[Asian Voices Amplified, pp. 205-219]

The Liturgy and the Already-Not-Yet Problematic: Towards A Holistic Pentecostal Spirituality

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Abstract

Historically, Pentecostal-charismatics have not managed well the biblical tension between the "already" and "not yet" of the eschatological Kingdom. This chapter proposes that the liturgy can address this problem. Therefore, practising the liturgy will result in a holistic Pentecostal spirituality.

Key Words: eschatology, Eucharist, indwelling, lectionary, liturgical calendar, Maranatha

The Problem

Historically, one of the major problems plaguing Pentecostal faith and experience is the vacillation between the "already" and "not-yet" aspects of the kingdom of God. An over-emphasis on the "already" results in an over-realised eschatology, while an over-emphasis on the "not yet" leads to an under-realised eschatology. Early Pentecostals tended to entertain an under-realised eschatology. They were so focused on the future coming of Christ that they neglected present social issues. Their view of the future was shaped by a crisis eschatology; that is to say, the return of Christ is set in chronological history marked by the calendar rather than in salvation history. To see Christ's coming in terms of salvation history is to set it within the history of God's determining rather than ours. The imminence of Christ's return, therefore, should not lead to a crisis mode of existence but to prayerfulness, since the "when" of Christ's return is entirely in the Father's hand (Mark 13:32). This crisis mode of existence, however, motivated early Pentecostals to preach the gospel to the far ends of the earth. If Jesus could come "any time," then the only thing worth doing was to save as many people as possible in the shortest time possible. The imminence of Christ's return created a sense of expectation and crisis, often leading to radical withdrawal from the world. Holiness came to be defined negatively, in terms of abstention from "worldly" things like smoking, drinking, the movie house, etc. To be sure, these specific expressions of holiness were largely a carryover from the Holiness Movement.

In contrast, modern Pentecostals tend to favour an over-realised eschatology. This is especially true of many Third Wave charismatics. The promises of God,

particularly health and wealth, can be realised in the here and now. Whereas in the past, Pentecostal eschatology was largely dispensational and futuristic, today the future dimension of the Christian life has largely receded and been replaced by a "Kingdom Now" theology. Anything imaginable is achievable if one has sufficient faith. This emphasis on the glories of the Kingdom realisable in the here and now without an equal emphasis on the need to carry the Cross has resulted in a way of life that has brought shame to the name of Christ. The late Peter Hocken, a Catholic charismatic, while grateful for all the achievements of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal, has noted with deep sadness the harmful effects of a theology of glory without the Cross:

> Should we be surprised at the shameful elements in Pentecostal-charismatic revival-renewal or even at their extent? Should we be surprised at the moral humiliation of famed preachers or at financial irregularities in major ministries? Should we be astonished at the break-up of charismatic communities previously admired as models? Or at the rivalries between charismatic celebrities? Does it amaze us to discover that big figures sometimes have big egos?[1]

While there are exceptions, what I have pictured in broad strokes is generally true of the Pentecostal Movement.

Whether one's eschatology is under- or over-realised, either does not promote wholesome Christian living. An under-realised eschatology, especially when undergirded by dispensational-futuristic theology, tends towards a spirituality of withdrawal. A song we used to sing in our church youth group says it all:

> This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through,
> my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
> the angels beckon me from heaven's open door
> and I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

If my treasures are somewhere beyond the blue, I'm likely to give the world no more than a passing glance. Consequently, I may not see its real evil – or its beauty. I cannot do much to alleviate the world's evil; only Jesus can effectively overcome it when he returns to earth. And as for the world's beauty, it's only temporary anyway. I cannot be too captivated by it, lest it becomes an idol. After all, when Jesus returns, the present heaven and earth will be consumed by fire (2 Pet 3:7). Such is the spirituality of an under-realised eschatology.

By contrast, those who entertain an over-realised eschatology usually end up in cultural bondage. This is true whether it is conservative or liberal, secular or religious, Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal. Their eschatological vision is largely shaped by the culture of this world rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. The religious version seeks to identify the good in culture, such as various liberation movements, as the work of the Spirit of God. But such hasty identification almost always turns out to be mistaken, as the chastened liberation theologians of the 1960s found out in Latin America. Secular eschatologies, whether Marxist or capitalist, are no less susceptible to cultural bondage. Currently, capitalist eschatology, epitomised in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, is still a controlling narrative in the West, even if it is no longer asserted

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[1] Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the 20th-Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Eagles, 1994), 183-84.

with the same confidence as when the Berlin Wall collapsed. It promotes the secular hope of the triumph of "human rights," "freedom," and "democracy," even though these are not the universal values they are touted to be but are in fact shaped by a particular narrative, as famously argued by Stanley Hauerwas and others.[2]

In summary, an under-realised eschatology blinds us to the world's goodness while an over-realised eschatology blinds us to its evil. Both fail in discernment. Both fail to maintain the proper distance needed to see the world as it truly is.

To overcome these twin problems, I propose a Christian spirituality predicated on the eschatological tension between the already and not yet. Such a spirituality comes from practising the liturgy. The liturgy addresses these problems because (1) it is thoroughly eschatological and (2) it is deeply formative. But before I go any further, I need to clarify how the word "liturgy" is used in this paper. It is to be understood theologically rather than ritologically. From a ritual studies perspective, *any* form of worship can be called a liturgy – even Quaker worship. But from a theological perspective, the liturgy refers to a pattern of worship centring on the gospel of Jesus Christ and finding expression in word and sacrament. Although there are many local variations, the liturgy has always had an enduring structure (word and sacrament) and content (the gospel story) for much of the history of the church.[3]

The Eschatological Dimension of the Liturgy

If there is one thing that liturgical scholars are unanimously agreed on, it is that the liturgy from beginning to end is thoroughly eschatological.[4] It envisions the church existing in the world marked by the paradox of the already and not-yet dimensions of the kingdom of God.

But how does the liturgy come to be shaped by this eschatological vision? The answer is the person of Jesus – the very embodiment of the Kingdom. His coming *is* the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt 3:2; Mark 1:15). But the Kingdom revealed in the person of Jesus is enigmatic. The gospel accounts make it clear that before the Resurrection, the disciples did not understand, or misunderstood, many of the claims of Jesus, especially his suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 9: 31-32; Luke 9:44- 45). Through their encounter with the risen Christ, though, the many enigmatic statements began to make sense. This is epitomised in the story of Thomas. When Jesus appeared to him, his spontaneous response was: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas's confession is not merely a creedal confession but an act of worship. As Gordon Wakefield aptly puts it, "[Thomas] believes and adores … If Thomas's doubt was not that of the intellectual sceptic, his faith is not that of intellectual conviction alone. It is believing, personal trust, total adoring worship."[5]

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[2] E.g. see Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).
[3] James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon, 2000), 19-20.
[4] See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Oxford, 1981).
[5] Gordon S. Wakefield, *The Liturgy of St. John* (Epworth Press, 1985), 90.

It is in the context of the *worshipful* encounter with the risen Christ that the disciples' understanding of Jesus was radically transformed: the risen Christ is the very embodiment of the kingdom of God, the one in whom God will carry out his mission to save the world. In the person of Jesus Christ, we encounter a unique Saviour-King who defies all Jewish expectations. He is the supreme paradox: God-in-the-flesh, the one from beyond time and history who entered our time and history. This is the mystery of the Incarnation (John 1), a mystery that was evident in Jesus's words and actions: he saves not by brute force but by his sacrificial death; he is "exalted" on the Cross (John 12: 32-33). He is the Servant of the Isaiah prophecy (Isa 42) who is also the King the early Christians addressed in their worship as "Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Phil 2:9-11).

To confess "Jesus Christ is Lord" (cf. 1 Cor 12: 3) is to confess a deep mystery: the Christ (Messiah) who died (unthinkable for the Jews) is raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand. The church incorporates this mystery in its eucharistic prayer when it affirms the "mystery of faith": "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." This confession sums up the main content of the liturgical celebration. To put it differently, the liturgy is simply a faithful expansion of the primitive church's encounter with the risen Lord in which it confesses: "Jesus Christ who died, is risen, and will come again, is Lord." This fact also explains why the liturgy is thoroughly saturated with paradoxes.

The eschatological dimension of the Christian life is seen throughout the liturgy. It begins with the processional, which enacts the journey of the pilgrim church towards the heavenly Kingdom. In ancient times, churches were built facing east, so that the processional is an eastward journey (*ad orientem*: towards the east). Thus, the church is proclaiming by its action that it is *oriented* towards the kingdom of God. This is seen in the Orthodox liturgy, which begins with "Blessed be the kingdom of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." With this benediction, the church is entering the kingdom of God. In the Orthodox understanding, at worship the church on earth participates with the saints in heaven: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering …" (Heb 12: 22). In the liturgy, the present and future aspects of the Kingdom coalesce. Moreover, this Kingdom is not only *not* of this world but stands in defiance of this world. In taking this stance, though, the church is not rejecting the world but doing it for the sake of the world. The church offers a message of hope for the world precisely by insisting that for the world to be saved, it must cease to be the world. To redeem the world, the church offers a different alternative: the kingdom of God.[6]

The liturgy enacts the eschatological Kingdom, which is neither purely future nor purely present. It sets forth salvation history, in which realities of the future are *already* experienced in the present, while the present anticipates the fullness that is *not yet* realised. It does so in two broad ways: first, in the way the liturgy is structured, and second, in the specific components of the liturgy.

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[6] Cf. Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1973).

The Structure of the Liturgy: The Juxtaposition of the Old and the New

Here, I would highlight two observations. First, Christian worship basically uses old Jewish sources and patterns and reinterprets them in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For example, the weekly Jewish Sabbath observance is replaced by the Sunday worship, the day of Christ's resurrection; Jewish fast days on Mondays and Thursdays were later replaced by the Christian fast days on Wednesdays (traditionally the day of Jesus's betrayal) and Fridays (his crucifixion); the Passover is understood as finding fulfilment in the death and resurrection of the Pascal Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; etc. In short, the church maintains continuity with the Old Testament and at the same time surpasses it by pointing to its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This prophecy-fulfilment motif, deeply embedded in Christian worship, had a profound impact on the early Christian eschatological consciousness: the new has come, but it does not completely break with the old. There is continuity and discontinuity between the present age and the age to come. To put it differently, if the new age has come, but the old order is still present, then it has not yet fully come.

The juxtaposition of the old and the new is also seen, for example, in the way Sunday worship has been traditionally understood. Sunday is the First Day of the week, the first day of the old creation when light was created (Gen 1). But it is also the day of Christ's resurrection: the day of the dawning of the light of the new creation. Thus, it is also called the Eighth Day; that is to say, the day that lies *outside* of the seven-day cycle. This going-beyond-the-present-age is made possible by the Resurrection. Christians, by their very act of gathering on Sunday, are proclaiming that the old world is not abandoned but transfigured into the new world of the age to come. The liturgy juxtaposes many such paradoxes.

The Structure of the Liturgy: The Liturgical Calendar

My second observation has to do with the way the liturgy progresses in the church or liturgical calendar. In the liturgical calendar, the full gospel story is told and retold in various ways. In this repeated telling, from the Incarnation to the return of Christ, we are reminded that the gospel is an unfinished story. The final episode is still to come. The yearly cycle of the liturgical calendar revolves around this story. The calendar begins with Advent, but Advent is not only preparation for Christmas (his first coming) but also his second coming, as seen in the many eschatological texts read during the Advent season. Further, while Advent focuses on the first (and second) coming of Christ, the last Sunday of the calendar celebrates the Feast of Christ the King, which focuses on the final triumph of the Kingdom. The liturgical calendar portrays Christ as both the king *now* as well as the *coming* king.

The gospel story is told through an arrangement of daily and weekly readings from Scripture known as the lectionary. Most liturgical churches in the English-speaking world use the Revised Common Lectionary. There are usually four sets of Scripture texts read or sung each Sunday: the first reading (mostly from the Old Testament), responsorial psalm (sung responsorially), second reading (from the epistles), and gospel. The arrangement of the readings reflects the particular season of the church year. For example, Advent is the season of preparation for the coming of Christ. It is a time of joyful *and* penitential preparation. In the third

Sunday of Advent of Year C (December 15, 2024), known as Gaudete ("Rejoice") Sunday, the first reading (Zeph 3:14-18a), psalm (Isa 12:2-3, 4, 5-6),[7] and second reading (Phil 4:4-7) are on the theme of joy, but the gospel reading (Luke 3:10-18) focuses on John the Baptist's call to repentance in view of the coming judgement by the Spirit Baptiser (v. 17). Although joy is the theme of the Third Sunday of Advent, that joy is tempered by the spirit of penitence. It is an important reminder that rejoicing and repentance, crown and cross, are intimately related and should never be separated.

Specific Components of the Liturgy

If we look at the specific components of the liturgy, we discover the eschatological tension suffusing its every part, especially in the Eucharist. This tension is communicated in various ways. Take for example the Lord's Prayer, which in some traditions is prayed just before the Lord's Supper. It includes a petition for daily bread. According to liturgical theologian Geoffrey Wainwright, many church fathers understand this part of the prayer as having an eschatological dimension because they believed that *epiousios* (daily) is derived from *epienai* (coming day; cf. *epiousa*: the next day, Acts 7:26; 16:11, etc.). Thus, in their understanding, it is a prayer not just for present sustenance but also in anticipation of what is to come: "Give us *already now* the bread of *the future age*."[8]

Pentecost is another case in point. It refers to a decisive day when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the church. Yet in the Eucharist, the church repeatedly calls upon the Father to "pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ."[9] The *epiclesis* ("call upon") is an inextricable part of ancient and modern eucharistic prayers in all liturgical traditions. In calling upon the Holy Spirit to be poured out afresh, the church recognises the need for a "perpetual Pentecost." Thus, from a liturgical perspective, Pentecost is a one-time event (past), a continuing event (present) and a future event where the Spirit will transform the present creation into the new heavens and the new earth. The church anticipates this transformation at the invitation to the eucharistic feast: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." The communicants not only receive the spiritual food now but are also reminded that one day they will sit with the patriarchs at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (cf. Matt 8:11; Rev 19: 9).

Early Christian eucharistic prayers such as in the *Didache* (late first or early second century) include the "*Maranatha*" (Our Lord, come!).[10] The word, which

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[7] Sometimes a "canticle" replaces a psalm.

[8] Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 32-37.

[9] *Book of Common Worship*, Second Presbyterian Church, accessed June 21, 2025, http://www.secondpresabq.org/uploads/5/3/8/3/53833777/book-of-common-worship.pdf.

[10] *Didache*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed January 23, 2026, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.iii.html, 10. 6. *Maranatha* is the Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word. This phenomenon is common in liturgical usage. For

also occurs in 1 Corinthians 16:22, can be translated as either an indicative ("our Lord has come") or an imperative ("our Lord, come").[11] If the former, it is affirming that the Lord has already come; if the latter, it is an appeal for the Lord to come. The imperative is generally preferred since a similar phrase occurs in Revelation 22:20: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." As many commentators have noted, the liturgical background of this phrase is unmistakable. According to G. K. Beale, while the phrase is an entreaty for Jesus's final return in response to his promise: "Surely, I am coming soon" (22:20a), in its liturgical context it refers to Jesus's many "preliminary comings" at the eucharistic celebration.[12] Wainwright draws a similar conclusion with respect to 1 Corinthians 16:22: "There is every likelihood that when this prayer was uttered in the liturgical assembly at Corinth it had a double reference: it prayed for both the final Parousia and also the Lord's immediate coming to His people in the eucharist."[13]

Many ancient writers saw in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 an intimate connection between the remembrance of Jesus ("Do this in remembrance of me") and his future coming ("until he comes"). The remembrance, as Wainwright notes, is not about the various *events* in the life of Christ that happened previously, but a remembrance of *Christ* himself. It would be odd to remember a future event, namely, his coming again, but it would make perfect sense to remember Christ who will come again.[14] The act of remembering Christ covers both past and future: already–not yet. Many more examples can be cited.[15]

The prayers in the liturgy, too, enact the eschatological tension. There are praises and adoration anticipating heavenly worship. E.g., the eucharistic prayer begins with the *sursum corda*: "Lift up your hearts/We lift them up to the Lord." In this act, the church ascends with Christ to the heavenlies ("You have come to Mount Zion…") where we join the heavenly hosts to sing the *Sanctus*:

> Holy, holy, holy, Lord,
> God of power and might
> Heaven and earth are full of your glory
> Hosannah in the highest!
> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
> Hosannah in the highest!

But we also confess our sins, plead for mercy, and pray for the needs of others. In these penitential and intercessory prayers, we acknowledge our present fallenness and the fallenness of our world. We realise that we have not yet

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example, Amen, Hallelujah, Abba, and Hosanna are transliterated rather than translated in the liturgy.

[11] David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1215.

[12] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1999), 1155.

[13] Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 70.

[14] Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 67.

[15] For more examples, see Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*.

arrived. We are far from perfect. Throughout the liturgy, we encounter many other similar paradoxes that are juxtaposed to one another.[16]

Liturgy as Spiritual Formation

What happens when we practise the liturgy regularly, with its pervasive portrayal of the eschatological Kingdom that is already inaugurated in the first coming of Christ and will be consummated in his second coming? To answer the question, we need to understand how the liturgy forms us. The liturgy is a practice involving word and deed, ritual actions, and explanations. It engages our cognitive and imaginative faculties. According to liturgical theologians, in practising the liturgy, we are practising a primary theology (*theologia prima*).[17] We are not merely reflecting on the truth (at least, not consciously, for the most part) but subliminally assimilating the truth. As we practise it, we are being shaped by it; the truth is scripted into our very being.[18] All forms of worship, in so far as they follow a regular pattern and are practised repeatedly, are spiritually formative, but they form us in different ways, depending on *what* is being practised at worship. A poor or incomplete form of worship can only result in malformation, but a wholesome liturgy leads to holistic spiritual formation.[19]

As already noted, the liturgy as we know it today takes a form and content going back to very early times. This is not surprising given the fact that the liturgy seeks faithfully to embody the unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In practising the liturgy, we are indwelling and imbibing the gospel story. It is in indwelling the *whole* gospel that we are being formed holistically. Christian formation is not primarily the result of applying abstract truths or principles; it is about indwelling and being shaped by the gospel narrative.

The concept of indwelling requires further elaboration since it is in this practice that effective formation continues to take place.[20] Indwelling happens whenever we are deeply immersed in, say, reading a novel, watching a play or movie, or participating as an actor in a play. A good story could so capture our attention that we become "lost" in the world of that story. While we are "in" it, we treat the story and its characters as real even if they are fictional. In literary circles, this is called "the willing suspension of disbelief." It means that while we are reading the book, we leave our "real" world temporarily to dwell in the world created by the novelist as if it were a real world. It is not something we do

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[16] For more examples of paradoxes in the liturgy, I refer readers to Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Augsburg Fortress, 1998).
[17] E.g. David Fagerberg, *Liturgical Dogmatics: How Catholic Beliefs Flow from Liturgical Prayer* (Ignatius Press, 2021).
[18] For an account of how the liturgy works in spiritual formation, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009).
[19] Holistic formation is more than personal spiritual formation. The liturgy forms us as a corporate body or a "public" with its distinctive social ethic. See Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[20] For a fuller discussion of indwelling, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), esp. 195-202.

consciously; rather, we are ineluctably drawn into the world of the story. We share that world's thoughts and feel its emotions. Unconsciously, we are being shaped by the story. Even when we come to the end of the story and re-enter our ordinary world, we carry over something of its feelings, values, and ideas. That is how powerful stories can move us even if they are fictional. Now, in the liturgy, we are indwelling not fiction but the true Story, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Week after week the gospel story is told and enacted in word and sacrament. As we move through the year, we indwell a different "episode" in accordance with the liturgical calendar. The story begins with Advent, when we prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God, and culminates in the story of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Indwelling this story week after week, year after year will have a profound effect on us. The truth of the gospel story will shape our lives, values, and worldview.[21]

For indwelling to be effective, though, we need to take an important factor into consideration: we need to be familiar with the liturgy. If I may use another analogy, indwelling the liturgy (and its gospel content) is like an actor indwelling a play. A good actor needs to know the script and its content so well that it becomes a part of him or her. In playing the character in that script, he or she *conforms to* that character in the story. In a similar way, to participate well in the liturgy, we need to be thoroughly familiar with it. This is why the ancient church had always insisted that before a person became a full member of the church, he or she needed to go through a rigorous process of training called the catechumenate. The truth of the gospel story is learned by heart as catechumens learned and memorised the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. But the question persists: does not the repetition of the liturgy make it merely formal and ritualistic? Two things must be said in response. First, for many people, the liturgy becomes ritualistic because they lack understanding. Many Pentecostals have little or no understanding of the liturgy. Second, repetition itself is not the problem. Acquiring any skill requires repetitive reinforcement. The problem is not repetition but *mindless* repetition. We need to be attentive or participate actively in the liturgy.[22] Understanding and active participation usually go together. When we understand why we do what we do, we are better able to participate meaningfully.

Conclusion

Historically, the church's answer to maintaining the eschatological tension between the "already" and the "not yet" is by indwelling the gospel embodied in the liturgy. What the church still needs today is no different. I believe that the

[21] For an extended discussion on the intimate connection between Christian ethics and the liturgy, see Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds, *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Blackwell, 2004).

[22] On how to participate actively in the liturgy, see "General Instruction of the Roman Missal," Vatican, accessed June 21, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20030317_ordinamento-messale_en.html.

modern Pentecostal church can and ought to be both Pentecostal and liturgical.[23] If we do the liturgy well, we will, over time, develop a holistic Pentecostal spirituality.

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[23] Simon Chan, "Mutual Challenges of Pentecostal-Charismatic and Liturgical Worship," in *Pentecostal Theology and Ecumenical Theology*, ed. Peter Hocken et al. (Brill, 2019), 261-82.

Pentecostal Formation as Mindful Liturgical Practice: A Response to Simon Chan

Jacob Cherian

"An unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates. Simon Chan's chapter may be read as a theological paraphrase of that dictum: an unexamined liturgy is not worth offering to the glorious God we worship.

Chan, a doyen among Asian theologians, calls the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement to a careful and sustained examination of the sacred structures that shape its worshipping life. Over several decades, his rigorous theological engagement with worship, pneumatology, and ecclesiology – articulated through influential books and articles – has deeply enriched the Asian church and wider global Christian community. This chapter arguably represents one of his most enduring contributions, for here he addresses a persistent weakness within Pentecostal spirituality: the failure to sustain the biblical tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's Kingdom inaugurated in Messiah Jesus.

Chan's diagnosis is compelling. Pentecostals and charismatics have frequently oscillated between two eschatological extremes, neither of which has fostered a genuinely holistic Christian spirituality. On the one hand, early Pentecostalism was often shaped by a crisis-oriented and under-realised eschatology. The "not yet" of Christ's imminent return dominated imagination and practice, producing communities that saw themselves as merely "passing through" the present world. This orientation sometimes resulted in withdrawal from both the beauty and the suffering of creation. The logic was pragmatic and urgent: "Why rearrange the deck chairs on a sinking *Titanic*? Let us instead rescue as many drowning souls as possible."

On the other hand, more recent Pentecostal and charismatic expressions have frequently embraced an over-realised eschatology – a form of "Kingdom Now" theology promising health, prosperity, and victory in the present age. This theology of glory, largely untethered from the Cross, has often produced disillusionment when expectations collapse, as well as a triumphalism that rings hollow before a suffering world. Chan rightly observes that both tendencies have failed to form mature disciples or to preserve the integrity of the gospel's witness.

What, then, is the way forward? Chan argues persuasively that the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement must recover a mindful and intentional practice of liturgy. By liturgy he does not mean rigid ritualism, but the patterns, rhythms, and structures that shape communal worship. Authentic gospel-centred worship, he insists, is grounded in Scripture and sacrament. Attentiveness to

well-ordered liturgical rhythms enables the church to enact and inhabit the tension between what God has already accomplished in Christ and what awaits consummation in the age to come.

God's people are thus formed to live faithfully within this paradoxical space – between the "already" and the "not yet." Chan contends that regular participation in thoughtfully structured worship cultivates a holistic, Spirit-filled spirituality. He urges Pentecostals to look beyond the ecclesial fences they have erected and to rediscover the riches of the historic church. Practices such as the church calendar, the lectionary's disciplined engagement with Scripture, and Sunday worship as an anticipation of the new creation all serve to reorient believers towards the fullness of God's redemptive purposes.

Chan is convinced that such mindful attention to liturgy within the worshipping community forms disciples whose imaginations and identities, desires and values, callings and ministries are shaped by the Spirit. Liturgical formation grounds charismatic vitality in the Cross, tempers triumphalism with hope, and nurtures a mature and integrated Pentecostal faith.

As both a pastor and seminary teacher, I resonate deeply with Chan's summons to fellow Pentecostals and charismatics to reflect critically on the sacred structures that shape believers into the likeness of Christ. In the remainder of this response, I briefly pursue three related tasks. First, I show that the language of the "already" and the "not yet" is not a recent theological fashion, even if it remains unfamiliar to many Pentecostals in the pews. Second, I seek to reclaim the term *liturgy* within Pentecostal discourse by attending to its New Testament usage. Third, drawing on the work of James K. A. Smith, I highlight how human lives are continually shaped by competing cultural liturgies.

The "Already" and the "Not Yet"

The language of the "already" and the "not yet" seldom features in the catechesis of many Pentecostal communities. Much emphasis falls instead on what one must believe and how one must behave in order eventually to reach heaven. While pastorally understandable, this framework often lacked a compelling account of how the kingdom of God impinges upon present life. Within academic theology, however, the "already-not yet" paradigm has become a widely accepted way of articulating the dynamic tension at the heart of Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom.

This perspective is evident in the work of Geerhardus Vos,[1] who spoke of an overlap between the present age and the age to come. Oscar Cullmann[2] and C. H. Dodd[3] developed related insights into realised eschatology. The most explicit articulation of the "already" and the "not yet," however, is associated with

[1] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930, repr., independently published, 2020).
[2] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, 3rd ed. (1946, repr., Wipf and Stock, 2018).
[3] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935, repr., Scribner, 1961).

George Eldon Ladd, particularly in *The Presence of the Future*.[4] Ladd's formulation became the standard evangelical account of New Testament eschatology.

I first encountered this paradigm more than three decades ago while studying under Gordon Fee – one of the earliest Pentecostals to gain broad recognition as a New Testament scholar. What was once nearly an oxymoron, the phrase "Pentecostal scholar," is now thankfully an established reality. Chan's work stands firmly within this tradition, calling Pentecostals to embrace a biblically grounded eschatological tension that resists both escapism and triumphalism.

Reclaiming *Liturgy* in Pentecostal Discourse

Chan's call to liturgical reflection meets significant resistance within Pentecostal-Charismatic contexts. The very word *liturgy* often provokes suspicion, conjuring images of dead ritual or spiritual constraint. As one colleague remarked to me, introducing the term might prompt congregants to ask whether they were being led "back to Babylon." Such reactions reveal a widespread assumption that Pentecostal worship is purely spontaneous, guided moment by moment by the Spirit, and therefore fundamentally opposed to structured liturgical forms.

Yet this dichotomy between Spirit and structure is a false one. The New Testament itself employs several Greek terms from which the English word *liturgy* is derived. The verb *leitourgeō* ("to serve") and its cognates – *leitourgia* (service or ministry), *leitourgos* (servant or minister), and *leitourgikos* (ministering) – occur fifteen times across six New Testament writings (e.g., Luke 1:23; Phil 2:30; Heb 1:14). These terms refer broadly to acts of service rendered to God and to others, often within a communal and sacred context.

Pentecostals readily employ other transliterated biblical terms such as *Immanuel* ("God with us") or *Maranatha* ("Our Lord, come!"), each appearing only once in the New Testament. There is thus little justification for resisting the term *liturgy* when it is understood biblically – as the thoughtful, Spirit-empowered service of God, embodied in communal patterns of worship that form disciples of Christ.

Liturgy as Formation: Cultural and Christian

Chan's insistence that "liturgy matters" finds strong resonance in the work of philosopher James K. A. Smith, who argues that liturgy is not merely expressive but formative: it shapes what we love, not only what we think. Human beings, he suggests, are best understood as "desiring creatures" (*homo liturgicus*), rather than primarily as rational agents. Our actions are driven more deeply by our loves and longings than by abstract beliefs alone.

From this perspective, liturgy concerns the re-education of desire. Worship is not simply the articulation of theological propositions; it is a habituating practice

[4] George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, rev. ed. (1964, repr. Eerdmans 1996).

that directs the heart towards God's Kingdom. Smith draws attention to the powerful influence of everyday "cultural liturgies" – shopping malls, sports arenas, educational systems, career trajectories, and leisure practices – that quietly but persistently shape our imaginations and loyalties.[5]

These secular liturgies often exert greater formative power than the few hours devoted weekly to church worship. As Augustine long ago observed, the direction of the heart's loves ultimately determines the shape of one's life: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you."[6] If this is so, then the church's liturgies must be intentionally ordered and examined, lest they be eclipsed by rival practices that deform Christian desire. Smith emphasises that formation occurs primarily through embodied practices rather than through intellectual assent alone. Christian worship trains the body through kneeling, singing, confessing, hearing Scripture, and participating in the Lord's Supper. Pentecostal worship is already profoundly embodied – through dancing, clapping, weeping, the laying on of hands, and praying in tongues. Over time, such repeated practices cultivate virtue and orient believers towards love of God and neighbour.

Moreover, liturgy forms a vision of the good life by situating believers within the narrative of God's Kingdom. Far from withdrawing Christians from the world, Christian liturgy forms citizens of the heavenly city who engage the earthly city with faithfulness and hope. In this sense, worship is inherently political, for it trains allegiance and shapes the Kingdom to which believers ultimately belong. Smith's liturgical anthropology thus resonates deeply with Pentecostal convictions regarding worship as participatory and pneumatic – a Spirit-led reordering of the believer's life.

Conclusion

Simon Chan's chapter offers Pentecostals and charismatics a timely and theologically rich summons: to examine our often-unacknowledged liturgies and to recover the formative power of thoughtfully ordered worship. Such examination is not a retreat into ritualism but a retrieval of practices through which the Spirit forms God's people into the image of Christ. By holding together the "already" and the "not yet," grounding charismatic vitality in the Cross, and resisting both escapism and triumphalism, examined liturgies can nurture a mature, holistic Pentecostal faith. For this faithful witness and prophetic challenge, the Pentecostal-Charismatic community owes Chan a deep debt of gratitude. His work reminds us that the Spirit who animates our worship also shapes its structures – and through them, forms a people into the image of Christ.

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[5] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 1 (Baker Academic, 2009); *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2 (Baker Academic, 2013); and *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 3 (Baker Academic, 2017).

[6] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, 1.5, Vatican, accessed January 27, 2026, https://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20020821_agostino_en.html.

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