

EVANGELICALS AND LITURGY

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Introduction

After ignoring liturgy for centuries many evangelical churches are experimenting with it. This article is an attempt to understand why and how, after all this time, a new renewal of worship is occurring in the evangelical church. The evangelical church now is engaging the historical worship resources of the entire church.

First, this paper will define what is meant by “liturgy” and understand the historical background of liturgical worship in the evangelical church. The second section will review the current climate of evangelical worship and some of the contextual details necessary for understanding the reassessment of historical liturgy. The final section will address the interest, appeal, and use of liturgical sources in the evangelical church today.

Defining Liturgy

The word “liturgy” has been in use for all of church history and has been utilized in many ways ranging from the general to the specific. Gail Ramshaw in her book *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals* defines liturgy as “the format of text and action used by a Christian community in its worship.”¹ In general terms, “liturgy” is the ordering of words and rituals for use by the public gathering of Christian believers in the practice of worship.

Unpacking this definition, this paper will look at three main ideas. First, there is some kind of ordering or organizing that is going on in liturgical worship. Corporate gatherings of the church proceed according to a design or reasonable progression. Worship is not haphazard or random but planned and systematic. The second component, words, is what informs the design of worship. The text of Christian worship is the Bible, and the canon of scripture is the foundational text that is both used in ordering worship and as the content of worship. Christian worship consists of words, including the reading of scripture, as well as various prayers, praises, thanksgivings, teaching, exhortations, and encouragements.

¹ Gail Ramshaw, *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 3.

Finally, liturgy has a ritual component, for worship is not simply words, but words in action. The word “liturgy” is often described as “the work of the people” and is rooted in the Greek concept of public works.² The Greek concept is further informed by the Old Testament witness as the root idea for liturgy is also that of priestly service, particularly in temple worship.³ Liturgy as ritual encompasses the physical activity of the Church bringing ideas into material existence. The church worships publicly as an act of service to one another and to God. Ritual is intended to keep religion from being merely about ideas and brings worship into the real world of human behavior.

Utilizing a broad definition, evangelical worship can be defined as liturgical. There is an intended order in evangelical worship gatherings. Evangelicals are firmly devoted to the scriptures as the source of all life and worship. While worship in an evangelical church is devoted to exposition of the biblical text through preaching, there is a commitment to public reading of the scriptures, and scriptural concepts are distributed in extemporaneous prayers and greetings. The active ritual parts of worship are often narrowly defined as the sacraments, including communion and baptism. Ritual is by nature action and activity. Because of this, evangelical worship is quite dynamic and full of movement. Evangelicals stand and sing vigorously, they pass around offering plates, and they stand and welcome one another. Yet, though they appear to have what can be broadly identified as a liturgy, they do not label it as liturgical.

Historical Antecedents: The Journey from Worship Books to the Free Church Tradition

Historically, the evangelical movement of Christianity has been a separate entity from liturgically styled churches. Since liturgy is broadly the ordering of worship using biblical texts and ritual actions, there is a need for each church to make particular and specific decisions on the liturgy for their gathered community. Each church must decide the order of elements contained in their worship. Since every gathering of the church cannot read the whole Bible, choices must be made as to which texts are utilized during the limited time they are together. People also live in a variety of local contexts with differing cultural practices. Local churches must make choices regarding ritual actions and faithful service.

² David L. Stubbs, “Ending of Worship = Ethics” In *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*. ed. Leanne Van Dyk. (Grand Rapids, MI: Willaim B. Eerdmans, 2005), 136-137.

³ Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 5.

Church history demonstrates how different traditions at different times made these choices. Ultimately, the evangelical tradition is a Free Church tradition, in that it arose in response to the radical idea that the local church has the right to guide liturgical life on its own. Tracing worship history in broad strokes, from the Edict of Milan (313 AD) emerged the idea of Christendom, that pagan Roman society could be transformed through the liturgical activity of the church.⁴ Public worship was the means by which the values of Christianity could be impressed upon the population. As the Roman Empire gave way to the medieval church, the religious and public reality of people were of one kind. Being born was to be baptized, thus Christian, and thus part of the societal order. Much has been made of the excess in this period, though the reality is a bit more complex. The medieval church had periods of both spiritual reform and spiritual decline.

With the Protestant Reformation a new way of thinking about church emerged. The issue was not simply a recovery of biblical doctrine but also a restoration of biblical worship.⁵ Martin Luther cast serious shadows over the entire medieval sacramental system.⁶ The fundamental authorities of the church came into question and the emerging Protestant movement exploded and expanded in a diversity of traditions. Some of these worship traditions remained more similar to the medieval church than others. Luther developed his own liturgical resources, and while allowing for local adaptations, was determined to maintain a fixed written form for worship.⁷

Other more radical movements, such as the Anabaptists and the Baptists, determined that the local body of believers had the freedom to develop their own worship resources on the basis of scripture, apart from any directive governing church oversight.⁸ The assumption of Free Church movements is that scripture provides all the necessary resources for liturgical decisions, and the scriptures are clear enough to anyone who reads them.⁹ This dependence on scripture negated the need for liturgical resources to be produced, and thus any prewritten or prepared books were simply unnecessary and unused in Free Church traditions. A more extemporaneous form of spirituality emerged based on the singular text, scripture alone.

⁴ Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work: A Social History of the Liturgy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 42.

⁵ Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney, Eds. *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*. Greensboro, (NC: New Growth, 2018), 49.

⁶ James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. Louisville (KY: Westminster/Jon Knox, 1989), 36.

⁷ Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney, Eds. *Reformation Worship*, 36.

⁸ James F. White, *Protestant Worship*, 80.

⁹ James F. White, *Protestant Worship*, 81.

With these two operating principles, scripture alone and local autonomy, the stage was set for a new kind of church, especially in North America where a new geographical reality dictated new techniques. The wide-open frontier, with a widely distributed population, gave rise to the revivalist camp meeting.¹⁰ Revivalism, led by Charles Finney developed a radical new liturgical arrangement focusing on conversion as the climax of worship. Pragmatism was the new value that drove this form of American worship, putting aside church tradition in favor of measurable results, in this case individuals confessing faith.¹¹ Revivalism continued to influence succeeding generations of the evangelical church with the revivals of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham.¹²

The pragmatic rationale gave rise to a marketplace-aware church which then contemporized the frontier spirit for a church in decline.¹³ In the middle of the twentieth century the evangelical church, concerned about losing membership in an ongoing culture war, updated the worship vernacular. One major focus of this contemporary worship movement was in the area of music. Evangelical worship endured an upheaval as traditional hymnody was supplemented, and at times supplanted, with popular forms of music. Revivalism was repackaged in contemporary forms.

Further recent developments in evangelical worship have come from two places. The church growth movement and later, the seeker church/mega church movement, are examples of using mass media and technology as integral to worship.¹⁴ Further influence on evangelical worship has been supplied by the freer spirit of Pentecostalism, received through the import of a contemporized music tradition.¹⁵

Liturgical as a Style of Worship

One of the conversations shaping evangelical worship today is largely related to the issues of style and the extent to which trends and cultural fashions are influential. The Free Church tradition allows for a more local and even individual approach to shaping the order of congregational worship. Evangelical worship leaders have taken the principles of freedom to their widest logical application and relish the flexibility

¹⁰ James F. White, *Protestant Worship*, 173. White refers to the “Frontier Tradition” but what he is describing are the roots of Evangelical Worship.

¹¹ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014) 15.

¹² Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work*, 272, 274.

¹³ Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work*, 275.

¹⁴ Cornelius Platinga Jr. & Sue a. Rozeboom. *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 16-17.

¹⁵ Cornelius Platinga Jr. & Sue a. Rozeboom. *Discerning the Spirits*, 20-21.

they have in drawing from whatever liturgical sources they desire and applying them in whatever forms they choose.¹⁶ Evangelical worship highly prizes the individualistic and the extemporaneous. Succeeding generations of evangelicals inevitably shape worship along the lines of their cultural environment, without much thought or consultation with the inherited traditions of the church. Liturgical freedom and individualistic spontaneity have in many ways led to the contemporary evangelical church elevating style as the guiding principle of worship.¹⁷

Style in contemporary culture is in many ways motivated by the demands of a consumer marketplace environment. Evangelical worship tends to follow the variations in tastes as demanded by a complex nebula of end user demands. Churches are always looking for the influential people and the techniques which enable a successful ministry which, when applied to worship, imparts a sense of God's presence.¹⁸ Bob Kauflin includes the practices of historic liturgy, among many other worship rituals, under the banner of novelty that the evangelical church is tempted to chase.¹⁹ Evangelicals are increasingly open to historic liturgy as a material source for worship. Historic liturgy is viewed favorably as another option available among the many existing possibilities for organizing the rituals of the evangelical church.

Evangelicals are not, however, adopting the entire system of liturgical thought, but mining selectively for what fits within their tradition. This search for liturgical novelty and style means that there is potentially a lack of nuance in how evangelical worship is adopting historic liturgy. Adapting liturgy, a tradition based on fixed forms, into a Free Church environment can be somewhat disingenuous. Liturgical sources are representative of a wider scheme of liturgical spirituality. Liturgical spirituality envisions worship as less about function and the logistics of worship than a means of nourishing the believer in their relationship with God.²⁰ Wresting an individually curated selection of bits and pieces from the liturgical tradition has the potential to lose some of the desired riches in the process of transplant. Old liturgies that are restored in contemporary usage are never used as they were intended.²¹ Worship communities today use historic liturgy to serve their own contemporary purpose. Yet, there is also the possibility of some of those liturgical riches finding fertile soil in the evangelical tradition. Evangelicals are increasingly aware that faithful biblical

¹⁶ Wilbur Ellsworth, "Classical Worship for Today: Worship That Is Evangelical and Classical," *Reformation and Revival*. 12, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 149.

¹⁷ Wilbur Ellsworth, "Classical Worship for Today: Worship That Is Evangelical and Classical," 150.

¹⁸ Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 134-135.

¹⁹ Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers*, 134-135.

²⁰ Susan J. White. *The Spirit of Worship: The Liturgical Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd), 29.

²¹ Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work*, 296.

worship is not captive to the styles and trends of the contemporary age, but rather based on the gospel of Christ.²²

Precursors for Evangelicals and Historic Liturgy

The evangelical turn toward historic liturgy is quite complex and there are many shifts and movements that add to this growing interest. Six significant conditions will be explored. First, as a transdenominational movement, evangelicals are already accustomed to importing influences from many worship traditions. Second, there is a grass roots interest in historic liturgy and, as a marketplace tradition, evangelicalism is quick to satisfy the appeal. Historic liturgy also offers a counterpoint to some of what was lost in the adoption of contemporary music as well as bridging some of the complicated shifts as Evangelicalism moves from modernity to postmodernity. Finally, we will look at how changes in training worship leaders have expanded the resources of Evangelical worship, bringing historic liturgy back into general awareness.

Evangelicalism as a transdenominational movement

The Protestant movement has always been committed to unity amongst a diversity of church expressions. Luther stressed the necessity for unity in the gospel while maintaining there could be freedom in worship practices and a generous disposition to different liturgical traditions.²³ John Calvin in Geneva and Thomas Cranmer in England both accepted that different contexts would lead to different patterns of worship.²⁴ The evangelical tradition maintains diversity through a myriad of denominational patterns even as they are united in a form drawn from revival patterns.²⁵

Much of evangelical scholarship has tended to focus on the discontinuity with the historical church, making much of the independent nature of the tradition.²⁶ For many evangelicals the idea of an ecumenical approach to church would be viewed quite negatively and with significant distrust. There were good reasons to break from historic church tradition, and restoring those worship practices would be unthinkable.

²² Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers*, 134-135.

²³ Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngley, Eds. *Reformation Worship*, 45.

²⁴ Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngley, Eds. *Reformation Worship*, 45.

²⁵ James F. White, *Protestant Worship*, 178-179.

²⁶ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014) 17.

Yet scholars today are seeing that the picture is more complex. Ross traces the ministry of George Whitefield as indicative of a more radical evangelical form of church unity. Whitefield (1714-1770) was an influential itinerant preacher who created a significant “disruption” among the more established churches in his willingness to preach anywhere, anytime, and to anyone.²⁷ His focus on preaching a “new birth” and essentially ignoring the issue of church form was a radical break from the denominational church paradigm.²⁸ In appealing to “new birth” Christianity, Whitefield “encouraged listeners to identify themselves less with a particular denomination and more with the larger ecumenical family.”²⁹

The fruit of this transdenominational approach is seen in the current rise of nondenominational churches. The megachurch movement has brought into focus a kind of church that is Protestant in pedigree and generally Evangelical yet has an independent ethos that sets megachurches apart from a typical denominational church.³⁰ Some may yet be attached to a denomination while others are wholly independent, and some create networks or associations of their own. In this environment, there are fewer boundaries for individual church members to overcome in transferring to a church of another denomination. Denominational loyalties are weakened and thus there is an increasing freedom in attending a different church set within the broader evangelical world.³¹

The Bible College movement is another example of transdenominational unity within the Evangelical tradition. Bible Colleges tend to be independent educational institutions without formal ties to a church body. Students from many different denominational traditions come together in the same place to study the Bible. There is a priority of commitment to the scriptures, and much less of an emphasis on historical tradition and liturgical forms. Yet within these places there is a sharing of resources and faith life in which differences can connect and develop together in a form of unity.

As a transdenominational movement, Evangelicalism has always had an openness to a variety of influences. This combined with the porous movement of church members continues to provide opportunity for other outside influences and thus an openness to historic liturgy is increasingly possible.

²⁷ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, 23.

²⁸ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, 24.

²⁹ Melanie C. Ross *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, 24.

³⁰ Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 152.

³¹ Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*, 153-154.

Evangelicalism as a marketplace American tradition

One of the ongoing realities of the North American experience is a culture of consumerism. Human existence currently is wrapped up in an economic reality where everything is commodified in some way, even parts of human identity.³² Bryan D. Spinks acknowledges this reality and notes the many ways the culture of consumerism is a significant influence in the development of evangelical worship. The emerging church generation is often quite unaware of the historical traditions of the church.³³ Church leaders also face the reality of an unchurched generation that has no attachment to a church of any kind.³⁴ In a culture of consumerism there is a new freedom when it comes to choosing a church. People can decide for themselves, based on personal preferences, what kind of church and worship tradition to attend.

The concept of church shopping has many problems, yet Spinks approaches the issue pragmatically and in a broader and more nuanced form. Spinks suggests that the evangelical church is in competition first with the world of leisure and entertainment.³⁵ Malls are open on Sundays and sports events are broadcast during the times of gathered worship. In generations past, there were limited alternatives competing for time. All places of business were closed. Sunday was the exclusive domain of the church. The choice was to go or not go, but there was nothing else offered as an alternative. Today, choices are abounding. Consumer choice has extended past the limitations of confines of brick-and-mortar existence. With online shopping and entertainment available at any time, the individual has an increasing number of options that keep them away from the orbit of church and religion.

Spinks also pragmatically identifies the diversity of options available in the contemporary evangelical church that fuel a more consumer-like response.³⁶ Since evangelical churches have the freedom to pattern worship in their local context, many options and variations appealing to specific personal tastes have appeared. Individuals can choose worship according to music style, preaching proficiency, formality, or size. The possibility of finding a church that fits the individual's desired worship has never been better. Spinks is not writing of those individuals that never simply land in a church and are hedonistically consumeristic. Church shopping as a spiritual practice is certainly unhealthy. Yet the marketplace reality of North

³² Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall: Contemporary Responses to Contemporary Culture* (New York, NY: Church, 2010), xv-xvi).

³³ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, xxii.

³⁴ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, xxiii.

³⁵ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, xxiii.

³⁶ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, xxiii.

American culture has enshrined individual choice in such a way that churches have had to pivot and offer a wide range of traditions.

The variety of options has opened the door to exploration of more historic forms of Christian worship. The idea of “blended worship” at first meant the blend of music styles, incorporating both traditional hymns and contemporary worship choruses. Over time the idea of “blended worship” broadened to become a synthesis of evangelical worship with a look back at the ancient church and the inherited liturgical forms.³⁷ This movement has developed in many ways, from the full adoption of fourfold liturgical ordering (gathering, word, table, sending) to a more flexible service which incorporates historical liturgy into contemporary evangelical worship style.³⁸ Even there we see the mixture of options made available to the evangelical worshiper, and how historic liturgy fits into this culture of choice.

Historic liturgy as a counterpoint to contemporary music

One of the difficulties in talking about worship today is the pervasiveness of music. Worship has been reduced to a synonym for music, specifically the time of singing prior to the sermon in an evangelical worship service.³⁹ Evangelical worship has been shaped by the contemporary incorporation of music based on styles and forms from mainstream popular culture.⁴⁰ Traditional evangelical worship utilized the resources of hymnody and classical instrumentation. Congregational singing was in the form of four-part harmony with piano and organ accompaniment. In larger churches, choirs and orchestral instruments would be featured as the soundtrack to accompany various elements of the service.

With the rise of popular music in North America, delivered via mass media communication technologies, there arose a significant change in the cultural landscape that inevitably affected the church.⁴¹ Instrumentation and vocal styles changed as traditional music gave way to guitars, drums and other synthesized sounds. Contemporary worship borrowed liturgical elements from the pop/rock concert venue, such that Evangelicalism envisions worship as a sound system, projection, and pop/rock band.⁴² Contemporary worship has become, in many ways,

³⁷ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, 1.

³⁸ Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall*, 2-3.

³⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 69.

⁴⁰ Lim Swee Hong & Lester Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2017), 59.

⁴¹ Lim Swee Hong & Lester Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, 59

⁴² Greg Scheer, *Essential Worship: A Handbook for Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 213.

the normal experience of evangelical worship as worship practices have embraced informality, hand raising, drama and extended periods of singing.⁴³

Yet even as contemporary worship expanded in influence, not all were satisfied with the changes. As evangelical worship transitioned to more contemporary forms of music, there were advocates for conservatism in style who found the new styles of music and the accompanying changes to worship quite alarming.⁴⁴ At the height of the conflict, many voices of caution were wrapped in preference and other absolute statements made up of what was essentially personal choice. The heat of the conflict over worship tended to distort the discussion both for and against contemporary music. Now, Evangelicalism is on the other side of the controversy and is finding that some of the traditional aspects that were discarded in the move toward a more contemporary worship expression could be beneficial and should be restored.⁴⁵

There has been a growing discontent with the caricaturizing of evangelical worship as a pop culture-oriented tradition.⁴⁶ Many church worship leaders are discovering that they are responsible for more than leading songs. There are many other tasks involved in leading a congregation in worship. Evangelicals, in moving to contemporary music-based forms, simplified worship into a two-part liturgy, and in the process, lost the pastoral heart.⁴⁷ There is an increasing awareness of gaps left behind in the transition to contemporary worship. The door is thus open for a more historical form of liturgy to fill a felt void in contemporary evangelical worship.

Modernity and rationalism in worship

Evangelicalism is a tradition born out of the Enlightenment and as such, is heavily influenced by rationalism. In this paradigm known as Modernity, worship activity is mostly accomplished through thinking. At the height of this understanding lies the evangelical approach to preaching. Evangelicalism left behind the more mystical and ritual approaches to sacrament in favor of a more objective sensibility. Historical sacramental understanding was replaced with the words of God as the one sacrament of the church. This sacramental understanding encompassed the words of the preacher in addition to the biblical text. The preacher's words were "the words of

⁴³ Lester Ruth & Lim Swee Hong, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship: Understanding the Ideas That Reshaped the Protestant Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 291.

⁴⁴ Donald Paul Ellsworth, *Christian Music in Contemporary Witness: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker) 1979, 147.

⁴⁵ Donald Paul Ellsworth, *Christian Music in Contemporary Witness*, 149

⁴⁶ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Worship: An American Mosaic* (Oxford, UK: Oxford, 2021), 33.

⁴⁷ Zac Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 17.

God” in a very real sense in evangelical worship.⁴⁸ To come to worship was most importantly focused on the words of the preacher; all else was preliminary.

Yet evangelical worship was always more than a sermon. This is evident in the architecture of church buildings. Worship spaces, while being designed to bring the pulpit into primary liturgical focus, were also required to accommodate an increasing number of other ritual acts.⁴⁹ Evangelicals have always been intuitively aware that exclusively rationalist approaches to worship are not adequate to disclose the sacred. Worship by nature revolves around the mystery, the revelation of the gospel. There is a numinous aspect of Christian devotion, even as corporate worship takes place in a thoroughly embodied context. Rational propositions alone could not bear the weight of sacred communication. Preachers demonstrated this as they employed more theatrical approaches. Theatrical technique and study in the arts informed the delivery of sermons.⁵⁰ Part of this was pragmatic. Dramatic approaches to preaching filled church benches. Yet partly, this was because evangelicals had a vacuum of ritual and action, which was filled in other ways. Worship for evangelicals was naturally aware that God used ordinary means to reveal his sacred nature in the world.⁵¹ While medieval sacrament and actions were disposed, a new form arose to fit in with a newly rational world.

Gordon Lathrop notes that historically, Evangelicals have been more interested in studying theology proper since it is the tradition most comfortable with words.⁵² Yet there is an increasing awareness in Evangelicalism as church people move past Modernity, that worship itself is able to communicate theology. Liturgy is a primary form of theology, a theology of immersion and experience that a book can never quite produce.⁵³ The harmony here is seen since Evangelicalism is not a tradition of liturgical books, but of scripture being the source for liturgical experience. Evangelicals became comfortable with a sophisticated worship steeped in modernity. Coming out on the other side of modernity, evangelicals are remembering that worship has a simplicity and that liturgical forms of worship can distill the gospel in a way that is accessible to a postmodern worshipping community.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 134-135.

⁴⁹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2002), 132.

⁵⁰ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 132.

⁵¹ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 134-135.

⁵² Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 7.

⁵³ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1937), 28.

⁵⁴ Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, eds. Colin Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 2003), 388.

Postmodernity and embodied worship

Exploring the postmodern worship setting further, a greater holistic sense of worship is transformational, and involves the whole person in a way that modern rational forms of worship could not. One of the fruits of modernity was to envision corporate worship as a school. One came to worship to learn and be taught. Yet worship is more than education. While learning does occur, the point of worship is not simply to download or transmit a message. Essential to worship is learning the patterns and competencies to be involved in the action of the liturgy.⁵⁵ Worship is not so much a place to learn how to think but to learn how to behave. One of the frustrations for believers in the modern era was the disconnect between thought and intention. In the modern church, believers knew the right answers to faith and doctrine, and yet the twentieth century was full of public and humiliating Christian failures. Knowing scriptural truths was not a guarantee of Christian behavior. Something was yet amiss.

James K. A. Smith writes about Christian worship as the mechanism to renovate and reorient the heart. In a modern secular world that pulls believers' affections toward false worship, liturgy works to recalibrate their desires.⁵⁶ Part of the postmodern experience is confusion brought about by many competing altars, many competing faiths. Smith unveils the powerful liturgies behind cultural institutions and how they bend the human heart towards consumerism, human achievement, nationalism, and militarism.⁵⁷ Rather than relying on the rational mechanism of ideals and information, Smith observes that secular institutions also strongly appeal to the affections, taking hold of human hearts through story and ritual.⁵⁸ Smith understands that in the postmodern age, the most significant and shaping liturgical experiences appeal to church people through the medium of their bodies. The shaping of the heart is accomplished through ritual performed in a fully embodied experience.⁵⁹

Use of historic liturgy appeals to the aesthetic and affective life of worshipers today. Evangelical worship is seen as essentially artful, based on the idea of story. Smith characterizes worship as drama and story.⁶⁰ Robert Webber, an early and influential figure in the evangelical recovery of historical worship, recognizes that scripture is full of images, stories, analogies, and metaphors, all proclaiming the grand narrative

⁵⁵ Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 28.

⁵⁶ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 57-58.

⁵⁷ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 46.

⁵⁸ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 46.

⁵⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 46.

⁶⁰ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 90, 93, 95.

of God's work.⁶¹ Webber is concerned that the worship of the church should conform more accurately to the rich resources recorded in scripture. Worship then is not simply a religious program consumed by a religious people. A more scripturally faithful worship form enacts the gospel story in corporate gatherings.⁶²

Liturgical worship engages the full body in practicing Christian life. Evangelicals are discovering that historical liturgy has the potential to place words and action on the congregation so that they have a more complete training in faith. In this way the habits of Christian life don't end with the worship service but walk into the believer's everyday life.

Changes in Christian education (from sacred music to worship leadership)

Ottaway describes what he calls a "seismic shift" in both the offerings and contents of degree programs in response to changing realities within the North American church.⁶³ Sacred Music degree programs mirrored classical western music education with a strong emphasis on performance skills, along with traditional studies in music theory, music history and other conventional aspects of historic music education.⁶⁴ Preparing ministers of music in the old paradigm aimed at developing choir directors and instrumental performers, those who could supply the soundtrack for worship services. Classic elements in evangelical worship would include instrumental preludes, accompaniment for hymn signing and choirs, as well as solo performances and offertories. Musicians in this era would be called upon to demonstrate a high degree of musical competence especially when asked to improvise during communion and offering processions, play a wide variety of hymn styles, play multiple lines in SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass), choir rehearsal, and hear the details of tuning and parts while directing an orchestra or choir. With the transition to more contemporary forms of music the Sacred Music degree fell into decline since it no longer served the ongoing vision for worship that churches were developing.⁶⁵

A pedagogical reset occurred as Sacred Music degrees gave way to the Worship degree. There were two significant areas of change. First was the easing of the high

⁶¹ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 31.

⁶² Robert E. Webber, *Ancient Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative*, 39.

⁶³ Jonathan Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree: Pedagogical Changes in the Preparation of Church Musicians." In *Essays on the History of Contemporary Praise and Worship*, edited by Lester Ruth, 160-175. Eugene, OR: Pickwick: 2020., 161.

⁶⁴ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 170.

⁶⁵ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 160.

demands for musical ability.⁶⁶ While worship in the new paradigm was still significantly understood to have a musical basis, the required exacting expertise in musical performance was no longer a reality in church worship ministry. The broader musicianship component required in classical training gave way to more emphasis on practical skills in voice and piano.⁶⁷ Contemporary worship music is simply not as difficult to play or as technically demanding. The hours required in individual instrument practice were significantly reduced leaving room for the addition of other areas of study, subjects that were also more in line with what the church sought.

The second area of pedagogical reset pertained to the additional emphasis on biblical studies and worship theology.⁶⁸ With less time in the practice room and dedication to musical studies, Worship degrees were able to focus energy on other subjects. In the evangelical church, music leaders took on more of a pastoral role and, instead of choosing the sound that would accompany the life of the church, they were more involved in shaping the liturgical practices of the church.⁶⁹ The pastoral emphasis required a greater proficiency in biblical and theological studies especially as contemporary worship emerged from Pentecostal roots and moved into the mainstream of evangelical worship. Praise and Worship music came with an implied theology that was not quite native to evangelical thought and practice. Worship leaders were increasingly required to exercise some kind of pastoral oversight regarding music as well as be able to answer questions regarding the practice of music and worship in the church. This was further necessitated as many of the traditional sources of worship music eroded. Churches could no longer depend on trusted denominational resources such as hymnbooks to guide music selection for the local church. With the exponential expansion of new worship music being produced from an unimaginable number of sources, the Worship degree equipped individuals for greater engagement in sourcing the music resources of the church.

The decrease in musical performance demands, combined with the increased emphasis on biblical and theological skills, produced worship leaders that were well versed in historical liturgy. Churches gained an influx of worship leaders comfortable with giving pastoral oversight. Beyond organizing songs, Sacred Music degrees equip worship leaders with competencies developing both the structures and contents of a broad range of liturgical practices.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 170.

⁶⁷ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 171.

⁶⁸ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 171.

⁶⁹ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 172.

⁷⁰ Ottaway, "The Rise of the Worship Degree," 172.

Moving Forward: Evangelicals and Historic Liturgy

The evangelical movement is more willing than ever to reintroduce historic liturgy back into the mainstream of worship. With favorable conditions laying a foundation, worship leaders need to understand what is ultimately driving the interest in historic liturgy and what the true appeal is for these practices. Finally, this paper will conclude with some thoughts on how Evangelicalism, as a Free Church tradition, is implementing the use of historic liturgy.

Historical Distance

The modern era has been challenging for evangelicals as the church experienced decline in overall membership as traditional Christian beliefs and morals eroded in favor of a societal commitment to materialism and the adoption of secular forms of life.⁷¹ One of the answers to this challenge in Evangelicalism was to address problems of worship. The evangelical church went through a renewal process as it transitioned away from more traditional forms of worship and adopted the contemporary milieu of today. Yet Evangelicalism is not the only tradition that experienced a renewal movement. Evangelical interest in liturgy is a fruit of what is known as the Liturgical Renewal Movement. The Liturgical Renewal Movement was a grassroots movement in the Roman Catholic Church leading to Vatican II. The movement reflects a greater concern in the Roman Catholic Church for biblical foundations in worship, an emphasis on vernacular language, and a recovery of ancient church traditions.⁷²

For evangelicals, discussions of the Roman Catholic Church and its liturgical practice tend to have negative connotations. Evangelicals have a long memory regarding the problems of the medieval Catholic excess and the Protestant Reformation was a definitive break from a broken church tradition. The topic of liturgy brings up that historical baggage and evangelicals associate inherited historical forms of worship with dead religion and a system confused by a works-based salvation theology.⁷³ Yet the Liturgical Renewal Movement reveals that the modern Catholic Church has experienced a significant restorative impulse that has had a wide-ranging effect.

Protestants were invited to participate in the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁴ This council had a much more conciliatory tone in that the Protestant contributions were

⁷¹ John Fenwick, and Bryan Spinks. *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), 1.

⁷² Fenwick and Spinks. *Worship in Transition*, 7-9.

⁷³ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 69.

⁷⁴ Senn, *The People's Work*, 312.

seriously considered.⁷⁵ As a result of their meaningful participation in the council, Protestants were open to recognizing some of the practices recommended by the council.⁷⁶ Evangelicals were quick to recognize the value of worship in the vernacular, the language of the people. Evangelicals, as a movement comfortable with the marketplace, were already renewing worship in that direction with modern translations of scripture and, eventually, in the contemporizing of church music through pop/rock styles.

In a more measured way, Vatican II opened the door to evangelicals considering the possibility of incorporating more historic liturgy. As evangelical worship scholarship developed there was a growing awareness of the rich resources of liturgy not simply from Catholic tradition, but also from Reformation tradition. The medieval reformers had the same apprehensions regarding the liturgical practices of the medieval church. Yet their intent was not wholesale disposal of the liturgical tradition, but a proper reshaping of liturgy according to biblical practice.⁷⁷ The Reformers shaped the worship in the merging Protestant church according to the principles of inherited liturgical resources.

The evangelical church is no longer reacting with such wholesale negativity to the idea of liturgical resources. Time has passed, and the liturgical traditions held in such disrepute in the evangelical imagination are no longer held with such strong hostility. The historical liturgical tradition is seen as having a worthwhile voice in the modern Evangelical church.

The rise of professional worship ministers

Evangelicalism as a movement has attended seriously to the global mission of the church to make disciples. The name of the movement expresses in many ways the deepest sense of identity. Worship never was a major concern and thus never was given much reflective theological thought. This in part explains why Evangelicalism has been open to the adoption of worship sources developed outside the tradition, and thus susceptible to worship forms that are not entirely consistent with evangelical values. As the movement has matured, however, there has been a growing awareness that the distinctive mission of evangelism may be lost if worship is neglected. Worship shapes the identity and values of the church and evangelicals have in recent years felt the urgency to study worship in more detail from within the tradition.

⁷⁵ Senn, *The People's Work*, 312.

⁷⁶ Senn, *The People's Work*, 312.

⁷⁷ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 69.

There is a rising conversation in Evangelicalism regarding liturgical worship.⁷⁸ Many books and articles are bringing awareness to the subject of liturgical studies. Much evangelical worship has focused on the issue of music. In the broader evangelical imagination, the terms “music” and “worship” are essentially synonyms. Evangelical scholarship is no longer studying worship in such a reductionist fashion. By avoiding the negative connotations of medieval liturgy and reaching back to the early church, evangelical scholarship has successfully reintroduced the idea of historic liturgy.⁷⁹ Looking back on church worship from the earliest of sources, evangelical scholars have discovered that it was largely liturgical. The shape of worship in the church has always been in some form liturgical. The pervasive nature of liturgy in the early history of the church has opened the door for more reflection and theological thought on worship.

The Appeal of Historic Liturgy

Acknowledging a rich tradition and abandoning presentism

Coming out of the worship wars, with the shifting of worship style into a more contemporary vernacular, evangelical pragmatism ultimately led to an elevation of presentism. The constant production and adoption of new worship styles and resources at first seemed exciting but the attraction is wearing off and some are wondering if the strong commitment to innovation is a dead end.⁸⁰ A tremendous amount of energy was required and expended to build a new paradigm for worship. All the allocated energy did not simply dissipate on the other side of the transition. One of the phantom outcomes from the transition was an ongoing apprehension of the potential for worship renewal to stagnate and thus lose whatever was gained in the process. Evangelical worship was thus entrapped in an ongoing search for novelty. Presentism has led the church to a wholesale rejection of any past liturgical resources and set worship exclusively in the contemporary culture. Presentism seeks to discover what is new, trending, and current.

Pragmatism and the prevailing impulse toward presentism are in many ways a capitulation to modernity’s commitment to materialism.⁸¹ The scientific worldview has reduced all the created order to the physical and concrete. Humans made in the image of God and living in a creation that includes spiritual realities are left with a

⁷⁸ Philip Luk Sinitiere, “Embracing the Early Church: Reflection on Evangelicals, Patristics, Ecclesiology, and Ecumenism,” *Reformation and Revival* 13, no.4 (Fall 2004): 18.

⁷⁹ Sinitiere, “Embracing the Early Church,” 14.

⁸⁰ Wilbur Ellsworth, “Classical Worship for Today: Roots in the Worship Storms,” *Reformation and Revival* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 110.

⁸¹ Ellsworth, “Classical Worship for Today,” 111.

vacuum of meaning.⁸² People today are left to their own devices to construct spirituality as they are increasingly dissatisfied with the confines of a purely material framework of existence.⁸³ The scientific material worldview is not providing satisfying answers to the deeper issues of life. Evangelical worship's alignment with material values has left some of the deeper issues of human experience on the sidelines.

Historic worship has the potential to correct the over-commitment to materialism by returning the sense of awe and wonder to worship.⁸⁴ Historic liturgy is rooted in a sacramental view of the world. Evangelicals have for the most part rejected sacramental understandings of worship due to the medieval problems of the sacramental system. The medieval church so abused the transcendent that the immanent world order was neglected, and worship was taken from the congregation and their world. Modern Evangelicalism is in some ways the full fruit of over reaction against the values of transcendence gone awry. Liturgy is speaking into the unhealthy tip towards immanence. Evangelicals do not need to become fully sacramental, but they do need worship that theologically maintains the tension between the physical and spiritual creation. Historic liturgy is born out of a sacramental view of the world and has the potential to restore a more robust transcendence to evangelical worship.

The way forward is understanding that historic liturgy employs the immanent to communicate the transcendent. At root, liturgy is very ordinary human action and activity. People sing, pray, read, listen, and interact. Historic liturgy widens the horizon of worship experience from the present by joining in with the experience of saints past. Through liturgy, evangelical worship is discovering rich roots in the confrontations, questions, wisdom, and sacred devotions of a rich church tradition.⁸⁵

Developing an evangelical theology of worship

Evangelicalism is widely accepted as a tradition devoted to evangelism, rigorous biblical devotion, and theological focus on the cross of Christ.⁸⁶ Yet having a conversation about Evangelicalism is in some ways difficult today as the tradition matures and expands, especially as the expansion comes up against other worship traditions. We see the roots for this interplay and exchange of tradition in the Reformation. While the reformers did not find enough common ground to become

⁸² James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 69.

⁸³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University, 2007), 506.

⁸⁴ Ellsworth, "Classical Worship for Today," 111.

⁸⁵ Ellsworth, "Classical Worship for Today," 112.

⁸⁶ Sinitiere, "Embracing the Early Church," 13.

a uniform alternative tradition, there was liturgical exchange in the practice of hymnody as songs were shared across denominational lines.⁸⁷ Evangelicalism is a tradition that is accustomed to sourcing and sharing music resources in an extensive and expansive way. With Praise and Worship, evangelicals translated Pentecostal and Charismatic music into the mainstream of the church worship experience. Today more modern styles of worship music are drawn from a geographically diverse supply. Music produced in the United Kingdom and Australia is widely utilized in what is largely a North American based church expression. The use of contemporary worship across denominational lines has brought about a particularly evangelical form of ecumenism.⁸⁸

The trend toward an evangelical ecumenism in music forms has provided the groundwork for adoption of historical liturgical sources. Evangelical worship as it emerged in North American tradition was influenced by the innovation and marketplace of the new world culture. Additionally, evangelicals are aware of the current trends toward decline in church attendance. In the past the solution has been pragmatic, adopting liturgical resources that bring about measurable results. Desiring to answer the demand for renewal in the church today is resulting in a more thoughtful and reflective turn from the tyranny of results and toward engagement with historic liturgical sources.⁸⁹ The way forward for many evangelicals is through an engagement with the past.

We are seeing an ecumenical convergence of worship practices that flows through the evangelical, charismatic and liturgical streams of the church, to the point where new denominations and churches are being formed on these broad principles.⁹⁰ There are concerns that Evangelicalism is vulnerable to adopting practices that are not consistent with biblical theology and to abandoning the urgency of missions and discipleship.⁹¹ One of the strengths of Evangelicalism as a Free Church tradition is that there is flexibility to mine the historical liturgical resources in a selective way. Not all liturgies are of equal value to the modern church. Evangelicalism is not bound to adopt the problems and excess even as they discover the treasures of a rooted biblical faith. Every liturgical practice is linked to a specific church at a specific time and the values inevitably will transfer to some degree. The Evangelical

⁸⁷ Scott Aniol, "Evangelical Worship and the Decline of Denominationalism," (lecture, The Evangelical Theological Society, March 7, 2014), 5. accessed June 6, 2024, <https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/evangelical-worship-and-the-decline-of-denominationalism/>.

⁸⁸ Aniol, "Evangelical Worship and the Decline of Denominationalism," 8.

⁸⁹ Sinitiere, "Embracing the Early Church," 37.

⁹⁰ Philippe R. Sterling, "The Return to Ritual: Should Free Grace Churches Adopt Ashe Wednesday, Lent, and Other Emergent Church Practices?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 22, no 43 (Autumn 2009), 33.

⁹¹ Sinitiere, "Embracing the Early Church," 42-43.

Ecumenical movement makes wary those who saw the wider ecumenical movement dilute the distinctive gospel witness of the church. As evangelicals borrow from other traditions, they first need to have their own house in order, secure in their distinctive identity.⁹² Evangelicals, even as they develop liturgical practice and theology, need to continue to develop their own unique theology of worship through ongoing scholarship.⁹³

Increased congregational participation

By the time of the Reformation, Christian worship moved from being a work of the people to being the work of the professionals.⁹⁴ The average congregant in this environment was put on the sidelines and could only look on as the action of worship was performed by the clergy. The performance was ultimately unintelligible, delivered in Latin, the language of the church. The Reformation addressed the marginalization of the gathered church by putting worship into the language of the common populace, and through the addition of hymnody. Hymnody was where the entire congregation had a united and performative role in preaching the gospel to one another. Today, with the professionalization of worship music through the influence of the music industry, we are finding a new professionalism marginalizing the congregation as more attention is placed on the platform. Historic liturgy brings a participatory shift back into the evangelical church.

Liturgical forms of worship acknowledge that the pastors of evangelical churches are not always consummate professionals, able to execute at the highest levels of skill.⁹⁵ The versions of church delivered via streaming and mass media set a standard of excellence that most churches are not able to deliver. Historical liturgy takes the pressure off the pastor while drawing on the resources of the whole church.

Contemporary forms of Evangelicalism have narrowed liturgy into a minimalist two-part form of music and preaching, limiting the opportunities for active participation. With the recovery of liturgical ritual there is an increasing ability to draw a wider range of people into a wider range of liturgical activity.⁹⁶ Historic liturgy gives opportunities for lay involvement in prayers, readings, actions, and art.

⁹² Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Worship: An American Mosaic*. (New York, NY: Oxford, 2012) 228.

⁹³ Ross, *Evangelical Worship*, 228.

⁹⁴ Steven D. Bruns, *Introduction to Christian Worship: Grammar, Theology & Practice* (Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry, 2019), 27.

⁹⁵ Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Public Worship* (New York NY: Abingdon, 1939), 61-65.

⁹⁶ Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Public Worship*, 61-65.

Greater participation in platform leadership models for the entire congregation messages that worship is for the people and performed by the people. Liturgical worship emphasizes that worship is a performance in nature, but that the key actor in the performance is the congregation, not the leaders.⁹⁷ Worship is a formal form of discipleship for the entire church body. Liturgical forms of worship engage the whole individual as they participate in worship, thus training the believer to participate faithfully in the Christian life outside of the church.⁹⁸ The entire Christian life is one of action and ensuring that the gathered church encourages participative action in worship is another benefit that evangelicals see in liturgy.

Ultimately seeing the benefit of maintaining rooted habits/disciplines in the scripture

Tremper Longman III looks at the created order and sees a liturgical design of fresh and abundant life in vibrant rhythm and order.⁹⁹ Days, months, and years advance with unflagging sunrises and sunsets, yet are never boring or ordinary. All nature moves in the abundant time bound routines of God's grace.¹⁰⁰ Instead of seeing ritual and liturgy as dead and dull religious duties, the evangelical church is discovering the life-giving resources in the inherited tradition. Instead of feeling trapped and restricted, the rhythms and habits of historic liturgy can be a place of freedom.¹⁰¹ A church wide reassessment of the liturgical tradition has discovered a new vitality and energy in the historic church and a theologically sound pattern to produce new worship resources.

Liturgy is no longer constrained as an exclusive domain of any particular church and has a new logic of openness and freedom. The evangelical church as a Free Church tradition no longer has any need to feel threatened by potential interference either theologically or politically when incorporating liturgical resources into worship. The freedom of the evangelical church has not always born the spiritual fruit that it desired. At times evangelical worship has been shaped too much by the whims of subjective individualism and overly creative impulses.¹⁰² The purpose of worship in the church is regular nourishment for the body of Christ. The worship of the church

⁹⁷ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*. The Church and Postmodern Culture. ed. James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: 2013), 134.

⁹⁸ Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life*, 156.

⁹⁹ Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 33.

¹⁰⁰ Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 33.

¹⁰¹ Susan J. White, *The Spirit of Worship: The Liturgical Tradition*. Traditions of Christian Spirituality, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999) 77.

¹⁰² Christopher Irvine, *The Art of God: The Making of Christians and the Meaning of Worship* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training, 2005), 120.

is meant to bring the memory of the church, the rich celebration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, into the present experience of the believer.¹⁰³

Historic liturgy has the potential to come alongside evangelical freedom through a complementary renewal of the objective work of God in worship.¹⁰⁴ God's objective work comes to us through the canon of scripture. Evangelicals take seriously the full council of God's word and give time to the objective study and preaching of the scriptures, sometimes to the neglect of other aspects of worship. Evangelicals see that scripture should be the source material for all worship, read, prayed, sung, and expressed throughout the corporate gathering of the church.¹⁰⁵ The entire worship service needs to be inundated with scriptural authority and support. Liturgy also better assists the whole church together to encounter Christ through the church year. Evangelicals have a strong sense of the cross, the resurrection, and even the incarnation as celebrated through Christmas. Historic liturgy enables a more thorough look at the gospel of Jesus through themes such as Advent, Lent, Ascension, and Pentecost. Evangelicals are discovering that the church year is another liturgical tool to ensure worship has a deep and rich sense of gospel through all of Christ's life and work.

Evangelical Liturgy with Variety and Freedom

The integration of historic liturgy into evangelical worship is still in many ways in its infancy. There is an enormous amount of material to sort through and not all of it will translate well into the evangelical tradition. The temptation is always to swing the liturgical pendulum too far toward the polarities of freedom or fixed historical forms.¹⁰⁶ Evangelicals continue to consider the scriptural implications of worship. There is no absolute prescriptive shape for Christian worship in the scriptures, neither is there any prohibition of utilizing historically established patterns. The key is to find the balance of worshiping in the context of both the received Christian tradition and the context of the contemporary local body.¹⁰⁷

Evangelicals are poised to enact a form of liturgical worship that is consistent with its ethos of immanence and as a tradition with a living vitality fueled by the urgency of mission. Worship is not the domesticated domain of a tamed and controlled sacred populace. Worship is meant to be living and active, aware of and responding to the

¹⁰³ White, *The Spirit of Worship*, 77-78.

¹⁰⁴ Irvine, *The Art of God: The Making of Christians and the Meaning of Worship*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 80.

¹⁰⁶ Leslie B. Flynn, *Worship: Together We Celebrate*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 63.

¹⁰⁷ Flynn, *Worship*, 63.

glorious living God.¹⁰⁸ As evangelicals draw on the best of the historical tradition, they will do so with freedom and at the Holy Spirit's direction.¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁸ Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come to its Senses* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Public Worship*, 71.

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