

“The Worldview-Driven Church” — Part Three<sup>1</sup>  
The Ministerial Vision  
*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est.*

## Introduction

Are you frustrated by a lack of genuine growth in your life as a Christian? Are you disturbed by a lack of abiding change in the lives of other believers and in churches generally? If so, then here is a stimulating idea offered by Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann to contemplate carefully: “People are not changed by moral exhortation,” he says, “but by transformed imagination.”<sup>2</sup> When I came across this claim recently, I was fascinated. I have been contemplating it carefully ever since. At one level, I disagree with Brueggemann’s *exclusion* of the possibility of personal change through moral exhortation. Surely at certain times in our lives, dos and don’ts, when rightly issued and received, can make a real difference in who we are and how we live. Parents and parole officers can surely testify to this.

Yet at another level, I think he is correct to suggest that the typical form of moralizing reigning in most churches today is often ineffectual in making a lasting, internal difference in human being and human acting. For multiple reasons — perhaps our hearts are hardened or we are suffering from “commandment fatigue” or we just take church stuff for granted — we often find it easy to turn a deaf ear to well-intended teaching, reproof, correction, and training

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<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). The second paper in this series unpacks the theological content of a worldview driven church, and it is available at <http://www.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/WV%20Driven%20Ch-Theologic%20Vision%202.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 25.

in righteousness (cf. 2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Most of us can effortlessly stonewall even the best sermonizing. At least I can. Outwardly we may acknowledge and comply, but inwardly we remain unaffected. We may talk the talk but we fail to walk the walk (excuse the cliché!). With us and our churches as cases in point, therefore, it seems that routine moral exhortation, even when accompanied by a steady diet of Bible knowledge, bears little fruit in generating change at a deeper level, whether individually or corporately. Instead what we need, Brueggemann believes, is a *transformed imagination*. I think he is right.

Francis Schaeffer once wrote that “the Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars.”<sup>3</sup> Yet often times it seems that ours barely make it to the ceiling, if that far. This seems especially true when it comes to the impoverished versions of the faith and the “stunted ecclesiology”<sup>4</sup> that we promote in far too many churches today. Imposing a sacred/secular split on Christian life and ministry generates the impoverishment. A theology that severs the New Testament ecclesiastical blossom from its Old Testament stem (resulting in a kind of quasi-marcionism) is a source of the stunted view of the church. The net result is a loss of understanding the whole story of Scripture and a lack of emphasis on the totality of life under God. These flawed outlooks unfortunately make up the mindset of a large percentage of evangelical believers today, consciously or not.

We need a creative alternative instead. If it is indeed true that the imagination — our image-making faculty and organ of meaning according to C. S. Lewis — is a key to change, then surely it is time to establish and cultivate a “ministry of imagination” in our churches through preaching and teaching, the sacraments, the liturgy, and the arts. Our grasp of truth is not just a matter of propositions as important as they are. We also call for a story, a song, a poem, a

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<sup>3</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, L’Abri Pamphlets, 1973), p. 61.

<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*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

parable, a symbol, a sacrament, and ultimately an incarnation.<sup>5</sup> After all, “The play’s the thing to capture the heart of the king!” (*Hamlet* 2.2).

At the center of this ministry to the imagination — Holy Spirit-generated and Word-based — must be a powerful vision of the Trinitarian God and His glory as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. This must be coupled with a clear grasp, not just of *Bible stories*, but of the overarching *biblical story* of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.<sup>6</sup> What we need is an expanded perception and embrace of God’s grandeur and His larger creative and redemptive purposes for the world expanding our imaginations in the center of our hearts.

A fresh grasp of these grand theological and cosmic realities purges our spiritual sight of the “film of familiarity”<sup>7</sup> and enables us to see things anew. “Glory be!” said the old London cabby who was stirred at the center of his soul when he witnessed the founding of Narnia. Its unspeakably beautiful music and the immediate appearance of a thousand glorious stars in the night sky shook him to the core. “I’d ha’ been a better man all my life if I’d known there were things like this.”<sup>8</sup> A similar kind of revolution in consciousness and way of life is at the heart of my proposal for a worldview driven church — a renewed perception

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<sup>5</sup> Corbin S. Carnell, “Imagination” in *The C. S. Lewis Readers’ Encyclopedia*, foreword Christopher Mitchell, ed. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 214-15.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Greenslade, *A Passion for God’s Story: Discovering Your Place in God’s Strategic Plan* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK; Waynesboro, Georgia, 2002), p. 3. The overarching biblical story, once grasped, will provide the framework for properly understanding Bible stories.

<sup>7</sup> Percy B. Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, et. al., vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968, 1962), p. 497, where 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.”

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955, 1970), p. 100. In biblical terms, St. Peter believes that a fresh reminder of the *eschaton* which entails the spectacular dissolution of the first creation with intense heat followed by the advent of a new heavens and earth can transform his readers’ imagination and motivate them to self-examination and growth in godliness and holiness of life (2 Pet. 3: 10-13).

of God, the universe, the world, faith, and life that causes our imaginations to fly beyond the stars!

### **Definition and Content of a Worldview Driven Church**

What, then, do I mean by a worldview driven church and what is its content? In terms of a definition, I refer simply to a local congregation whose life and ministry is informed and guided throughout by a comprehensive, holistic biblical worldview. It seems to me that the recent emphasis on biblical worldview needs to extend beyond Christian schools, colleges and universities, apologetic ministries, para-church groups, and missions organizations, and take up residence in the church of the living God, “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3: 15). Fleshing it out content wise, it consists of the following theological and ministerial components, the latter of which I address in this paper.

#### **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, Redemption, and Consummation
- III. Jesus: Recovering the Person and Work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ
- IV. Salvation: Recovering the Reign (Kingdom) of God and its Redemptive Significance
- V. Humanity: Recovering the Nature of the Believer as a Whole Person
- VI. Church: Recovering the Identity of the Church as the Israel of God
- 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 Authentic 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
- XIII. Evangelism and Mission: Recovering the Whole Gospel for the Whole Person for the Whole World in the Whole of Life

### **VIII. Worship: Recovering the Historic Liturgies of the Church**

“The meaning of the liturgy is therefore everything the church means to express — nothing less than its view of reality.”  
Frank Senn, *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview*

An honest diagnostic of contemporary churches at worship may confirm several observations of the current religious scene. A *New York Times* editorial writer asserted recently that American faiths tend “to be optimistic and easygoing, experiential rather than intellectual,” and that churches these days “are seeker-sensitive, not authoritarian” where “the music is modern, the language is therapeutic, the dress is casual.”<sup>9</sup> This condition exists particularly in evangelical churches which a leading sociologist of religion has declared to be “part of American culture, not dissenters from it.”<sup>10</sup> A respected theologian has written that just as mainline denominations capitulated to modern *high culture*, so evangelicals have been co-opted by modern *popular culture*. Though the former is elitist and sophisticated and the latter is not, still the consequences for the born again are just as serious and certain as they were for liberals.<sup>11</sup>

If this is the case, we would do well to ask some questions about what transpires in a typical evangelical worship service and what the answers reveal: “What theology is being prayed? What experience of (what) God is being

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<sup>9</sup> David Brooks, “The National Creed,” *The New York Times*, Wednesday, December 31, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), quoted in David Brooks, “The National Creed,” *The New York Times*, Wednesday, December 31, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 11-12.

promoted? What in the story of Christ is being proclaimed? What understanding of the church is being generated? What attitude toward the creation is being cultivated? What relationship to the world is being strategized? ... What kind of hospitality is being extended? How are new Christians being made? What values are being instilled? What doctrines are being expressed?”<sup>12</sup>

Forthright answers to these questions will likely reveal not only a fair amount of cultural accommodation, but also a startling measure of theological and spiritual impoverishment. *Thus I suggest that contemporary evangelical churches, either as a complement or as a fresh alternative, consider setting aside long-standing prejudices and embrace the wisdom and value of the historic liturgies of the Church.* This time-honored approach provides new and yet ancient ways of worshipping God, of inhabiting the biblical narrative, of being spiritually formed, of living and serving in the world.

Etymologically, the word “liturgy” (from Greek *laos* — people and *ergon* — work) means “the work of the people.” It is an interactive and ordered form of worship in contrast to more passive and freestyle approaches. Theologically, liturgy seems uniquely capable of reflecting the holiness of God, the goodness of creation, the sacramental character of life, the unity of God’s people, the significance of the incarnation, the importance of the body, the authority of the kingdom, the value of space and time, the eschatological goal of history, the role of memory, and the riches of tradition. Furthermore, interest in liturgy has coincided nicely with a change in cultural sensibilities from modernity to postmodernity with its openness to the transcendent, its emphasis on story, and its embrace of symbolism and the arts.<sup>13</sup> A recovery of liturgy, therefore, is both theologically grounded and culturally astute.

There are various elements of the liturgy that can cross-fertilize our own worship traditions. *The Christian Year* is an historic way for churches to rehearse

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<sup>12</sup> Frank C. Senn, *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>13</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), Appendix A, pp. 169-72.

the fulfillment of the biblical narrative in Jesus Christ annually. Advent prepares the saints for the first and second comings of Christ. Christmas celebrates the incarnation of the Word. Epiphany recognizes the revelation of God in Christ at His baptism and through His words and deeds. Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, calls believers to repentance in anticipation of the passion. Holy Week (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday) commemorates the events in the final week of Christ's life, including His crucifixion and burial. Eastertide, Ascension, and Pentecost celebrate respectively (1) the resurrection of the Son of God and His defeat of evil and death, (2) His installation as Lord of the cosmos at God's right hand, and (3) the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Ordinary or Common Time, which is the lengthy season after Pentecost until the next Advent, focuses on the vocation and pilgrimage of the Church in the world empowered by the Holy Spirit. Now the real end of the Christian calendar is not just chronological, but liturgical. It marks time Christologically by providing a common shape to Christian experience which is grounded in the memory of a past which is not past, infuses the present with kingdom meaning and purpose, and is expecting a hope that is already the Church's possession.<sup>14</sup>

Time may be hallowed not only annually by the Christian year, but also by daily through the *liturgy of the hours or the daily office*. Just as there is a natural flow to seasonal time, so also there is a primal rhythm of dark and light, sleeping and waking, resting and working to each day. The daily office sanctifies the cadence of each twenty-four hour period through morning, afternoon, evening, and night-time prayer. Morning prayer or *Lauds* (Latin for "Praise") begins the day with praise and dedication; afternoon prayer expresses continued dependence upon God as the day and its labor unfold; evening prayer or *Vespers* (Latin for "Evening Star") offers thanks for the completed day and asks forgiveness for sins committed; *Compline* (Latin for "Complete") expresses trust

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<sup>14</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 108-09.

in God's care for rest and protection throughout the night.<sup>15</sup> To structure each day liturgically in this manner, whether privately or corporately, preserves the significance of each moment and sanctifies all activities, transforming them into the worship of God.

In addition to sanctifying time, a recovery of classic liturgical practices might also include the *ancient order of Christian worship*. Based on clues taken from the New Testament and on early Christian literature, especially chapters 65-67 of Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (A.D. 150), this liturgical order specified that the weekly worship of Christians should take place on Sunday, and include the reading of Scripture, preaching, corporate prayer, the eucharist (including service to the absent), a collection of goods and their distribution to the needy. This historic format highlights the necessity of Sunday worship and the importance of weekly communion, posing challenges to contemporary churches that believe the day of worship is negotiable (Saturday night?) and that weekly celebration of the eucharist is optional. When this order is framed by acts of entrance and dismissal, an ideal for pattern for worship emerges, especially when tailored to the traditions and needs of particular congregations.

I would also propose that more serious consideration be given not only to the eucharist, but also to baptism as the rite of initiation into the church with its attendant theological meanings and symbolism. Also, the character of the worship space and its architecture, the role of the arts, drama, and sacred dance, the posture of the body, the employment of the senses, the effective use of symbols, and the singing of the Psalter are issues that need addressing. I also recommend reciting the Lord's prayer regularly, saying the ecumenical creeds with meaning, reading Scripture responsively and antiphonally, singing the *Doxology* and the *Gloria Patri*, encouraging congregational responsiveness, highlighting the reading of the gospels, and so on.

When all these matters have been thoughtfully considered and acted upon, however, we must remember that while our forms of worship are



significant, more significant still are the spirituality and truthfulness of the worship that we offer to our God.

Just imagine, then, a church that is attuned to its surrounding culture without being co-opted by it. Imagine a church that understands and is open to the historic Christian liturgies — the Christian year, the daily office, the ancient order, and so on — and is able to incorporate elements from this classic tradition into its own context with biblical fidelity and evangelical vibrancy for the edification of the saints to the glory of God!

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

“Thus, without Scripture, which has Jesus Christ as its sole concern, we understand nothing, and we see nothing but obscurity and confusion in the nature of God and in our own nature.”

Pascal, *Pensées*, §547

When it comes to reading and interpreting, as well as preaching and teaching the Bible these days, considerable confusion reigns in both pulpit and pew. One of the problems consists in misunderstanding what kind of book the Bible is (success manual? self-help book? daily light? theological treatise? historical document? pragmatic guide? mystical source? etc.). Other difficulties arise in actual homiletic and hermeneutic practices. To top things off, many Bible interpreters have excessive confidence in the accuracy of their exegesis, confusing the infallibility of the text for their understandings of it.

In the interest of promoting a church that is informed and guided by a biblical worldview, I would like to address two “large scale” hermeneutic issues that will help us see the big picture in order to read and teach Scripture better. My hermeneutic reflections are based upon the ancient principle of the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) which argues that obscure biblical passages are illuminated and interpreted by clear ones, that what is taught in one text cannot contradict what is taught in others, and that Scripture must be interpreted by its own presuppositions and not by an alien framework. *With this in mind, I want first*

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<sup>15</sup> Br. Benedict Young, C. J., compiler, *The Little Book of Hours: Praying with the Community of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), pp. x-xi.

*of all to demonstrate the Christ-centeredness of Scripture, and secondly show that creation, fall, and redemption make up the basic hermeneutic categories of the Bible.* These notions should illuminate other biblical texts, serve as the guiding presuppositions of interpretation, and should not be contradicted. Let me explain in a little more detail.

The NT teaches clearly that Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of the Bible. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets (OT), but to fulfill them (Matt. 5: 17-18). A similar note is sounded in Mark's gospel when Jesus said that in Him the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1: 14). In Luke's story of Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Lord Himself, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets," explained to His clueless traveling companions, "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24: 27)." In the gospel of John, Jesus unequivocally announced to recalcitrant Jewish leaders that the OT Scriptures bear witness of Him and that Moses wrote of Him (John 5: 39, 46).

On this basis, the Church early on asserted that the Old Testament, "the swaddling clothes of baby Jesus" (M. Luther),<sup>16</sup> pointed to Christ and could only be understood correctly in reference to Him.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the New Testament can be understood rightly only against the background of the Old. Consequently, the familiar themes of the OT — creation, wisdom, the image of God, temptation and sin, death, the promise of blessing to Abraham, the nation and history of Israel, Moses, the gift of the land, the Law, the temple, the sacrifices, the messianic kingship, the high priesthood, the suffering servant, and more — only make sense in terms of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus who embodies and fulfills them all. There are many stories in the Bible, but there is also a single, coherent Biblical story that focuses on Jesus who alone makes sense of the many biblical stories, transforming them into a colorful and

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Suzanne de Dietrich, *God's Unfolding Purpose: A Guide to the Study of the Bible*, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) p. 21.

dramatic whole. The church must read and interpret, preach and teach Christologically!

The theological framework established by creation, fall, and redemption provides needed hermeneutic guidance as well. Our understanding of the biblical term “world,” for example, can serve as a “litmus test” for the real content of our Christianity.<sup>18</sup> If we fail to interpret this concept in light of the governing assumptions of Scripture, the result can be a negative outlook on creation itself that has more in common with Platonism, Gnosticism, or Manichaeism than with biblical religion. The same is true when it comes to other expressions such as “flesh,” “body,” “aliens and strangers,” “temporality,” “things below,” and what it means to “deny self.” Are these expressions actually meant to denigrate creaturely life? What is the solution to this interpretative and practical problem?

That solution is found in understanding the proper relations between creation, fall, and redemption. Redemption in Christ takes dead aim, not at God’s very good creation (why would He attack His own handiwork?), but rather at the *enemies* of creation in order to save it from them. Just as a medicine attacks a disease to restore the body, so salvation assails evil in order to renew the world. You don’t burn down the barn to get rid of the rats; rather, you get rid of the rats to get your barn back. God is in the process of recovering His “barn,” having dealt effectively with the “rats” in the death and resurrection of His Son. Consistency, therefore, demands that the things God has made will never be the objects of biblical derision. No Scripture can be read in a manner that denigrates creation or any aspect of it. Texts that condemn or contain renunciations must be understood to refer to sin and its corrosive effects.

Hence, verses that condemn the “world” do not disparage creation, but its sinfulness (e.g., 1 John 2: 15-17). Texts that condemn the “flesh” do not degrade the body, but the evil that corrupts it (Rom. 7: 18; Gal. 5: 24). Passages that

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). As this author puts it, “At the heart of their [the apostles’] interpretation is a Christology and a Christocentric perspective” (p. 207).

<sup>18</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 52.

demand a heavenly outlook do not undermine earth (Col. 3: 1-2, 12-25; Phil. 3: 20-21), but require a godly engagement within it. Sayings that call for self-denial do not vilify humanity, but the things that disfigure it (Matt. 16: 24 and par.). That believers are aliens and strangers does not mean they do not belong in the world, but that they are at odds with wickedness (Heb. 11: 13; 1 Pet. 2:11). References to temporality do not belittle time, but speak about the limits of suffering and pain (2 Cor. 4: 17-18). And so on. This way to interpret not only saves us from serious error, but also frees us up to embrace embodied life fully as whole people living in a world God has created, judged, and redeemed!

Just imagine, then, a church with a mature hermeneutic that reads the Bible with Christ-centered lenses, and understands how the themes of creation, fall, and redemption enable believers to read texts of Scripture in such a way that they learn to abhor evil, but cleave to that which is good.

### **X. Fellowship: Recovering the Dynamics of Authentic Christian Community**

“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.  
Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.”  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Thoughtful believers in these postmodern times are hungering and thirsting for participation in authentic Christian community. The rich communal experience of the early church (Acts 2: 43-47) and the NT teachings about believers constituting the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) and the household of faith (Eph. 2: 19-22) certainly foster this desire. The history of the Church has demonstrated that the biblical ideal of “life together” as the people of God has been actualized often and successfully, generating hope for its revival in our own day (e.g., Bonhoeffer’s community at Finkenwalde). Furthermore, the individualism that has thwarted meaningful connections with others in the last century or so has no doubt generated the current backlash of communal aspiration in the contemporary church as well. *Several factors, then, combine to*

*explain why our current generation earnestly seeks the renewal of Christian community centered in significant relationships between “I and Thou.”*<sup>19</sup>

The basis for this deep longing for relationship is rooted in God the Trinity. He is One to be sure, but He exists as a community of three distinct persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who together have shared fellowship in love, one with another for all eternity. Similarly, we desire unity in relationships of love with others. But we must be careful not limit our communal vision to the human realm alone, but bring God Himself and the whole creation within its overall scope.

There is no community apart from communion with God. If we are out of touch with Him, then we are out of touch with ourselves, others, and the world around us. Conversely, to know Him puts us in right standing with everyone and everything else. Hence, the Scriptures place primary emphasis on our relationship with God, recognizing its profound implications. The Greatest Commandment requires supreme love for the Supreme Being (Deut. 6: 4-5; Matt. 22: 37 and par.). The first of the Ten Commandments prohibiting allegiance to competing deities (Exod. 20: 3; Deut. 5: 7) affirms the priority of the divine-human relationship. Even eternal life is defined as the knowledge of God and Christ (John 17: 3). This gracious fellowship with God, enjoyed individually and corporately through faith, is initiated by the Father, mediated by the Son, and enabled by the Holy Spirit. As a result, we have peace with the Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of the world. Rightly, then, did St. Augustine assert in the opening chapter of his *Confessions* that God has made us for Himself and our spirits are restless until they rest in Him.<sup>20</sup>

Authentic community certainly begins with God. But fellowship with Him also establishes a new view and relationship with the world. We apprehend the immense diversity and amazing unity of the entire creation as the imaginative

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<sup>19</sup> The notion of “I and Thou” comes, of course, from Martin’s Buber’s work, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman, new trans. S. G. Smith (New York: Simon and Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, intro. Peter Brown (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), p. 3, §1.1.

and colorful work of the Trinitarian God. This changes how we relate to creation itself. Exercising stewardship over the earth through productive activity; living compassionately with the animal kingdom; exercising responsibility toward the ecosystem; developing diverse yet united institutions and enterprises in which human friendship and productivity flourishes; cultivating relationships in the home and neighborhood — all these activities and their associated connections constitute the warp and woof of human community at large. Like an old-fashioned clock with its various sprockets and gears united to form a single timepiece, so the creation with all its unique institutions and enterprises are bonded together under the providence of God, making a rich human community possible in the world.

There still remains the community of the church and the kinds of meaningful relationships and experiences that ought to characterize the body of Christ. Theologically speaking, Christian community is the gift of God, established through the redemptive work of Christ and actualized by the baptism of the Holy Spirit: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12: 13).

Given, then, that Christian community is a divine gift, what should it look like? It should be well informed by Scripture and shaped by its overall narrative. It should be a locus of worship, praise, and thanksgiving. It should emphasize the importance of worship and the sacraments. It should be a vital center of prayer and song. It should be a source of support for vocation and daily labor. It should foster the practice of the classic spiritual disciplines. It should further the cultivation of virtues and the avoidance of vices. It should be steeped in church history and the Christian tradition. It should prize unity and affirm diversity. It should promote the reading of a canon of great books. It should valorize the creation and enhance concern for the environment. It should be steeped in the creative arts and promote the vigorous exercise of the mind. It should be marked by festivity and the common meal. It should rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. It should bear up under suffering. It should be

hospitable, show active concern for the poor, and advance social justice. It should sponsor thoughtful cultural engagement and transformation. It should promote whole person evangelism and the spreading of the gospel globally. It should, in short, be a kingdom community where God's rule is manifested comprehensively in love of God, neighbor, and world. It should not be taken for granted. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."<sup>21</sup>

Just imagine, then, a church where a theology of the Trinity grounds the human need and aspiration for community where the love, unity, and diversity shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is manifested in the body of Christ among believers who know their God and are intimately connected in redemptive ways with the world, its culture, and human family at large.

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

"The glory of God is a person fully alive."  
St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 20. 7

Many believers, and many non-believers, think that committed Christians as Christians must renounce their status as human beings. Whatever normal impulses remain after conversion must be crushed in obedience to Scripture. The goal of discipleship, many believe, is the elimination of the believer's residual humanity in order to become as *spiritual* as possible. Christianity and being human simply do not mix.

The basis for this common conception of the Christian life is grasped easily enough. Various *NT texts* (deny self, hate your own life, take up your cross, sell all you have, seek things above, crucify the flesh, love not the world,

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etc.), the residual influence of the *monastic tradition* (poverty, chastity, obedience), portions of the church's *hymnology* ("Lose ourselves in heaven above" – John Keble), and *teachings on the Christian life* ("despise yourself for the love of Jesus" -Thomas A' Kempis) generate this outlook. These and other notions promoted historically make it seem as if Christianity is a life-denying rather than a life-affirming affair. As a result, it has become very difficult to appreciate our humanity as the gift of God and that the goal of redemption in Christ is its comprehensive renewal.

Yet this is precisely what I propose. *I believe that salvation in Jesus Christ is not a dehumanizing but a rehumanizing enterprise, and that biblical Christianity as a total worldview is nothing less than the true humanism.* What is the basis for these claims?

Our essential humanity consists in our identity as the image and likeness of God, something He called "very good" (Gen. 1: 26-27, 31). To be sure, sin has corrupted our humanity and we have gone astray. But God did not make junk and He will never junk what He has made. In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ became fully human in the incarnation for the purpose of redemption. What a testament this is to human dignity! The reason why He has saved us is to not destroy our humanity but to renew it for our benefit and His glory. His grace restores nature, including our own as human beings. We are saved and free to become fully and truly human as believers in Christ. For this we were made and to this we are being restored. What dignity, what liberty, and what fulfillment of life this vision brings!

Of course, this kind of Christian humanism is not to be confused with secular humanism which rejects God and seeks to build an ideal world in the here and now based exclusively on humanity's intellectual, scientific, and technological resources. The preceding adjective makes all the difference in the world. *Secular* humanism is an anti-God, and eventually, anti-human state of mind. *Christian* humanism, on the other hand, is God-centered and affirms that

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<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans., intro., John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954), p 20. This discussion overall has been inspired by Bonhoeffer's



His redemption, worship, love, service, truth, and hope are the things necessary for a truly human life.

Furthermore, to affirm that the Christian life is the genuine pathway to authentic humanity is no justification for sin and is not incompatible with suffering or self-denial. The vision of Christian humanism allows us to affirm the self as God's good's creation, but not the sinfulness of self. The Bible supports the truly human experiences of work and play, the faculties of body and mind, and the virtues of goodness and beauty. But it opposes what is sinful. In fact, what is sinful in us — say, fleshliness, worldliness, possessiveness or lustfulness — is what is to be hated, denied, and crucified so that the beauty of our true, God-given personality can emerge.

Christian humanism simultaneously affirms the self and yet the possibility, indeed, the likelihood, of suffering and sacrificing for Christ. Our renewal in Him is sometimes met with persecution which can result in the loss of truly human things, even life itself. Sometimes it is possible and even right to forego the blessings and pleasures of life that are entirely legitimate (e.g., marriage). But disciples, as the whole people of God, are willing to do His will even if it means painful rejection and significant loss. A Christian perspective puts such grief in a larger context that shows what is at stake in kingdom terms, and also reveals that “momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4: 17). Only Christians know how to suffer and sacrifice well.<sup>22</sup>

Still it is important to affirm enthusiastically our humanity under God. He made it, and Christ Himself, who is the true measure of all things human, is renewing it by His Spirit and Word. It is as if we are getting new faces, a make-over of the ultimate kind. In fact, the Eastern Church fathers understood salvation in Christ as the restoration of faces to the faceless. A slave in ancient Greece was called a “no face” or a “faceless one” (*aprosopon*). We, too, are in faceless

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book.

bondage because of our sin, our visage hardened and pale. However, when Christ assumed a ruddy human face in His incarnation and communicated to us God's grace, truth and glory (John 1: 17; 2 Cor. 4; 6), He gave us new faces that radiate a transformed life as the image of God.<sup>23</sup> So now, as the Paul says, "we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3: 18).

Just *imagine*, then, a church that does not negate things human, but teaches that the goal of Christ's redemption by the Spirit means the renewal of our God-created, God-indwelt, God-sanctified, and one day a God-resurrected humanity such that believers receive truly human faces and are made whole to the glory of God!

## **XII. Ministry: Recovering the Classic Doctrine of Calling in all Spheres of Life and Service**

"There is difference betwixt washing of dishes and preaching the word of God;  
but as touching to please God, none at all."  
William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*

Participate with me, if you will, in a little thought experiment. How would you *think and feel* if Sunday after Sunday after Sunday you get the distinct impression based on the language used in the pulpit that the only Christians called by God into "full time Christian work" are pastors, church workers, evangelists, and missionaries? What if the religious rhetoric regularly served up indicates clearly that church related work is sacred and eternally significant, but that all other career paths are of temporal value and secular in character? How would you regard your "worldly" occupation if clerical leaders seem to say that the only kind of work that really makes a difference in the world is "kingdom work"? Would you feel guilty? Second class? Overlooked? Disenfranchised?

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<sup>22</sup> These qualifications of the vision of Christian humanism are taken from Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), pp. 119-34.

<sup>23</sup> John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 18-19.

Would you feel the need to make up for your insignificant vocation by intensive church involvement? Of course, those “in the ministry” try to console those who are not by telling them they can always minister on the job, presumably by sharing Christ with co-workers. At the end of the day, however, a distinction remains in the body of Christ and the basis for this distinction — the “perfect life” and the “permitted life” as it used to be called — is where they work!

So I wonder how many struggle, and even get depressed, over their daily doings because the churches they attend have failed to teach *that all believers are gifted and called by God to multiple roles and realms of service, and that what they are doing in the “marketplace” is just as important as the labor performed in Christian service careers.* An ecclesiastical failure to communicate the classic doctrine of calling to the people of God is an egregious sin of omission with solemn repercussions.

What, then, do we need to know and do to help rectify this present state of affairs? What do the Scriptures teach about calling? First of all, the Bible speaks of a “general calling” to salvation and sanctification in Christ through the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8: 28-30; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Thess. 2: 10- 12; 1 Thess. 2: 10-12; 1 Tim. 6: 12; Heb. 9: 15; 1 Cor. 1: 2; 1 Pet. 1: 15). God has chosen and brought us to Himself, and we have responded in faith to His gracious summons. We are now His children, undergoing renovation from the inside out.

Now this general call to salvation has clear implications on what kind of people we are and the kinds of things we do with our lives. As Paul writes, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2: 10). Thus our sovereign Lord not only leads us to Himself but also guides us into various spheres of service both inside and outside the church. Certainly each of us ought to be serving actively in the church, equipped for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ, especially through the faithful exercise of our spiritual gifts.

But God also calls many if not most of His people to various vocations in the real world. He desires that we love and serve our neighbors with the gifts and talents He has given us. He desires that we transform the areas to which we are called through excellent work and serve as His witnesses there. These particular, vocational callings are a logical extension of our general calling in Christ. It invests everything a believer does with godly purpose and meaning. In short, calling means, as Os Guinness states, “that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”<sup>24</sup>

So, in order to display His glory, cultivate His creation, extend His kingdom reign, meet significant needs, and accomplish His redemptive purposes in the world, our Lord calls *all believers* (not just some) to specific stations and tasks in life (1 Cor. 7; 20-24; Eph. 6: 5-9; Col. 3: 22-4: 1). Whether artist or farmer or nurse or politician or homemaker or teacher or salesman or plumber or engineer and so on, we are all gifted and called to serve and glorify God in whatever we do (1 Cor. 10: 31). This eliminates distinctions in the body of Christ. We are all in the ministry, *literally*, and not just by witnessing on the job! This is the classic teaching of the protestant Church. Martin Luther wrote, “What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our calling here on earth in accordance with His word and command He counts as if it were done in Heaven for Him...” John Calvin taught, “The last thing to be observed is, that the Lord enjoins every one of us, in all the actions of life, to have respect to our own calling...” William Perkins affirmed, “The main end of our lives...is to serve God in the serving of men in the works of our

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<sup>24</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 4.

callings.”<sup>25</sup> These teachings place extraordinary value on ordinary life in which we see and serve God, transforming routine duty into a source of delight.

Of course, discovering our callings is a crucial yet challenging matter. “All we have to decide,” Gandalf said to Frodo in a moment of uncertainty, “is what to do with the time that is given to us.” In making this life-determining decision, begin by matching up gifts and needs. As Frederick Buechener puts it, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>26</sup> Discovering this dynamic intersection at which our place in the world lie gives specific direction to all our days. As John Milton says in *Paradise Lost*, “To know//that which before us lies in daily life//is the prime wisdom.”<sup>27</sup> This is God’s grand purpose for all His children and the means by which He blesses the world.

Just imagine, then, a church that preaches and teaches the doctrine of calling, that affirms the value and contributions of all believers in their common lives, that supports and prays for them in their strategic roles, and that builds up the kingdom and transforms the world through the gifts and good works of the people of God who are making a difference right where they are with a resolute sense of purpose.

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

“The story of the triune God rescuing the world from death and restoring life is the central story of the Bible and the story that gave rise to the classical Christian message and mission.”  
Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*

Question: What is the purpose of the church? Answer: The purpose of the church is evangelism, to spread the gospel, to save souls. Question: What is the gospel? Answer: The gospel is the good news that Jesus died on the cross to

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 102; John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. X. 6; William Perkins, *Vocations or Callings of Men*, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 757.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Buechener, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, rev. and expanded (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 119.

pay the penalty for sin. Question: What must I do to be saved? Answer: You must believe in Jesus as Savior in order to be forgiven and to receive the gift of eternal life in heaven with God. Question: Must Jesus also be my Lord to be my Savior? Answer: No. Submission to Christ's lordship is optional for salvation. Discipleship decisions follow later. Question: How can I know I am saved? Answer: By believing in the promises of God that teach assurance. Question: What is the goal of the Christian life? Answer: To go to heaven when you die and to take as many people with you as you can.

This make-believe catechism, admittedly a caricature, conveys what churches often proclaim and what many Christians believe about evangelism and the gospel. Though it may appear biblical, this set of questions and answers presents a truncated view of the gospel and the Church's mission in the world. Is the Church's ultimate purpose evangelistic? Does the gospel consist of simple faith in Jesus who died? Can we drive a wedge between Christ's roles as Savior and Lord? Isn't assurance of salvation connected to the Spirit's Word-based testimony in the believer's heart coupled with a persevering faith? Is Christianity a life-boat religion? What I have actually presented is an impoverished version of the gospel — some would call it “cheap grace” or “easy believism” — and *it needs to be replaced with an account of the NT evangel and the evangelistic task in its biblical wholeness and glory*. Here are a few thoughts *toward* this end.

Though some would put it first, I have saved my treatment of evangelism until last for a couple of reasons. The first is to suggest that bearing witness to the gospel before non-Christians is the natural, Spirit-induced *outcome* generated by a full understanding and experience of Christian faith and life. Sharing Christ with others is not the root of the plant, but the lovely flower of the faith encountered in its radiant wholeness. My second reason for placing evangelism last is to highlight the *doxological priority* of the church. “Salvation-centeredness” can result, surprisingly, in an unrecognized kind of humanism in which saving people trumps everything else. While recognizing its importance, J. I. Packer, who speaks for me here, says that an over emphasis on evangelism

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Guinness, *The Call*, p. 34.

can lead “to a habit of human-centered theologizing, which sets needy humans center stage, as it were, brings in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit just for their saving roles, and fails to cast anchor in doxology, as Paul’s expositions of the gospel lead him to do....<sup>28</sup>

Hopefully, then, by suggesting that vigorous evangelism is the fruit of faith and a means to a God-glorifying end, we thwart potential problems and foster a church that promotes a whole gospel to the whole person to the whole world in the whole of life.

*The whole Bible is the gospel!* Evangelicals are experts at packaging the gospel in brief, easy to understand formats. The aims are noble no doubt, but the truth content can be minimal and the results misleading. Instead, I propose that we understand the entire narrative of Scripture as God’s gospel —creation, fall, and redemption — focused and fulfilled in the gracious, saving work of Jesus Christ. This gospel requires that people repent, trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, and show forth that faith by being baptized, growing as a disciple through Word and Sacrament, and becoming assimilated into the life and ministry of a local church through gifts and service. Evangelism does not stop once a person is saved. It sees the new convert through a process that culminates in full engagement in the community of the church. That’s a whole gospel!

*The whole person is saved!* We speak frequently about saving or winning “souls,” but doesn’t this often betray a dualistic perspective that affirms the spiritual and negates the physical aspects of the person? Contrariwise, the biblical terms for soul in both the Old and New Testaments (*nephesh*; *psyche*) are typically used as a figure of speech (*synecdoche*) in which soul stands for the whole person (e.g., Psa. 57: 4; John 12: 27). That’s what God made. That’s what Christ Himself was. That is what God redeems. Salvation is a whole-person affair, affecting everything a believer is and does, for time and eternity!

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<sup>28</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*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 125-26. The expression “Salvation-centeredness” is Packer’s also.

*The whole creation is being redeemed!* Evangelism is not only personal but is also a cultural affair. God saves whole people who in turn impart the influence of their redemption through their callings to the world around them. Believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5: 13-14). While it is often necessary for Christians to fight the world in its unrighteousness and to protect themselves from its polluting powers, the ultimate mindset of the Church ought not just be one of militancy and safety. Rather, the primary orientation of the people of God is positively redemptive whereby they infuse the healing and sanctifying powers of the gospel wisely and effectively into the institutions and social structures of human life and history.<sup>29</sup> Christ transforms culture through the church. On the day of His choosing, He will return and complete His redemptive work, setting the entire creation “free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8: 21; Rev. 21-22).

*The whole of life is evangelistic!* Though many of us think of evangelism as a distinct program, campaign, or crusade — some well-defined kamikaze raid into enemy territory — the fact is the totality of life is evangelistic in nature for the Christian. The best text on evangelism in the Bible — the creation decree in Genesis 1: 26-28 — suggests this. Life as God planned it, according to this text, consists of loving relationships with Himself and others, the blessings of marriage and family life, fulfilling work and cultural tasks in having dominion over the earth. This rich, original human project is what Christ has redeemed and is that to which He restores us as His people. As we live out this renewal with God in all these truly great human areas of our lives, we are witnesses “as we go.” We fulfill the great commission to make disciples through thoughtful, faithful, evangelistic Christian living. Witnessing and sharing our faith, therefore, is not just something we do occasionally. It is a way of life, just like worship is.

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<sup>29</sup> Henry Stobb, *Theological Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), chaps. 20, 21, 22.



Just imagine, then, a church that pursues evangelism out of a full experience of faith to the glory of God, preaching the whole gospel to the whole person, recognizing its cultural implications and contributing to the fulfillment of the Great Commission through Christians whose every word and deed bears testimony to the amazing grace of the gospel.

### **Conclusion: Just Imagine**

Remember now that people are not changed by moral exhortation only, but by a transformed imagination. What I am striving for, then, is a transformed imagination regarding the church, and a resulting change through the Spirit and Word of God.

*Just imagine*, then, a church that understands and is open to the historic Christian liturgies — the Christian year, the daily office, the ancient order, etc. — and is able to incorporate elements from this classic tradition into its own context with biblical fidelity and evangelical vibrancy for the edification of the saints to the glory of God!

*Just imagine*, then, a church with a mature hermeneutic that reads the Bible with Christ-centered lenses, and understands how the themes of creation, fall, and redemption enable believers to read the texts of Scripture in such a way that they learn to abhor evil, but cleave to that which is good.

*Just imagine*, then, a church where a theology of the Trinity grounds the human need and aspiration for community where the love, unity, and diversity shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit are manifested in the body of Christ among believers who know their God and are intimately connected in redemptive ways with the world, its culture, and human family at large.

*Just imagine*, then, a church that does not negate things human, but teaches that the goal of Christ's redemption means the renewal of our God-created, God-indwelt, God-sanctified, and one day a God-resurrected humanity, giving believers truly human faces and making them whole to the glory of God!

*Just imagine*, then, a church that preaches and teaches the doctrine of calling, that affirms the value and contribution of all believers in their common lives and vocations, that supports and prays for them in their strategic roles, and

that builds up the kingdom and transforms the world through the gifts and good works of the people of God who are making a difference right where they are with a resolute sense of purpose.

*Just imagine*, then, a church that pursues evangelism out of a full experience of faith to the glory of God, preaching the whole gospel to the whole person, recognizing its cultural implications, and contributing to the fulfillment of the Great Commission through Christians whose every word and deed bears testimony to the amazing grace of the gospel.

Just pray for our churches to become informed and guided by a comprehensive, holistic biblical worldview that causes our imaginations to fly beyond the stars!