CHAPTER 4

EUCHARISTIC

What Do You Have That You Did Not Receive?

Architecture tells you a lot about what people value.

A century ago, when the street I live on was being built, architects were carefully separating kitchens from dining rooms with walls and doors, so that domestic work could happen in an environment designed for it, without being seen or obstructed by guests or children or even men, and the spaces where people were received ("reception rooms") could be as pleasant and uncluttered as possible. For the last two decades, builders on the same street have been knocking those walls down to create larger kitchens, so that all of life can happen in one place: children's play, food preparation, the welcoming of guests, the serving of meals, audio-visual entertainment,

maybe even paid work. The floor plans in my street reflect changes in society as a whole. We separate work and play, domestic and social, men and women, less than we used to; we also regard family meals, in which everyone sits down together without any distractions, as less important than our grandparents did. We can celebrate those developments or we can lament them, but they are there for all to see in the way we design our buildings. Architecture reveals priorities.

So it is with church buildings. Show me your architecture, and I'll show you your theology. Admittedly, some of the differences between church buildings across the centuries are merely a matter of technology (the availability or not of electric lighting, projector screens, amplification, heating, and so on). But most of them reflect—and then reinforce—theological priorities. High vaulted ceilings communicate grandeur. Stained glass windows with gospel scenes assume the legitimacy and importance of teaching through visual images. Crypts and graveyards communicate something about the memory of the faithful departed. Chancels, steps, and screens indicate a separation between the people and the priesthood. Bells, pews, soft chairs, kneelers, towers, coffee lounges, lecterns, video screens, spires, vestries, breastfeeding rooms, lighting rigs, organs—all of these embody assumptions about what the church is and how it functions. If a church has a cross-shaped layout or has the children's ministry in a separate wing or sits on top of a hill or faces east, it speaks to us. The very stones cry out.

Most striking of all is whatever is central. In all worship spaces, there is one central spot that our eyes are naturally drawn to as we enter the building. In an Orthodox church

building, this might be the icon of Christos Pantokrator. In a Roman Catholic one, it would probably be the altar, where the Mass is celebrated. (In yet another sign of how layout communicates theology, the Protestant Reformers turned the "altar," which implies we are offering a sacrifice to God, into a "table," which makes it clear that God is offering a meal to us. Tweaking the furniture can have profound significance.) In many Presbyterian and Baptist sanctuaries it is the pulpit, where the Word of God is preached. In contemporary evangelical buildings, whether they are purpose-built warehouses, chapels, school halls, or theatres, our eye is usually drawn to the stage, on which you can see a band of musicians and, behind them, a screen. The centerpiece of a church's architecture usually reflects the centerpiece of its worship: singing, Communion, the preaching of the gospel, or whatever it may be.[1]

Clearly, it is not as if an architectural emphasis on one feature has to diminish the significance of others, and it is perfectly possible to design a building in which a fusion of sermon, song, and sacrament converges on the center. Many Anglican churches, for instance, center on the Table flanked by the Word—with the lectern on one side and the pulpit on the other—with the choir facing each other immediately behind them. Other churches use the central space for a number of different purposes in the course of the service. Even so, it is probably fair to say that the focal point of a church's building and the focal point of its worship are closely connected—and, by the same token, if something is marginal spatially, it will probably be marginal in worship as well. Out of sight, out of mind.

Thus you can tell a lot about a church's theology and practice by simply standing in their building with your eyes open. In many worship spaces, for instance, one of the first architectural features you encounter on your way in is a baptismal font. You cannot find your seat without walking past it. So every time you come to worship with God's people, you face a small but insistent physical reminder that you have been baptized (or, of course, that you have not been baptized).[2] As soon as you have walked past it, you head down the nave—the chairs, or pews, are on either side—toward the large table that will later be used to celebrate the Lord's Supper. So in the very mundane act of entering the building and finding a seat, you walk unthinkingly between font and table, baptism and Communion. The message from the architecture is clear: sacraments are central to the Christian life around here.

Now consider a different experience. You enter the church building and see no physical features whatsoever that would suggest the sacraments exist. There is no font, no baptism pool, no altar, and no table.[3] If and when baptism happens, it happens in a nearby swimming pool. If and when the Eucharist happens, collapsible tables appear at the back, or in the aisles. In such a context, the message from the architecture is equally clear: sacraments are occasional intrusions into our normal patterns of worship. They are like a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

My point is not to recommend reshuffling our worship spaces, although in many cases that might not be a bad thing. Many New Testament churches met in homes and baptized people in rivers, and Jesus is present in the breaking of bread

whether the table we use is made of oak, plastic, or nothing at all. My point is that the layout of our buildings reflects, and over time reinforces, our approach to the sacraments. So a church that has a permanent video screen, yet only has collapsible Communion tables, is also likely to be one in which videos are shown more often than the Lord's Supper is celebrated—and there is plenty of (admittedly anecdotal) evidence to suggest that this is actually the case. What we find space for, we will usually find time for. And lots of us, including most charismatics and many of those in garden variety evangelical churches, have less space and less time for the sacraments than Christians have typically had for twenty centuries.

In other words: we are not as eucharistic as we could be.

To anyone familiar with contemporary evangelicalism, that much is probably not news. Across the world, there are thousands upon thousands of churches, most of which are evangelical and many of which are also charismatic, in which neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper are celebrated on the average Sunday (and in which, on those Sundays when they are, they take up no more than a small fraction of the meeting time).[4] The conviction behind this chapter, however, is not merely that we *could* be more eucharistic than we are; it is that we *should* be more eucharistic than we are. The sacraments should be at the heart of our corporate worship, not peripheral and

occasional interruptions to it. There is an "ought" here, not just an "is." That requires an explanation.

The explanation begins with Jesus. On the night he was "handed over"—by God, by the disciples, by Judas, by the soldiers, by the Sanhedrin, by Pilate, by Herod, by Pilate again, and in a sense by the entire human race—he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said to them: "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."[5] After supper he took the cup, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." As he inaugurated this mysterious meal, he connected it simultaneously to past, present, and future: back to the exodus ("I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"), forward to the new creation ("I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"), and, of course, to the meaning of his own death in a few hours' time ("this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins").[6] He also, in what would turn out to be probably the most controversial thing he ever said, identified the bread and wine as somehow *being* his body and blood.[7] In giving it both this meaning ("this is my . . .") and this regularity ("do this as often as you . . ."), Jesus ensured it would stand forever at the center of the church's worship as a tangible sign of his presence with his people, a means of participation ("communion") with him, and a reenactment of redemption, a physical symbol of our deliverance from slavery through his death and resurrection.[8]

Baptism, likewise, is a physical sign that represents our participation and union with Christ. Like the Eucharist, it re-enacts our redemption from slavery to sin and death through the narrative and drama of the exodus from Egypt, as we, like Israel, go down into the waters and come out renewed, united, washed, and rescued from our enemies. Like the Eucharist, it is specifically connected in the Gospels with the forgiveness of sins.[9] Like the Eucharist, it is a practice Jesus specifically commanded for all of his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."[10] Like the Eucharist, it was not only given to us but also modeled for us by Jesus who submitted to baptism not because he had sinned, but because it was necessary "to fulfill all righteousness."[11] The obvious difference between the two signs is that whereas the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently, baptism only happens once. Yet their many similarities—external signs, instituted by Jesus in word and action, that convey forgiveness of sins, union with Christ, the presence of God, and the church's "exodus" through his death and resurrection—show why they have so often been marked off as distinct from other Christian practices, whether we call them "sacraments," "mysteries," "ordinances," or whatever.[12] Jesus said it; Jesus did it; that settles it.

The early church got the message. From the first day of the church, quite literally, the apostles insisted that Christianity required baptism—not just as a demonstration that a person had become a disciple, let alone as the sort of thing that Christians really ought to get around to at some point, but as part of the process of Christian initiation.[13] They went on to argue

that baptism was how we put on Christ, are buried with Christ, raised with Christ, washed, and saved.[14] Modern evangelicals, nervous that these texts might imply salvation by works, hurry to explain that none of this means baptism actually *does* anything; it is just a symbol of what God has done inwardly. The apostles, on the other hand, were not so squeamish. As Paul puts it in Galatians: you are children of God through faith, for you have put on Christ in baptism.[15] The latter does not contradict the former, but rather provides the very reason for it.

At the same time, from the first day of the church, the disciples "devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of bread."[16] We know that this devotion continued, because decades later Luke describes a miracle as happening "on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread."[17] (As an aside, that is a fascinating and revealing summary of a Christian Sunday meeting. How many evangelical churches today could describe their services as "gathering together to break bread"?) When Paul brings teaching on the Lord's Supper, he matter-of-factly uses the phrase "when you come together" three times, as if one naturally involves the other.[18]

Furthermore, for Paul, Communion is not just a memorial or a symbol; it acts, bringing the church together with Christ and with one another. We are one, he explains, because we all share in one bread. We share a loaf of unity and a cup of blessing. As we do so, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We actually participate in the body and blood of Christ. Consequently, if we do so in an unworthy way, we eat and drink judgment on ourselves.[19] The logic of statements like this is

that in the Lord's Supper, just as in baptism, Christ is *presented* to us, not just *represented* to us. When we celebrate the sacraments, we do things that do things.

As we move out of Scripture and into the history of the church, we find all kinds of discussions and disagreements taking place over the nature of the sacraments.[20] But there is virtually unanimous agreement that baptism and Eucharist are enormously powerful and enormously important. Their power and importance are connected, of course; the more you think the sacraments do, the more you are likely to think they matter. So across the world, in all branches of the church—Orthodox, Catholic, Nestorian, Oriental Orthodox, and eventually Protestant—the Eucharist became central to Christian worship. Baptism featured in the Apostles' Creed. And both were practiced in ways that communicated the transformative power and mysterious grace at work in the ordinary gifts of bread, wine, water, and oil.

Consider, for instance, how you experienced baptism and first Eucharist if you lived in Jerusalem in the fourth century.[21] First, you were catechized at length throughout Lent, in preparation for your baptism on Easter Eve. When the time came, you went down into an outer chamber, faced West, stretched out your hand as Moses did at the Red Sea, and renounced Satan and all his works. You then turned to face East, toward the sunrise, and affirmed your belief in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance. Having done this, you proceeded to the inner chamber. You took off all your clothes, symbolizing the removal of the old humanity and your identification with Christ's sufferings. You were anointed

with exorcised oil, representing the casting out of any powers of darkness. You approached the baptism pool, made another confession of faith, and then went down into the water three times, aligning yourself not only with the Trinity, but also with the three days Jesus was buried. On coming out of the water, you were anointed with oil on the forehead, ears, nostrils, and chest, the *chrism* indicating that you were now a Christian, and the body parts representing the removal of shame, ears to hear, the fragrance of Christ, and the breastplate of righteousness. Finally, you were given new, white clothes and were led back toward the sanctuary to sing a hymn, before receiving your first Eucharist.

My point is not that all churches today should do all of these things. Naked baptism would be a stretch in many cultures, I imagine.[22] My point is that baptismal practices like this reflect—and reinforce—a very high view of what baptism is: death, life, victory, burial, washing, renewal, anointing, and so on. They give a sense of the transformative, world-changing power of what is happening. They also get new believers off to a great start, both by starting their discipleship with pretty thorough catechesis and by framing their conversion in a narrative of exodus, grace, newness, lordship, and the overthrow of the devil.[23]

The sacraments, in that sense, enact the gospel. They dramatize our union with Christ in ways that words alone cannot. Clearly this can be enormously helpful in discipling all kinds of people: those from high-context cultures, oral learners, nonliterate communities, and so forth. Even in the most

bookish societies it makes a huge difference when the Word is not just heard but also seen, felt, smelled, and tasted.

Not only that, but because they are so bound up with the presence of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins, the sacraments keep hoicking us back to the gospel, as long as they are accompanied by the preaching of the Word, so that the meaning of the symbols is plainly understood. John Wesley, one of the most effective evangelists of any generation, argued that it was the duty of Christians to receive Holy Communion as often as possible: "No man can have any pretense to Christian piety who does not receive it [not once a month, but] as often as he can."[24] Martin Luther, who emphasized the centrality of the gospel as clearly as anyone, went so far as to say: "Now the mass is a part of the gospel; nay, the very sum and compendium of the gospel. . . . Hence also *sermons to the people ought to be nothing else but expositions of the mass*." [25]

The symbols explain the Word, and the Word explains the symbols. Put differently: If you want to be gospel-centered, be Table-centered. If you want to be truly evangelical, be eucharistic.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider why, in so many church circles (including my own), it does not always seem this way. Why, given how central to Christian experience baptism and the Lord's Supper have always been—from Jesus, through the apostles, to pretty much the entire worldwide church until

quite recently—are there so many churches today that would find the last few pages challenging or even bizarre? How have we ended up with entire denominations in which, on the basis of the space and time they allocate, the sacraments are relegated not just below preaching and singing but also below taking up the offering and even giving the notices? What is behind all this?

Several factors are at work, I think. For some, it is a visceral dislike of anything that seems routine or repetitive as opposed to spontaneous and free. For others, it is the association of symbols and rituals with formalism, "religion," and legalism. For others, the problem with particularly the Lord's Supper is its exclusivity: those who are not believers are not welcome to participate, which makes it awkward for guests and visitors in attendance. For others, the context is the issue; breaking bread should happen in homes, not on Sundays. Many of us grew up in churches where Communion was extremely boring, a lengthy and solemn section of the service in which the children did not seem welcome and the adults did not seem happy. Some (especially in larger churches) worry that it takes too long. Some find the whole process of taking Communion, especially the call to self-examination, to be introspective and uncomfortable. Many have simply been born or converted into churches that have never known anything different. There are probably other reasons as well.[26]

That requires some disentangling, at least if we want to do anything about it. It may be helpful to think about these various objections as forming a sort of spectrum. At the positive end, there is the insistence that the Lord's Supper should not

be glum, incomprehensible, and tedious. Similarly, we should recognize that some ways of sharing Communion put such an emphasis on self-examination that all joy flies out the window; dancing turns into mourning, nobody would dream of calling it a "love feast," and if any observers were told it was a foretaste of a future meal, they would assume it was a funeral wake rather than a wedding banquet.[27]

Moving along the spectrum, we find objections that have some merit but need to be challenged nonetheless. Yes, the early church broke bread in their homes, but as we have seen, they also did it when they came together. Yes, the Lord's Supper can take a long time if there are hundreds or even thousands of people present, but then again there are many ways of celebrating it, and if the Jerusalem church managed it with five thousand members, then we probably can too.

But there are also reasons that need to be flatly rejected and, if necessary, publicly debunked. The sacraments are clearly religious—which, if James 1:27 is to be believed, is not a bad thing anyway—but in their embodiment of the gospel of grace they are the exact *opposite* of legalism (unless we are to accuse Jesus, the apostles, and most churches in history of legalism, which seems a little harsh). Routines and repetitive patterns in our worship (we could even call them "habits") are inevitable and, as we will see below, powerful. The "we've never done it like that" defense is, in a weird irony, the archetypal appeal to tradition, which is just what nonsacramental evangelicals are apparently trying to avoid. Furthermore, the separation that takes place when people go into the baptism pool, or approach the Lord's Table, is one of the most evangelistic moments in

Christian worship, an explicit statement that people need to turn to Christ and be saved. Those who do not follow Jesus, and those who profess to but are currently in unrepentant sin, are welcome to sing, pray, read, give, and listen, and as a result could easily conclude that they need make no further response. To anyone in that position, simply by excluding some and including others, the sacraments proclaim, loud and clear: Repent of your sins, believe the gospel, and come to Christ.

Two further benefits of holding a high view of the sacraments, both pastoral in nature, are worth mentioning. The first is that the sacraments are a wonderful antidote to the fuzzy, shallow Gnosticism that characterizes Western culture today, in which the soul is the authentic self, the body is a malleable and fungible commodity that can be reconfigured through technology, and all things are subordinate to the will (usually expressed in terms of "choice"). Bodies are destroyed in utero, incinerated in death, redesigned in appearance, and reassigned in gender; the soul, and primarily the will to choose, is sacrosanct. Swimming in cultural waters like that can gnosticize the church, and a quick glance at the ecclesial landscape suggests that it has. A mixture of consumer preferences and accessible technology enables us to prioritize soul over body, experience over action, romance over love, choice over commitment, virtual over physical, anywhere over somewhere. *Vorsprung durch Technik*, as Audi puts it: "Progress through Technology."

Celebrating the sacraments draws us into a different and better story. It is thousands of years old, not shiny brand-new. It is repetitive, not innovative. It is unashamedly physical—

hydrogen and oxygen, wheat and grapes, flesh and blood—and so takes us back to creation, in which God says that matter is good, and to the incarnation, in which God actually became flesh for us. It roots us in a particular place, with particular people. You can watch sermons online or sing worship songs in your car, but for the sacraments you actually have to *be* there, touching and smelling the elements in front of you and the people around you, and acknowledging the goodness of physical stuff as you participate.[28] As such, it is tricky to be eucharistic and gnostic at the same time.

The second benefit also relates to discipleship. Frequently, I come across the question: How can we welcome everybody into the church, no matter what their lifestyle, while making clear that certain types of behavior are incompatible with following Jesus? If a person has been coming to our church for years, and hearing the gospel preached regularly, but still shows no sign of repenting of X, Y, or Z, then how should pastors (and church members) respond? What does it look like, in this context, to exercise church discipline in a way that is full of grace and truth?

I think a large part of the answer is: Take the sacraments seriously. Dial them up, not down. Before you baptize people, teach them what Christians believe, how we live, how we pray. (There's a reason so many catechisms are structured around the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.) Be clear on repentance as well as faith. Make the process of dying and rising, renouncing old loyalties and embracing new ones, as explicit as possible in the way you baptize. Celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly, and make clear on what basis

people are welcome to the Table. If a person refuses to repent of X, Y, or Z, explain to them why they should not participate until they have. Such an approach avoids ignoring sin but also avoids a perfectionist exclusivity that only allows people to come to church if their lives are already sorted out. It's a version of the point Jesus made in the parable of the wedding banquet: everyone is invited to the wedding, but those who share in the feast need to be wearing appropriate clothes.[29] It is also, as far as we can tell, how Paul instructed the church in Corinth. Unbelievers and enquirers are welcome to join in your meetings—but the Lord's Supper is for those who worship God, forsake sin, and share in Christ.[30]

The sacraments, then, are biblically commanded, historically warranted, cross-culturally wise, evangelistically significant, and pastorally helpful. More than that, though, they are God-given ways of sharing in Christ, experiencing the work of the Spirit, drawing close to the Father, and enacting the gospel. As such, celebrating them regularly, and making much of them when we do, is not just dutiful or useful but beautiful.[31] It may mean departing from our tradition or rearranging the schedule (or even the furniture), but it will be worth it.

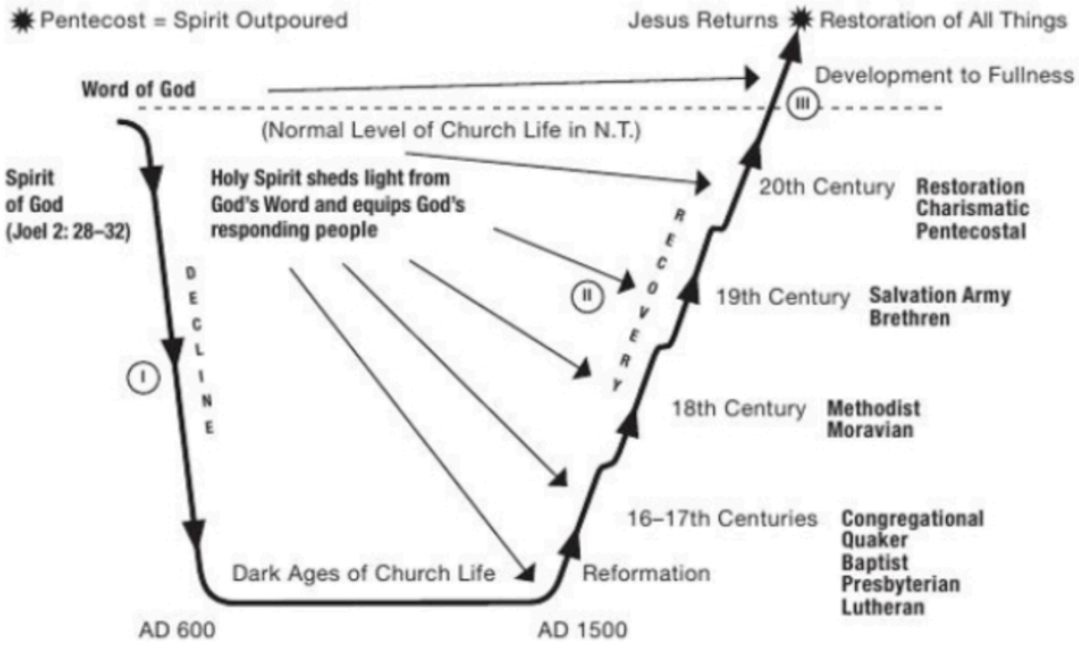
That, believe it or not, was the easy bit. No matter how "low church" we are, we all know that baptism and Communion are good things and that Jesus gave them to us and that our churches would ultimately be deficient without them. At the

start of this book, however, I described "eucharistic" churches not just as unashamedly sacramental, but as historically rooted, deliberately liturgical, and self-consciously catholic. That may be a tougher sell.

Perhaps not when it comes to history. Human beings love stories, and we want to know where we come from, so we naturally give an account of how our church, network, or denomination came to be. Those Protestants who emphasize continuity—Lutherans, Anglicans, the Reformed, some varieties of Baptists and Methodists, and so on—inevitably highlight historical roots as we do so, tracing them back to the Reformation (and often beyond it, through medieval Catholicism right back to the church fathers). Those of us who stress discontinuity, and portray the institutional church as the dark backdrop against which the bright light of our movement first began to shine, may prefer to find our heritage in protest movements and martyrs (Montanists, Donatists, Cathars, Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites, Anabaptists, Huguenots, Puritans, Moravians, Nonconformists, and the rest), or even in monasticism. Chances are, though, that all of us will lay claim to historical roots of some sort.

Not all of those roots will be self-consciously catholic, however. I doubt I am the only evangelical pastor who, on leading my church to recite the Nicene Creed, has had puzzled members of the congregation approach me afterward to ask why on earth we are saying "we believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church." Some of that is just a matter of terminology: in modern English, the word *catholic* sounds like it means "Roman" as opposed to "universal," so people unfamiliar with

the language will assume that the *catholic* church is the one with the pope.[32] But some of it may go deeper, reflecting a self-understanding that is more sectarian than universal. We are the true, the pure, the radical church, in contrast to the compromised, stuffy, carnal, unbiblical, and even idolatrous institution(s) over there. In my British charismatic context, that perspective is summed up beautifully by the following diagram of the church's history, which appeared in a magazine in the 1980s:[33]



Admittedly, this is a somewhat cartoonish example. Most of us would raise our eyebrows at any historical account that writes off the fathers, the creeds, the evangelization of the known world, and the emergence of Christian civilization as "decline," or the age of Christian hospitals, universities, philosophers, and cathedrals as the "dark ages." We would also be

suspicious of its ethnocentrism—the chart would not look remotely like this if you were Syrian, Abyssinian, Russian, or Chinese, or if your ancestors were shipped in chains across the Middle Passage—and its disregard for the unity of the church.[34] More than that: we would worry about the arrogance of making our generation the high point of history, and the theological implications of what on earth God was doing for the first fifteen hundred years. Was the Light of the World snuffed out by the darkness of his people? Was the Spirit on an extended holiday?

Yet we may recognize the shape of the narrative, all the same. Stories move from problem to solution and incline us to see ourselves (or people like us) as part of the solution, so it is not surprising that we are tempted to do the same when we describe the history of the church. This went wrong, but God made it right. Things were bad when they did that, but things are better now that we are doing this. They lost something; we found it. The arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward us.

To be self-consciously catholic is to fight this temptation. It is to think, talk, act, and pray as if we believe that what the Creed says is true—the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—and that if Jesus asked the Father to make us one, then it will actually happen.[35] That involves telling the story of the church, and understanding ourselves in light of that story, with suitable levels of humility, honor, and gratitude.[36] Gratitude, because we only have access to the doctrine of the Trinity, the gospel, the Bible, and so on through the efforts and sacrifices of those who have gone before us: saints and scholars, popes and patriarchs, monks, mystics, and martyrs.

Honor, because many of them made massive sacrifices in the process, and almost all of them lived their daily lives in conditions that were immeasurably less pleasant than ours. Humility, because for all of our differences with many of them, they got an awful lot right, we get an awful lot wrong, and the same Holy Spirit who works in us was at work in them.[37] Frankly, I cannot imagine anyone reading Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, or Blaise Pascal and *not* being deeply humbled by how small we are, whether we were aiming to or not. Being eucharistic in this broader, catholic sense entails thankfulness—*eucharistia*—for the church across time and across the world. And it expresses itself in appreciation, respect, and prayer in and through our disagreements.

For many of us, I imagine, the most alien aspect of this book is the invitation to be deliberately liturgical. To us, the very word *liturgy* smells of death. It evokes arcane language, disengaged chanting, and dust clouds billowing out of the organ loft. Our version of Christianity is about freedom and spontaneity, not empty repetition. We let the Spirit blow where he will, making each meeting different, rather than following the same form of words, every week. We swapped liturgy for liberty a long time ago and have no plans to go back.

To which one obvious response is: no, we didn't. We didn't get rid of our liturgy; we changed it. In some cases, we made

a direct swap—a welcome instead of a call to worship, an offering instead of a collection, a midmeeting interval to greet one another instead of "the peace," a closing prayer instead of a benediction. In other cases, we got rid of some things that get said every week (the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the comfortable words), and replaced them with some other things that get said every week (like "the Lord inhabits the praises of his people" or "let's sing a new song to the Lord" or "if you're visiting, we're not after your money" or "please stick around for coffee after the meeting"). Most obviously, we continue to chant set phrases of prayer and worship that were written by somebody else, often several times in the same service (as long as they are set to music). If I know that somebody attends a contemporary evangelical or charismatic church, I can make a pretty good guess as to what their order of worship will be, even if I have never been there.[38] The reports of liturgy's death are greatly exaggerated.

We can say much more than that, though. Yes, a set order of worship is more or less inevitable, and therefore it makes sense to ensure that ours is as spiritual and biblical as possible.[39] But even this statement could make repeated worship practices sound like an unavoidable pitfall, a necessary nuisance that we might as well learn to live with. We need to go beyond that. Liturgy is not merely neutral, but positive. It is not just inevitable, but powerful. It can train us, shape our habits, and reorient our desires. So it is helpful for us to see how formative liturgy is and, more than that, how graceful—how full of *charis*—it can be.

The best recent argument for the formative power of liturgy, at least that I have come across, is found in James K. A. Smith's book *Desiring the Kingdom*.[40] (The only downside of this is that it is also one of the most frequently summarized recent arguments for anything, so if you have already read the book, or an overview of it, you may want to skip this next section.)[41] Evangelicals today, Smith explains, tend to assume that the way to make disciples and form character is to give people information, whether in education or in church. We teach and instruct people, in pulpits, classrooms, and lecture halls, and trust that the knowledge they have will change their worldview, which will lead them to make good choices and become more like Jesus. When they do something silly, we ask incredulously, "What were you *thinking*?" We treat people, that is, as if they are fundamentally *knowers*.

Only we aren't. Fundamentally, as Augustine saw, we are *lovers*. The most defining feature of our character is not what we know, but what we love, whether we can fully articulate it or not. So to truly form a person, you have to get to their hearts, their desires, their affections.

These loves are not formed logically. We may not even know what they are, let alone where they came from. Smith presents a fascinating challenge from Andrei Tarkovsky's movie *Stalker*: if you could walk into a room in which your deepest desire would become a reality—but with the proviso

that it would be what your deepest desire *really* is, rather than what you *think* it is—would you go in? Or would you hesitate, fearful that, like Kevin Spacey in *American Beauty*, getting what we want might not be all it was cracked up to be?[42] Sometimes, Smith argues, we do not love what we think. Loves are not rationally deduced, or even cognitive. We learn to love and to desire long before we learn to think logically.

Further, our loves are shaped in large part by our habits. They involve our bodies and our emotions, not just our minds. Developing them is more like learning to drive or playing the piano or practicing a golf swing, than it is like learning algebra or history. They are shaped by our routines, our rituals, our practices, and particularly those "thick" practices—or, we could say, liturgies—that form our identities and aim at a particular vision of the good life.

The modern world sees this more clearly than the modern church. In a famous passage, Smith walks us through the secular liturgy of shopping at a mall: we enter the sanctuary, have our eyes drawn skyward to the vaulted ceiling, pass through the central meeting area, wander through various side chapels (shops) browsing their different offerings, experience multisensory worship through music, lighting, food, drink, aromas and the like, see icons (mannequins and posters) pointing to an idealized version of the good life, make transactions at altars (tills) in order to get closer to it, and receive a benediction (have a nice day). Later he does something similar with the way in which military pride is cultivated in American sporting events and shows how the practices (standing, singing the national anthem, spreading a flag across the

field, military flyovers whose sound reverberates in the chest, cheering across the stadium) shape the desires of the people there far more than any information could.

The reason for all this is that marketers—and American patriots—have a fuller, more holistic view of the human person than many Christians do. They recognize the importance of patterns of behavior that form the heart, not just information that shapes the mind. "We are," Smith writes, "ultimately *liturgical animals* because we are fundamentally desiring creatures. . . . We are embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate."[43] If you want to shape people's lives, you don't just need to shape their logic; you need to shape their loves, which probably also means shaping their liturgies.

If Smith is right—and despite some minor objections I think he basically is—then three things follow for Christian discipleship.[44]

The first is that our liturgy is the most powerful corporate disciple-making tool we have available. This may seem outlandish. Disciples are made in many ways: in families, through personal times of prayer and reading Scripture, in small groups, in one-to-one relationships, through suffering, and so on, as well as in church gatherings. Yet when we consider the means of Christian formation we have at our disposal *corporately*—the things we are able to do together, as opposed to the things we can encourage people to do in their daily lives—then nothing has more power than our liturgy: the things we say, hear, and do when we meet for worship. If we want to be trained to pray, nothing is more effective than corporate

prayer. If we want to be trained to turn from sin, nothing is more effective than corporate confession. If we want to be trained in the Bible, nothing is more effective than hearing it read and declaring it out loud, with or without music. Reading it is good; hearing it is better; speaking and hearing it, best of all. Ask any child. So it always surprises me when I hear of churches who allocate three quarters of their Sunday service to a sermon on the basis that it is the best way of grounding people in Scripture; this strikes me as somewhat naïve about how we come to learn things, let alone about how we come to love things. Despite appearances, I suspect the boot is usually on the other foot.

The power of our liturgy is enhanced by the fact that its impact continues beyond the Sunday service. The elements we include in our corporate gatherings will inevitably influence our view of what worship *is*, and therefore shape the things we do when we are together in small groups or prayer meetings or Bible studies or family devotions or even on our own. If our Sunday meetings are comprised entirely of singing and listening to sermons, then the chances are that we will grow to think of spirituality as primarily about those two things (and from there, it is a relatively small step to simply listening to Christian music and sermon downloads). By contrast, if they involve reading, hearing, praying, singing, confessing, declaring, giving, eating, and drinking, we are more likely to regard those practices as normal aspects of Christian discipleship, and to bring them into our daily lives. Unsurprisingly, our patterns of worship when we are scattered are shaped by our patterns of

worship when we are gathered. Good liturgy is a gift that keeps on giving.

Our second takeaway regarding discipleship, which is closely related to this, is that we need to think carefully about the content of our liturgy. Were we all to undertake a thoughtful audit of the elements present in our church's worship, as compared to those in the New Testament, those of the church through history, and those of the global church today, it might well reveal that we have nothing to be concerned about. But it might reveal various practices that, though biblically and historically rooted, have been jettisoned for pragmatic or traditional reasons, and could be retrieved for the benefit of everybody. Here, for example, is a list of twenty such practices, along with biblical instances of each, and examples of ways in which they bring benefit to the church.[45] It is far from exhaustive, but it might provide a starting point for such an audit, and prompt reflection on what our ancestors prioritized, what we prioritize, and why:

PRACTICE	SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLE	BENEFITS TO THE CHURCH
1. Call to worship	"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord! Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation!" (Psalm 95:1 NIV)	Focuses us on God and his goodness at the beginning. Provides a clear starting point.
2. God's greeting to us	"Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,	Reminds us that God is already present, and that he is welcoming us as much as we are welcoming him. Begins the service with God's work rather than ours.

	and the ruler of kings on earth." (Revelation 1:4–5)	
3. Our greeting to one another	"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." (Romans 16:16)	Physically enacts what it is to be a family. Welcomes guests. Includes everybody.
4. Baptism	"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)	Enacts the defeat of sin, the washing away of sin, being drenched in the Spirit, burying the old life, and rising again to new life.
5. Singing	"Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." (Ephesians 5:18–19)	Expresses and cultivates joy. Articulates lament, expectation, and hope. Teaches theology. Encourages creativity in music and dance. Develops thankfulness.
6. Prayer	". . . praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me." (Ephesians 6:18–19)	Teaches us how to pray, by drawing on the prayers of others. Highlights that prayer is a corporate activity not just a solo one ("Our Father . . ."). Reinforces solidarity with the worldwide church.
7. Reading the Old Testament	"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture." (1 Timothy 4:13)	Exposes sin. Points us to our need for Christ. Instructs us in Christian living.
8. Confession	"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16)	Encourages us to renounce sin specifically and corporately, not vaguely and individually. Shows us our need for grace.
9. Assurance of forgiveness	"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold	Heals our consciences. Assures us that God's grace is greater than

	forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:23)	our sin. Debunks the accusations of the devil.
10. Using spiritual gifts	"When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." (1 Corinthians 14:26)	Encourages us to function as an interdependent body, not a front-led show. Demonstrates to unbelievers that God is really among us. Builds us up.
11. The Creed	"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:3–5)	Centers on the Trinity. Reinforces solidarity with the church across history and across the world. Keeps us focused on the primary truths of Christianity. Teaches theology, especially the doctrine of God. Provides a framework for catechesis.
12. Reading the Gospels	"It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:3–4)	Centers the church on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Builds faith. Grounds us in the gospel. Challenges us to live zealous Christian lives. Reinforces the supernatural shape of Christianity.
13. Reading the Epistles	"I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers." (1 Thessalonians 5:27)	Expounds the implications of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and applies them to us. Equips us. Teaches and encourages us.
14. Preaching and teaching	"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living	Heralds the good news of what God has done for us in Christ, and

	and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." (2 Timothy 4:1–2)	how we should respond. Explains the meaning of God's Word, so that we can be shaped and changed by it. Exhorts and encourages us. Engages with unbelievers.
15. Eucharist	"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)	Unites us to Christ and to one another. Proclaims the Lord's death until he comes. Enacts thankfulness. Brings joy.
16. Offering	"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:2)	Puts God first where it hurts most. Prioritizes the ordinary work of the local church. Serves the poor. Supports the ministry of the gospel.
17. Blessing	"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14)	Closes the meeting with grace, just as it opened. Concludes by reminding us of God's goodness and favor.
18. Commission as witnesses	"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)	Esteems the ordinary work of Monday to Saturday. Connects the Lord's Day gathering with the rest of the Christian life. Reinforces the mission to which we are called.
19. The lectionary	"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26–27)	Ensures that a wide range of Scripture is covered in a year. Prevents a church's biblical diet from being too shaped by pastors' styles or preferences.
20. The church calendar	"For Paul had decided	Orients the shape

	to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost." (Acts 20:16)	of the whole year in the Christian story. Communicates the value of seasons and rhythms. Encourages both fasting and feasting. Narrates the gospel.

The third takeaway regarding discipleship is that we need to reflect not just on our liturgy's content, but on its shape. Corporate worship is not a series of unrelated practices thrown together without sequence; our liturgy tells a story, and the shape of this story forms our imagination at least as much as the practices do. (In Smith's neat phrase, restoring people involves restorying people.) If we are not attentive to the shape of the story, then we can easily end up in silliness at best, implicit legalism at worst. A service that began with confession, for instance, would put the accent on the way we approach God in the wrong place. More pointedly, a service that began with forty minutes of expressive praise, suffused with the language of pursuing God's presence and waiting for him to come, without a clear proclamation of how God has already come near to us in Christ, would communicate that encountering God is basically about our climbing the mountain rather than his descending it. Without meaning to, it would diminish the gracious initiative of God. It would lack grace or *charis*.

A well-structured liturgy, on the other hand, can reinforce the call-and-response dynamic of the gospel; it can be, literally, grace-full. God has welcomed us, so now we can welcome each other. God's Word exposes our sins, we confess them,

and he forgives them. God speaks, and then we speak. Christ has offered himself for us, so now we bring our offerings to him. God acts, then we act. We breathe in revelation, then we breathe out response.[46] Grace, then gratitude. If structured carefully, with gospel-like elements in a gospel-like order, a liturgy can be evangelical in the best sense. In centering on the grace of God, and our response of thankfulness, it can also be genuinely *eucharistic*.[47]

All of which being said, the most compelling case for liturgical practice—as for eucharistic practice in general—will not be found in an argument or a book, but in actually doing it.[48] It is hard to explain to someone who has never tried bungee jumping or Beethoven why they should; the proof of the pudding is in the eating. No argument for creeds or hymns can rival the power of actually reciting the Nicene Creed or singing "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" with your brothers and sisters.[49] No argument for Cranmer's wedding service could have the same power as hearing yet another young couple pledge "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, till death us do part," in imitation of the covenant promises made between Christ and the church. No argument for catechisms can compete with corporately asking and answering question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

> Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?
>
> A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also

watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall
from my head without the will of my Father in heaven;
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.
Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures
me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing
and ready from now on to live for him.

And no argument for set prayers can hold a candle to confessing your sins like this:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

To which the pastor then responds:

May Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Talk about amazing grace.

There is a certain humility to eucharistic Christianity. It forces us to acknowledge how small we are in the grand scheme of things, how reliant on the theological insights, evangelistic efforts, and faithful prayers of others. It challenges both our ethnocentrism and our chronological snobbery, as we declare truths and say prayers written by Asians, Africans, Europeans, and Americans who lived and died before anesthetics or electricity. It balances our self-assessment: yes, we are the most likely generation in history to be able to contextualize the gospel to twenty-first-century people, but we are also the most likely people in history to have swallowed the twenty-first-century *zeitgeist* without realizing it. It reminds us of the interdependence and interconnectedness of Christ's global and historic church. It encourages us to think of ourselves not as stand-alone saplings that have sprung up out of nowhere in

the last few years, but as twigs in an enormous oak tree that are still fed and sustained by its giant roots. So, as Paul said in another context, if you now share in the nourishing roots of the tree, do not be arrogant toward the other branches.

More basically still, to be eucharistic is to be thankful. It means receiving all the sacramental, liturgical, and historical gifts that God has given to his church with glad and grateful hearts. It involves seeing our legacy as a gift, both in the strengths that sustain us (prayers, creeds, confessions, missions, songs, sacrifices, art, courage), and in the weaknesses that warn us (divisions, wars, moral failures, compromises, injustices, abuses of power, persecutions, and the rest).[50] And it urges us, even compels us, to consider the great cloud of witnesses—the communion of saints, dead and alive, with whom we share one Lord, one loaf, one cup, one baptism—and give thanks to him who has brought us into one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. For what do we have that we did not receive?

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1 In some church traditions, including my own, corporate worship has been so colonized by singing that people use the word "worship" as if it actually *means* singing ("now so-and-so is going to preach from the Bible, and then after that we're going to have a time of worship").

2 Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 17–18.

3 I hope it is obvious that this is not a criticism of churches (like the one I serve) whose baptism pools are under the floor and covered

up to stop people falling in. Celebrating sacraments does not mean celebrating silliness.

4 My very unscientific Twitter poll of just under 1,000 people revealed that 39% do not share the Lord's Supper on a typical week, and a further 33% allocate it less than a tenth of their meeting.

5 1 Corinthians 11:23–25; the word *paradidōmi* can be translated "betray" or "hand over."

6 Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23.

7 Christians have been burned, wars fought, and entire continents divided over that "somehow." My own view is expressed most succinctly in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q78–79.

8 For a superb reflection on the past, present, and future dimensions of the Lord's Supper, see Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

9 Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3.

10 Matthew 28:19.

11 Matthew 3:15.

12 Martin Luther famously concluded *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* by arguing that there were not seven sacraments as in medieval Catholicism (Baptism, Communion, Penance, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Extreme Unction), but strictly speaking only two: "It has seemed best, however, to consider as sacraments, properly so called, those promises which have signs annexed to them. The rest, as they are not attached to signs, are simple promises. It follows that, if we speak with perfect accuracy, there are only two sacraments in the Church of God, Baptism and

the Bread; since it is in these alone that we see *both a sign divinely instituted and a promise of remission of sins*" (emphasis added).

13 Acts 2:38; cf. 2:41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16.

14 Romans 6:1–4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11–12; 1 Peter 3:21–22.

15 Galatians 3:26–27.

16 Acts 2:42.

17 Acts 20:7.

18 1 Corinthians 11:17–20. This connection flows both ways: breaking bread involves coming together, just as coming together involves breaking bread. It is not surprising that the rejection of the former, for instance in "online churches," has largely been confined to traditions that have already rejected the latter.

19 1 Corinthians 10:14–22; 11:27–32.

20 An excellent recent introduction is found in Justin Holcomb and David Johnson (ed.), *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

21 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Lectures* I–III.

22 Although it is worth mentioning that this practice of baptism was single-sex, with female deacons baptizing female catechumens, and so on.

23 The argument of C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 196–98, is relevant here. Lewis asks whether Christianity is hard or easy and replies that it is both: if you start off the easy way, then it is incredibly hard, but if you start off the hard way, it is incredibly easy. The more definitively

you give up (and kill!) your old life as you start the Christian life, the easier your growth as a disciple becomes. On that basis, baptismal liturgies like this may have significant power in forming disciples. By starting out with such an emphatic renunciation of the old life, clothes, allegiances, and gods, the baptizand is given a huge advantage over those who experience a softer, more accommodating initiation. Easy come, easy go.

24 John Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," in Albert Outler (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 3:427–39. Wesley's own summary of his argument is worth considering: "It has been shown, first, that if we consider the Lord's Supper as a command of Christ, no man can have any pretence to Christian piety, who does not receive it (not once a month, but) as often as he can. Secondly, that if we consider the institution of it, as a mercy to ourselves, no man who does not receive it as often as he can has any pretence to Christian prudence. Thirdly, that none of the objections usually made, can be any excuse for that man who does not, at every opportunity obey this command and accept this mercy."

25 Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (emphasis added).

26 Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," cites and responds to five objections to regular Communion: (1) we feel unworthy, (2) we do not have enough time, (3) we diminish our reverence for it through habit, (4) we do not feel like we benefit from it, and (5) our church does not receive it regularly. *Plus ça change*.

27 The phrase *love feast* comes from Jude 12.

28 There is probably a connection between the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on the sacraments, their robust theology of the

body, and their (so far) fairly unwavering response to the sexual revolution. I owe this point to Professor Carl Trueman.

29 Matthew 22:1–14.

30 Compare, e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:23–25 (on unbelievers in worship) with 5:11; 10:14, 18–22; 11:27–32 (on the need for godliness, worship of God alone, and self-examination).

31 I have deliberately avoided spelling out what *regularly* might mean; personally my preference is weekly, but there is no text of Scripture that requires it. My point here, in the end, is about more than just frequency. It is possible to celebrate Communion weekly in a way that trivializes or minimizes it, just as it is possible to celebrate it monthly in a way that makes much of it.

32 The Greek *katholikos* derives from the word *katholou* ("in general"), which itself is a combination of *kata* ("according to") and *holos* ("the whole").

33 *Restoration Magazine* (Nov/Dec 1983), 40.

34 If the X-axis represented the number of ethnic groups united together into one church, the U-bend shape of the chart would be turned entirely on its head: the church grew rapidly across the world in the first few hundred years while remaining united, then stabilized as a result of limitations in travel and the growth of Islam, and then fragmented into first dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of denominations following the Protestant Reformation.

35 John 17:20–23.

36 This does not mean flattening the story to ensure that all generations are presented as equally positive. Few historians would deny that the fourth century was a high point in the church's

story or that the fourteenth century was unusually difficult. It does, however, mean owning both the successes and the failures, since we are all one body, and doing our best to understand (and learn from) both.

37 "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death" (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 205).

38 This point is often made through satire, as in North Point Media's "Contemporvant" video, or The Babylon Bee's article, "Local Church Sings '10,000 Reasons' for 10,000th Time."

39 I remember asking a friend at university why his church used the Book of Common Prayer. His reply had never even occurred to me: "The basic idea is that we all get into habits in our worship, so they might as well be good ones."

40 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

41 Smith's argument has sparked a whole host of insightful writings from younger evangelicals, all of whom summarize his case, on topics ranging from sex (Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015]), to ambition (Jen Pollock Michel, *Teach Us to Want: Longing, Ambition and the Life of Faith* [Downers Grove: IVP, 2014]), to daily life (Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*), not to mention Smith's summary of his own work in *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

42 Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 27–32.

43 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40.

44 I see three main challenges to Smith's broad argument, although there are probably others. (1) It is very possible to be a fundamentally secular consumer in our choice of traditional piety; low church evangelicals have not cornered the market on liturgical brand preferences or ecclesial shopping. "Even the return to traditional liturgy that one finds in some circles can be driven by the same underlying forces of expressive individualism. Rather than a submission to authority, tradition can be an attractive consumer choice for those in search of 'authenticity' in a society where many options on offer seem to lack the weight and beauty of long-established custom. Attending a church with a higher liturgy can be a worshiper's means of signaling refinement, elevated aesthetic judgment, ecclesiastical pedigree, and socio-economic class. In such cases, tradition may be valued principally for its vintage feel or ancient dignity, rather than for the truth that first animated its creation" (Alastair Roberts, "Liturgical Piety," in *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor*, ed. Collin Hansen [Deerfield: TGC, 2017], 63–73, at 69). (2) Practically, if the shape and content of our liturgy is as powerful as Smith suggests, then the Church of England, complete with the Book of Common Prayer, ought to be making more and better disciples than Pentecostal house churches in China, which it clearly isn't. In his recent work, Smith wrestles with a similar objection (which he calls "The *Godfather* problem," after the climax of Francis Ford Coppola's film) at some length; see James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017), 165–208. On the question of the relationship between liturgy and behavior, the study of Christian Scharen, *Public Worship and Public*

Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004) is worth noting: worship is not so much formation as "con-formation, a reinforcement and reminder of what is important in life as they envision it in that place" (at 221). (3) Glenn Packiam argues that Smith stresses worship as formation (a Reformed emphasis) far more than as mission (an evangelical emphasis), and almost entirely neglects worship as encounter (a Pentecostals-charismatic emphasis). This may be missing something important, since the evidence suggests Pentecostal-charismatics are more engaged in (say) practical service to their neighbors than other branches of the church, as argued by Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). The answer to these last two objections, in my view, is to be Eucharismatic—but then I would say that, wouldn't I?

45 This list is similar, but not identical, to the list given (with explanations of each) in Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155–214. Good examples of virtually all of these practices can be found in, among other places, *The Book of Common Prayer*.

46 This excellent phrase has become one of the hallmarks of the contemporary worship leader Matt Redman.

47 There is a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension to this. Vertically, good liturgy catches us up in thankfulness to God. But allowing our liturgy to be shaped by our ancestors also catches us up in horizontal gratitude: it involves the acknowledgment that we are receiving both the content and the shape of our liturgy as *gifts* from men and women who thought carefully about them, practiced them amidst circumstances that were far more challenging and physically painful than most of ours, and in some

cases died for them (Thomas Cranmer, as so often, is the classic example). In his introduction to Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, C. S. Lewis urges people to read old books, because the errors of our own generation are likely only to be challenged by those from previous centuries. If this is true of books, it is surely also true of prayers, hymns, creeds, liturgies, and catechisms—and continuing to use them expresses thankfulness to them, for helping to identify our blind spots and drawing us into truly catholic worship, as well as to God.

48 Having said which, there are obviously anecdotal arguments for the power of liturgy. As part of a training course for pastors a few years ago, I asked the group whether they thought a person needed to have turned away from all their sins before being baptized, or whether it was sufficient to have believed and confessed in Jesus. One person said no: in our church, we just ask people whether a person trusts in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Another person said yes: in our church, we ask people if they have *repented of their sins* and put their trust in Jesus. Unwittingly, both were arguing *from* their liturgy *to* their theology and practice of baptism, not the other way around (and I doubt this situation is unique). Liturgy trains.

49 Ben Myers has a super passage at the start of his *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018) in which he traces the similarities between repeating creeds and repeating wedding vows, rather than making up our own: "Christians today are often suspicious of creeds. Many churches are more comfortable with mission statements than with creeds. The thing about a mission statement is you always get to make it up for yourself. It's like writing your own wedding vows. But here's the paradox. It is the individualised confession,

like the personalised wedding vow, that ends up sounding like an echo of the wider society. . . . By contrast, to confess the creed is to take up a countercultural stance. When we say the creed we are not just expressing our own views or our own priorities. We are joining our voices to a great communal voice that calls out across the centuries from every tribe and tongue. We locate ourselves as part of that community that transcends time and place. That gives us a critical distance from our own time and place. If our voices are still echoes, they are now echoing something from beyond our own cultural moment."

50 For a brief meditation on the latter, see my "The Strange Encouragement of the Church's Appalling History," *Christianity Today* (April 2017).