is what I choose to think it is. Thus Kant’s ideas heralded a radical intellectual autonomy for Western thought; and is the basis, for example, of gender-fluid thinking and activism—‘my reality’ or ‘my truth’ overrules that of the external world of biological fact.

Kant’s project, however, was an attempt to rescue both science and religion from the Enlightenment. Science answered to the *phenomenal* category and religion the *noumenal*. Thus, science (*phenomenal, nature*) and religion (*noumenal, freedom*) became a dualism that was dichotomous, a contradiction.

Religion (*freedom*) is the upper story and science (*nature*) the lower. Even so, faith (*noumenal*) remains radically intellectually autonomous. It is not grounded in historical events or objectively verifiable propositions of truth in the external world (*phenomenal*), as is the Bible. Christianity was thus denied a foundation in fact. Faith for Kant, instead, consists of categories imposed on reality by the human mind. For Kant this consisted of pragmatic ethics and a works-based religion. All the same, the upper story in Kant’s system is devoid of structure and, hence, reduces to nothing. It is ultimately unknowable. Consequently the human mind forms the world out of nothing. Furthermore God becomes unknowable, leading to Kierkegaard’s “leap of faith” and existential theology. With the foundation of Scripture destroyed, on the whole Christians now look to the Bible for devotional comfort, but not intellectual content. Existential experience therefore trumps propositional truth and Christianity is without a reasoned defence.

Science, on the other hand, in the lower story is now bereft of certainty. The upper story provides no structure for it. There is no Creation or Providence undergirding the natural world. Hence, the uniformity of natural law is reduced to a probability. Knowledge, therefore, through empirical investigation (evidence based on experimentation and observation) in the lower story (*nature*) ends in scepticism. Both science and religion are destroyed.

This dualism was Kant’s ground-motive, replacing the Greek *form-matter* and Aquinas’ *nature-grace* ground-motives with *nature-freedom*. Whereas the ground-motive of Scripture is *creation-fall-redemption*. These three philosophical dualisms all failed to reconcile *universals* (upper story) and *particulars* (lower story), the age-old philosophical dilemma of the *One and the Many*. In other words, they are dichotomies; the upper story and lower do not cohere. The field of knowledge remains divided. The philosophers were unable to draw a circle of truth providing a unified field of knowledge. It is only the biblical worldview of *creation-fall-redemption* that provides it. And more particularly, only the revelation of the Triune-God – *the three in one* – that unifies the divided field of knowledge, the dilemma of the *One and the Many*. Only in Christ do the *universals* and *particulars* cohere: “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph. 1:9–10). Rather than a Copernican revolution, Kant’s ideas were just another suppression of the revelation of God to man.

As a result the West is drowning in an ocean of scepticism and existentialism; with *rationalism* as her starting point she has ended in *irrationalism*. Rather than saving both science and Christianity, they are destroyed by Kant’s divided field of knowledge. Because this separation is contrary to God’s ordination of reality, it is nothing other than hyper-rationalism, of modern man’s arbitrary and autonomous mind. This therefore explains the irrationality of the contemporary zeitgeist (e.g. arbitrary self-identification of a gender contrary to biological sex). Add to this Nietzsche’s nihilism – his ‘beyond good and evil’ and ‘will to power’ – and you have the final ingredient for today’s amoral statist tyranny. It was sufficient for Hitler.

But the real *coup de grâce* for Germany was the German church’s adoption of the ‘Two Kingdom’ theory, which is again current in many evangelical circles (see Alec Ryrie, *Two Kingdoms in the Third Reich*). This purports that God has two separate kingdoms, one for the church and another for the world. God’s law (the Bible) applies to the church but man’s law (natural law) to the world—a dualism if there ever was. This effectively castrated the church in Germany, robbing her of any prophetic voice to the state based on the Bible as God’s law-word. The church was therefore helpless in confronting Hitler and the slide into tyranny. Ideas have consequences, and our current cultural iteration is one of them. Rationalism always leads to irrationalism. The health dictatorship of COVID-19 is not occurring in a vacuum.

So, if we are to see things in their true light we must discover how to think, and for us as believers, how to think ‘Christianly’. Or as Johannes Kepler put it, to “think the thoughts of God after him”. How we interpret or read things depends on the lenses through which we perceive them. Our lens can either be the precision lens of the biblical worldview or the distorted lens of a

secular-humanist culture and its false constructs of reality. Now here is the crux of the issue: these lenses are totally antithetical. Jesus said, “he who is not with me is against me” (Mt 12:30). In other words, we live in a moral universe governed by God in which there is no neutrality. The assumed neutrality, therefore, of reason and its children, secularism and the secular state, is a myth. Neutrality in a moral universe is a *non sequitur*.

### **Landmarks of the Christian Worldview**

The landmarks of the Christian worldview demonstrate this. They are—Creation, Fall, Redemption. This biblical model delivers explanatory power for the world that exists. It shows that the world, created by God, has both structure and direction. For example, the individual person, the family, the church, and the state are all creational structures and hence covenantal. God the Creator relates to man covenantally. And as the God-ordained steward of the created order, man engages with these structures in one of two antithetical ways: either as a *covenant-breaker* or as a *covenant-keeper*.

This then plays out either in a *decreational* direction (covenant-breaking) through the Fall, or in a *recreational* one (covenant-keeping) through Redemption. By *decreation* is meant structures as perverted by sin. And by *recreation* is meant the restoration of a given structure through redemption in Christ. As God-created structures they are inescapable and inherent, they are integral to reality and non-negotiable. They can be denied or distorted but not destroyed. The totality of human existence is governed by man’s response to these structures. Everything that exists, therefore, is susceptible to distortion and in need of renewal. Physical, social, moral, and spiritual structures can therefore work *for* man or *against* him, for blessing or curse, depending on whether they are engaged through the Fall or Redemption, through covenantal obedience or disobedience.

### **Decreation and the Fall**

Man’s Fall was, hence, an act of *decreation*, a denial of God-created categories (structures), headquartered in the Creator/creature distinction. These two categories – Creator and creature – are fundamental to reality. The attempted erasure of this distinction (structure) is integral to all unbelief and to every apostate culture and worldview. Our first parents, presuming the neutrality of reason, stood over God’s law-word as judge and jury, deciding for themselves between two supposed hypotheses: God’s communication versus Satan’s counter-communication (Gen. 3)—their autonomous perception of what was, in fact, God’s command versus Satan’s counter-command. Thus deceived, they became, in their view, autonomous – their own ultimate authority – and hence erased the Creator/creature distinction. They became would-be gods, just as the serpent had promised (Gen. 3:5). The myth of neutrality was born—the neutrality of autonomous-man and of reason, of man as judge, the sole determiner of what is true.

With the Creator and creature now fused into one mystic whole, the pagan worldview is essentially panentheistic, the notion that God interpenetrates the world of matter. This then obscures the delineation of God’s transcendence and immanence. In fact, for man, dislocated from the one transcendent Creator-God, divinity becomes immanentistic; bound by space, time, and matter. Hence, the Greek gods were merely deified men, subject to the lusts and foibles of a corruptible humanity. All distinctions of Creator and creature are blurred, with nature, man, and his corporate expression in the state divinised in a mystic union. As an aside, this panentheistic worldview undergirds contemporary environmentalism, which, significantly, originated as a movement in National Socialist Germany of the 1930s (see R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust*).

But because the Creator/creature distinction is inescapable the fallen creature hears the echo of eternity and, in imitation of the Creator/creature distinction, bifurcates – and hence fragments – reality into a *spirit-matter* dualism.

In this view, matter is inherently evil, occupying the lower story of the duality. However, to escape the world of matter, to be reabsorbed into the divine, man must ascend into the realm of spirit through various levels of secret initiation. Known as the ‘chain of being’, this is common to all forms of Gnosticism, ranging from the ancient Near Eastern civilisations to Greece and Rome. Imitating the ancient Near East, Rome’s emperors not only governed politically but also religiously as the high priest of the emperor cult, as Pontifex Maximus. The king-priest of antiquity was the mediator in the chain of being between the evil world of matter and the divine. This gnostic and dualistic worldview was inherited by the church through Greek philosophy – Neoplatonism – outworking in the dualism of *secular/sacred* and *clergy/laity*, reducing it to another gnostic cult.

While common to all unbelief and apostate cultures, autonomous-reason had its apotheosis in classical Greece – the age of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – and after the rise of Christendom (Christ’s Kingdom or Domain) experienced a resuscitation in

the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. And hence, dominates the modern era. The Enlightenment – rationalism, empiricism, existentialism – thus signalled the apostasy of the West, of both church and culture. We are now 300 years into this downgrade and travelling at breakneck speed.

### ***Decreation and Politics***

This has political manifestations. Culture and society can only move in one of two antithetical directions: *decreation* or *recreation*. The rebellious autonomy of our first parents immediately replicated in the direction of society. Rather than dispersing to fill the earth in obedience to the Dominion Mandate (Gen. 1:26-28), consequent to the Fall autonomous-man, in rebellion against God, moved east of Eden to build Babel under history's first dictator, Nimrod (Gen. 4:16; 10:8-12; 11:1-9). Since the Fall the direction of every apostate culture is toward *decreation* and, by the nature of the case, centralised power. Authoritarian control inevitably arises to arrest the fragmentation caused by man's dislocation from the Creator/creature relationship. Hence, the ground-motive of politics is that of building towers to heaven, to ironically recover Paradise without God. This urge to Paradise is basic to every humanistic political ideology. Every civilization from Mesopotamia, to Persia, Egypt, Greece and finally Rome was driven by this urge (see Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*). As mentioned earlier, with their god-king the power-state served as the mediator between the human and the divine, promising, with each new king, the good life—heaven on earth, a divinised new world order of peace and prosperity.

But man's quest for godhood instead rendered him a rebel and a slave to sin. After the nature of the case, those who are themselves spiritually dead and enslaved to sin can only produce systems of death and slavery. Hence, the dictatorships of antiquity. Apostate cultures inevitably result in the institutionalised devaluing of man; thus Rome's practice of the exposure of infants (after birth abortion) and of slavery. The beast-like nature of the pagan power-state is thus dramatically symbolised in Daniel and Revelation.

### **The Dominion of Sin versus the Dominion of Righteousness**

This dominion of sin controlled every political order for millennia until at the climax of history the promised seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the Son of man, came as Messiah and Mediator between God and man, to be the "Ruler of the kings of earth" (Rev. 1:5). As the firstborn of the new humanity (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18), he terminated the old order of the dominion of sin and death to inaugurate the new. Both orders are solidarities with covenant heads: Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:17). And both have socio-political implications.

For this reason the early Christians were quickly confronted with the question of who was lord: Christ or Caesar—God or the state. This is evident in Peter's defence before the Sanhedrin, appropriating for the Gospel the proclamation of the emperor cult that "...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). The emperor cult heralded Caesar as the Saviour of the world and his Advent as the birth of a new world order. There is, therefore, according to Peter's counter-proclamation, no salvation through politics (i.e. Tiberius Caesar), but only through the legitimate Governor of nations, the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason the Christians refused to become a *licit* religion. Rome practiced religious toleration, welcoming new religions into their pantheon of gods, if Caesar was recognised as lord. Martyrdom therefore was a political phenomenon. The messianic state is thus a pretender to God's Throne, to the absolute authority that is exclusively his. Thankfully the early Christians passed their test of faith, refusing to bow to any other than Christ as lord. The Christian Gospel is, therefore, inescapably political. Christianity is a public faith and is declared openly in the public square with political claims.

### **Christ's Dominion and *Limited* Government**

This injected into human history the notion of *limited* government, fulfilling the prototype of ancient Israel as a free nation under God; of civil government not as absolute but as servant of Messiah, who possesses all dominion and authority, "... who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords". (1Tim. 6:15). Christ's redeeming work and enthronement established his Messianic government over the cosmos, which is executed through the preaching of the Gospel and obedience to biblical law. His dominion is one of freedom from the tyranny of sin and, hence, of righteousness and justice, which demands the rule of God's law among men. However, Christ's dominion is delegated through a plurality of governments, i.e. through four covenantal spheres: the individual, the family, the church and the state (see Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*). The biblical principle of sphere sovereignty was first articulated by Abraham Kuyper, prime minister of the Netherlands, theologian, and founder of the Free University of Amsterdam. Each sphere is

sovereign and accountable to Christ and his law-word, which defines and delimits each's role. No sphere may usurp another by encroaching upon its biblically defined role. The moment one sphere usurps the role of another there is a tyranny. Because God delegates his authority through a plurality of spheres the state is not absolute.

With the collapse of Rome, the Kingdom of God emerged as a new world order, and eventually externalised culturally in Christendom and Western civilization, with its laws rooted in the Ten Commandments; for example, Alfred the Great of England (circa AD 800) codified God's law as the basis of English common law. However, despite the further advance of the Reformation and its quest for a more apostolic Christianity, a great apostasy occurred with the so-called Enlightenment, producing the modern era. From the Christian perspective though, one of "endarkenment".

### **The Modern State: an anti-Christian fact**

The emergence of the modern state is thus a religious and anti-Christian fact. The shift from multiple forms of government (e.g. the family, the church, the medieval guild, feudal lords, and the state etc) to the consolidation of power solely in the state was a religious one. Such that today when the term 'government' is referenced, it immediately connotes *civil* government. As Greek thought was revived through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the pagan doctrine of the state was introduced into European thought. Rejecting the biblical narrative of the state as ordained by God, with authority delegated and delimited under Christ, entailing a mandate to enact his ethical standard of God's righteous laws (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Mt. 28:18-20), the Enlightenment conceived of the state as humanly contrived, the so-called 'social contract'. Rather than in God, the state now originates in autonomous-man as a citizen, who delegates his sovereignty to it.

Consequently, as the child of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution then served as the political faultline demarcating the modern era from the medieval. It is unique in human history as the only anti-Christian revolution, set to overthrow Christianity and the Christian monarchies of Europe (see Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*). It thus divides political history and doctrine between the medieval Christian state and the modern secular-humanist state. Hence, the Russian Revolution followed suit by assassinating the Tzar and his family and the overthrow of his government, despite the Tzar's commitment to reform. Even so, prior to this, in the mid 1800s Europe had erupted in a spate of revolutions overthrowing the Christian monarchies. Every modern state, apart from a self-conscious re-establishment of the 'Christian state', is a child of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution. The modern state is thus revolutionist, founded in the absolute sovereignty of autonomous-man in rebellion against God. This then entails the myth of neutrality, of autonomous-reason and its handmaiden the secular state.

### **Summary Conclusion**

In summary, to understand our cultural moment and the relevance of a Christian worldview, we have taken a wide-angle view of recent intellectual history, ranging from the Enlightenment to Darwinism and Modernist theology. Using Germany as a case study, we have considered the role of Darwinism, the Higher Critical School of biblical criticism, the Enlightenment, and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in particular.

We have then considered the landmarks of the Christian worldview – Creation, Fall, Redemption – discovering that there are only two directions for mankind—*recreation* or *decreation*, either covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking.

We saw that the fountainhead of every apostate culture is our first parent's response to the Creator/creature distinction. We then explained the Fall as man opting for autonomous-reason, which engages with four covenantal spheres – the individual, family, church, and state – in a *decreational* direction. Rooted in the dislocation of the Creator/creature distinction and man's usurpation of godhood we have considered the nature of unbelief and its dualistic worldview.

We have then seen how that plays out in politics with the resuscitation of the pagan power-state. Through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, Europe and the West turned its back on God and returned to pagan Greece.

In conclusion, the West's apostasy has resulted in the loss of its ability to think and of liberal democratic values and liberties. This has been consummately manifested in the medical tyranny of COVID and the homosexual agenda of gay-marriage and gender-fluidity. Even so, the 26 bullet points of Part 1 provides the wider 'progressive' agenda.

In view of all that has been adduced above, so-called 'progressives' are in fact 'regressives', returning to the wrong side of

history—to a pagan totalitarian dystopia.

We have not arrived at the ‘crazies’ by accident!

Part 3 will consider more impacts of the Fall and the malfeasance status of the modern state.

Read: [Part 1 | KeyNote 2024—Sound the Alarm! Understanding the Times Through a Covenantal Worldview](#)

Read: [Part 3 | KeyNote 2024—Sound the Alarm! Understanding the Times Through a Covenantal Worldview](#)

Read: [Part 4 | KeyNote 2024—Sound the Alarm! Understanding the Times Through a Covenantal Worldview](#)

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