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Increasingly, Christians who are caught up in the ‘whitewater rapids’ of cultural change are looking for ways to follow Jesus authentically. More Christians than ever – in established congregations as well as in non-traditional contexts – are asking what the “way” of Jesus Christ really is in their particular time and place. This is exactly what I am striving to address in my teaching, research, writing, and consulting with congregations. My overall thrust is *to clarify the nature of the church as the body of Christ and to provide a framework and some strategies for living more faithfully in whatever context we find ourselves.*

There are many models ‘out there’ by which people are starting, organizing, and operating Christian communities. But ever since its beginnings, the church has maintained that its *primary mode of being is worship*. Despite the superficial and reductive nature of worship on most Sunday mornings, a scriptural understanding of worship has mostly to do with a daily sacrificial offering of ourselves to God (Romans 12:1-2) *by following the way, truth, and life of Jesus Christ*. Since there are innumerable elements in his life and ministry, death and resurrection, we need some way of focusing upon discipleship as our offering of worship without reducing it to some aspects and eliminating others. These principles of biblical worship have led me to focus on the two primary ways that the church enacts its worship to God: Baptism and Eucharist. *Baptism and Eucharist are not only rituals, but they are actually **movements of discipleship whereby we are formed in faith together**: we dwell more deeply in Christ (baptism) by participating in the divine communion that encompasses the entire creation (Eucharist).*

My sacramental perspective is informed ecumenically. Within the great diversity of the Christian tradition, I am *located within the Wesleyan tradition* of sacramental theology but have found great inspiration in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and free church traditions as well. Integrating their insights makes sacramental theology active and dynamic. It has great potential to **renew the church and transform the world**. How? Baptismal and Eucharistic movements of the Christian life are both oriented toward offering ourselves for transformation. In this respect, a sacramental perspective can cut against two of the most corrosive trends in contemporary culture: an achievement-orientation that burns people out and a consumerism that fractures Christian communion by fostering self-absorbed individualism.

Within a baptismal-Eucharistic perspective, *discipleship and leadership* are understood quite differently. The primary goal of both discipleship and leadership has less to do with accomplishing tasks and getting my needs met and more about being conformed to Christ and being an *image/icon of the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus*. Christian discipleship is characterized devoted service in the communion of Christ, leadership is that and more. Leadership intensifies this iconic nature of discipleship in that *Christ-like* leaders are those in whom others encounter God more deeply and hear the call of God upon their

lives more forcefully. Leadership in a sacramental perspective is *not* primarily about getting others to do what they otherwise wouldn't. Rather, Christian leadership primarily ***evokes authentic discipleship*** in and with others. This changes the orientation of leadership from directing others to ***inspiring passion for ministry*** by calling forth the gifts and graces of each person.

Theological education that is informed by a robust sacramental perspective will be as holistic and dynamic as possible. As a crucible of the Spirit, a seminary will seek to immerse students ever more deeply in the particulars of their context, the most trenchant questions of existence, and the manifestations of the divine life wherever it may arise. While it is the goal of theological education to increase understanding, that is really only a penultimate goal. Ultimately, ***theological education drives toward personal and social transformation*** as the consequence of offering (and losing) ourselves – all that we know, believe, and practice – to God, with the hope that our meager offering will be changed to some extent into body and blood of Christ for the redemption of the world.