

Worldview, Worship, and Way of Life How Worship Helps Us See the World

Introduction

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end. Alleluia, Amen.*

There are three sets of questions that the title of this talk evokes. Let me try to state them as succinctly as possible. First of all, what doctrinal guidance and influence should a Christian worldview have on the content and character of the corporate worship of the church? How can and should the church's biblically-based, all-embracing vision of life inform the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments in the church's worship?

Second, in turn, how might the totality of the church's worship embody and manifest a scripturally-based, comprehensive account of the cosmos and human existence? How should the liturgy (of whatever kind) inform and shape the essential consciousness and worldview of the Christian community? How should worship help us better understand God, the universe, our world, and ourselves? How should it also articulate the unique identity of the church as well?

Finally, what is or should be the compelling influence of both worldview and worship on the spiritual and moral formation of believers and their way of life in the world? In what way might worldview-based worship be the heart of the church's *paideia* (education/training) in transforming the thought-styles, desires, and habits of believers into a God glorifying Christ-likeness? What epistemic assumptions and kind of pedagogy make such transformation possible, so that believers become "constituted differently."¹ These questions address matters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and are of great consequence for God's kingdom, church, and glory.

¹ Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship at the Heart of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), p. 102.

An historic way of discussing this dynamic trilogy of worldview, worship, and way of life is found in the classic, ecclesiastical terms of *Lex credendi* — the rule/law of belief, *Lex orandi* — the rule/law of prayer, and *Lex agendi* — the rule/law of action or practice. At the core of this celebrated discussion has been the question of the priority of the first two of these elements — belief or prayer — and the relationship of both of these to the third — on action and practice. In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, that priority has been given to prayer or worship and the formula has read ***Lex orandi est lex credendi et agendi***, that is, the rule/law of prayer is the rule/law of belief and action.² Prayer or worship is the source of belief and right behavior. In biblical language, the sequence is this: “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34: 8). A worship emphasis looks like the following:

Worship \implies **Worldview + Way of Life**

On the other hand, by attributing supreme authority to God’s Word (*Sola Scriptura*), the Protestant tradition has sought to exercise biblical or doctrinal control over both worship and way of life, and has generated the essential reformational conviction that ***Lex credendi est lex orandi et agendi***, that is, the rule/law of belief is the rule/law of prayer and action. By Scripture, the church is reformed and always reforming (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*). Indeed, the Apostle Paul corrected the liturgical infidelities of the Corinthian church on doctrinal grounds by pointing out that “God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14: 33). A doctrinal emphasis may be diagrammed in this manner:

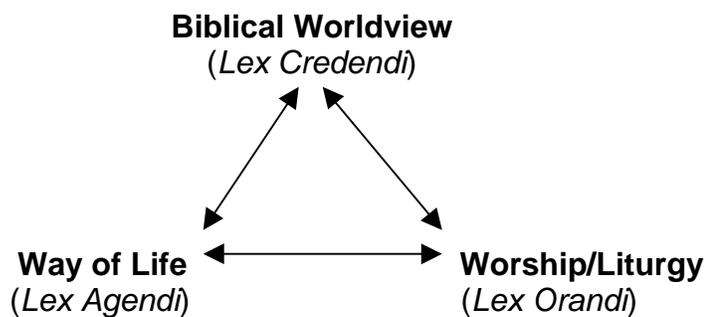
Worldview \implies **Worship + Way of Life**

These traditions — Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant — all agree that there is, or at least should be, a harmony and interplay between belief and prayer, as well as way of life. But they disagree over which of these first two should “set the

² Attributed to Pope Coelestinus or Celestine I (A. D. 422-432). See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 175.

pace,” and both emphases, it seems, contain dangers.³ The Catholic and Orthodox stress on “prayer” has resulted in questionable “beliefs” (according to some). The Protestant concentration on “beliefs” has negated “prayer” (according to others). In other words, the former liturgical tradition generates doctrinal anxieties, and the latter doctrinal tradition is liturgically deficient. Both, therefore, have something to learn from each other — respectively, the restoration of doctrinal direction to the liturgy, and the renewal of liturgical significance to doctrine⁴ — when it comes to this triad of worldview, worship, and way of life.

If I am forced to choose between these two alternatives, as a protestant, I assert my belief in the primacy of Scripture’s authority in all matters of faith and practice. Thus, I advocate that a Christian worldview or what is believed biblically and theologically (*Lex credendi*) ought to be foundational and determinative on the worship of the church (*Lex orandi*). At the same time, I affirm their reciprocal relationship, and believe that the liturgy of the church ought to manifest its biblical and theological beliefs and be expressive of a Christian vision of the world. Furthermore, I assert that a biblical worldview and form of worship are central to the formation of gospel Christians, and should have a radical impact on their way of life in the church and world (*Lex agendi*). Hence, my model is “trinitarian” in nature, involving the “perichoretic” diversity and unity of these three fundamental elements as this diagram indicates:



³ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford, 1980), p. 252.

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, “Theology and Liturgy,” in *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 145-6.

But we have some problems here. First of all, churches understand and impart only a fragment of a biblical worldview. Second, as a result, a biblical worldview is rarely on display in the churches' worship. Third, this breakdown of worldview and worship authenticity has diminished the discipleship of believers who are also encumbered, often un/subconsciously, by the deadly, idolatrous influences of contemporary culture in them and their churches.

What we need, therefore, is fresh insight into the grandeur of the biblical vision of reality, its impact on the church and in her worship, and how this renewal of vision and worship can reinvigorate the catechetical development of the saints and transform their walk in the world. We begin, then, with a look at a biblical worldview and its theological implications that may inform and guide the church as its rule or law of belief — its *Lex Credendi*.

Lex Credendi

*"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."
Apostles' Creed*

As an alternative to "worldview" definitions that are rather bookish and even uppity in tone, I propose what I believe is a biblical and more human understanding of this notion. Since in Scripture, the "heart" — in its deep connection with the human body — is the seat and source of thought, affection, volition, and worship, it seems to me that life proceeds "kardiologically," out of a vision of the embodied heart. That's what I think a worldview is: a vision of God, the universe, our world, and ourselves grounded corporally in the human heart. So conceived, worldview is not just an intellectual construct, but involves the world engaging powers of the whole person as *imago Dei* in the mysterious interplay of spirituality, thought, emotion, will, and body, focused and unified in the heart. While the whole process of worldview formation is something of an enigma, such an embodied vision is utterly determinative for every person individually, and for the course of human history collectively. It is imperative, therefore, for followers of Jesus and for the church corporately to find its cosmic

bearings through an immersion and fluency in the master narrative of the canon of Holy Scripture and its graciously revealed account of truth and reality.

From my own experience and observation, however, I detect that many churches and believers lack a cohesive, comprehensive, and holistic worldview orientation. A *bits and pieces syndrome* where biblical faith is known and experienced in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion shatters the cohesiveness I have in mind. A fundamental *disconnection between the Old and New Testaments* and its unified theological message from creation to new creation damages a needed canonical comprehensiveness. An egregious *dualism and religious compartmentalization* fracture the sacred wholeness of human existence which, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts, is the most “colossal obstacle” to genuine faith.⁵

These three problems — one illogical (bits/pieces), another un-canonical (OT/NT disconnect), and the other heretical (dualism) — are responsible for a severe diminishment of biblical faith and an impoverished ecclesiology. However, if with G. K. Chesterton, we affirm that “Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags,” just think about what it would be and do if it were mixed to full strength and filled to the brim?⁶

Is there, then, an alternative that is more maximalist than minimalist when it comes to the substance of a Christian vision and its ecclesiastical and spiritual implications? I believe that there is, and for better or worse, I call it the worldview-driven church.⁷ Churches, I propose, ought to be “driven,” that is, informed and guided by the Christ-centered metanarrative of Scripture with its fulsome themes

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 196-97; quoted in Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 16-17.

⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, ed. David Dooley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 323. He continues this thought by stating immediately afterward: “The mere minimum of the Church would be a deadly ultimatum to the world.”

⁷ The “worldview-driven church” may be an infelicitous expression, but for the time being, I will stick with this nomenclature since it suggests a “big picture” conception of the Christian faith that is universal and cosmic in scope.

of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation and their radical consequences in every department of life. In this I am striving to recover what has been known traditionally as the “catholicity” or wholeness of genuine biblical religion under the sovereignty and blessing of the triune God.

Since people rarely seem changed by routine expository preaching or moral exhortation, but might, indeed, be altered significantly by a “transformed imagination,”⁸ at the heart of my proposal is the need for a radical enhancement and grasp of God’s greatness and His larger creative and redemptive purposes for the world stirring us up at the center of our souls. Such an expanded perspective can purge our spiritual sight of the “film of familiarity,”⁹ renew our “heartset,” and enable us to picture things anew.

“Glory be!” said C. S. Lewis’s old London cabby who was turned inside out when he witnessed the founding of Narnia unexpectedly. Its unspeakably beautiful music and thousand glorious stars in the night sky shook him to the core. “I’d ha’ been a better man all my life,” he said, “if I’d known there were things like this.”¹⁰ The cabby’s imagination was affected profoundly by this new revelation, and his life would have changed drastically had the disclosure not come too late.

The church’s ministry and the lives of believers, I contend, can experience a similar kind of revolution in consciousness and conscience if and when they encounter a coherent, canonical, and holistic presentation of God and the total cosmos that transfigures the imagination and causes it “to fly beyond the stars!”¹¹

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 25.

⁹ Percy B. Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, rev.ed., gen. ed., M. H. Abrams, vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1962, 1968), p. 497. Here he is actually speaking about the effects of poetry itself, and by proxy, the imagination. Thus he adds that poetry (the imagination) can create “anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.”

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955, 1970), p. 100.

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, L’Abri Pamphlets, 1973), p. 61.

This new, expanded, vigorous “kardioptic,” or vision of the embodied heart, consists of several basic theological and ministerial components.

At the theological level, it begins with the incomparable majesty of God the Trinity and the intention to recover the church’s central purpose of worship — to glorify, love, and fear Him in order to insure that the means of the church’s ministry (e.g., evangelism and discipleship) are not substituted for her final end. *Biblically*, as we have already suggested, it recovers the church’s *whole* canonical story as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation — “the dogma is the drama,” as Dorothy Sayers said — and understands her theological identity and purpose in the world in the context of the whole counsel of God. *Christologically*, it is committed to a view of the person and work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ — the Creator and Redeemer of all things, the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 1) — in an effort to counteract the unfortunate effects of a limited, pietistic, and sentimental conception of our Savior. *Soteriologically*, it emphasizes the centrality and redemptive focus of the kingdom/reign/dominion of God in Christ in its confrontation with evil, both as a present mystery and future hope with transformative significance for the whole of life to offset the confusion and neglect surrounding this crucial theme. *Anthropologically*, it consists of an embrace of the dignity and wholeness of the human person in body and soul as God’s image and likeness in order to overturn diminished perspectives on personhood and activity, and what it means to be either male or female. *Ecclesiologically*, it maintains that Christ’s church is the new, spiritual Israel in substantial continuity with the people of God in the Old Testament from Adam to Abraham to David to Jesus, showing the unity of God’s purposes in redemptive history from creation to new creation, thus thwarting unwarranted discontinuities. *Eschatologically*, it understands the church as the community of saints upon whom the last days and the ends of the ages have already come (1 Cor. 10: 11; Heb. 1: 2), and contends that she lives “at the hyphen”¹² between present

kingdom redemption and the second advent which terminates history in resurrection and judgment and brings the descent of the new Jerusalem to the new heavens and earth where God will abide with His saints forever.

At a ministerial level, this proposal for a worldview-driven church begins with a *liturgical reinvigoration* of the ministry of Word and sacraments, and a call to consider the historic worship practices of the church (e.g., Christian calendar) as an ancient and yet fresh way of remembering God's mighty deeds and edifying believers. *Homiletically*, it encourages the church's preachers and teachers to rediscover the Christ-centered focus of Scripture (Luke 24: 27, 44), and to adopt the theological themes of creation, fall, and redemption as the guiding hermeneutical principles for interpreting and proclaiming God's Word. *Socially*, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating Christian community — serious *koinonia* or what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “life together” — as a redeemed form of human relations and alternative to contemporary uncharitable selfishness and radical individualism. *Catechetically*, it recommends the classical vision of Christian humanism as the goal of sanctification and Christian discipleship, undercutting Gnostic and legalistic interpretations of spirituality and the Christian life that tend toward dehumanization. *Vocationally*, it urges congregations to promote the biblical doctrines of giftedness and calling as the basis for service, valuing the roles and contributions of *all* believers who are making a difference in the church and the world with a resolute sense of purpose. *Evangelistically* and as the culmination of the preceding theological and ministerial components, it advocates the proclamation of the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world in the whole of life as the basis of evangelism, mission, and cultural transformation.

How utterly idiosyncratic is the church's divinely revealed account of reality! Its Trinitarian ontology, its “engraced” cosmology,¹³ its epistemology of

¹² Appropriated for a different purpose from Justo L. Gonzalez, *¡Alabadle! Hispanic Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 16, quoted in Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 164.

revelation, its distinguished anthropology, and so on establish adherents in a unique way of knowing, seeing, and being in the world. For these and other reasons, then, the church and her worldview must NOT be regarded simply as another world religion or spiritual option, but rather as a glorious new estate — a *villanova*, new city or *polis* — with a culture, form of community, and politics of her own.

At this point, my worldview church proposal intersects significantly with the work of contemporary biblical scholars, ethicists, and theologians and the escalating movement known as radical orthodoxy.¹⁴ As leaders in these disciplines point out, the church not only offers an alternative *mythos* or story (canonical gospel), a new set of rituals (Word and Sacraments), and a distinctive manner of life (cruciform discipleship),¹⁵ but also that an alternative language, history, literature, psychology, economics, aesthetics, and semiotics, etc. are essential to her constitution and countercultural vision of the world. In general, how different are the theology and practices of the biblical church to “Babylon” or the ruling “culture of seduction” in any age.¹⁶ In our day, how she stands (or should stand) in marked contrast to the prevailing assumptions of liberalism’s sovereignty of the individual, conservatism’s veneration of history and tradition, capitalism’s hope in science, economy, technology (and its therapeutic, narcissistic, hedonistic, consumerist ethos), nationalism’s deification of the

¹³ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, Radical Orthodox Series (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 115, quoted in James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, foreword John Milbank (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 122.

¹⁴ Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003), pp. 7-8, 36. Leithart explains that this understanding of the church as culture, city, nation, etc. is a common theme in recent theology as seen in “New Testament scholars (N. T. Wright, Richard Horsley, James D. G. Dunn, Krister Stendahl), systematicians (John Milbank, George Lindbeck, Oliver O’Donovan), ethicists (John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas), sociologists of religion (Rodney Stark), historians of early Christianity (Wayne Meeks), and more popular writers (Rodney Clapp, Wes Howard-Brook, Barry Harvey)...” (p. 8). For amplification on this notion, see also Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 51, 235-39.

¹⁵ Leithart, *Against Christianity*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 136. The latter phrase is Graham Ward’s, *Cities of God*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 76, quoted in Smith p. 245.

nation-state, democracy's exaltation of the sacred voice of the people, socialism's salvation in common ownership, and so on.¹⁷ The church's immersion in these divergent environments makes perception of her own theological-political identity and unique *civitas* (citizenship) difficult to discern and practice.

The question, then, is how can the church as a "third race" display in worship her revealed explanation of the world and matchless ecclesial identity through the chief liturgies of Word and sacrament, and thus shape believers as citizens of the Christian commonwealth — the *politeuma* — who bow the knee, not to Caesar, but to Christ as Lord (cf. Phil. 1: 27; 2: 9-11; 3: 20). How should the worship of the church reveal and echo this? What should it also invert and deny in the process?¹⁸ In other words, of what should the rule or law of the church's worship consist — her *Lex Orandi*?

Lex Orandi

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world, grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacrament, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that He may be known, worshipped and obeyed to the ends of the earth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

With so many worship styles abounding today — contemporary, traditional, seeker-sensitive, ethnically-focused, liturgical, postmodern, and so on — it is difficult to discern the leadership of the Holy Spirit and to know what to think about this all important matter of worship. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that the content of the church's governing narrative and her countercultural identity as a new city or *polis* ought to be clearly embodied and conveyed in the two non-negotiable ecclesiastical marks of Word and Sacrament.¹⁹ Whatever else churches may be and do, these two functions are

¹⁷ See David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Word and sacrament were joined together in Sunday worship by the middle of the second century as this statement from Justin Martyr indicates: "And on the day called Sun-day an assembly is held in one place of all who live in town or country, and the records of the apostles or writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. Then, when the reader has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts us to imitate these good things. Then we all

central and should reflect the church's deepest convictions and basic character. The proclamation of the Word and the rituals of baptism and communion depict an alternative world — indeed, the true one — and participation in them constitutes the church's powerful method of education and training (i.e., *paideia*) that resocializes believers in every significant relationship and opens up astonishing new possibilities for Christian-human existence.²⁰ We must sketch how Word and Sacrament, well construed, might accomplish this.

The Proclamation of the Word. The proclamation of Scripture, especially through preaching, is an essential component of the church's liturgy. It is designed to build up believers in faith, hope, and love, and to exalt God as He is made known through the declaration of His mighty deeds as Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of the world.

In this matter of preaching, however, we must first critique the notion, quite common in evangelical churches, that the sermon is to be the focal point of the service, and that everything else either leads up to or follows from the pastor's preaching as preliminaries or appendices. For many, worship services are really preaching services, and little more.

Instead, I suggest that, without diminishing its importance, the sermon needs to be "decentered," and rightly relocated in the larger context of the total liturgy where it finds its proper place among other necessary components.²¹ It is even better not just to resituate the sermon in the dramatic narrative of the liturgy

stand up together and offer prayers; and as we said before, when we have finished praying, bread and wine and water are brought up, and the president likewise offers prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and there is a distribution, and everyone participates in the elements over which thanks have been given; and they are sent through the deacons to those who are not present (*Apology* 1, 67), quoted by Geoffrey Wainwright, "Preaching and Eucharist," in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, ed. Richard Lischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 444. John Calvin also identifies a true church by these two distinguishing marks: "Wherever we

see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists." *Institutes* (4.1.9).

²⁰ Leithart, *Against Christianity*, p. 16; Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 151.

²¹ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 144.

as a whole, but to say that preaching itself is a liturgical and doxological act. Indeed, it is comparable to the eucharist (Lord's Supper) as an endeavor that recalls God's mighty deeds, whose efficacy requires the work of the Holy Spirit, and whose larger context is the eschatological purposes of God in history.²² Doxological preaching, therefore, reconceptualizes reality and renovates Christian consciousness and conduct. In Debra Murphy's words, "As it maintains its rootedness in liturgy,... preaching is the Scripture-driven, worship centered act (art) that makes meaning for a community's life together as it strives to bear witness to the truth of the gospel in the world."²³

To ascertain the true meaning of things through the preached Word, it must be interpreted in the total context of Scripture and in light of its Christocentric focus. There is no way to understand the multiplicity of Bible *stories* apart from a clear grasp of the whole biblical *story*, and it is impossible to understand Scripture correctly apart from the person of Jesus who fulfills it all. The Bible is not a cookbook of recipes for successful living, nor is it "a box or casket of gems and jewels to be mined."²⁴ Rather it is a comprehensive, unified narrative that tells the true story about how God in Christ created a very good world, judged its egregious sin, and wholly redeemed it out of His mercy and grace. These themes form the broad paradigm or pattern of thought within which the discrete texts and

²² Wainwright, "Preaching and Eucharist," pp. 443-52. Alexander Schmemmann makes a similar argument about the liturgical, doxological or sacramental character of preaching the Word.

He writes: "Western Christians are so accustomed to distinguish the Word from the sacrament that it may be difficult for them to understand that in Orthodox perspective the liturgy of the Word is as sacramental as the sacrament is 'evangelical.' The sacrament is a manifestation of the Word. And unless the false dichotomy between Word and sacrament is overcome, the true meaning of both Word and sacrament, and especially the true meaning of Christian 'sacramentalism' cannot be grasped in all their wonderful implications. The proclamation of the Word is a sacramental act par excellence because it is a transforming act." See *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), pp. 32-33.

²³ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 145.

²⁴ James A. Sanders, "Contextual Hermeneutics," in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, ed. Richard Lischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 228.

tales of Scripture must be interpreted, with Jesus at the center of them all. Any passage read outside this governing framework will be a misunderstood passage. A Christ-centered theology of creation, fall, and redemption, therefore, forms the proper hermeneutics for homiletics. If it fails to do so, then presuppositions and worldviews alien to the faith will undermine the interpretive process, resulting in Scripture twisting, false consciousness, Christian malformation, and the diminishment of the divine glory.

On the other hand, when hermeneutics and homiletics are in alignment with the truth of God's word, then the results are significant. First, the preached language of the Bible, coupled with the church's historic linguistic traditions in theology, worship, and witness, provide a new *vocabulary* by which to name and explain reality Christianly (Spirit graced language is power!). Second, liturgically centered preaching over time also transforms the Christian *imagination* and cultivates new images of the world and the church, and of the self within both. Third, the homiletic dimension of biblical worship is central to *catechesis* by converting a believer's essential desires and cultivating a variety of virtues, skills, and habits commensurate with the character of Christ.

Preaching and teaching God's Word, therefore, always envision a world that is fundamentally different from and in conflict with the fallacious ways the fallen world views the world. This new preached biblical vision is always directed toward life change and God's glory. It should engender multiple responses, not the least of which is participation in the sacraments of baptism and communion which are also revelatory of the "gospel's counterstory of God's sovereignty in the world," and the nature of the church's true civic identity.²⁵

*Lord, teach me that I may teach Your people; sanctify and enable all my powers, that in their full strength I may deliver Your message reverently, readily, faithfully, and fruitfully. Make Your Word a swift Word, passing from the ear to the heart, and from the heart to life and conversation, that as the rain returns not empty, so neither may Your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given, through the Word incarnate, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever, Amen.*²⁶

²⁵ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 161.

²⁶ Adapted from a prayer by George Herbert

The sacrament of baptism. Over against modernity's anti-ritualism and postmodernity's empty ritualism, and in light of the contemporary loss of significant cultural symbols and festivities (not to mention evangelicalism's suspicion of all things ritualistic, symbolic and festive), the radical church recognizes the immense importance of her rituals — powerful expressions of a new conception of reality. As Stanley Hauerwas writes, "These rites, baptism and eucharist, are not just 'religious things' that Christian people do. They are the essential rituals of our politics. Through them we learn who we are."²⁷

Commissioned by the resurrected Christ (Matt. 28: 19-20), baptism itself is a *sacrament of initiation* into the kingdom of God and fellowship of the church. It is a royal act and a communal celebration. Through it, the person baptized is given a new identity and launched upon a lifelong vocation to manifest faithfully the commitments and character that are native to the rite itself. Despite the unfortunate superficiality and frequent sentimentality that characterizes baptismal services in many congregations today, the act is truly a matter of death and life. It immerses the baptismal candidate into Christ's death to sin and simultaneously identifies her with the triumph of His resurrection, making her alive unto God. It is both an exit and an entrance, a funeral and a birthday. As Paul states in Romans 6: 4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

By the fourth century, the church had established a relatively uniform baptismal procedure and its rather dramatic or theatrical nature demonstrated the revolutionary significance that was attached to it. Baptisms, which were typically held during Easter, culminated a three-year educational or catechumenal process in which the candidates received instruction in the Christian faith. During this time, they participated in worship up to the Eucharist, whereupon they were dismissed from the service in order to receive further teaching. When the day of

²⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 108, quoted in Smith, p. 239.

baptism finally arrived, the candidates participated in a six-step process. First of all, in a rite of renunciation, the candidates stripped off their clothing as a sign of leaving their old lives behind. They faced west, denounced Satan and all his works, and even spat upon him as a symbol of rejection. Then they turned eastward, facing the baptistery to receive the oil of exorcism. Second, the candidates were then immersed in the baptismal waters three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as a sign of dying and rising with Christ. Third, the candidates were then clothed in a white baptismal robe, symbolic of putting on Christ. Fourth, the new believers received the sign of the cross, indicating divine possession or ownership, and assuming the responsibility of a cruciform life. Fifth, the candidates were *Christ-ened*, that is, they were anointed with oil and then called Christians. Sixth and finally, these new Christians were given candles as symbols of the light of Christ's resurrection. Once these steps were complete, the newly baptized participated in the communion meal for the first time, sealing the meaning of their initiation into the faith.²⁸

From this elaborate process, we can see how this profound action signifies an altered perception, confers a new identity, and imparts a vocation upon those who submit to it. In essence someone baptized says:

"I used to see and live in the world this way; then I met Jesus, and now I understand everything differently. This watermark is my testimony to a radical change in my perspectives and allegiances, and with God's help, I intend to keep what my baptism signifies in my character and way of life."

This rite, then, testifies to the utterly new way of interpreting the meaning of life based on the story of the gospel to which baptismal candidates have committed their lives. It calls those who submit to this sacrament to embody its meaning in behavior that does justice to this new vision and manifests grateful submission to their new Lord. This is why a failure to live accordingly constitutes a renunciation of one's essential baptismal calling and is an act of treason, for it amounts to a repudiation of all that being a baptized Christian is meant to convey.

²⁸ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, pp. 167-68.

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit, Grant that all who are baptized into His Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess Him as Lord and Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory, everlasting. Amen.

The sacrament of communion. The covenant community of the church created through baptism is nurtured not only by the proclamation of God's Word, but also by frequent participation in communion or the Eucharist. For one thing, the Eucharist, or "Great Thanksgiving" as it is called, is a miniature expression of the larger cosmic sacrament. Just as we offer bread and wine in Christ to God in thanksgiving, so we are to offer everything in creation to God in gratitude, seeing Him in it all. "All that exists is God's gift to man," says Alexander Schmemmann, "and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God."²⁹ Thus, to live in this world, to receive and enjoy its gifts, and to offer them back to God in thanksgiving and praise is our fundamental function as human beings.

Christ is the model as the new Adam and perfect Eucharistic God/man who gave everything to God. Following Him in this, we find our true fulfillment. The church's regular Eucharistic celebration certainly *remembers* Christ and His self-giving act through bread and wine. But it does more: it teaches us about the sacred character of the world as God's creation, and how we should offer it and ourselves to God as Christ did, revealing our purpose in it as its grateful priests.

By participating in this sacrament, the church also discovers more about her own identity and purpose. Eucharistic texts in the gospels, Acts, and the epistles (Matt. 26: 26-29; Mark 14: 22-25; Luke 22: 17-20; John 6: 52-59; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 10: 14-22; 1 Cor. 11: 23-25) reveal the church's participation in the self-giving love of the Trinity and her countercultural status and role in the world, as these features indicate:

- A community of food and festivity
- A community of gratitude
- A community of sharing

²⁹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), p. 14.

- A community of the blood and covenant
- A community of sacrifice and service
- A community of forgiveness and reconciliation
- A community of the eschatological kingdom
- A community of hope and expectation
- A community of symbol and memory/remembrance
- A community of prayer, worship and praise
- A community of life eternal
- A community of resurrection
- A community of divine and human fellowship/friendship
- A community of knowledge and teaching
- A community of awe, wonders, and signs
- A community of gladness and joy
- A community of proclamation, evangelism, mission, salvation
- A community of oneness and unity
- A community of exclusive worship
- A community of examination and judgment

Indeed, if these traits revealed in communion are the church's charter, then in seeking to reach outsiders, she should not sell out to the values of the surrounding culture, for non-Christians neither need nor want more of what they already have. Rather the church should strive to be and present what she actually is, namely, a divinely ordained "new way to be human" that eschews idolatry and the disfiguring ideologies of the age. "In the celebration of the Eucharist," Murphy states, "the church embodies a visible politics as an imaginative, utterly real alternative to the false and destructive powers and principalities. The Eucharist is the politics of the church, a Christian economy (*oikonomia*) in a world of ... folly and injustice."³⁰

Lord, grant that all who share this bread and cup may united in You, and become one in body and spirit, a living and holy sacrifice to Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Summary. Word and sacrament, then, are the two crucial elements of Christian worship that reflect the content of the biblical vision from which they come. They inform and shape the consciousness of the Christian community and help it to understand itself and perceive the world aright.

³⁰ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 194.

If it is true that we learn what we do, and that we are shaped by the worship we offer, then the ministry of the Word and Sacrament ought to form the church into a wise (Word), committed (Baptism), and thankful (Eucharist) people of God. Worldview and worship, in other words, should generate the peculiar character and way of life of biblical Christians. The belief and prayer of the church, then, must slide naturally into its rule or law of action and practice, its *Lex agendi*.

Lex Agendi

O Lord, my God, Ruler of heaven and earth, please direct and sanctify, set right and govern my heart, my body, my sentiments, my words, and my actions in conformity with Your truth and Your commandments, that I might adorn the gospel with works of righteousness, and be found faithful to the end, by Your help and grace, O Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever, Amen.

Just as there should be no interruption between worldview and worship, there should be no breakdown between worship and way of life — the liturgy of life after the liturgy of worship. Belief and mission, preaching and justice, baptism and service, Eucharist and hospitality, among other things, ought to be a unified whole.³¹ For Martin Luther, the church's theology in the Eucharist carried profound responsibilities to minister to those in need. He writes:

Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a [Eucharistic] sacrament of love. As love and support are given to you, you must in turn render love and support to Christ in His needy ones. ... You must fight, work, pray, and — if you cannot do more — have heartfelt sympathy.³²

Grounding work and service in Eucharist suggests that worship constitutes the church's ethic — “it is the enactment, the ritual performance, of a moral vision out of which the people of God are called to live justly and ethically.”³³ Undoubtedly, in the church's past and present, this has been a reality, and there have been and now are countless numbers of churches and Christians who have

³¹ Duncan Forrester, “Moral Formation and Liturgy: A Response to Vigen Guroian,” *Ecumenical Review* 49 (July 1997), p. 380, quoted in Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 210.

³² Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ,” quoted in Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 159.

³³ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 211.

wed belief, prayer, and action together and walked in a manner worthy of the calling with which they have been called (Eph. 4: 1). From Paul's collection for the saints at Jerusalem to present day tsunami relief efforts, Christian believers of all kinds have demonstrated their faith by their works, and have even sealed the offering of their lives to their Master in their own blood. There should be no shortage of recognition or appreciation for the expressions of Christian faithfulness throughout the history of the church.³⁴

However, today we are experiencing a crisis in Christian behavior, especially in the North American evangelical church whose moral vision seems to be rather impotent. Apparently there is a marked separation of *Lex credendi* and *Lex orandi* from *Lex agendi*, for many, it seems, believe and pray, but fail to build their moral lives in their prayers and beliefs.

The evidence for this concern is more than anecdotal or intuitive as Ronald J. Sider's new book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* documents clearly. "How bad are things?" Sider asks. "What is the depth of the scandal?" The statistics (see below) paint a rather depressing picture which he sketches in this bold summary.³⁵

³⁴ For example, see Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). In this work, he documents the faithfulness of the Christian community and the transformative influence of believers in fourteen key cultural domains.

³⁵ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004). The stats here are from a synopsis of the book, "The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience," *Books and Culture* 11 (January/February 2005), pp. 8-9, 39-42.

- ◆ **Divorce:** 33% of all born again Christians had been divorced compared to 34% of non-born again Americans, and 25% of evangelicals as 25% of the total population have been divorced ("evangelicals" are more fluent in faith than those merely "born-again").
- ◆ **Giving:** Evangelical giving decreased from 6.15% of total income in 1968, to 4.74% in 1985, to 4.27% in 2001. In 2002, 6% of born again Christians and 9% of evangelicals tithed.
- ◆ **Sexuality:** Evangelical youth are 10% less likely to engage in pre-marital sex than non-evangelicals. Since the True Love Waits program began in 1993, 2.4 million teens pledged sexual abstinence until marriage, but in 2004, 88% of those that pledged among a sample of 12,000 reported having sex before marriage; 12% kept their promise. 25% of born again Christians have cohabited with a member of the opposite sex prior to marriage, compared to 33% of non-Christians. 26% of traditional evangelicals deny that premarital sex is wrong, and 13% believe that extra marital sex is acceptable; 46% of moderate evangelicals say that premarital sex is acceptable, and 19% believe that adultery is morally permitted.

To say there is a crisis of obedience in the evangelical world today is to dangerously understate the problem. Born again Christians divorce at about the same rate as everyone else. Self-centered materialism is seducing evangelicals and rapidly destroying our earlier, slightly more generous giving. Only 6% of born again Christians tithe. Born-again Christians justify and engage in sexual promiscuity (both premarital sex and adultery) at astonishing rates. Racism ... seems to be worse in evangelical circles than elsewhere. This is scandalous behavior for people who claim to be born again by the Holy Spirit and to enjoy the very presence of the Risen Lord in their lives.³⁶

Assuming there is accuracy in Sider's analysis, we must ask the reasons for this hypocrisy, for this nauseating lukewarmness, for this overall spiritual self-deception and slothfulness. Far be it from me to say for sure, but I will hazard a guess that the church has succumbed to the triple jeopardy that I mentioned before. First of all, churches understand and impart only a fragment of a biblical worldview. Second, as a result, a biblical worldview is rarely on display in the churches' worship. Third, this breakdown of worldview and worship has diminished the discipleship of believers who are also encumbered, often un/subconsciously, by the deadly, idolatrous influences of contemporary culture in them and their churches.

In terms of this third point, what Christians bring with them to church *culturally* is as much of a problem, if not a greater one, than the church's own sins of omission or commission. Its pervasive atmosphere is often taken-for-granted, giving it extraordinary power: "I have never thought about things any other way."³⁷ As Murphy explains, "It is not always easy to recognize what we bring with us to worship — much of it is subtle and unspoken, rooted in the

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- ◆ **Racism:** 11% of Catholics and non-evangelical Christians, 16% of mainline protestants, 17% of evangelicals, and 20% of Southern Baptists object to having black neighbors.
 - ◆ **Worldview:** Born again Christians spend seven times more time each week watching TV than they spend in Bible reading, prayer, and worship, and only 9% of born again adults and 2% of born-again teenagers have a biblical worldview.

³⁶ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 39.

³⁷ I am indebted to John Seel for this insight.

broader cultural socialization each of us undergoes as a citizen of the wider world, a socialization that often goes unreflected and uncommented upon.”³⁸

Murphy herself is not reticent to name and critique what she thinks are the two most powerful, modern/postmodern cultural forces that shape most people in North America today, and that make serious Christian formation so difficult. The first of these “powers” is *consumerism* and its accompanying hedonism, narcissism, and therapeutic sensibilities with Oprah Winfrey as the patron “saint” (things, self, happiness/fulfillment). The second is a *nationalism* that confuses the flag and cross, and tends to exclude those beyond one’s own borders from the hospitality of the gospel. These things, and more, are chief causes of the church’s impotence and the crisis in Christian behavior today.³⁹

All these sources of infidelity, however, can be reduced to one, and that is that well-intended churches and believers, even without knowing it, have simply been caught in the jaws and masticated by the teeth of the behemoth of modern and postmodern culture. Rather than being *in* the fallen world, but not *of* it, as Jesus commanded (John 17: 14-18), many Christians and churches, ironically, are *of* the fallen world, and at the same time, not really *in* it.⁴⁰ What, then, does the breakdown in the behavior of believers suggest if not the ferocity of the cultural competition, not only in its moral allurements (divorce, race, materialism, etc.), but also in its metaphysics and epistemology, in its perceptions of reality and way of knowing and teaching the truth. When these alien perspectives invade a church already weakened by a breakdown in its own worldview and worship, the consequences can be deadly. What is to be done?

Summary and Conclusion

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us, that we might delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your name, Amen.

³⁸ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p. 119.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ I owe this thought to Ken Myers.

If I were a better homiletician or rhetorician, I would have started this presentation by highlighting these problems, and then pointing to a solution. But as it is, I started with the solution. This entire presentation that has almost reached its conclusion IS the response to the problem I have just now identified. Of what does it consist? Here is the review. First, I believe that the piecemeal, non-canonical, dualistic interpretations of the Christian faith in the churches need to be replaced with a unified, canonically complete, holistic biblical worldview with all of its attendant metaphysical, epistemic, and ethical implications — its countercultural *Lex credendi*. Second, this generous kardioptic of God and cosmos must establish and be embodied in the church's worship, especially in the rituals of Word and Sacrament — its countercultural *Lex orandi*. Finally, as believers engage regularly in the liturgy and are shaped by its dramatic story and moral vision, they are transformed at the root of their being and in the fruit of their lives, enacting works of love and justice in all aspects of human life — its countercultural *Lex agendi*. These interrelated dynamics of worldview, worship, and way of life, of *Lex credendi*, *Lex orandi*, and *Lex agendi* manifest the church's urban identity as *villanova* — God's new city or *polis* in Christ Jesus the Lord. It offers a radically new way of seeing and being in the world, revealing it as it truly is, and growing men and women of faith into whole persons as the image of Christ to the praise and glory of God.

Lord, I pray that Your grace may always precede and follow me, that I may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ my Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Amen.*

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