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**A CHURCH WITHOUT A VIEW: JONATHAN  
EDWARDS AND OUR CURRENT  
LIFEVIEW DISCIPLESHIP CRISIS**

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When evangelicals<sup>1</sup> lament the current state of our Christian worldview, one of those we most often look longingly back to for inspiration is Jonathan Edwards. As Edwards' biographer George Marsden observed, however, Edwards was not some Moby Dick, an anomalous white whale breaching history out of the blue, but his life and thought were very much a product of his background.<sup>2</sup> As we search for a footing in which to once again foster in our ranks the

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<sup>1</sup>Alistair defines "evangelicalism" with four characteristics: (1) a focus, both devotional and theological, on the person of Jesus Christ, especially his death on the cross; (2) the identification of Scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of spirituality, doctrine, and ethics; (3) an emphasis upon conversion or a "new birth" as a life-changing religious experience; and (4) a concern for sharing the faith, especially through evangelism. *Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>2</sup>See George Marsden, *A Life: Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale

kind of robust “God-Entranced Vision of All things” worldview that Edwards embodied, perhaps we ought to ask, what kind of church produces the worldview of a Jonathan Edwards?<sup>3</sup>

The answer to such a question could not be more urgent. Make no mistake: the Christian worldview among evangelicals is in crisis. Studies show that the pews are shockingly devoid of Christ-formed lives. The Willow Creek Association’s recent sweeping *Reveal* study of church and spiritual life across a diverse cross section of congregations of differing ministry models has shown that our evangelical church goers’ increasing participation in the standard fare of church activities is shockingly *not* a predictor for the maturity of their level of discipleship.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the way we have been trying to form lives is not working.

According to George Barna’s findings in his book *Revolution*, the problem is real and it is alarming. The average believer coming out of our churches has a spiritual short circuit between faith and life. Only 9 percent of those who call themselves born again have the basics of a biblical worldview. Most admit that the church service is the only place they worship God. Half would say they have not even experienced God’s presence in the last year. According to Barna, the majority defines success in life without mentioning their faith. Fewer than one out of ten wants to be known by others for their relationship with God. Is it any surprise then that, as Barna observes, “the typical church member will die without leading a single person” to Christ? With results like these, how can we be optimistic about our current efforts to disciple lives in a Christian worldview?<sup>5</sup>

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University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup>See John Piper and Justin Taylor, *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, with contributions from Eric Arnsion, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 31-35.

## Puritan Lifeview Formation

The Puritans such as Edwards offer a stark contrast. These were deeply pious people who, although imperfect, lived lives much more saturated with an awareness of Christ in all they did than is found in many of our anemic modern churches. What were they doing to foster a Christian life view that we are not?

It is not news that the Puritans taught a Christ-centered 360° view of all life. But, what has remained relatively unknown is how they taught it. There are many factors to be sure, but one that is notable and little studied is their specific curriculum for a God-filled life. Despite the current intellectual popularity of the Puritans, few today even among reformed scholars and connoisseurs of Edwards have ever even heard of—much less read or studied—the actual Christian worldview curriculum from which the Puritans taught.<sup>6</sup>

A clue to their worldview curriculum is found on the printed commencement program of Edwards' 1721 graduation from Yale. Listed there alongside the traditional disciplines of a classical education like logic, grammar, rhetoric, and mathematics, is a strange subject called "Technologia." *Technologia* is the Puritan academic discipline that taught the philosophy of their Christian worldview. Literally "*technologia*" means the study of art or skill. The mastery of this Puritan philosophy of Christian worldview was so critical to Christian formation in their minds that they required students such as Edwards to defend it publicly at their baccalaureate in order to graduate.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably I fear that many of our church members today would probably not pass that test.

The Puritan worldview curriculum of *technologia* was comprehensive and systematic. It taught how all knowledge and

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<sup>6</sup>The reason for the surprising unfamiliarity to us of this discipline of Puritan worldview philosophy of *technologia* is that its curriculum does not show up in Puritan sermons and books that are much reprinted and studied, but in the Puritan's textbooks written in Latin which are for the most part forgotten and untranslated.

<sup>7</sup>See David Scott, "From Boston to the Baltic: New England, Encyclopedics and the Hartlib Circle (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003). Here after cited as "New England Encyclopedics."

human endeavor was a unified God-glorifying circle called “encyclopedia” with Christ at its center as the sum of all things. Its method taught the flow of all reality from its Christ-created ontological origins to its Christ-exalting eschatological consummation and how the practical knowledge of this Christ-saturated creation could be applied in “eupraxia,” or the practice of right living in all of man’s God-given vocations. Puritans taught the logic of this God unifying vision of *technologia* from the earliest ages all the way up through the undergraduate level.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the precepts of this worldview curriculum called *technologia* were central to Edwards’ sweeping 360° Christian vision and to his Christ-enthralled way of living. Furthermore, the intellectual matrix of *technologia* also provided much of the framework behind the ideas for which Edwards is best known: his rigorous defense of reformed soteriology, his incisive psychology of religious experience, his Trinitarian ethic, and his all encompassing Christ-enthralled aesthetic. You cannot fully understand Edwards’ Christian vision without the *technologia* curriculum of Puritan worldview philosophy on which it was built.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>The Puritans were part of a pedagogical tradition of encyclopedism that can be traced from the Second Reformation networks of Central Europe and England to the new world. Encyclopedism’s philosophical influence flowed through the logic textbooks of Peter Ramus; the *Encyclopedia* of another New England favorite authors, John Alsted; the Latin primers used at early Harvard and Yale of Alsted’s protégé, the Czech Moravian John Comenius, and the *technologia* treatises of Alexander Richardson and William Ames (Edwards’ favorite theologian). All of these were studied in successive levels forming an academic “spine” from the earliest grades to college. Furthermore, these provided the method for the God-imitating “Art” of applying knowledge in life through the all various vocational callings. See my dissertation, chapter 1: “English Reformers, Samuel Hartlib, and The Second Reformation,” *New England Encyclopedics*, 23-55.

<sup>9</sup>For Edwards’ background and use of encyclopedic *technologia* in his sweeping Christian thought, see chapter 7 of my dissertation, “‘The arts and sciences, the more they are perfected, the more they issue in divinity’: Jonathan Edwards and the Encyclopedic Tradition,” *New England Encyclopedics*, 234-280.

## The Lack of Christian Worldview Today

Why should this arcane Puritan history matter to us in the twenty-first century? Personally I walked away from the study of Edwards' Christian vision and its background in *technologia* with one major ministry altering conviction: while we talk so much about Christian worldview in evangelicalism today, the truth is that we do not have one.

Stop and let that sink in for a minute. What are the consequences if that is true? One reason our churches are not producing Christ-enthralled lives is that our churches lack a Christian worldview themselves. What does it mean to have a Christ-enthralled way of living?

*Technologia* was a clear, defined, systematic, and comprehensive worldview helping people see and enjoy God in *all* they do. It was supported by a long textbook publishing history. To be sure, many local churches of today have faithfully taught a standard biblical view of discipleship. But, if you check their bookshelves, you will find them sorely lacking in synthetic worldview treatments of a biblical view of all of life.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the Puritans, that faith view of our Christian subculture has a significant blind spot. It has not taught how that biblical vision of truth relates to the full scope of life. We know we should glorify God in everything, but we do not have a clue how to do that. And that is a fatal pill for lifeview discipleship because as author and long-time professor at Dallas Theological Seminary Howard Hendricks says, "You cannot impart what you do not possess."

My ten year old needs the church to explain to him what Jesus has to do with Legos and soccer. My thirteen year old needs to see how algebra reflects the glory of Christ. The saints heading to work on Monday morning need to know if what they do all week at the office

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<sup>10</sup>Several books recognize and point to evangelicalism's need for a reformulated worldview: Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984). Most modern surveys of worldview are actually about apologetics. See "Limitations of Christian Apologetics" below.

<sup>11</sup>See Nancy Pearcey's discussion of worldviews in *Total Truth*, 23-24.

has anything to do with the kingdom of God. When they come home, they need an answer to what the Great Commission has to do with mowing their lawn.

The problem is that the implicit, accepted evangelical answer to all of these questions is that “they don’t have anything to do with God at all.” In our value system none of these are esteemed as “spiritual” activities. Yet this is the stuff of life. Is it any surprise then, that our disciples also have an underdeveloped faith detached from life? Dorothy Sayers had her finger on this lack of life traction when she asked, “How can anyone remain interested in religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?”

### **What is a Christian Worldview?**

A Christian worldview is simply God’s view of life in this world. Worldview comes from the German word *Weltanschauung*, which literally translates “to look at the world.” It is a web of meaning. Everyone has a worldview. The question is just what our view says that meaning is.<sup>11</sup> We have a worldview; we just do not have a *Christian* worldview. A Christian worldview is a *biblical* view of *all* reality. As Francis Schaeffer said, a Christian worldview is not just truth “about religious things.” “Biblical Christianity,” he said, is truth concerning total reality<sup>12</sup>

The evangelicalism I grew up in did not have a biblical view of all of life. I grew up in the mainstream evangelical church and was disciplined in the parachurch. But I never heard how the panorama of my life—my skills, my work, my mind, and my hobbies—how they all related to Christ's kingdom. I was never tested as Edwards was on the day he graduated on how all that I learn and all I do can be part of a resonating symphony of God’s glory that vibrates throughout the entire cosmos.

Edwards had a Christian worldview because he grew up in a church that had a Christian worldview. That meant that it could see and explain how God related to all of life in this world. As a result it

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<sup>12</sup>Francis Schaeffer quoted in Percy, *Total Truth*, 15.

was able to teach a definable comprehensive curriculum of a God-centered view of reality.

When I saw the Christian worldview that Edwards was taught, I instinctively recognized that it was something for which the church today has no functional equivalent. As Mark Noll concluded, “Evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians. . . . There are no successors to [Edwards’] God-enthralled worldview.”<sup>13</sup>

If we cannot see how all of life’s areas relate to God, then we do not have a complete Christian view of life. And you cannot glorify God with something that you think has no spiritual value. If, as the Westminster confession rightly observes, that is the “chief end of man,” we are in deep trouble.

It is true that I was taught that my goal in life is to glory God. Evangelicalism gets that much. But I was never taught how or what that encompasses. The reason is that in our ratings of what is spiritually significant, most of life does not qualify as God-glorifying activity. When you look at all our standard discipleship curricula, they are great at discipling someone to be a good church-member, missionary or a pastor, but for the most part they never get around to explaining what it means to be a Christian engineer, IT specialist, or sales manager. They do not have “a view” of those things. Life pursuits like these occupy most of the waking hours of the average believer, yet until very recently they were simply off the discipleship radar screen.

The Puritan curriculum of *technologia* taught Edwards a God-centered view of all reality. He grew up in a church that believed it had an obligation to teach what it meant to live a God-filled life in

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<sup>13</sup>Mark Noll, “Jonathan Edwards, Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought,” *Reformed Journal* 33 (February 1983): 26. My theodicy into encyclopedism began with an observation in a seminary class by Dr. Richard Lovelace that three of the greatest Christian visionaries were Jonathan Edwards, John Comenius, and Abraham Kuyper. Interestingly, what I found was that these same Second Reformation currents that connected Comenius’ Pansophism and Edwards’ Puritanism, also influenced the Dutch Calvinism that later produced Kuyper and another worldview philosopher of note, Herman Dooyeweerd. Of course C. S. Lewis captured much of this type of a Christian vision, but mainly in fictional and allegorical portrayals.

everything we do. That is why the textbooks of *technologia* began with the being of God and traced His truth through creation all the way to how it is lived out as a farmer, shoemaker, or merchant. You can see its panoramic view clearly from the charts in its textbooks that outline the full scope of human knowledge and vocation.

### **Discipleship Blind Spots**

Why do churches today not foster a plan for the systematic formation of a Christian worldview like Edwards' church did? Several factors have contributed to the huge discipleship blind spot in the local church today.

#### Limitations of Christian Apologetics

The first culprit is our conception of worldview itself. When we use the term worldview, what we most often mean is apologetics. Pick up any book on worldview and thumb through its contents. Read any worldview conference schedule and look at its seminar topics. Here is what you find: ninety percent of the content of what we call Christian worldview is actually apologetics. That means that almost all of our focus and energy in worldview is targeted exclusively at refuting other people's worldviews. We have little to say about our own. Essentially the Christian church today is like a football team with a great defensive line and no offensive playbook.

Therein lies a huge strategic oversight. A worldview is a positive articulation of "what is." Apologetics is the negative statement of "what is not." Christian worldview as apologetics is the Christian fixation on why the "ism's" are not true. Granted, the defense of the faith is incredibly necessary. Apologetics is critical to unmask the falsehood of unbiblical lifeviews and for giving a full defense of Christian truth. Edwards himself was a master apologist. Apologetics, however, is not sufficient by itself.

The default to apologetics is understandable. It is the path of least resistance. We are right. We know we are right. So proving our case against the other guy is an easy thing to do from our perspective. But proving *what is not* leaves one huge question unaddressed: explaining *what is*. As a result, Christians are left constantly answering questions that our culture is no longer asking. What is more, it has also left us without an answer to the most important question of all: what does the



truth have to say about our life in this world, about what we actually do here? It means that while we have a whole arsenal of apologetics against other people's lifeviews, we lack a full articulation of our own.

Even though Edwards operated from the worldview that he was taught, he himself is a good example of this defensive tendency in evangelicalism. Almost all of Edwards' written works are apologetic in origin. He never wrote his planned systematic work titled, "A Rational Account of the Doctrines of Christian Religion." Without his summa we are left to piece together his worldview from his miscellaneous writings. Like evangelicalism today, Edwards was fixated on his intellectual opposition. But even Edwards' apologetics were based on the precepts of his encyclopedic Christian worldview. Edwards took it for granted.<sup>14</sup> The problem is not our apologetics per se, but their lack of foundation in an organic mature Christian worldview. We lack what Edwards assumed: being disciplined in a comprehensive Christian worldview.

Given the strong cultural counter current that Christians have faced, our fetish for apologetics is an understandable over-compensation. Edwards lived in the period when the tide was turning. Puritanism had lost its theocratic monopoly and evangelicalism began adapting to a minority position. But as George Marsden and Mark Noll have documented, the last two hundred years have only intensified that reflexive defensiveness in our tradition.<sup>15</sup> Our defensive posture in the fundamentalist battle against modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often left evangelicalism with anti-intellectual predilections. We ceded the cultural high ground of higher education. We withdrew into the safer confines of a personal spirituality and limited our discipleship to the subjects of a pious inner life. We wrote off public life as a pagan realm. We left the marketplace as godless, while daily continuing to eat from its trough of consumerism. This retreat is a concession fatal to the formation of lives sitting in the pews.

## Dualism

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

There is a dualism behind it that would have been foreign to Edwards and which offers a second reason for our lack of a functional lifeview. In trying to avoid paganism, we actually internalized one of its mental viruses: a dualistic split of the sacred and secular. To keep the church's monopoly on the spirit, we spiritually divested ourselves of the public sphere. We made a distinction between that which is "spiritual," (i.e., all that pertains to or helps perpetuate the life of the church) and that which is secular.

This dualism pervades our value system and much of our "spiritual" discourse. Here is how its values equation works: souls are what matter. The all-important goal is to get souls to heaven. Ministry helps souls get to heaven, so ministry matters. Widgets (and all material culture) do not have souls and do not get souls to heaven. So they do not matter (unless you can print John 3:16 on them).

So if you make widgets or study widgets or enjoy playing with widgets or if you sell widgets or manage people who make or sell widgets, then what you *actually* do does not matter. Why? Because by the definitions of our values system, it is not spiritual. Ministry is the apex of our values hierarchy. This dualism denies the biblical truth that everything was created by Christ and is for His glory. It is all His domain. God is not a dualist.

Neither was Edwards. In his Christian vision, Edwards saw all of the world and all of life as a Christ-saturated symphony. Every afternoon he went for horseback rides with his wife for the sheer joy of it. As he rode he marveled at God's creation. For Edwards, even the spiders glorified God. He was exercising a Christian worldview that saw inherent value in something that our worldview would count as non-spiritual and insignificant. He wrote notes on how he saw God in nature, pinning them to his jacket as he rode. When he got home, he collected them in a notebook titled, "Images and Shadows of Divine Things." Horseback rides, spider webs, and the beauty of a moment shared with your wife have no place in the anti-terrestrial bias of modern evangelicalism because they are of no *heavenly use*.<sup>16</sup> But these were all natural expressions of the Christ-centered panoramic vision of the Puritans like Edwards. That is why Leland Ryken rightly

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<sup>16</sup>For a rebuttal and antidote to the anti-terrestrial bias of evangelicalism, see Michael E. Wittmer, *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

calls them “Worldly Saints.”<sup>17</sup> I am afraid what our surveys show about the state of the lifeview formation in the church today is that evangelicals are only worldly saints in the other, uncomplimentary sense of the phrase.

Many today would say the more spiritual thing would have been for Edwards not to waste that time, but to stay at his desk and keep writing apologetic treatises, waging war for the cosmic spiritual battle. His choice, however, reveals his worldview. Evangelicalism gave up life to wage war non-stop. In the process, it lost what it was fighting for—a life where Christ brings meaning to all things.

### Pragmatism

Our divergence from Edwards in this regard also reveals a third short circuit in the spiritual accounting system of our worldview, namely its dependence on the atheistic values of pragmatism. Pragmatism says what is useful is what should be valued. It is based on a philosophy that needs to establish value apart from divine revelation. Pragmatism is a close cousin to naturalism. Christians are so addicted to pragmatism because it helps justify so much of our activity. The pragmatism of our approach to ministry and church life makes us feel good about ourselves. If we can count it and put a number on it, then it proves we are doing something of value. Supposedly the more efficient we are with our souls to dollars ratio, the more successful we are. The numbers help establish that our Great Commission endeavor is worthy of further funding. That is pragmatism.

Pragmatism does not come from God. It comes from our culture. It is worldly. It is ironic that a value so central to the Christian lifeview, namely “eternal significance,” is often powered by functional atheism, the pragmatist ethic that needs to count because it believes there is no such thing as inherent worth, only utilitarian value. So when we are really focused on what counts in eternity, in effect, we need to ask as Jesus did the Pharisees, who is doing the counting and what exactly is it that counts?

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<sup>17</sup>Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

Tragically, our syncretistic pragmatism has stunted our lifeview and hamstrung our strategies of spiritual formation. In worshipping the god of “more,” we have ended up with less. Sadly, one thing is implicitly clear in the resulting Christian worldview message: the church counts and life does not. So why are we surprised when the lives inside church have little to do with Christ? The scandal of the evangelical mind reveals a deeper tragedy: *the scandal of the evangelical life*.

### Lifeview Equipping in the Local Church

The emaciation of our lives so evident in the statistics is symptomatic of a fourth blind spot: the malformation of the local church. In contrast, the most striking thing about the *technologia* of Edwards’ worldview education is that it shows how the church he grew up in had intentional structures to teach and form a Christian lifeview. It was fundamental to the Puritans. A good example is how thoroughly it was integrated into missions methodology of their missionary efforts among Native Americans.<sup>18</sup> The Puritans were an expression of the Second Reformation movement within the international reform network that was pushing for “*reformatio vitae*,” the reformation of all life. They structured the church to reform life.

Our lack of lifeview discipleship is a symptom of the misdirection of the structure in our local church today. According to Eph. 4:12-16, the church is supposed to organize itself to shape Christ-like lives. But our churches today are only producing a superficial disembodied church-like spirituality. Instead of equipping the saints for the work of their service, we equip the saints for the work of the church’s service. We equip the saints to outfit the church instead of outfitting them for life. In our new member assimilation training and mobilization process, too often it is the church’s mission we are mobilizing the saints to perpetuate, instead of the church being mobilized to perpetuate the life mission of its saints.

Why is that? When pragmatism is alloyed with our sacred/secular dualism, together they produce an evangelicalism codependent on

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<sup>18</sup>See chapter 6 of my dissertation: “That All the World Might Become A Divine College’: The Instaurational Encyclopedism of John Eliot’s Indian Mission,” *New England Encyclopedics*, 190-233.

itself. As we move people toward their next steps spiritually, our discipleship and mobilization processes tend to focus them more on a faith leading to involvement in the life of the church than they do fostering peoples' application of faith in daily life. The "people funnel" of most churches today feeds into the bottle of church organizational maintenance. A home run is when they round the bases and add to the score of our churches numbers. Home plate is not centered in their life but squarely in the life of the organized church. We must reverse this.

Why does the church exist? It exists to grow people's lives. Mature believers then reach out to lead others to Christ, bring them into the church, and mature them. The whole point is not our meetings, but how we live between meetings. Our product is life. The question is not how impressive our program is, but how impressive are our lives? In today's church there is a great sucking sound as life is displaced by Christian activity. Ironically, the more "successful" and exciting the local church is, the greater the sucking sound. And what little life is left for the active churchgoer is a life, for the most part, left unformed. Evangelicalism is a ministry industrial complex that knows how to crank out its church product. But as John Piper and others have concluded, in the process we have "hollowed out evangelicalism from within."<sup>19</sup>

### The Tunnel Vision of Evangelism

A fifth reason evangelicalism neglected the development of its worldview is to some degree because it often focused too exclusively on evangelism. I am a child of the Great Commission movement. I believe in initiative evangelism. A booklet led me to Christ. I have subsequently lead many others to Christ. But, as a true believer in sharing my faith and training others to do the same, I would offer the following observation. Even though evangelicalism begins its value proposition touting the abundant life, it falls short of teaching what the abundant life encompasses. As soon as a person "signs up" for salvation, our value system assures him that the only thing that matters in this life is sharing this with others. Certainly, seeing God use you

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<sup>19</sup>Piper and Taylor, *A God Entranced Vision*, 21.

to help someone else trust Christ is a real blessing, but that experience is not the whole sum of the abundance that Christ wants to give us.

We never get around to explaining what God has to do with life in this world because for us this life is all about selling a view of life in the world to come. The result of this is what Dallas Willard describes as “vampire Christians’ who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing to do with Jesus until heaven.”<sup>20</sup> If the church were a business, it would be Amway—all sales and very little product. It is all about getting the next guy to sign up.

A favorite evangelical aphorism says, “When the house is burning down, you don’t waste time to rearrange the furniture.” When we make our faith all about selling fire insurance, we lose sight of the value of the house. The Church’s failure to engage and renew culture stems in part from this lifeview short circuit. This mentality, however, forgets that the fireman’s sole purpose is so that people can live in houses. When we believe the lie that life here is not worth the effort to redeem, we focus just on soul formation and not on life formation.

John Winthrop, one of the first Puritans to land here, gave an ominous prophecy aboard ship on the way over about “the city on a hill.” His sermon was actually titled “A Model of Charity” by which Winthrop meant a Christian model of commerce built on the radical precept of divine love. The entire text of the sermon is about business ethics, about the importance of the gospel changing the way we view how we actually live at the office. He said, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God’s sake.”<sup>21</sup> He could not have been more prescient about how the inconsistently formed lives of believers now discredit

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<sup>20</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 403n8.

<sup>21</sup>John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” in Perry Miller, *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 83.

our witness. More skeptics have turned away from Christianity because of the dualistic hypocritical lives of Christians.

Winthrop was the CEO of a major venture capital corporation called the Massachusetts Bay Company. What makes him different from us is not the three hundred years that stand between us but that he was a lay businessman whose church had taught him a Christian “view” of his life. He realized what our evangelism in twenty-first century must re-appreciate: the *prerequisite* of compelling authentic life transformation. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, may have been right that lack of training was the largest barrier to Christians’ lack of evangelism, but today there is a second problem. Our lack of lifeview formation means that people do not have fully transformed lives to share. If the statistics are right, we have a huge task ahead, better forming the lives in our pews before they will have credibility witnessing to those with whom they live and work. It is no wonder that we are attracted to the likes of Jonathan Edwards and John Winthrop because their spirituality is a purple cow even to us.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Lifeview Imperative of Our New Missional Context**

Evangelicalism could get away with this to some degree as long as it maintained some degree of nominal cultural hegemony. For two centuries it could just teach the doctrines and practices of inner piety and an apologetic defense against its opponents. It got away with this abridged discipleship agenda because of the tacit Christian consensus in nominally Christian America.

As Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, has pointed out, the shrinking of Christendom means that the internally focused church must missionally re-embrace equipping the worldview of its people for public life or face ministry obsolescence. Keller argues that for the church to be missionally effective in post-Christian twenty-first century America, one of its core characteristics must be that it “theologically train lay people for *public* life and vocation.” He explains, “In ‘Christendom’ you can

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<sup>22</sup>For a more recent manifesto calling for the return of this type of Christian vision of the marketplace, see the late Bob Briner’s book, *Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993).

afford to train people just in prayer, Bible study, evangelism—private world skills—because they are not facing radically non-Christian values in their public life. . . .” But to prepare people to live amid the anti-Christian culture of today, “the laity needs theological education to ‘think Christianly’ about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness.”<sup>23</sup>

Our new missional context as Christians in a hostile culture dictates that “ministry” be redefined. Keller continues, “In a ‘missional’ situation, lay people renewing and transforming the culture through distinctively Christian vocations must be lifted up as real ‘kingdom work’ and ministry along with the traditional ministry of the Word.”<sup>24</sup> Today we are cultural dissidents. That means we have to be missional. We must reach and form lives for a mission within a spiritually foreign culture. Without a lifeview, our people are left to the default non-Christian worldview of the culture around them.

Mark Greene, director of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, has warned American evangelicals that either we change the way church is done here or face the same fate of irrelevance being faced by the English church today. At the end of WW II, England had the same church attendance that the US does currently, about 35 percent. Today Britain is largely post-Christian with only 6 percent attending church. Britain’s quaint village churches failed to change and now find themselves stuck behind their own rock walls.

Like Keller, Greene specifically points to the current lifeview disconnect between local church discipleship and the marketplace work lives of its people as one of the causes for greatest concern for the local church. Here is one expression of the disconnect between life and faith in the stunted Christian lifeview where it is most easily seen in the daily lives of believers. The fact that Enron’s indicted former CEO Kenneth Lay was a trustee of his local congregation says as much about the way we do church as it says about him. The double-minded lives we are producing are but reflections of the disconnects in our own approaches to ministry.

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<sup>23</sup>Tim Keller, “The Missional Church,” PDF, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, September 11, 2008, <<http://www.redeemer2.com/rcpc/rcpc/index.cfm?fuseaction=resources>>.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



What stands out so remarkable about Edwards' and Winthrop's Puritan background is that their church tradition had an intentional plan to disciple people in a God-centered view of their work. They had a Christian vision for business. They had a theology of work. They had an intentional plan of how to teach it. They mobilized godly men of means to use their vocation to reach a new land with the gospel. Once there, they raised money for a college to train godly merchants and pastors to pastor them. They wrote and published books furthering these ends. There was a church with a lifeview and *plan* to bring reformation to the marketplace.

#### A Practical Application: Worklife Ministry

How many churches in your town have a strategic initiative addressing people's work lives? Worklife discipleship is like the continent of Atlantis. It somehow fell off the map of the local church. Check out church websites and you will rarely find worklife even mentioned in their all-important stated mission, vision, and values. Check out the budget. There is no line item for worklife. Neither does it rate a staff position on the organizational chart. Until recently there was no such thing as a pastor of worklife in the United States. In all but a handful of churches, you will look in vain to find worklife listed under their official ministries. How can we say we are committed to worldview when we commit nothing to actually grow a Christian view of life in the world where people work?

Local churches historically have not identified pastoring people's work lives as part of their purpose, yet it is the place where their members' lifeview is challenged with the greatest intensity and frequency. So what do you call an area of life discipleship whose priority is not articulated, funded, or staffed and which has no strategy? Call it what you will, but it is any thing but purpose driven.

There is a growing movement of churches who have seen this need and have begun attempts to address it.<sup>25</sup> What might worklife ministry look like in the context of a local church? Doug Spada, founder of the parachurch ministry His Church at Work, defines local-church based worklife ministry as "a sustainable plan and process of the gathered

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<sup>25</sup>See, the conclusion of *Life@Work* by John Maxwell, Steve Graves, and Tom Addington (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 226-239.

church to envision, disciple, equip, commission and support the scattered church in their worklife as they walk well with God at work while reaching and transforming their workplace for Christ.” It is the missional commitment of the local church to worklife evangelism and discipleship, to reaching and transforming people in and through their work.<sup>26</sup>

How can we say we are fulfilling our discipleship mandate when our lifeview formation efforts ignore life at work? In Luke 3, when John the Baptist preached the kingdom of God, the immediate response of the soldiers and tax collectors present was to ask, “What shall we do?” John gave them specific lifeview answers about the implications of discipleship for their work situations. The modern church like John has been preaching the kingdom, but it has not sufficiently answered the lifeview question of what discipleship means for daily life. Jesus’ Great Commission command to the church was to teach whole-life observance. We have not done that. Worklife discipleship is a lifeview issue. In overlooking it, we are guilty of partial life discipleship. The result is that, unlike Jonathan Edwards, most Christians today have no idea what it means to enjoy God through their job.

### **Conclusion**

Jonathan Edwards is so appealing because he embodied what we lack—a 360° Christian vision. He had that vision because he grew up in a church with a view. Today evangelicalism is suffering an enormous cost because of its lack of a synthesizing Christian worldview. To borrow a phrase, it is a “great omission.” It is fundamentally handicapping our fulfillment of the Great Commission. In Matt. 28:18-20 Jesus said, “All Authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” That is Jesus’ comprehensive claim to all of life.

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<sup>26</sup>His Church at Work (with whom I am affiliated) is an innovative parachurch ministry helping churches “Grow their influence through the work lives of their people.” For more information, go to their website, <http://www.hischurchatwork.org>. See also David Scott and Doug Spada, “Launching a Work-Life Ministry in Your Local Church,” *The Regent Business Review* (Jan. 2004): 9-11.

Next comes our commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” Without Jesus 360° view of life, there is no warrant for discipleship. However, if we see like Jesus did how everything in heaven and on earth relates to Him, then we have a radical message of total life transformation. Like Edwards we would have an utterly unique and all-encompassing template of Christ-enthralled life to remodel our own lives as disciples and to use to make disciples of others.

***About the Author:***

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