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“How the Church Lost Her Story and What She Can Do To Get It Back:
Helping Local Congregations Develop a Biblical Worldview”
By David Naugle

Introduction

In the October 1993 edition of the journal *First Things*, the noted Lutheran theologian Robert W. Jenson wrote an article with the provocative title: “How the World Lost Its Story.” In this article, he documented how the secularizing forces of modernism undermined the world’s defining narrative of the creating and redeeming God rooted in the Jewish-Christian Scriptures. It was replaced, of course, with a new Enlightenment vision of life based on human reason and scientific and technological prowess and progress as the hope of the world. This story became the world’s new story, but it was a story without a “universal story-teller.” As Jenson rightly points out, however, “If there is no universal story-teller, then the universe can have no story line. ... If God does not invent the world’s story, then it has none, then the world has no narrative that is its own.”¹ For these reasons and others, the modern story failed, as the horrors of the twentieth century have demonstrated clearly. Now we are left only with the postmodern critique of this failure, as we grope about for viable alternatives for the human future.

Certainly the biblical Church ought to provide a viable narrative alternative for the human future, but sadly, she has lost her story as well. Or if the Church has not lost her story entirely, then at least she has lost a substantial part of it, and the part she now has and tells is unfortunately limited and certainly less powerful. As a matter of fact, the Church’s missing or partial story is perhaps the best explanation why the world lost its story. To the extent that the Church is called by God to be the custodian of the world’s story as the storehouse of divine

revelation — the pillar and support of the truth, as St. Paul states in 1 Timothy 3: 15 — the Church’s faithfulness or failure in maintaining and explaining that revealed story in its fullness will determine not only her own, but also the world’s narrative fortunes. So much is at stake when it comes to the Church’s responsibility as the minister and herald of the total biblical story.

Now the Church’s story is also her worldview, her overall view of life and the world that is based upon Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to new creation. But if the Church has lost her story or her worldview as a whole or in part, what must she do to get it back? What should be done to rectify this situation? Certainly there are many needs and challenges facing the Church today. I am convinced that one of the most important, if not THE most important, is the foundational issue of helping local congregations recover a holistic, comprehensive biblical worldview as the larger theological context that has the potential to revolutionize Christian experience, deepen and enrich parish life and ministry, and empower the kingdom role of churches in mission and cultural renewal. Just think what could and would happen if the Church retrieved the amazing wealth of her narrative resources and began to fulfill her divine vocation in the world as the people of God within the framework of an all-encompassing vision of life rooted and grounded in the whole counsel of God!

The question, of course, is how are we doing on this front? What kind of progress is being made, or not being made, in terms of worldview implementation in an evangelical context? Well, quite honestly, in this situation, the reviews are mixed. It is like the doctor who said to his patient: “I have some good news and I have some bad news.” The patient said, “Ok, what’s the good news? The doctor said, “The good news is that the tests you took showed that you have twenty-four hours to live.” The patient said, “Well, if that is the good news, then what on earth is the bad news?” “The bad news is,” said the doctor, “is that I have been trying to get in touch with you since yesterday!”

¹ Available at <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9310/articles/jenson.html>. This article has been anthologized in Gregory Wolfe, ed., *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), pp. 135-49.

Similarly, when it comes to this matter of the promotion of a Christian worldview in the Christian community at large, I have some good news and bad news. Some realms of the evangelical church 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 domain are at the lower end of the grading scale. To borrow Charles Dickens opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities*, “It is the best of times, it is the worst of times....”

But let me be a bit more specific. What I detect is that the progress and influence of a Christian worldview in evangelical culture is primarily due to the efforts of various para-church organizations. For example, Charles Colson’s Wilberforce Forum and BreakPoint ministries, L’Abri Fellowship, Mars Hill Audio, The C. S. Lewis Foundation, The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, among other venues, are adept at thinking and ministering worldviewishly. And there are many, many more.

In evangelical churches at large, however, the worldview diagnosis is not nearly as cheery. 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.² The elementary nature of Barna’s worldview criteria makes his conclusions even more distressing.³ I think my dog

² 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.

³ 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.⁴ Thus, the crucial need today, as I have already mentioned, is for the promotion, development, and implementation of this same worldview vision in the preaching, teaching, and ministries of evangelical churches. In this way, evangelical ecclesiology, I humbly submit, needs to be born again. I am sensing and bringing to our attention what J. I. Packer has called the “stunted ecclesiology” of contemporary evangelicalism, and its loss of genuine “churchliness.”⁵ There has to be more to Christianity, the church, and the believing life than what we so often see and experience today. If with G. K. Chesterton, we believe that “Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags,” just think about what it could and would be and do if it were mixed to full strength and filled to the brim?⁶

Consequently, for the past year or so, I have been working on a project of bringing Christian worldview into the church context, and I would like to present it

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

⁴ For example, James Sire’s seven worldview questions in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd 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?

⁵ J. I. Packer, “A Stunted Ecclesiology?” in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century — Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall, eds (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 120-27.

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

to you in a nuts and bolts outline form. I call my proposal, with all due respect to Rick Warren, “the worldview-driven church!”

But first of all, 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?”⁷ 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,

⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1963, 1973), p. 8.

soteriological understanding of the Church's faith divorced from its larger cosmological context rooted in a created but fallen world. After all, Christianity is not only a religion of salvation, but of creation, indeed of the salvation of creation!

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.⁸

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, and 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.

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

Instead, I refer to the establishment of the church's life and ministry on the basis of a clear and substantial vision centered in the human heart that is derived

⁸ 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.

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

So far, this proposal consists of three essential papers, soon to be a book, Lord willing.⁹ 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 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

⁹ These three papers are available online at <http://www.dbu.edu/naugle/papers.htm> under the title “Rethinking Ecclesiology.”

transformed imagination.”¹⁰ 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 “kardiologically,” 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”¹¹ and provide new ways of seeing and living.

Theologically, and first of all, 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. Joining the praises of creation already in progress, the church under an ordained leadership through a well ordered liturgy that includes the ministry of the Word and sacrament, offers praises and commitment of life to God as its chief reason for its existence.

Second, I summarize the whole story of the Church as creation, fall, redemption, and 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. Grasping the nature of God’s enduring purposes in creation, their corruption due to sin, and their progressive restoration through a covenantally-structured redemptive history promised to Israel in the Old Testament and fulfilled and consummated by Christ for the church in the New Testament is the absolute prerequisite. The whole counsel of God from creation to consummation, in other words, must provide the framework for any sound ecclesiology.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 25.

¹¹ 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.

Third, I present the person and work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ in an effort to counter act the effects of reduced, pietistic interpretations of Christology. Without sacrificing the importance of our personal bond with the Savior and the meaning of our pilgrimage in life with Him, at the same time a more complete perspective will showcase His cosmic identity and roles in the larger purposes of God as the Creator and Redeemer of all things. After all, God's method for dealing with the whole creation, with all the nations, with Israel, and with the church are focused in Him — □□□□□□□□.

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. The New Testament affirms that through the words and works of Jesus, the kingdom of God broke into history at His first advent and is now present, though it arrived in a mysterious, unexpected way through a serving, suffering, saving Lamb of God. This same kingdom, which by the Spirit is presently effecting the salvation and sanctification of those who believe, will be manifested in its fullness when Christ returns. This kind of royal theology implies that real, historical life is to be redeemed now as it is lived out by the people of God, resulting personal salvation and cultural transformation “as we go” into all the world.

Fifth, I make the case that the people are not simply souls temporarily inhabiting bodies, but that people are whole persons as God’s image and likeness. To be such constitutes their genuine humanity and is the source of their dignity and worth. This unifying perspective of the total human person as the *imago Dei* is confirmed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ who was fully human as well as fully God. It is also affirmed by His subsequent resurrection from the dead in whose train all believers follow as they too are being restored to their complete humanity in Him.

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 creative and redemptive purposes in history from beginning to end. The election of Abraham in Genesis 12 began the

process of forming the covenant people of God, and whose own call was the divine response to the advent, spread, and escalation of sin in the world (Gen. 3-11). From Abraham's race came the Christ who is also the new Adam (1 Cor. 15: 45; Rom. 5: 12-21) and who has fulfilled the OT redemptive promise, restored fellowship with God, and renewed His purposes for the world in the body of Christ. The church as the worshipping community based on the ministries of the Word and sacrament is best identified as the people of God standing in continuity with and as the consummation of the Old Testament covenant community of Israel.

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. The presence of the God's rule, the order of the resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the fact of justification, the reality of glorification are all presented in the New Testament as eschatological magnitudes that have leapt from the future into the present, yet without the final consummation. Within this eschatological framework and identity, the church enjoys her life in Christ and carries out her ministry in the present with an eye to the past and a hope for the future as the already but not yet people of God.

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 joy and fulfillment 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.

If there is anything that, however, that the devil and his minions don't want, it is for our churches to recover their true story, to recover a holistic, comprehensive world and life view as the basis and framework of the churches' life and ministries. What kind of demonic strategy might be in use to thwart such a vision?

To this end, in imitation of the inimitable C. S. Lewis, I have written a new screwtape letter that I think may put the matter in perspective. Here we have

Screwtape as the veteran demonic tempter admonishing his pupil Wormwood on how to make sure his pastor patient is kept in the dark regarding the relevance of a biblical worldview for local church ministry, and its application to the whole of life. I have put it in the context of this seminar here at GRTS and specifically with each of you and your roles as church leaders in mind.

A New Screwtape Letter
By David Naugle

My Dear Wormwood:

I have just returned from our weekly meeting of the Infernal Lowerarchy* where before my peers I was utterly humiliated to report that that pastor 'patient' of yours has signed up for a seminar on Christian Worldview at GRTS. For hell's sake, how could you let that happen? He was supposed to play golf on Monday — that's the preacher's day off, you know! You are on the verge of letting that man slip through your scaly fingers. At that gathering, they plan on exposing things we devils have been working assiduously to establish in the churches for centuries. They may discover how the Enemy's Word establishes a coherent, holistic vision that revolutionizes their ministries, transforms Christians, leads to more effective witness, and even renews culture. This cannot happen!

As you might imagine, our Father below* is not pleased with these developments. He fears that the compartmentalized, pietistic and pragmatic version of faith and life that we have successfully imparted to them through multiple avenues may be undermined, not only in your pastor patient, but also in others who attend this gathering. Consequently, he has told me to take immediate action, else the consequences will be unusually severe for both you and me.

You know very well that from the time of our cosmic takeover, our fiendish Father has inspired us with a shrewd vision of disintegration, corruption, and diminishment. The Enemy, who has a slight advantage over us as the Creator of

the universe, has revealed His large and generous plan for humanity and the earth in His despicable — uh... um... I can barely make myself say it — *Scriptures* with its overriding themes of creation, fall, and redemption. We, however, have labored night and day to make sure that most Christians and their churches never make the discovery of this total story and its radical implications. We have aspired to reduce and distort, to separate and fragment, to exploit and malign, to relativize and idolize everything *their* Creator has made and revealed.

Various unconscious human recruits have served us admirably in promoting our lies. Slubgob* is famous throughout our kingdom for prompting both Plato's forms/world distinction and the dualism of the Gnostics and Manicheans, not to mention his success in adequately infecting the thought of that sexually repressed, neurotic bishop of Hippo with a residual neo-platonism. Triptweeze* caused these wonderful misunderstandings to endure throughout the middle ages, with only a slight scare when that Dumb Ox Dominican synthesized Aristotle's philosophy with theology and reintegrated nature and grace. Fortunately William of Ockham's nominalism restored the separation which we have successfully used to "bedevil" the Church's thought and life ever since. Descartes and Kant contributed unwittingly to our covert cause to divide and conquer through their respective mind/matter and noumena/phenomena distinctions. The rise of idolized science (how we love to twist the Adversary's gifts!), especially in its evolutionary form (Zozezas' work on Darwin should be noted here), has undermined the notion of creation itself. Next to redemption, of course, there is no more important doctrine for us to destroy. This has made it certain that facts and values are forever severed and that any transcendent moral vision is forever nullified. Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, who by then required very little coaxing from us, took things the rest of the way home. How excited we were when the latter of this triumvirate — our favorite infidel — announced to the world that God was dead! After all, our overall goal has been the liquidation of the Judeo-Christian worldview from the face of the earth.

But our crowning achievement has been in the churches. Though sincere in all they do, their well-deceived leaders actually believe our lies are the truth!

We have caused them to mistake the practical means of ministry for its ultimate doxological ends. We have made them substitute bits and pieces of the faith for the whole story of the Church from creation to new creation. We have reduced Jesus to personal Savior alone, and kept His roles as cosmic Creator, Redeemer and Lord far from view. We have obscured the role of the kingdom/rule of God in its redemptive significance, certainly excluding the news of our own conquest by it from their awareness. We have reduced their understanding of their own nature as whole persons, making them think they are merely good souls trapped in bad bodies. We have severed the integral connections between creation, Israel and the Church, causing them to lose sight of the unity of God's Word and plan. We have hidden from them the meaning of salvation history and their own eschatological character as kingdom people living in between the times of the already and not yet.

As if this wasn't enough, we have caused them to overreact to the valuable role of the church's historic liturgy as an empty, Catholic thing. We have misled them hermeneutically to preach and teach the Bible apart from its overall canonical context. We have diminished their understanding and experience of true community to coffee and doughnuts. We have caused them to think that sanctification and Christian growth ought to dehumanize rather than rehumanize them. We have severely limited their thinking about work, making them divide jobs into sacred and secular categories, and preventing them from recognizing how vocational calling leads the Enemy's people into all aspects of valuable service in the world. We have prompted them to proclaim an abbreviated gospel to a part of the person, to a limited portion of the world, for application to a fraction of life. We have been able to enthrone many good, solid resounding lies at the center of their lives!*

The good news about all this, Wormwood, is that the silly little Christians we have in the palm of our cloven hooves can hardly wait to evacuate planet earth and head off to heaven where they think they really belong! How joyfully they sing, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." As a result, their faith remains privately engaging but publicly irrelevant, thank Beelzebub!

So, you must never let their leaders read Michael Wittmer's book, *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You do Matters to God*. If they did, they would cease to see everything as essentially sacred or secular, and fail to promote, as they *now* do, the spiritual over the physical, grace over nature, the soul over the body, the eternal over the temporal, faith over reason and so on. They would cease to think of Christianity as its own distinct realm of life, but instead would recognize it as a way of life for every realm. We must maintain their pride in the super-spirituality that flows from their compartmentalized faith, all nicely ensconced in their cozy, pietistic evangelical ghettos! Otherwise, our victories in the churches may soon end.

This is why I am so shocked that you, Wormwood, of all tempters, would allow that pastor patient of yours to attend this ridiculous seminar. You know good and well that what they will be teaching is diametrically opposed to what you and I believe in. You must seek to suppress its malevolent influence as effectively as possible. So, regarding your man, I suggest you employ weapons of mass distraction to trip him up. Cause him to think about how he could be out on the golf course improving his short game right now if he weren't at this meeting. Perhaps you can distract him with anxieties about matters back home, or problems with the kids, or with sexual preoccupations, or with silly things, like shoes that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, or funny hair, or the strange pitch of another's voice.* That should keep him from profiting from this meeting, the one thing we can't allow. In any case, report back to me when the seminar is over, and I expect to hear of significant success. Or else.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

*Indicates words or phrases original with Lewis