

“An Introduction to the Reformational Worldview”

Introduction

In Tom Wolfe’s recent novel, *I am Charlotte Simmons*, Charlotte, the main character, is a young Christian woman and the extremely bright valedictorian of her high school class who gets accepted to Dupont University — one of the most prestigious in the country. Hailing from the bucolic town of Sparta in the western hills of North Carolina, Charlotte is as naïve, proud, countrified, and virginal as she is brilliant.

As the story of her life unfolds as a first semester freshman at Dupont, she is thoroughly corrupted within the first four months of her collegiate experience through the astounding paganism of the university’s culture which Tom Wolfe describes with amazing insight. One of those transformations is in the area of Charlotte’s worldview.

Mesmerized as she is by Nobel prize-winning neuroscience Professor Victor Starling, her very view of life is altered profoundly during a class lecture in which he explains the nature of the human mind in thoroughly materialistic terms.

Against the backdrop of the thin materialism of Marxism and Freudianism, Professor Starling states, “Neuroscience says to us, ‘You want materialism? We’ll show you the real thing, [in] the material of your own brains and central nervous systems, [in] the autonomous circuits that operate outside of what you conceive of as ‘consciousness,’ [in] the behavioral responses you couldn’t change even if you trained for a lifetime....” In hearing these words, Charlotte was changed metaphysically at the deepest level of her being. Here is how Wolfe describes it:

— Charlotte was transported. ...

In that moment, in the theatrical darkness [of the lecture hall], as the sublime figure [of the professor] down on stage moved in an electrifying succession of planes of chiaroscuro whose light, plus the light of the screen radiant with the image of the man who revolutionized the way the human animal sees herself, cast a glow upon the very crest of the heads

of all the students...Charlotte experienced a *kairos*, an ecstatic revelation of something too vast, too all-enveloping, too profound to be contained by mere words, and the rest of the world, a sordid world of the flesh and animals grunting for the flesh, fell away.¹

As the novel continues, readers can't help but wonder to what extent this fundamental shift from one worldview to another was responsible, at least in part, for Charlotte's later academic and moral collapse.

Worldview

Now I begin with this story from *I am Charlotte Simmons* to convey the nature and foundational, life-determining importance of the concept of worldview, and with the purpose of introducing you to a Reformational, biblical worldview and its centrality in the Christian life and in Christian higher education.

While many definitions of "worldview" abound, I take my cue in explaining the concept in holistic, existential terms from the biblical teaching about the heart, the embodied human heart. Both the Old and New Testaments are clear in its 1000 or so uses that the human heart is the seat and source of all of our thinking, feeling, choosing and worshipping.

Our intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual lives originate there, making it "the radiating center that suffuses all of man."² Accordingly, Proverbs 4: 23 states, "Watch over your heart with all diligence//for from it flow the springs of life." Also, as Jesus says in Matthew 6: 21, "where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

On this basis, then, it seems to me that life proceeds "kardi-optically," out of a vision of the heart. That's what I think a worldview is. More specifically, I suggest that a worldview as a "kardi-optic" is a vision of God, the universe, our world and ourselves that is rooted and grounded in the embodied human heart. The heart is not just a psychic phenomenon, but is anchored in the body. Far

¹ Tom Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004), p. 393-394.

² Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, quoted in Kristen Michaelis, "Woman and the Salvation of the World: Reflections on the Thought of Paul Evdokimov," unpublished paper, April 2005.

from being merely cognitive in character or simply a brain thing, a worldview defines a person at the deepest level of one's being and determines one's way of being in the world.

This kind of a "kardi-optic" is what shifted in Charlotte Simmons and thus altered the course and character of her life. Perhaps it was for these reasons altogether that G. K. Chesterton once wrote that "the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe," and that Richard Weaver asserted that "a man's vision is the great fact about him." Well, if so, what, then, is your vision, your view of the universe, your kardi-optic, your worldview?

In this light, how important it is for serious Christians and seriously Christian institutions such as Erskine to cultivate a biblically based vision and view of the universe, to shape a kardi-optic or worldview that has its roots in Christ and the Word of God. It is now my pleasant task to offer a brief outline of a Christian worldview that takes its rise from the Reformation, that is, to introduce you to a Reformational, biblical worldview.

But first of all, from my own experience and observation, I detect at least three debilitating, often unrecognized problems among Christians today, each of which could be remedied substantially by a knowledge and application of a Reformational worldview.

The first is the problem of bits and pieces. This is when the Christian faith is taught and experienced piecemeal in many fragments — a teaching here, doctrine there, an outreach event here, church activity there — bits and pieces rather than as unity of coherent parts appropriately fitting into the larger context of a biblical whole. With lots of parts, but no whole, with lots of pixels, but no big picture, Christianity is like the unconnected dots on a page in a coloring book, or like the *unassembled* pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The second is the problem of the disconnection between the Old and New Testaments. This results in the failure to understand New Testament Christianity in light of the Old Testament and in the context of the entire biblical canon and its cohesive theological message. Many people in evangelical

churches are what a pastor friend of mine calls “New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs believers.” They are familiar with only one part of the Book. But focusing on the NT apart from its OT context is like going to a movie an hour late: you can pick up on some of the action, but you will never really know what’s going on. It’s like reading a sixty-six chapter novel, but beginning in chapter forty: you really don’t understand the characters or the true plot. Only if the Old and New Testaments are coherently tied together will believers grasp the total story of Scripture, accurately understand Jesus, the church, and their faith, and apprehend God’s overarching purposes for the world from beginning to end.

The third is the problem of dualism and Christian compartmentalization. This horrible heresy and doctrine of demons, as Paul calls it in 1 Timothy, with Platonic, Gnostic, Manichean, and Enlightenment roots, divides reality into the distinct categories of the spiritual vs. the physical, the sacred vs. the secular, and the eternal vs. the temporal. Typically this kind of compartmentalization leads to the *promotion* of the church, the soul, and faith, and to the *demotion* of culture, the body and reason.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has called this split view of reality the most “colossal obstacle” to genuine faith.³ A Reformational worldview, however, strongly resists this heretical dualism, and refuses to view Christianity as a separate realm or compartment of life, but rather as a *way of life* for every realm and compartment (Kenneth Hermann’s expression).

This mega-problem of dualism, along with the bits and pieces syndrome and the disconnection between the Old and New Testaments are chief causes for the reduced, powerless versions of Christianity that are commonplace in far too many Christian communities today. Plus, this loss of a comprehensive Christian vision is also a cause for the contemporary breakdown in behavior

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 196-97; quoted in Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 16-17.

among believers, or what one has called recently “the scandal of the evangelical conscience.”⁴

The big biblical picture of a Reformational worldview is comprehensive, and goes a long way in responding to these issues, especially with its emphasis on the overarching biblical narrative and its the “pillar points” of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Creation

Unlike other Christian worldviews that begin with Christ and salvation, a reformational worldview begins where the Bible itself begins — in the beginning with God and creation in Genesis 1-2. The **Apostles’ Creed**, perhaps the greatest summation of Christian belief ever articulated, follows this biblical starting point with its famous, opening line: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth!” Likewise, John Calvin opens his great work *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a discussion in part one of “The Knowledge of God the Creator” before presenting his understanding of “The Knowledge of God the Redeemer” in part two. More recently, Francis Schaeffer wrote, “Christianity as a system does not begin with Christ as Savior, but with the infinite-personal God who created the world in the beginning and who made man significant in the flow of history.”⁵

I emphasize this because where and how you start in many ways determines where and how you finish. First things influence last things, and starting here puts NT *soteriology* in its proper OT *cosmological* context, and enables us to recognize, as a reformational worldview does, that Christianity is not only a religion of salvation, but of creation, indeed of the salvation of creation, that is new creation!

So, beginning with Genesis 1-2 and the narrative of creation, we understand exactly where it is we are here on this earth. This is a serious matter.

⁴ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2005).

⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 97.

The Roman emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius once wrote that “He who does not know what the world is does not know where he is. And he who does not know for what purpose the world exists, does not know who he is, nor what the world is.”⁶ Sadly, Marcus Aurelius describes many people throughout history who were unaware of their cosmic address. He also describes people even today who find themselves, to use the old TV and now movie title, “Lost in Space.”

But Genesis 1-2 makes it crystal clear to people exactly where they are by unmistakably communicating the truth that this world is God’s very good creation. Perhaps a couple of questions will put this into focus.

If it is, indeed, true, as some have suggested, that the most profound philosophical question of all is “why is something here rather than nothing at all,” then Genesis 1: 1 has a short and sweet answer: The reason is, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God the Creator is the explanation of the *origin and existence* of the universe.

Now if the second most important philosophical question of all is why is that which is the way that it is and not different, then the rest of Genesis 1-2 informs us that the reason why things are as they are and not different is because God made and designed them that way.

On the first three “days” of creation, God forms what was originally formless, and on the second three “days” of creation, He fills what was originally void. Light, Day, Night, Sky, Seas, Land, Plants, Trees, Sun, Moon, Stars, Birds, Fish, Cattle, Creeping Things, Beasts of the Earth, and eventually Humanity all represent the way God ordered the realms of reality and filled them with their respective rulers. Each thing God created was good individually, but put together, all that He made was very good (Gen. 1: 31). God the Creator, then, is the explanation, not only of the *origin and existence* of the universe, but also of its *nature and character* as well.

⁶ *The Great Syntopicon*, The Great Books of the Western World, vol. 2, p. 1118.

But not only do we have this *chronological* account of creation in Genesis 1, but in Genesis 2 we have a *topical* narrative that focuses on the origin of the seventh or Sabbath day and the making of man and woman, along with the institution of marriage and a prohibition to test covenant obedience to the Creator God.

While the creation narrative as a whole has cosmological implications, it is also a work of theology and is designed to promote the glory and worship of God. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth” (Psa. 8: 1). “The heavens are telling of the glory of God, and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands” (Psa. 19: 1). “O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Psa. 104: 24). “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the fullness of the earth is His glory” (Isa. 6: 3). “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You did create all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4: 11).

In this light, Maltbie B. Babcock got it just right in penning the hymn, “This is My Father’s World.”

This is my Father’s World, and to my listening ears,
All nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s World, I rest me in the thought,
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas His hands the wonders wrought.

Central to a Reformational worldview, then, is the knowledge of God the Creator. Christians, the Christian academy, and the Church must make the wonderful rediscovery of the world as God’s very good creation, and as a result, glorify and worship Him.

But this creation account not only tells us where we are, but also who we are, and why we are here. Genesis 1: 26-28, a text often called the “creation decree” and the “cultural mandate,” informs us of our true human identity and our central human purposes. Who are we as persons? What are we as human beings? Genesis 1: 26-27 gives the answer and says we are made as the image and likeness of God. The bodiless, invisible God chose to represent and express Himself in the created order by the uniting of body and soul in whole human

beings as male and female. In this identity as the *imago Dei*, human uniqueness, dignity and worth reside, an identity that also comes to expression in three divinely ordained purposes for all human persons.

The first is our spiritual purpose to have relationship of love and worship with God whose image and likeness we are. The second is our *social purpose* to have relationships of love and service with other people, especially as male and female in the context of marriage and family. The third is our *cultural purpose* to have a relationship of stewardship over the whole creation as the makers and shapers of culture and civilization for the blessing of others and to the glory of God. In common terms, these three reasons for our existence respectively refer to our Master, our mate, and our mission.

While our spiritual and social purposes are well known and frequently emphasized in church, our cultural purpose, unfortunately, is often neglected. But we must recognize that in addition to our walk with God and our fellowship and friendships with other people, God has also designed us to have dominion over the earth, to rule and subdue it wisely under Him.

As one theologian put it, “Down to the present day, all the instructing of children, every kind of school, every script, every book, all our technology, research, science and teaching, with their methods and instruments and institutions, are nothing other than the fulfillment of this command. The whole of history, all human endeavor, comes under this sign, this biblical phrase.”⁷ Or as Dorothy Sayers succinctly explained the human cultural instinct, “The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.”⁸ Or in even more practical terms, “Cultures advance as people learn to cultivate the resources of God’s creation, learning how to grow more wheat with less energy, pounding the earth’s metals into automobiles and musical instruments, and mastering the lengthy process of turning the extra wool on a lamb into a hand-knit sweater” (Michael Wittmer).

⁷ Ludwig Kohler, *Der Hebraische Mensch*, p. 112, quoted in H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) p. 164.

At the heart, then, of a Reformational worldview is a robust cultural vision, carried out in the context of love for God and neighbor by human beings who are the image and likeness of God, living and serving in His very good world! This is the good news of creation, and in many ways it is also a gospel, a story of creative grace and glory that transforms life itself into a sacrament.

Fall

But there is bad news as well, the bad news of the fall of humanity into sin. If creation describes the *formation* of all things, then the fall results in the *deformation* of all things. Something went wrong. Things are no longer the way they are suppose to be. The world is now abnormal.

Humanity's transgression described in Genesis 3 consisted of the violation of the divinely intended *shalom* (soundness, wholeness, well-being) for creation and the human race and shattered the peace (Neal Plantinga). It reminds me of the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty." Now I don't know the author of this frequently used bedtime story (which interestingly enough, ends in nihilism and despair), or what its intended meaning was. But it is a useful parable about the brokenness of humanity and serves as a good illustration of the first two pillar points of the reformational worldview — the creation and now the fall.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall (creation).
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall (sin).
All the kings' horses and all the kings' men,
Haven't been able to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Fragile egg that he was, when Humpty Dumpty fell, he was broken into a 1000 pieces, and according to the text is yet to recover. It illustrates nicely the fragile, broken, despairing, tragic and difficult condition which a Reformational worldview attributes to humanity's primeval sin in Genesis 3 as the explanation of what has gone wrong. Though "Centuries of religious art and, in recent years, hundreds of cartoons of naked women, apples and snakes have served to distract us from the meaning of the fall in Genesis 3,"⁹ a Reformational worldview

⁸ Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), p. 22.

⁹ Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 39.

takes the story of humanity's lapse very seriously as the only adequate explanation of what has gone wrong. It would agree with John Milton's first line in *Paradise Lost* that "Man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree brought death into the world and all our woe!"

Genesis 3 makes it clear that there were severe consequences of humanity's first act of covenantal disobedience, consequences that ushered in what I call the "uncreation." *Theologically*, it resulted in the separation and alienation of humanity from God, and thus our idolatry (v. 8). *Psychologically*, it resulted in the separation and alienation of human beings from themselves, and thus our craziness and insanity (v. 10). *Sociologically*, it resulted in the separation and alienation of human beings from one another, and thus our hostility (v. 12). It culminated in a curse on the serpent (vv. 14-15), a curse on the woman (v. 16), and a curse on the man and all creation (vv. 17-19). Finally, the primeval human couple was cast out from God's presence and the tree of life from the Garden of Eden (vv. 22-24). Creation and humanity died and the world became a cosmic cemetery, for the wages of sin are death (Rom. 6: 23).

What was the essence of the fall according to a reformational worldview? At the heart of humanity's sin and rebellion was the deadly aspiration to be autonomous, independent of God, and self-legislating. This rejection of divine authority and the quest to be absolutely free has been the centerpiece of the fallen human condition ever since.

In addition to the tragic consequences of sin already mentioned, a Reformational worldview, going back to much of its inspiration in St. Augustine, also recognizes the epistemic and ethical consequences of the fall in the forms of ignorance and wrong desire. In our sin and its noetic effects, we know neither God, ourselves, others, nor the world rightly. In our cupidity or disordered love, we succumb to an excessive love for self in pride, envy and anger, to a defective, incomplete love for God in sloth, and to an inordinate, unreasonable love for things, food, and sex in avarice, gluttony and lust.

The outcome of all this is Pascal's "misere" of mankind in contrast to our original peace and grandeur. We have been reduced from weightiness as the

bearer of God's image and glory to weightlessness, to mere wind and breath, to vanity and futility (Ecclesiastes). We are both beauty and beast, angel and demon, good and bad, righteous and wicked. Humanity is the ultimate paradox or oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. No wonder all the kings' horses and all the kings' men have not be able to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Redemption

But in the midst of the darkness, a light shines. There is hope despite the despair — hope that the One who made Humpty Dumpty in the first place will put him back together again. God *formed* all things. Sin *deformed* all things. Now God will *reform* all things through Jesus Christ. There has been *good news* in creation, *bad news* in the fall, but *good news* again in the gospel of redemption. The Reformational worldview, with its grasp of the total narrative of the Scriptures, recognizes that the remedy to the human condition is found in the promise and fulfillment of coming of the kingdom of God into the world!

Even in the midst of His judgments on the world, God promised in Genesis 3: 15 that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, destroy death and evil, and bring salvation to the whole world. Thus the “Scarlet Thread of Redemption” began and is traced from Adam to Seth to Abel to Noah to Shem to Terah to Abraham.

God called Abraham in Genesis 12 as the answer and response to the problem of sin that began in Genesis 3, and spread and escalated in Genesis 4-11 at the flood and tower of Babel. God promised to Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed, or perhaps better, re-blessed. Through Abraham's offspring would come one who would defeat evil, restore creation, reconstruct the believing person, and reestablish the kingship of God in the earth.

That one singular offspring of the woman and seed of Abraham, after a long series of Old Testament covenants, prophecies, and promises, was none other than Jesus Christ — “the Son of David and the Son of Abraham,” as the gospel of Matthew announces, the “Son of God” as the gospel of Mark proclaims, and the “Son of Adam” as the gospel of Luke asserts.

Jesus unites in Himself and brings to fulfillment the “Scarlet Thread of Redemption, “the great hope of eschatological salvation anticipated in the Old Testament. Jesus proclaimed that in His person and work, the kingdom (empire) of God had come, that in Him, God was at work, exercising the divine sovereignty against all the evil in the world. As Jesus asserted in Matthew 12: 28, “The kingdom of God has come upon you,” in Mark 1: 15, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand,” finally in Luke 17: 21, “The kingdom of God is in your midst.”

However, the redeeming rule of God in Jesus did not come the first time in a flashy display of power and authority, but rather as a mystery in secret and through service, and ultimate by sacrifice and suffering. Behold in the four gospels the kingdom of God in humble action: where there was disease, Christ healed it; where there were storms, Christ calmed them; where there was hunger, Christ satisfied it; where there were demons, Christ cast them out; where there was falsehood, Christ corrected it and taught the truth; where there was sin, Christ forgave it; where there was death, Christ conquered it.

The superlative expression of His kingdom was in the cross. Though the cross appeared to be anything but a royal victory, there He defeated evil and by His resurrection, He set the cosmos free — the new exodus and new creation!

Because the kingdom came inauspiciously and humbly, Jesus compared it to a tiny mustard seed or a little bit of hidden leaven; it was a kingdom whose authority would not be extended militarily, but through the preaching of the word like the sowing of seed; its value, nevertheless, was inestimable, like a hidden treasure and costly pearl, worth selling every thing you own in order to possess it.

That’s because this kingdom means the redemption and transformation of the world! We who believe this gospel of the kingdom are restored to God in worship, to ourselves in wholeness, and to others in peace. Our ignorance is replaced with truth, our wrong desires with rightly ordered loves for God and neighbor. It means the renewal of our spiritual, social and cultural purposes. In short, Jesus salvages a “sin-wrecked” humanity and world (Albert Wolters). He

redeems creation from uncreation by new creation. God has put Humpty Dumpty and his world back together again!

Of course, this is not quite the complete story, for though the kingdom of God has *already* come, it has *not yet* been completed or consummated. Kingdom redemption as we now know it is partial, though adequate for our present needs. We see, yes indeed, but in a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13: 12). Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again to complete His work of New Creation. New Testament theologian George E. Ladd has explained it in this way:

Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish His rule among men and women, 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].¹⁰

So as we read in Matthew 24: 30, we anticipate His return: "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all of the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory!" And we look forward to this final announcement: "And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21: 5). This final, grand announcement brings the biblical story to an end, when God shall be all in all.

Conclusion

It also wraps up this introduction to a Reformational Worldview. Its genius lies (1) in its capacity to integrate the bits and pieces of the Christian faith into larger, coherent whole, (2) in its grasp of the unified biblical message in the ongoing narrative of both the Old and New Testaments from Genesis to Revelation, and (3) in its emphasis on the integrity of creation and the wholeness of Christian experience. Its profundity is also found in its cogent answers to humanity's deepest questions, informing us of where we are (God's very good

creation), who we are (*imago Dei*), why we are here (spiritual, social, and cultural purposes), what's gone wrong (human rebellion), and what's the remedy (the kingdom of God). It is a vision of life that renews it. It is a vision of life that glorifies God! It ought to be the *kardi-optic* of our churches and schools, that vision of the embodied heart as the most practical and important thing about a person. I wish Charlotte Simmons could have owned it. I pray that you do ... or will.

Thank you.

¹⁰ George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 91