

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF RE-ENCHANTMENT

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

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ABSTRACT

The current discourse surrounding re-enchantment presents a unique opportunity for Christian witnessing in the modern era. However, before this newfound opportunity can be taken, it is important for us to understand where Confessional Lutheran theology fits within the context of the broader push for re-enchantment. This thesis seeks address that question. The question is first addressed by contrasting the current “disenchanted” worldview with the “enchanted” worldview of the pre-modern man to provide a framework from which a critique of scientific naturalism is built. This establishes why re-enchantment is necessary. From there, the broader purpose of re-enchantment is defined, and several contemporary attempts at re-enchantment from broader Christianity are summarized. Finally, Confessional Lutheran theology’s place within the context of re-enchantment is proposed based primarily on the hiddenness of God in the theology of the cross.

INTRODUCTION

Consider, for a moment, the modern, Western¹ man as he watches gray clouds roll over the horizon. He hears the distant and deep rumbling of thunderheads. Beyond the sights and sounds, he can smell the ozone in the air—a sign as clear as any that rain and lightning are near. However, he does not need those signs to know that a storm approaches. He was already informed about the coming storm earlier that morning by the meteorologist on his television. Even prior to that, the forecast on his phone had informed him ten days in advance about the high chances of rain on Monday.

Not only does he know that a storm is coming, but he thinks he knows how it comes. Since childhood, he has been educated in basic meteorology. He knows that precipitation involves a water cycle in which liquid water evaporates, becomes water vapor, ascends into the air, condenses to form clouds, and, finally, falls back onto the ground due to gravity. He need not quote Eliphaz, “[God] performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. He provides rain for the earth, he sends water on the countryside” (Job 5:9–10 NIV). His thorough education in the natural sciences has convinced him that this is not a miracle beyond understanding. In his mind, he knows *how* the rain comes because natural phenomena are explained sufficiently in terms of natural phenomena.

1. This paper uses “the West” in the same operating definition as Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (as opposed to, e.g., Islamic countries). Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

As for *why* this happens, he needs no explanation. He need not quote Isaiah, “the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater” (55:10). There is no *why*; there is no need to assign some teleology to the rain. It just happens according to the laws of nature. The world in which the modern, Western man lives is disenchanted. It has been emptied of any personal intentionality and filled only with pitiless indifference.²

However, that same modern, Western man, living in his thoroughly disenchanted world, might come across circumstances that make him question his convictions. Maybe those convictions are questioned while he is scrolling through social media and comes across a post directing him to witches on Etsy who will curse someone or provide a divination for a few dollars.³ Maybe they are questioned as he is listening to a podcast and hears a journalist say that alien sightings are actually demons disguising themselves cleverly in this modern, tech-oriented world.⁴ Maybe he questions them when large language models, like ChatGPT, give instructions on how to self-mutilate as an offering to a Canaanite god.⁵ Maybe what made him question them was the news that a prominent and outspoken atheist had recently converted to Christianity.⁶ His

2. “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.” Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1995), 133.

3. Meredith Wilshire, “Looking for a Love Spell or a Hex on your Ex? There’s an Etsy Witch for That (Exclusive),” *People*, post date: June 22, 2025, <https://people.com/etsy-witches-are-on-the-rise-as-tiktok-users-ask-them-to-cast-spells-exclusive-11758001>.

4. Jonathan Pageau, host, *The Symbolic World*, podcast, episode 367, “Rod Dreher – Living in Wonder,” November 21, 2024, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-symbolic-world/id1386867488?i=1000677792628>.

5. Alex Perry, “ChatGPT told Atlantic writer how to self-harm in a ritual offering to Moloch,” *Mashable*, post date: July 25, 2025, <https://mashable.com/article/chatgpt-atlantic-moloch-ritual-self-harm>.

6. Clemente Lisi, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Journey to Christianity: From Islam Critic to Freedom Advocate,” *ReligionUnplugged*, post date: February 22, 2025, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/hirsi-alis-journey-to-christianity-from-islamic-critic-to-advocate-for-spiritual-freedom>.

modern, Western, thoroughly disenchanted world is starting to look different. He thought that the world had moved past the need for superstition, but the bedrock of his beliefs is being shaken. All the while, there is this question that quietly echoes like a refrain in the back of his mind, “What does this mean?”

Seizing Her Moment

The illustration above serves a point: the Christian Church is in a unique missional moment, and she needs to seize it. For much of the twenty-first century, the voices of scientific naturalism (Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett, to name a few) have occupied a vocal space in the discourses surrounding religion, how humans should view themselves, and how they should view the world.⁷ However, it seems that the death-grip with which scientific naturalism has held the modern world is fading. A study by Pew found that seven out of ten American adults view themselves as “spiritual.”⁸ In another study, they found that although fewer Americans have become more religious, one in ten Americans has become more spiritual over time.⁹ Gallup’s data corroborates this evidence, finding that 82% of Americans identify as spiritual, religious, or both.¹⁰ So too does NORC’s General Social Survey,

7. These four men have been identified as the “Four Horsemen of New Atheism.” Cf. *The Four Horsemen: The Conversation that Sparked an Atheist Revolution* by Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.

8. “Spirituality Among Americans,” *Pew Research Center*, post date: December 7, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/12/07/spirituality-among-americans/>.

9. “Around 4 in 10 Americans have become more spiritual over time; fewer have become more religious,” *Pew Research Center*, post date: January 17, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/01/17/around-4-in-10-americans-have-become-more-spiritual-over-time-fewer-have-become-more-religious/>.

10. “In U.S., 47% Identify as Religious, 33% as Spiritual,” *Gallup*, post date: September 22, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/511133/identify-religious-spiritual.aspx>.

which found that one in three Americans identifies as spiritual rather than religious.¹¹

Additionally, there have been countless books written attempting to document the rise of spirituality in the American context.¹² This could be correlated with the rise of postmodernism and its denial of metanarratives, rejection of absolute truth, and embrace of relativism.¹³ As postmodernism breaks down the established order, whether scientific or religious, it creates a vacuum. It is in this vacuum that spiritualism is pursued.

In many ways, postmodernism stands diametrically opposed to Christianity,¹⁴ but it has also opened a door for conversations about Christianity to once again enter the public sphere. If some view being “spiritual” simply as “believing in something larger and more creative than science,”¹⁵ then, as Baron notes, “Christianity has not lost its ability to offer a revelatory, salvific and meaningful message to the world.”¹⁶ Christianity has been primed with the opportunity to show those who are searching for something more that there is meaning beyond what scientific naturalism offers. “Postmodernity enables the re-enchantment of the world through the disruption of the rational and its resulting invitation to take a fresh look at ambivalence, mystery,

11. “More Americans Turn Their Backs on Organized Religion,” *NORC*, March 2022, <https://www.norc.org/research/library/more-americans-turn-their-backs-on-organized-religion.html>.

12. E.g., *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* by Linda A. Mercadante, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* by Wade Clark Roof, or *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* by Robert C. Fuller.

13. Postmodernism is often used as a blanket for a wide range of ideas. Concerning the ideas mentioned here, I primarily have in mind Lyotard’s assessment. Cf. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean Francois Lyotard.

14. Stephen J. Vallesky, “The Impact of Postmodernism on Our Ministry and Its Antidote,” paper presented to the pastoral conference at Abiding Faith, Ft. Worth, Texas, April 26–27, 1999, WLS Essay File.

15. “Measuring spirituality” *Pew Research Center*, post date: December 7, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/12/07/measuring-spirituality/#Who-says-they-are-spiritual-or-religious>.

16. Craig A. Baron, “Christian Theology and the Re-Enchantment of the World,” *CrossCurrents* 56.4 (2007): 112.

excess, and aporia.”¹⁷ Simply put, the door has been opened for a new (or really very old) way of looking at the world—a re-enchanted way.

If the Christian Church is in a unique missional moment, then the Lutheran church is also in a unique missional moment. Re-enchantment is not a new conversation occurring within Christianity. The failures of a totally materialistic view of the universe and the need to recognize that there is literally more than meets the eye have been argued before. While not a new conversation, it is a relevant conversation. This is an opportunity brimming with possibilities and far-reaching implications within the context of pastoral ministry. However, before she can address this unique missional moment, the Lutheran church needs to figure out how she fits within it.

The goal of this thesis is precisely that: addressing how Confessional Lutheran theology fits within the broader push for re-enchantment. First, the pre-modern (medieval) view of an enchanted world will be contrasted with the current disenchanted view of the world held by the modern West to build the framework for a critique of the current disenchanted worldview. Second, the broader call for re-enchantment will be examined through the lens of various Christian attempts at re-enchantment. Finally, a Lutheran approach to re-enchantment will be proposed.

17. Baron, “Christian Theology and the Re-Enchantment of the World,” 116.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature consulted for this thesis falls into three main categories: summarization of the current disenchanted socio-religious landscape and criticism of a disenchanted worldview, re-enchantment as proposed in broader Christendom, and finally, primary and secondary sources on Confessional Lutheran theology to form a Lutheran approach to re-enchantment.

The primary source for understanding the modern, disenchanted worldview as contrasted with the preceding, medieval, enchanted view of the world is Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Taylor has had a prominent role in popularizing an analysis of secularism in terms of re-enchantment. He traces the development of the porous individual whose meaning was centered outside himself in the transcendent reality around him to the modern, buffered individual whose meaning is located within himself as he operates within an immediate reality characterized by the immanent. C.S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image* provides further context for the enchanted worldview by expounding upon the medieval view of the cosmos and man's place within it. The work of Morris Behrman in *The Reenchantment of the World* also helps in offering context about the mechanized view of the universe held by the modern man. The inward *locus* of meaning and its implications for the modern man were supplemented by Carl Truman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, which expands on several of Taylor's key ideas.

G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* and Lewis' *The Discarded Image* provide the basis for a criticism of disenchantment and a support for a re-enchanted view of reality. Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia*, an examination of how Lewis' medieval cosmology influenced his writing, was

instrumental in further fleshing out Lewis' support for an enchanted reality. John Lennox in *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend* is also instrumental in arguing against the position of scientific naturalism. These resources help to establish a broad definition of the goal of re-enchantment: a move beyond scientific naturalism. Alister McGrath's *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* offers a Christian perspective on re-enchantment, specifically as it relates to nature. Rod Dreher's *Living in Wonder* provides context for how some within Eastern Orthodoxy have approached re-enchantment. Berman is influential in articulating a non-Christian approach to re-enchantment. Journal articles by Thomas Jussuf Spiegel, Craig A. Baron, and Joy Marie Clarkson help supplement further context in the contemporary conversation around re-enchantment.

Confessional Lutheran Theology provides a rich framework with which re-enchantment can be approached but has had minimal direct interaction with it outside of Gene Edward Veith Jr. (briefly) in *Authentic Christianity* and Luke Thompson's "A Pedagogy of Re-Enchantment." In order to construct a Confessional Lutheran approach, Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, Adolf Hoenecke's *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces*, and Martin Chemnitz's *Loci Theologici* are instrumental in categorizing the enchanted reality presented in a biblical worldview through the doctrines of creation and providence. Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* and Gerhard Forde's *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* are used to further a Confessional Lutheran understanding of re-enchantment as informed by the theology of the cross and the hiddenness of God.

The theology of the cross leads to a rich understanding of the hidden God: hidden in the cross, in the means of grace, and finally in vocation. *The Book of Concord* helps frame this entire section. *The Spirituality of the Cross* by Veith Jr. and Oswald Bayer's *Living the Faith* and

Martin Luther's Theology expand on God hidden in the cross. For God hidden in the means of grace, the two works by Veith Jr. are instrumental, as well as Herman Sasse's *This is My Body*. Finally, for God hidden in vocation, Veith Jr. is consulted, as is *The Genius of Luther's Theology* by Kolb and Arand, and an essay by Jonathan Schroeder, "Our Calling."

THE ENCHANTED PAST AND THE DISENCHANTED PRESENT

To understand the desire for re-enchantment, it is imperative to understand the modern experience of reality as contrasted with the pre-modern one. Charles Taylor, a prominent philosopher in analyzing secularism in the context of re-enchantment, summarizes the problem with this question: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”¹⁸ This question is really one of cosmology (how the universe is viewed), anthropology (how man views himself), and the interaction between the two. He proposes that the answer to this question is larger than a simple theory of subtraction: as time has gone on and progress in science continues, belief in God is seen as superfluous and fades. That is just one piece of a narrative of secularity.¹⁹ Instead, the conditions of belief (or unbelief) have changed. There has been a distinct shift in the way people experience and interact with the world around them.²⁰ The way a man living in the twenty-first century operates is fundamentally different than that of one living in the sixteenth century. Borrowing terminology from Taylor, the cosmological differences will be summarized by comparing the enchanted, purposeful world of the pre-modern man to the disenchanted, purposeless universe of the modern man. The anthropological differences will be examined by

18. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

19. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 590.

20. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 8.

comparing the porous, pre-modern individual to the buffered, modern individual. The ultimate result of these shifts will be explained with what Taylor calls the conditions of belief, that is, the “immanent frame.” Finally, a critique of scientific naturalism will be offered based on the groundwork laid by Taylor’s assessment.

Differences in Cosmology

Taylor identifies three distinguishing features that made the world in which the pre-modern man lived one where atheism was inconceivable and belief in God was inevitable. Firstly, the natural world was understood to have a distinct teleology. Its existence reflected an order and design that could only be centered in divine purpose and activity.²¹ C.S. Lewis echoes this point, “the Model of the universe of our ancestors had a built-in significance. And that in two senses; as having ‘significant form’ (it is an admirable design) and as a manifestation of the wisdom and goodness that created it. There was no question of walking into beauty or life.... The achieved perfection was already there. The only difficulty was making an adequate response.”²² The medieval man had more than science on his mind as he contemplated the nature of existence, rather it was “the whole organization of their theology, science, and history into a single, complex, harmonious mental Model of the Universe.”²³ The pre-modern worldview was one of intense purpose and meaning: a living world that must reflect its divine origins. Behrman offers the following: “As a result, this world is ultimately changeless, but being riddled with purpose, is an exceptionally

21. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

22. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 204.

23. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 11.

meaningful one. Fact and value, epistemology and ethics, are identical. ‘What do I know?’ and ‘How should I live?’ are in fact the same question.”²⁴

This reflection of divine origins was strengthened by the understanding that everything in creation moved in relation to God out of love for God.²⁵ In order to understand this, a summary of the Ptolemaic universe is necessary. The Ptolemaic universe was geocentric with seven spheres/heavens moving around the Earth, each with its own planet.²⁶ Outside of these heavens was the *Stellatum*, the place of the stars. Encompassing the *Stellatum* was the *Primum Mobile*, which gave motion to all the other heavens. Beyond the *Primum Mobile*, outside of time and space, was the abode of God.²⁷ The universe was large, but it was also finite.²⁸ As for the movement of the *Primum Mobile*, “All power, movement, and efficacy descend from God.”²⁹ Each link in this “chain” of movement ultimately points to the incredible verticality of the medieval universe, one in which God’s love and influence descend to the earth through the mediation of his creation. Berman supports this, “The World was seen as a vast assemblage of correspondences. All things have relationships with all other things, and these relationships are ones of sympathy and antipathy.”³⁰ Thus, when the medieval man looks out at the heavens, it is “like looking at a great building... the spheres of the old present us with an object in which the

24. Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1981), 51.

25. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 114.

26. The seven spheres, in order, are Moon (Luna), Mercury, Venus, Sun (Sol), Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

27. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 96–97.

28. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 99.

29. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 102.

30. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 74.

man can rest, overwhelming in its greatness but satisfying in its harmony.”³¹ The purpose, detail, and care with which the universe exists were evident in this model of the universe.

Secondly, Taylor identifies that “God was implicated in the very existence of society.... A kingdom could only be conceived as grounded in something higher than mere human action in secular time.... One could not but encounter God everywhere.”³² Every sphere of life—whether religious, political, economic, social, etc.—was littered with the evidence of God because he was woven into the very fabric of society. It is important to recognize that the different spheres into which modern life is divided cannot be so neatly separated in the pre-modern worldview because God permeated everything.³³ For example, Americans proudly value the separation of church and state. This separation would seem foreign to the pre-modern man. Kings held their authority by divine right. Churches were actively involved in governance within the feudal system. There could be no true separation of church and state if both flow from God. No matter where he went and no matter with what he interacted, the world in which the pre-modern man lived pointed decidedly to the existence of God, for he operated in “a cosmology in which it was axiomatic that ‘all perfect things precede all imperfect things.’”³⁴

The final distinguishing feature of the pre-modern world was that its inhabitants lived in an enchanted world in which the reality of spirits, angels, demons, and moral truths was a

31. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 99. It may help to make this concrete. The Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican is a breathtakingly large building. Statues of Peter and Paul appear roughly man-sized when viewed from a distance, but upon closer inspection they are nearly twenty feet tall. It is an incredibly massive structure, but it is also finite. Even the smallest tile in one of the many mosaics within the nave was placed with intention and care. If St. Peter’s can evoke that feeling of both overwhelming greatness and satisfying harmony, how much more could the medieval view of the cosmos?

32. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

33. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

34. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 220.

given.³⁵ Because this was the case, the “minds” of people were not the only ones in the universe. These powers could affect meaning on a person resulting in a change of attitude, disposition, or bodily condition.³⁶ As Taylor notes, “in the enchanted world, the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn.”³⁷ If this were the case, then it was in the best interest of a person to be on the side of the most powerful spirit: God, who guaranteed that in the end, good would prevail over evil.³⁸

In stark contrast to the medieval worldview stands the modern one. Behrman contrasts these views well. Rather than Earth occupying a special, central, and purposeful space within a finite universe, it is just one planet among many orbiting a sun held up by gravity within an infinite universe. Rather than a living and rich cosmos, nature is dead, mechanistic, and open to manipulation. Rather than explaining things in terms of teleology, everything is explained in terms of matter and motion with no higher purpose.³⁹ If the medieval cosmos can be likened to a great building, then the modern universe could be compared to an endless ocean and the earth to a tiny spec of sand floating within those boundless waters. Carl Truman summarizes these differences by contrasting the *mimetic* worldview of the pre-modern man with the *poietic* worldview of the modern man: “A mimetic view regards the world as having a given order and a

35. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

36. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32–33.

37. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

38. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26.

39. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 50. Copernican mediocrity (elsewhere called the Mediocrity Principle) is illustrative of Berman’s assessment and is summarized well by Carl Sagan, “We live on an insignificant planet, of a humdrum star, lost in a galaxy, tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe.” Modernity’s perspective on the earth culminates in the sentiment that there is really nothing all that special about it, or mankind, or their place within the greater universe. Howard A. Smith, “Questioning Copernican Mediocrity,” *American Scientist*, 104.4 (2017), 232.

given meaning and thus sees human beings as required to discover that meaning and conform themselves to it. Poiesis, by way of contrast, sees the world as so much raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created for the individual.”⁴⁰ In modern eyes, the world does not inherently have meaning, but rather man brings meaning to it. It may help to consider one example of how this has affected Christianity. In the past, a key tenet of evangelism might be characterized as helping someone to discover how he or she fits into God’s already-ordered universe. The evangelist’s role is to show man that he has a divinely ordained role within God’s established plans. On the contrary, much of popular outreach today could be characterized in terms of helping a person to see how God fits into his or her personal pursuit of meaning. God is just one part of the many variables that bring meaning to one’s life rather than the source of all meaning.

This *poietic* worldview results in a society in which God’s existence is not apparent or even needed for the world to make sense. Government, business, relationships, etc., are not grounded in a higher, transcendent reality. Instead, each of these occupies its own distinct sphere of life, and each one aids man in his pursuit of meaning. This is not to say that these different spheres do not at times interact or bleed into one another, but religion is not the glue holding them together. The higher (heaven, God, etc.) does not precede and inform the lower (the earth), but rather the lower is the totality of life.

Finally, the modern man lives in a world in which the existence of spirits is vehemently denied, and this is not only true of secular atheists. A study by Barna found that the majority of Christians whom they interviewed do not believe that Satan is real and likewise believe that the

40. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 39.

Holy Spirit is only symbolic.⁴¹ In modern eyes, spirits and the like have been relegated to the realm of entertainment and media. They are nothing more than a fanciful escape to be enjoyed by the modern man at his whim. For example, a child might watch *The Exorcist* (1973) and be afraid. This is not to say that these movies, which contain some element of the supernatural, do not affect people, but their greatest danger is losing a couple of hours of sleep from fear. What is the common solution if a child is afraid from watching a movie like *The Exorcist*? The loving parent will gently remind his or her child, “It’s not real. You don’t need to be afraid.” The posture modern Westerners have toward the spirits and the like is one that automatically assumes that they do not exist. Spirits are another invention of the pre-modern man to explain a world that he did not fully understand. They are nothing more than a superstitious vestigial limb of the past—something to be gawked at but not taken seriously.

Differences in Anthropology

It is within these two very different understandings of cosmology that we find two very different men who experience them with very different senses of “self.” Taylor uses two terms to contrast the medieval man with the modern man. He calls the medieval man “porous.”⁴² Because power resided inherently in things—whether the world itself charged with purpose, or the good “magic” of the church, or the ill intentions of demons—the *locus* of meaning was outside of an

41. “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist,” *Barna*, post date: April 13, 2009, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/>. This is not necessarily indicative of all American Christians, as a more recent study by Gallup found that 58% of Americans whom they surveyed still believe in the devil. The point of this is meant to be illustrative of the larger problem: belief in the spiritual has faded and continues to fade (a reality corroborated by that same Gallup study). Megan Brennan, “Belief in the Five Spiritual Entities Edges Down to New Lows,” *Gallup*, post date: July 20, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/508886/belief-five-spiritual-entities-edges-down-new-lows.aspx>.

42. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

individual.⁴³ As was noted in the previous section, operating within this world meant that there was a great deal of vulnerability for a person. Thus, it was natural in this view of the cosmos that man could not help but be constantly concerned with God, lest he risk not only bodily harm but spiritual, mental, and emotional harm. This porousness and the vulnerability it resulted in could be seen clearly in, for example, the fear of demon possession.⁴⁴ Things from the outside could affect what happened to a person both outwardly and inwardly.

Taylor contrasts the porousness of the pre-modern man with the “buffered” self of the modern.⁴⁵ Taylor says, “For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside of the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meaning of things are those defined in my responses to them.”⁴⁶ In the modern view, there is a clear line of demarcation, or a boundary, between the world and the man, or really the “mind,” which lives in the world.⁴⁷ Therefore, “the things beyond, don’t need to ‘get to me,’ to use the contemporary expression.... This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meaning of things for it.”⁴⁸

Helpful in understanding this distinction is an illustration Taylor provides about the feeling of melancholia or depression. When the modern man feels this way, he is told, “it’s just your body chemistry, you’re hungry, or there is a hormone malfunction, or whatever.

43. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32–33.

44. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

45. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 27.

46. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

47. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

48. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

Straightaway, he feels relieved. He can take a distance from this feeling.... Things don't really have this meaning; it just feels that way."⁴⁹ This reflects that *poietic* view of the world. He is in the world, but he can separate his "mind" or self from the phenomena that happen in the world. Events in the world can impact him, but they do not do so with purpose. Therefore, he can choose whether they continue to impact him. The pre-modern man in his *mimetic* worldview cannot conceive of reality in that way, for "a pre-modern may not be helped by learning that his mood comes from black bile. Because this doesn't permit distancing. Black bile *is* melancholy. Now he just knows that he's in the grips of the real thing."⁵⁰ This is a startling contrast. For the pre-modern man, his life is a constant flux of influence from the purpose and power inherent in the world acting upon his whole being. Said simply: the "stuff," e.g., black bile, in the world is what causes him to feel or act the way he does. The pre-modern man is not afforded that same conviction of the modern man by the very rules of the world in which he lives.

The Immanent Frame

The "buffered" self and the disenchanted world which it inhabits are two of the factors that contribute to the conditions of belief within the modern world, which Taylor calls the "immanent frame." He describes the emergence of the immanent frame,

the new science gave a clear theoretical form to the idea of an immanent order which could be understood on its own, without reference to interventions from outside (even if we might reason from it to a Creator, and even a benevolent Creator), the life of the buffered individual, instrumental effective in secular time, created the practical context

49. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37.

50. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37. Emphasis original.

within which the self-sufficiency of this immanent realm could become of matter of experience.⁵¹

Taylor is saying that the modern man does not need God, or anything “from the outside,” i.e., some power beyond that of humanity, to explain the world around him because his conception of science, time, and his own buffered self does that adequately without God. It is a reality focused on the immediate world around mankind, and that reality is a tightly explained, self-sufficient system—at least, that is what the modern man believes it to be. Noteworthy here is the following: this immanent order in which the modern man experiences life is not one that necessarily eliminates the possibility of the transcendent (God). The immanent frame can either be “open,” i.e., there is something beyond the immediate, or “closed,” i.e., scientific naturalism, but it does set itself up against the transcendent by contrasting the “natural” with the “supernatural” and placing its focus wholly on the immanent.⁵² For example, the pre-modern world did not see miracles as a “break” in the “natural” order, the way both those who operate within an open immanent frame (the example Taylor give is Christian fundamentalists) or those who operate within a closed immanent frame do, because it is only within a world in which its orders are seen as regular and impersonal that this distinction needs to be made.⁵³

51. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 543.

52. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542–44.

53. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 547. Confessional Lutherans have also reflected this language of an open immanent frame in their attempts to define miracles, “But occasionally God will preserve *immediately*. He will for his own purposes suspend the natural law and the normal means of his preservation. Essentially that is what happens in a miracle. In a miracle God acts apart from or above the normal means.” Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2015), 132. Emphasis original.

Although the immanent frame *can* be opened or closed, it naturally lends itself to a “closed” reading because of its self-sufficiency and reliance on science as the source of truth.⁵⁴ If the lived experience in which the majority of the modern West finds itself is one where “natural science is not just one road to truth, but becomes the paradigm of all roads,” then the result will be a worldview that may point to the inevitability of no transcendent reality.⁵⁵

The picture that Taylor and others have presented is one of great differences. The pre-modern man’s lived experience pointed to the inevitability of belief in God. His world was enchanted—full of angels, demons, and objective moral truths. His world was one in which everything lower proceeded from something higher, i.e., no matter where he went, it all pointed to God. His world was full of inherent purpose given by God, and he was expected to conform to it. Transcendence was “baked into the cake.” The modern man’s lived experience is one of pure immediacy. He is “buffered,” ultimately separate from the world in which he lives. The world is governed by impersonal, natural orders that are purposeless. Meaning is his to make, and the world is his to change. He may be open to transcendence, but his experience is not one that favors it.

54. “the protocols of modern ‘scientific’ and analytic thinking privilege the impersonal ‘view from nowhere’, the standpoint which is ‘experience-far’. So it tends to make us systematically devalue insights which might challenge the understanding of impersonal order, insights which might arise, for example, out of prayer, or in love relations. In our epoch, the most prestigious, well-established experience-far, impersonal order is that developed out of natural sciences. Taken on its own terms, as the whole story about us and our world, this can easily be seen as supporting materialism.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555.

55. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 566.

A Critique of Scientific Naturalism

In identifying the modern man's immanent frame as the lens through which he interacts with and understands the world, Taylor provides the framework for a critique of scientific naturalism. As noted earlier, one of the key factors contributing to the disenchanted worldview is the idea that natural science is the only road to truth. Underlying this belief is the idea that humanity, as it has discovered more and more of the world via empirical study in the natural sciences, has moved from a position of error in understanding the world to one of truth.⁵⁶ This is consistent with Taylor's characterization of modernity's view of education as simply "moving beyond" the past.⁵⁷ This means that whatever preceded the current view of the universe must, to some degree, be obsolescent and invalidated.

Following this idea, the medieval model of the universe with all its metaphysical implications simply becomes a mixture of superstition and science pasted together in an attempt to explain a world in which there was much that they did not understand. However, that line of thinking betrays something which C.S. Lewis calls "chronological snobbery,"

the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also "a period," and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions.⁵⁸

The idea that the old model was one in which science and superstition came together betrays far more about the modern man's assumptions about the medieval man than it actually comments on

56. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 70.

57. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22, 573–74.

58. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), 207–8.

the medieval man's knowledge. On the contrary, the medieval man "was an organiser, a codifier, a builder of systems. He wanted 'a place for everything and everything in the right place.'"⁵⁹ The old model was so well thought out that everything could fit together "without a clash."⁶⁰ The medieval man may have been scientifically wrong in some areas, but his model had better explanatory power when it came to what is metaphysically right. This correction of one aspect of his system, his view of natural science, should not diminish all that he had correct.

Lewis would rightly acknowledge that empirical evidence has driven modern people to dispel certain aspects of the old model (advances in astronomy, biology, chemistry, etc.), but "we should misrepresent the historical process if we said that the irruption of new facts was the sole cause of the alteration."⁶¹ Rather, "when changes in the human mind produce a sufficient disrelish of the old Model and a sufficient hankering for some new one, phenomena to support that new one will obediently turn up. I do not at all mean that these new phenomena are illusory. Nature has all sorts of phenomena in stock and can suit many different tastes."⁶² The goal in understanding this is to dispel the myth that man's understanding has "progressed," but rather that one model has simply replaced another. The replacement of one model with another does not invalidate all the knowledge in the previous model, e.g., belief in God or an immaterial aspect of reality.

This is further complicated by the tendency of this new model (scientific naturalism) to try to answer questions that it cannot. One such question is the existence of God. John Lennox

59. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 10.

60. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 11.

61. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 219.

62. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 221.

summarizes the problem as follows: “The success of science sometimes leads people to think that because we can understand the mechanisms of the universe, then we can safely conclude that there was no God who designed and created the universe in the first place. This reasoning commits a logical error that confuses mechanism and agency.”⁶³ Modern science is overstepping its bounds by claiming that the existence of God or a transcendent order to reality have been disproven. Alister McGrath says it this way: “the natural sciences cannot simply comment with competence on matters that cannot be observed or detected, directly or indirectly. ‘It cannot be observed’ can never legitimately be restated as ‘it does not exist.’”⁶⁴

Berman notes another failure of attempting to use modern science as the only avenue to truth: “modern science is grounded in a sharp distinction between fact and value; it can only tell us how to do something, not what to do or whether we should do it.”⁶⁵ Lennox provides a helpful illustration to this point: science can tell a person that putting poison in someone’s drink will kill them, but it cannot say whether a person should or should not do that.⁶⁶ These unanswerable

63. To support this, John Lennox offers a helpful illustration about Henry Ford, “It is conceivable that someone who was seeing [an automobile] for the first time and who knew no science might imagine that there is a god (Mr. Ford) inside the engine, making it go. Of course, if he were subsequently to study engineering and take apart the engine, he would discover that there is no Mr. Ford inside it. He would also see that he did not need to introduce Mr. Ford as an explanation for its working; his grasp of the impersonal principles of internal combustion would be enough to do that. However, if he then decided that his understanding of the principles of how the engine worked made it impossible to believe in the existence of a Mr. Ford who designed the engine in the first place, this would be patently false. Had there never been a Mr. Ford to design the mechanisms, none would exist for him to understand.” John Lennox, “Challenges from Science,” in *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend*, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 115–16.

64. Alister McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* (New York: Image, 2013), 170.

65. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 51.

66. Lennox, “Challenges from Science,” 113.

questions create cracks, which Taylor identifies as “cross pressures,” in the otherwise tight, self-sufficient system of a closed, immanent frame.⁶⁷

G.K. Chesterton furthers this argument against scientific naturalism by offering a polemic against those who adhere to it. He compares the materialist’s views to those of a madman, “The madman’s explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory. Or, to speak more strictly, the insane explanation, if not conclusive, is at least unanswerable.”⁶⁸ This explains why scientific naturalism has a serious appeal. It offers an explanation of the universe that feels complete. Everything can be reduced to chemistry and physics, but nothing more.⁶⁹ Although this view of the world feels complete, it operates within a very small circle, “The lunatic’s theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way.”⁷⁰ In other words, the madman’s perfect circle does not have the explanatory power of an enchanted worldview. For that reason, materialism is extremely limiting,

The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle.... The Christian admits that the universe is manifold and even miscellaneous, just as a sane man knows that he is complex.... But the materialist’s world is quite simple and solid, just as the madman is quite sure he is sane.... Materialists and madmen never have doubts.⁷¹

67. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594–96, 617.

68. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1908), 32.

69. This is how Lennox frames Richard Dawkins’ description of the universe. Cf. Lennox, “Challenges from Science,” 116.

70. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 33–34.

71. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 41–42.

The fact that neither madmen nor materialists doubt the completeness of their worldview does not mean that they are correct, but rather that they have limited themselves. By reducing everything to solid matter, there is no room for beauty, art, wonder, appreciation, love, etc. In fact, there is no room for rational thought because “Thought is replaced by electro-chemical neural events. Two such events cannot confront each other in rational discourse. They are neither right nor wrong. They simply happen.... The very assertions of the reductionist himself are nothing but blips in the neural network of his brain. The world of rational discourse dissolves into the absurd chatter of firing synapses.”⁷²

These considerations suggest that scientific naturalism will ultimately fail its proponents as a worldview. Firstly, the naturalist is guilty of the arrogance of chronological snobbery. He supposes that his understanding of the world has surpassed those of the past in a movement from error to truth, while failing to recognize that he is the adherent to no more than another model—one that, with enough time, will be replaced. Secondly, he is unable to answer certain questions, like the existence of God or anything of an ethical nature, and he cannot adequately ground concepts like beauty or love. In doing so, he is battered with “cross pressures” that poke holes into his otherwise seemingly self-sufficient system. Finally, his model for understanding the universe is limited, narrow, and falls into ontological reductionism.⁷³

72. Lennox, “Challenges from Science,” 117.

73. Lennox, “Challenges from Science,” 116.

RE-ENCHANTMENT

Re-enchantment's purpose is to address the disenchanted worldview held by the modern man. However, the question must be raised: what is re-enchantment? Is it simply an attempt by thoroughly disenchanted people to inject meaning into the world by returning to a view of the world that ignores the progress that has been made, as suggested by Joe Marie Clarkson, or is it something else?⁷⁴ One of the main difficulties in answering that question and, in turn, defining re-enchantment is its varied usage by its proponents. To answer that question, first the common basis from which the pursuit of re-enchantment is sought will be examined to create a broad definition of re-enchantment. Then, contemporary Christian examples of re-enchantment will be examined to see how various individuals have moved beyond that common basis.

Why Re-Enchantment?

The goal of re-enchantment, broadly speaking, is to break free from the limited circle of scientific naturalism and to recognize that there is more to this world than the empirical and the

74. Clarkson's opposition to re-enchantment is largely a reaction to re-enchantment as Rod Dreher presents it, "The impulse to re-enchant the world is, it seems, part and parcel of disenchantment itself. The act of *re-enchantment* presupposes being *disenchanted* as a precondition; one cannot re-enchant something which is not disenchanted. And thus, the impulse toward re-enchantment is itself an expression of a disenchanted outlook. There is an irony in the fact that many attempts to re-enchant the world lead to more deeply entrenched disenchantment.... By attempting to *re-enchant the world*, we underscore the sense of distance between ourselves (the ones doing the re-enchanting) and the world (that which will be enchanted). By putting ourselves in the posture of a consumer who demands enchantment from the world as spiritual solace in draining time, or even a wizard who re-enchants it, we inscribe into the world the alienation we seek to escape." Joy Marie Clarkson, "Against Re-Enchantment," *Plough* 45.3 (2025):15–16. Emphasis original.

material. This means that re-enchantment is primarily concerned with how people view the world and, by extension, their place within it. However, Lewis makes it clear that its goal is not simply to return to the thinking of another time, “I hope no one will think that I am recommending a return to the Medieval Model. I am only suggesting considerations that may induce us to regard *all* Models in the right way, respecting each and idolizing none.”⁷⁵ Thus, re-enchantment might be stylized as a push to approach the understanding of the universe with a posture of humility and wonder. Chesterton is helpful here,

All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption; a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clockwork. People feel that if the universe was personal it would vary.... But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.⁷⁶

Re-enchantment’s purpose is for humanity to wake up to the amazing world in which it lives—a world of both the seen and the unseen. Its purpose is to make mankind marvel at the entirety of reality, not just the parts about which the field of natural science can comment, and to see that there is incredible purpose and meaning behind it all.

It is imperative to note that for both Chesterton and Lewis (as well as other Christian re-enchanters), the goal is not simply to wonder at the world for its own sake. Instead, there is also a decidedly theological aspect to re-enchantment. Christians actively confess that the world is physical *and* spiritual, yet, if Taylor’s assessment is to be believed, they may not live like it. If

75. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 222. Emphasis mine.

76. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 107–9.

Christians are to look at the world and live in it the way that God would have them, then secularism the way that Taylor has portrayed it stands in direct opposition to that goal. A worldview in which belief in God is accidental to an understanding of it is incompatible with a worldview that calls itself “Christian.” Simply put: re-enchantment wants Christians see the world with Christian eyes, not secular ones.

Varied Christian Voices

Although broadly speaking, proponents of re-enchantment want Christians to see the world with Christian eyes, the use of re-enchantment within the context of broader Christendom is hardly uniform. Thus, several different perspectives on re-enchantment will be summarized to demonstrate where Christian proponents for re-enchantment have proceeded from their common basis. First will be the re-enchantment centered on nature proposed by Alister McGrath. Second will be the ideas of re-enchantment found in the writings of C.S. Lewis. Last will be the re-enchantment grounded in Eastern Orthodox theology offered by Rod Dreher.

Alister McGrath and Nature

Alister McGrath views the current state of disenchantment, especially as it applies to humanity’s view and use of the natural world as “one of the most worrying cultural developments of our time. What once evoked a sense of awe from appreciative and respectful human beings has now been explained away, deconstructed and desacralized.”⁷⁷ For McGrath, central to moving away

77. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, xi.

from this disenchanted state is a re-enchanted view of the natural world, for “Re-enchantment depends on the reaffirmation that nature is special and clarification of how this ‘special’ character is to be understood.”⁷⁸

How one arrives at this special view of nature is important. For McGrath, this starts with understanding the Christian view of creation: “The divine creation of the world establishes an analogy between the creator and what is created. The beauty of the world thus reflects the beauty of God. Nature is like a mirror, itself beautiful while reflecting an even greater beauty of God. To study the wonder of nature is to glimpse tantalizing facets of the face of God, and long to see more.”⁷⁹ Here, McGrath is echoing many of the key features of the pre-modern, enchanted worldview: a purposeful world in which everything lower (in his example, nature) reflects and proceeds from the higher, the divine Creator. Nature cannot merely be dead matter with which man can do whatever he pleases, for to look at nature is to see God in it.

Connected with this high view of nature is a high view of mankind created in the image of God, “we have been created with the ability to peer into the mind of God. If our reasoning has its source in God, it has the potential to lead us to its fountainhead.... The resonance between reason, the world, and God is no accident; it is an integral aspect of the Christian doctrine of creation.”⁸⁰ This has incredible implications for mankind. If the entire world is the result of God’s divine act and God has given mankind the ability to see himself through it, then it is humanity’s duty to appreciate, prize, and care for the world which they have been given.⁸¹

78. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 74.

79. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 16.

80. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 22.

81. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 184.

To McGrath, creation is the “imitator of transcendence,” not only because it is the result of God’s divine creative act, but also because it foreshadows the new creation that is to come, the redemption of a broken world.⁸² McGrath recognizes that this world has been broken by sin and that through their sins men have continued to heap abuse upon the creation for which they were meant to be caretakers.⁸³ Yet, the care which a re-enchantment person has for nature is linked to promises of the restoration God will accomplish, “We are called to care for this earth while we look with expectation to another world, which will be like the best of this world, only better.”⁸⁴ The world which McGrath describes is one that has a given order in which man has a place and one that is moving toward a distinct end—a decidedly *mimetic* understanding of the universe. McGrath summarizes his desire for re-enchantment with the following: “To reenchant nature is not merely to gain a new respect for its integrity and well-being; it is to throw open the doors to a deeper level of existence.”⁸⁵

C.S. Lewis and Narnia

For Michael Ward, an expert on C.S. Lewis, three problems plagued him as he contemplated Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Firstly, why were they written at all, i.e., why would a respected scholar like Lewis, who was childless, write a series of stories intended for children? Secondly, he wondered about the composition of each book, namely, why, in what is often

82. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 185.

83. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 79.

84. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 24.

85. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 186.

viewed as Lewis' great allegory for Christianity, only three of the books have definitively Christian themes (creation in *The Magician's Nephew*, redemption in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and the final judgment in *The Last Battle*). Additionally, why would Lewis include the influence of mythology outside of the Christian tradition (e.g., Greek/Roman gods, a Snow Queen, Father Christmas, etc.) in this story about Christ? Finally, he wondered how books with questions like these surrounding them have remained so popular. He summarizes these three questions as follows: "How is it that seven such stories, authored by an unlikely novice and possessing little apparent coherence in design, should have become some of the best-selling and most influential fables in the world?"⁸⁶

Michael Ward believes that the answer to those questions lies in Lewis' crafting of a literary universe with a "pregnant silence, resonant with significance."⁸⁷ The atmosphere behind each of the *Chronicles of Narnia* was Lewis' deep appreciation for medieval cosmology, that is, underlying each chronicle is the rich symbolic meaning of one of the seven planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos.⁸⁸ Each chronicle is littered with the language and themes associated with one of the spheres. Consider, for example, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which is saturated with the themes of Sol, the fourth sphere of the Ptolemaic heavens. Light is the most prominent of these themes and plays a key role in the novel as the characters oscillate back and forth between darkness and light. The novel culminates with Aslan as a transcendent Lion/Lamb beheld beyond the full brightness of the sun.⁸⁹

86. Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Oxford University, 2008), 4.

87. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 22.

88. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 22.

89. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 116–120.

What does this have to do with re-enchantment? That answer lies in why Lewis wanted to use the medieval view of the cosmos. Ward offers that, for Lewis, “The glory of science is to progress as new facts are discovered to be true, and such progress means that ‘factual truth’ is a provisional human construct. Which is why the wise man does not only think in the category of truth; the category of beauty is also worth thinking in. And it was because he thought it beautiful that Lewis so reveled in the [Ptolemaic] cosmos.”⁹⁰ Already, Lewis’ clear rejection of scientific naturalism is evident, as well as his desire to see and appreciate “more.” Lewis saw every bit of knowledge in the world—not just the scientific, but also those related to aesthetics, myth, etc.—as leading to a revelation about God:

Since God is the Father of lights, even dim and guttering lights of paganism could be ascribed ultimately to Him. Christians should feel no obligation to quench the smouldering flax burning in pagan myths: on the contrary, they should do their best to fan it into flame. Lewis, with [Edmund] Spenser believed that ‘Divine Wisdom spoke not only on the Mount of Olives, but also on Parnassus.’ Of course, the Parnassian Wisdom was not as complete or sufficient as that offered in Christ, but it should be honoured as far as it went.⁹¹

To Ward, Lewis’ position had a biblical basis. For Lewis

did not want merely to instrumentalize paganism like the ancient Hebrews plundering the spoils of the Egyptians: rather, like St. Paul quoting Aratus’s poem about Zeus (Acts 17:28), he wanted to respect and redeem and accommodate it within a new, large worldview, even though it was superficially at odds with his faith. And if he was prepared to adopt such an inclusive stance with respect to pagan divinities, it is to be expected that he would be all the more inclusive with respect to a cosmology that had once been considered fully consonant with Christianity.⁹²

90. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 27.

91. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 28.

92. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 28. This an allusion to Augustine, “The Egyptians not only had idols and crushing burdens which the people of Israel detested and from which they fled, but they also had vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and clothing, which the Israelites leaving Egypt secretly claimed for themselves as if for a better use. Not on their own authority did they make this appropriation, but by the command of God, while the Egyptians themselves, without realizing it, were supplying the things which they were not using properly. In the same way, all the teachings of the pagans have counterfeit and superstitious notions and oppressive burdens of

In this sense, the re-enchantment of Lewis is one that is centered on experiencing everything differently—in a Christian way.

This is evident through the character of Aslan. Lewis did not view Aslan as an allegory for Christ or Narnia as an allegory for the earth, but rather a supposition for the question, “What might Christ become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?”⁹³ What makes Narnia enchanted is not the talking animals; it is the all-pervasive presence of Aslan, “Aslan in each book is not just incarnate as an identifiable, locatable character; he is also discarnate as the Word who sustains the cosmos of each romance. He is present in two modes at once.”⁹⁴ In this sense, the God of Lewis’ universe is present personally and locally as Aslan and present illocally as the principle that is behind everything and sustaining everything. In Narnia, Lewis crafts a world like the one in which the pre-modern man lived. It is a world in which contemplating it means contemplating Aslan (Christ) because his existence is implicated throughout it in every possible way.⁹⁵ Ward furthers this position, “It seems natural, within Narnia, to pass from consideration of the heavenly bodies to consideration of the Christ-figure, and this should not surprise us once we

useless labor, which anyone of us, leaving the association of pagans with Christ as our leader, ought to abominate and shun. However, they also contain liberal instruction more adapted to the service of truth and also very useful principles about morals; even some truths about the service of the one God Himself are discovered among them. These are, in a sense, their gold and silver. They themselves did not create them, but excavated them, as it were, from some mines of divine Providence which is everywhere present, but they wickedly and unjustly misuse their treasure for the service of demons. When the Christian severs himself in spirit from the wretched association of these men, he ought to take these from them for the lawful service of preaching the Gospel.” Augustine, *Christian Instruction*, FC: Saint Augustine, vol. 4, translated by John J. Gavigan (New York, CIMA: 1974), 111–112.

93. C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, Volume 3: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950–1963, ed. Walter Hooper (New York, HarperCollins: 2007), 1062.

94. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 237.

95. “Lewis’s ‘dynasts seven’ are a planetary pantheon deployed in order to symbolize the paradoxical experience of a God who is simultaneously both near and far, both speaking and silent.” Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 238.

understand that Lewis is using the sun and moon and wandering stars to represent Christ under seven veils, seven kinds of iconography: King, Commander, Light, Son, Word, Life, Mystery.”⁹⁶

How, then, does a Christian arrive at this Narnian, or enchanted, view of the universe, one that naturally experiences everything differently? Ward offers that this view “is imparted to those who surrender in Christ to the divine grace of God the Father. This new life or *novitas* is absolutely supernatural to the Christian’s created being, and is always and only good. It is not a faculty separate from the other parts of person, but a redirection of them all: body, soul, and spirit (that is, reason).”⁹⁷ Through this *novitas*, the Christian is able to enjoy the world, “not confined to moments of special intensity, but to all moments, special and ordinary, individual and universal.”⁹⁸ In the line of thought, the Christian cannot be “buffered” and decide for himself where meaning is to be found but rather is redirected to see everything pointing to Christ and finding meaning in Christ. Lewis can take it all—myth, the medieval cosmos, the natural world, etc.—and bend it to be used in service to God.

This quiet fullness with which a Christian looks at the ordinary world in wonder and awe and sees everything ultimately pointing to Christ is what Lewis attempted to convey through *The Chronicles of Narnia*.⁹⁹ Alister McGrath makes a helpful addition here, “For Lewis, the sense of wonder we experience at nature is not meant to satisfy us; it is meant to make us yearn for the greater wonder that it silently signposts and whispers will one day be ours.”¹⁰⁰

96. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 238.

97. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 32.

98. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 39.

99. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 39.

100. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature*, 5.

Rod Dreher and Re-Enchantment

Rod Dreher's take on re-enchantment is heavily linked to his Eastern Orthodox theology. He proposes that within a Christian context, meaningful re-enchantment is recognizing that the world holds these realities: mystery and wonder, order, purpose, meaning (i.e., there is a hierarchy of significance to objects and events encountered), the possibility of redemption, a means of connecting to the infinite, the existence of sacred spaces, miracles (events that go against the accepted order of the world), and epiphanies (moments in which a quasi-mystical union with something larger than oneself is held out).¹⁰¹ Dreher argues that the world "is not what we think it is. It is far more mysterious, exciting, and adventurous. We only have to learn to open our eyes and see what is already there."¹⁰² Dreher furthers this by saying,

Christian re-enchantment is not about imposing fanciful nostalgia onto the world, like coating a plain yellow cake with pastel fondant frosting. Instead, it is about learning how to perceive what already exists and reestablishing a participatory contact with the really real. God has already enchanted the world; it is up to us to clear away the scales from our eyes, recognize what is there, and establish a relationship with it.¹⁰³

This raises an important question. What would Dreher consider "really real?" He offers,

"the universe and everything in it is sacramental—it is a symbol of spiritual reality that both points to transcendent reality and participates in it. Christians use the term customarily with reference to the Eucharist, baptism, and other sacraments.... To call the cosmos sacramental means that, in a mysterious way, all created things bear divine power and participate in the life of God."¹⁰⁴

The entire universe is sacramental because "God imbued all created things with a logos, a reason for existing, and that their own logos was mystically bound to these other *logoi*, and to the divine

101. Rod Dreher, *Living in Wonder: Finding Mystery and Meaning in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024), 14–15.

102. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 17.

103. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 43.

104. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 23. Emphasis original.

Logos, which is Christ... humans participate in the life of God through the logos.... Our divinely ordered task as humans is to elevate all things to deeper participation in the Logos.”¹⁰⁵

In order to view the world in this way, man must seek *metanoia*, or a complete change of his entire worldview.¹⁰⁶ The only way to perceive that all created things are connected to the divine Logos is with a purified heart resulting from this *metanoia*.¹⁰⁷ The reason that man needs to undergo a change in order to perceive the world this way is because “From an Eastern Christian point of view, the fall of man entailed the damaging of the nous [the heart of spiritual knowledge]. It damaged—but it did not destroy—the part of our souls that allowed us to commune directly with God and with the world of spirit, of transcendence.”¹⁰⁸ Because the *nous* has been darkened, “the degree to which we can receive God’s grace is governed by the transparency of one’s *nous*. The clearer one’s *nous* becomes (through prayer, fasting, obedience and works of love), the more grace flows into one’s soul, purifying it and drawing it closer in unity with God.”¹⁰⁹

Dreher views the reality of mystical experiences and having them as another key to this process of *metanoia*,

If I had not had those mystical experiences—some of them with God, and some with the demonic—it is easy to see how I could have been carried away by the cultural undertow of our era. These hierophanies, manifestations of the unseen realm, brought me back to reality.... It cannot be said enough: mystical experience alone cannot suffice.... Yet to

105. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 175–76.

106. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 50.

107. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 51.

108. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 51.

109. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 51–52.

downplay or deny mystical experience is not only to risk dismissing reality but also to surrender a powerful source of strength and clarity during the fog of spiritual warfare.¹¹⁰

It is impossible to experience that enchanted world without *metanoia*,¹¹¹ and *metanoia* requires *theosis*, “to become fully united with God while remaining oneself.”¹¹² To become re-enchanted, man must take up practices which lead to *theosis*, for re-enchantment is not a matter of knowledge but of action and practice.¹¹³ Although God made the world enchanted, “enchantment is not a permanent state of existence; the best we can do is live within a framework.”¹¹⁴

A summary of Dreher’s position might be as follows: the world is enchanted, but man’s natural disposition to the enchantment has been darkened. To open himself again to transcendence, man needs to undergo a radical change. That change requires the framework of a sacramental universe, in which man participates in the divine through prayer, fasting, and other prescribed practices. In doing this, man unites himself to God and opens himself up to a life full of meaning and mystical experience. Dreher views this process as critically important because the success or lack thereof of re-enchantment is imperative for Christianity’s future in the face of disenchantment. There are only two possible outcomes: “Either we will recover enchanted Christianity or we will succumb to chaos and cruelty.”¹¹⁵

110. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 259.

111. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 254.

112. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 52.

113. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 52–53.

114. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 53.

115. Dreher, *Living in Wonder*, 80.

A LUTHERAN APPROACH TO RE-ENCHANTMENT

How then does Confessional Lutheran theology relate to re-enchantment?¹¹⁶ If the goal of re-enchantment is to move beyond the current state of disenchantment and to restore a sense of wonder, mystery, meaning, purpose, and humility as mankind approaches the world in which they live, Lutheran theology fits excellently within that context. Although Confessional Lutherans would find good reason to steer well clear of Rod Dreher's notion of re-enchantment with its emphasis on mystical experience, Confessional Lutheran theology points to seeing the world in an enchanted way. Consider once again the key features Taylor outlines in his analysis of secularism: man lives within a meaningless, mechanistic, and accidental universe lacking any intentionality with truth only found in empirical study, man is "buffered," that is, his mind is ultimately separate from the world and he is responsible for generating meaning in it, and finally his interactions within the world are guided by his immanent frame. In putting forth a biblical worldview, Confessional Lutheran theology stands vehemently opposed to that naturalistic view of the world and its disenchantment. Beyond the biblical worldview that Lutherans share with much of the historic Church, the uniquely Lutheran concept of the theology of the cross and the hiddenness of God prime mankind for seeing enchantment by demonstrating purpose in the

116. "Confessional Lutherans believe in the ongoing relevance of the Book of Concord of 1580 and the confessions of faith contained therein. They believe that the confessions are normative for the Church today because they are statements of the changeless truths of Scripture." Jonathan Schroeder, "Our Calling: Christian Vocation and the Ministry of the Gospel," paper presented at the 60th biennial convention of the WELS, 2009, 15, WLS Essay File.

cross, mystery in the means of grace, and meaning in vocation, all while recognizing the reality of the miraculous.

The Biblical Basis for an Enchanted World¹¹⁷

In its doctrines of creation and providence, Confessional Lutheran theology is incompatible with the cosmology and anthropology of scientific naturalism held by secular modernity. Firstly, Confessional Lutheran theology recognizes that the world is the result of God's divine, creative action. It also recognizes that God has made this world (and mankind!) consisting of both the material and the immaterial. Finally, it recognizes this world as the *locus* of God's continued action.

The Bible clearly argues against an accidental or orderless universe. The Bible articulates that God created the entire universe *ex nihilo* (Heb 11:3) and did this according to his free will (Rev 4:11). Nothing has been made apart from God (John 1:1ff.; Rom 11:36). The account of creation not only depicts that creation is the result of God's divine action, but also that it was done with intention. "Genesis 1 teaches clearly that God, in creating, progressed from the simple and the inorganic to the organic, or from the imperfect to the perfect."¹¹⁸ The order within creation is reflected especially in the celestial bodies (Jer 33:25; Ps 104:19–20). Not only is creation intentional and orderly, but it also has a definite purpose: "the final goal of creation is

117. This section is heavily indebted to Luke Thompson's metaphysical summary of the world. Luke Thompson, "A Pedagogy of Re-Enchantment," paper presented 2025 WELS National Education Conference, Green Bay, WI, June 25, 2025, 6–9.

118. Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St Louis: Concordia, 1957), 469.

the glorification of the goodness, wisdom, and omnipotence of God.”¹¹⁹ The entirety of creation serves as a testimony in a silent yet resounding encore to the glory of God (Ps 19). In the biblical account of creation taught by Confessional Lutheranism, everything lower (the entire universe) has literally proceeded from the highest possible thing (God). For that reason, God’s existence is implicated throughout the entirety of the created order.

Confessional Lutheran theology also contends with a materialistic view of the universe. Because it recognizes that it is not just the visible, material order which proceeds from God. Rather than limiting the universe to the material, it presents the full picture of the universe as one of both material *and* immaterial.¹²⁰ The creation account in Genesis 1–2 highlights this twofold reality: God created the observable universe and also endowed man with an immaterial soul, the breath of life. This soul is distinct from the material world yet within it and returns to God in death (Ecc 12:7). Just as there are material creatures, there are also immaterial creatures, such as angels (Ps 104:4; Heb 1:7,14) who guard believers (Ps 91:11–12) and demons (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7–9) who actively fight against believers in the context of a cosmic spiritual battle (Eph 6:12).¹²¹ There are immaterial locales—heaven (Matt 5:12; 7:21) and hell (Matt 8:11–12; 25:41). There are also immaterial concepts, e.g., in placing a conscience in every man, God has demonstrated that there is right and wrong, or a standard of morality (Rom 1:18–21; 2:15). There

119. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2009), 233.

120. A synonym for the material world would be everything that is physical, i.e., composed of matter (e.g. plants, animals, the stars and planets, etc.). Included in the immaterial is everything outside of empirical study.

121. “But Scripture affirms two things: (1) that heaven, earth, the abyss, light, the angels, and the spirit of man were created without means and out of nothing; and (2) that God not only made visible, corporeal creatures but also invisible creatures... as the spirits whom He calls angels.” Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, Part 1, translated by J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 300.

is more to God's creation than simply what is observable via the five senses. Rather, the material is saturated with the presence of the immaterial.¹²²

Recall Taylor's assessment of the key differences between the modern man and the pre-modern one. The modern man believes himself to be the only "mind" in an entirely physical universe and thinks that he must generate meaning for himself in it. The pre-modern man recognized that his "mind" was just one among many others—both material and immaterial—whose job it was to find his place in God's grand design for creation. Based on the following biblical considerations, who has a view of the world more grounded in reality? A Confessional Lutheran, on the basis of Scripture, would have to answer, "The latter."

Furthermore, against a mechanistic or impersonal universe, the Bible demonstrates that God is actively involved in the world. This is what theologians have called God's work of providence.¹²³ Providence demonstrates that belief in the transcendent cannot be accidental to one's interaction with the universe (as with the open immanent frame held by much of contemporary Christianity). Rather, belief in the transcendent is essential to one's interaction with the universe because the transcendent God is always providentially at work in the universe.

122. Gerhard offers this helpful summary of creation, "Creation is the act of the one and only God, the indivisible work of the three persons of the Godhead, in which the Father through His coeternal Son in the coeternal Holy Spirit, by His free will, created all things *visible and invisible* on six distinct days, not out of some material coexistent with Him from eternity but out of nothing, for the glory of His name and for man's use. All things whatsoever God has made are very good. What He created He also still today preserves, sustains, and governs. To Him be praise, honor, and glory. Amen." Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, vol. 8–11 (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 44. Emphasis mine.

123. "Divine providence is the act by which God not only looks upon all things but also preserves each and every thing He has created according to the counsel of His will; governs them freely, powerfully, wisely, doing this ordinarily by preserving the established course of nature but extraordinarily by acting without natural means or even contrary to them; especially directs the life and actions of all people by commanding, aiding, and approving good things, and by permitting evil things, by setting their limits beforehand, and by eliciting good from them." Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, 119.

This providential work is divided into three categories: God's work of preservation, God's concurrence, and God's governance.¹²⁴

God's work of preservation means that everything is actively being held together in God and by God, i.e., he is immanent in creation that it may continue to exist (Acts 17:28; Col 1:16–17).¹²⁵ Preservation reflects God's active involvement and care for his creation for it is, “a constant working of God (Jn 5:17), a constant willing of existence (Ps 33:9, Jas 4:15), a constant sustaining and permeating with his essential, omnipotent omnipresence (Ps 139:3,5,8–10, 13; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3).”¹²⁶ Creation's ongoing existence serves as a witness to God's continued care for the world (Acts 14:16–17), “If you intend to be a pupil of nature, you will discover that it is taken care of in its basest and least significant things no less than in its noblest; that necessities are given to all until the end; that all things continue in a marvelous, certain order; that those things which act without intelligence and understanding still attain their purpose.”¹²⁷

God is not only immanently preserving the world, but he is also concurrently involved in the world.

Holy Scripture (Job 10:8; Php 2:13; Ac 17:28) teaches us that nothing happens in the world without God's will and influence.... But Scripture also teaches us that created things, the so-called secondary causes, have a relatively independent power to produce certain effects.... This double teaching of Scripture—that nothing in the world happens without God's working, but also that everything does not happen through God's

124. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 24.

125. “After creating the world, God did not withdraw from it, neither entirely nor half nor in the least degree, but He remains in contact with the world and sustains everything in it, the greatest and the least, by His divine power. The sustaining power of God, and this alone, insures the continues existence of the world. If God would desert this world, it would at once disappear. If God would withdraw His presence from any part of the world, that part would cease to exist.” Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 483.

126. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 249.

127. Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, 47.

immediate, sole working—is set forth in dogmatics by the doctrine of *concursum*, of God’s cooperative assistance.¹²⁸

The doctrine of concurrence is far different than the fatalistic causality of a mechanistic, materialistic universe. Rather, the concurrence of God with his creation, neither separated in action nor separated in time, is the result of “the uninterrupted operation of God on the creatures and through the creatures.”¹²⁹

The final part of divine providence, God’s governance, is the act, “according to which God regulates and directs all things and actions for the best, corresponding to his goodness and wisdom and for the glory of his name, as for the salvation of his people.” God’s governance is done ordinarily through “the course of nature which [divine providence] has established.”¹³⁰ God’s work through the natural order he has established is clearly demonstrated in Scripture (e.g., Lev 26:4; Ps 104:14; Ps 147:8–9). God also works through miraculous means in his governance. This miraculous governance is either done mediately (e.g., 1 Kings 17:1–16) or immediately (e.g., Ex 24:18).¹³¹ Scripture clearly outlines the purpose of God’s ruling activity: God is actively working all things and using them for his purposes, i.e., the good of his Church to glorify his name (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11–12, 22).

Within his enchanted universe, Lewis captures the essence of this providential care in an interaction between Shasta and Aslan in *The Horse and His Boy*,

“Don’t you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?” said Shasta. “There was only one lion,” said the Voice.... “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horse the new strength of

128. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 252. Emphasis original.

129. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 488.

130. Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, 74.

131. Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, 74–75.

fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.”¹³²

In Narnia, there are no coincidences, accidents, bad luck, or the like. Aslan’s hand is guiding all the action throughout the world for the benefit of his people—in this case, Shasta. Likewise, Christians, when looking at how Confessional Lutheran theology defines God’s providential care on the basis of his Word, must come to that same conclusion about their own world. Nothing happens without God’s involvement. Interaction with the transcendent is a given.

Re-enchantment Informed by the Theology of the Cross

Based on the biblical description of the world, Confessional Lutheran theology must wholly reject the current disenchanted, mechanistic, materialistic, and meaningless worldview that has dominated the modern man in his narrative of secularity. So far, the re-enchantment of Confessional Lutheran theology has not differed greatly from the efforts at re-enchantment espoused by McGrath and Lewis, as it emphasizes a world which God has created and which is the seat of God’s ongoing activity. What makes Confessional Lutheran theology singular in its approach to the enchanted world is its recognition of the hiddenness of God in the theology of the cross.

Throughout the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Martin Luther contrasts two different kinds of theologians: theologians of glory and theologians of the cross.¹³³ The chief contrast is described

132. C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: HarperTrophy, 1954), 175–76.

133. When using the term “theologian,” it is important to understand that Luther has more in mind than simply the “professional” theologians, i.e., those who study God in academic and scholarly pursuits. He has in mind those who should be able to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel, i.e., all Christians. Gerhard O. Forde, *On*

in Thesis 21, “A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.”¹³⁴ This contrast is related to how these two types of theologians view works: both man’s “good” works and God’s work. Theses 3–4 outline the chief appeal of the theology of glory, for according to reason, “the works of man always seem attractive and good,” whereas “the works of God are always unattractive and appear evil.”¹³⁵ Thesis 19 describes how a theologian of glory thinks he knows God: “That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have actually happened (or have been made, created).”¹³⁶ Thesis 20 demonstrates the startling reality of how God is actually known: “he deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.”¹³⁷

One risk of today’s movement toward re-enchantment—at least how some others have proposed it—is what Gerard Forde emphasizes as a key tenet of the theologians of glory, “they think one can see *through* the created world and acts of God to the invisible realm of glory beyond it.”¹³⁸ Consider how this relates to the previously mentioned push toward re-enchantment by Rod Dreher. Its goal is for man to participate in the divine. To do this, man must recognize the *logoi* in all of creation, which leads to that deeper participation in the divine. It’s as if man

Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 10.

134. LW 31:40.

135. LW 31:39

136. LW 31:40

137. LW 31:40

138. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 13.

must uncover the “secret code” behind nature in order for nature to have meaning. Already, the theology of glory is clearly seen: man must look *through* or even past creation to see its divine participation. The emphasis on mystical experience is another red flag for a theology of glory. These subjective, attractive experiences become fundamental for *actually* recognizing that there is a spiritual dimension to reality. Creation itself is not enough. Still, this theology of glory goes further. Through efforts in meditation, fasting, participation in the liturgy, etc., man becomes more and more enchanted. Dreher’s take on re-enchantment fails to be a legitimate method of enchanting precisely because it puts the impetus of enchantment on personal experience. It is an attempt to generate meaning from the inside out—a marked characteristic of buffered, disenchanted people with a *poietic* worldview.

The re-enchantment Dreher proposes is a fickle thing. It is something gained with much difficulty and something that can be easily lost because it is only retained through man’s continued effort and work. The underlying assumption behind a re-enchantment like Dreher’s, and behind every theology of glory, is that “we can prepare for grace by doing our best with our natural powers.”¹³⁹ The sickening reality of the re-enchantment of a theology of glory is that the world will never be enchanted enough. This is why “Luther likens the plight of the theologian of glory to that of an obsessive lover or a miser.... The desire, the thirst for glory or wisdom or power or money, is never satisfied by the acquisition of what is desired. The more we get, the more we want. There is never real satisfaction, never the confidence that we have or have done enough.”¹⁴⁰ There will always need to be an even deeper appreciation and even greater recognition of how creation participates in the divine. There will always need to be more

139. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 75.

140. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 94.

mystical experiences, each one greater and revealing more than the last. Man will need to do more fasting, worship, meditation, etc., if he really wants to keep his enchanted state. He is constantly attempting to claw his way up to God and pull him out of heaven. It's a theology of "never enough."

Confessional Lutheran theology is a theology of the cross. It's a theology that says that man does not and cannot claw his way to God, but God condescends to man (John 3:13). The God who announces from the cloud that man cannot see his face and live, is the same God who, in love, lets his creatures see his back (Ex 33:12–23) and hear him in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:9–17). In order to come down to man, God must hide himself for man's sake.

This means that Confessional Lutheran theology's view of an enchanted world is centered on recognizing that God is a hidden God (Is 45:15). Confessional Lutheran theology does not look through creation or past it in order to grasp the hidden things of God. Instead, it sees the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary. God has masked himself in the everyday, the unimpressive, and even the downright offensive in order to reveal himself to the world. God veils himself to reveal himself, i.e., God works through masks,

Luther says that God wears masks when he interacts with man. On Halloween, a child wears a mask to turn his cherubic face into the haunting face of a ghoul, that he might scare someone. But consider our God! His is a face at which all the cherubim cover their eyes; from his face shines glory so great, and beauty so indescribable, that no one in earth or heaven can fully bear that sight. He wears a mask that we might not be scared, but succored; that we might not be killed but cared for.¹⁴¹

This means that the Lutheran approach to re-enchantment recognizes something more. The other attempts at enchantment often start from the wonderful creation and proceed toward transcendence, meaning, purpose, etc. A Confessional Lutheran approach appreciates these for

141. Schroeder, "Our Calling," 9.

what they are *and* grounds them in something higher: the hidden God. The theology of the cross leads to enchantment precisely because it does not ask for more, whether it be mystical experiences, work, transcendence, enchantment, meaning, etc. Instead, it finds all of those centered outside of man in the hidden God—a truly *mimetic* understanding of this universe. This God hidden in the cross shows mankind that there is incredible purpose—redemption—in this world. This God hidden in the means of grace shows mankind that there is incredible mystery too. Finally, this God hidden in vocation gives mankind meaning as they live in this world.

Hidden: In the Cross

Confessional Lutheran theology is primed to talk about re-enchantment as it relates to purpose because it knows God hidden in the cross. Purpose in this world is centered in Christ and his cross. Therefore, “a characteristic mark of theologians of the cross is that they learn to call a spade a spade. Since the cross story alone is their story, they are not driven by the attempt to see through it, but are drawn into the story.”¹⁴² Theologians of the cross are drawn into the story of the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world (Rev 13:8), for “The cross is key to unlocking the entire story.... Unless the cross story does claim us and become our story, we shall not escape the clutches of the glory story. It is not a matter of choice, a matter over which we deliberate.”¹⁴³ The story of the world is the story of Christ and his cross, and this carries incredible implications for how man sees God, himself, and the world because it reveals a universe whose *telos* is redemption.

142. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 13.

143. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 9.

The “cross story” is God’s work of justification through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. The cross presents mankind with so much more than simply that he lives in a world that God has created or even that he is continuing to rule over, as important as those truths are. The story of the cross shows mankind that the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, entered this world. He took on flesh, becoming incarnate for the distinct purpose of giving his perfect life so that all his creatures, those who believe in him, might become his righteousness and receive salvation (John 1:1ff., 3:16; 2 Cor 5:21).

This “cross story” centered in the theology of the cross really has two parts: the hiddenness of God in Christ on Calvary and the rejection of the false glory of works righteousness.¹⁴⁴ That the utterly transcendent God, who created the whole world and continues to rule over it, would set aside his power and glory and would subject himself to unimaginable suffering (Phil 2:6–8) is the most divisive, detestable and offensive message to human reason (1 Cor 1:18, 22–23; 2 Cor 2:16). Man would never know nor choose this story if left to his own devices (1 Cor 2:6–10). Yet this is precisely where that same God who created the world and continues actively ruling over it is found—hidden in frail human flesh and crucified on a cross of wood next to common criminals. The theology of the cross directs the world to look right at the cross in all its horror and suffering and to see God,

Theologians of the cross see things differently. They can’t get around the cross. They can’t see through the cross to what is ‘behind’ it.... The cross is not transparent but more like a mirror. Our line of sight is bent back upon itself, upon ourselves and our world. We ‘see,’ so to speak, in the reflected light of the cross. Instead of trying to see through the world and the cross to the invisible things of God, we are turned back to what is ‘visible

144. Gene Edward Veith Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals*, Third Edition (St Louis: Concordia, 2021), 45.

and manifest' of God here among us, and we 'comprehend' it through suffering and the cross.¹⁴⁵

This mirror of the cross changes man's understanding of who God is by showing a God who enacts his purpose in the most unexpected place by the most seemingly shameful of means.

This mirror also changes how man sees himself because it forces them to reject the glory of works and to hold in tension a strange paradox. When a man looks at himself, he sees both a person who has no value at all and a person whose life is priceless. On the one hand, he knows that no value is inherently within him, for "the unregenerated human will is not only turned away from God but has also become God's enemy."¹⁴⁶ He is forced to recognize that he can do no good (Ps 14:1) and that the deserved wage he has in this life for his works is death (Rom 3:23). On the other hand, he knows that despite his natural state, his life *is* priceless because "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). The explanation for this value is God's love (Eph 2:4–5). Because of his justification, when man looks at himself, he can see an individual of incredible value who has become a temple (1 Cor 6:19) in whom the whole Godhead dwells and uses his heart as a royal throne (John 14:23; 17:20–23, 1 Cor 3:16).

Finally, this mirror of the cross still changes more. It even has implications for how man sees the world,

So it is clear to see: justification is not simply an isolated topic, next to which other topics can exist; it has essential importance and is connected with every topic. Justification does not just affect my individual life, not even just the history of the world, but impacts the history of nature as well; it affects all things... the meaning of justification must be taken

145. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 77.

146. FC EP II:3 as found in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

seriously in its breadth, with ramifications that have application for a theology of creation and for ontology.¹⁴⁷

Christ's work of redemption affects the entire created order (Rom 8:18–22; Col 1:19–20; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1–5). The cross makes man look at creation differently because it

eliminates either the alternative of either a backward look at creation or else a forward look at consummation. Those who are painfully aware of the contradiction between the suffering and sighing creatures of the present world and the promised creation of the original world will never close their eyes upon the world but will always keep them open so that they may see the newly manifested glory of creation. They are astonished.... [This astonishment] arises out of the overcoming of a deep rupture, out of the victory over death and the powers of death.¹⁴⁸

The cross leads to re-enchantment precisely because through the justification the cross brings, man cannot help but see *everything* in a dramatically new light. That God has hidden himself in the cross reveals a dramatically different world: one which has redemption as its purpose.

Hidden: In the Means of Grace

Confessional Lutheran theology is primed to talk about re-enchantment as it relates to mystery because it knows God hidden in the means of grace. The means of grace are the instruments, God's Word and Sacraments, through which God proclaims righteousness on Christ's behalf and grants the faith which receives that righteousness.¹⁴⁹ These ordinary-looking means are the only way God bestows upon people the benefits of Christ's salvific work, "Therefore we should and

147. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, translated by Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 98.

148. Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 29–30.

149. AC V:44.

must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament.”¹⁵⁰ These means speak specifically to a world marked by disenchantment, for, through the means of grace, God invites his children to find unempirical gifts hidden in empirical form—the extraordinary in the ordinary. Said another way, God uses the finite to contain the infinite.¹⁵¹

Firstly, God uses something as seemingly ordinary as human language to be the vehicle through which he conveys divine truth (John 17:17). Jesus promises that the Spirit is always accompanying his Word (John 6:63). The Word is where man should seek God,

Although he is present in all creatures, and I might find him in stone, in fire, in water; or even in a rope, for he certainly is there, yet he does not wish that I seek him there apart from the Word, and cast myself in the fire or the water, or hang myself on the rope. He is present everywhere, but he does not wish that you grope for him everywhere. Grope rather where the Word is, and there you will lay hold of him in the right way.¹⁵²

This Spirit-accompanied Word gives faith (Rom 10:17) and grants rebirth (1 Pet 1:23). This reality is not just unfathomable to the natural man, but he considers it foolish (1 Cor 1:21, 2:6–13). This Spirit-accompanied, life-giving, unfathomable-to-reason Word is powerful (Jer 23:29), the very power of God (Rom 1:16), and is always accomplishing God’s purposes (Is 55:10–11).

God also promises that when his Word—his very power—accompanies water in baptism, it grants rebirth and salvation (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Luther gives an excellent explanation,

How can water do such great things? Answer: Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and

150. SA III: 8(3).

151. Gene Edward Veith Jr. and A. Trevor Sutton, *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World* (St Louis: Concordia, 2017), 131.

152. LW 36:342.

a “bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit,” as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3[:5–8], “through the bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he richly poured out over us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that through that very grace we may be righteous and heirs in hope of eternal life. This is surely most certainly true.”¹⁵³

Again, that simple and plain water accompanied by words could do such great things is beyond human comprehension. It is truly a mystery that must be revealed and that can only be grasped through faith. Yet, God promises that it does.

Finally, God reveals that when his Word accompanies the bread and wine, there are the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:26–28; 1 Cor 10:16).¹⁵⁴ This presence of the infinite God’s body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine has incredible implications, “The institution of the Lord’s Supper did not signal the beginning of a long period of absence in which Jesus would ascend into heaven and leave his followers with only the distant memory of His word, On the contrary, the institution of the Lord’s Supper was a promise and pledge by God to be bodily present in an unmistakable way.”¹⁵⁵ Week in and week out, Christians participate in the transcendent through the seemingly insignificant, immediate, and physical.

All of these show that Confessional Lutheran theology, specifically in the means of grace, fits within the context of re-enchantment well because it emphasizes both the spiritual *and*

153. SC IV:9–10.

154. Particularly in its doctrine of the Real Presence, Confessional Lutheran theology stands alone in allowing this mystery to stand. The Roman Catholic Church errs when it attempts to explain how Christ’s body and blood could be with the bread and wine by using Scholastic language to say that the bread and wine are the accidents left behind when they are essentially changed into Christ’s body and blood through the process of transubstantiation. Other Protestant denominations err when they claim that in the Lord’s Supper, Jesus’ body and blood cannot be received in a real way but only spiritually because Jesus’ human body is finite. Confessional Lutheran theology is different because it allows the mystery to stand, “the Lutheran church, when asked today why she still upholds the doctrine of the Real Presence, can give no other answer than that given by Luther and the Lutheran Confessions: Since Christ has given no other explanation, we are bound by his words.” Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaide: Lutheran, 1959), 296.

155. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 144.

the physical, “Christianity, on the other hand—particularly Lutheran Christianity, which makes a special point of it—is a *physical* religion... we are connected to this physical Christ by the physical water of Baptism and the physical bread and wine of Holy Communion.”¹⁵⁶ Lutherans maintain that even after Christ’s ascension, the Son of God is no less present in the physical realm because he is always working through the means of grace—the gospel in his Word and Sacraments.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, they are not led to seek God through the *poietic* attempts of generating meaning in spiritual experiences, but rather they find him where he has promised to be: in ordinary bread and wine, water, and word.

Hidden: In Vocation

Finally, Confessional Lutheran theology is primed to talk about re-enchantment as it relates to meaning because it knows God hidden in vocation. When Confessional Lutheran theology speaks of vocation, it refers to the unique station in life into which God has placed an individual Christian.¹⁵⁸ It’s more than just the work a person does, e.g., as a plumber, electrician, lawyer, teacher, etc., but everything that pertains to their lives.¹⁵⁹ This is evident through Luther’s four orders of life: home, economy, civic, and religious life.¹⁶⁰ It is not only in the religious sphere that one practices his or her faith and carries out God’s will (as in the medieval Roman Catholic

156. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 126–27.

157. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 127.

158. Schroeder, “Our Calling,” 7.

159. Veith Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 139.

160. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 58–59.

understanding of vocation).¹⁶¹ Rather, in each of these areas, whether as a parent, an employee, a customer, a citizen, a parishioner, etc., a Christian is called to actively live out his or her faith. The biblical basis for this is strong (1 Cor 7:20; Eph 5–6; Col 3:18ff.). In doing this, Christians too serve as the masks of God, for “God is hidden in vocation. We see the milkmaid, or the farmer, or the doctor or pastor or artist.... But looming behind these human masks, God is genuinely present and active in what they do for us. And similarly, as we carry out vocations, we, too, are the masks of God.”¹⁶²

The doctrine of vocation is a strong rebuke and rejection of the need for supernatural experiences like visions of angels or saints because vocation is just as supernatural,

We expect our religion to give us miracles, spectacular events, and mystical experiences.... Vocation discloses the spiritual significance of everyday life. Our spiritual and moral lives are to be found in our relationships and in our tasks in our families, the workplace, the Church, and the society. Vocation transfigures our ordinary, mundane existence, charging it with spiritual significance and with the very presence of God.¹⁶³

Gustaf Wingren gives this beautiful description of vocation: “Heaven is on earth. The boundary between heaven and earth has been bridged in this descent [of love in the form of vocation].”¹⁶⁴

Christian as they carry out their daily lives, even in the ways that seem the most insignificant, are the masks of God through whom he is actively mediating his grace and bridging heaven and earth.¹⁶⁵ When Christians carry out this work, it is not just for others whom they are expressing love but for Jesus himself (Matt 25:40).

161. Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 109.

162. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 157.

163. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 170.

164. Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation*, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 47.

165. Veith Jr. and Sutton, *Authentic Christianity*, 156, 171.

This rich vocational theology is the direct result of the Confessional Lutheran understanding of justification. Christians recognize that their value before God is the result of the passive righteousness imputed to them by Christ's atoning work. They also know that they receive this righteousness through faith, and this equips them to live out this purpose of vocation. With a proper understanding of justification Christians live out their active righteousness in faith before the world by serving their neighbors in love always.¹⁶⁶

The Confessional Lutheran doctrine of vocation leads to re-enchantment precisely because through it Christians find meaning. Christians can look at the world around them, look at the tasks they are given to do, look at their unique stations in life, and in every single one of them find divine meaning and presence, as God wears them as a mask to carry out his work.

The Hidden God *and* the Miraculous

God has hidden himself in order to reveal himself to the world. Confessional Lutherans rightly value the cross as the way God has most clearly revealed himself, and the means of grace and (secondarily) vocation as the ways that God has continued to disclose himself. However, they also recognize that this hidden-to-be-revealed God has disclosed himself in other ways than the cross, the means of grace, or vocation. This means that Confessional Lutherans must have a healthy posture towards the miraculous, neither denigrating it nor, even worse, considering it altogether absent from this world, lest they fall prey to the very attitudes held by the buffered, disenchanted, modern man.

166. Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 110–111.

God has made himself known in the miraculous throughout history. He came to Moses in a burning bush (Ex 3), he went before Israel as a pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:17ff.), and Jesus came with a ministry of signs and wonders in order to reveal himself as the Messiah (Acts 2:22). Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that the ongoing battle in this world is spiritual in nature (Eph 6:12) and that Christians should expect the miraculous to happen on both sides of that battle (Mk 16:18–18; 2 Thess 2:9).

The world in which the Christian lives is one full of the spiritual and the physical, and Confessional Lutherans are right to acknowledge both. The theology of the cross and of the hidden God helps Christians to confess readily that the most important parts of Christ as their Savior from sin are not found in the miracles but in the one to whom they point. At the same time, it also leads Christians to be primed to face the miraculous (and the demonic) with a healthy posture in God's own time.

CONCLUSION

The call for a re-enchantment of the world has arisen specifically because of the current state of disenchantment and the failures of scientific naturalism to account for a complete view of human experience in this world. Many voices—Christian and otherwise—have contributed to this ongoing conversation. Confessional Lutheran theology has a unique contribution to make to the conversation.

Confessional Lutheran theology confirms an enchanted worldview: there is inherent order, purpose, goodness, and meaning in creation because it is the result of God's divine creative action and is the seat of his ongoing activity through his work of providence. However, it centers that enchantment in a rich theology of the cross. It looks not upward and away from creation to find God but rather sees the God who condescends through his creation to his creation—the God hidden to reveal himself. Through the offensive, the ordinary, and the unimpressive, Confessional Lutheranism recognizes a world that does not need to be re-enchanted, but rather one full of enchantment already. In the cross, Confessional Lutheran theology finds purpose: a universe waiting on its final redemption accomplished through Christ's work. In the means of grace, Confessional Lutheran theology finds mystery as God wraps the infinite in the finite, the heavenly in the physical, in order to give his greatest blessings. Finally, in vocation, Confessional Lutheran theology finds purpose: lives of faith lived out as masks of God bridging heaven and earth.

Once more, consider the modern, Western man as he watches the storm clouds gather on the horizon. Confessional Lutheran theology has no qualms when he thinks of the water cycle, but it also points to the almighty hand continually behind every natural phenomenon. More than that, the Confessional Lutheran is primed to speak to the current cultural moment in which that modern, Western man finds himself asking, “What does this mean?” Confessional Lutheran theology can show him that there is more to this world than what mankind views with his senses. It shows him that the same God who created and sustains this world has made his creation the seat of his greatest purpose: redemption. To find wonder, meaning, mystery, and purpose, this man does not need to escape this world or ascend above it. Instead, he will find them in the cross. There, in the lowly and offensive, he beholds God as he has made himself known most fully. There, he finds a world already brimming with enchantment because it is centered on that very cross.

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APPENDIX: NON-CHRISTIAN RE-ENCHANTMENT

Re-enchantment has also been proposed outside of a theological context. Spiegel divides these other attempts into two separate categories: normative re-enchantment and optimistic re-enchantment. He uses normative re-enchantment in a similar way to the broadly defined re-enchantment mentioned earlier. Namely, it is

simply to reject the ontological restrictions of scientific naturalism, yet not simultaneously rejecting (or “disrespecting”) the advances of the natural sciences: one can hold that there are norms and values — facts about what is right or wrong — independent of us while still accepting the results of the natural sciences at face value. That is simply to say that natural sciences, however great their achievements are, do not determine the correct metaphysical picture of the world which, again, is simply a way of rejecting scientific naturalism.¹⁶⁷

He uses optimistic re-enchantment as “a label to group statements or attempts to the effect that our worldview can be reenchanting to include entities and phenomena which seem to be in direct and indubitable conflict with the natural sciences, i.e. the idea of magic, including ghosts, witchcraft and the like.”¹⁶⁸ Spiegel rejects that either a theological re-enchantment or an optimistic one is plausible based on the advances of natural science, and therefore only favors a normative re-enchantment.¹⁶⁹

Morris Berman offers another non-theological perspective. He sees re-enchantment as divorced both from the religious worldview of the past and the present domination of scientific

167. Thomas Jussuf Spiegel, “Liberal Naturalism with(out) Reenchantment,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14.1 (2022): 222.

168. Spiegel, “Liberal Naturalism with(out) Reenchantment,” 217.

169. Spiegel, “Liberal Naturalism with(out) Reenchantment,” 221.

naturalism, “Modern science got into trouble by claiming to be the one true description of reality. In this sense, it had much in common with its predecessor, the medieval Catholic worldview, and there is no point in deliberately repeating this error.”¹⁷⁰ For Berman, man must approach knowledge in more holistic terms:

What do I know in my heart, then? I know that in some relational sense, everything is alive; that noncognitive knowing, whether from dreams, art, the body, or outright insanity, is indeed knowing; that societies like human beings, are organic, and the attempt to engineer is destructive; and finally, that we are living on a dying planet, and that without some radical shift in our politics and consciousness, our children’s generation is problem going to witness the planet’s last days.¹⁷¹

Berman’s suggested solution to this problem is complex but is grounded in some future post-Cartesian worldview, one that leaves behind distinctions between subject and object, mind and body, the conscious and the unconscious, and sees man’s relationship with reality as participatory.¹⁷²

170. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 196.

171. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 269.

172. Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 149, 207, 297.

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