

## GETTING MY PEOPLE TO CHURCH ON TIME: REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORIC LITURGY, EXPERIENTIAL WORSHIP, AND "SPIRITUAL ROMANCE"

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"What hearts, what number of tongues, shall affirm that they are sufficient to render thanks to Him...that by His birth and suffering for us in the flesh, which He assumed, we might know how much God valued man, and that by that unique sacrifice we might be purified from all our sins, and that, love being shed abroad in our hearts by His Spirit, we might, having surmounted all difficulties, come into eternal rest, and the ineffable sweetness of the contemplation of Himself?"

Augustine, *City of God*, 7.31

"The secret to freedom from enslaving patterns of sin is worship. You need worship. You need great worship. You need weeping worship. You need glorious worship. You need to sense God's greatness and to be moved by it—moved to tears and moved to laughter—moved by who God is and what he has done for you. And this needs to be happening all the time."

Tim Keller

On a typical Sunday morning (pre COVID-19) only about 50 percent of our congregation is in the sanctuary when the service starts. We're up to 80 percent by the time we get to the third song, and about 90 percent have filtered in by the time we get to the announcements immediately following the worship set; the final 10 percent arrive in time for the offertory (just prior to the sermon). The tardiness is sufficiently pronounced that our ushers don't do the headcount until just before the sermon starts. I'm told by my pastoral ministry colleagues that this pattern is similar in their churches.

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Our congregation's lack of attention to punctuality has troubled me. Of course, half of our congregation consists of folks who make it to the service on time because that's the proper thing to do (enneagram 1's, 2's and 6's, no doubt). But we have just as many good, mature folks who simply don't feel especially motivated to be in the pew when the call to worship is given.

I've been asking myself why. It's not because our tardy folks are lazy or love God less. And many of them have little kids, which certainly complicates punctuality. But when you peel back all the layers, the bottom line is that many in our congregation don't feel like they are missing out on much when they arrive late to church. Truthfully, I don't care too much about punctuality. But I do care that so many people in our church seem content to miss out on our time of corporate worship.<sup>2</sup>

Now here's my general pastoral rule: if a small percentage of one's congregation is dropping the ball in some way, that's probably on them. But if half of one's congregation is missing the mark, that might be on you. So rather than chiding and chastising and exhorting our congregation about the godliness of punctuality, I've come up with three strategies that I think we need to do if we want to give our people a better reason to get to church on time: 1) improve our liturgical "flow," 2) balance our left brain "cognitive" view of discipleship with a right brain "experiential" view of discipleship, and 3) increase the "spiritual romance" in our worship leading.

These strategies are particular to my context as pastor of Calvary Memorial Church, a 100-year-old, conservative(ish) independent, non-Pentecostal, and (historically, though no longer meaningfully) dispensational congregation located in Oak Park, Illinois. An additional word of context will be helpful: this essay began as a personal reflection paper on how to improve the spiritual vitality of Calvary's worshiping life, particularly in light of our church's search for a new worship pastor—hence the regular references to Calvary throughout. The jury is out on how effective these strategies will be in shoring up our tardiness. But regardless of the fruit they will bear regarding punctuality, I'm persuaded they are the right way forward for Christian formation. We begin with the first strategy—improving our liturgical flow.

## I. IMPROVE OUR LITURGICAL FLOW

Calvary is rooted in the Bible church tradition, which is itself rooted (at least in part) in the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening (1790–1840's). In particular, the Bible churches followed the liturgical structure of the Second Great awakening revivals. The revivals were essentially "two-act" evangelistic rallies. In the first act, corporate singing was used to stir the affections of the people. The times of worship were emotive, rousing, and high impact for those attending. The aim of the singing was to get the attenders spiritually ready to hear and respond to the gospel presentation.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I am using the term "worship" as shorthand to denote the portion of the Sunday service prior to the sermon and communion—most typically involving corporate singing.

In the second act, the evangelist (typically a very gifted speaker) would preach the gospel and give the altar call.

The revivals of the Second Great Awakening took place just prior to the rise of European theological liberalism in the mid-nineteenth century. As Europe's theological liberalism crashed upon North American shores, the historical mainline traditions in North America (such as the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians) began to fracture.<sup>3</sup> In many instances, new "conservative" versions of the mainline traditions were formed. But many local congregations rejected "higher up" ecclesiastical control altogether. These congregations reorganized as independent "Bible" churches, where the focus of ecclesiastical authority was on the Bible, rather than any denominational or episcopal structure. Non-denominationalism was born.

Freedom from ecclesiastical authority also meant freedom to rethink the liturgical structure of Sunday worship. The success of the revivals during the not-so-distant Second Great Awakening offered the Bible churches what seemed to be a better liturgical model than the historical liturgies of the mainline traditions. The Second Great Awakening's emphasis on singing as preparation for preaching, and the Bible church's freedom from historically rooted liturgical structure, resulted in a reframing of the Sunday liturgy along the lines of the Second Great Awakening revivals. The Bible church liturgy, like the early nineteenth-century revivals, consisted of two main "acts"—worship songs in the first half of the service and preaching during the second. For the independent Bible churches, traditional liturgical elements such as corporate confession, prewritten prayers, weekly communion, liturgical vestments, creeds, etc., were all viewed as barnacles of a dead past, merely inauthentic ways of enabling spiritually dead (or nearly dead) congregants to shuffle along spiritually, while yet still feeling religious. Traditional liturgy was a living example of 2 Timothy 3:5; it "had the form of godliness but denied its power."

The net effect of this historical development is that the Bible church tradition left traditional liturgy far behind. This, I believe, has been a mistake. The revivals of the Second Great Awakening were genuinely moving and impacting. But I'm not convinced the "two-act" liturgy of the Second Great Awakening has been—in the long run—a liturgical success for the non-denominational Bible church. My critique is twofold.

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<sup>3</sup> The egalitarian, anti-elitist impulse of post-revolution American evangelicalism also undercut the foundations of traditional ecclesiastical structures. The American Revolution gave rise to a democratic impulse all across the religious landscape. No longer (it was asserted) did the church need learned clergy and scholars to serve their congregations in a priestly role; every person was competent to be his own man or woman before God. This egalitarian spirit helped set the stage for the subsequent rise of non-denominational churches, which rejected higher-up ecclesiastical authority, as well as the rise of "toothless" denominations that functioned as little more than voluntary associations of like-minded independent churches. For more on the democratization of American Christianity, see Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), especially pp. 9–16.

First, and perhaps most relevant to congregational punctuality, a “two-act” liturgy lacks any sense of liturgical *narrative*. In more historic liturgies, a worship service is not conceived of as a preaching event preceded by a worship pep rally (to put it crassly). Historic liturgy contains a narrative structure—from the call to worship, to the confession of sins, to the assurance of forgiveness, to the preaching of the word, to the Lord’s table, to the benediction and the sending. The entire service unfolds like the plot of a book or movie. Things happen in a particular order and build off what comes before on the way to a narrative climax at the end of the service. This liturgical narrative is important, I think, for giving people some sense of a starting point.

When we enter into a narrative (say, in a book or a movie) we make a point of beginning at the beginning. There’s a reason we don’t (cavalierly) arrive twenty minutes late to a movie, or casually start a novel in the middle of the third chapter. We make a point of getting to a movie on time (even if we have kids) because we don’t want to miss the important plot elements that are necessary for making sense of the story to come. In the same way, a historical liturgical flow tells a story that starts at the beginning of the service, climaxes toward the end of the service, and ends with a “to be continued” as the people of God are sent out on mission into the world. Arriving during the “assurance of forgiveness” after missing the confession of sins *feels* like one has arrived late.

But in the liturgical “flow” of the Second Great Awakening, there is no clear sense of beginning, and no real sense of being late. There are only two elements to the Sunday liturgy: the opening worship set, followed by the sermon. The first “act” is pretty much the same all throughout. As a consequence, it doesn’t feel like one has missed any important plot elements when one arrives late. Whether you come into the service during the first, second, or third song doesn’t really make a big difference (especially if you don’t care much for singing). You can make sense of the third song, regardless of whether you were there for the first two. It’s all just more of the same.<sup>4</sup>

As Calvary moves forward, we need to continue improving the narrative arc to our Sunday service. Over the past few years, we’ve moved away from “two-act” worship, but there is still room to deepen our liturgical narrative by including weekly communion and more frequent use of the creeds. Additionally, we can strengthen our existing liturgical arc by making more explicit the narrative sequence of our worship—a sequence that moves us from where we are at the beginning of the service, all the way to encountering Jesus at the climactic act of the drama. Everything that happens in

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<sup>4</sup> I am here perhaps being too dismissive of “two-act” revivalist worship. The worship experiences of the Second Great Awakening were enormously impacting, and everyone who has ever attended an evangelical youth conference or camp can attest to the power and authentic value of the “two-act” liturgy. My critique is not that such worship experiences are without value, but that they have been divorced from the narrative flow of a more historically grounded liturgy. As an occasional revival service, they are compelling; as a steady diet they are impoverishing.

each moment of the service should be viewed by our congregation (not just the worship team and ministry staff) as part of a logical narrative chain, where each link is necessary for understanding the preceding and following.

The second reason for moving Calvary toward a more historical liturgy is to help us tap into the theological wealth and experience of the great tradition. (My nudging toward liturgy is not merely a trick to get our folks to church on time.) The anti-liturgical liturgy of the non-denominational tradition has tended to sever non-denominational churches from their historical place within the Great Tradition. I'm against dead traditional liturgical practices as much as any other evangelical pastor; but I don't think traditional liturgical practices need to be dead. There is a wealth of theological and practical richness in the great tradition of catholic Christianity (to include Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy). This is especially true as it relates to anthropology, sexuality, soteriology, and our capacity to read and understand the Bible we evangelicals (so rightly) prioritize.

Traditional liturgy helps remind contemporary Christians that they are indeed part of the broader stream of church history—that the theological wisdom and faithful obedience of the past is *our* history. Just as we look to contemporary evangelical scholars and commentators to help us make biblical and theological sense of the world and our lives, so too we need to look to the great scholars and commentators of the past whose writings and wisdom have endured the test of time. There is no golden age of the church, no infallible past. But time has a way of winnowing the wheat from the chaff. The voices of St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Julian of Norwich, Luther, and Calvin (and beyond) are the voices we do well to listen to today. Traditional liturgy helps us avoid the hubris of thinking we have no need for the church universal, or that only the evangelical tradition has something to offer evangelical churches. It pushes back against the mistaken idea that we can go it alone with just us and our Bibles. Traditional liturgy helps us remember that we belong to a deep and mighty current—a great river that enfolds the whole world, that transcends culture, language, time, and any one particular church tradition. Liturgy helps neutralize anglo-American exceptionalism and gives us a sense of place and belonging within the “great cloud of witnesses” that surrounds the throne of Jesus.

Calvary needs to continue to prioritize and celebrate the “great tradition” of Christianity—from the patristics to the medievals to the reformers on to the present day. We need to affirm, through our liturgy, that Calvary needs more than Calvary to read the Bible wisely. Not because the *Bible* is insufficient as a text, but because we are insufficient as solo readers. We need the wise and culturally diverse voices of the past to help us read our Bible and to help us understand how to apply it wisely in today's complex world. This is why I have pushed us (gently) in a “lite” Anglican direction over the past year. Anglicanism in north America (as distinct from Episcopalianism) is thoroughly evangelical in doctrine and has a rich tradition of historically rooted liturgy. It, more so than the other Protestant traditions, reaches back into the patristic age and is the most ‘catholic’ of the Protestant traditions.

I respect the other Protestant traditions but believe that Anglicanism has the most theological depth and historical/global breadth. Calvary is not an Anglican congregation, nor am I trying to turn us into one. But insofar as I believe it is in our best interest to connect with a tradition beyond our own, I have been inviting us to take our cues from the Anglican liturgical tradition.

But as any student of history will tell you, historically rooted liturgy is not a cure-all. The death of the mainline churches in North America is proof of that, which leads to a second strategy that I think Calvary needs to embrace in order to better minister to our congregation in corporate worship: a more right-brained experiential approach to discipleship.

## II. A RIGHT-BRAIN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH TO DISCIPLESHIP

Growing up in the non-Pentecostal Bible Church tradition, my church's primary approach to discipleship was cognitive. Christian maturity was synonymous with biblical expertise (not doctrinal or theological expertise, so much, as biblical expertise).<sup>5</sup> The more likely you were to win at Bible trivia, the more likely you were to be spiritually mature. Underlining, highlighting, notes in the margins—generally, the more scribbles in your Bible, the godlier you were. There was more to Christian maturity, of course, than simply being smart about the Bible. Nevertheless, all the mature people in my church were smart about Bible. I don't recall having a category for a mature Christian who had only a mediocre understanding of the Bible. (To quote Vizzini from *The Princess Bride*: "Inconceivable!")

This cognitive view of discipleship undergirded our view of corporate singing. Congregational singing was important and useful, but useful primarily insofar as it was either a teaching device, or preparation for the sermon (or both). In the first instance, singing truths about God helped us learn about God better. Singing wasn't actually about the experience of singing, as much as it was about helping the congregation learn biblical and doctrinal truth via song (since every schoolteacher knows that things are more easily remembered when put to song). This was an essentially cognitive view of corporate worship; we sang to learn.

In the second instance, our church adopted the approach to corporate singing bequeathed to us by the Second Great Awakening. Like our Second Great Awakening heritage, we sang to "prepare our hearts for the preaching of God's Word"; it was warm-up for the sermon. The sermon, not the warm-up singing, was the main vehicle of discipleship. Thus, our singing functioned like a (at times somewhat under-inspired) pep rally prior to a

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<sup>5</sup> "Biblical expertise" is knowledge of the content of the Bible (e.g., the names of the twelve disciples, the order of the Jewish Kings, etc.). "Doctrinal expertise" is knowledge of the core teachings of the Christian faith (e.g., the deity of Christ, the omniscience of God, etc.). "Theological expertise" is the capacity to understand how biblical and doctrinal knowledge should be applied to contemporary life (e.g., addressing sexual ethics, navigating American politics, human cloning, etc.)

football game. We did it as part of our revivalist heritage and likewise out of devotion to the Bible's teaching (which told us that churches should "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"). But I don't recall that many of us viewed singing as absolutely essential to Christian discipleship; certainly not essential like the sermon was essential.

Our cognitive view of discipleship, combined with our pep rally view of singing, subtly caused us (or at least me) to view corporate singing as both "emotional" and "unnecessary." It was "emotional" insofar as the main point of singing was to prepare us emotionally for the preaching. And it was "unnecessary" in that the main point of the service was the sermon. You really only needed to sing if you needed preparation. If you weren't much given to emotions or pep rallies, or if the worship wasn't very inspiring, then you could just as easily take it or leave it. Subtly (and ironically) emotional pep rally worship—when paired with a cognitive view of discipleship—communicated that emotions were not really a necessary part of Christian maturity. To put it crassly (and perhaps a bit ungenerously), emotions and singing were milk for the immature who still needed a bit of help preparing for the meat of the sermon.

But the mistake in all of this was the idea that Christian maturity is synonymous with Bible knowledge (or doctrinal or theological knowledge).<sup>6</sup> But this is only half the story. Jesus told us that we must love God with all of our minds, *and* all of our hearts.<sup>7</sup> Authentic Christianity involves both a cognitive knowledge *about* Christ, as well as an experiential knowledge *of* Christ. The New Testament's use of marriage as a metaphor for our relationship with Jesus is instructive here (Ephesians 5:21–32, etc.). Christianity includes both cognitive and experiential knowledge of Jesus, just as a healthy marriage includes both cognitive and experiential knowledge of one's spouse. On the cognitive side, a robust marriage involves knowing basic facts about one's spouse—their name, their family history, their hobbies, their likes and dislikes, etc. Spending the night with a person about

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<sup>6</sup> This is James K. A. Smith's argument in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009). Smith's target is Protestant Christianity, which he claims has been unduly influenced by an intellectual (disembodied) anthropology that can be traced from Plato to Descartes, to Kant, to the present. According to Smith, Protestant Christianity has been too influenced by a rationalist, cognitive anthropology, that has made the Protestant worship service a "heady affair fixated on 'messages' that disseminate Christian ideas and abstract values (easily summarized by PowerPoint slides). The result is a talking-head version of Christianity that is fixated on doctrine and ideas..." *Desiring the Kingdom*, 42. Smith goes on to argue that what we love is more basic to who we are as human beings than what we know. This is a false alternative, in my mind. But I believe Smith is right to critique the lopsidedness of cognitive discipleship.

<sup>7</sup> Were this a paper on discipleship, I would include "strength" as a third major category of discipleship (following the Great Commandment's call to love God with heart, mind, and strength). A focus on "strength" corresponds to spiritual pragmatism—to actions and doing. We are to act out the Christian life, not just believe it and love it. But I leave spiritual pragmatism aside here because our focus is on the worship service. It seems to me that the function of liturgy is to strengthen the *heart* and *mind*, so that we are better prepared for *action* as we are sent out on mission. The worship service is not a moment of Christian pragmatism but rather enables it.

whom you know nothing (not even his or her name) is called a one-night stand, not a marriage; you might have loved the experience, but you can't say you're in love with the person. On the other hand, a marriage involves more than simply knowing facts about one's spouse. A loving husband and wife want to do more than know information about each other. They want to *experience* each other. They want to embrace, to touch, to stare into each other's eyes. They want to feel something *about* each other that corresponds to the feeling they have *of* each other. They desire a union of their persons mediated through the union of their bodies—what John Paul II insightfully refers to as the “gift of self.”<sup>8</sup>

In the same way, cognitive knowledge *about* God, and experiential knowledge *of* God, are meant to work together toward the common goal of *loving* God.<sup>9</sup> Some of us are more naturally emotive, and we are wired to connect with God through our hearts. And others of us are more naturally cognitive and are more wired to connect with God through our minds. Both are needed, regardless of our natural wiring. Experiential knowledge of God without a cognitive knowledge of God, is like a body without a skeleton—all mushy and unstable. But a cognitive knowledge of God without an experiential knowledge of God is like a skeleton with no body—all rigid and lifeless. A robust view of Christian discipleship requires both. Likewise, a congregation needs both. Too many churches settle for one emphasis or the other. A worship service that prioritizes cognitive preaching as the primary event of the morning impoverishes those in the congregation who are wired up to connect with God via experiential means. Likewise, a worship service that exclusively focuses on experience will impoverish those in the congregation who are wired up to connect with God through cognitive means. And regardless of our proclivity, we all need both.<sup>10</sup> Generally, when a church impoverishes a portion of its congregation, those so impoverished tend to find their way to other churches that more

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Male and Female He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 300.

<sup>9</sup> I suppose if one had to choose between cognition and experience, my money would be on experience. St Irenaeus writes, “It is therefore better. . . that one should have no knowledge whatever of any one reason why a single thing in creation has been made, but should believe in God, and continue in His love, than that, puffed up through knowledge. . . he should fall away from that love which is the life of man,” *Against Heresies*, 2.26.1. And as St. Paul reminds the Corinthians (and us) in 1 Cor 8:2–3, cognitive knowledge can get in the way of love. “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”

<sup>10</sup> Christian psychologist Curt Thompson argues that an integrated brain is essential to spiritual maturity. As Thompson (and all of neuroscience) shows, the left hemisphere of the brain enables logical thought, cognition, and the ability to process abstract ideas; the right hemisphere of the brain enables us to respond intuitively, emotionally, and experientially. The left hemisphere enables us to know about a person; the right hemisphere enables us to fall in love with that person. Human beings thrive when we live integrated lives—with both hemispheres of the brain working together to help us navigate the world. For more on the right brain/left brain connection, see Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices that Can Transform Your Life* (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale, 2010).



naturally “speak their language,” until eventually a congregation becomes mono-chromatic in its approach to discipleship.

Like most churches in the Bible church tradition, Calvary has operated over (at least) the last decade with a primarily cognitive view of discipleship; we do not fluently speak the language of experience. This is not to say that we have entirely discounted experience. But we have certainly subordinated experience to learning about the Bible and doctrine (and theology). I am aware of many people who attend Calvary because of the preaching. But I’m not aware of anyone who attends Calvary because of the corporate worship/singing. Again, not that our worship is always sub-par. Occasionally it is moving. But *experiencing* God is not the focus of our Sunday service, nor even the primary focus of our corporate singing. The long-term effect of this lopsidedness is that we have gradually become a congregation full of people who approach God primarily through cognition. “Experiential” Christians have mostly wandered to other congregations. This is not necessarily because they are immature in their faith, but rather because we have not offered them an experiential way to connect with God that is authentic to who they are.

Developing an experiential view of discipleship in our corporate worship will involve at least two moves. First, we will need to put as much effort/resources into our corporate singing as we do into our corporate preaching. Our elder priorities, staffing priorities, budget, resource allocation, and volunteer energy all need to reflect a view of discipleship that respects experience as much as cognition.

Second, we need a worship pastor who embodies (who lives and breathes) an experiential view of discipleship. I am what I am as a preacher, because I am what I am as a person; I can flex a bit to one side or the other, but I can’t be something I’m not. The same is true for a worship pastor. We need a worship pastor whose primary approach to discipleship is experiential, even while they genuinely appreciate the cognitive/mind emphasis brought through the sermons. Our preaching is primarily cognitive. I make no apologies there. I believe preaching *should* be primarily cognitive.<sup>11</sup> But when the preaching leadership is primarily cognitive, the worship leadership should be primarily experiential. The combination of experiential worship and cognitive preaching helps provide a well-rounded approach to discipleship.

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<sup>11</sup> I think the leading category for preaching should be cognitive. One might think this goes without saying, but not all preaching is cognitive. In the same way that cognitive churches reduce singing to a cognitive moment, experiential churches reduce preaching to an experiential moment. In both instances, the strength of the other side is lost. It seems to me there are three main types of preaching: cognitive, experiential, and pragmatic. In experiential preaching, the preacher is so full of energy and charisma that the event of preaching is just that—an event. People attend the service to experience the preaching, not necessarily to learn from it. In pragmatic preaching, the preacher does not teach the Bible or doctrine or theology, so much as he provides practical advice on how to live into a particular way of life. Very often it seems that a preacher will be strong in two categories, but not all three. A megachurch where I pastored had experiential worship and experiential/pragmatic preaching.

But I anticipate a counter. Suppose (you might say) that rather what's needed is an equal measure of both cognition and experience in both worship and preaching. Instead of putting all the experiential eggs in the singing basket and all the cognitive eggs in the preaching basket, why not do an equal mix in both? My rejoinder is twofold: First, certainly there should be a mix of both experience and cognition in both singing and preaching. A purely non-cognitive song would be...well, humming. And a purely cognitive sermon would be completely inaccessible. I am not arguing for a complete bifurcation but rather an appropriate distribution of emphasis, given the aim of each liturgical moment. Singing should lean strongly toward experience, rather than cognition, while yet honoring cognition. And preaching should lean strongly toward cognition while yet honoring the importance of experience. Perhaps a two-thirds versus one-third split is the best division, respectively. Second, studies have shown that too much experiential emphasis in public speaking actually diminishes the listener's capacity to follow the content of the speech. A study conducted by Cambridge University professor Jochen Menges demonstrated that strongly charismatic speakers, while stirring up strong inward emotions in their listeners, at the same time, tend to cause their listeners to suppress the outward show of those emotions. This emotional suppression "absorbs mental resources, deteriorates cognitive performance, and impairs memory."<sup>12</sup> Menges goes on to point out that the listeners of charismatic speakers, while *feeling* they have deeply absorbed the content of the speech, actually score lower on post-speech comprehension testing, than do the audiences of less charismatic speakers.<sup>13</sup> The point of all of this is that too much "experience" and charisma in a sermon actually works against the aim of the sermon, which is to communicate the cognitive information necessary for loving God. In the same way, too much cognition in a song works against the aim of the song, which is to help the singer emotionally encounter Jesus. Both cognition and experience are needed, but each has its appropriate liturgical place.

Which leads to my third strategy. In order to foster and nurture a more well-rounded "experiential" approach to discipleship, we will need to increase the "spiritual romance" factor in our corporate worship.

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<sup>12</sup> Jochen I. Menges, Martin Kilduff, Sarah Kern, and Heike Bruch, "The awestruck effect: Followers suppress emotion expression in response to charismatic but not individually considerate leadership," in *The Leadership Quarterly* 26 (2015), 627–41. See also Gross, J.J. "Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences" in *Psychophysiology* 39 (2002), 281–291.

<sup>13</sup> See Menges' TED talk, "Awestruck: Surprising Facts about Why We Fall for Charismatic Leaders", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpCnR7BOS0I>, accessed on May 13, 2020.

## III. INCREASE THE "SPIRITUAL ROMANCE" IN OUR WORSHIP LEADING

Growing up in the Bible church tradition, I recall our times of corporate worship being fine, but not inspiring. The first church where I pastored was much the same. But then I took a job at a large church in the Chicago suburbs. The church had less of a cognitive view of discipleship and more of an experiential view. Even the preaching was primarily experiential. This translated into how the worship service was conducted. The singing was passionate and expressive, and the worship was much more central to the Sunday service. Initially, I loved the worship. It was a welcome and life-giving change from the half-hearted pep rally approach to worship to which I had been accustomed; this was full-throated pep rally worship! But after a while I began to feel like I couldn't keep up with the energy of the worship service. The young worship leader would begin the service by enthusiastically telling us he was "so excited" to be with us; how he was "so pumped up and ready to worship!"; how he was "so on fire and ready to praise the Lord!" and how he hoped we were too. We cheered to assure him of our readiness to worship. All this said over the thumping drums and driving guitar.

There was a lot of energy. But I eventually arrived at a season in my life when I couldn't match it. Looking back, it's hard to know exactly why. No doubt some of it was personal. No doubt some of it was because I was getting older. But I also think I began to feel somewhat spiritually manipulated. I recall speaking with a friend who served on the worship staff. He told me that the stated goal of the worship team each Sunday was to "get the congregation to a place where everyone had their hands raised, eyes closed, and brow furrowed." That seemed about right, from my experience. As though the goal for every service was to get each congregant to a place of spiritual ecstasy. I don't believe the worship pastor had ill motives or manipulative intentions. Just a lot of youthful energy and passion. But all the same, the more I felt like I was expected to generate feelings of excitement and spiritual intensity, the more I felt myself closing down.

Eventually I transitioned out of the church and ended up at Calvary—back into the Bible church tradition. After ten years in a megachurch, it was a relief to step away from the expectations of the megachurch worship culture. But then fast forward ten years to the present. I find myself again longing for a meaningful connection with God during worship. The Bible church tradition is historically weak on experience; the megachurch tradition overdoses on it. How does one stay in the center of the road, without falling into the ditch on either side?

It strikes me that a helpful way forward is to consider the New Testament's typological connection between earthly marriage and heavenly marriage.<sup>14</sup> Understanding the connection helps provide a framework for

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<sup>14</sup> This typological reading of marriage is as old as the Church. We see it in Ephesians 5:21–32; it is carried forward from there on into the Christian tradition. See 2 *Clement* 14:2; Augustine, *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, I.60; Thomas, *Summa* III.42.1; Calvin,

bringing together both head and heart in a sustainable way. My thesis in this final section, is that what romance is to sex, worship is to communion/union. I begin with a lengthy (but I think relevant) primer on romance and sex. Bear with me.

#### A. A PRIMER ON ROMANCE AND SEX

At a basic level, romance is a tool of persuasion wielded by the prospective lover to secure the sort of communion enjoyed only by lovers. But not just any kind of intimacy calls for the use of romance. Romance is deployed in pursuit of a *particular* kind of intimacy, namely sexual intimacy. Stated plainly: the *telos* of romance is the bedroom. Yet romance is not merely a means to an end. Indeed, romance is the very beginning of love making. This is why Jane Austen refers to Mr. Darcy's romantic advances toward Elizabeth as "making love" to her. Darcy's romantic advances are ultimately spousal-sexual and are of one piece with "love making" as we understand it today (i.e., sex). In the same way that holding a fine wine in your mouth in order to savor its taste is both a means of consuming the wine and part of the actual experience of consuming it, so too romance is both a means to love making and part of the love making of which it is the means.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, love making is not without its risks, hence the need for romance. Even in healthy relationships, the depth of vulnerability required for sexual intimacy sometimes outstrips the depth of trust a woman has (at any given moment) in the relationship. This is especially true in the early stages of a relationship/courtship. A woman may be sexually attracted to a man, but she might nonetheless suppress this attraction because of the risks involved in sexual intimacy (e.g., emotional risks, physical risks, procreative

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commenting on Ephesians 5:23, states, "Christ has appointed the same relation to exist between a husband and a wife, as between himself and his church," *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 317–18. So too Luther, while denying that types are inherently sacramental, still affirms, "Christ and the church are . . . a great and secret thing which can and ought to be represented in terms of marriage as a kind of outward allegory," *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhauser (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 223. Jonathan Edwards states explicitly, "[Christ is] united to you by a spiritual union, so close as to be fitly represented by the union of the wife to the husband," "The Excellency of Christ, 1758," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 186. Many modern evangelical commentators embrace this typological interpretation as well. For particular attention to the connection between sexual romance and spiritual desire, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 77; Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984) and *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, ed. Alice M. Hadfield (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); also C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 131–60.

<sup>15</sup> Sex should not be compartmentalized into a sequence of steps that culminate in intercourse, where only the last and final moment of intercourse constitutes sex. Intercourse is the consummation of sex, not the sum total of sex. See my "What Would St. Paul Say about 'Making Out?'" in *Venus and Virtue: Celebrating Sex and Seeking Sanctification* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 106–20.

risks, etc.). Romance is a strategy (ideally of love) deployed by the man to overcome a woman's natural inhibitions.

Romance works in two directions. First romance seeks to elevate a woman's sexual arousal to the point that her motivations for sexual intimacy exceed her natural inhibitions. Second, romance simultaneously seeks to lower the woman's inhibitions by alleviating her fears about any possible negative consequences of sex. Romance is a man's way of communicating relational care, gentleness, genuine concern for a woman's well-being, and of assuring her that she will be safe and taken care of. Romance is a way of saying (through words, gestures and gifts), "You are delightful to me in every way. You can trust me. If you let me in to the most intimate part of yourself, I will affirm you and bring you a unique and powerful blessing. I am here for you today, and I will be here for you tomorrow—whatever comes."<sup>16</sup>

As noted, there is a natural domain in which romance does its best work—namely early in the relationship. There is a legitimate and life-long need for romance in all healthy spousal relationships. But romance is especially useful in the courtship phase of a relationship. This is when feminine inhibitions are most robust and when male assurances are most needed. When two people first meet, they have no shared experience on which to base a relationship; the woman has nothing more than a hunch on which to judge the trustworthiness of the man. Assuming a relationship is desired by both the man and the woman, the initial attraction is mostly limited to sexual attraction. Romance taps into this attraction and amplifies it with a view to creating a sense of relational (even if somewhat superficial) security.

But the heightening effect of romance is not (and was never intended by God to be) limitless. In a healthy marital relationship, the need (and capacity) for intense romance gradually lessens with time; not because the couple is less in love, but because the sexual intensity of the relationship naturally lessens with age. And while the sexual intensity is decreasing to a "normative" state, at the same time a healthy relationship gradually develops deeper avenues of bonding—i.e., having children, enduring and overcoming trials together, sharing joyful experiences, etc. This is not to say that romance completely dies in a healthy marriage. But romance's original ability to heighten sexual tension cannot be sustained throughout the normal life span of a marriage, precisely because sexual tension naturally decreases. I still love holding my wife's hand; but the electric feeling of sexual tension that I felt the first time I held her hand can no longer be replicated, no matter how much romance I pour on. To expect that it can be, or should be, would inevitably lead to disillusionment. Romance at twenty years cannot

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<sup>16</sup> The aim of a man's romantic overtures are often, but need not be, manipulative. In the purest instance, a man's desire to be sexually intimate with his beloved is not motivated by selfish interests at the expense of the woman but are motivated by a genuine and "self-giving" love that desires to bring a blessing to the woman. Analogously, Jesus desires to know his church in the full depth of the "one-spirit" relationship (Eph 5:30–32; 1 Cor 6:15–17). This pure and loving desire motivates his spiritual "wooing" of the Church into a posture of relational and spiritual intimacy; if the motivation is love, the wooing (spiritual or sexual) is not manipulative.

be expected to produce the same mind-numbing, tongue-tying, soul-lifting, heart-racing, giddy experiences that it did in the early days of courtship.

The inevitable diminishment of sexual intensity is a reality that our broader culture has not easily learned (nor any culture, really). The overwhelming majority of our culture's music focuses on male/female relationships. And the overwhelming majority of this music focuses on the courtship phase of the relationship, when sexual intensity is at its peak. Listening to our culture's music, one gets the impression that the most significant part of a male/female relationship is its amount of sexual tension. The more sexual tension, the more love. However true this might be early on in a relationship, a relationship's ability to sustain the original level of sexual tension is not an accurate indicator of its health. There is more to marital love than sexual intensity.<sup>17</sup>

This is not a critique of romance or our culture's valorization of new love. There is a genuine beauty to romantic love and sexual desire, and we are right to celebrate it (despite what Origen and much of the Christian-Platonic tradition has said). But we have been wrong to normalize a high degree of sexual intensity as the fixed state of true love. Invariably, sexual intensity must subside and give way to deeper expressions of love. Lovers who fixate on sexual intensity as the *sine qua non* of true love are doomed to be disappointed. Those beguiled by the lie of eroticism's intense perpetuity invariably begin to grow weary of their (now no longer intensely) sexual relationship. Insofar as sexual intensity is most potent in new love, starting over with someone new seemingly provides the best solution to the diminishment of "true love." But this only gets one so far. The Quixotic quest for an intense sexual experience only repeats itself in an endless shuffling of lovers until one is like Sophocles, the old and spent Greek playwright who was "only too glad to be free of all that."<sup>18</sup>

Now, to again quote Plato, "Our story is ended; let us put it to use."

## B. WORSHIP AS ROMANCE

Here's the first half of my thesis on the connection between romance and worship: what romance is to sexual union, singing is to spiritual union. Just as the primary aim of romance is to heighten sexual desire and lower inhibitions on the way to the sexual union of marriage, so too the primary aim of singing is to heighten spiritual affections and lower inhibitions on the way to spiritual union with Christ. Jonathan Edwards, that seventeenth-century pastor theologian, captures this idea when he writes, "And the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned, why we

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis helpfully distinguishes between Eros (i.e., romantic love) and Venus (i.e., sexual love), which is a subset of Eros. Eros desires the beloved, while Venus desires sex. It is possible for romantic love to flourish even while sexual love diminishes. See his *The Four Loves*, 131–60.

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Book 1, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornfield (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968).

should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.”<sup>19</sup> According to Edwards, we sing in church in order to excite and elevate our spiritual passions. Singing is a form of spiritual romance insofar as it heightens our spiritual passions and lowers our innate inhibitions.

Edwards’ perspective on singing is in keeping with Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18–19 about the function of singing in corporate worship. Paul encourages believers to “address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Most interestingly, Paul’s comments about singing are set in contrast with drunkenness. “Do not get drunk on wine,” Paul tells us at the start of verse 18, but instead “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” For Paul, singing is the outward expression of being filled with the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> His logic seems to run thus: “Don’t get intoxicated on wine; instead get intoxicated by the Spirit. The intoxication of wine leads to debauchery; the intoxication of the Spirit leads to heartfelt rejoicing.” The expression “drunk with love” is not for nothing.<sup>21</sup> Romantic love, like alcohol, lowers inhibitions, makes us do crazy things, and reduces our cognitive capacities.<sup>22</sup> There are no doubt times when being drunk with love is just as dangerous as being drunk with wine. But generally, we don’t critique the intoxicating effect of love. We see it as beautiful that sexual love motivates us toward acts of charity, kindness, and self-giving, and that, at its peak, it transcends cognitive thought.<sup>23</sup> In

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, I.II.9, as quoted in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol 2, Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 115.

<sup>20</sup> Paul uses the participle *λαλοῦντες* (‘addressing’) in verse 18, which helps us understand that singing is the outworking/expression/embodiment of being filled with the Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> It turns out there is quite a bit of scientific overlap between the effect of alcohol and the effect of sexual love. See Ian J. Mitchell, Steven M. Gillespie, and Ahmad Abu-Akel, “Similar effects of intranasal oxytocin administration and acute alcohol consumption on socio-cognitions, emotions and behaviour: Implications for the mechanisms of action,” in *Neuroscience & Behavior Reviews*, vol. 55, Aug 2015, 98–106. The main point of the research is that both romantic love and alcohol raise a person’s level of oxytocin, which suppresses cognition, lowers anxiety and fear, and enhances feelings of empathy and trust. All the sorts of things that heartfelt singing does in corporate worship.

<sup>22</sup> “Can you think of a greater or keener pleasure than sexual pleasure?” [asked Socrates]; “I can’t—or a madder one either [Glaucón replied].” Plato, *Republic*, 3.403.

<sup>23</sup> Psychologist Donald Mosher notes that deep sexual arousal involves a trance-like condition and an altered state of consciousness; capacity to remain in touch with the “real world” fades into the background as sexual intensity increases. See his, “Three Dimensions of Depth of Involvement in Human Sexual Response,” in *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 16, no. 1, Feb. 1980, 1–42. In the same vein as Mosher, Wheaton College psychologist William Struthers points out that during orgasm, the amygdala (the primary fear center of the brain) shuts down, giving the woman a sense of safety, and the man a sense of invincibility. See his *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 98. The ancient Stoics and Platonists (and many early Christian theologians) were against sexual arousal for precisely all these reasons. For the ancient Greek philosophers, sexual desire was suspect because it impaired cognition and sound thinking. I’ve heard the same argument used against churches whose worship is “too emotional”.

the same way (and keeping with our metaphor), corporate Spirit-filled singing motivates us to acts of charity, kindness, and the offering of ourselves to Jesus, and, at its peak, transcends cognitive thought. We sing from the heart, not primarily the head.

This need not mean that singing/worship is merely a warm-up to something beyond it (i.e., the sermon). In the same way that romance is both a means to making love and part of the love making of which it is the means, so too worship is both a means to union with Christ and itself part of that union. Singing is not merely a pep rally on the way to the real thing. Corporate singing is itself a part of the real thing, because it is in singing that we experience God in unique and powerful ways. C. S. Lewis insightfully remarks, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."<sup>24</sup> Jesus wants his people not only to know about him; he wants his people to be one with him. Singing (when done with sincerity and from the heart) is a chief way of enacting our union with him.<sup>25</sup>

In this framework, the worship leader is a priestly romancer, rather than a singing catechizer. Ultimately, the worship leader stands before the people of Christ as a representative of Christ and spiritually romances the congregation to Christ. The worship leader conveys the love and care, the gentle kindness and regard, that Christ has for his people. Through the leadership, presence, and ministry of the worship leader, Christ lowers the inhibitions that stand in the way of true communion between him and his beloved and invites his people into a reaffirmation and re-consummation of their covenantal/baptismal vows.

Likewise, just as the worship leader represents Jesus to the congregation, so too the worship leader stands with the congregation, representing the congregation to Jesus. The worship leader invites the congregation to lovingly respond to Jesus' love, and *embodies* for the people, and on behalf of the people, this loving response. This is done with sensitivity to the needs of the congregation and in step with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the worship leader is bringing together the spirit of the congregation with the Spirit of Jesus.

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Depending on one's sacramental commitments, it might be more appropriate to say that communion is the ultimate way of enacting our union with Jesus. From a "real presence" sacramental perspective, both singing and preaching would be penultimate means of ushering the congregation in to the worship of Jesus at the table, which is itself the final consummating moment of the worship service. This approach to communion need not cause us to view singing and preaching as mere "warm-ups" for the table; rather both singing and worship are part of the sacramental union that is consummated at the table (just as savoring wine is part of consuming it). The "real presence" sacramental encounter is consummated at the table but begins with the call to worship. Churches that do not sacramentalize the sacraments will invariably sacramentalize something—either the preaching or the singing, or both. In such cases, I believe it is best to sacramentalize the preaching and singing equally, insofar as both are mutually necessary means by which one mystically and spiritually encounters the presence of Jesus.



Spiritually romancing the congregation on behalf of Jesus and embodying the congregational response back to Jesus does not mean that the worship leader has to be especially musically talented or good looking or charismatic. Sticking with our metaphor, genuine sexual romance does not require a man to be good-looking, smooth, and sophisticated (though admittedly, this doesn't hurt). It requires him to be genuine, humble, free in his ability to express love, truly sensitive, attentive to the needs of the beloved, and appropriately self-assured. In short, romance "works" when it freely expresses genuine love. In the same way, spiritual romance "works" when it sincerely and truly expresses the genuine love that Jesus has for his people and enables Jesus' people to respond freely in kind.

At present, Calvary is not strong in this kind of leadership. We already have plenty of cognition in the sermon. We need worship leaders who are able to "romance" the congregation into communion/union with Jesus. We need worship leaders who have a genuine, deep love for Jesus and likewise a genuine, deep love for our congregation, and who are able to romance us to Jesus.

### C. THE LIMITS OF SPIRITUAL ROMANCE

But the use of romance as a metaphor is a sword that cuts both ways. So, here's the second half of my thesis on spiritual romance: the same sort of natural progression that we see in a healthy marriage likewise happens in our spiritual marriage to Christ. Just as healthy spousal relationships mature beyond the need for intense sexual romance, so too the Christian's healthy relationship with Christ matures beyond the need for intense spiritual romance. The early days of conversion are often white hot and intense. The whole world is awash in new colors never noticed before. Sins drop from us like our souls are made of spiritual Teflon. We can't get enough of the Bible, and every worship service is a deep and profound encounter with Jesus. But then we make the same mistake our culture makes about sexual love. We suppose that this white-hot intensity is the norm. We suppose that we will always feel like this; that our spiritual life will always be so effortless. But such is not the case, as any mature Christian will tell you. The life of the Christian is a journey that moves from conversion to maturity. And over the course of this journey our need for spiritual intensity decreases as we learn to walk in faithful obedience.<sup>26</sup> Like in a healthy marriage, our moments of communion with Christ become less intense but more satisfying.

Churches that fail to recognize the natural life progression of the Christian run the risk of turning the spiritual intensity of conversion into

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<sup>26</sup> On this point, I have been much influenced by the "peaks and troughs" metaphor that C. S. Lewis uses in his *Screwtape Letters*. According to evil Uncle Screwtape, God withdraws his hand (like a wise parent) so as to teach his children to walk. Only in troughs do we really learn what true faith is. "Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys." C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 40.

the norm for all Christians (such was the case in Corinth). In the same way that our culture has mistakenly viewed sexual intensity as the ultimate sign of relational “connectedness,” so too have many churches mistakenly viewed spiritual intensity as the true sign of spiritual “connectedness.” Having bought into this mistake, many worship leaders attempt to use spiritual romance as a means of propping up (what they perceive to be flagging) spiritual intensity. Anything less than spiritual intensity becomes an ominous warning sign that we are slipping away from our “first love.” Quick! Grab the matches! We must stoke the coals, relight the fire, and reclaim our conversional passion! And so the worship leader spends more and more effort trying to recapture a spiritual intensity that is only realistically felt at conversion. This invariably ends up feeling manipulative and tiring (for both the worship leader and the congregation), regardless of how sincere the leaders’ intentions.

The *via media* in all of this is to hold together the legitimate place of spiritual romance, without making spiritual intensity the norm for all Christians. Spiritual romance is for all seasons of life; spiritual intensity is not. A church should have a worshiping life that appropriately reflects its maturity, while leaving room for the energy and passion of those in the congregation who are younger in the faith. A church of established believers should not expect to worship in the same way as a congregation of new converts. But neither should a church conduct its liturgy in such a way that new converts feel under- or un-inspired.

Both newer and more mature Christians have much to learn from each other. Returning to the marriage analogy...newly married couples enjoy being around older couples because they see in the older couple a model of marital maturity; and older couples enjoy being around newly married couples because they see in the young couple’s love a reminder of the beauty of their own marital love and romance. Both benefit from the presence and life stage of the other. In the same way, a healthy church should span the ages. A younger church will have lots of romance and less wisdom, while an older congregation will have lots of wisdom and less romance. Wisdom without zeal eventually (and quite literally) dies; zeal without wisdom eventually dissipates and is misspent. When both youth and maturity are present in the same congregation, each supplies what the other needs and lacks. These mutually edifying perspectives have application to the worship service.

As an older, more seasoned believer, I love to worship with young people who are worshiping with energy and zeal (just as long as I’m not expected to feel everything they are feeling as intensely and effortlessly as they are feeling it and then judged when I don’t!). Their zeal helps to activate my own zeal, which would otherwise be inclined to lie dormant. In the same way, I hope that my depth of life experience and spiritual maturity can help serve as a ballast and guide for those younger in the faith, so that their life of zealous worship stays grounded in the truth of God.

## IV. CONCLUSION

There is more to congregational health than punctuality. My heart in all of this is not to make sure that our people merely attend church on time. My heart is that our congregation would see a value in corporate worship because we have indeed made our time of corporate worship valuable. My prayer is that we would be strengthened by the depth of resources available in the Christian tradition and that Calvary would effectively minister to every type of Christian disciple—to both the head and the heart—in a way that would inspire lives of missional strength. A more historic liturgy connects Calvary to the time-tested wisdom and guidance of the church catholic, and a more balanced view of discipleship (to include an experiential view) helps us minister beyond our present cognitive focus. And a romantic view of worship will help raise our spiritual passions and lower the inhibitions that stand in the way of our full surrender and union with Christ.

I am aware that my above vision for worship is not typical. Most traditional liturgical churches do not have a “romantic” approach to corporate singing. And most churches that prioritize the sermon tend to approach corporate singing as a warm-up to the sermon or as a singing catechism. Likewise, most “romantic experiential” churches tend to view (and then reject) both liturgy and cognitive sermons as spiritual libido killers. But all of these divisions are unnecessary. And unbiblical. The fullness of Christian growth takes place in congregations that bring together the time-tested wisdom of the Church’s liturgy, the cognitive truth of God, and a spiritual/romantic experience of the Spirit of Jesus that “frees us from enslaving patterns of sin” and ushers the congregation into “the ineffable sweetness” of the contemplation of God.