



## Finding Our Roots

A few years ago I stumbled upon a book that I recognized as a “must read” for evangelical Christians. Having been raised in a more evangelical/fundamentalist tradition, this book spoke to the longing I had for connection to the Church of the past two millennia. The church of my youth was bereft of imagery and symbol. As an adult, and an artist, I found that I was increasingly drawn to traditions that were rich in symbol. That is where this book came into play.

I happened to be at the corporate offices of InterVarsity Press, just outside of Illinois, and found myself browsing the current titles they had on display. The title *Liturgical Theology* caught my attention. The premise of the book, according to the statement on the back cover, is that “Bad worship produces bad theology and bad theology produces an unhealthy church.” The author, Dr. Simon Chan, does a masterful job of describing how so many evangelicals have confused the purpose of the church because they have an inadequate understanding of worship.

In essence, some non-liturgical traditions have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. As reformations have taken place through the ages, many aspects of worship have been watered down or cast off by those with valid concerns about corruption, improper stewardship, or theology. The Church has never been perfect because it is composed of imperfect people, but God, through the Holy Spirit, has enabled the Church to gain a deeper understanding of Him, and our relationship to Him, through corporate worship—liturgical worship.

Dr. Chan describes topics such as the importance of communion in the act of worship, and how the order of worship, set forth in the liturgy, is vitally important to the way that Christians view their relationship to God and the world. Altering that order of worship to suit our tastes can unwittingly produce huge shifts in the theological views of the common person in the pew. This comes down to things as simple as the “greeting time” that is a part of so many evangelical services. In reality, this is based on the “passing of the peace” that still exists in many more liturgical churches. The theological purposes of making peace with our brothers and sisters, because God sent His son that we might find peace with Him, is much deeper and more complex than being friendly and saying hello. We are acting out the patterns that God wants us to live in our relationships with the world.

At the time I came upon Chan’s book I was already attending an Anglo-Catholic parish in Boston. The book provided confirmation for my recent switch to this highly liturgical parish. The liturgy was filling in those elements that I had begun to sense were missing in the worship at many churches that I had visited. Many of my friends in that church had made a similar journey from evangelical folds to the more liturgical. I started suggesting the book to all my evangelical friends.

One evening, about a year later, I was at dinner with a female Episcopal priest and two Roman Catholic priests. The three clergy and the artist. When the Episcopal priest, who is really an evangelical at heart, steered the conversation to books that we should all be reading, *Liturgical Theology* was on the top of my list. It was her top choice as well, and we hadn’t ever discussed it before. Eventually, she invited Chan to speak at a conference where I was invited to be the guest artist. Chan was equally engaging in person and everyone in attendance commented on how much they gained from his talk.

I will go so far as to state that this book should be required reading for ALL evangelicals—especially pastors. While I do not think that evangelical churches need to shift to pre-Vatican II liturgy and speak in Latin, I know that the churches will be more cognizant of the way they are worshipping and how they are forming individuals in the faith through worship. If God has allowed the liturgy to exist for about two thousand years then we may want to take heed of its importance to our worship.