

Rethinking Ecclesiology:
The Worldview Driven Church
(A Critique of Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church*)

Introduction

On a few occasions, I have thought about the possibility of becoming the pastor of a church. Over the years I have certainly enjoyed fulfilling a ministerial role in the lives of both traditional and adult students that I have encountered as a university professor. There is, after all, a kind of pastoral dimension to college teaching that occurs both inside and outside the classroom, especially on a Christian university campus. So every once and a while I have considered the alternative of focusing my time and attention on a local parish ministry. Such a role, I say to myself, would be a fresh challenge and great opportunity. It would also be an enormous task and a serious responsibility. I don't know if there is a tougher job on the face of the planet than leading local congregations in the worship and service of God. May the Lord strengthen those whom He has called to such demanding posts.

Overall, however, I am convinced that local church ministry is not my primary area of giftedness and calling. I thrive in a university environment where I have the privilege of working in community with students and colleagues as we undertake our shared tasks of studying, teaching, and learning. I have always aspired to be a "university man," devoted enthusiastically to the cultivation of a holistic biblical worldview in myself and my students through the rigors of academic life. As a matter of fact, it has been this very project I have pursued as a Christian professor that makes me think that being a minister would be an important endeavor to pursue.

So occasionally I ask myself a battery of questions: "Don't the people in the pews, as well as college students, need to know about this important matter of worldview development?" Wouldn't a church built upon a comprehensive

Christian vision revolutionize believers' lives, transform congregations, and contribute more effectively to the renewal of our culture? "Is it even possible to transfer this grand biblical conception of reality, which is so easy to talk about in the college classroom, to a local congregation, and create a worldview driven church? Will congregants say it's impractical or too intellectual? Maybe yes. Maybe no.

In many ways I am motivated by a desire to conduct an experiment. I have spent the better part of the last thirty-three years of my life studying and thinking rather intensely about the meaning and implications of the Christian faith. On the basis of these three-plus decades of reflection, as well as having extensive church involvement my entire life (including serving nine and a half years in two churches), I have arrived at two basic conclusions. The first is that while many local congregations are often very good at what they do, they are often handicapped in life and ministry by serious shortcomings in their biblical and theological understanding of the faith. The second is that as a corrective to these shortcomings, there is a need to recover the role of the church within the framework of an overarching biblical worldview. What I want to do is test the validity of my criticisms, and find out whether or not my alternative approach is an achievable goal. In this paper, therefore, I am going to attempt to conduct at least a portion of my experiment before your very eyes. And here is how I am going to try to do it.

First of all, I will highlight the common shortcomings in the contemporary church's theological understanding by offering some loving yet firm critiques of Rick Warren's very popular notions of the purpose driven church and the purpose driven life. My quarrel with him is not at the practical level. I am not concerned to talk about contemporary worship styles or mega-churches *per se* (those are stories in themselves). Rather, my critiques are conceptual in nature. That is, they have to do with components to Warren's actual theology that undergird his purpose driven church model.

As the second component to my experiment, I will sketch out very briefly my own alternative to Warren's model by presenting what I will call "the

worldview driven church.” I will explain what I mean by this expression and then seek to flesh it out in a series of short proposals that I believe possess considerable potential for believers and for the ministries of local congregations. After that, I will turn it over to you to see what you think!

Please note that I undertake this experiment, especially its critical component, with some fear and trembling. I recognized clearly how popular Rick Warren is not only here on campus, but around the country, and throughout the world. I feel the weight of those who have endorsed his books.¹ I have no desire to cast aspersions on him or on his ministry. Nor do I want to hurt the feelings of those who admire his work and follow him. By the grace of God, my goal, in the spirit of Priscilla and Aquilla, is simply to try to understand and explain “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18: 26). After all, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to think critically about various Christian teachers and their teachings when he says: “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5: 21).

So with that said, we now move to part one of my “experiment.”

A Critique Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Church and Purpose Driven Life

Though he claims to be just “a regular guy,” *Christianity Today* in its November 18, 2002 cover story stated that Rick Warren might very well be “America’s Most Influential Pastor.”² According to the information about him on

¹ *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) is endorsed by Bill Bright, Jim Henry (Kate Campbell’s dad!), George Brushaber, Leonard Sweet, Ken Hemphill, Bruce Larson, Lyle Schaller, Marshall Shelley, Charles Chaney, Ezra Earl Jones, Henry J. Schmidt, Bill Sullivan, George G. Hunter, III, Archibald Hart, Lewis Drummond, Gary McIntosh, Joe Ellis, Bob Roberts, Thom S. Rainer, William Crews, Elmer Towns, Walt Kallestad, Jim Reeves, Randy Pope, Jack Graham, Jerry Falwell, Robert H. Schuller, Adrian Rogers, Jack Hayford, O. S. Hawkins, Jerry Sutton, James Merritt, Paul D. Robbins, Ed Young, Jr., W. A. Criswell, Aubrey Malphurs, Leith Anderson, James Draper, Haddon Robinson, John Maxwell, Robert Coleman, and a few others. *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) is endorsed by Billy Graham, Bruce Wilkinson, Lee Strobel, and Max Lucado.

² Tim Stafford, “A Regular Purpose-Driven Guy: Rick Warren’s Genius is in Helping Pastors See the Obvious,” *Christianity Today* 46 (November 18, 2002), 42ff.

his purpose-driven life website, that assertion may not be an exaggeration at all.³ Undoubtedly he is gifted as a church visionary and as a master manager and organizer. His heart for evangelizing non-Christians is exemplary. Furthermore, his two books *The Purpose Driven Church (PDC)* and *The Purpose Driven Life (PDL)* offer any careful reader a plethora of profitable insights by which to grow spiritually and minister effectively.⁴

Despite many helpful ideas in both volumes, however, I detect two serious conceptual problems that must be addressed. Both are examples of a fallacy in thinking called “reductionism.” This occurs when we shrink a whole, complex entity to one of its parts, and then mistakenly think that the shrunken part is in fact the whole, complex entity, or the only important thing. The first of these two

³ According <http://www.purposedrivenlife.com/>, accessed 11 February 2003, Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. He and his wife, Kay, began the church in their home in January 1980, with one family. Now, with 16,000 in attendance each weekend, and over 50,000 names on the church roll, Saddleback is one of America's largest and best-known churches. It's been named the fastest growing Baptist church in history, and the largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention. In the past seven years, more than 9,200 new believers have been baptized at Saddleback. The church has also started 34 daughter churches, and sent over 4,000 of its members on mission projects around the world.

Warren is well-known as the pioneer of the **Purpose-Driven** paradigm for church health (not growth). More than 250,000 pastors and church leaders from over 125 countries have attended *Purpose-Driven Church seminars* conducted in 18 languages. His book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, has sold over one million copies in 20 languages. Winner of the Gold Medallion Ministry Book of the Year, it is used as a textbook in most seminaries, and was selected as one of the *100 Christian Books That Changed the 20th Century*. In addition, Rick is the author of *The Power to Change Your Life*, *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions*, and *Personal Bible Study Methods*. Warren is also the founder of **Pastors.com**, a global Internet community that serves and mentors those in ministry worldwide. His ministry also operates other websites including one for his Saddleback church (<http://www.saddleback.com/home/today.asp>), one for the book *Purpose Driven Church* (<http://www.purposedriven.com/>), and one for the book *Purpose Driven Life* (<http://www.purposedrivenlife.com/>). Over 60,000 pastors subscribe to **Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox**, a free, weekly email newsletter.

Warren was born in San Jose, California. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from California Baptist College, a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. Other honors include the Biblical Preaching Award, several honorary doctorates, and Metro Magazine named him one of the 25 most influential people in Orange County, California. Rick and his wife, Kay, live in Trabuco Canyon, California. They have three children, and a dog.

⁴ For example, in *PDC*, he cites Einstein's warning about the twentieth century's penchant to confuse means and end. He then makes this application for the church: “We must never become so enamored with our methods that we lose sight of our mission and forget our message” (71). Well said. Our purposes (ends) should always be the focus that determines how we go about fulfilling them (means), else the tail wags the dog.

problems I see in Warren has to do with metaphysics, or his limited view of reality. The second has to do with ecclesiology, or his incomplete view of the theology of the church.

Metaphysically, Warren reduces (or limits) the whole of reality *to its spiritual aspects* where God's purposes for the Church and the Christian life are located. He then seems to undermine the value of the rest of life. Essentially he is concerned with only half a world, what he calls the "eternal" over against the "temporal," rather than with the totality of God's creation.

Ecclesiologically, Warren reduces (or limits) his understanding of the Church and her purposes *to the New Testament*, and fails to provide an understanding of the doctrine of the people of God in the context of the whole canon of Scripture. Essentially he is concerned with half a Bible (actually only a third), and he seems unconcerned to relate the church to Israel in the Old Testament and to the overall purposes of God for humanity and the earth in creation.

Philosophically, the first problem is called *dualism*. Theologically, the second problem is called *dispensationalism*.⁵ Please allow me to elaborate on both of these criticisms in some detail.

Warren's dualism. There are passages in both *PDC* and *PDL*, especially the latter work, that initially suggest a holistic rather than a dualistic perspective. At first glance, it appears that for Warren, all of life is important to God and the Christian. He speaks glowingly about creation as intelligently designed (*PDL* 24) and doxological in character (*PDL* 53). In emphasizing life as a "trust," Warren affirms the creation decree in Genesis 1 as something that has "never been rescinded," and is a "part of our purpose today" (*PDL* 44). He points out that worship is a holistic lifestyle (*PDL* 65), and that all believers, not just pastors, are

⁵ I hasten to state that *I do not know* if Rick Warren is a dispensationalist theologically. *I do know*, however, that dispensationalists believe that the Church is not mentioned in the Old Testament, and is the hither to unannounced purpose of God that was established only *after* the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Warren's failure to relate the Church to Israel and creation in his discussion of her purposes, therefore, suggests that he *might* adhere to a dispensational understanding of the outworking of God's plan (the divine economy) in history. In short, I am suggesting that he is "dispensational," not necessarily a dispensationalist (though he may be).

servants of God and have ministries, at least in the church (*PDC* 368). These positive affirmations about the goodness of creaturely life come to a crescendo when he offers this exhortation about using our God-given abilities and being fully human (the context is the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9).

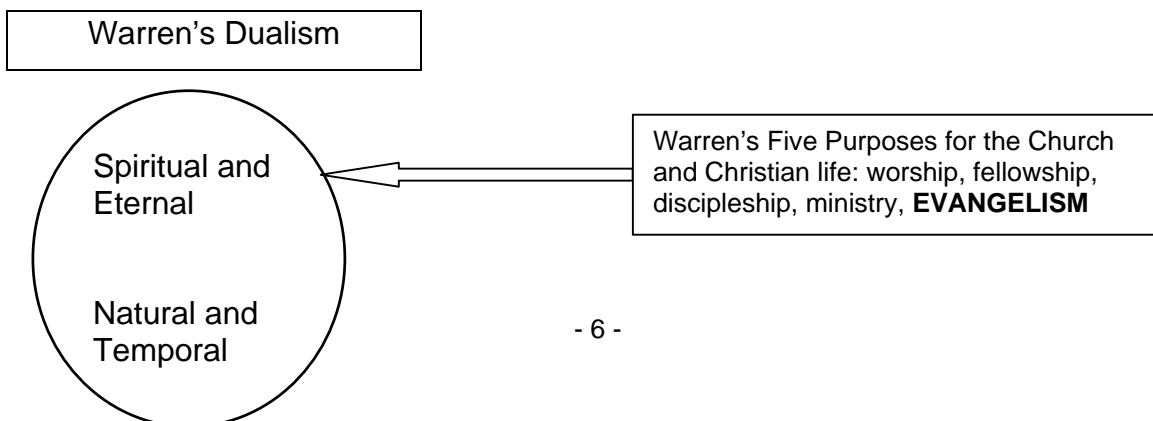
God said [to Noah], “It’s time to get on with your life! Do the things I designed human beings to do. Make love to your spouse. Have babies. Raise families. Plant crops and eat meals. Be humans. This is what I made you to be!”

You may feel that the only time God is pleased with you is when you’re doing ‘spiritual’ activities — like reading the Bible, attending church, praying, or sharing your faith. And you may think God is unconcerned about the other parts of your life. Actually, God enjoys watching every detail of your life, whether you are working, playing, resting, or eating. He doesn’t miss a single move you make....

Every human activity, except sin, can be done for God’s pleasure if you do it with an attitude of praise. You can wash dishes, repair a machine, sell a product, write a computer program, grow a crop, and raise a family for the glory of God (*PDL* 74).

Warren even illustrates this holistic point of view out of his own life experience when he refers to a joyful Hawaiian vacation he took with his family on one occasion (*PDL* 45), and also when he bought a plot of alpine land and cleared it in order to build a mountain home (*PDC* 85).

So, then, how could I designate Warren a dualist, especially in light of these statements that so enthusiastically affirm the totality of human experience under God? Good question. But there is an answer, for when we look at other teachings in his books, it appears that what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other. His statements notwithstanding, he actually demotes natural human activities as temporal, secondary activities, and promotes his five purposes for the church and Christian life as the only eternally significant aspects of life. With sleight of hand, he compartmentalizes Christianity and separates it from the bulk of human existence. Here is a diagram of his dualistic perspective.



With this in mind, I would like to see ways Warren seems to undermine a holistic view of life. Warren notes a dualistic one. *The first is by his sharp distinction between what is eternal and what is temporal, by his teaching that this world is not our home, and by his view that this life is merely a preparation for the next.* Warren could not be clearer in affirming that some activities are eternal and some are temporal. Some things we do have lasting significance; others do not. He presents his viewpoint in these words.

Secondary issues: marriage/family, work/vocation, education, leisure activities, location, etc.

Living to create an earthly legacy is a short-sighted goal. A wiser use of time is to build an eternal legacy. You weren't put on earth to be remembered. You were put here to prepare for eternity (*PDL 33-34*).

You will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, "Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary? What was I thinking? Why did I waste so much time, energy, and concern on what wasn't going to last?" (*PDL 51*).

You are going to give your life for something? What will it be — a career, a sport, a hobby, fame, wealth? None of these things will have lasting significance. Service [in the church] is the pathway to real significance. ... As we serve together in God's family, our lives take on eternal importance (*PDL 232*).

The consequences of your mission [evangelism] will last forever; the consequences of your job will not (*PDL 284*).

The truth is, only the kingdom of God is going to last. Everything else will eventually vanish. That is why we must live purpose-driven lives — lives committed to worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, ministry, and fulfilling our mission on earth. The results of these activities will last — forever! ¶ If you fail to fulfill your God-given mission on earth, you will have wasted the life God gave you (*PDL 285*).

Shift from here and now thinking to eternal thinking. To make the most of your time on earth, you must maintain an eternal perspective. This will keep you from majoring on minor issues and help you distinguish between what's urgent and what's ultimate. ... ¶ So much of what we waste our energy on will not matter even a year from now, much less for eternity. Don't trade your life for temporary things (*PDL 302*).

Focus on God's [five] purposes for your life, not your plans, since that's what will last forever (*PDL* 317).

In support of this perspective that separates the eternal and temporal is Warren's conviction that "this world is not our home." Indeed, he says that life is a temporary assignment, especially when compared to eternity. No doubt there is truth here. He also says the earth and our bodies are temporary residences (*PDL* 37). "You won't be here long," he says, "so don't get too attached" (*PDL* 47). In fact, the best approach is to see ourselves as an aliens, pilgrims, foreigners, and strangers on earth, carrying "spiritual green cards" to remind us that our identity is in eternity and our homeland is heaven. After all, we are ambassadors for Christ. But some forget this. "Sadly," Warren states, "many Christians have betrayed their King and his kingdom. They have foolishly concluded that because they live on earth, it's their home. It is not. The Bible is clear: *"Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it"* (1 Pet. 2: 11, *The Message*; *PDL* 48-49).

In a chapter titled "Made to Last Forever," Warren also argues that this life is best understood as preparation for the next. According to his metaphors, we should look at this present existence as a "dress rehearsal," a "staging area," "preschool," a "tryout", a "practice workout," a "warm-up lap, and so as we wait for the real thing later on (*PDL* 36). This eternal perspective, he believes, should change one's attitudes and behavior, so much so that "The closer you live to God, the smaller everything else appears" (*PDL* 37). I wonder about that.

Of course, Warren's views raise very important questions like these: What are temporary things? What are eternal things? If God created the world and placed human beings to live in it (which He did and called it all "very good"), then why is this world not our home, at least in some sense? Did God make a mistake? What does it really mean to be aliens and strangers? Are we aliens and strangers in relation to creation? Or in relation to sin and corruption? What difference might that make? Life in this world certainly *includes* preparation for the next one, but is that all there is to it? Does it not have some intrinsic worth? What is the nature of the next life in the first place and what relationship does it

sustain to this one? These questions should give us plenty to think and talk about! Meanwhile, we move on.

The second way Warren undermines a holistic perspective and promotes a dualistic one is by teaching that God's five eternal purposes for our lives and churches exclude really human things which must be downgraded at best to a secondary status. This is implicit in the previous point. Now we make it obvious. But first we must ask: what are these five eternal purposes of the purpose driven church and life? In fact, they are identical. Warren derives them from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (*PDC 102*). He expresses these five purposes in various ways, but essentially they consist of the following: (1) worship; (2) fellowship; (3) discipleship; (4) ministry in the church; and (5) evangelism in the world. As we have seen, they all have to do with the spiritual realm. They constitute “eternal things.” They are what the “kingdom of God” is all about. Everything else vanishes. Only the results of these activities last forever (*PDL 285*)!

Now what is of particular concern is how Warren separates these five purposes from regular, and presumably, God-given things like work, marriage, leisure activities, and other aspects of daily life. For example, he says, “You may choose your career, your spouse, your hobbies, and many other parts of your life, but you don’t get to choose your purpose. The purpose of your life fits into a much larger, cosmic purpose that God has planned for eternity” (*PDL 21*). In fact, for Warren, these really human things are “secondary issues” in comparison to what he thinks God really wants us to do.

You may wonder, “What about God’s will for my job or marriage or where I’m supposed to live or go to school?” Honestly, *these are secondary issues in your life* [emphasis added], and there may be multiple possibilities that would *all* be God’s will for you. What matters most is that you fulfill God’s *eternal purposes* [emphasis added] regardless of where you live or work or whom you marry. Those decisions should *support your purposes* [emphasis added]. ... Focus on God’s purposes for your life, not your plans, since that’s what will last forever (*PDL 317*).

I wonder how Mrs. Warren feels about being a “secondary issue” in Rick’s life as his wife? Is she happy about being chosen merely as a way of supporting

God's true purposes, since marriage and family are peripheral? And what about Warren's three kids? Are they "secondary issues" as well? Are spouses and children not a primary part of God's purposes for our lives? Is not work as a dominion-having activity not also part of God's plan for us? Isn't our education important to God? Why would God be indifferent about where we live and what we do with our leisure time? But if God can have will for these things, as Warren states, they how can they *not* be a part of His purposes for us? Warren's dualism is responsible for these disturbing ideas.

The third way Warren undermines a holistic perspective and promotes a dualistic one is by making evangelism the most important activity in life, both for the individual believer and for the church, thereby lowering all other callings and activities. For Warren, nothing else really matters much except evangelism. Despite his frequent appeals for balance in life and ministry (his so-called ninth beatitude is this: "Blessed are the balanced, for they shall outlast everyone" *PDC* 128; *PDL* 305), the following quotes so elevate evangelism that it's hard to see how any one could support any other activity in life other than sharing the gospel with non-Christians. He writes:

Your mission . . . will impact the eternal destiny of other people, so it's more important than job, achievement, or goal you will reach during your life on earth. The consequences of your mission will last forever; the consequences of your job will not. Nothing else you will do will ever matter as much as helping people establish an eternal relationship with God (*PDL* 284).

I intend for that ["Got to save one more for Jesus"] to be the theme of the rest of my life. I invite you to consider it as a focus for your life, too, because *nothing* will make a greater difference for eternity. If you want to be used by God, you must care about what God cares about; what he cares about most is the redemption of the people he made. He wants his lost children found! Nothing matters more to God; the Cross proves that. I pray that you will always be on the lookout to reach "one more for Jesus" so that when you stand before God one day, you can say, "Mission accomplished" (*PDL* 288).

The eternal salvation of a single soul is more important than anything else you will ever achieve in life. Only people are going to last forever (*PDL* 295).

If this is the case, it is hard to justify being anything else vocationally but a full-time evangelist or missionary. On this basis, it is hard to avoid feeling pretty guilty when you must attend to other matters in life other than evangelistic ones. On this basis, it's hard not to feel like you are wasting your life if you are not witnessing 24/7. On this basis, not much room is left for normal human pursuits — working, playing, singing, conversing, eating, sleeping, dating, marrying, parenting, grand-parenting, thinking, reading, studying, learning, writing, programming, fixing, walking, jogging, exercising, building, making, creating, traveling, vacationing, relaxing, resting, watching, listening, etc. — because “the eternal salvation of a single soul is more important than anything else you will ever achieve in life” (*PDL* 295).⁶

But is this really true? Can anyone live out the practical implications of this teaching? Does anybody, can anybody really witness 24/7? Not if witnessing is seen as an event dualistically separated from real life. On the other hand, if we understand evangelism as a component of everything we do, if we see ourselves as ambassadors for Christ in the totality of life's activities, if we carry out every pursuit in our daytimers in a Christ-like manner, then the problem is eliminated. For bearing testimony to the gospel before a watching world is a way of life in real life. But as it stands, Warren's dualism leads him to separate faith and life, and to conclude that only the five purposes of the purpose driven church and life really count, and of the five, evangelistic activity is by far and away the most important.

What, then, are we to make of Warren's dualism? Though he offers many good points, and in places *seems* to affirm the whole of life, at the end of the day his bifurcated view of reality wins out. He divides life into the eternal/spiritual and

⁶ J. I. Packer, “A Stunted Ecclesiology?” in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 125, has written this criticism about the evangelical overemphasis on evangelism: “But is [sic. this] has led to a habit of human-centered theologizing, which sets needy humans center stage, as it were, brings in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit just for their saving roles, and fails to cast anchor in doxology, as Paul's expositions of the gospel lead him to do (see Rom. 11: 33-36, 16: 25-27; Eph. 3: 20-21; 1 Tim. 6: 13-16; cf. Rev. 5: 9-14). In fact, it might even be fair to say that an overemphasis on

the natural/temporal realms. His interpretative framework for understanding faith and life consists of this most fundamental metaphysical division. As a result, I am forced to conclude that not all, but certain *aspects* of the version of Christianity he presents amounts to a kind of “Platonism for the people.”⁷ That is, it is a hierarchical, otherworldly interpretation of the faith that has more in common with Plato’s dualistic philosophy than it does with a biblical Christianity that is grounded in creation, incarnation and resurrection.⁸ For indeed many Christians are Platonists unaware. Much of the confusion in his system could have been avoided, however, if his understanding of church had a broader base. To this second major matter we now turn.

Warren’s dispensationalism. To attempt to state in a biblical way what are the very purposes of the church of Jesus Christ is no insignificant task. It is characterized by tremendous potential for evil or for good, depending on whether or not the theologian undertaking it arrives at accurate conclusions about what the Scriptures say concerning the very reasons for the existence of the church on earth. How influential such teachings will be on the lives of the saints! How important to employ the right method, taking into consideration the whole counsel of God in order to make sure that the vision of the church so presented is complete! How great the responsibility is the teacher’s in this regard!

Now what concerns me about Warren’s ecclesiological understanding is how he limits his discussion for it to the New Testament. There is certainly nothing wrong with the two primary texts he chooses to base his theology on, namely the Great Commandment (Matt. 22: 37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 19-20). From the former passage he derives the purposes of worship (“love God”) and ministry (“love your neighbor”); from the latter he gets the

evangelism, where saving souls is the superlative concern, is a kind of humanistic preoccupation unbecoming the true gospel.

⁷ This phrase is Friedrich Nietzsche’s and conveys what he understood Christianity to be. See the preface to his *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern, intro. W. H. Wright (New York: The Modern Library, 1927, 1954), p. 378. Thanks to Russ Hemati and Chadd Kidd for helping me locate this quotation.

purposes of evangelism (“go and make disciples”), fellowship (“baptizing them”), and discipleship (“teaching them to obey”). Out of this matrix of thought he came up with the following slogan: “A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church” (*PDC* 102-03). Of course, he employs many other New Testament texts in fleshing out his understanding (*PDC* 96). He also encourages a careful look at Christ’s ministry and commands, the images and names of the church, and the examples of New Testament churches themselves as a way to complete the picture.

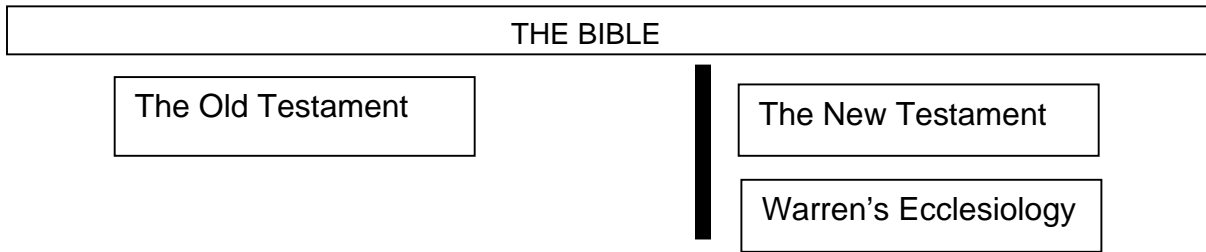
But can the theology of the church really be complete without the Old Testament? I don’t think so. Only against that larger backdrop does the doctrine of the people of God find its true richness and proper meaning. Specifically, any credible ecclesiology must relate the church to the nation of Israel and the original purposes of God for humanity and the earth in creation. Otherwise, one’s theology of the church is out of context, and things taken out of context are easily misunderstood and can be misleading.

Why would Warren, then, omit two-thirds of the Bible when considering a matter as important as the purposes of the church? I don’t know. I do know, however, that dispensationalists believe that the church is not mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament, and is in fact the hitherto unannounced purpose of God that was established only *after* the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. As Charles Ryrie states, “Thus this truth concerning the Body of Christ, the Church, the new people of God, Paul considered a mystery unknown before New Testament times.”⁹ Warren’s failure to relate the Church to the Old Testament, therefore, suggests that he is at least “dispensational” in this aspect of his ecclesiology. Whether he is a true dispensationalist in his overall understanding of the outworking of God’s plan (the divine economy) in history is another matter.

⁸ See the helpful discussion of the platonic view of Christianity which is quite popular among North American evangelical Christians in Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 38ff.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 189.

Warren's "Dispensationalism"



But whether he is or isn't, it is still a serious matter to exclude the Old Testament from one's basic understanding of the church for whatever reason. What if God established permanent purposes for humanity and the earth in Genesis 1-2 through a covenant with creation that embraced the life of humanity as a unified whole? What if these original, all-embracing purposes for humankind and creation were carried on after sin through the redemptive covenants and promises made with Abraham and his descendents in the nation of Israel? What if Jesus as the son of David, Abraham and Adam (Matt. 1; Luke 3) fulfills these covenants and promises in the Old Testament (Matt. 5: 17-18)? What if the church which is called into existence by Jesus as the New Israel inherits these fulfilled covenants and promises (Gal. 3) in such a way that God's abiding purposes for humanity and the earth are restored in the church? And what if the Great Commission of Matthew 28 is best understood as a renewal of the original commission in Genesis 1 so that making and baptizing disciples of all the nations has to do with the totality of creaturely life under God, not with just five spiritual purposes extracted out of context from the New Testament and unrelated to the total life of redeemed human beings? The implications are serious indeed. Here is how one theologian explains the significance of the matter.

The total life involvement of the covenant relationship provides the framework for considering the connection between the "great commission" [of Matthew 28: 18-20) and the "cultural mandate" [of Genesis 1: 26-28]. Entrance into God's kingdom may occur only by repentance and faith, which requires the preaching of the gospel. This "gospel," however, must not be conceived of in the narrowest possible terms. It is the gospel of the "kingdom." It involves discipling men and women to Jesus Christ. Integral to that discipling process is the awakening of an awareness of the obligations of humanity to the totality of God's creation. Redeemed humanity, remade in God's image, must fulfil — even surpass — the role

originally determined for the first man. In such a manner, the mandate to preach the gospel [and make disciples] and the mandate to form a culture glorifying to God merge with one another.¹⁰

This generous understanding of the purposes of the church and the Christian life are lost, unfortunately, when the Old Testament is not integral to ecclesiology. The negative outcome of such wizened thinking on the lives of individual believers who are taught that marriage, work, education, and other important matters have no lasting significance are incalculable. Such a perspective is dehumanizing. Furthermore, this kind of ecclesiology hamstring the church in the long run and undermines her kingdom influence as salt and light in the most important spheres of human existence. Consequently, the dualism and dispensational ecclesiology that is found not only in Warren's model, but in many other congregations as well, has created an overwhelming need for a worldview-driven church!

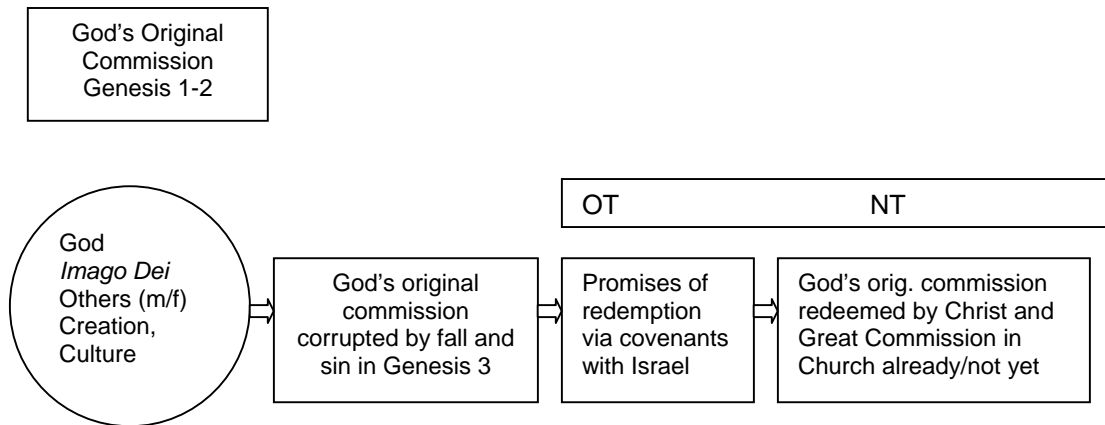
The Worldview Driven Church

What is a worldview driven church? This is the second and constructive component of my experiment. Let me offer a brief definition. It is this.

An understanding of the identity and purpose of the body of Christ in the context of the total biblical story consisting of creation, fall, and redemption with a corresponding emphasis on the value of the totality of life under the authority and blessing of the triune God.

In other words, it is a view of ecclesiology based on a comprehensive biblical vision of life and reality. It sets the ministries of local congregations within the framework of Scripture from cover to cover. As a result, it is neither dualistic nor dispensational. Rather, it affirms the whole of life as intrinsic to God's purposes. It draws its understanding of the church from the entire biblical canon. It is the church made new! It can be diagrammed as follows:

¹⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), p. 83.



An additional aspect of the worldview driven church would be to help congregations understand the diverse worldviews that make up contemporary culture so as to live in it more wisely and engage it more effectively. Hence, the worldview driven church model entails deepening the Church's comprehension of her own biblical identity and purpose, and enhancing her grasp of the dynamics of the world in which she ministers. The need of the hour is for both biblical insight and cultural discernment!

In what follows, I summarize the basic components of the worldview driven church in twelve themes. The model consists of two parts. First of all is a theological framework where those doctrines in Scripture most affected by this viewpoint are developed. The second aspect consists of practical considerations by which this holistic vision is set in motion in the life of a local congregation. Unfortunately, I don't have time to elaborate here on each one, but I hope to do so in a future paper (or book!).

Part One: Theological Framework

- Christian Worldview: Recovering the Whole Story of the Church as Creation, Fall, and Redemption
- Christology: Recovering the Person and Work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ
- Soteriology: Recovering the Kingdom of God and its Redemptive Significance
- Anthropology: Recovering the Nature of the Believer as a Whole Person

- Ecclesiology: Recovering the Identity of the Church as the New Israel
- Eschatology: Recovering the Eschatological Nature of the Church in the Historical Purposes of God

Part Two: Practical Considerations

- Worship: Recovering the Historic Liturgy of the Church
- Preaching: Recovering Contextualized Proclamation of the Word of God
- Fellowship: Recovering the Dynamics of Genuine Christian Community
- Spiritual Formation/Discipleship: Recovering the Vision of Christian Humanism as the basis for becoming whole in Christ
- Ministry: Recovering the Classic Doctrine of Calling and Vocation in all Spheres of Life and Service in the church and world
- Evangelism and Mission: Recovering the Whole Gospel for the Whole Person for the Whole World in the Whole of Life

Conclusion

So with these twelve themes, I bring my so-called “experiment” to an end. It has consisted of two parts. I have set forth my criticisms of churches that are handicapped by an insidious dualism and a “dispensational” or New Testament only ecclesiology. Rick Warren’s purpose driven model just happened to be a convenient and contemporary expression of these abiding problems that have plagued the church throughout her history. I have also presented an alternative to the standard approach in the form of a worldview driven church. I think it has the potential to make an important difference individually and corporately. Meanwhile, after setting forth my ideas on paper, I feel I may need to consider once again whether or not I should become the minister of a church. But until then, I am going to have to think of some creative ways that I as a university

professor can encourage ecclesiastical leaders to develop a worldview driven church!¹¹

¹¹ Actually, I have just assumed responsibility with the Wilberforce Forum of Prison Fellowship for editing a monthly electronic publication called *The Worldview Church E-Newsletter*. It has a twofold purpose. The first is to encourage Church leaders across the denominations to develop a holistic biblical worldview as the foundation and framework for the life and ministry of their local congregations. The second is to help churches understand the diverse worldviews that make up contemporary culture so as to live in it more wisely and engage it more effectively. To subscribe, contact Kelley Reep at this address: kreep@nc.rr.com