

A TALE OF TWO CALENDARS: CALENDARS,
COMPASSION, LITURGICAL FORMATION,
AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT

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The end-time judgment described by Jesus in Matthew 25 is at once memorable, troubling, and full of surprises. Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of the scene is the confusion of the righteous at the bestowal of their inheritance of the kingdom on account of their acts of compassion to the hungry, thirsty, alien, naked, sick, and imprisoned. The King identifies himself with “these brothers of mine, even the least” (v. 40), with the result that feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty is a doing unto the King. But the righteous are surprised at this. When Jesus tells them of their service to him, they ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink?” (v. 37). The righteous invite Jesus into their presence without even knowing it.

Coming to this point in the text, Martin Luther asked a crucial question: “How does it happen that the righteous do not recognize and know that they have done their works unto Christ?” According to Luther, the righteous evidently considered caring for the needy “as a matter altogether of too small significance to be so precious in the sight of God.”¹ But then why do it? Clearly, as their surprise at the King’s reason for bestowing their inheritance proves, they are not compassionate in the hopes of impressing God and currying his favor. Their compassion (like all true compassion) is less calculating and deliberate than that. The righteous “unconsciously serve Christ.”² We need not think that such service is a wholly unintentional accident (the righteous certainly intend to care for the needy). It is not a mere physiological reflex that responds unthinkingly to stimuli. Nevertheless, we might be justified in calling their service reflexive in another sense: their service is a kind of spiritual (i.e., Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered) reflex, a holy instinct that leans lovingly and wisely into areas of need. Authentic and mature compassion that meets others’ needs and serves Christ himself is like a virtuosic violin player who, we might say, quite intentionally improvises: she intentionally

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¹ Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity, Matthew 25:31–46,” in *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. J. N. Lenker (trans. J. N. Lenker et al.; Minneapolis: Luther Press, 1909; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 8:393.

² D. A. Carson, *Matthew 13–28* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 522.

makes beautifully meaningful music but *precisely because* she is not (thank God!) deliberately thinking through each successive note. Her playing is beautiful and virtuosic because it is “second nature” to her—she “plays without thinking” (though of course she has not gotten there without a great deal of “thinking” and practice). In the same way, it seems that a life of compassion poured out to meet the needs of the helpless is second nature to the righteous brothers and sisters of Matthew 25.

Bringing honor to Jesus and loving our neighbors in a way that is instinctual and reflexive, doing so less by conscious deliberation and more by “second nature,” as it were—this should be a central desire and prayer for all Christians and for the Christian church. In light of such a desire and prayer, a crucial set of questions arises: Whence comes this “second nature”? How might we pursue it? What obstacles, if any, stand in the way of our living into it? As I hope to show in what follows, these are questions that are best answered with attentiveness to the realities of cultural formation and liturgical practice. Drawing upon and interacting with the thought of James K. A. Smith (whose *Cultural Liturgies* project, in particular, has proven to be for me a major source of insight and challenge in these matters³), I would like to consider the role that the church’s liturgical practice might play in helping us become a people with compassionate and Christ-honoring reflexes and instincts. Specifically, I want to zero in on what might be one of the more foreign elements of the church’s liturgical practice—namely, observance of the church calendar⁴—and in so doing also offer something of an argument for the intentional appropriation of this aspect of liturgical practice in our local churches.

I. THE CHURCH CALENDAR

Since the calendar of the Christian church is likely a bit alien in many wings of evangelicalism, it will be helpful to map out its basic shape and rhythm.⁵ The church calendar is a rhythmic pattern of celebrations

³ Two of three planned volumes have been published: *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

⁴ At least, the church calendar is more foreign to (and even looked at somewhat askance in) the low (and independent) church tradition out of which I come. However, interest in the liturgical calendar within evangelicalism (particularly in churches within the Reformed tradition) has increased in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. See, e.g., Horace T. Allen Jr., “Calendar and Lectionary in Reformed Perspective and History,” in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. L. Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): 390–414. Smith has devoted some space to “exegeting” the liturgical calendar in *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155–59.

⁵ The structure and content of this (and the following) section has been greatly informed by Michael Linton’s essay “Happy New Liturgical Year!” *First Things*, December 3, 2008, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2008/12/happy-new-liturgical-year> [last accessed December 8, 2015]. For discussion of the complex historical development of the church calendar, see Allen, “Calendar and Lectionary,” 392–403; and, with a view to Orthodox practice, Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (trans. A. Moorehouse; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996). Allen notes that development of the liturgical calendar is “a process that is ongoing.” Indeed, “In principle,

(feasts) and seasons. What probably first comes to mind for most at the mention of the church calendar are celebratory days (or feast days) and observances. The most obvious and climactic are Christmas and Easter (and the days of Passion Week). A little less well known are Ascension Day and Pentecost. Additional feast days of note include Epiphany in early January, Transfiguration Day about a month later, Ash Wednesday on its heels, and Trinity Sunday the week after Pentecost. Some of these days are fixed (e.g., Christmas on Dec. 25), some are variable or moveable (e.g., Easter, always on a Sunday, but the exact date differs each year).

Perhaps less familiar are the “seasons” of the liturgical year, which link together the church’s celebrations or feast days: Advent, Christmastide (or the Twelve Days of Christmas), a series of weeks simply called Ordinary Time, Lent, Passion Week, Eastertide, and another extended block of Ordinary Time, which is sometimes called Trinity Season. Plotted visually, it might look like Figure 1.

A few things are worth noting about this schema. First, this is only a partial calendar. It could be filled in with a lot more: more feast days and saints’ days, a color scheme for the changing seasons, lectionary readings, and concrete practices of fasting and penitence and celebration that all fit into the big picture.

Second, there is diversity both locally in different parts of the globe, historically in differing eras, and among various Christian traditions on the specific details of these dates and practices and colors. Nevertheless, the basic shape of the calendar as a whole seems to be preserved throughout.⁶

Third and importantly, the church year is built around the climactic events of salvation history—specifically, the saving deeds of God in Jesus Christ. As Smith comments, “time here revolves around a person—Jesus of Nazareth.”⁷ The church’s calendar basically parallels or narrates the life of Christ: birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and time of filling the church with the Spirit.⁸

the ‘architecture’ of calendars is always open to further developments” (“Calendar and Lectionary,” 393). Allen also offers brief but helpful comments addressing the potential criticism that the NT bears no witness to the practice of intentional calendrical ordering of time (in some circles, the NT may even be read as overtly opposing the “observing of days”).

⁶ While the notion of a “liturgical year” is, in some respects, a kind of “fiction” (see Kathleen Hughes, “Liturgical Year: Conflict and Challenge,” in *The Church Gives Thanks and Remembers: Essays on the Liturgical Year*, ed. L.J. Johnson [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1984]: 69–86, at 70, 77–78; also Allen, “Calendar and Lectionary,” 396), and there is no such thing as *the* liturgical calendar of the church, nevertheless there is enough overlap across times and places and traditions to identify a common “something” along the lines of what we are here outlining and calling the “church/liturgical calendar.” For a similar situation with respect to the diversity of proposals for a “center,” or central themes and plotlines, for biblical theology, see my “Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities: The Search for a Center of Biblical Theology Reexamined,” *Themelios* 35 (2010): 400–412, at 407–8.

⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 157.

⁸ As Allen, “Calendar and Lectionary,” 391, tells the story, the early Reformers sought to simplify a Roman calendar that “had become, by the time of the sixteenth century, incredibly ‘cluttered up’” with attention to a legion of saints and theological considerations. The Reformers’ simplification centered on the life and work of Christ, following his story from Christmas to Easter to Ascension to Pentecost (see *ibid.*, 392).

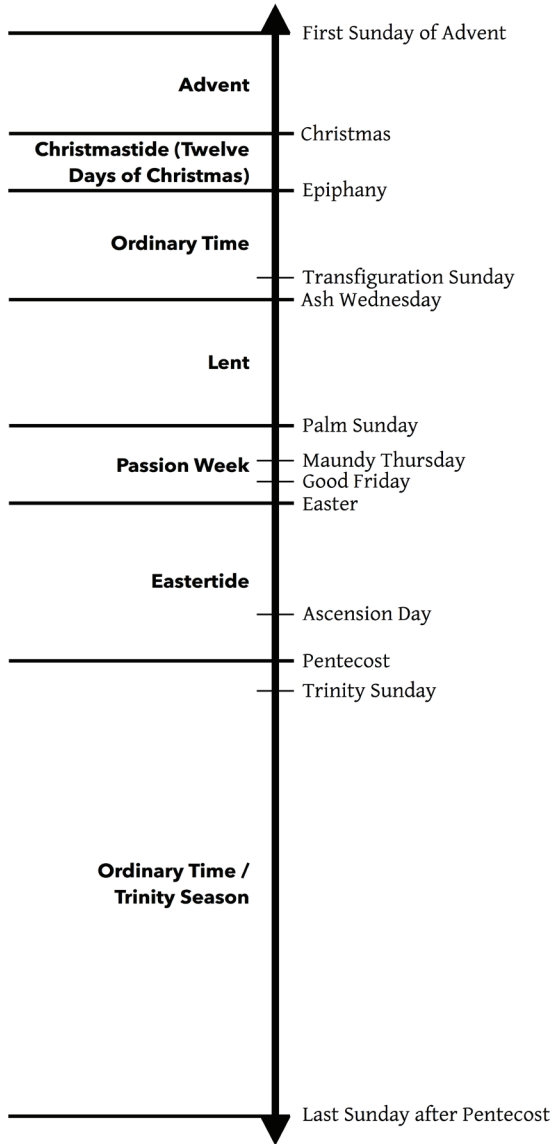


FIGURE 1. THE CHURCH CALENDAR: MAJOR HOLY DAYS AND SEASONS

Finally, the various seasons work in concert with the feast days/observances. There is a rhythm and logic. Seasons of preparation, repentance, and longing for the work of God promised (Advent, Lent) lead into feasts of joy in and thanksgiving for God's gracious deeds (Christmas, Easter),

which then flow into different seasons of intentional remembrance and celebration of the work of God accomplished (Christmastide, Eastertide). The great celebration of the full outpouring of God's trinitarian presence (Pentecost) flows into a season of living in and into the life and love of God (Ordinary Time or Trinity Season).

Hopefully, we can see that the church calendar has a meaningful flow and pattern, or better, a distinct *plotline*. It is, in fact, the plotline of Jesus' life (which is also a microcosm of, and the hermeneutical key to, the biblical plotline as a whole). As Robert Louis Wilken has commented, "Like the earliest (and later) Christian art, the liturgical year (as we now call it) had a narrative shape drawn from the Scriptures, particularly the Gospels. Through ritual it imprinted the biblical narrative on the minds and hearts of the faithful, not simply as a matter of private devotion but as a fully public act setting the rhythm of communal life."⁹

It is important, at this point, to underline that when Wilken speaks of the biblical narrative being "imprinted ... on the minds and hearts of the faithful" in the very rhythms and rituals called forth by the church calendar, he does not mean only that the church calendar serves as a teaching aid for better understanding of doctrines or as so much illustrative material for the "remembrance" of past historical events (though those are inevitably some of its functions). He means also that the church calendar is a way of ordering *public* time and is a manifestation of the church's distinct culture with its "unique sense of *temporality*."¹⁰ It is less a prompt for thinking about things "behind" our temporal experience (e.g., "truths," or past events), and more a way of inhabiting time, of naming our experience of time as *the story of God's mighty saving deeds in Christ*, and of covenantally taking up and living into our part in that story.¹¹

In this light, the church calendar is not just one among several different possible audio-visual aids for teaching the "content" of a story.¹² Rather, it is a kind of *lived* story—a story about God's work in Jesus Christ, to be sure, but a story also of which we are, and are being made, a part. How might this story be ours? What are our roles in this calendrical drama? We may say that ours is the part of preparing for (esp. through repentance and

⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, "The Church as Culture," *First Things* 142 (April 2004): 31–36, at 34.

¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 156, emphasis original.

¹¹ Peter Leithart puts the matter well: "the church calendar isn't just a teaching device. It places us in the time of Jesus, and works the life and times of Jesus into us" ("Lord of Time," *Epistula*, April 2015, http://resource2.veritaspress.com/epistula/0415/Feature_Article.html [last accessed May 3, 2015]; thanks to Lindsey Brigham for pointing me to this essay). The church's calendar functions in the same way as Israel's feasts, which "solemnized a perpetual, present participation in the redemptive events of the past and their fulfillment in the future" (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 781, emphasis added).

¹² See Alexander Schmemmann's criticism of modern Christianity's reduction of the "Christian year" to mere "liturgical 'illustration' of certain theological affirmations," which "are in no way related to the real time or of consequence to it" (*For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* [2nd rev. and exp. ed.; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973], 52).

fasting), believing in, and worshipfully remembering and celebrating and giving thanks for God's gracious deeds in Christ. We could also say that the story lived or enacted in the church calendar is one of God coming to dwell among us—first in the Incarnation (foreshadowing the Second Coming), and second in the giving of the Spirit (as the down payment of our full inheritance). Our part in this story is to long for his coming, to celebrate the initial manifestations of it, to seek to live more fully in and into the presence of our Triune God, and to pray for fuller realizations of it. There is a rhythm in this story of promise and fulfillment, of longing and being satisfied, of God's gracious work for us and of our grateful receiving of and resting in and responding to it.

In such a story, to return to our initial concerns, care and compassion for those in need around us “makes sense” and is regularly practiced in the rhythm of God's gracious work and our grateful response. Our extending mercy to others “makes sense” and “fits” or is called for in this story since

1. it is a story that celebrates and revels in God's mercy to us, thereby reminding us to “be merciful as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36);
2. thanksgiving and rejoicing in God's abundance toward us, which are regular activities in this enacted story, have the remarkable capacity to fuel liberality toward others (see, e.g., 2 Cor 8:1–4);¹³ and
3. the practices of fasting and humility, which the story repeatedly calls for, are, in part, for the sake of identifying with the humble and needy all around us (see Isa 58).

As Ellen Charry observes, while “theologians have by and large assumed that knowing God creates the proper conditions for loving God rather than the reverse,” nevertheless “concomitant with dedication to knowing God, the church has stressed participation in Christian community and practices as a way not only of reinforcing the knowledge of God but also of shaping the mind so that knowledge of the love of God *fits into a life prepared to interpret it properly*.”¹⁴ A life habituated to the church calendar is prepared and ordered to interpret properly the grace of God, and thus equipped with knowledge of fitting responses to that grace, including the response of compassion. But more than that, space

¹³ This is also part of the logic of the celebration of the Eucharist (from the Greek *eucharistia* [= thanksgiving]), which historically has been tied to the giving of alms (on which, see, e.g., Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 153–159, esp. 155, 157–58; in my church, we collect donations for the church Benevolence Fund on Communion Sundays). In much early Christian worship, the Eucharistic meal was expressly intended as a means of providing food for the poor (see Christopher N. Hays, “By Almsgiving and Faith Sins Are Purged? The Theological Underpinnings of Early Christian Care for the Poor,” in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. B. W. Longenecker and K. D. Liebengood [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 260–80, at 262–63; note also that concern for the poor is at the center of Paul's criticism of the Corinthian celebration of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:17–34).

¹⁴ Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 28, emphasis added.

is also opened up practically for the exercise of mercy and compassion throughout the course of the year. For example, in the season of Lent prayer and fasting partner with almsgiving;¹⁵ in the Ordinary Time after Pentecost, which makes up the bulk of the church calendar, the kind of life lived by the early Christians after the first Christian Pentecost (see Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–35) is called for and practically pursued.

Perhaps a concrete illustration may be helpful. In “Does Community Have a Value?,” Wendell Berry tells the story of a subsistence farming community in Port Royal, Kentucky, in the late 1930s.¹⁶ The community was made up of nine households, “all more or less within walking distance.” Each household had, of course, its own rhythms and responsibilities, “but all the big jobs they did together: housecleaning, wallpapering, quilting, canning, cooking for field crews.” In the fields, there was a similar mutuality in the “big jobs,” and “when they worked together, they ate together.” When one person was injured or ill, others would gather around him or her to help in their distress, knowing that the good of the whole was bound up with the good of the individual. Local knowledge and wisdom, practical skills, and ways of doing and living in response to the place were passed on from older to younger. Indeed, the place was “central to its own interest and its own economy,” so much so that “the community and its economy were almost identical.” Berry makes a crucial observation about the Port Royal community:

Even so cursory a description of one of the old local subsistence economies . . . reveals that its economic assets were to a considerable extent intangible: culture-borne knowledge, attitudes, and skills; family and community coherence; family and community labor; and cultural or religious principles such as respect for gifts (natural or divine), humility, fidelity, charity, and neighborliness. . . . The wonderful fact, then, is that those emotional and spiritual values that are now so inconsequentially associated with the idea of community were economic assets in the old communities, and they produced economic results.¹⁷

What is striking about the picture Berry paints is that “intangible” values and virtues are woven into the fabric of Port Royal economy and material culture. Respect for gifts (and, one supposes, thanksgiving), humility, fidelity, and so on were not simply private “values” arbitrarily added as epiphenomena onto a self-standing and self-sufficient public culture. They “fit” with the concrete practices of the public culture, were

¹⁵ On which, see Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year: Its History and Its Meaning after the Reform of the Liturgy* (trans. M. J. O’Connell; New York: Pueblo, 1981), 93; also Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 113–15.

¹⁶ In Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: Northpoint, 1987), 179–92. Berry’s “A Jonquil for Mary Penn” is a kind of short-story equivalent to this essay (in *Fidelity: Five Stories* [New York: Pantheon, 1992], 61–81).

¹⁷ Berry, “Does Community Have a Value?,” 187. For the quotations in the preceding paragraph, see 180, 180–81, 181, 184.

part of the logic of their life together and economy. Similarly, I suggest that a virtue like compassion “fits” in the culture of which observance of the church calendar is a part. Here I have in mind important recent emphases not simply on the church *and* culture, but on the church *as* culture.¹⁸ The church calendar is important because it is a part of the culture which is the church. Compassion is consistent with the internal logic of such a culture with its unique ordering of time, and within such a culture practical space is opened up for the pursuit and practice of mercy—which means that it is much easier to be compassionate within such a culture than without it.

All of this is to assert with James K. A. Smith that liturgical practice, such as observance of the church calendar, is a matter of *formation* and part of prayerfully seeking *sanctification*. The calendar and the practices it calls for “carry their own understanding that is implicit within them,”¹⁹ or, as I have been articulating the issue, they embody a particular kind of story. By living into or enacting that story, the shape and rhythm of the story borne in liturgical practice becomes the shape and rhythm of the church’s lived experience in time and space. Just as importantly, we submit our imaginations to formation according to the “way of construing the world”²⁰ that is embedded in the practices of observing the church calendar.²¹ Liturgical practice is part of being habituated to that “way of construing the world” so that it might become, in a sense, “automated.”²²

¹⁸ See, e.g., Wilken, “The Church as Culture,” 31–36; Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 2003), passim; and Ken Myers, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (repr. with a new introduction; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), v–xx.

¹⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 166. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 3, who speaks of “the theology implicit and explicit” in the church’s liturgy (he also provides helpful discussion on the definition of “Christian liturgy”; see 3–9). Importantly, liturgical practice does not simply cause us to *think about* the implicit and explicit theology (as though liturgy were a creative and “artistic” way of transmitting doctrine to minds) but also imprints a way of “imagining” the world on the lives of the worshipers by enacting that imaginative vision (cf. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 166–67).

²⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 167.

²¹ However, to say it this way sounds too voluntaristic, as if we are always and only *consciously* and *deliberately deciding* to submit ourselves to such formation. Sometimes (perhaps most often) that is not the case.

²² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 167. In this same context, Smith adds in a footnote that what he is suggesting is “in the ballpark of the principle of *ex opere operato*” (ibid., 167, n. 29). This will surely make many uncomfortable (which Smith expressly acknowledges), but it is important to ask what precisely is the “work” that is “worked.” What Smith seems to assert is “worked” (or formed) by liturgical practice is a “way of construing the world,” a kind of imaginative vision of the whole. Tellingly, he speaks of this forming, this “implanting of the gospel” in the imagination, as “not ideal” *in itself* (ibid.). It seems that Smith has in mind, therefore, not a formation automatically unto conversion/sanctification, but some other kind of formation. It is a formation that is only a (potential) part of sanctification, not a formation that just is sanctification, not a formation that is “salvific” (in the narrow sense of the mechanism whereby at some specific time individuals “get saved,” receive “saving grace,” secure their eternal destiny). But it is a crucial formation nonetheless, largely because it has to do with the embodied human wholes we are created as. Thus, Smith goes on to

We are thus prepped and primed and increasingly practiced in seeing, naming, and even receiving reality in certain ways. Of course time is the gift of God, who is the chief actor in the story. Of course at the center of time—indeed, transforming the time of the old age into the time of the new—is the death of Christ and his resurrection on Easter morning. Of course responding to this gracious work of God, and living into the new creation inaugurated in Jesus' resurrection, involves a life of loving God *and* our neighbor. Of course the life of faith is the life of thanksgiving, and of course thanksgiving pairs with mercy toward those in need.

So while the church calendar does not *make* us virtuous or *create* virtue in us, neither is the calendar disconnected from virtue. We might say that virtue flows forth most freely from ordered forms, and the church calendar is an attempt to “impress” upon our being-in-time such ordered forms.²³ Therefore, the ordering of our lives by the church calendar is a way of prayerfully seeking the virtue that tends to inhabit, or is bound up with, such order. The church calendar involves a “way of construing the world” in which love for God, compassion toward neighbor, and still other virtues “fit” and “make sense” and are even “natural.” We take up the calendar with the aim and prayer that we might begin to imagine and construe the actual world we inhabit in space and time *as* the world of the gospel story (which it is), and that we might live in ways that flow “naturally” from such construing. Liturgical practice in the form of living within the rhythms and patterns of the church calendar is, I submit, a crucial component in the pursuit of an instinctual, reflexive compassion, a life of compassion that comes “by second nature.” But there is more to be said, and it might be instructive, at this point, to contrast this basic outline of the church calendar with the calendar that most of us are likely more used to: the everyday calendar of modern American society.

II. THE MODERN AMERICAN CALENDAR

Like the church calendar, our larger society's calendar has special celebratory days, or “holy days” (= holidays), and saints' days. Some of the most universally observed are Christmas (et al.), New Year's Day, and Independence Day. We should also add Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, and Memorial Day. Another important one culturally, in terms of attention to it and ordering our lives around it,

state that “what's going on in worship has relevance not just for my religious or spiritual life but also for my *human* life” (ibid., 169, emphasis original). In this light, we might say that what gets “worked” through liturgical practice is not only an ordered construal of the world but also ordered forms of human living. This work of formation leaves an imprint, an “afterimage,” on one's whole person. For those affirming the faith, an “afterimage” remains to order aright their lives under their primary allegiance to and love for and faith in Jesus; for those renouncing the faith, the “afterimage” remains to haunt (Smith cites Richard Blake's work on Catholic filmmakers [the term “afterimage” is Blake's; see ibid., 167, n. 29]; Graham Greene's novels also come readily to mind).

²³ As C. S. Lewis has commented, “though ‘like is not the same’, it is better than unlike. Imitation may pass into initiation” (“Christianity and Culture,” in *The Seeing Eye and Other Selected Essays from Christian Reflections*, ed. W. Hooper [New York: Ballantine, 1986]: 15–48, at 31).

is Super Bowl Sunday.²⁴ (Other “holy days” and “saints’ days” could be added [e.g., Father’s Day,²⁵ Veteran’s Day, MLK Day].) Some of these celebratory days are fixed (e.g., Independence Day on July 4), and some are variable (e.g., Mother’s Day, always on a Sunday).

These special days in our national-societal life, like the feast days of the church calendar, punctuate a series of what can be called “seasons.” The easiest to identify is the season stretching nowadays from Halloween to New Year’s Day—namely, the Holidays. What follows is a kind of recuperative (penitential) season (think New Year’s resolutions), which, for reasons that will become evident presently, we may call J-Term.²⁶ This season, about a month long, concludes symbolically with a major feast day: Super Bowl Sunday. The season that Super Bowl Sunday flows into is generally referred to as the School Year,²⁷ which lasts until Mother’s Day/Memorial Day (the two days together signaling a transition between seasons), and which has a parallel season from Labor Day to Christmas (thus overlapping with the Holidays). The season from Mother’s Day/Memorial Day to Labor Day, with a parallel brief period from Christmas to New Year’s Day, could be named Break (Summer and Winter, respectively). The modern American calendar can be plotted visually as in Figure 2.

It is clear that the modern American calendar has many formal similarities to the church calendar. Both mark celebratory days and feasts. Both provide a pattern of seasons. And, importantly, both have a plotline—that is, they both tell a story.²⁸ The church calendar is a story about God. It is the lived remembrance and celebration of God’s saving deeds in Jesus. About whom or what is the story of the American calendar, which I have roughly filled in?

²⁴ Linton, “Happy New Liturgical Year!,” highlights Super Bowl Sunday as “the most important occasion between New Year’s and the Fourth of July—actually, it’s more important than the Fourth of July.”

²⁵ It could be argued that Father’s Day is just as important in the modern American calendar as Mother’s Day. I have chosen to highlight Mother’s Day here for a few reasons, the most important of which is that, as we will see below, Mother’s Day plays an important role in the rhythm of the overall calendar (that of marking a change of “season”), a role that is not paralleled by Father’s Day.

²⁶ Cf. Linton, “Happy New Liturgical Year!”

²⁷ Some friends of mine who have recently purchased a house tell me that the real estate industry deliberately marks the beginning of its “season” as the Monday following Super Bowl Sunday.

²⁸ Talking specifically about the state, civil society, and globalization as “ways of imagining space and time,” William Cavanaugh notes that “Far from merely ‘secular’ institutions and processes, these ways of imagining organize bodies around stories of human nature and human destiny which have deep theological analogues” (*Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002], 2).

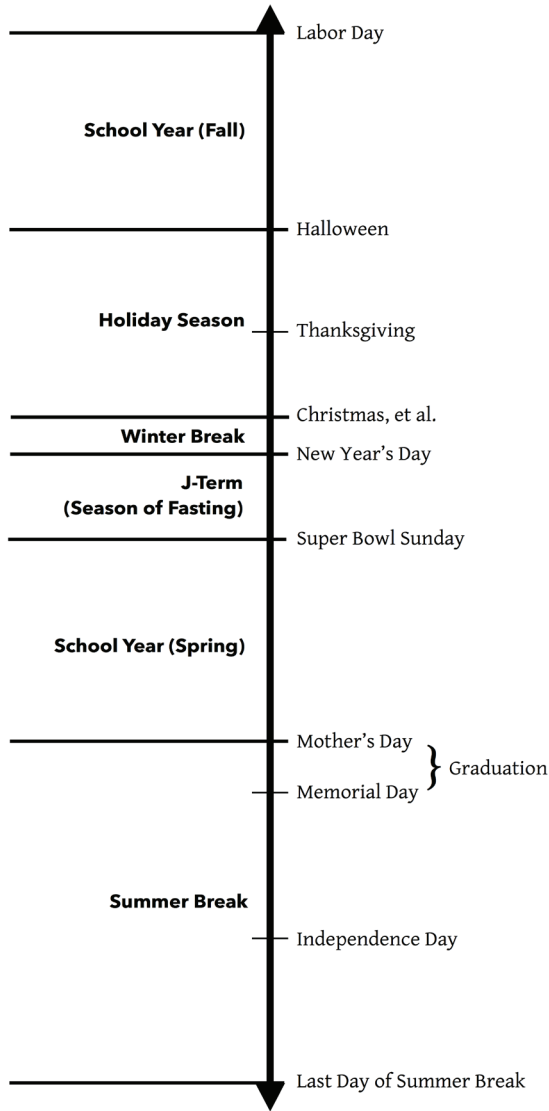


FIGURE 2. THE MODERN AMERICAN CALENDAR:
MAJOR HOLY(I) DAYS AND SEASONS

To ask this question is to enter into the realm of phenomenology. There is no master interpretive key that gives us complete certainty about “what’s really going on” in our experience of the modern American calendar. In seeking to describe what the calendar might mean, what we

say should sound more like proposals and suggestions than authoritative pronouncements. Do you see here what I am seeing? Does this make “sense” of our collective experience of living in the rhythms and patterns of the American calendar? Is it “satisfying”?²⁹ Do we find this or that way of describing the “narrative logic” of the calendar compelling, illuminating of our experience, so that we say, “Yes, of course, that’s right!” even if it is a little surprising?³⁰ Thus, though I believe the following musings about the modern American calendar are on target, nevertheless they are still best read as interrogatives.

It seems to me that the story implicit in our contemporary calendar is, first, largely about money and the amusements it buys. These are key themes (even the gods) in this story. The special days are increasingly times to spend (or make) money (gifts, decor, consumer foods). Consider, for example, how Halloween has become increasingly important culturally, both as an opportunity to make and spend money (on costumes, candy, parties) and as a signal that the most important shopping season is beginning. And what are Summer and Winter Break for, if not spending cash on big vacations? The modern American calendar is not only about money, but it is, in my opinion, hard to deny that our calendar—its explicit themes and the rhythms and pursuits it calls forth—revolves around the making and spending of money.³¹

A second key feature in this story is school. The rhythms and practices of school dominate the modern American calendar, so much that we find ourselves having regularly to distinguish between the “school year” and the “calendar year” in conversation and planning. This is why I place Labor Day at the beginning of the calendar in Figure 2 above. Functionally for all of us, whether we are students or have “real jobs,”

²⁹ Here I am appropriating one of Richard Hays’s “tests” (namely, the test of “satisfaction”) for the discerning of literary echoes in texts, which for Hays is “finally the most important test” (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 31–32). In fact, phenomenological description of activities and artifacts is not unlike the work of textual interpretation, which is why Kevin Vanhoozer speaks of the need to read/exegete/interpret the “cultural texts” we encounter every day (see “What Is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture,” in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer, C. A. Anderson, and M. J. Sleasman [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007]: 15–60).

³⁰ The phrase is part of Matt Jensen’s parenthetical explanation of phenomenology; see *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 185, n. 194. Crucial to hearing Smith’s proposals aright is understanding his phenomenological approach. For Smith, the task of phenomenology “is nuanced *description* in the face of ‘what gives,’ and its warrant is the extent to which such descriptions are compelling on the basis of our prephilosophical experience” (*Imagining the Kingdom*, 42, n. 19, emphasis original). Smith’s description of Charles Taylor’s “phenomenological mode” in *How (Not) to Be Secular* is equally a description of his own work on cultural liturgies: “His claim is forthright, but qualified,” appealing “to a *sense*: this is an analysis you’ll find convincing if his phenomenology has just named something that’s been haunting you. If not, then Taylor doesn’t have any ‘proof’ to offer you” (*How [Not] to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 69, emphasis original).

³¹ Michael Linton is especially emphatic that our society celebrates money through our calendar observance (see “Happy Liturgical New Year!”).

the year really begins in September (or mid-August).³² That is when we speak of things getting started. June and July are a breather; September is when we roll up our sleeves and get to work (nowhere, outside of actual schools, is this more evident than in a church!). The story that we live in the modern calendar is a story that reinforces the rhythms and patterns of school. In such a story, we, as individual learners, are the chief actors. Ambition is virtue and our purpose is success: passing exams, making the grade, getting into a good school, landing a good job to make good money, saving up for “great” vacations (briefer, more expensive winter/summer breaks), securing a good and comfortable retirement. The story is one of hard work, passing “tests,” achievement, and attaining much earned times of amusement. The story’s title is “The American Dream.”³³

The story told by and enacted through the modern American calendar underlines the glory and power of money, places us as students/workers in the role of chief protagonist, and posits for us roles and pursuits involving productivity, achievement, getting the grade/job, and relaxing and purchasing amusement as individuals or family units. Time itself is construed less as a gift to be received with thanksgiving and more as a commodity to “use” in our press toward achievement and acquisition. In this story, what practical space is opened up for compassion toward the helpless? Where might mercy “fit” in this story? Does it even “fit” at all? Indeed, where acquisitiveness reigns, how can gratitude (arguably one of the main well-springs of authentic compassion) thrive? If my read of the modern American calendar is anywhere near the mark, then there is at least a bit of dissonance between living within the rhythms called forth by this calendar and pursuing and practicing compassion. Embodying and enacting the story of the modern American calendar habituates us to see, name, and receive reality in ways that differ significantly from the habituation to be had via the church calendar.

III. NORMALIZING WORLDLINESS

If left unchecked, I suggest that the modern American calendar contributes to the formation of our ways of construing reality, and more broadly of our ways of being in the world, that are not only different from but also, in certain crucial respects, *contrary to* the formation provided through the church calendar. That is to say, the critique of the modern American calendar being here offered is not simply that it is formative, but also that in its whole configuration it is disordered and therefore plays a role in disordered formation. It forms toward the wrong ends—namely, the service of idols. It contributes to a *malformation*, a “*mis*-formation

³² See also Hughes, “Liturgical Year,” 78.

³³ It is also worth pointing out that the story told and lived in the modern American calendar also clearly celebrates the blood and sacrifice of various people who have made possible both our ability to go to school and our freedom to make and spend money. Chief among these individuals are our family members (esp. parents), and our soldiers and national forefathers who fought and served and died for our freedoms (note, e.g., Independence Day, Memorial Day). This frequently observed motif in the modern American calendar is (perhaps) more tangential to our concerns about cultivating compassion and mercy.

of our desires—aiming our heart away from the Creator to some aspect of the creation as if it were God.”³⁴ Thus, like the church calendar, the modern American calendar is a matter of the *liturgical* ordering of our lives, a matter of embodied worship and seeking and serving ultimate ends (idols) such as money, self, efficiency, comfort, and success. To observe the modern American calendar is to engage in liturgical (worshipful) practice, a practice that will “teach’ us to love something very different from the kingdom of God.”³⁵

This is not to say that every individual component of the modern American calendar is fully and inescapably contrary to Christian commitment. It is conceivable that some elements of this calendar are more or less benign, and some may even be capable of standing alongside the story lived out through the church calendar without dissonance. Conflict and tension with the gospel are not the only viable categories in which to set various individual parts of the modern American calendar.³⁶ This is in part because the liturgical significance of the modern American calendar is less the mere sum of each individual element, and more something that emerges from the configuration or matrix as a whole of which each individual element is a part.³⁷ There is nothing wrong, in itself, with eating meat sacrificed to idols (see 1 Cor 8:4–8), but to do so within the larger configuration of a pagan temple feast must be named idolatry and sharing in demons (see 1 Cor 10:14–22). The problem for Christians is less located in any specific scene(s) in the story enacted through the modern American calendar, and more in the narrative shape and logic of the whole, some key features of which I have tried to outline.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider how remarkable it is that we are able with relative *ease* to identify the make-up of the modern American calendar. In a certain respect, there is no such thing as the “modern American calendar.” Nothing actually goes by that name in our everyday experience (more on this below). The “modern American calendar” is a kind of fiction. And yet, when pressed, we have no problem identifying what it consists of. When I have taught on such matters

³⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88, emphasis original.

³⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88.

³⁶ As Kathleen Hughes, “Liturgical Year,” 69, rightly notes, of equal importance to consider are the possibilities of “crisis, cooperation, conundrum, convergence, communion, collision, consonance, claim, connection, etc.” While Hughes’s basic point is appropriate, nevertheless she operates within a Niebuhrian “transformational” framework for understanding “Christ and culture” that is not without problems (on which, see the introductory comments of D. Stephen Long, *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion* [Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2010], 65–70; see also Wilken, “The Church as Culture,” 32; and Leithart, *Against Christianity*, 39–40).

³⁷ Schmemmann’s notion of a “liturgical coefficient” seems relevant here: “that significance which, apart from its own immediate content, each [of the elements of worship] acquired as a result of its place in the general sequence or order of worship” (*Introduction*, 19). Importantly, Schmemmann adds that only by attending to the “basic structures of worship” as a totality, which involves “all the interrelatedness of all the individual services and of each liturgical unit in particular,” can we protect the theological interpretation of liturgy “from arbitrary symbolic interpretations” (*ibid.*, 22).

in my church, without fail my classes have had no difficulty outlining the basic shape of the modern American calendar. Moreover, they have easily wrapped their minds around the notion of Super Bowl Sunday as a kind of “feast day.” There is no confusion about what it might mean to have recurring “seasons” such as the Holidays and Summer Break, which revolve around “holy days.” The modern American calendar is a cultural phenomenon that we can readily identify if asked. The ease of identification is owing to the fact that we are all (in the contemporary American church) very well-practiced, well-trained, and well-versed in this calendar.

Through a long engagement in the rituals of the modern American calendar, through regular and uncritical submission to its rhythms, the story of the modern American calendar has been “programmed” into our imaginations and experiences and patterns of living³⁸—which simply means that we are well-formed to seek and serve idols. It is important to clarify that just as the church calendar does not “make” us virtuous, neither does the modern American calendar “make” us worship idols. Nevertheless, the worship of idols “makes sense” or “fits,” and is given ample space, in this calendar: “Secular liturgies don’t *create* our desire; they point it, aim it, direct it to certain ends.”³⁹ The calendar postures us in such ways that idolatrous endeavors and sensibilities and ends seem “natural,” are, in a sense, called for and appropriate. It is a way of normalizing worldliness, a socialization into “the world.” It’s just normal to live as though money and amusement were what life were about. It’s normal to view ourselves as the main actors in the story. It’s normal to live good, respectable, and generally godless lives (at least in the realms of economy, education, leisure, politics, family, and work).

As I have already suggested, a virtue such as selfless compassion in service of Christ is, at best, ill-fitted to life in the rhythms and logic of this calendar. Compassion is not impossible for those well-versed in the modern American calendar, but they will need a profoundly concerted and conscious effort to be compassionate since such a virtue is contrary to their formation. The quality and character of compassion will be inevitably affected.⁴⁰ Compassion might not be impossible, but the cultivation of *instinctual* and *spiritually reflexive* compassion of the sort testified to in Matthew 25 will have to overcome significant barriers, to say the least.

³⁸ And this is true in spite of the fact that, as Peter Leithart observes, “Americans [are] notoriously deaf to symbols and puritanical in our rejection of ritual” (*Against Christianity*, 83).

³⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 122, emphasis original. Similarly, while Smith says that “our love is shaped, primed, and aimed by liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends,” he stops short of saying that our love is *made* by liturgical practice (*ibid.*, 38).

⁴⁰ This line of thought is comparable to James Davison Hunter’s comments concerning the effects of a pluralistic, consumer culture, which “certainly undermines the possibility of belief but even more significantly, it undermines the *character* of belief—that is, *how* one believes” (*To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 204, emphasis original).

Our introductory questions concerned the cultivation of a people for whom compassion comes, in a sense, instinctively, by “second nature.” We have seen that liturgical practice such as observance of the church calendar is one aspect of such a pursuit, in that it forms our lives so that compassion “fits.” But we have also seen that we are formed otherwise by other “liturgies.” In particular, the liturgical formation we receive by way of living within the rhythms and patterns of the modern American calendar constitutes one major obstacle to our ecclesial task of cultivating a compassionate and Christ-honoring people.

IV. INVISIBLE INFLUENCE

But the challenge may go deeper than mere tension and conflict between the overt “content” of these two calendars, and the ends toward which we are formed through them. To get at this, let me point out a difficulty I have had in thinking through these matters. As I analyze the year observed by the Christian church, I have no problem knowing what to call all this: the church (or liturgical) calendar. But things are not so easy and obvious when I plot out the alternative calendar we have been considering. I have stumbled over what a good name for this other calendar might be. I have decided here on “the modern American calendar,” but that is a little clumsy and, as I have pointed out, no one refers to it by that name in everyday experience.⁴¹

Why might it be challenging for us to come up with a name for this other calendar? I propose that it is largely because we envision (imagine) these two calendars in markedly different ways. For us, the church calendar is known to be an artificial construct, which we might want to *superimpose* upon our experience of time for personal and private purposes (as a way of reinforcing our “Christian values”). We all know that the church calendar is not really “real time,” and it is not a way of ordering public (societal) time. But the “modern American calendar”? This calendar is so “normal” and taken for granted that we tend not to envision it as a “thing,” as an artificial construct to name, much less as something to subject to critical inquiry.⁴² Why give a special name to something that is simply normal? This calendar is, as we say, “just the calendar,” *just a neutral and normal* and *natural* way of marking time, while the liturgical calendar is a special “church calendar” that we may, if we are a certain type of consumer, take

⁴¹ I suppose we could call it the “secular calendar” or “civic/national calendar” but, again, few refer to it by those terms in everyday discourse. Furthermore, with respect to the term “secular calendar,” it would, in most circles, give the false impression that the calendar is “religiously neutral,” which it is *not* (see, e.g., Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88, n. 20). With respect to the term “civic/national calendar,” there are several parts of the calendar that modern American society functionally operates within that are not, strictly speaking, civic/national matters (e.g., Super Bowl Sunday, Summer Break).

⁴² Smith, too, notes that “we take our experience of time to be ‘natural’ (i.e., *not* a construal),” attributing this to the unique “time-consciousness” of modernity (*How [Not] to Be Secular*, 34, emphasis original).

up as a devotional aid in our plodding along through “just the calendar.”⁴³ All cultural institutions and artifacts have a “religious nature,” yet “we all tend to inhabit [them] as if they were neutral sites.”⁴⁴ As we have seen, the modern American calendar is not neutral. It is not “bare” reality, but is a religiously charged “take” on reality. It gives meaning to time and posits an identity for us, a “kingdom” to serve, a purpose for our lives. It tells and compels a lived story.

A calendar, any calendar, is not simply “the ways things are” but is always an interpretation, a “take” on reality expressed “calendrically.” A calendar, any calendar, is a way of receiving and naming reality by telling and enabling us to live into a story. It is important to underline that the modern American calendar is not problematic simply because it is an interpretation as opposed to the “bare” reality of time. We cannot *not* name our experience of time—we all interpret the passing of days and months and years through some system of organization and naming. Ordering and interpreting time, construing it as a story, is part of our God-given human nature. The modern American calendar is not problematic because it is an interpretation but because (1) it is in crucial respects a problematic interpretation of reality (a bit of which I have sought to highlight above), and (2) it is an interpretation of reality that, for many, operates under the status of “neutral” and “normal” and is thus functionally above critique (as I am here emphasizing). So the challenge facing a Christian church

⁴³ In this context, “devotional” is a synonym for private and personal (as opposed to public, corporate). In popular accounts of the church calendar, the liturgical year is valuable because it adds spice to the ahistorical, “spiritual” (i.e., private, individual) side of our life. So, for example, Bobby Gross expressly claims that his otherwise helpful book *Living the Christian Year* is written to “acquaint you with the movements of this liturgical calendar so that you can use them in your own devotion to God” and “let the year give shape to your personal practice of Bible reflection and prayer” (*Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005], 19, 25, emphasis added). The problem here is not that what Gross suggests is wrong or unhelpful, but that the liturgical calendar is not only, or even primarily, an aid to one’s personal Bible study and prayer life. To view the church calendar simply as a personal “devotional aid” that helps me think and meditate upon various doctrinal points or events in the gospel story is not to take it seriously *as a calendar*. This way of commending observance of the church calendar assumes from the outset that observance of the calendar as a calendar is moot. Am I not able to think and meditate personally on, say, the Incarnation at any time of the year, not only during Advent? In fact, are there not better ways to get me thinking about that event than calendar observance? One would think a calendar would have something to do with *time* and *the experience and perception of time* and not only with objects of personal thought that could be gotten at quite apart from calendrical marking of time. But in many accounts of the liturgical calendar, even many that commend its value, calendar observance has little to do with time and the rhythmic passing of days and weeks and seasons by a community or society, and is instead the functional equivalent of a Passion play or a Christmas carol or reading the New Testament. Much better is the proposal of Kimberlee Conway Ireton, “Redeeming Time,” *Christian Reflection* 37 (2010): 11–16, at 12: “Marking time by the calendar of the Church instead of the calendars of our culture—the school year, the civic year, the fiscal year—sets you apart. . . . It means I look at time a little differently.” However, Ireton’s “you” and “I” might be better replaced with, or at least understood as representative of, an “us” and “we” (i.e., the church of God).

⁴⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 23, emphasis original.

seeking to cultivate Christ-honoring, neighbor-loving virtuous people living in contemporary America is not merely that we are all well-versed in a story that is at least somewhat at odds with the biblical story, but also that we do not even realize that this is a story to be named and identified as being at odds with the biblical story.

A great source of the story's power to influence lies in its functional invisibility. Since we do not imagine the modern American calendar to be a "special" calendar, we tend not to subject it to scrutiny. But this calendar is also *pervasive* in a way that other calendars are not, which further contributes to its functional invisibility. The modern American calendar is more or less observed through diverse stages of life and in a variety of contexts.⁴⁵ Its logic is echoed and sustained through numerous other practices, rituals, curricula, and institutions of modern American *culture* (of which the modern American calendar is a part, an artifact).

Culture has an atmospheric quality. It is like an odor that fills a whole room and is unnoticeable to the occupants because they do not recognize it *as an odor*. In our home there resides a dog, a "family member" of sorts (readers may pigeonhole us accordingly). Not long ago when someone visited our home for the first time, the first thing he mentioned as he stepped inside was, "You must have a dog; I can smell it." We have had our dog for several years, during which we have not generally noticed such a smell, but not because it is not there. It is because we have become accustomed to the smell, because it has become "normal" and hence unnoticed. Our day-to-day experience does not present it as a "thing" to consider, to analyze, to subject to scrutiny.⁴⁶ Only when we *step outside* our home and enter a new environment, a new atmosphere, with new and "strange" smells, are we enabled to begin to notice the odors of our "normal" environment. When we are dealing with maleficent odors, familiarity with a new and different atmosphere becomes of utmost importance.

A culture is like an odor—it is atmosphere-filling and hence goes largely unnoticed so long as we remain firmly within it. As an artifact of modern American culture, the modern American calendar is part of a larger and pervasive atmosphere. As a result, its liturgical nature and formative power remain functionally invisible, which is a problem if, as I have suggested, it tells the wrong story and names reality wrongly, in ways that are not in keeping with who God is, what he has made (us included), and what he is doing in time and space. As long as we imagine the modern American calendar to be simply normal and neutral, it stays unquestioned, and we practically welcome the gods and rulers of the age to prod and pull us wherever they choose without ever being aware of it. "Culture is," Philip Rieff has warned us, "the form of fighting before the

⁴⁵ Cf. Smith's comments on the "catholicity" of the iconography of the mall (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 21–22).

⁴⁶ When we speak of "cultural blind spots," we are assuming this aspect of culture. We are amazed at how Christians in antebellum America could have thought slavery to be biblical, and we say it was a "cultural blind spot." What we mean is that the atmosphere (the culture) of slave-trading and slave-owning was so broad and so "normal" as to be unnoticed, unquestioned, un-critiqued—or the critiques that were occasionally offered were easily brushed aside as fanciful or fanatical, "abnormal."

firing actually begins.”⁴⁷ We are in a war that does not (often) look or feel like one. What we need, then, is to develop a better fighting strategy. What we need is a different culture, a new “atmosphere,” to provide the “training” necessary to identify both analytically and experientially, as it were, some crucial contours of the battle.

V. A SPACE OF COUNTER-FORMATION

Smith asks, given the “quasi-liturgy” and “formative pedagogy” of the shopping mall together with “its ‘parachurch’ extensions in television and advertising,” “Is there a place that could form us otherwise—a space of counter-formation?”⁴⁸ I am here asking the same question of the “quasi-liturgical” modern American calendar. And the answer I have been building up to is that the church with its liturgies and pedagogies—particularly, its observance of the church calendar—would seem to be a God-ordained “space of counter-formation.” The church calendar is important as part of a larger strategy for formation—of our postures and sensibilities and directions—in ways that are contrary to the formation that takes place in the modern American calendar. Just as importantly, the church calendar provides an alternative “atmosphere” that may enable us better to identify the modern American calendar as an “odorous” matter of liturgical formation—that is, as a matter of (mal)formation and *worship*.⁴⁹ Indeed, as Marshall McLuhan has claimed, “Without an anti-environment all environments are invisible.”⁵⁰ For McLuhan, it is the artist’s role “to create an anti-environment as a means of perception and adjustment.” We may say that the church calendar (and more generally, the church’s culture) similarly creates an “anti-environment” to help us detect and counteract the noxious “environments” we find ourselves in.

Yet Smith asks further and devastatingly, “What if the church unwittingly adopts the same liturgical practices as the market and the mall? Will it then really be a site of counter-formation?”⁵¹ Indeed, will we not, as Smith has more pointedly stated in another context, be engaging “in merely *subcultural* production,” promoting “‘Jesufied’ versions of the majority culture”? He goes on,

Such subcultural production (that is, the production of an evangelical subculture) actually betrays that “large swaths [of evangelicalism] have been captured by the spirit of the age” (92). No matter how

⁴⁷ Philip Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority*, vol. 1 of *Sacred Order/Social Order*, ed. K. S. Piver (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 1.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24–25.

⁴⁹ Even if my specific read of the modern American calendar is wrong, it is a cultural-liturgical artifact that forms us in *some* manner and must, like all things, be subjected to evaluation in the light of (and to potential critique from) the gospel. At very least, the church calendar offers a heuristic tool for such evaluation.

⁵⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, ed. E. McLuhan and F. Zingrone (New York: Basic, 1995), 36.

⁵¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

many Jesus action figures or Hipster Study Bibles™ we might sell, the battle's already been lost as soon as such phenomena exist. All we've done is carve out a new market sector that extends dominant cultural forces. This is a long way from "changing the world," despite our rhetoric to the contrary. The world has changed us.⁵²

When it comes to calendar observance, Peter Leithart offers "a test for your local church: which holiday receives more attention, the Fourth of July or Ascension? Mother's Day or Pentecost?"⁵³ From my experience (admittedly limited, for the most part, to low and free church traditions), the former options do not simply get "more attention"; they receive nearly exclusive attention *institutionally*—that is, what we observe *as a church* is the Fourth of July, *not* Ascension; Mother's Day, *not* Pentecost.⁵⁴ The liturgical calendar may be appropriate for individual (devotional) use; but the church, as a public, orders its time largely according to the modern American calendar. In precisely the space where a formation counter to, and an exposing of, the malformation taking place through the modern American calendar should be offered, we ourselves seem to be happily (or at least unwittingly) contributing to that malformation. If, as Ken Myers has commented, "The church can only engage the culture by *being* a culture,"⁵⁵ then, at least with respect to cultural artifacts such as calendars, the church has largely abandoned the call to "engage" modern American culture in favor of echoing it.

Three clarifications are in order. First, many may be leery of something so "rote" as mere calendar observance in the church. Is not the observance of the liturgical calendar a matter of "empty formalism," even an encouragement of hypocrisy and false assurance? Hypocrisy and false assurance are real dangers. But they arise less from routine, forms, and ritual per se,⁵⁶ and more from our sinful tendency to abuse God's good gifts for our own self-centered advantage. More to the point here, Dorothy Bass's words with respect to practices of "receiving the day" are equally true of ordering our time more broadly by way of calendars: "The gestures, words, and work through which we practice receiving this day are

⁵² James K. A. Smith, "How (Not) to Change the World" (review of James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*), *The Other Journal*, September 8, 2010, <http://theotherjournal.com/2010/09/08/how-not-to-change-the-world/> [last accessed May 3, 2015], emphasis original. Smith is quoting Hunter's work.

⁵³ Leithart, *Against Christianity*, 100.

⁵⁴ Leithart asks, "Now, why is that?" (*Against Christianity*, 100.). A minimum indictment would be that we have failed to recognize the (at least potentially) *mal-*formative power of the modern American calendar. A more serious indictment may involve our failure to recognize our calling *as a church to be a culture*. A maximum indictment is, however, not out of question: we have baptized worldliness so that ritually we may order our lives around and pursue what is *really* important to us and feel pious about it.

⁵⁵ Myers, *All God's Children*, xviii, emphasis original.

⁵⁶ Indeed, we always will and do ritualize what is most important to us. Warnings against "empty formalism" and "rote" ritualism are often red herrings—pious-sounding ways to criticize *certain* rituals, being ready all the while to defend stridently other rituals of choice (and the objects of worship they aim at).

repeated morning after morning, evening after evening, and also during the hours in between. Though the repetition can lull us into boredom or complacency, *there is no other way.*⁵⁷ Calendar observance is the only way we have of being in this world. We will name our days and seasons *something*. We will observe *some calendar*. The questions of import are, What does the calendar we observe as a church form us toward?⁵⁸ and, What resources are we as a church offering for identifying and combating currently prevailing mal-formative “liturgical” calendars?

Second, in asserting that the church with its liturgies and pedagogies is a God-ordained “space of counter-formation,” I really do mean to emphasize the church. Christian liturgical formation is formation that occurs in and through the *church’s* liturgy. The liturgical formation we need is not really something we can enact in individual isolation. Nor is it something that comes by way of para-church organizations or social gatherings.⁵⁹ Rather, it is centered in the church. We can go further: it is centered in the church’s *liturgy*. There is a sense in which the motto “all of life is worship” is true, but if by saying this we would obviate the need for gathering for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day and the practices that take place therein, then the statement loses its usefulness and truthfulness.⁶⁰ The practices and postures and logic of Christian corporate worship prepare us for and send us out to lives ordered to God.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 25, emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Perhaps we may need, first, to ask, What is the calendar we are observing as a church?

⁵⁹ Smith’s writings have been read with excitement in classical education circles, but they tend to emphasize the embodied *practice* side of “liturgical practice and formation” to the neglect of the central role of the church (as one example, note Jenny Rallens’s worthwhile lecture “The Liturgical Classroom and Virtue Formation,” from the 2013 Alcuin Retreat for Classical Educators sponsored by the Society for Classical Learning [a video of the lecture can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/83236278>]). Smith is, of course, concerned about “Christian education” and academic institutions, asking at the outset of his project, “what is at stake in a distinctively Christian education? What does the qualifier *Christian* mean when appended to education?” (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 17, emphasis original). But his answer is not that Christian education engages in and attends to “Christian practices” in a classroom, or at least not only that. Christian education also springs from, or is anchored in, the *liturgy of the Christian church* (see, e.g., *ibid.*, 24–25). Thus, Smith devotes an entire chapter to “exegeting” Christian corporate worship, and asserts therein that “the formative force of . . . extra-Sunday practices is diminished if they are unhooked from the liturgical practices of the ecclesial community, particularly if they become ersatz substitutes for gathered worship”; indeed, the corporate worship of the church “provides a center of gravity that then orients and nourishes other Christian practices, which are extensions of latent possibilities for practice in Christian worship” (*ibid.*, 212–13).

⁶⁰ See the comments in Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 148, and the larger discussion in John Bolt, “All of Life Is Worship? Abraham Kuyper and the Neo-Kuyperians,” in *Our Worship*, by Abraham Kuyper, ed. H. Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009): 321–29; also Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 39–40.

⁶¹ As I hope to explore elsewhere, implicit testimony to the priority of corporate worship for the church’s life in the world may be found in the structure of Ephesians. This letter is not best broken up into a “doctrine” or “theology” section (chs. 1–3) followed by an “application” section (chs. 4–6). Instead, Ephesians offers a *liturgy* (chs. 1–3) that flows into

Third, the resources the church has to offer to counter the malformation of the modern American calendar (and culture) include a distinct church calendar, but it is not only a calendar the church must offer and, thankfully, has historically offered. The counter-formation we need involves more than liturgical practice alone, if by “liturgical practice” we mean something separable from and exclusive of what we might call “the life of the mind.” As Nicholas Healy has recently argued, “the idea that frequent enactment of a practice over time will form us is far too simple.” Indeed,

Going to church does not, of itself, make us more Christian. As most people admit, most Christians are much the same as everyone else in their daily behavior. The only way to become really different is to work hard at it both inside the church, and especially outside, in all our daily situations, by making cognitive as well as behavioral changes. *Thinking, not just enactment of practices, is necessary.*⁶²

Perhaps it might be more accurate to say that church practice has always included practices and habits of mind and rational instruction—habits of memory and reflection and reading, practices of catechesis, the writing and recitation of creeds and confessions. Even observance of the church calendar is not simply a matter of embodied practice (though it is that), but also a matter of *naming* (understanding, interpreting) the reality of time aright.⁶³

Smith often sounds as though he is suggesting otherwise—namely, that practice is a category *over against* (and more determinative of action than) thought. So, for example, “we are the sorts of animals whose orientation to the world is shaped from the body up *more than* from the head down.”⁶⁴ Again, “we are affective *before* we are cognitive.”⁶⁵ Smith seems to want to press a certain direction and degree of influence between “body” and

life more generally as the one people of God (chs. 4–6). Ephesians 1–3 is less bare doctrine and more a basic order for corporate worship: call to worship (1:3–14); intercessory prayer (1:15–23); homiletical instruction (2:1–3:13); closing prayer (3:14–19); benediction and concluding “amen” (3:20–21).

⁶² Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 94, emphasis added. For Healy, “Formation is not simply a product of enacting a given set of practices. Persons are also formed by their reflections, discussions, and decisions about which practices to enact and how, as well as by their inevitable confusion over such matters. Our characters are constructed as the products of ongoing negotiations, whether explicit or entirely unreflected or something in between” (ibid., 96). Thus, “the liturgy, though indeed necessary and formative, is not enough” (ibid., 116). More generally, Healy offers much needed critical analysis of the turn to concrete practices (and, typically, away from dogmatic accounts) in contemporary ecclesiology; see ibid. (esp. chs. 4–5) for interaction with Stanley Hauerwas; and “Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?” *IJST* 5 (2003): 287–308, for interaction with Hauerwas and Reinhard Hütter.

⁶³ As Healy comments, “The enactment of a church practice thus involves *theological judgments*” (*Hauerwas*, 112, emphasis added).

⁶⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25, emphasis added.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 53, emphasis added. Here, however, he adds a crucial parenthetical comment: “we are affective before we are cognitive (and even *while* we are

“head,” between affect and cognition.⁶⁶ I am less confident that the two can be separated so neatly and a direction and degree of influence so easily and (apparently) universally assigned. I am largely sympathetic with Smith’s criticisms of “worldview thinking.”⁶⁷ And I find the basic elements of his “theology of culture” more or less compelling.⁶⁸ But I wonder if, in his zeal to correct a certain overemphasis on ratiocination, Smith’s typical articulations tend to reinforce (or just as importantly, will be taken as reinforcement of) the same problematic formal bifurcation characteristic of much “worldview thinking” (namely, a soul-body dichotomy) simply with a differing material emphasis (the body is determinative). It may be, however, that a more apt description of Smith’s writing is to be found in an analysis that he himself offers of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. In an interview with Ken Myers, Smith suggests that Merleau-Ponty “is trying to, in a way, fight against a mind-body dualism, at the same time that he doesn’t want to collapse everything into just a materialistic monism.” Nevertheless, perhaps because of the limitations of language, Merleau-Ponty keeps “resorting to the language of soul and body.”⁶⁹ In the end, perhaps the language Smith frequently employs in his cultural liturgies project is language he has “resorted” to.⁷⁰

cognitive)” (emphasis original). The parenthetical comment seems to me to be the better articulation of the matter.

⁶⁶ Elsewhere, he is more equivocal. For example, when he asserts that our “affective take on the world” is a “constual of the world that is governed by our ‘emotional’ training as much as (or really, more than, or at least *before*) it is governed by information deposited in the intellect” (*Imagining the Kingdom*, 36, emphasis original), what are we to make of that curious and seemingly unsure parenthesis? Is it “really, more than,” or is it “before,” or might the initial “as much as” suffice? Is Smith trying to trump the intellect, or chastise it for its imperialism in favor a more democratic anthropology, or assign it a more accurate place within a robust “order of action”?

⁶⁷ Particularly, I agree that, where such “worldview thinking” is operative, “the formative cultural impact of sites like the mall tends to not show up on our radar. . . . An idea-centric or belief-centric approach will fail to see the pedagogy at work in the mall, and thus will also fail to articulate a critique and counter-pedagogy” (*Imagining the Kingdom*, 24). Again, “because such worldview approaches remain largely fixated on the cognitive, something like the mall drops off the radar (while an institution like the U.S. Supreme Court is unduly amplified)” (*Imagining the Kingdom*, 85).

⁶⁸ See Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 35.

⁶⁹ James K. A. Smith, interview with Ken Myers, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 121.6 (2014), beginning at 13:38 of the recording. For further comments on “lexical limitations” in Merleau-Ponty, see *Imagining the Kingdom*, 56, n. 37.

⁷⁰ An important possible instance comes when Smith glosses the Greek term *kardia*, preferring “guts” to “heart” (see *Desiring the Kingdom*, 18, 24, 26, 47, 57, 126, 137). Of course, “guts” can be very misleading, giving the impression that our *kardia* is nothing but our bowels. In fact, in Scripture our *kardia* is very much a matter of “understanding, knowledge, and will” (A. Sand, “καρδία, ας, ή,” EDNT 2:249–251, here 250; see, e.g., Matt 9:4, which speaks of “*thinking* [*enthymēomai*] evil in your hearts [*kardia*]”), though it is not exclusively a matter of the intellect (see, e.g., Phil 4:7, which pairs but distinguishes *kardia* and *noēma*). Smith might have had more lexical grounding if he had zeroed in on *splanchnon* instead of *kardia*. In an important admission, Smith explains that he chooses “a Message-like translation of *kardia*” in order to “shock us out of our familiarity” and press toward something that “is much more holistic (and less dualistic),” rather than to

In any case, the point here (one with which I believe Smith would more or less agree) is that the counter-formation necessary to curb malformation via the modern American calendar must involve much more than ecclesial observance of an alternative calendar. It must also involve other engagements in the whole of the church's liturgy as well as, or including, habits of the mind (both personal and corporate), practices of catechesis, and theological judgment and instruction. Living in a world of disordered loves and practices, we need to "develop disciplines of cognitive and embodied resistance."⁷¹ Both cognitive and embodied resistance are crucial if we would enjoy deep and lasting faithfulness.⁷²

VI. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

If any of the discussion I have offered about calendars and compassion has proven compelling, then there may be some church leaders who desire to reconsider the calendrical practice in their local church contexts and to appropriate more of the church calendar in their communities.⁷³ Before concluding, then, it may be fitting to offer a few practical suggestions for how such appropriation might be pursued.

A first and obvious step is to seek to deepen our understanding of the church's liturgical calendar itself—its biblical and theological bases, its historical development, its internal rhythms and logic, its formative

reduce *kardia* to the realm of materiality (ibid., 57). Smith is well-aware of the danger of reductionism, and the gloss "guts" seems to be his chosen means to help us identify a metaphorical space "between" the duality of mind and body (see *Imagining the Kingdom*, 13, 43). But it is probably not the best term for the task at hand, and may have been "resorted" to. Interestingly, Smith avoids (so far as I can tell) reference to a *kardia* = guts equation in *Imagining the Kingdom*.

⁷¹ David John Seel Jr., "Material Boy: On Artifacts, Discernment, and Elites" (review of Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*), Ransom Fellowship, <http://www.ransomfellowship.org/article/detail.asp?AID=450&B=David%20John%20Seel,%20Jr.&TID=5> [last accessed March 13, 2015].

⁷² On a somewhat related front, Schmemmann makes an important distinction between liturgical forms and "liturgical piety" that can "project" onto liturgical forms "content" and experiences that are alien to the forms (see *Introduction*, 97–99). This is a difference between the "objective content and order" of worship and the "reception, the experience, the understanding of worship" (ibid., 127). It seems to me that liturgical practice alone (understood in a reduced way as mere concrete practices and forms within the church) can provide little to challenge an unhealthy "liturgical piety" (cf. Healy, *Hauerwas*, 111–13).

⁷³ I focus on church leaders and not individual Christians in general for a couple reasons. On the one hand, church leaders are the most responsible for the shape of the church's liturgy and liturgical practice. Though Smith wants to emphasize that "worship is best understood on the order of action, not reflection," nevertheless he admits that "Reflection is especially important for those who are responsible for *leading* worship, so that the rhythms and practices of worship are *intentional*" (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 166, emphasis original; the binary opposition of "action, not reflection" seems unnecessary to me). On the other hand, while I have no qualms about individuals (or families) privately observing the church calendar in principle, nevertheless to present calendar observance as a matter only or primarily for individual appropriation is to run the risk of (1) not taking the church calendar seriously as a public calendar, and (2) institutionally contributing to malformation since we *will* observe some sort of calendar as churches.

impact as a matter of liturgical practice. (Tied to this is the need to grow in our awareness of other “liturgical” calendars that our lives tend to be ordered by.) Hopefully the thoughts shared here are a beginning step toward that end. Such understanding is crucial for the enactment of the liturgy, but it will also equip us to offer wise and fitting responses to church members who may look upon the liturgical calendar with no little suspicion and reservation.

Second, a careful consideration and re-evaluation of the days/seasons that we *actually* observe as a church is needed. As I have pointed out, the question is not *whether* to observe a calendar, but *how* we will “calendrically” order and shape our time together institutionally as a church and what the calendars we will necessarily observe consist of. In most churches of which I have been a part, the calendar highlighted in and as a church has been predominantly the modern American calendar with a small dose of the church calendar thrown in (i.e., acknowledgment of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter). Institutionally, we observe the church calendar much like “nominal” individual Christians attend church—only on the “special” days of the year. Of course, there has never been, and will never be, a church that observes *exclusively* one calendar or another, just as there has never been, and will never be, a church that is wholly separable and sealed off from its surrounding culture.⁷⁴ In “the wild,” all local churches will observe some kind of “mixed” calendar, for lack of a better term.⁷⁵ But what if we prayerfully sought out ways to reverse the quantities in the “mixture” that currently prevails in many of our churches so that our observance of the church calendar were less incidental and “nominal”? To do so, we would need to begin by identifying the current “mixture” we offer in our churches, plotting out the shape and rhythm of a typical year in our local churches (much like we did for the abstractions of “the church calendar” and “the modern American calendar” in the opening sections above). From there, we may need discerningly to decrease the “thickness” of our ritual observance of days/seasons of the modern American calendar in our corporate gatherings.⁷⁶ Would, for example, a few brief words acknowledging mothers during the morning welcome on Mother’s Day be preferable to using the whole service to thematize motherhood and having mothers in the congregation stand year after year?

⁷⁴ As Peter Leithart has recently commented, “the middle ground is the only ground we have. Purely common-grace and purely special-grace communities are theoretical only. They have never actually existed for sons of Adam and Noah” (“Kuyper’s Common Grace,” *First Things* (blog), May 9, 2014, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2014/05/kuyper-common-grace> [last accessed November 30, 2015]). With respect to liturgy and liturgical practice, see John D. Witvliet, “Theological Models for the Relationship between Liturgy and Culture,” in *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003): 91–123, esp. 114–23.

⁷⁵ I would not, however, go so far as Hughes, “Liturgical Year,” 79, to suggest that “When Hallmark is successful in establishing a new feast and the entire country is caught up in caring enough to send the very best, the Church calendar cannot *not* acknowledge it” (emphasis original).

⁷⁶ See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82–84, on “thick” and “thin” practices/rituals.

Third, to turn to more constructive suggestions, there are a variety of ways we can seek to highlight important feast days and seasons/seasonal transitions, some more subtle and some more overt. Many possibilities will be discovered by acquainting ourselves with historic church practices, but a few proposals come readily to mind. We can decorate and color our buildings and sanctuaries (or even simply our bulletins) to mark visually the changing seasons.⁷⁷ We can select “themes” for our individual services that are in accord with the particular Sundays of the year on which, and the seasons of the year during which, we gather (e.g., Transfiguration Sunday, Sundays after Pentecost). This would require a discerning selection of calls to worship, words of welcome, songs/hymns, times of confession, intercessory prayers, responsive readings, Scripture readings, etc.⁷⁸ With respect specifically to the relationship of Scripture to the church calendar, Scripture readings might be strategically chosen to help us both to interpret the church calendar aright and (to say the same thing from a different angle) to give us a regular, annual rehearsal of the story of Jesus (and more broadly, the whole canonical storyline). Here the use of something like the Revised Common Lectionary would prove quite helpful, at very least as a starting point for guiding us in the selection of lections from Sunday to Sunday.⁷⁹

We might also incorporate various other practices, rituals, and celebrations that are consistent with and reinforce the logic of the present day/season of the church calendar. I have joked (or only half-joked) with a friend about hosting Pentecost Day barbecues (think “tongues of fire”) as a way of celebrating the pouring out of the Spirit and the birth of the church. Churches regularly hold picnics and potlucks during the course

⁷⁷ Cf. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155–56.

⁷⁸ Arranging orders of service around a particular theme for special days is not at all strange to us. We do so regularly with the “holy days” of the modern American calendar (e.g., emphasizing the notion of “freedom” on the Sunday closest to Independence Day; having mothers in the congregation stand on Mother’s Day and focusing that day’s sermon on motherhood).

⁷⁹ Horace Allen, “Calendar and Lectionary,” 391, observes that the recovery among Reformed churches of calendrical considerations often occurs *apart from* intentional consideration of (and involvement in) lectionary use. One historical factor contributing to this development is the abandonment among early Reformers (e.g., Zwingli, Calvin) of lectionary use “in favor of ‘in course’ or continuous reading week by week.” This had the effect of “dissociating ‘days’ from lections”—that is, the lived experience of the calendar had little or no meaningful parallel in the church’s engagement with Scripture. Calendar was detached from canon, the latter being increasingly tied to clerical will—that is, the church’s lived experience of the Scriptures was decided by *individual pastors* who “spontaneously” selected texts to read and preach from week to week (or season to season). “Let it not be forgotten,” Allen comments, “that there is always a lectionary system operative, even if it is as casual and spontaneous as the ‘inspiration’ of the local pastor in any given week as the Lord’s Day approaches” (ibid., 410). Of course, no formal lectionary is without faults, but a functional “lectionary system,” which is all the more influential for not being recognized as such, is important to bring to the light. For an entertaining set of rants against the Common Lectionary, see Robert Farrar Capon, *The Foolishness of Preaching: Proclaiming the Gospel against the Wisdom of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 72–78; similar but more measured critique is provided by Oliver O’Donovan in Oliver O’Donovan with Michael Vasey, *Liturgy and Ethics* (Bramcote: Grove, 1993), 12–13.

of the year. What if we keyed them to important days in the church's calendar? We might also offer special services for days such as Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, and Ascension Day, and throughout Holy Week—all of which would be at least as appropriate for who we are as a church as offering a special Thanksgiving eve service, as many churches regularly do. Additionally, it might be worth considering the holding of other regularly recurring events during fitting times of the church year. For example, what if we scheduled a "Missions Week" around Epiphany given its connection to Gentile mission, or during Trinity Season as a mark of the church's life in and with the Triune God? Differently, we might emphasize the practices of corporate fasting and almsgiving during penitential and anticipatory seasons such as Advent and Lent. Or we might consider, in line with the general practice of the early church, performing baptisms and first communions on Easter Sunday, using the season of Lent for our baptismal instruction.

There is much more we could and should say. But hopefully these few suggestions provide some useful starting points as we seek after a liturgical life and practice that will form us well and counter malformation.

VII. THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE SPIRIT

At the conclusion of an illuminating essay entitled "Tutoring the Affections: Liturgy and Christian Formation in the Early Church," Robert Wilken confesses to "something of a bad conscience."⁸⁰ That is a good way of describing an ongoing unease I have had throughout the writing of this article. Part of this unease arises from a matter of emphasis. I have been exploring the nature and importance of the church calendar with a view to its possible connection to the cultivation of compassion in the lives of God's people. For the most part my focus has been on the church calendar as a strategy of resistance to the mal-forming influences of the modern American calendar and, more generally, of life in a fallen and disordered world/culture. But something like the church calendar is not important simply as an instrument of resistance and counter-formation; it is also, I believe, a part of or a seeking after true and ordered formation. It is not an effort in counter-cultural activity alone, but also a prayerful pursuit and anticipation of true culture. I do not want to commend the way of negation taken by the Pharisee in Luke 18, suggesting that we observe the church calendar only or primarily as a way to make us aware, and thus lift up our "thanksgiving," that we are not like our individualistic consumer culture. I do not want to cater to an adolescent impulse toward contrarianism or a fundamentalistic delight not so much in truth, goodness, and beauty but in being able to show how everyone else is wrong. I want to live into the church calendar as part of authentic thanksgiving for what we *are* and *have* as a gift from God, and part of a constructive labor in naming reality (specifically the passing of days and seasons) aright.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Robert L. Wilken, "Tutoring the Affections: Liturgy and Christian Formation in the Early Church," *Antiphon* 8 (2003): 21–27, at 26.

⁸¹ Oliver O'Donovan rightly observes that part of Adam's task, now fulfilled in Christ, was "to call things by their proper names" (*Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline*

But a second and more significant source of my unease is the same thing that gives rise to Wilken's "bad conscience." I fear I may be giving a false impression about the nature and weightiness of liturgy—namely, that it is chiefly important for its functional value, that it is a means to an end (i.e., formation) outside of it. Wilken explains:

Although everything I have said is, I hope, correct, and reflects the contribution of the Church's worship to formation in the Christian life, yet I cannot bring these remarks to a close without saying that it is a debasement of liturgy if we view it primarily as an instrument, a means for some other end, even as laudable a goal as formation in the Christian life. The liturgy is not a device to accomplish some other end. Worship is its own end.⁸²

As the form and expression of the church's worship, liturgy is its own end. It is not a calculated strategy to attain something else, even something as good as the cultivation of compassion. It is a reverent response to the goodness, grace, and presence of our Creator and Savior and Lord. As Wilken goes on to conclude, "Only when liturgy serves its proper end, the celebration of Christ's presence and the praise and adoration of the triune God, will it be able to serve other ends."⁸³ This is simply a liturgically focused way of saying, with C. S. Lewis, that when we pursue "first things" first, "second things" tend to follow.⁸⁴

Of course, we can still ask why it is that "second things" (in this instance, formation unto virtue) tend to follow "first things" (worship of God). I have offered a hint toward an answer at the very outset by asking after a holy instinct and a "spiritual reflex" of compassion. We need to take the "Spirit" in "spiritual" seriously.⁸⁵ Our liturgical practices might prepare lives well-suited for the virtue of compassion, lives into which compassion "fits." But like love, joy, peace, and the rest, compassion is a fruit of the Spirit—it is born of the Spirit, sustained and empowered by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit. Liturgical practice per se does not create compassion; the Spirit does. But I agree with Smith that "the Spirit meets, nourishes, transforms, and empowers us just *through* and *in* such material practices."⁸⁶ If formation unto compassion tends to arise from

for *Evangelical Ethics* [2nd ed.; Leicester: Apollos, 1994], 26). See further Myers, *All God's Children*, 38–39; and Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 75–78.

⁸² Wilken, "Tutoring the Affections," 26.

⁸³ Wilken, "Tutoring the Affections," 26. See also Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 150.

⁸⁴ See C. S. Lewis, "First and Second Things," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. W. Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970): 278–81.

⁸⁵ The word "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*), for the Apostle Paul, "functions primarily as an adjective for the Spirit, referring to *that which belongs to, or pertains to, the Spirit*" (Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994], 29, emphasis original; see further 28–32).

⁸⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 150, emphasis original; see more fully 148–51. Smith's brief but pregnant comments concerning "catching" sleep (following Merleau-Ponty) with his concluding suggestion that Christian (liturgical) practices may be "habitations of the Spirit" (following Craig Dykstra) are important to consider in this connection as well (see

the practice of the church's liturgy, it is because the church's liturgy is a place where the Lord through his Spirit is present to us. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom and transformation.

Imagining the Kingdom, 65). We might best think of liturgical practice as a kind of lived prayer, an embodied crying out through Christ to the Father for the Spirit's help and enablement, indeed, for rebirth by the Spirit.