“For students and colleagues to present essays to a professor is already a great honor, but for the essays to be both scholarly and pastoral is a tribute to the person of Maxwell Johnson who has consistently demonstrated that sound historical scholarship is the best approach to good pastoral praxis.”

— Michael Driscoll  
Co-Director of the Master in  
Sacred Music Program  
University of Notre Dame

“[This is a] magnificent volume of equally outstanding essays. Instead of digging in the liturgical past as nostalgic antiquarians intent on restoring authenticity and purity, the contributors have ingeniously focused on three main categories—liturgical year, Christian initiation, and Eucharist—and used three innovative approaches that address primarily the pastoral role of liturgical history. In so doing, they have produced an extraordinary work of scholarship, which not only does justice to the research of one of the most prominent liturgical historians living today, but to the field as a whole.”

— Nathan D. Mitchell  
University of Notre Dame

“These essays demonstrate the pastoral relevance of careful historical investigation of liturgy while avoiding the romantic approach to history that characterized liturgical renewal in the twentieth century. Both academic specialists and working pastors will find much here to consider. The collection demonstrates the cutting edge of liturgical studies in the twenty-first century, and it is a fitting tribute to a scholar who himself has left an indelible mark on the field.”

— L. Edward Phillips  
Associate Professor of Worship and  
Liturgical Theology  
Candler School of Theology  
Emory University
A Living Tradition

On the Intersection of Liturgical History and Pastoral Practice

Essays in Honor of Maxwell E. Johnson

Edited by
David A. Pitt  Stefanos Alexopoulos  Christian McConnell

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Introduction

Whether through study with Maxwell Johnson or through reading his *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, one encounters a particularly helpful observation concerning the French term, *Pastorale Liturgique*. Johnson is quite fond of noting that this term, frequently rendered in English as “pastoral liturgy,” has shaped the Liturgical Movement in the United States in an immeasurable way. The term has been incorporated into the names of publications, institutions, and academic degrees. Johnson is quick to point out, however, that the proper translation of the term is not “pastoral liturgy” but rather “liturgical pastoring.”¹ This, he insists, represents a fundamentally different understanding of liturgy’s role in the lives of Christians. Consequently, Johnson embraces the theological vocation of the historian.² Not merely one immersing himself or herself in ancient texts, assembling data from the past, the historian is instead called upon to narrate the present story of the community—its living tradition—pointing out those events and themes that have contributed to its current shape and experience: “It is, then, not so much our experience of the rites that must be primary . . . but the evolution and interpretation of those rites themselves that are to shape, challenge, and critique


our experience. In other words, here it is the Christian liturgical tradition as known from the texts of that tradition that is primary, and our ‘experience’ of the contemporary use or misuse of that tradition that is secondary.” 3 These two themes, of an inherently formative function of liturgy that has historically shaped the present incarnation of the church, are woven throughout the breadth of Johnson’s work.

This volume of essays, dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Maxwell E. Johnson on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, pays tribute to Johnson’s scholarship by addressing some of the ways in which the historical study of the liturgy contributes to the liturgical pastoring of the church. Such a venture is necessary in the face of a liturgical culture that appears beset by two conflicting approaches. On one hand, Johnson has argued that the evidence gleaned from liturgical history provides the necessary foundation for avoiding liturgical relativism: “there is still a case to be made for some kind of ‘normativity’ based on the inherited traditions . . . centered in Sunday, assembly, baptism, word, meal, year, and some kind of ministerial ordering, together with the orthodox doctrinal heritage of the church of the first millennium, [and that] there should be plenty of room for a diversity of practices and interpretations, past and present, in which the gifts of several differing Christian churches might find a welcome place.” 4 He insists that the normativity of the liturgical tradition is not simply a matter of preference: “Recent developments in Christian worship around the world—for example, the increasing phenomenon of megachurches, the church growth movement, the development of ‘seeker services,’ and the increasing notion across ecclesial lines that the church’s liturgy is but ‘one’ of several options for ‘worship’—challenge the historic priority of sacramental worship. What appears to be at stake in this, I would submit, is a particular theological understanding of how God is believed to act in the world and church.” 5

On the other hand, Johnson has insisted that liturgical history and liturgical antiquarianism are decisively different projects:


Archaeologists do not dig beneath the surface of sites where very many generations of peoples have lived and expose the different layers of habitation in order to persuade modern humans to return to the conditions of prehistoric dwellings, nor are liturgical historians bent on excavating the various strata of the past in order to restore some sort of imaginary primitive purity. . . . It is only when we have a clearer picture of the stages of that evolution that we are in a position to make any judgments about which of these trends were of genuine and lasting value and which represented a loss of something significant from earlier times. Indeed, it is not up to liturgical historians to reform liturgy; all the historian can do is to unpack as carefully and clearly as possible the richness and diversity of the liturgical traditions as they actually appear in history. What legitimate liturgical authorities in the various churches do with the results of liturgical history in service to liturgical reform and renewal is something altogether distinct.6

The navigation between these two polar alternatives provides the lens for each of the essays in this collection, which are organized according to three liturgical categories: liturgical year, Christian initiation, and Eucharist. Further, each author has addressed the pastoral role of liturgical history in varying combinations of three different approaches. First, several essays consider ways in which figures from liturgical history were, themselves, liturgical pastors. Second, several essays investigate ways in which liturgical history has been used in the shaping of contemporary liturgical rites and prayers. And third, several essays consider the ways in which liturgical history informs contemporary understandings and beliefs. In all, this collection is an attempt to rise to the task that Johnson sees for liturgical history and the historian, who “must attend to the great variety that actually exists—liturgically and theologically—in the sources of the various Christian traditions, as that variety is revealed to us by study of those documents themselves.”7

The collection begins with two introductory essays that help to establish the framework for this project. Paul F. Bradshaw, Johnson’s former dissertation director and now colleague and frequent coauthor,8

8 Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2012); Paul F. Bradshaw
introduces this anthology. In his essay, “The Relationship between Historical Research and Modern Liturgical Practice,” Bradshaw identifies some of the historical perspectives and assumptions affecting the shape of late twentieth-century Western liturgical revision and reform and indicates how many of these scholarly positions have changed since then. Articulating potential difficulties associated with such a shift, he investigates some of the ways in which the historical study of the liturgy might impact how the liturgy is celebrated and understood. This focus is somewhat narrowed in the second introductory essay, Robert F. Taft’s “Between Progress and Nostalgia: Liturgical Reform and the Western Romance with the Christian East; Strategies and Realities.” Here, Taft examines the valuation of Eastern liturgy in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, arguing that what Westerners saw in Eastern liturgy may well be best understood as an indication of what they perceived themselves to be lacking. After proposing alternatives to some of these (mis)perceptions, Taft offers suggestions for the renewal of Western liturgy and spirituality.

The trajectory established by the introductory essays is continued in the first essay of the section treating the liturgical year. Ruth Langer’s contribution, “The Liturgical Parting(s) of the Ways: A Preliminary Foray,” investigates points of seeming connection, yet ultimately divergence, between Jewish and Christian liturgical years. She not only asks the significant question as to why the connections between the two were so unexpectedly superficial but also points to the value that these differences have for interfaith relations. Michael Daniel Findikyan’s article, “Saints Nicholas in Armenia,” shifts the comparative focus to the Armenian Church, investigating the unusual problem of two feasts within the span of three weeks venerating the same Saint Nicholas. Findikyan explores reasons for the doubling of the feast and offers the possibility that these past reasons for Nicholas’s significance might still resonate today. The final essay of the liturgical year section is Nicholas V. Russo’s “The Distribution of Cyril’s Baptismal Catecheses and the Shape of the Catechumenate in Mid-Fourth-Century Jerusalem,” which presents an image of Cyril the liturgical pastor. Russo offers an arrangement of Cyril’s pre-baptismal instructions that may

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well correspond to the expansion of the pre-baptismal period from three weeks to six weeks, resulting from the emergence of a forty-day Lenten season at Jerusalem.

The third section of this collection, which treats initiation, begins with Christian McConnell’s essay, “The Meanings of Paschal Baptism in the Non-Roman West.” Examining liturgical sources from Spain and Gaul, McConnell assesses the range of baptismal images that illuminate Easter baptism beyond that of death and resurrection with Christ. He argues that the clear preeminence of a Romans 6 baptismal theology in contemporary Western baptismal rites need not result in an exclusive interpretation of contemporary paschal baptism. Walter D. Ray’s article, “Baptismal Images, Baptismal Narratives,” expands upon the multiplicity of received baptismal images by suggesting two interrelated claims. First, Ray argues that Paul utilizes a narrative pattern associated with baptism in order to foster both the faithful’s entry into salvation history through Christ and their living it out in their own experience. Ray continues by suggesting that an image of baptism that highlights such a dynamic is marriage—enacted ritually, baptism marries the Christian to Christ the bridegroom both in his death and in his life. The connection between the baptismal event and a baptismal life are further developed in Jeffrey A. Truscott’s essay, “Luther’s Pastoral Approach to Baptism.” Truscott provides a look back at another liturgical pastor, tracing Martin Luther’s baptismal theology from 1519 to 1529. He identifies ways in which Luther’s treatment of baptism developed in response to both pressing theological issues of the day and a heightened awareness of the implications of baptism for the faithful. Luther’s method of baptismal theology thus emerges as a formative model for contemporary pastors. The theme of baptismal living is continued in David A. Pitt’s essay, “Lex Exorcismi, Lex Vivendi: The Minor Exorcisms of Adult Initiation and Baptismal Identity.” He narrates the development of the minor exorcisms during the revision of the rite of adult initiation following the Second Vatican Council, arguing that these exorcisms are central to the period of the catechumenate. Their celebration would help establish a baptismal spirituality better equipped to combat contemporary semi-Pelagian trends. The issue of semi-Pelagian tendencies related to baptism is also taken up in Lizette Larson-Miller’s essay, “‘That You May Be a Christian’: Baptism, Identity, and Naming.” Larson-Miller explores the increased centrality given to naming those about to be baptized (particularly infants) and argues that a more traditional practice—direct
reliance upon the names of the Triune God—might contribute greatly to a deeper understanding of being named as Christian.

The concluding section of this collection treats the Eucharist. In “Revisiting Egyptian Anaphoral Development,” Bryan D. Spinks considers the difficulties associated with geographically based descriptions of liturgical units. Spinks examines the structure of Egyptian Basil, the Barcelona anaphora, and the anaphora of St. Thomas the Apostle. Ultimately, Spinks concludes that speaking of Egyptian eucharistic praying may require recognizing variety in anaphoral construction, proposing that the union of “Egyptian” and “West Syrian” elements found in Sarapion may actually reflect a consciously pastoral and genuinely Egyptian effort to serve a local community. The discussion on anaphoral construction is continued in the next contribution, which treats the epiclesis and institution narrative in the anaphora of Basil: “*Attempto*: Rethinking the Question of Summaries,” by Gabriele Winkler. Whereas previous articles more directly concern the pastoring of the faithful, Winkler does so indirectly by pastoring scholars. Her thorough summary of her own recent German-language scholarship not only provides a clear model for what summaries ought to be but will clearly benefit a good many English-speaking scholars by minimizing the potential for interpretative errors. Anne McGowan’s essay, “The Epiclesis in Eucharistic Praying Reconsidered: Early Evidence and Recent Western Reforms,” builds upon the work of both Spinks and Winkler by examining the use of the epiclesis in current Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Methodist eucharistic prayers. She engages questions pertaining to structure and theology of ancient epicleses, leading to a survey of epicletic diversity in the contemporary Christian West. The section and collection concludes with Stefanos Alexopoulos’s contribution, “‘Ὅλοι μαζί’: Liturgical Practice and Liturgical History.” Alexopoulos engages in a case study of the use of historical sources for contemporary liturgy by examining the theological motivation and liturgical practice of an added admonition for participation in the context of Byzantine worship. Beyond the issue of this particular addition, he helps set out a method for engaging in sound tradition-based liturgical practice.

All the essays collected here demonstrate a variety of pastoral implications for the present celebrations and understandings of liturgy arising from its historical study; nevertheless, they are unified by a common thematic thread. Similarly, the authorship reflects a great diversity of persons. Gathered here is the work of Max’s mentors, his
former students, and his colleagues, members and (to varying degree) nonmembers of Das Institut, who emerge from a variety of liturgical traditions. Despite these differences, all are unified in being honored to be numbered among Max’s friends. We, the editors, very much appreciate their ready willingness to give their time and energy to this project. We are, similarly, most grateful to Hans Christoffersen and Liturgical Press for so willingly publishing an honorific collection of essays in that same spirit of commitment. The eagerness with which all involved in this book have undertaken to celebrate the service that Max has rendered to the life of the church through his academic ministry is a testament to the respect that he enjoys as a scholar and as a friend.

David A. Pitt, Stefanos Alexopoulos, and Christian McConnell
March 21, 2012

The Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict
Anniversary of the Death of Sarapion of Thmuis
Part I

Introductory Essays
Chapter 1

The Relationship between Historical Research and Modern Liturgical Practice

One of Maxwell Johnson’s major concerns has been whether and how we might view historical liturgical sources as being not merely descriptive but also in some way normative for Christian worship today.¹ This is also an area in which I have dabbled in the past and to which I now return. There can be little doubt that those who were engaged in the process of liturgical revision in a number of churches in the second half of the twentieth century did regard what they knew of early Christian worship practices as models on which to draw when composing their own texts. What is also clear from a vantage point some thirty years after most of these revisions took place is that historical scholarship has moved on considerably from that earlier time and that a good number of the conclusions reached by the scholars on whom the revisers then relied would now be seriously questioned as a result of the research that has been pursued in the last two or three decades.

Among the views of early Christian worship that were widely held by liturgical historians of the mid-twentieth century were the following:

- That the Easter Vigil was the principal occasion when new converts were admitted to the church in a rite that included baptism, confirmation, and First Communion; consequently, many modern rites have “restored” this pattern as normative for Christian initiation.

• That eucharistic rites conformed almost without exception to a standard fourfold shape—taking bread and wine, giving thanks over them, breaking the bread, and distributing both to all those present—a pattern which itself was an early modification of the sevenfold shape of the Last Supper; consequently, modern revisions generally either emphasize that structure as already existing in their rites or have “restored” it where it was lacking.

• That the ancient church order known as the Apostolic Tradition had been composed by Hippolytus of Rome and gave an accurate picture of liturgical practice in Rome in the early third century; consequently, many revised rites adopted elements from this work as the basis for modern practice, not least adaptations of its eucharistic prayer and in some cases its ordination prayer for a bishop too.

As the result of more recent research, however—research in which Maxwell Johnson has played a significant part—this former scholarly consensus no longer exists. On the contrary:

• It is now generally recognized that prior to the fourth century only in North Africa and possibly at Rome was there a preference for baptism at Easter and that during this earlier period the dominant theological motif for baptism was that of new birth (as in John 3) rather than dying and rising with Christ (as is Romans 6). In other parts of the Christian world baptisms might have taken place at any time in the year, after a final period of preparation that lasted for three weeks instead of the later forty days of the Lenten season.

• The existence of anything that might be said to resemble “confirmation” is not universally attested in these early centuries. Our first- and second-century sources (the Didache and Justin Martyr) witness to no other ritual than immersion in water. Third-century

2 The principal proponent of this theory was Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (London: Dacre, 1945), a book that continues to be reissued. The latest edition, with an introduction by Simon Jones, was published by Continuum in 2005.

Syrian sources are aware of an anointing with oil, but occurring before the immersion rather than after it, and apparently in two different forms: one in which the head alone was anointed and related to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and another in which the whole body was anointed as a symbolic protection or healing and the Spirit was associated instead with the water. Only Roman and North African sources reveal the existence of a post-baptismal anointing, but here it was not that action but the laying on of hands with prayer that followed it that was understood as bestowing the Spirit on the newly baptized.4

A growing body of scholars now argue that the roots of Christian eucharistic practice lie not in the Last Supper alone but in the habitual meals that Jesus shared with his disciples and that the first Christians continued on a regular (apparently weekly) basis. Nor was the Eucharist at first a rite within a meal: it was the meal and hence took the form that was customary within the particular local cultural environment in which groups of Christians found themselves. In some cases, prayer over the cup apparently preceded prayer over bread at the beginning of the meal; in some cases wine was avoided and water drunk instead; and in some cases what was consumed was related to the remembrance of Jesus’ sayings about bread being his body (and wine his blood?), while in other communities this association was not made. It was only much later, in some cases not until well into the third century, that the evening meal as such was abandoned and emphasis put instead on the holy food, which was both distributed and consumed within a communal gathering in a morning and also taken home by participants or sent to those not present for individual consumption later.5

Although the liturgical provisions of the *Apostolic Tradition* were formerly treated as nearly the only solid rock in otherwise shifting sands of early evidence, the authenticity of this church order has now come to be questioned by a number of scholars. Rather

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than its being the official handbook of the church at Rome in the third century, these scholars argue that it is an artificial amalgam of traditions from various parts of the ancient Christian world, some elements dating back to very primitive times and other additions not being made until the fourth century. It therefore does not represent the actual practice of any single Christian community, and its eucharistic prayer in particular appears to belong to Eastern Christianity, to West Syria, rather than to Rome.6

In the light of the above, what, then, should be the reaction of those responsible for the process of liturgical revision in churches today? Should modern forms of worship be revised again in order to conform more closely to what we now know were the patterns adopted by early Christians? It is important to note that the aims of the twentieth-century liturgical reforms were never to reproduce exactly the earliest known forms of Christian worship or to eliminate all later developments as a departure from the ideal. It was certainly necessary, in the interests of reform and renewal, to get behind some of the accretions and distortions of the tradition that had been introduced, both in the course of the Middle Ages and during and after the sixteenth-century Reformation, in order to get a clearer perspective on the longer-term developments of liturgical practice. Rather than seeking the oldest forms, however, the modern revisers generally settled on the late fourth century as their preferred baseline but willingly included in their new texts features that they knew were introduced only in later periods. One may certainly criticize their choice of the late fourth century as their “golden age” for liturgy, when it seems on the contrary to have been a time when the church was struggling to come to terms with an influx of more “nominal” Christians and seeking to adapt the liturgy to this changed pastoral situation.7 One may also criticize an occasional tendency to preserve archaisms that are either misleading or completely unintelligible to modern ears rather than to find more suitable


alternatives, as, for example, in the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, where the retention of “Rite of Election” carries unfounded connotations of democracy in contemporary minds and the use of the term “mystagogy,” if it communicates anything at all to most people, suggests that it is a mystery in a completely unintended sense! But it is surely not fair to accuse the various revisers of wholesale “liturgical fundamentalism.”

The aim of these reformers was certainly not, as has sometimes been alleged, to restore what is discovered from the past as normative for the present and to eliminate from modern practice all later developments as inauthentic. As Maxwell Johnson himself has observed: “Archaeologists do not dig beneath the surface of sites where very many generations of peoples have lived and expose the different layers of habitation in order to persuade modern humans to return to the conditions of prehistoric dwellings, nor are liturgical historians bent on excavating the various strata of the past in order to restore some sort of imaginary primitive purity! The gradual development of liturgical practice involved the positive refinement and enrichment of earlier ways of thinking, speaking, and acting, even if it also tended to bring along with it elements of impoverishment and distortion.”

As a very obvious example of the desire not to put the clock back to the fourth century absolutely but to include what appeared to be appropriate later developments, we may point out that the text of the eucharistic prayer of the *Apostolic Tradition* has in no instance been adopted verbatim in any church today. On the contrary, various additions and amendments were made to it, as, for example, the near universal insertion of the *Sanctus*. All modern revisers have similarly believed it to be important to include a penitential unit within their eucharistic rites, in spite of the fact that such a thing is never found in the oldest texts that we possess. Because there was no patristic model to follow, there has not been unanimity as to where it should be placed in today’s orders—at the beginning in preparation for the whole rite, after the intercessions as part of the response to the proclamation of the Word, or immediately before the reception of Communion?

Of course, even when they have attempted to incorporate elements from early Christian practice, revisers have sometimes failed to capture the essence of their meaning. A clear instance of this is found in what

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9 On this, see further Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship*, 132–44.
is often termed in modern rites “the exchange of the peace.” Because in all ancient eucharistic sources something like this—although generally described there as “the kiss of peace”—occurs between the end of the intercessions and the presentation of the bread and wine (except at Rome, where it came to occupy a place immediately before communion\(^\text{10}\)), it has usually been interpreted by modern revisers as intended to fulfill the injunction of Jesus: “If you are offering your gift on the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-24).\(^\text{11}\) It is true that some ancient texts do understand it as just such a gesture of reconciliation and so the emphasis falls on the word “peace,” but this is not how it is interpreted in the oldest sources we possess. There, its connection is seen as being with what precedes rather than what follows. It is said to be “the seal of prayer,”\(^\text{12}\) and a proper knowledge of the social conventions surrounding the practice of kissing in Greco-Roman culture helps to illuminate its true significance in those rites. In those days people normally only exchanged kisses with members of their immediate family or very close friends. Thus, for Christians to kiss those with whom they were not so related was in effect to proclaim that these were their true brothers and sisters in the household of faith. Indeed, there is evidence that some Christians took this so seriously that after their conversion they refused to exchange kisses any more with members of their biological family who were not baptized.\(^\text{13}\) Thus, the real emphasis was on the act of kissing as a powerful countercultural symbol: it was “the KISS of peace,” not “the kiss of PEACE.” Modern practice not only interprets the meaning of the gesture differently but usually employs a quite different ritual action—the handshake—which at least in American society is generally reserved as a greeting for those with whom we are not closely connected, not for those in our intimate circle, and so tends to symbolize the opposite of what the earliest Christians were doing. There is no reason why churches should not continue this present practice if they

\(^{10}\) For a possible reason for this exception, see John F. Baldovin, “The Fermentum at Rome in the Fifth Century: A Reconsideration,” *Worship* 79, no. 1 (2005): 38–53.

\(^{11}\) All translations of Scripture in this essay are by the author.

\(^{12}\) See, e.g., Tertullian, *De oratione* 18.

judge it to be pastorally valuable, but they should not be labeling it as “doing what the early church did.”

Another example of a common symbolic action based on ancient practice but generally failing to communicate its original significance is the offertory procession or presentation of the eucharistic bread and wine. In most churches this simply involves two people carrying these elements from a small table placed near the back of the church down to the front to hand over to the presiding minister or his or her assistants to place on the altar or holy table. The twentieth-century Liturgical Movement, which introduced this custom as one of its principal expressions (along with moving the holy table away from the wall, about which more later), informed people that they were thus “doing what the early church did” and that the action symbolized the offering to God of themselves, their souls and bodies, their work and life, through the ministry of their representatives. Unfortunately, many members of congregations have failed to visualize those carrying the gifts as being their representatives because they themselves did not elect or appoint them to this task, and in most cases every member of a congregation does not eventually get to take a turn at doing this, but it tends instead to be restricted to a relatively small number of people who can be relied upon to be present when needed and to be willing to do it without too much persuasion. Moreover, what was usually omitted in the description of “what the early church did” was that in those distant days people did not simply carry things from one place to another in the building. Just as they had formerly done when the Eucharist was a complete meal, they continued to bring their contributions of bread and wine from home themselves. What they presented was truly their own offering, not something thrust into their hands by others. And in some places, including Rome, they did not actually carry it to the altar themselves, but it was collected from them. Once again, modern revisers, in their enthusiasm to replicate the past, have got hold of the wrong part of the action as being of the greatest significance. Those congregations that today have some of their members actually baking the bread to be used in the service come closer to ancient practice, though such a custom is not without its risks with regard to the quality of what is produced, and those risks are greatly magnified if wine is included in this process as well.

What, then, should be the relationship between research into the earliest known Christian worship practices and the composition or revision of modern liturgical texts? Should historical study be viewed
as “pure” scholarship, without any connection to what may be going on in today’s church? To some extent yes, because past research has sometimes suffered unfortunate consequences from too close an association with the issues current in the world of the researcher. Investigation into the history and origin of particular liturgical practices has rarely been completely divorced from a desire either to legitimate that practice in the present or to find grounds for changing or removing it from current use. This inevitably affected, however unconsciously, the way in which scholars evaluated the evidence they were examining. So, for example, those who have concluded that the meal ritual in chapters 9 and 10 of the early church order known as the Didache, which lack any reference to the Last Supper or to the bread and wine being the Body and Blood of Christ, cannot have been a Eucharist have generally been those who come from one of the ecclesiastical traditions that believe consecration to be effected by the recitation of the words of Jesus at the Supper.14 Similarly, those who claim to discern some apostolic roots for the practice of confirmation, whether located before or after the baptismal immersion and whether by anointing or the laying on of hands, have again generally been those coming from ecclesiastical traditions in which the rite of confirmation continues to be practiced.15 Gerard Rouwhorst has also pointed out that the conclusions reached in three major dissertations on the subject of the Sabbath and the early Christian Sunday strikingly match the practices of the particular ecclesial denomination to which each of the authors belongs.16

On the other hand, there are numerous historical areas that would probably never have been examined at all had it not been for related questions having arisen in today’s church. The most obvious example of this is the study of the place of women in worship and ministry.17 What is needed is not to allow the modern agenda to dictate the con-

15 See, for example, J. D. C. Fisher, Confirmation Then and Now, Alcuin Club Collections 60 (London: SPCK, 1978; Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2005).
17 See, for example, Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress
clusions that are reached but to strive to achieve a triumph of scholarship over churchmanship.

If, then, we are not to try to imitate slavishly the findings of recent research but to learn from them judiciously, in what ways may the changes of historical perspective outlined earlier in this essay help to illuminate our approach to worship today?

**Baptism at Easter**

The discovery that not all early Christian baptisms took place at Easter does not mean that an emphasis on Easter baptism is wrong, just that it is not the only “right answer.” Nor should we tell people without qualification that we should do it “because that is what the early church did.” In any case, we need a theological and not just a historical reason to do something. Easter baptism can be defended as a particularly appropriate expression of the theology of dying and rising with Christ articulated in chapter 6 of the letter to the Romans—but that is not the only interpretation of baptism in the New Testament, nor even the dominant one among Christians of the first few centuries. We need to ensure, therefore, that our explanation of the meaning of baptism draws on the full riches of the images and metaphors used for it in the Scriptures, and above all the theme of being born anew that is so fully set out in John 3; that our rites themselves reflect this same richness; and that we recognize that other times of year may be equally appropriate as Easter. Maxwell Johnson himself has suggested the possibility that Pentecost may have been the oldest regular occasion for baptism and not just an “overflow” from Easter.  

**The Place of Confirmation**

Although valiant efforts have been made to defend the apostolic origin of the rite of confirmation, it becomes increasingly difficult to do so as historical research proceeds. Whatever may have been the

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Press, 2006); Teresa Berger, Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy’s Past (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

significance of the post-baptismal imposition of hands recorded in the book of Acts (8:14-17; 19:1-7), it is clear that the great majority of early Christian churches throughout the ancient world did not perpetuate that practice in their initiation rituals. Only North Africa and Rome retained something resembling it and understood it to be invoking the Holy Spirit. It is true that some, but not all, early Eastern rites had a pre-baptismal anointing of the head that was understood as conferring the Holy Spirit and that later all Eastern rites adopted a post-baptismal anointing that signified sealing with the Spirit. But to say that either of these is the exact equivalent of the Western post-baptismal laying on of hands is to stretch a line to breaking point.

Although all Christian traditions have believed that the Holy Spirit is received when a person becomes a Christian, there is no one universally espoused symbol of that gift, and therefore to insist that any baptismal rite that lacks a particular form of its expression is somehow deficient is to fly in the face of the historical evidence. In any case, while various ancillary rites—anointings, imposition of hands, giving of lighted candles, and so on—may explicate the central act of the profession of faith and immersion in water and help to draw out aspects of its meaning, baptism is always full initiation into Christ and his church even without any of these being present. One is either a Christian or one is not. Expressions such as the forgiveness of sins, new birth, dying and rising with Christ, being illuminated, and being sealed with the Spirit are different ways of speaking about the one reality, not different things that may or may not happen to someone being initiated and certainly not things that must occur in a particular temporal sequence. There may still be a place for a pastoral rite by which a person who was baptized in infancy, and especially any who have been alienated from the church in the intervening period, may make a personal profession of faith, even though there is no ancient precedent for such a rite, but that is quite a different matter.

Eucharist as Meal

The twentieth-century Liturgical Movement had been well aware of the meal character of early eucharistic practice, and this insight had been part of its desire to encourage what is often called “celebration facing the people.” This way of describing it is not very helpful because it implies that this is the most important purpose of moving the altar or holy table away from the wall of the church so that the presid-
ing minister can stand behind it. In reality, its true aim was that its nature as table might be more clearly seen and that the presider and people might gather around it. Sadly, as is well known, this objective has not always been achieved. Altars that looked fine when against the wall have often turned out to be inappropriately shaped for the new position, resembling a shop counter rather than a table as such and constituting more of a barrier between minister and people than an enabler of corporate celebration. And only in a few places has any real gathering around it been achieved: frequently the people are still placed on only one side of it rather than on three sides and, in any case, still at a considerable distance from it.

The Liturgical Movement also encouraged the idea of associating some form of socializing over food and drink with a celebration of the Eucharist, ideally a “parish breakfast” following it. But because of the problematic logistics of such an undertaking, this is often simply a “coffee hour” in the church porch or parish hall, for which only a proportion of the congregation generally stay—and thus a case of good intentions that have been only partially successful. For those who do participate in this social activity, relationships between worshipers have been greatly enhanced over against the situation where the only human contact was a handshake from the minister at the door after the service, and sometimes not even that if an introverted communicant left promptly and was able to make it out of the church before the minister reached the door. But it has mostly not succeeded in drawing all who attend the Eucharist into this circle, remaining as an optional extra and, in any case, resulting in Eucharist and social event still being seen as two separate activities rather than helping a congregation to experience Eucharist as meal.

Now that scholarly research has enabled us to appreciate better the importance of the meal character of the earliest forms of Eucharist, however, in which both the building up of the Body of Christ through interaction between participants and the practical care for the needy were as essential elements as the reception of bread and wine, is there anything that can be done to enhance these aspects for today’s congregations? To set the Eucharist within a full meal is clearly impractical in all but the smallest of gatherings and, in any case, would present difficulties of comprehension in a culture where, unlike that of the first Jewish Christians, everyday meals are not generally thought of as having a sacred character. But more might be done in other ways to give the rite a greater sense of being a meal. Even where a major and
potentially very expensive reordering of the building to make possible a true gathering around the altar/holy table is not a practical possibility, a relatively small congregation might be persuaded to leave their seats and stand close to it in a circle during the eucharistic action itself and to receive Communion there.

At the very least, consideration might be given to the way in which Communion is distributed. Standing in long lines to receive the bread and wine one by one from ministers may have a long history behind it, but it does nothing to enhance the sense of feeding together at the Lord’s table. It is more reminiscent for some people of standing in line to receive charitable handouts. There may be no real alternative to the use of “communion stations” when there are very large numbers of communicants, but in other situations it might be possible for them to be arranged around three sides of the altar/holy table and to receive Communion together “as tables” before returning to their places in a group together rather than simply receiving as individuals.

For the first few generations of Christians, however, their regular shared meals were more than occasions for building up the body of Christ. They were a practical and not just a symbolic expression of the sacrificial love for one another that was meant to characterize the new movement. Many believers lived in such poverty that the food provided on these occasions by wealthier members of the community and also given to them to take home afterward to consume during the week was vital to their physical well-being. It is no wonder therefore that one of the names given to these meals was not Eucharist but *agape*—the Greek word for “love.” 19 The confession of God’s love for all in sending Jesus Christ summoned them to show their love for one another. This intrinsic link between being fed at the Eucharist and sharing food with the needy has been eroded over the centuries, first by the substitution of money for actual foodstuffs brought from home and then by the tendency to take a collection of money at every kind of religious service rather than at the Eucharist alone. Those churches that do encourage members of the congregation to bring items of food and drink to church with them on occasions and to have them brought up along with the bread and wine during the service for later distribution to those in need are obviously trying to do something to restore

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that connection, and those that have the members prepare and cook a meal to share with the disadvantaged of the neighborhood immediately after the Eucharist is over are taking a further step. But it is also important to try to think of ways of making the connection between the rite and those in other parts of the world who lack not only food but very often a supply of clean water also. As St. Paul warned the church at Corinth, when some indulge their appetites to excess while others go hungry, “it is not the Lord’s Supper that you are eating” (1 Cor 11:20).

The So-Called Apostolic Tradition

The primary reason why a version of the eucharistic prayer from this church order was adopted in modern times by the Roman Catholic Church was that the original was thought to be authentically Roman in origin, but significantly different from the later Roman Canon of the Mass, especially because it included an invocation of the Holy Spirit otherwise absent from the Roman tradition but characteristic of the prayers from Eastern churches. Other churches followed suit not so much because of the alleged Roman origin but on the grounds of its apparent early date of composition—the beginning of the third century—and thus seemingly far older than any other eucharistic prayers that were known, except for the meal prayers in the Didache, about which there was uncertainty whether they had been intended for a Eucharist as such or not. Now that serious doubts have been raised about both the date and place of composition of the Apostolic Tradition, should not its use be discontinued?

This verdict does not necessarily follow, but we may certainly question the primacy that it often seems to be given in some places of worship. Even in those denominations that provide quite a wide range of alternative texts, this particular prayer appears to be used more often than the others, although one suspects that sometimes this may be because of its relative brevity in comparison with other authorized texts rather than because of its antiquity. This is a pity, because one prayer alone cannot convey the fullness of the theology of the Eucharist, and consequently congregations are being deprived of experiences that would broaden their understanding and deepen their spirituality. For example, the eucharistic prayer produced by the Consultation on Common Texts in the United States and based on the classic anaphora of St. Basil from the East that forms the basis of Prayer IV of the
Roman Catholic Church and Prayer D of the Episcopal Church, among others, offers a much richer alternative. Thus, when the time comes for different churches to contemplate a further revision of their eucharistic texts, the question of whether or not to retain the prayer derived from that in the *Apostolic Tradition* should be decided purely upon the theological and linguistic merits of the composition and not upon its alleged superior antiquity, still less upon its relative brevity. It can claim no privileged place in the repertoire over other ancient prayers.

**Conclusion**

The findings of historical research, therefore, should not be able to claim normative status in the sense that modern liturgical practice should be forced to follow slavishly some presumed original pattern that was handed down by the apostles as a norm to be observed throughout all ages. Indeed, the very findings of modern historical research reject the idea that there ever was such a thing as the apostolic liturgy and on the contrary see diversity over many aspects of Christian practice as having existed from the first. Variety tended to decrease rather than increase as time went by, especially in the fourth century onward. On the other hand, as the above examples have sought to illustrate, the results of research into Christian origins can rightly claim some sort of *illuminative* status—not models to be copied but the basis of insights that may be adapted to contemporary culture and used to bring out deeper significance in the rites that are celebrated. This includes recognizing that the tradition does not present us with just one right answer—that there can be a variety of expression. For example, Easter is not the only appropriate time for Christian initiation; the gift of the Spirit in baptism can be expressed in different ways; the fourfold shape of the Eucharist does not have to be the only pattern of eucharistic celebration thought to be legitimate; and the West Syrian shape is not the only form that modern eucharistic prayers should take. But illumination should go way beyond acknowledging this primitive diversity and recover other aspects of liturgical theology that have been lost or diminished in the course of history, among them the richness of baptismal imagery and the significance of the Eucharist as meal.

What is needed for this endeavor is a proper understanding of inculturation, both of the ancient culture in which the original practice
emerged and of the modern culture on which it is desired to shed illu-
mination. Otherwise, one ends up with either a shallow imitation of
the superficial features of the liturgical act that fails to capture its true
significance, as in the case of the offertory procession discussed earlier
in this essay, or else a mistaken attempt to embody the alleged inner
meaning in a quite different ritual form that results in sending a quite
different message, as in the case of the exchange of the peace. In both
instances, a lack of sufficient understanding of the historical and
cultural background of the original and an insufficient grasp of its
equivalent in the culture of today has caused these well-meaning
efforts at “ritual translation” to miss their mark. The same is usually
true of attempts to “translate” Jesus’ washing of the feet of the disciples
at the Last Supper into modern dress, such as the clergy polishing the
shoes of members of the congregation, certainly an act of human kind-
ness but not a true equivalent of the task of a slave in first-century
Palestine toward his master and the master’s aristocratic friends. Nor
is the version of the ceremony adopted by kings and queens of
England since the eighteenth century, in which they have handed out
gifts to the poor in place of the actual washing of feet, even though
their attendants continue to be vested in the towels needed for the
original ritual gesture. In the first attempt, the parish clergy are not the
social superiors of the congregation stooping to an act of great humility;
in the second, the monarch is distributing the largesse of the economi-
cally and socially superior without any shade of humility.

Moreover, a little greater knowledge of the true history of this litur-
gical rite would show that even its traditional form had undergone a
significant modification from its original context and meaning. It is
first known to us clearly as a fourth-century ancillary in some baptis-
mal rites, especially those of North Italy, although Martin Connell has
plausibly suggested that its true root may be not as a supplement to
full-body immersion but as an alternative initiation practice in some
very early Christian communities.20 In this baptismal context, the spot-
light falls more on the need for those being baptized to humble them-
20 Martin F. Connell, “Nisi pedes, Except for the Feet: Footwashing in the Commu-
nity of St. John’s Gospel,” Worship 70, no. 6 (1996): 517–31. See also Johnson, The
Rites of Christian Initiation, 21–23.
us are happier performing services for others than allowing others to perform acts of service to us—and especially ones that involve considerable intimacy. To replace ritual gestures that require intimate physical contact with those that put some distance between giver and receiver and so depersonalize the actions, such as substituting an outstretched arm in blessing for the laying of the hand on the head, the antiseptic dab of oil on the forehead for its being poured over and rubbed into the skin, the kissing of a wooden board for actual contact with another human being (as happened to the peace in the Middle Ages\textsuperscript{21}), or self-administered Communion for the intimacy of being fed by another that otherwise normally only happens to the very young and very old in society—all such modifications destroy the potency of the symbolic act. Having one’s shoes cleaned is not the equivalent of having one’s bare feet gently massaged in warm water. Nor is a footwashing performed tentatively by the parish priest on twelve embarrassed-looking “volunteers” sitting on a bench at the front while the rest of the congregation simply watch from a safe distance the same as inviting everyone to take part, from the youngest child to the oldest senior citizen. Insisting that each one must first have his or her feet washed by someone else before he or she may wash the feet of another comes closer to capturing the essence of the early ritual and of the sacramental act of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8). We cannot serve until we have discovered what it is to be served.

As in so much else of life, good intentions on their own are not enough when it comes to liturgical revision or innovation. If we are not to miss the point more often than we need to do, we must combine the finest historical research with a deep sensitivity to the nature of symbolism, to contemporary culture and to the psychology of worship. Anything less weakens our ability to communicate the depth of the treasures of our Christian past to the hunger for spirituality that is so evident in people today and can leave them with little more than the froth on the surface for their liturgical diet.