

11/21/09 - Against the Self-Secularization of European Christianity

This is my foreword in the German edition of: David A. Noebel. Understanding the Times ? The Collision of Today's Competing Worldviews (Kampf um Wahrheit ? Die bedeutendsten Weltanschauungen im Vergleich. 504 pp. Resch-Verlag: Gäfeling, ISBN 978-3-935197-41-0).

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God?this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is?his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-2)

Paul calls upon Christian to continually let themselves be "transformed" by "renewing" their thinking (Romans 12:2). That is the only way for the Christian to avoid being conformed to the Zeitgeist, or the spirit of the age (Romans 12:1). For that reason, the Zeitgeist is not something that is found ?out there in the evil world,' but rather in our minds. Only those who are consistently prepared to conduct self-critiques of what the standards are that they are employing in their thinking, and where they lead, can change their thinking and with that, their actions. Peter calls upon Christians to be prepared to give a response to all those who ask them to give an account (2 Peter 3:14-17). Only those people who first give an account to themselves, and thereafter are ready to invest time in understanding the intellectual edifice that others possess, are in a position to sensibly answer the questions of adherents of other worldviews.

At the time of National Socialism the comparison of worldviews was so little developed that many people were not aware of the fact that Hitler, when he purposely referred again and again to the fact that God had created the world for a battle between the races, was defining and configuring all areas of live completely differently than within the Christian faith and within democracy. Many Christians knew their own worldview too little (e.g., the consequences of belief in a Creator who was not partial, even with respect to the most distant ramifications in social life) and as well spent too little time coming to fundamentally understand other worldviews, to answer them, or by disclosing their contents to warn about them. North America and Europe are indeed closely tied on the basis of cultural history. Yet religiously and on the basis of their worldviews, they are certainly growing

further apart. Europe, in spite of the fact that there has been some recent reignited Christianity in the wake of the worldwide threat of Islamic terrorism, is on the whole still becoming increasingly Dechristianized. This is visible via the disinterest individuals demonstrate as well as via legislative measures. In the USA, on the other hand, Christianity in the USA is experiencing a new bloom. In the USA, religion as expressed in the form of a 'civil religion,' has always had a firm place in politics and in the public eye. And this is in spite of the fact that there is a strict separation of church and state in contrast to Central Europe. The presently strong growth in religious life, for instance the strengthening of Evangelicals among Caucasians and Afro-Americans and of the Catholic Church among Latinos, is, for better or for worse, again making Religion a politically meaningful factor. In this connection what is unfortunately overlooked is that the various atheistic schools of thought are better organized and in the public sphere are significantly more aggressive. Furthermore, their distinct confession is much more evident.

In the USA, worldview discussions are more prominently conducted in public than here in Europe. One thinks, for example, of the discussion surrounding evolution or creation, or, as the case may be, 'intelligent design.' Debates that are geared towards the media between leading professors and before fully packed lecture halls are widespread at American universities. In the process Christians discuss with atheists, Catholics with Protestants, Muslims with Christians, evolutionists with creationists, opponents of abortion with proponents of abortion, socialists with capitalists, opponents and proponents of capital punishment, and many, many more. For this reason the comparison of religions and worldviews is the topic of many publications, while we in Europe shy away from direct confrontation and favor monographs or lobbying and infiltration of institutions in order to propagate a worldview. For such comparisons one has to start with some specific conception of a worldview. If one wants to compare Islam and Christianity, given all the inevitable differentiation, one has to just formulate some sort of typical position on both sides. This makes the comparison more manageable and distinct. That surely has the disadvantage that the actual everyday life of the millions of followers might possibly look somewhat different. On the other hand, the excessive differentiation in Europe often leads to a situation where no actual comparison takes place and, with respect to central questions, everything becomes arbitrary and is over-discussed.

If with this book one wants to take a US classic in terms of worldview comparisons and make it accessible for European and German readers, then this background needs to be kept in mind. At the same time one has to bear in mind that the

positions are in part documented with American authors and texts as well as with German 'classics', eg when it comes to the fathers of Marxism. However, there are texts referred to that, while they are available in Germany, are not as aggressively disseminated as confessional texts as they are in the USA. Examples include Humanist Manifestos.

What for the German reader might seem more novel is to publicly avow one's own worldview, in particular when it does not have to do with an official religion. I would like to demonstrate this using the example of the three Humanist Manifestos, which the author uses as a basis for the presentation of secular humanism. Naturally, this form of humanism is also widespread in Germany, but its organized form is small in numbers. This means that it remains a rather private mindset, which one does not necessarily publicly and stridently confess. Additionally, it is found among people who officially are aligned with other worldview or religious groupings, for which reason one often finds numerous hybrid forms. Christianity is often rarely unrecognizable when compared to its 'opponents'. That is a fact that the highest representative of Protestantism in Germany, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, with respect to his own history aptly described as 'self-secularization'.³ Worldview opponents of Christianity frequently function within the churches, and devout Christians often instead find that their field of activity lies outside of the big churches. For this reason the line of separation we find between worldviews here in Germany is optically less apparent.

The Protestant theologian Helmut Thielicke defines 'worldview' in his *Theological Ethics* as follows: "With worldview we understand the attempt to subsume all worldly phenomena under a final subject matter, that, as a theory of everything, provides those phenomena with meaning. With this, all areas of life are brought down to a common denominator, regardless of whether one is speaking about understanding history, nature, science, or art."⁴ Even though Thielicke defines worldview as distinct from religion, religions have precisely the same function. The only difference is that the final 'topic' in religion is transcendent nature. There something is chosen which stands over the world as the final fixed point and is personified more or less according to the type of religion.

Worldviews emanate in all the directions of the various areas of life. This is for the most part more apparent to Americans than it is to Europeans. However, this applies in Europe and Germany just as it does overall. This book helps to think through the consequences for all segments of society and science on the basis of a range of important worldviews. This moves one away from what are mostly

diversionary discussion ? discussions of minor problems in place of discussions the major presuppositions lying behind them -, which we in Germany love. Namely, we often discuss very intensively in detail, without disclosing that different consequences arise from completely different presuppositions. The worldviews of most German politicians remain a secret and it is preferred to act as though their suggestions and basic approaches are based on pure reflection and a knowledge of the facts. In reality most politicians just implement their worldview, which is all the more easily done, depending on how little they name their worldviews and have to justify them. I wish for all readers that they with Paul will self-critically reflect upon their own thinking, compare this with the comprehensive outlines of other worldviews, and then work out an elaborate foundation for their life and act accordingly.