

The Church: Individuals in Community Modeling an Alternative Worldview

I. Introduction

In Life Abundant, Sallie McFague explains that if a worldview becomes pervasive, its way of being is seen as the only way of being (84). Though in many cases the church has forgotten that there is anything else, the role of the church is to offer an alternative way of being (198). The church tells the story of God in a way that stands in opposition to the pervasive worldview (182). The task of the church is to oppose this worldview with a thunderous, “No!” (197, 198). The goal of the church is to change the minds of the people, so that they can live the good life. The neo-classical economic worldview, which is the most pervasive worldview in this place and time, tells us that having more and more money to buy more and more things is what makes life good (i.e. provides happiness) and happiness is considered the ultimate good (84). The emphasis in the neo-classical worldview is on the individual and what is best for him/her/me, but the church should emphasize community and what is best for all, particularly the marginalized (197). This is done by telling the story of Jesus Christ. The church can provide a different answer to the question, “What is the good life?” and, “What is the ultimate good?” It can provide the world with a different model of what the good life looks like and a call to live that life. The good life is working tirelessly for justice. It is the cruciform life (186). The church can show people a new way of life, if it so chooses (187, 196).

II. The Church Offers an Alternative Way of Being

Churches have assimilated to their surrounding cultures to varying degrees (198). To the degree that churches have assimilated, they have lost sight of the fact that the way of being put forth by neo-classical economic worldview is not the only way of being. They have lost sight of

their revolutionary beginnings (198). They have forgotten that their role is to offer an alternative to the pervasive worldview by telling the story of God and of Jesus, which opposes that worldview. Their goal should to offer a counter-cultural understanding of what the good life is. The church is not a building or a group of people, the church is its actions. It needs to choose to be countercultural instead of assimilating, because the world needs to remember that there are alternatives to the neo-classical economic worldview.

The current economic model tells us to consume. It tells us that the more we buy the happier we will be. However, that economic model does not account for the fact that not all of the world's people can consume at the rate of middle class North Americans, because not all people have sufficient resources to do so and because the earth itself does not have sufficient resources for all to do so (80). That particular worldview and those who hold it are unconcerned with the ability of all to achieve the "good life" because the focus is on the individual and on him/her/me having what he/she/I want(s), so that he/she/I is/am happy (81). We have lost our sense of community and the communal good (82).

The role of the church is to offer an alternative view of the good life which is accessible to all people, not just to the wealthy and privileged. The church needs to preach that alternative worldview, so that change can occur (198). But more than to preach, the church and its members need to model an alternate good life because actions are much more convincing than words (187). The church needs to tell the story of God, who we see through the lens of Jesus Christ (186).

In Luke 4, Jesus says that he has come to bring good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captive (NRSV Luke 4:18). When we, as the church, tell the story of Jesus, we proclaim release to the captives and we bring good news to the poor. We bring news of a new

worldview, in which some take less so that others might have more (LA 109). And not only do we bring news, we also model this worldview. We show people how to live free from the oppressive worldview of neoclassical economics. Within the church, we do not privilege people based on wealth. We welcome all, and all are treated equally. In Acts 4, the members of the church shared what they had and none were in need (NRSV Acts 4:32-35). When we are the church, we tie our joys and sorrows, gains and losses, needs and responsibilities to those of others (LA 111). We are all individuals, but we are all part of the community (104). The church should not be about what one can get for oneself, but about what one can give to others so that all might flourish (109).

The good life, which the church should model as an alternative to the “good life” of the neo-classical economic worldview, is a life of sacrifice (186). It is a life modeled on the life of Christ, the cruciform life (186). It is a life working for justice for the captive, for the poor, for all people (186). It is a life shared with others in community, not a life of greedy individualism (192). The role of the church is to model the alternative, so that people can remember that there is an alternative.

III. Objection

The good life modeled by the church is simply a model. It is an ideal. As an ideal it has weaknesses. People are still people. They are not perfect. They will sin. Idealist, utopian visions are the stuff of horror. 1984 by George Orwell, Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury, and The Giver by Lois Lowry come to mind. These books describe utopia at its worst. As an ideal, a worldview is unattainable, but if it were attained it

would mean the loss of freedom and individual identity. The church's alternative worldview is dangerous and impossible.

Human beings sin. They turn away from the reality which is God and choose to live a lie (183). They may know that the church's worldview is a better worldview, but they will be unable to resist trying on the other worldview or they may simply mess up and give in to their greed for only a few moments. Perfection is simply unattainable. So the church's alternative worldview would not work. In fact, it could not work, because it is based on an ideal.

Furthermore, we all read the books in high school; they were books about failed idealist worlds. These "perfect" worlds were more like nightmares than utopias. People lost their individualism and their freedom in a quest for the common good. If the church's worldview is based on an ideal, it could quickly turn to a nightmare. Those who are to proclaim release to the captives become captives of their own worldview.

IV. Rebuttal

The alternative worldview that the church offers to the world is an ideal. However, the neo-classical economic worldview is also an ideal (108). Neither of these worldviews is a workable model. The neo-classical economic worldview ignores the reality of the availability of resources (80). The alternative worldview offered by the church is just as unworkable, but it is a model built on justice and not on consumption. Human sin is a reality in both worldviews. However, in the neo-classical economic worldview, sin is encouraged (e.g. avarice) and justice is something that might or might not happen due to taxes and/or philanthropy (109). What matters is not whether or not the vision of the worldview is achieved, but instead that we choose a worldview that makes us better when we become who we think we are (108).

Furthermore, in the church, individuals remain. Individual identity is not lost as people become members of the church community (104). Community is only possible if the members of that community are healthy individuals (104). The utopian visions found in Lowry and Huxley do not allow individual identities to remain. The individualism found in these utopian visions, if existent, is not healthy. The individualism encouraged by the currently pervasive worldview is also unhealthy as individuals cannot exist without community and some individuals are left to starve, literally and figuratively, without the support of community.

V. Conclusion

The role of the church, though the current churches seem to have forgotten it, is to offer an alternative to the neo-classical economic worldview which is currently so pervasive that it seems to be *the* worldview, not simply *a* worldview. The good life modeled in the church's worldview involves working for justice, not so that one can have more money to buy more things. The good life is a life of the individual existing in community. The church must offer this model by telling the story of Jesus Christ, the lens through which we can see God (182, 186). The church is this action of the church.