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Dr. David Naugle

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## A Christian Worldview and the Futures of Evangelicalism<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

**Doctor:** I have some good news and I have some bad news. **Patient:** What's the good news? **Doctor:** The good news is that the tests you took showed that you have 24 hours to live. **Patient:** Well, if that's the good news, then what on earth is the bad news? **Doctor:** The bad news is that I've been trying to get in touch with you since yesterday!

When it comes to this matter of a Christian worldview and the futures of evangelicalism, well guess what? I have some good news and bad news. Some realms of evangelicalism deserve the grade of an A in terms of their understanding, embodiment, and promotion of a Christian worldview and its cultural significance. Other domains in the same born again, Bible-believing community are at the lower end of the grading scale. Various para-church ministries are rather worldview healthy. In evangelical churches at large, however, the diagnosis is not as cheery. As Charles Dickens writes poignantly in the opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...."

So it is regarding the status of worldview thinking and living in evangelical Christianity: times are good, but they could be even better, especially in local congregations. So, in my reflections on this evening's topic, I will highlight some bright spots, and indicate where I think more work needs to be done. At the end, I will offer a few recommendations for the way forward.

Above all, however, I wish to communicate one key idea and it is this: that the progress and influence of a Christian worldview in evangelical culture is primarily due to the efforts of para-church organizations, and thus the crucial

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<sup>1</sup> This title is taken directly from Craig G. Bartholomew, "A Christian Worldview and the Futures of Evangelicalism," in *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Robin Perry and Andrew West (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2003), chp. 7.

need today is for the promotion, development, and implementation of this same worldview vision in the preaching, teaching, and ministries of evangelical churches. Local congregations must recover their heritage of the big biblical picture of the Christian faith with its radical comprehensiveness and full-bodied implications across the whole spectrum of thought, life, and culture. Along these lines, evangelical ecclesiology, I humbly submit, needs to be born again.

Of course, addressing the issue of Christian worldview and the futures of evangelicalism is notoriously difficult for two reasons. The first is because of the uncertain identity of evangelicals or evangelicalism. The second concerns alternative understandings of the phrase “Christian worldview. Perhaps it will sufficient to say in regard to the first matter that evangelicalism at large is characterized *biblically* by an unmitigated commitment to the saving gospel (*euangelion*) of Jesus Christ, *theologically* to the complete trustworthiness and final authority of Scripture, and *historically* to a classic stream of orthodoxy through the centuries and to significant renewal movements of that orthodoxy in Church history. These traits, along with an intuitive grasp of evangelical identity, should be sufficient for this discussion to proceed.

Things are more complex when it comes to what a Christian worldview means. Evangelicalism is characterized by worldview pluralism, especially in regard to hermeneutics and view of the Church’s relationship to culture. Covenantal unity or dispensational distinctions plus convictions that the Church should be either *against*, *of*, *above*, *in paradox with*, or the *transformer* of culture make a great deal of difference. Communication becomes a bit tricky since our worldview definitions can vary along these lines.

Since this is the case, the best I can do is identify my own point of view, enabling you to detect the nuances that inevitably will attend to my language. When I am thinking of a Christian worldview, I am thinking canonically and holistically about creation, fall, redemption and consummation in a hermeneutically covenantal and culturally transformative way. At a minimum, however, perhaps enough common ground can be found in our shared beliefs in the Creator-Redeemer God and in His Church that must interact with the world

and its culture effectively. Hopefully this general understanding, along with a sufficient dose of evangelical good will, is sufficient to permit this discussion to proceed profitably.

So now with these preliminaries in place and the terrain laid out before us, let's take a look at some of the *good news* about evangelicalism and worldview, especially in the para-church context where it seems to be the best of times.

### **Good News**

There is no doubt that evangelical Christians have made great strides in the formulation and deployment of a Christian worldview, especially in the context of non-profit, para-church ministries. Michael Lindsay, co-author with George Gallup, Jr. on two recent books on the landscape of Christianity in American culture,<sup>2</sup> noted recently in a lecture on my own campus that evangelical influence is on the rise in a wide spectrum of gate-keeping areas including politics, the arts, education, and business. This, he says, is largely due to the assiduous efforts of a variety of extra-ecclesiastical organizations that are promoting a culturally engaged vision of the Christian faith. This, plus a classic theology of vocation that brings the rich resources of biblical wisdom to bear on the callings of all believers, is inspiring them to pursue their daily tasks redemptively, enabling them to serve as agents of cultural change right where they live and work. Lindsay's professional observations as a sociologist have confirmed my own intuitions about the progress of evangelical cultural influence here in North America and throughout the world through these means. I see this occurring in a variety of areas, especially in Christian education and in ministries focused on cultural engagement.

*Christian education.* A Christian worldview is often foundational to the education vision and philosophy of a number of church related and Christian academic endeavors from the home schooling movement, to traditional

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<sup>2</sup> *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in US Beliefs*, 1999; *The Gallup Guide: Reality Check for Twenty-First Century Churches*, 2002.

academies, to classical schools on to colleges and universities. For example, the goal of *The Association of Christian Schools International* is that “Christian students worldwide will acquire wisdom, knowledge, and a biblical world view as evidenced by a lifestyle of character, leadership, service, stewardship, and worship.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, *The Association of Classical and Christian Schools* asserts that its primary mission is “to promote, establish and equip schools committed to a classical approach to education in light of a Christian worldview grounded in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.”<sup>4</sup> The *Council for Christian colleges and Universities* (CCCU), an association of over one hundred such institutions, states that its vision is “to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.”<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on a worldview based education among CCCU institutions is evidenced in the recent publication and widespread use of Neal Plantinga’s excellent book *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*.<sup>6</sup> In a blurb on the back cover of this work, CCCU president Robert Andringa states that, “Plantinga makes a case ... why the Christian worldview makes a huge difference in how we learn and live.” Union University, a CCCU school in Jackson, Tennessee, led by president David Dockery, would agree. Dockery along with his faculty and staff have made a biblical worldview the essential feature of their educational vision, recently publishing a book titled *Shaping a Christian Worldview*, which as the subtitle indicates, lays *The*

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<sup>3</sup> The Association of Christian Schools International, <http://www.acsi.org/acsi/Welcome.aspx> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> The Association of Classical and Christian Schools, <http://www.accsedu.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, <http://www.cccu.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004). In addition to the CCCU, there are at least four other organizations that are promoting a worldview based vision of Christian higher education globally. These include Overseas Council International (OCI); International Institute for Christian Studies (IICS); International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE); International Council for Higher Education (ICHE).

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

*Foundation of Christian Higher Education.*<sup>7</sup> The faculty at my own institution, Dallas Baptist University, is in the process of implementing a required course for all incoming freshman and transfer students titled *Developing a Christian Mind*. The course description, authored by yours truly, includes the topics of worldview development, the problem of dualism, Christian liberal arts education, faith-learning integration, vocational calling, and the implications of biblical faith across the whole spectrum of life. In addition to the CCCU, there are at least four other organizations that are promoting a worldview-based vision of Christian higher education globally. These include Overseas Council International (OCI); International Institute for Christian Studies (IICS); International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE); International Council for Higher Education (ICHE).

Outside the CCCU orbit, Baylor University's aggressive 2012 Vision is based largely on the assumption of the "integration of Christian faith and the intellectual life," the goal being to foster "a conversation about great ideas and issues that confront humanity, and how a Christian world-view interprets and affects them both."<sup>8</sup>

Much more could be said about Christian education and worldview. From this brief survey, however, we see that considerable academic activity at every level revolves around this notion. Many Christian educators believe in the potential of the Spirit-generated power of a biblical worldview to transform the educational enterprise in a radical way, enabling their institutions to recover their classic roles as agencies of personal, ecclesiastical, and cultural renewal. The short and long term consequences of this vigorous educational vision must not

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<sup>7</sup> David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds. *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Baylor University 2012 Vision, <http://www.baylor.edu/vision/index.php?id=8778> (accessed March 4, 2004). There are four explicit references to a Christian worldview in this document as the foundation upon which their vision, and specific aspects of it, rests.

be overlooked.

*Cultural Engagement.* The number of non-profit organizations seeking to help believers engage contemporary culture or a particular aspect of it from the perspective of a Christian worldview seems almost limitless. Charles Colson's BreakPoint radiobroadcasts and website, and his Wilberforce Forum are certainly prominent in this regard. BreakPoint exists "to develop and communicate Christian worldview messages that offer a critique of contemporary culture and encourage and equip the church to think and live Christianly."<sup>9</sup> The Wilberforce Forum's goal is "to help Christians approach life with a biblical worldview so that they can in turn shape culture from a biblical perspective." Their newly formulated Centurion's program, the goal of which is "to teach one hundred Christian men and women to understand, articulate, and live out a biblical worldview—and then, to teach it to others" makes this vision concrete in specific lives and callings.<sup>10</sup> Colson's recent and influential book — *How Now Shall We Live?* — co-authored with Nancy Pearcey, and written "to understand biblical faith as an entire worldview, a perspective on all of life," (back cover) has certainly made this theme accessible to evangelical readers at a popular level.

Of course, the title to Colson and Pearcey's book reminds us of Francis Schaeffer's earlier volume *How Should We Then Live?* and of L'Abri Fellowship, another ministry that is worldview intensive. In general, L'Abri study centers worldwide provide opportunities for individuals to seek "honest answers to honest questions" (a Schaefferism) about God and the significance of human life, demonstrating in the process how Christianity speaks to all aspects of life. This year's annual L'Abri conference in Rochester, Minnesota, held on February 6-7,

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<sup>9</sup> BreakPoint, <http://www.pfm.org/BPTemplate.cfm>; Wilberforce Forum, <http://www.pfm.org/WilberforceTemplate.cfm> (accessed March 4, 2004).

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[http://www.pfm.org/Content/ContentGroups/BreakPoint/Conferences/Training/Wilberforce-Annoucneces\\_Centurions\\_Program.htm](http://www.pfm.org/Content/ContentGroups/BreakPoint/Conferences/Training/Wilberforce-Annoucneces_Centurions_Program.htm)

was on this theme: “The Heart Set free: The Transforming Power of the Christian Worldview.”<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein, the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington D.C., led by Tom Tarrants, is seeking to articulate, defend, and embody a transformative vision of the Christian faith in personal and public life, enabling believers to impact their spheres of influence for Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the C. S. Lewis Foundation in The Redlands, California, under the leadership of Stan Mattson, has a similar agenda: “to advance the renewal of Christian thought and creative expression throughout the world of learning and the culture at large.”<sup>13</sup> The kind of all-embracing Christian vision that animated Lewis himself is at the heart of the work of these organizations, and others groups like them such as the Trinity Forum, the Trinity Forum Academy, and the Discovery Institute, especially its Center for Science and Culture.<sup>14</sup>

Several print journals are fostering careful Christian thinking across the entire spectrum of public life. *First Things*, published by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, and *Books and Culture*, a *Christianity Today* publication, are at the forefront of these efforts.<sup>15</sup> Along these lines but in a different format, Mars Hill Audio, produced and hosted by Ken Myers, “exists to assist Christians ... to move from thoughtless consumption of modern culture to the vantage point of thoughtful engagement.” Central to this organization’s purpose is the belief that Christian discipleship requires believers to pay careful attention to every sphere of human life where God is either glorified or despised, where neighbors are either edified or undermined. Mars Hill Audio tapes, which are an education in

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<sup>11</sup> L’Abri Fellowship International, <http://www.labri.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> C.S. Lewis Institute, <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis Foundation, <http://www.cslewis.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Trinity Forum, <http://www.tff.org/>; Trinity Forum Academy, <http://www.trinityforumacademy.org/>; The Discovery Institute, <http://www.discovery.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *First Things*, <http://www.firstthings.com/>; *Books and Culture*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/books/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

themselves, help thinking Christians to live faithfully and fruitfully in contemporary culture from the vantage point of Christian conviction.<sup>16</sup>

The Ransom Fellowship, located in Rochester, Minnesota, and The Christian Worldview Network, headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa, along with their respective periodicals, *Critique* and *The Big Picture*, are providing rich resources for careful worldview thinking, cultural interaction, and faithful living for many thoughtful Christians.<sup>17</sup> In addition to these groups, there is also *Summit Ministries* that seeks to train servant leaders in worldview analysis; *Worldview Academy* which is dedicated to teaching students to think and live in accord with a biblical worldview in order to serve Christ and lead the culture; and the *Worldview Weekends* program that entails intensive worldview training to enable Christians to understand the times, how they ought to live and lead in contemporary culture.<sup>18</sup>

When you add to all these organizations (and I have just scratched the surface) to the countless web-based resources like the Baxter Institute's Christian Worldview Boutique which serves a clearing house for numerous worldview ministries,<sup>19</sup> we can see why the news is good when it comes to worldview thinking in contemporary para-church evangelical culture. As Craig Bartholomew states, "There is hardly an area of study or cultural life in which one can't find some serious evangelical writing [or program], whether it be in the arts, politics, literature, economics, family life, counseling or psychology. Evangelicalism, not least in terms of worldview and cultural involvement, has

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<sup>16</sup> Mars Hill Audio, <http://marshillaudio.org/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Ransom Fellowship, [www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org); Christian Worldview Network, <http://thebigpicture.homestead.com/> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Summit Ministries, <http://www.summit.org/>; Worldview Academy, <http://www.worldview.org/>; Worldview Weekends, <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/index.shtml> (accessed March 4, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Christian Worldview Boutique, <http://members.aol.com/BaxterInstitute/Worldview.html> (accessed March 4, 2004).



experienced a major resurgence in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as Charles Dickens perhaps would say in this regard, it is the best of times.

### Bad News

Unfortunately, however, like the moon and most people, there is also a darker side to this story. This flurry of worldview interest and activity does seem to be somewhat quarantined in its reach to para-church organizations. Thus the news isn't all that good and the times aren't all that great when it comes to a biblical worldview in local evangelical churches. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization. Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City with its vision of cultural renewal, Hollywood Presbyterian with its outreach to the entertainment industry, and Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas with its Howard Center for Christian Studies come to mind. There are also a few efforts focusing on worldview development in local churches, like the *Worldview Church E-Report*, produced by the Wilberforce Forum, that are trying to make a difference.

Nonetheless, recent polling by the Barna Research Group among born-again, Bible-believing Christians paints a pretty dismal worldview picture in the churches. According to Barna's criteria, only 9% of adults and 2% of teenagers have a Christian worldview. In a separate study, Barna found that only 51% of Protestant pastors possessed the same.<sup>21</sup> The elementary nature of Barna's worldview criteria makes his conclusions even more distressing.<sup>22</sup> I think my dog

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<sup>20</sup> Bartholomew, "A Christian Worldview," p. 206.

<sup>21</sup> On adults, teenagers, and worldview, see George Barna, *Think Like Jesus: Make the Right Decision Every Time* (Nashville: Integrity Publishing, 2003), p. 23. On pastors and worldview, see <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=156&Reference=F> (accessed March 8, 2004). The Southern Baptists had the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview (71%), while the Methodists were lowest among the seven segments evaluated (27%). Among the other segments examined, 57% of pastors of Baptist churches (other than Southern Baptist) had a biblical worldview, as did 51% of non-denominational Protestant pastors, 44% of pastors of charismatic or Pentecostal churches, 35% of pastors of black churches, and 28% of those leading mainline congregations.

<sup>22</sup> The criteria are these: (1.) Belief in absolute moral truth; (2) Belief that the Bible is the standard for moral truth; (3) Six core biblical teachings: a. View of the existence and nature of God; b. The sinless life of Jesus Christ; c. The existence of Satan; d. The ability to earn salvation;

“Kuyper” could successfully answer most of the questions he asked on his survey (yes, his name is “Kuyper,” named after Abraham Kuyper!). One can only imagine what the results would be if the criteria used to measure worldview comprehension in the evangelical churches were raised to an intermediate, much less an advanced level.<sup>23</sup>

At times I have been somewhat skeptical of Barna’s analysis. Could the status of worldview thinking among believers in evangelical churches be that bad? Yet, when I call to mind a recent *New York Times* editorial describing the appalling superficiality of American faith, sociologist Alan Wolfe’s current claim that evangelical churches are “part of American culture, not dissenters from it,” and theologian David Wells’s recent trilogy of books bemoaning the dismal state of evangelical theology, truth, and virtue, I am inclined to think Barna right.<sup>24</sup> When I observe the overwhelming decadence and corruption of American culture, I tend to believe Barna right. When I detect how the faith of many evangelicals is privately engaging but publicly irrelevant, I am disposed to consider Barna right. Much is at stake theologically, ecclesiastically, spiritually, morally, and culturally in this ecclesiastical forfeiture of a distinctively Christian vision of life. The crucial need today is for the promotion, development, and implementation of biblically worldview driven churches. After all, the church, as St. Paul asserts, is suppose to be the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3: 15). For the past year or so, I have been working on a project of bringing

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e. Personal responsibility to share the gospel; f. The reliability of Scripture. From *Leading Your Church Forward: The Barna 2003 Seminar*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> For example, James Sire’s seven worldview questions in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 17-18. 1. What is prime reality — the really real? 2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us? 3. What is a human being? 4. What happens to a person at death? 5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? 6. How do we know what is right and wrong? 7. What is the meaning of human history?

<sup>24</sup> David Brooks, “The National Creed,” *The New York Times*, Wednesday, December 31, 2003. Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: The Free Press, 2003). David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Eerdmans 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Eerdmans 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Eerdmans, 1998).

Christian worldview into the church context, and I would like to present it to you in a nuts and bolts outline form.

From my own experience and observation, I detect at least three debilitating problems in churches today, each of which could be remedied substantially by the knowledge and application of a canonically complete, holistic biblical worldview. *The first is the bits and pieces syndrome.* This is when the faith is taught and experienced in imbalanced fragments — a teaching here, doctrine there, an outreach event here, church activity there — rather than as unity of coherent parts appropriately fitting in the larger context of a biblical whole. For example, in regard to three doctrines of creation, fall, and redemption, Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes, “our real question is: how can we ‘hold together’ — in faith, in life, in action — these seemingly contradictory affirmations of the Church, how can we overcome the temptation to opt for and to ‘absolutize’ one of them, falling thus into the wrong choices or ‘heresies’ that have so often plagued Christianity in the past?”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, that is the question. Sometimes it seems that the manner in which Christianity is communicated in the churches, despite a regnant Biblicism, is like a dictionary: it contains lots of information, but doesn’t have much of a plot. It resembles the *unassembled* pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

*The second problem is a disconnection between the Old and New Testaments.* This results in the failure to understand New Testament Christianity in the context of the total biblical canon and its unified theological message. Many people in evangelical churches are what a pastor friend of mine calls “New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs believers.” Their own devotions and the sermons they hear are from the New Testament primarily, with only an occasional excursion into an Old Testament poetic or wisdom book. But they have few clues about how the New Testament, Jesus Christ, redemption, and the Church connect integrally to the Old Testament, Adam and Abraham, creation, and the nation of Israel. The results are a kind of quasi-Marcionism, and a partial,

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soteriological understanding of the Church's faith divorced from its larger cosmological context rooted in a created but fallen world.

*The third problem is dualism.* This egregious heresy and doctrine of demons, with Platonic, Gnostic, Manichean, and Enlightenment roots, slices metaphysical and anthropological reality into the distinct categories of the spiritual, sacred, and eternal *vis-à-vis* the physical, secular, and temporal. Christianity is sequestered in the former domain and in the latter domain is found ordinary life. To so compartmentalize Christianity and quotidian affairs has distorted the faith, disfigured believers, devastated creation and culture, damaged the Church, diminished its influence, and deprived God of glory. For these reasons, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has called this bifurcated outlook, in which “the cause of Christ becomes a partial and provincial matter within the limits of reality,” the most “colossal obstacle” to genuine faith.<sup>26</sup>

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 versions of Christianity that are commonplace in far too many evangelical churches today. My worldview driven church proposal, therefore, is an attempt to respond to these three problems through an articulation of the big picture of the Christian faith, rooted in God the Trinity and the themes of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. I offer it as the guiding framework for the faith and practice of local congregations who love God, His Word, His world and His people.

This proposal consists of three essential papers, soon to be a book, Lord willing).<sup>27</sup> The first paper consists of a charitable yet firm critique of Rick Warren's wildly popular purpose driven church and purpose driven life books. I am grateful

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> These three papers are available online at <http://www.dbu.edu/naugle/papers.htm> under the title “Rethinking Ecclesiology.”

for Warren's talents and influence in multiple ways. I also recognize that we are all subject to deficiencies in our thinking and systems. Otherwise, God couldn't use any of us. At the same time, it seems to me that Warren's two volumes come up short hermeneutically and theologically, and in many ways foster the three problems of bits and pieces, the breakdown between the testaments, and the dualism itemized earlier.

As an alternative, I propose a worldview driven church in which I reflect on its theological foundations (part two) and ministerial functions (part three) in the context of a holistic biblical vision framed by creation and new creation and illuminated by historic Christian perspectives on God, humanity, and the world. In this modest attempt to revitalize evangelical ecclesiology, I capitalize on a theology of the imagination, concurring in many ways with Walter Brueggemann who argues that "People are not changed by moral exhortation, but by transformed imagination."<sup>28</sup> Beyond the uninspiring cliché that Christianity and the gospel consist of going to heaven when you die and taking as many people there with you as you can (indeed, did the Roman empire really put Christians to death just because they preached a message like this?), I suggest that what we need is an expanded perception and embrace of God's grandeur and His larger creative and redemptive purposes for the world and His people captivating our imaginations at the very center of our hearts. After all, life proceeds "kardiopically," out of a vision of our hearts! A fresh grasp of these grand theological and cosmic realities will purge our spiritual vision of the "film of familiarity"<sup>29</sup> and provide new ways of seeing and living.

*Theologically*, my proposal begins with an attempt to recover the Church's central purpose as the glory, worship, and love of God in order to insure that the means of the ministry are not substituted for the Church's final end. Second, I summarize the whole story of the Church as creation, fall, redemption, and

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 25.

<sup>29</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.

consummation, making sure that we understand the Church's theological identity and role in the world in the context of the whole counsel of God. Third, I present the person and work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ in an effort to counteract the effects of reduced, pietistic interpretations of Christology. Fourth, I highlight the centrality of the kingdom/reign of God and its redemptive significance both present and future for the whole of life, to offset the confusion and neglect surrounding this crucial theme. Fifth, I make the case that the believer is a whole person as God's image, and not simply a soul temporarily inhabiting a body. Sixth, I argue that the Church is the new Israel in substantial continuity with the people of God in the Old Testament from Adam to Abraham to David to Jesus, showing the unity of God's purposes in history from beginning to end. Seventh and finally in this theological category, I describe the eschatological character of the Church in redemptive history, demonstrating that present kingdom redemption will culminate in the new, redeemed heavens and earth where God will abide with His saints forever.

*Ministerially*, I begin with the area of worship, calling for a reconsideration of the historic liturgies of the Church, and recommending the incorporation of such classic traditions such as the Christian calendar into evangelical congregations with biblical fidelity as an ancient and yet fresh way of worshipping God and edifying believers. Second, I encourage preachers and teachers in the Church to recover the Christ-centered character of Scripture and the theological framework provided by creation, fall and redemption as the guiding hermeneutical principles for proclaiming God's Word. Third, I emphasize the importance of cultivating authentic Christian community as a central biblical mandate and solution to the contemporary problem of radical individualism. Fourth, I recommend the vision of Christian humanism as the goal of spiritual formation and Christian discipleship, thwarting unbiblical interpretations of the Christian life that tend toward dehumanization. Fifth, I urge congregations to promote the classic doctrine of giftedness and calling as the basis for service inside and outside the Church, valuing the roles and vocations of all believers who are making a difference where the worship and work with a resolute sense

of purpose. Finally, as the outgrowth of the preceding theological and ministerial components, I advocate a view of evangelism and mission that emphasizes the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world in the whole of life.

Just imagine, then, a plethora of evangelical churches informed and guided by these thirteen total theological and ministerial components as an expression of a canonically complete, holistic worldview grounded in the Scriptures from creation to new creation with all of its attendant ecclesiastical, cultural, and practical implications. This just may be enough to transform some bad news into good news in more and more local evangelical congregations!

### **Recommendations**

I have some recommendations for my recommendation for a worldview driven church that I would like to present before I conclude. *First*, I recommend a prudent use of the word “worldview” in a church context. Its academic tone may be a turn off to some. Its overuse may cause other congregants to grow weary of it. I would advise compiling a good list of synonyms to use in its place (e.g., outlook, vision, perspective, frame of reference, vantage point, etc.). Today the terms “story,” “narrative,” or even “meta-narrative” are the most popular, and I use them frequently. They have an immediate appeal and they certainly fit well with Scripture a large percentage of which is obviously of the narrative genre (even though none of them is found in the Bible *per se*). Such terminology is quite useful as long as it is cleansed of any fictive nuance or postmodern skepticism. Still, the word worldview has philosophic strength (perhaps more so than “story” or “narrative”), and is capable of conveying rigorously the distinctive perspective of biblical religion on reality.

*Second*, I recommend that church leaders beware of intellectual approaches to worldview promotion in their congregations. It is rather easy for the concept itself to be construed in a dry, academic manner. However, if my own biblically based definition of the concept as *a vision of the heart* is legitimate, then worldview is not just a mental matter, but a fusion of mind, affection, will and spirituality residing at the center of the person. It is a deeply existential notion,

one that is integral to our human identity as the image and likeness of God. There is no excuse, therefore, for a dry, scholastic approach to investigating worldviews in general or a Christian worldview in particular. They are the stuff of real life, governing the destinies of men, women and nations.

*Third*, I recommend that a Christian worldview be Trinitarian in character with a Christ-centered focus. People sometimes get side-tracked regarding the final goal of their actions. What counts in shaping a Christian worldview is not just the worldview itself, but God at the center of it. The two of course go together. It is easy, however, to embrace system building or cultural transformation as the chief end. It is not. The chief end is loving God, promoting His glory in everything, and finding satisfaction in Him. At the end of the day, therefore, developing a Christian worldview in our churches is simply an important means to authentic spirituality and genuine holiness as these affect everything. The final goal, in other words, is true saintliness.

*Fourth and finally*, I recommend some changes in theological education at the seminary level in order to facilitate worldview development in the churches. Church leaders will preach and teach in their churches as they have been preached to and taught in the seminaries. So, if we want to change the churches in this regard, we must change their leaders and the seminaries that train them. My recommendations concern the areas of biblical scholarship, biblical theology and systematic theology.

To begin with, then, I recommend that evangelical Scripture scholars learn to relate their technical biblical exegesis and scholarship to the larger issues of life and learning. They must do their work with an eye toward contributing to biblical worldview formation on behalf of which they are tirelessly and ultimately laboring. As Mark Noll suggests, evangelical biblical scholars “need to bring the fruits of biblical research into conjunction with theological, philosophical, historical, cultural, and even political and economic reasoning, in order to allow biblical work to flower in its fullness.”<sup>30</sup>

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N. T. Wright has set the example in this regard. In his public presentations, he consistently relates his biblical insights to the larger questions of the day. He also contextualizes his magnificent New Testament theology in a worldview framework in the prolegomena of his first volume. In the second, he defines worldview as consisting of characteristic stories, fundamental symbols, habitual praxis, and a set of questions and answers and then proceeds to sketch his profile of Jesus in terms of these four categories.<sup>31</sup> How refreshing it is to understand the life and ministry of Jesus in terms of the bigger biblical picture of which He Himself is a part. Think about how an approach like this to biblical studies might affect young seminarians as expositors of the Word and the fruit it might bear in local churches through their preaching and teaching!

Next, I recommend that more emphasis be placed on the discipline of biblical theology in evangelical seminaries and in ministerial training. The goal of this oft-neglected enterprise, pursued at least in theory apart from the categories of current thought, is to understand the theological content of a biblical book or author in its original historical and canonical context. It pays close attention to the unity and diversity of the biblical material and is especially sensitive to the narrative unfolding of God's purposes in the dynamics of redemptive history. For these reasons, biblical theology is particularly helpful for worldview development since it traces the contours of God's work in history at large and in particular flow of biblical history from beginning to end. It also shows how the mind of God so revealed in the unified and yet diverse plot of Scripture with its unique set of assumptions and beliefs bears upon the questions and concerns of our own day.

Graeme Goldsworthy and William Dumbrell have written exemplary books in this field, helping believers in evangelical churches understand the theological backbone of the biblical narrative as it discloses the meaning of God's mighty

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<sup>30</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 29-144; *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 125-474.

deeds in history.<sup>32</sup> As the latter author concludes in a book that connects Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament, “Our biblical survey has confirmed the schema, Creation ... the New Creation, as the axis around which all biblical theology turns. Any theology therefore which fails to put redemption into this total biblical context will not do just to the motif. And any Christian application of the gospel which does not assent that the gospel has to do with a total world view, not merely with a personal renewal... has misunderstood the biblical concepts expresses through that term.”<sup>33</sup> Can you imagine, then, what the results would be if church leaders were well schooled in the biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments and how this grasp of God’s larger purposes in history could affect the Christian vision of parishioners in local churches and their way of life in the world!

Finally, I recommend that systematic theology be grounded hermeneutically in the major worldview themes of creation, fall, and redemption. Never has a theological system been formulated in the history of the Church apart from antecedent philosophic commitments. For better or worse, Augustine read Scripture with neo-platonic glasses, Aquinas with Aristotelian ones, and so on. A question worth pondering, therefore, is whether or not it is proper to do dogmatics by means of a philosophic framework alien to Scripture itself? While a foreign context might yield some interesting insights, it also creates the risk of serious distortion. Surely the notions of an originally good creation, the corruption of that creation by sin, and the restoration of that creation in Christ provide that interpretive paradigm. Invoking the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*), these essentials constitute the clear, non-contradictory, governing assumptions for reading the Bible well in a systematic manner. As Gordon Spykman, who embodies this methodology most effectively, states, these themes provide “the

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<sup>32</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: Gospel and Kingdom; Gospel and Wisdom; The Gospel in Revelation* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2000). William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p.196.

revelational pointers, the guidelines, the 'control beliefs' (Nicholas Wolterstorff) for shaping a biblically directed...Christian theology."<sup>34</sup>

These, then, are my recommendations should the notion of a Christian worldview be introduced into the culture of evangelical churches. It will take bit of wisdom in regard to nomenclature, an existential approach, and God-centeredness to do it well. It may take a change in theological education if it will be done at all.

### **Conclusion**

If the Lord Himself ever spoke in terms of good news and bad news, I wonder if it might go something like this. He might say the good news is that His para-church groups are doing a great job in promoting an overall biblical view of life, transforming lives and affecting the culture as a result. The bad news is that the churches themselves have a long way to go. He might also add that He has been trying to get in touch with us about this for sometime now. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying to the churches. Thank you very much.

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<sup>34</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, pp. 101-02.