

“The Worldview-Driven Church:  
A Theological Vision”  
Part Two<sup>1</sup>

*“We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church”  
The Constantinopolitan Creed, A.D. 381*

Introduction

The time has come, I earnestly believe, for church leaders in North America, and perhaps around the world, to reexamine the basic theological commitments which shape the ministries of their congregations, and to consider the alternative of an all-encompassing, canonically-complete, biblically-based *Weltanschauung* (worldview) as the framework for local church ministry.

For too long, too many churches have operated on the foundation of an underdeveloped view of Christianity with many unfortunate consequences. The means of the church’s ministry are often mistaken for her ultimate end (e.g., evangelism). The essential doctrines at the heart of the church’s life are repeatedly reduced in their true scope and significance (e.g., the kingdom of God). Biblical texts and teachings are often detached from their overall canonical context and seriously misinterpreted (e.g., the Christian life). Time-honored ministerial perspectives and practices are sometimes maligned and frequently forgotten (e.g. historic liturgies of the church). A gnostically-induced division at the very heart of reality is embraced habitually, resulting in a compartmentalized faith (e.g., dualism). These, and other things, are culprits that greatly lessen the maturity of the church in her God-ordained goal to attain to the measure of the

---

<sup>1</sup> The first paper in this three part series consisted of a critique of Rick Warren’s wildly popular purpose-driven church and purpose-driven life books. At the conclusion of that paper, I proposed the alternative of a worldview-driven church model that would offset the dispensational ecclesiology of the former volume, and the compartmentalized, dualistic interpretation of the Christian life in the latter volume. That paper was titled: “Rethinking Ecclesiology: The Worldview Driven Church (A Critique of Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church*),” and is available online at [http://www.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/worldview\\_church.pdf](http://www.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/worldview_church.pdf).

stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 13). As a result, the true splendor and magnitude of biblical Christianity is diminished. The church's understanding of her own identity and purpose is confused. Her role and influence in the world is undermined. The Christian lives and spiritual experiences of many believers are impoverished and enfeebled.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I am not intending to be hypercritical, as these opening comments may suggest, about what's happening in churches today. I am not cynical by disposition, and inordinate negativity is certainly no Christian virtue. Undoubtedly, many congregations are serving well as the "mother of believers,"<sup>2</sup> and bear the distinctive marks or notes of true churches as they have been known historically (unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity).<sup>3</sup>

Yet at the same time, I perceive that something very significant is missing. I think we may be getting only half the story. I am sensing and bringing to our attention what J. I. Packer has called the "stunted ecclesiology" of contemporary evangelicalism, and its loss of genuine "churchliness."<sup>4</sup> There has to be more to

---

<sup>2</sup> This classic expression, based on Galatians 4: 26, was applied to the local church by Cyprian, Augustine, and Calvin, and denoted the nurturing and pedagogical role of the visible congregation in the life of the Christian community. "For there is no other way to enter into life," Calvin writes, "unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance.... Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation" (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.1.4).

<sup>3</sup> These marks or notes as signs of the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of churches derive from these well-known words of the Constantinopolitan Creed: "I believe in one, holy, catholic [universal], and apostolic church." These four traits — *una, sancta, catholica, apostolica* — have defined the essential character of the church throughout her history.

<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, "A Stunted Ecclesiology?" in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century — Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall, eds (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 120-27.

Christianity, the church, and the believing life than what we so often see and experience today. If with G. K. Chesterton, we believe that “Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags,” just think about what it could and would be and do if it were mixed to full strength and filled to the brim?<sup>5</sup>

What, then, is to be done? Is there a biblical, credible, workable alternative to this historic and current ecclesiastical situation which is more maximalist than minimalist when it comes to the theologies, perspectives, services, and ministries of local churches? I believe that there is, and for better or worse, I call it the worldview-driven church.<sup>6</sup> (For an example of a vision statement for a worldview-driven college/campus ministry which I led in the mid 1980s at UT-Arlington, see the appendix to this paper).

Now by a worldview driven church, I am not speaking in theoretical or academic terms. I am not suggesting that as a cure-all the church today ought to embrace a set of abstract doctrines about God or philosophical beliefs about reality in some kind of arid, cognitive manner. Far from it.

Instead, I refer to the establishment of the church’s life and ministry on the basis of a clear and substantial vision centered in the human heart that is derived from the complete canon of Scripture and grounded in the Trinitarian God and His comprehensive works of creation, fall, and redemption. These great works of

---

<sup>5</sup> 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.”

<sup>6</sup> The “worldview-driven church” may be an infelicitous expression, and is perhaps subject to misunderstanding and/or criticism. I have sought for alternatives such as the kingdom driven church, the Bible driven church, the gospel driven church, the covenant driven church, the God driven church, and so on. Each of these terms, however — kingdom, Bible, gospel, covenant, God — is subject to reductionistic interpretations that derive from the loss of the very thing that concerns me most, namely a holistic, canonically complete perspective on Christianity and the ministry of the church. Hence, for the time being, I will stick with this worldview nomenclature since it suggests a “big picture” conception of the Christian faith that is universal and cosmic in scope.

God carry with them all their attendant, holistic implications and are centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ and His gospel as the beginning, middle, and end of all things. This gospel of God in Christ is promoted throughout the world in all its power and glory by the irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit. Churches, I propose, ought to be driven, that is, informed and guided by the coherent theology of the total biblical metanarrative with its cosmic scope and matching emphasis on the totality of life under the authority and blessing of the triune God. In short, I am striving for a way to emphasize the wholeness of genuine biblical religion in order to recover what has at least, in part, been known classically as the “catholicity” of Christian church. As Gordon Spykman, quoting theologian Herman Bavinck, explains,

Catholicity is the biblical answer to all dualist worldviews and life-styles. For, in the words of Bavinck, Christianity is not “a quantitative entity” which “hovers transcendently” above our life in the world, but a religious power that “enters immanently” into it. It is opposed to nothing creaturely, but “banishes only what is impure.” The Christian religion proclaims “the joyful news of the renewal of all creatures.” For in it “the gospel comes fully into its own, comes to true catholicity.” “There is nothing that cannot and ought not to be evangelized. Not only the church, but also the home, school, society, and state are placed under the principles of Christianity...” (*Katholiciteit*, pp. 30, 32).

Thus, nestled in my initial description of the worldview driven church are several significant traits. First, it is *Trinitarian* in character with a *Christocentric* focus and a Holy Spirit emphasis. Second, it is *canonical* in its biblical scope, basing its ecclesiology on both the Old and New Testaments and the theological unity that joins them. Third, it is *holistic* in its conception of life and faith, eschewing dualism and reductionistic versions of basic doctrines. Fourth, it is a vision of Christianity and the church that is deeply *implanted in the heart* as the core of Christian person individually and the church collectively where all thinking, feeling, acting, and worshipping originate. For, indeed, out of the heart flow the rivers of life (Prov. 4: 23).

This vision, as I have outlined it briefly, is a response to my experience of disappointment and frustration with churches that lacked it. But the trumpet is sounding clearly for the recovery of a Christianity and an accompanying

ecclesiology that is well situated in a more generous and richer biblical picture of life and reality. This agenda needs to be spelled out in some detail. Immediately below is a summary of the key elements of a worldview driven church, and my paper today will focus on part one: its theological framework.

### **Part One: Theological Framework**

I. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Recovering the Church's Central Purpose as the Worship and Love of the Trinitarian God

II. Scripture: Recovering the Whole Story of the Church as Creation, Fall, and Redemption

III. Christology: Recovering the Person and Work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ

IV. Soteriology: Recovering the Kingdom of God and its Redemptive Significance

V. Anthropology: Recovering the Nature of the Believer as a Whole Person

VI. Ecclesiology: Recovering the Identity of the Church as the New Israel

VII. Eschatology: Recovering the Eschatological Character of the Church in Redemptive History

### **Part Two: Ministry Considerations**

VIII. Worship: Recovering the Historic Liturgies of the Church

IX. Preaching: Recovering the Christological and Contextualized Proclamation of the Word of God

X. Fellowship: Recovering the Dynamics of Genuine Christian Community

XI. Spiritual Formation/Discipleship: Recovering the Vision of Christian Humanism

XII. Ministry: Recovering the Classic Doctrine of Calling in all Spheres of Life and Service inside and outside the Church

XIII. Evangelism and Mission: Recovering the Whole Gospel for the Whole Person for the Whole World in the Whole of Life

### **Part One: Theological Framework of the Worldview Driven Church**

*I. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Recovering the Church's Central Purpose as the Worship and Love of the Trinitarian God.*

The whole of biblical revelation unites in teaching that the ultimate *telos* or purpose of the church of Jesus Christ, both gathered and scattered, is the worship of the triune God and the promotion of His glory in the world. “From the rising of the sun to its setting,” declares the psalmist, “the name of the Lord is to be praised” (Ps. 113:3). Various New Testament writers highlight the doxological objective of the church in a variety of benedictions located at strategic points in their epistles (Rom. 11: 33-36; Eph. 3: 20-21; 1 Tim. 1: 17; 6: 15-16; 2 Pet. 3: 18; Jude 24-25; Rev. 4: 11; 5: 9, 12-13). At the end of Ephesians 3, for example, Paul writes: “To Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations. Amen” (Eph. 3: 21). “Worship, [therefore], is the supreme and only indispensable activity of the Christian church.”<sup>7</sup>

Many churches, however, confuse the various *means* of ministry for this ultimate *end*, thereby making such activities as studying the Bible, equipping the saints, doing evangelism or missions, serving the poor and needy, or enjoying community fellowship the *terminus ad quem* (primary goal) of the church’s very existence. These excellent activities are essential, and must flourish. But they must each be rightly viewed as agencies directed to the larger goal of making believers corporately and individually the full-time worshippers of Yahweh in spirit and in truth.

This momentous purpose, for which God surely created us in the beginning and to which He has restored us in Christ, certainly takes place when the body of believers gathers together for worship at a particular time and place. Joining the praises of creation already in progress, the church under an ordained leadership through a well ordered liturgy that includes the ministry of the Word and sacrament, offers praises and commitment of life to God who is the Creator and Redeemer of all things.

---

<sup>7</sup> W. Nicholls, *Jacob’s Ladder: The Meaning of Worship*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship No. 4 (London: Lutterworth, 1958), p. 9; quoted in David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 15.

At the same time, worship must also be understood as an overall life orientation, indeed, a comprehensive category describing the believer's total existence.<sup>8</sup> Life as a whole, including all of its undertakings, can be an expression of worship to God for those who have offered themselves to Him as a living and holy sacrifice (Rom. 12: 1). Whether we are eating or drinking or whatever we do — studying, playing, working, resting, thinking, listening, or speaking — we can and should do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10: 31), and in the name of Christ, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Col. 3: 17). Worship, in other words, is a condition of everyday life.

This primary worship objective of the church is, in fact, coterminous with the greatest commandment to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and its corollary to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we love God supremely, we worship and glorify Him in all things. When we show as much concern for our neighbors as we show ourselves in all things, they are edified and God is honored and served in these relationships. Through obedience to these two chief biblical injunctions, the worship and glory of God is manifest, and the ultimate doxological and agapic end of a worldview driven church, fostered by her various ministries, becomes a brilliant reality whether in a cathedral or out in the world.

## *II. Scripture: Recovering the Whole Story of the Church as Creation, Fall, and Redemption*

Properly understanding the church and her true theological identity is possible only in the context of the total biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. Grasping the nature of God's enduring purposes in creation, their corruption due to sin, and their progressive restoration through a covenantally-structured redemptive history promised to Israel in the Old Testament and fulfilled and consummated by Christ for the church in the New Testament is the absolute prerequisite. The whole counsel of God from creation to consummation, in other words, must provide the framework for any sound ecclesiology.

---

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, p. 17-18.

Many churches and individual Christians, however, live and minister on the basis of an incomplete Bible. I call them New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs churches, or New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs believers. Both tend to focus their doctrinal and devotional attention almost exclusively on the New Testament, with only an occasional excursion into Old. How the two Testaments are connected, and how God's purposes in creation (Adam) relate to Israel (Abraham) and the church (Jesus) are *bona fide* unknowns. Without understanding the narrative unity and theological underpinnings of Scripture from cover to cover, the doctrines and practices of the church are lifted out of their overall context, and subject to serious misunderstandings, grave reductionisms, and outright error. After all, can you really understand the plot of a movie when you arrive an hour late? Do you really know what's going on in a sixty-six chapter novel if you begin reading in chapter forty? Can you really have a sound ecclesiology as a New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs church or Christian? It's highly unlikely. As Gordon Spykman asserts,

Clearly, then, our understanding of the gospel message stands and falls with our view of the interrelatedness of the 'older' and 'newer' covenant, of the two parts of the single canon, of Israel and the church. In the measure that we loosen these ties we seriously shortchange Christian faith and life. Not only is the Old Testament by far the larger part of the Bible, which we neglect only to our own hurt. But more importantly, detached from its subsoil in the Old Testament, the New Testament is like a cut flower which, severed from its roots, soon withers in our hands.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently we must recover the church's whole story as creation, fall, and redemption. There is, indeed, an organic unity between the two testaments. The key themes of the Old Testament are deeply imprinted in the New. What was latent and concealed in the Old Testament is patent and revealed in the New. Jesus Himself did not originate in a vacuum, but was the "Anointed One" of Israel, fulfilling not only the covenants and promises given to the fathers, but also the "mother promise" of Genesis 3: 15. As Jesus himself said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill"

---

<sup>9</sup> Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformation Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 363.



(Matt. 5: 17). In light of this grand fulfillment of the Old Testament hope, St. Paul affirms that the church was built, not only on the foundation of the apostles, but also of the Old Testament prophets (Eph. 2: 20). Hence, the total biblical story is absolutely indispensable for a right understanding of the New Testament and its ecclesiology.<sup>10</sup> A worldview church, therefore, is anchored in the complete canon of Scripture which fills in the gaps in her self-understanding, and imparts a greater degree of clarity, coherence, and power to the content of the faith.

### *III. Christology: Recovering the Person and Work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ*

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and Son of Man, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos of God incarnate, the Creator and Redeemer of heaven and earth, the Messiah of Israel, the Head of the Church, the Alpha and Omega of human history, is not only a Christian's personal Lord and Savior, but is in fact, as these designations indicate, the foremost figure in the universe and Lord of all.

Many churches today, however, have a rather truncated view of the person and work of Jesus. He is often described in rather privatized and pietistic language that limits the full range of His character and significance. He saves believers from their sins, enhances their chances for happiness now, struggles with them in their problems, and insures a spot in heaven for them when they die. As King He rules over the church and spiritual affairs, but has little concern for or connection with the ongoing life of the world. In typical church understanding, Jesus is a soteriological, but not a cosmological Lord.

While not necessarily wrong as far as it goes, this partial portrait of Jesus needs to be enhanced. Without sacrificing the importance of our personal bond with the Savior and the meaning of our pilgrimage in life with Him, at the same time a more complete perspective will showcase His cosmic identity and role in the larger purposes of God. After all, God's method for dealing with the whole creation, with all the nations, with Israel, and with the church are focused in Him — εν χριστω. For He holds all things together (Col. 1: 17), is the light of the world (John 8: 12), the hope of Israel (Acts 28: 20), and the head of the body the

---

<sup>10</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, pp. 364-65.

church (Col 1: 18).<sup>11</sup> In Him, through Him, and for Him all things have been created (Col. 1: 16). In Him all the fullness of Deity dwelt in bodily form, and by the blood of His cross He has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to God (Col. 1: 19-20). Because of His self-emptying, suffering and death which is total in its impact and scope, He has been highly exalted and given the name which is above all names so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2: 10-11). Such is the magnitude of the divine and human Lord with which the church has to do. He is the One, indeed, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28: 18-20).

□n articulating a vision for a worldview driven church, therefore, we affirm that the “person and work of Christ is the hermeneutic key to the meaning of life in the world.”<sup>12</sup> All aspects of faith and life must be brought in relation Him, joyfully submitting everything to His Lordship and love.

#### *IV. Soteriology: Recovering the Kingdom of God and its Redemptive Significance*

The central biblical notion of the “kingdom of God” refers to God’s rule, authority, and power expressed in Christ to accomplish the redemption of the world by the power of the Holy Spirit both now and in the future. God’s original kingdom, which He established over the whole earth at creation, was attacked and taken over by the satanic regime, bringing rebellion, death, and destruction into the world. Immediately, as expressions of both judgment and grace, God launched a counteroffensive manifested in mighty deeds throughout redemptive history in order to defeat His enemies and restore all things back to Himself. This cosmic battle between these two rival kingdoms culminated at the first advent of Jesus Christ. In and through His person, words, and work, God exercised His redemptive rule and sovereign power against all the evil in the world (sin, death, Satan). He achieved a great victory, reclaimed His creation, and is in the process

---

<sup>11</sup> Spykman, *Reformation Theology*, p. 376.

of renewing all things. Thus, the concept of the kingdom of God with its redemptive focus stands at the heart of the Christian faith, and should be central in the life and ministry of a church that is informed and guided by a biblical worldview.

Unfortunately, many congregations today possess little comprehension of this central concept. For some it is heaven; for others it is the church herself; for still others it is God's rule on the throne of the heart, or a present moral commonwealth, or a future 1000 year period of blessing for the Jews. Lip service is given often to this notion (e.g., "kingdom work"), but it remains a woefully misunderstood biblical theme.

Yet, the gospels proclaim clearly that the kingdom, indeed the *gospel* of the kingdom, was the main mission and message of Jesus Christ. It is a prominent concept in the book of Acts (8: 12; 19: 8; 28: 23), and is a crucial teaching in the epistles (1 Cor. 4: 20; Col. 1: 13; 1 Thess. 2: 12; 2 Tim: 4: 1; Heb. 12: 28; James 2: 5; 2 Pet. 1: 11). The combined witness of the New Testament affirms that through the words and works of Jesus, the kingdom of God broke into history at His first advent and is now present, though it arrived in a mysterious, unexpected way through a serving, suffering, saving Lamb of God. This same kingdom, which by the Spirit is presently effecting the salvation of those who believe, will be manifested in its fullness when Christ returns. The kingdom of God comes, as it were, in two stages, both as an "already" and as a "not yet." As George Ladd explains, "The kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history [already], and consummation at the end of history [not yet]."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Spykman, *Reformation Theology*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 89-90.

Meanwhile, in the present form of the kingdom, Christ rules over the lives of believers and of the community of the church, affecting how they live individually and corporately in relation to God, each other, and the whole world. *Corporately*, a kingdom church ought to be a model of a truly human society which manifests what the will of God means for whole areas of society (e.g., education, arts, politics, work, etc.), and what life should be like when it is submitted to the God's reign (righteous, orderly, reasonable, disciplined, holy, wise, etc). *Individually*, every aspect of a believer's life ought to be submitted to the kingship of Christ, demonstrating what His righteous rule means in such personal areas as work, education, play, entertainment, family life, friendship, the arts and so on.<sup>14</sup> The doctrine of the kingdom of God engenders a Christianity that is culturally engaged.

Truly, this kind of royal theology, at the heart of a worldview-driven church, implies that real, historical life is to be redeemed now as it is lived out by the people of God, resulting in the fulfillment of the great commission "as we go" into all the world.

#### *V. Anthropology: Recovering the Nature of the Believer as a Whole Person*

The Bible regards each individual as a whole and complete person who in the totality of his or her being is the image and likeness of God. To be such constitutes their genuine humanity and is the source of their dignity and worth. "Therefore the whole man," notes Herman Bavinck, "is the image and likeness of God. He is that in soul and body, in accord with all his abilities, strengths, and gifts. Nothing in man is excluded from the image of God. It reaches as far as our humanity itself. It is the humanness of our humanity."<sup>15</sup> Though some would wish to identify God's image with this or that particular component of human nature,

---

<sup>14</sup> Robert Recker, "The Redemptive Focus of the Kingdom of God," *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (November 1979): 178-80.

especially its non-physical aspects, the best thinking in recent scholarship affirms that the entire person is the image of God without distinction between spiritual or bodily components. This high, holistic conception of humanity — “made a little lower than God, crowned with glory and majesty, and made ruler over the works of His hands” (Psa. 8: 5-6) — is a chief tenet of a worldview driven church.

Many church leaders, however, regard a person exclusively as a soul temporarily encased in a physical body as its prison-house. The goal of the gospel is to save the soul so that when the body dies, it (the soul) is released to go to heaven and live there in a disembodied state for all eternity. Such dichotomist or even trichotomist anthropologies, however, have more in common with Plato and other philosophical or psychological traditions, than with biblical thought. For humanity is a *unity* in diversity, a differentiated *totality*, a psychosomatic *whole*, not an assemblage of parts.

Indeed, the rather vast array of biblical terms that seemingly refer to the diverse components of human beings — body, soul, new self, old self, flesh, spirit, mind, heart and so on — actually designate the whole person from various points of view. Only by interpreting these concepts by a set of assumptions alien to the Scriptures do they support bipartite or tripartite anthropologies. In fact, of all of these notions, the “heart” is most significant in pointing to the true integral nature of human beings. “It is the well-spring of all our willing, thinking, feeling, acting, and every other life utterance. It is the fountainhead from which flows every movement of man’s intellect, emotions, and will, as well as any other ‘faculty’ or mode of our existence. In short, the heart is the mini-me.”<sup>16</sup> This heart-centered, unifying perspective of the total human person as the *imago Dei* is confirmed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ who was fully human as well as fully God. It is also affirmed by His subsequent resurrection from the dead in whose

---

<sup>15</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 2, pp. 516; quoted in Spykman, *Reformation Theology*, p. 225. See also D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968). 53-103.

<sup>16</sup> Spykman, *Reformation Theology*, p. 218.

train all believers follow as they too are restored to their complete humanity in Him.

This doctrinal perspective of human wholeness, therefore, is filled with implications not only for self-understanding, but also on the nature of Christian worship and on the kinds of ministries pursued by a church whose outlook on life in this world is shaped by a biblical *Weltanschauung*. It is the kind of congregation that cares about and ministers to the whole person.

#### *VI. Ecclesiology: Recovering the Identity of the Church as the New Israel*

On the basis of the theological unity that pervades the two testaments, the church of Jesus Christ is best understood as the new, true, spiritual Israel, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham of a great nation (Matt. 21: 43; Rev. 5: 9-10). The election of Abraham in Genesis 12 began the process of forming the covenant people of God. Abraham's own call was the divine response to the advent of sin in the world (Gen. 3), and its spread and escalation into two great world apostasies at the flood of Noah (Gen. 6-9) and the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). For from Abraham's race will come the Christ who is also the new Adam (1 Cor. 15: 45; Rom. 5: 12-21) who will establish the new creation where friendship with God and His purposes for the world are restored (2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15). Indeed, this chief Seed of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah, will fulfill all the promises made to the fathers, and found a people who through faith in Him are the true spiritual descendents of Abraham by whom all the families of the earth are blessed (Gal 3).<sup>17</sup> For as Paul makes crystal clear in Romans 2: 28-29, being a Jew is not a matter of physical descent, but of the spiritual condition of the heart, something open to both Gentiles and Jews.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s. v., "Church" (1973).

Looking at the New Testament church from a canonical vantage point, she is best identified as the people of God standing in continuity with and as a consummation of the Old Testament covenant community of Israel.

Many Christians, however, have rather limited understandings of the theological identity of the church. At a basic level, she is the assembly of baptized believers where the Word is preached and the ordinances are administered. For others she is a source of spiritual sustenance and encouragement for daily life. For still others, an agency for evangelism or mission. At worst, some might view her simply as a kind of religious social club, or voluntary association, or special interest group. But who or what, really, is the Church in the overall plan of God?

In addition to suggesting that the church is the new Israel, I would like to step back even farther. I want to propose that the church as the people of God actually started in the Garden of Eden when God made the human race to carry out His original purposes for the whole creation. From the beginning, humanity was called to society (Gen. 1: 27; 2: 18), to cultural pursuits (Gen. 1: 26, 28), and to propagation (Gen. 1: 28), while living at peace with and under the authority of God. Sin disrupted this divine plan, however, and Adam became the father of a race corrupted by hate (Gen. 4), consumed with evil (Gen. 6), dispersed by pride (Gen. 11), and living in flight from its Creator (Gen. 3: 8; 4: 14). How great was the need, therefore, for a great work of redemption to restore fellowship with God, reunite and reconcile humanity, and renew the human purposes for the world. Such was the role of the covenant community of Israel under Abraham which, in turn, prepared the way for Jesus and the church. The fact that almost all of the descriptions of the church in the New Testament come from concepts and images used of Israel in the Old Testament (bride, vine, remnant, flock, covenant, twelve, etc.) demonstrate the continuity and solidarity that exists between them. The church, then, as the new, true Israel, is God's final answer to sin and its consequences, including death, which had thwarted His original purposes for creation. Now, those who believe in Christ return to God and are reunited to one another in love. This makes the church the community of the new

creation in which God's magnificent pattern for human life is renewed — for His glory and for the well being of His people.

This is the enlarged ecclesiology of a worldview driven church. It greatly magnifies her self-understanding in the overall plan of God from beginning to end, and it causes her to fulfill her ministry and pursue her tasks in the world with a heightened awareness of their significance, a greater sense of responsibility, and with an increased degree of gratitude and joy.

### *VII. Eschatology: Recovering the Eschatological Character of the Church in Redemptive History*

From beginning to end, biblical history is eschatological in character. In Christ the decisive eschatological events have already broken into history: the future is present, the age to come has come, the kingdom of God is now, the last days have arrived, and believers are those upon whom the ends of ages have come. The Church lives "in-between-the-times" of the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. The technical language is that of realized and future eschatology. The whole of New Testament theology, including ecclesiology, is structured by the "kingdom has come, the kingdom is coming" framework.

Most churches today lack any awareness of their eschatological character and its implications. Indeed, if and when the term "eschatology" is used, the first thoughts that jump into the minds of most concern end-time events: rapture, anti-Christ, tribulation, millennial kingdom and so on. But biblical eschatology is more than just "end times," or "last things." Unfortunately, since this is rarely recognized, the church comes up short in seeing herself as an eschatological community through and through.

But the fact of the matter is that the church is the eschatological people of God, an identity which must be cultivated and not forgotten. The presence of the God's rule, the order of the resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the blessing of justification, the reality of glorification are all presented in the New Testament as eschatological magnitudes that have leapt from the future into the present, yet without the final consummation. While hidden from the eyes who



know not Christ, these are profound spiritual realities that the church presently enjoys. The following rather poetic words explain this eschatological orientation within which the believing church must learn to live and minister.

The *eschaton*, the end of history, has already come in Jesus Christ and time has already been filled with eternity, yet the very hiddenness of the *eschaton* implies that this period of hiddenness must end in a final consummation when the full glory shall shine forth. Then, what is happening in the present period of history, when the aeons overlap and the powers of the coming age are at work in historical time, will be summed up and made plain. Then, the judgment that is already supervening upon men and the salvation that is already effective in their lives will be gathered up into a fully consummated eternal order, and history will be no more. Then, the Christ, whose glory is known only to faith, will stand forth in his supernal splendor, and the mists of history will be taken up into the unbounded and unfettered eternity of God.<sup>18</sup>

This kind of biblically-based eschatology provides the people of God with the big picture, and enables her to carry out her duties in the present with an eye to the past and a hope for the future. The church in a worldview perspective must recover a sense of her place in redemptive history as the “already-but-not-yet” people of God.

**Conclusion:**

This, then, is part one of my worldview-driven church model: its theological framework. In summary, it consists of the following seven basic points. First, a worldview-driven church finds its ultimate purpose in the worship and love of God and refuses to confuse her various activities and means of ministry for her final end. Second, a worldview-driven church derives her identity and sense of purpose in the context of the complete canon and overarching story of Scripture as creation, fall, and redemption, and refuses to limit her biblical self-understanding to the New Testament only. Third, a worldview-driven church conceives of the person and work of Jesus in His fullness as the cosmic Christ, the Creator and Redeemer of the universe, and includes but refuses to limit her conception of Him as a personal and/or pietistic Savior and Lord. Fourth, a worldview-driven church recognizes the centrality of the kingdom of God as His

---

<sup>18</sup> Eric Rust, *Theology Today* (October 1953): p. 349.

redemptive rule and reign manifested in Christ in the present and future, and refuses to neglect this doctrine or succumb to faulty interpretations of it. Fifth, a worldview-driven church values and ministers to the whole person as the image and likeness of God, centered and unified in the heart, and refuses to limit human identity and Christian service to either soul or body. Sixth, a worldview-driven church recognizes that she is the new, true, spiritual Israel and community of new creation which stands in continuity with and as the consummation of the covenant people of God in the Old Testament, and refuses to define herself in any way that fails to acknowledge that her genealogy and heritage extends back even to creation. Seventh and finally, a worldview-driven church regards herself as an eschatological community that lives and serves within the framework of realized (already) and future eschatology (not yet), and refuses non-eschatological ways of defining herself and her role in the history of redemption. The purpose of worship, a complete biblical story, a cosmic Christ, the kingdom of God, whole persons, a new Israel, and an eschatological community just may be the elements that can change the church and end up turning the world upside down.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.  
2 Cor. 13:14