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LITURGICAL  
MISSION



The Work of the  
People for the  
Life of the World



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## LITURGICAL RENEWAL

*God has called the church into being to be the servant of the kingdom, to be a sign of God's new order, to celebrate in the streets and fields of every land the liturgy of heaven.*

CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA



PEOPLE OFTEN VIEW RENEWAL through the lens of the awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, what if one oft-neglected feature of revival is a rediscovery of aspects of tradition, doctrine, or practice that have been lost or neglected?<sup>1</sup> Author Howard Snyder reminds us, “True renewal in the church always weds new insights, ideas, and methods with the best elements of history. And true renewal is always a return, at the most basic level, to the image of the church as presented in Scripture and as lived out in a varying mosaic of faithfulness and unfaithfulness down through history.”<sup>2</sup>

Renewal is not something new, but is often the result of the convergence of old and new. After all, there is nothing new under the sun. We can see this throughout the history of the church. When we open that treasure chest of church history, we find that there have been a number of renewal movements, such as the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century and the Mercersburg and Oxford Movements of the nineteenth century—all of which resulted from a rediscovery of early church tradition.

I want to begin our journey together by introducing you to a renewal movement that is already happening all around us. It is a renewal that is leading Christians to embrace liturgy, many of whom are coming from nontraditional backgrounds. Anglican bishop Todd Hunter proclaims, “There is something in the air today, something in the spirit of our age, something in the Spirit that is leading thousands, maybe millions, of people to reconsider liturgical forms of worship.”<sup>3</sup> I am a part of this movement, and the fact that you are reading this means that you, too are in some way connected to it, as well.

In the next few pages, I want to introduce you to the worldwide Liturgical Movement that has been going on since the nineteenth century. It is an ecumenical movement that has touched every part of the world and the church, and it is committed to bringing renewal through worship and mission. This movement is springing up in some very unusual places—and, in some exciting ways—all across the church today.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT**

The origins of the Liturgical Movement can be traced to the nineteenth century in monastic communities in Europe.<sup>4</sup> It

began with a hunger for renewal and reform that led to recover the liturgical norms of the early church and to restore the active participation of the people in the liturgy. The movement attempted to revise the liturgy to be in greater accord with early Christian liturgical practices, while at the same time make it more relevant to modern church members. In many ways, it was an attempt to recover the liturgical norms of the Bible and the early church, which lay behind the Reformation divisions and medieval distortions and which are fundamental to Christian liturgy in every time and place.<sup>5</sup> These recovered norms included the historic shape of worship; frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper; and an adherence to the church year, among others.

A major contributing factor to the spread of the principles and practices of the Liturgical Movement was the Second Vatican Council. Commonly known as Vatican II, it took place between 1962 and 1965. Vatican II endorsed many of the aims of the movement, which are laid out in the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," a document that established the principle of greater participation by the laity in the celebration of the liturgy, which included the use of the vernacular for liturgies, overturning the traditional use of Latin as the sole liturgical language, as well as creating a new lectionary and calendar. In many ways, Vatican II helped break down the walls that long divided Catholics and Protestants. Since then, there has been a growing dialogue and greater interaction between the two traditions, which also included the renewal of liturgical worship.

While the influence of the early Liturgical Movement on the development of liturgical revisions around the world has

been significant, it is worth noting that not everyone welcomed or embraced its ideas and reforms. Movements are often messy, and the Liturgical Movement was no exception. Like most movements, it was very complex and had its own set of challenges. However, despite all of its imperfections, the movement helped inspire liturgical renewal in the Catholic church and beyond, eventually influencing mainline Protestant churches worldwide.

Over time, Protestant mainline churches were increasingly influenced by the Liturgical Movement, which also helped foster a deeper ecumenicism among Christians.<sup>6</sup> Commenting on the influence that the Liturgical Movement had on both Catholics and Protestants, Horton M. Davies, professor at Princeton University, states that “What is fascinating about the [liturgical] movement is that it has enabled Protestant churches to recover in part the Catholic liturgical heritage, while the Catholics seem to have appropriated the Protestant valuation of preaching, of shared worship in the vernacular tongue, and the importance of laity as the people of God.”<sup>7</sup>

The Liturgical Movement spread within the Anglican Communion and the Church of England at the dawn of the twentieth century and produced a large body of literature, including A. Gabriel Hebert’s *Liturgy and Society* (1935) and Dom Gregory Dix’s *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945). The Liturgical Movement also contributed to a number of revisions in how Protestants worshiped. Examples include Church of South India’s *Book of Common Worship* (1962); the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* (1970); the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978); the Episcopal church’s revised *Book of Common Prayer* (1979); *The*

*United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992); and *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (1997).

A significant proponent of liturgical renewal among Protestants was professor and liturgical scholar James White of the University of Notre Dame. White advocated for liturgical renewal among Protestants and evangelicals, which he described as “a new reformation of word and sacrament . . . occurring in North American Protestantism.” He went on to say, “Many practices long dormant in Christian worship now seem relevant and useful. Greater knowledge of the first four Christian centuries has provided much impetus for recent reforms.”<sup>8</sup> To help promote and ground liturgical renewal among Protestants, White crafted “A Protestant Worship Manifesto,” which offers us a helpful framework for conceptualizing what worship renewal can look like in a variety of contexts. It also reminds us that the Liturgical Movement was not confined just to those traditions that already had some form of liturgy.

### **LITURGICAL RENEWAL AMONG EVANGELICALS**

In the aftermath of the recent fragmentation and decline of the church, a growing number of evangelicals in the United States are seeking to find identity and spiritual renewal in the retrieval of ancient church tradition for contemporary faith, especially in the area of worship. This recovery is not the result of any one particular factor or person, but the convergence of various significant influences and developments. Rather than being a thing of the past, the recovery of tradition among evangelicals today is very much a renewal movement and a sign of hope. Perhaps the most significant

area of recovery of tradition among evangelicals is the embrace of liturgical worship.

Let me share about several events and thinkers who have contributed to the rediscovery of liturgy among many evangelicals today. Further developments toward a rediscovery of liturgy and tradition happened at Wheaton College in the 1970s when forty-five scholars and leaders organized a conference to discuss the need for evangelical Christians to rediscover the church's historic roots. Dr. Robert E. Webber, Associate Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, was the central figure who called together a planning committee to organize a "National Conference of Evangelicals for Historic Christianity."

The conference issued several documents, which together are known as "The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals." "The Chicago Call" focused on eight key theological themes: a call to historic roots and continuity; a call to biblical fidelity; a call to creedal identity; a call to holistic salvation; a call to sacramental integrity; a call to spirituality; a call to church authority; and a call to church unity.<sup>9</sup> This call was not initially well received among evangelicals and was not without its critics; however, it is one of the most significant and influential factors in the recovery of church tradition among evangelicals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>10</sup>

It was through the writings and teaching of Robert Webber that the initial concepts of "The Chicago Call" began to spread, especially in regard to worship. His own spiritual journey led him from being a fundamentalist Baptist to eventually joining the Episcopal church. In *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, Webber shared his own story and six characteristics which he



and others found in the liturgical church. These were: a sense of mystery; worship that transcends intellectualism and emotionalism; sacraments that provide tangible symbols of Christ; a historic sense of identity; an ecclesiastical home; and a holistic spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

Over the course of his career, Webber wrote more than forty books, many of which focused on what he called the “convergence of worship old and new,” that he believed “stands at the uncertain crossroad of future worship.”<sup>12</sup> He wrote for both academic and popular audiences, but the majority of his writing was focused on reaching the broader evangelical world with renewal through the recovery of worship. Some of his most influential books on worship include *Worship Is a Verb* (1992), *Worship Old and New* (1994), *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (1996), *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 8 vols. (1995), *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (1996), and *Ancient-Future Worship* (2008). His lifelong legacy of helping renew evangelicalism through the recovery of church tradition can be summed up in the phrase, “the road to the future runs through the past.”<sup>13</sup>

Liturgical renewal eventually reached into the Pentecostal/charismatic movement as well. This has been called by some the “Convergence Movement” because it draws on “liturgical/sacramental, charismatic, and evangelical aspects of the Christian faith to develop a style of worship that is rooted in Scripture, aware of history, and committed to relevance.”<sup>14</sup> The Convergence Movement is a movement among evangelical and charismatic churches in the United States and elsewhere that

seeks to unite the charismatic, the evangelical, and the liturgical dimensions of the Christian faith into one expression of worship.

There are traditional, mainline, and liturgical churches who are embracing charismatic elements into their worship, and there are Charismatics who are moving to embrace traditional liturgy. Each side is drawing from the other in an unusual confluence of both old and new. In 1960, an Episcopal priest named Dennis Bennett experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which ignited the charismatic renewal in many mainline churches across North America.

There are several charismatic denominations that have resulted from this movement, including the Charismatic Episcopal Church and The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. The book *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal: Why the Church Should Be All Three* by Gordon Smith, president of Ambrose University and Seminary in Calgary, Alberta, argues that the church not only *can* be all three, but in fact *must* be all three, in order to truly be the church. The Convergence Movement demonstrates that liturgy is not just for high church traditions, but for the entire body of Christ. A similar movement is springing up among African American Pentecostals, called the Union of Charismatic Orthodox Churches, led by Bishop Emilio Alvarez in Rochester, New York.

Singaporean theologian Simon Chan, an Assemblies of God minister who teaches at Trinity Theological College, wrote *Liturgical Theology*, a very influential book in my own understanding of the importance of liturgy. Evangelicals, he argues, have an inadequate understanding of what it means to be the

church. He calls on evangelicals to develop a robust ecclesiology that is grounded in the Great Tradition to recover the church's identity as a worshipping community. He argues that "the practice of liturgy provides the basis for all other ecclesial practices."<sup>15</sup> This includes what he calls the "missiological orientation of the liturgy," which we will explore in another chapter. Ecclesial renewal, he argues, "can't be achieved through theological arguments and reflection. There must also be an adequate knowledge of appropriate liturgical practices."<sup>16</sup> Drawing heavily on the Great Tradition, Chan argues that the renewal of the evangelical church lies in the recovery of sound liturgical practices.

Today, we see this movement continuing with a new generation of believers. I recently wrote a book called *Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation* that documented a growing movement of young adults across North America who are embracing liturgy. Throughout this book, I shared research that was based on spending two years traveling across the United States visiting churches, cathedrals, universities, and seminaries interviewing hundreds of young adults and leaders to hear their stories about how liturgy has impacted their faith.<sup>17</sup> I believe this movement can teach the church many things about its past as well as its future.

One stereotype that I often hear about the appeal of liturgy is that it is somehow a White, North American phenomenon. Nothing could be further from the truth. The appeal of liturgy is universal, global, and multicultural. Rev. Dr. Esau McCaulley is professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and an Anglican priest. He is also a leading voice in the African American

community and often speaks on issues of diversity and culture. He believes that a growing number of African Americans are being drawn to liturgy. “There has never been more interest from African Americans and other ethnic groups. . . . Many have been burned by the culture wars in wider Evangelicalism and want something with a bit more generosity, but that maintains the theological clarity. Also, Black people can fall in love with the liturgy just like anyone else.”<sup>18</sup> Liturgical renewal is for all people, regardless of skin color or nationality.

### **LITURGICAL RENEWAL AMONG NEW CHURCHES**

One of the most encouraging features of the liturgical renewal is the emergence of a new kind of missional church. Over the last decade, I have also been researching a growing number of new churches who are embracing liturgy for their local context. I call them “neo-liturgical churches” because they make up a distinct movement of new churches that are experimenting with new forms of liturgical worship that are being contextualized, blending old with new, yet are rooted in the Great Tradition.

Many of these churches come from very diverse theological, ethnic, and denominational backgrounds. They are not just adopting ancient practices; they are often contextualizing them or changing them in subtle ways to incorporate them within the context of a modern worship experience. They remind us how the embrace of neo-liturgical worship—an eclectic combination of old and new forms of liturgy—is taking hold in many congregations across the theological and denominational spectrum. While each church is unique,

these congregations share something in common: a creative balance of historic liturgy and contemporary elements of modern worship.

One example of a neo-liturgical church is NextGen Church in New Jersey. NextGen was founded in 2008 by the lead pastor, Rev. Dr. Mia Chang. The church represents nearly a dozen nationalities, including Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Singaporean, Filipino, Malaysian, Indian, Bangladeshi, African American, and Anglo. One of the things that unites the members of NextGen is the liturgy each week. I asked Chang if she felt that the liturgy was helpful for her multicultural context. She responded, “Absolutely. I definitely think so.” She said, “I think the liturgical prayer allows us to really find unity.” For her, the liturgy allows the church to come together and worship Christ “no matter what language we speak, no matter what background we come from.” She believes that liturgy provides a “form of worship that we all can understand and that we could all participate in together.” Liturgical renewal is widespread and transcends race, culture, and nationality.

Many of these churches simply use the term “Word and Table” to describe their worship. It is a popular way of structuring the liturgy and worship in a neo-liturgical church today, a model of worship in which *Word* refers to the place of Scripture reading and teaching in the worship service, while *Table* refers to the Lord’s Supper—the act of remembering the death of Jesus Christ and anticipating his second coming by partaking of bread and wine.

Word and table worship provides a framework that these churches are contextualizing for their local context. Bishop

Stephen Croft and Ian Mobsby argue for the need for “developing a mature, contextual sacramentality and spirituality is therefore the pursuit of drawing on ancient faith traditions to meet contemporary, and future, mission needs.”<sup>19</sup> Many of these churches are infusing their liturgical worship with contemporary forms of worship. Every week, neo-liturgical churches retell the gospel story through the structure of their liturgy while utilizing additional contemporary connection points: modern music styles, paintings, and other art forms in conjunction with the Word and Table.

### LITURGY AND MISSION

Liturgical renewal shows us that the real hope for the church is not in going backward, but in a convergence of old and new that paves a way forward. I believe that there are profoundly important implications for the future of the church in this fresh convergence of tradition old and new, which can transcend many of the church’s deep divisions and fuel the church’s mission in the world. For many people who are embracing liturgy, it is not about reliving the past; it is about retrieving tradition and appropriating it into the context of life in the twenty-first century. This convergence is what I call a “higher synthesis.” It’s an embrace of the whole church past, present, and future that comes together through the liturgy.

It is also a hunger for renewal and wholeness. One example of this is in the final chapter of Webber’s *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, titled “Signs of Renewal,” where he argues that a convergence of liturgical and evangelical traditions is a model for spiritual renewal. He says,

Evangelicals bring to the liturgical tradition these strengths—the sense of personal conversion, a deep concern to be orthodox, an attachment and love for the Scripture, and a sense of mission. . . . My real point is that these strengths combined with the six drawing cards of the liturgical church . . . (mystery, worship, sacraments, historic identity, affirmation of the ecumenical church, and a holistic spirituality) make for an unusual church in which the best of the evangelical tradition and the liturgical tradition are brought together.<sup>20</sup>

For Webber, myself, and many others I have encountered, there is a pattern of renewal through recovery of liturgy. More than that, the recovery of liturgy leads us to deeper engagement in mission. Why? Because they belong together.

Finally, liturgical renewal should ultimately lead to liturgical mission. James White ends his manifesto by saying, “Liturgical renewal is an important agent of change in American Protestantism.”<sup>21</sup> I completely agree on the need for liturgical renewal, which is one of the primary reasons why I have written this book. However, liturgical renewal by itself is not enough. It is also why I believe that we need to reconnect liturgy and mission. We cannot have long-lasting renewal without historic worship, nor can we have sustainable mission without rich, biblical worship.

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