

ANNO DOMINI: THE TRANSFORMATION OF TIME

Like a great piece of music, time or history has rhythms. From the second hand on our modern clocks to the days, weeks, months and seasons of the year, history moves forward rhythmically. In this movement there is sameness, yet there are differences. Like that piece of music that uses the same notes and similar rhythms to move toward an appointed end, so history has repetition which is moving forward to an appointed end. Some have made the mistake of emphasizing the sameness of history to the point of saying that history is cyclical (for example, reincarnation). History is not cyclical. It is moving forward. But those patterns, those rhythms, remain quite familiar.

This is true not only on a cosmic scale, but also in our individual lives. These cosmic patterns are personalized, if you will, in each individual. Even if you are not a very scheduled or structured person, your life has some rhythm to it. Whether it is a sleeping and waking pattern, work and rest pattern, or, more broadly, a day-by-day pattern, all of us live with these rhythms of life. It is when these rhythms are interrupted that we recognize them the most. For instance, if you fly from here to Japan you stand the great chance of becoming somewhat disoriented because you will go an entire day without seeing the sun go down. This interrupts your pattern in sleeping. We call this jet lag.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we live with these patterns and rhythms in life. This way of living is not arbitrary. They are created by God. The rhythms of life keep us connected to the past, keep us oriented in the present, and keep us moving toward the future as individuals and communities. God providentially guides things to be so. How these patterns are to be defined or what perspective we are to take on them in what concerns us in this article concerning the theology of the Church or Liturgical Year.

The Liturgical Year is *the definition of history in terms of the work of Jesus Christ*. Understand this: History will be defined. Man will understand and mark time in some way. Whether it is through the old pagan understanding and rituals of celebrating fertility in the spring all the way to defining history as essentially meaningless, time will be shaped, molded, or defined in some way. God defined time in the old creation quite clearly. The church for nearly two thousand years has understood that time/history must be shaped, molded, or defined by the advent, death and resurrection of Jesus. The purpose of this article is to give you the theological reasons that lie behind the liturgical year.

In order to accomplish this purpose, we begin where God began and understand the development of history from original creation to new creation in Christ.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORIGINAL CREATION AND NEW CREATION

One truth that we learn throughout the Scriptures is that the scope of salvation goes far beyond the individual or even beyond a collection of individuals called the church. Most certainly salvation includes both of these, but it is much more than this. The church has been heavily influenced by movements such as pietism with all its first cousins into reducing salvation into a matter of personal devotion that somehow “rises above” history and is distinct from it. So, salvation is understood almost as a “substance” like water that is poured into us that does not necessarily have any bearing on the rest of history, except, that is, striving to get others to join you in your salvation prayer closet. In this view, salvation is really an escape from history and

creation. But the Scriptures are opposed to reducing salvation/redemption to individual piety and some sort of “escape.”

Redemption, in its broader terms, is the transformation and reconciliation of all things to their proper relationship with God. Original creation, even as it has been corrupted by sin, is not destroyed but rather transformed. The Christian mission in the world is not one of “escape” or “hanging on until we leave this evil creation.” That is a pagan view. The Christian mission in the world is one of transformation and reconciliation. Our mission is to take up the vocation of Christ: that the world, the entire cosmos, might be saved through him (John 3:17). This is what Paul describes in part in the passage in Romans 8 (cf. esp. 8:19-22). Creation is being and will be redeemed; that is, set free from the bondage brought about by the sin of Adam.

Two basic biblical images will help us to understand this continuity between the original creation and the new creation in Christ:

Night and Day

The first biblical image that gives us the rhythm or pattern of redemptive history is found in the opening words of the revelation of God. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen 1.1-5). The theme of darkness and light is prevalent throughout Scripture and characterizes the progress of redemptive history. On the fourth day of creation the darkness and light are given governing bodies, as it were. The sun will rule the day, the moon will rule the night along with the stars. These lights in the firmament will serve for *signs* and seasons, and for days and years. Here it is from Genesis:

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; “and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was* good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day. (Gen 1.14-19)

“Signs” here is the same word used in Exodus 12.13 to speak about the “sign” of the blood displayed in the Passover. The presence of the sun is not simply there for pragmatic purposes (for example, warmth, light, *etc.*), even though it provides all of those things. God appointed the sun to tell the world about himself and how he works. As we look back through the complete revelation of God, we can understand better how God orchestrated these themes and how his glory is etched in all of creation.

When dealing with the history of redemption, the themes of darkness and light, night and day, characterize the progress from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is characterized as darkness or sometimes shadows while the New Covenant is characterized as day or light.

Two realities need to be noticed from the reading of the opening verses of Genesis that will be made clear as God unfolds his story of redemption. The first is that *light comes out of darkness*. It might seem a little odd that the God who dwells in unapproachable light (cf. 1Tim 6:16) would have created the heavens and the earth and that there would be darkness on the face of the deep. One might think that light would be the first thing that would be recognized. But the Scripture is clear: darkness is first, and light comes out of the darkness.

This is how the story of redemption will unfold: out of the darkness light will come. Paul takes this passage in Genesis and gives it its theological import in light of the coming of Jesus (pun intended) in 2 Corinthians 4.6: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” As in creation the light came out of the darkness, so the light of God’s salvation in Jesus will come out of the darkness of the Old Covenant.

The second reality is that *day follows night*. Throughout the creation account we have, what is for us, a somewhat strange way of reckoning days: “and the evening and the morning were the first day.” The entire “day” began in the evening and progressed through to the daylight. This is why, not so incidentally, the Jews begin their day at 6:00 PM. The day begins at night based on creation.

So it will be in God’s history of redemption: day will follow night. God has etched his plan in his providential pattern throughout the creation. And when we see allusions to night and day, we should take greater notice of them. For instance, we see the New Covenant being described by Isaiah as light as opposed the present darkness:

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But Yahweh will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.” (Isa 60.1-3)

The Messiah himself is described as the “Sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings” in Malachi 4.2. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praises God for the deliverance coming through his promised Messiah and says, “Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us...” (Lk 1.78). Matthew writes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise spoken by Isaiah:

Nevertheless the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed, As when at first he lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed *her*, *by* the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. (Cf. Isa 9.1-2 quoted in Mt 4.15-16).

While there are other ways in which the darkness-light theme is used in Scripture (for example, walking as pagans as opposed to the people of God), ultimately the theme always points to Jesus. In Jesus himself we have the Sun rising, bringing in the *day* of the Lord (which is another interesting allusion). So, when we see Paul referring to the Jewish calendar as “shadows” but the substance is Christ (Col 2.17), or the writer of Hebrews speaking about the tabernacle being the shadow of heavenly things (Heb 8.5) and the sacrifices being shadows of good things to come

(Heb 10.1), this darkness to light theme seems to lie behind these references.

For the purposes of this article, what needs to be recognized is that the pattern of night and day are still maintained in creation. These patterns still reveal the glory of God, and as those who are informed by God's special revelation through his word, we see that glory and understand it in its redemptive significance. Darkness and light, sun, moon and stars are all still in place, but our understanding of them has been transformed by the resurrection of Jesus. Our salvation does not deliver us from creation but from the sin that perverts it. The understanding of the "signs" of God's creation must be informed by the work of Jesus. The liturgical year recognizes and acknowledges the patterns in creation. But these days, weeks, months and seasons are all defined in the light of the day that Jesus shined upon the world. The Liturgical Year celebrates the dawning of the day of the Lord.

But in considering the relationship between the original creation and the new creation, there is also another strong allusion throughout the Old Testament which points to and looks for fulfillment in the new creation in Christ:

The Eighth Day

It is quite obvious from the beginning of creation that God established a seven-day week. In six days God created all there is and on the seventh day God rested. This pattern of labor and rest was practiced since creation and codified in the Fourth Word given at Mt. Sinai. But again, something seems to be a little out of place when the Old Testament refers to the "eighth day."

Granted, if one were just counting up days, the eighth day would seem to be just one more number in a succession. After all, it does come after seven and before nine. But the eighth day stands as a prominent reference in feasts and covenant rituals to the point that it begs for an explanation. Several examples from Scripture will help us to see that there is great significance in this "eighth day."

First, the sign of the covenant is given on the eighth day (cf. Lev 12.3). This was the day that the male children were formally initiated into the covenant. It was the sign that they were born in sin, but God has graciously brought them out of the world dominated by sin and included them among his people. In this sign God gave them not only a privileged status, but a vocation to be a part of the holy priesthood to the nations. The eighth day was not only the sign of death, but also of resurrection for in it they were given and promised new life.

Second, the cleansing of a leper went through an eight-day process. It was on the eighth day that sacrifice was offered for him, he was cleansed, and readmitted into the people of God (cf. Lev 14.10, 23). This was not only true of the leper, but it was also true of anyone who was unclean because a discharge (cf. Lev 15.14) and the cleansing of a defiled Nazarite (Num 6.10). The eighth day was the time of new life. The unclean person passed from being separated from the people of God and the worship of God—death—into being readmitted to presence of God—life.

Third, the eighth day also played a prominent role in the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. The first day and the eighth day of this feast were both to be holy convocation (cf. Lev 23.33ff; Numb 29.12ff.). This feast was appointed as a festival to remind the people of Israel that they dwelt in booths after God had brought them out of Egypt. The eighth day was the final sacrifice and the "beginning" of life after the wilderness.

Fourth, there is an allusion to the eighth day in the dedication of the Temple of Solomon. After Solomon offers multitudes of sacrifices and the people feast for two seven days (this is the way the passage reads in 1Kg 8.65), on the eighth day they are sent away with joy and gladness. The Temple has been completed and Israel has a new beginning of life. A similar allusion to the eighth day is also found in Ezekiel 43 as he prophesies of the coming restoration of the people from exile when the Temple will be rebuilt. The altar will be cleansed for seven days. Then on the eighth day God will accept them once again (cf. Ezek 43.27). The eighth day is the beginning of new life or new creation.

This is the way the early church fathers understood it. In the *Epistle of Barnabas*, an early church letter, the writer there says,

Finally He saith to them; *Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot away with.* Ye see what is His meaning; it is not your present Sabbaths that are acceptable [unto Me], but the Sabbath which I have made, in the which, when I have set all things at rest, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world. Wherefore also we keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in the which also Jesus rose from the dead, and having been manifested ascended into the heavens.” *The Epistle of Barnabas (15:8-9)*

The eighth day of the week is what we are living in right now. We live in the new creation. But the way these days are reckoned is significant. The eighth day assumes a numbering from the first day. The eighth day is reckoned from the first day of creation. Therefore, it is grounded in original creation but goes beyond original creation in some sense. Not only that, it is the same day as the first day of original creation; that is, Sunday, the first day of the week. It is on the eighth day, or the first day of the week, that Jesus rose from the dead inaugurating the new creation. So that, if any man be in Christ, he is, literally, “new creation.” He participates in God’s transformed creation.

What we pick up through this is that, like the resurrection itself tells us, the new creation is continuous with the old creation. There is great continuity between the two, but there are radical transformations also. As Laurence Stookey says in his book Calendar: Christ’s Time For The Church in reference to the eighth day theme, “The creation of the cosmos (which God began on Day One) and the new creation are not antagonistic to each other; we do not have to leave the physical world in order to participate in the new creation in Christ...” (41) Consequently, we must jettison all beliefs that seek to make us want to disdain creation and history as if it is a total loss. Instead, the church should define all of life—including the calendar—in terms of the lordship of Jesus.

Of course, because the church is not infallible, these definitions are not on par with Scripture and, thus, cannot bind the conscience. But, the church should take dominion in this area as well as all other areas. The sun, moon, stars, days, weeks, years and seasons will remain at least until the coming of Jesus. This was promised by God to Noah in Genesis 8. These things have aided the people of God in the past to understand time and history in terms of what God is doing with, through and in it. We who stand in the light of day brought about by Jesus would be wise stewards of what God has given in expounding the glory of God in redemption through marking our calendars.

Two examples of how others have used understood the definition of time will be helpful for our

understanding of how it shapes a life and a culture. In the Roman Empire, everything was dated in relation to the founding of the city of Rome. To put a date on events happening before the founding of the city, you would count backwards from the year 1; for example, 1 before Rome. Events after the founding of the city would be calculated from that same year 1 only counted forward. This was the turning point of history. This was the measure by which all other events would be judged.

Jews also understood the calendar in this way. Beginning in what we call AD 132 there arose another rebellion among the Jews against Rome. This rebellion was led by a man called Ben-Kosebah. He was given the title Bar-Kokhba by the famous Rabbi Aquiba. This was a messianic title which means “son of the star” taken from Numbers 24.17. Being a messianic figure who was bringing in the kingdom of God, the beginning of the rebellion became the turning point of history. So much did Ben-Kosebah believe this that he had coins minted with the year “1” stamped on them. (This corresponds to AD 132.) The years progressed with the rebellion until Rome crushed the rebellion in AD 135.

One thread that is common between both of these examples is that in each case a particular event was understood as the turning point of history. If we as Christians believe that the turning point of history occurred in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, should we not proclaim this loudly to the world through orienting our lives around this event?

The question is not “Will we have a calendar?” but “What calendar will we have?” Will we allow others to define history for us in light of the founding of a country, the birthdays of heroes, or some other non-Christ centered approach to history? It is okay to celebrate all of these other things or have a national calendar. But we must understand that Jesus Christ is Lord over time and, thus, the calendar. Will we insist that while we may celebrate other special events like birthdays, the founding of our country, national heroes, etc., history must be defined pre-eminently the Lord of the calendar?

The Scriptures are quite clear on the relationship between the old creation in Adam and the new creation in Christ. They are one, but they have been transformed. History itself has been transformed. Because of this, Christians ought to understand Jesus as the Lord of the calendar. The Christian faith is history. History is nothing more than the actions God takes in completing his plan. A discussion of the Christian calendar, therefore, should be rooted in the understanding of:

THE HISTORICAL NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

God’s intention to redeem the world necessarily involves his intention to redeem history itself for his own glory. History or time is part of that created order. It is within this time and space created order that the Christian faith finds its existence. The Christian faith does not “relate” to history as if our faith were simply holding hands with history. It does not stand outside of history only using history as some sort of physical vehicle to carry “the real thing.” The Christian faith *is* historical. That is, it is impossible to pull the Christian faith out of history or make it somehow distinct from history. If the Christian faith is dissected from history you don’t have the Christian faith at all.

Redemption is historical

The marvelous plan of God for the redemption of the world literally became embodied in the Person of Jesus. The implications of the doctrine of the incarnation as they relate to our present subject are numerous. In the Person of the historical Jesus we see heaven and earth perfectly united. God joins himself to creation. This act of divine grace tells us much about the nature of God's work. We understand through the incarnation that God does *not* "save us" from outside of time in such a way that we are called to an escape of some sort. The incarnation reveals to us that God is not up in heaven throwing down some sort of salvation that would be equivalent to the proverbial lightning bolts. It is quite the opposite. God himself in the Person of Jesus enters into history in order to reshape and remold it from within into a proper reflection of the image of God, thus, bringing glory to God.

The ancient Christian creeds—the Apostles' and Nicene—pick up this biblical teaching and put them as statements of our Christian faith. The Creeds with all of their historical recounting are defining for us the shape of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is a story written by God himself in which we are all participants.

To say that redemption is historical does not simply mean that redemption came floating down at some point in time in history. It is true that redemption *occurred* within history. But it is much more than that. Redemption is an historical event. Again, redemption is not, as it were, holding hands with history. It is not an "invisible" thing that substantively fills us within this thing we call time. Rather than thinking in terms of a substance that fills a container but is distinct from it (like water and the glass), we should think more along the lines of a marriage relationship. While there are certainly immaterial or invisible aspects to it, they are all woven together with history and physicality so that to seek to separate these things into "real marriage" which is immaterial and "physical/historical" marriage which is material is nonsense. We would never say after a marriage ceremony, "I wonder if they were *really* married or if they just went through the motions." To say something like this would be ludicrous. When vows are spoken, tokens of commitment exchanged, pronouncement is made, *etc.*, a marriage has taken place no matter what the two people felt at the time. They weren't filled with some sort of outside substance. They have entered into a relationship.

So, in the history of redemption God does not simply go through historical motions while withholding real redemption. Redemption is tied to historical covenants. And through these actions within history God is moving history toward a particular conclusion. One problem in the church and one reason why we may not appreciate a liturgical calendar is because of our view of salvation as being ahistorical (that is, disconnected from history, historical acts, *etc.*).

"Certainly," we say, "salvation must occur within history because we are in history." And again, this betrays the thought that salvation is that substance that is given to us within this bondage of time from which we need to be freed. This is unbiblical thinking. Thinking this way (joined with certain comrades) spins off into thinking that we can let the evil world system have God's creation which includes time/history because "We ain't gonna be here long" (read: We are going to escape.). But again, redemption is not escape from history/time, but the transformation of it. Time itself is subject to the lordship of Jesus.

Here is a little test to help you to understand if you are viewing redemption in a biblical fashion or not. Questions: Was the Passover, the exodus from Egypt, the passing through the Red Sea and the eating of the manna and drinking from the rock redemption? Are these historical acts normally what you think of when you think of "being redeemed?"

Many times, these examples are taken as physical representations of the invisible. But Paul takes these historical events as their redemption. The water they drank they drank from the rock that was Christ (1Cor 10.4). These historical events were aspects of their redemption. Redemption was not understood as something that was outside of time but rather related to time itself. What Jesus did, is doing and will do in the world in history is redemption.

Bringing this all back around to the liturgical calendar, one way the church can acknowledge our historical faith and Jesus' lordship over history is through conscientiously defining the calendar in terms of redemptive history. This means that the church will define her calendar in terms of Jesus and his church. The Liturgical Year is a recognition of God's redemptive work past, present and future. The church year keeps us grounded in history, helping us understand where we've come from and where we are going.

No other place is this more clearly seen than in biblical worship in word and sacraments within the church. The historical nature of the Christian faith is then seen in the fact that ...

Worship is Historical

What we do when gathered with God's people on the Lord's Day, no doubt, occurs within history. For instance, we worship on a particular day that can be pin-pointed on the calendar and referenced in the future. But like the redemption which it embodies and enacts, the worship of the church is not merely a blip along the historical time line. Our worship is not just a matter of being in a chronological sequence of events. Christian worship brings together in perfect harmony the past, present and future.

Each Lord's Day our covenant renewal is an acting out God's redemptive story and an actual participation in it. Thus, all aspects of history—past, present and future—meet in the church's worship. All of these historical aspects are tied up in a Biblical understanding of *memorial*. This involves ground in a past even which has present implications and looks to the future. Let's look at each aspect of this.

Christian worship connects us to the past

Our connection to the past in our worship is termed theologically *anamnesis*. This is the Greek word for "remembrance." This remembrance of the past, which involves the work of Jesus, is not a mere mental recollection (although in some ways it involves that). "Remembering" in worship is not primarily intellectual or cognitive but ritual and action. This is very much the case in the Fourth Word, for instance. Memorializing the Sabbath day is engaging in the proper ritual action and avoiding certain other types of actions.

The best example of this, of course, is the Lord's Supper, which is a memorial of Jesus our Lord. Along with his words, Jesus left his church a meal. This meal is to be carried out in certain actions which set it apart from all other meals. These actions are not unnecessary addendums so that we can get to the *real* substance of the Supper itself. The actions of the Supper are a part of it as much as the bread and wine itself.

Our ritual is grounded in what Jesus did in the past when he initially established the meal. Every Lord's Supper that has been celebrated since that time is connected to that one historical

event when Jesus instituted the Supper. The Supper memorializes the death of Christ, understanding that we are connected to that historical event. J. J. von Allmen in his book Worship: Its Theology and Practice comments on the Lord's Supper:

This anamnesis or memorial ... is something quite different from a mere exercise of memory. It is the restoration of the past so that it becomes present and a promise. In the world of Biblical culture "to remember" is to make present and operative. As a result of this type of "memory", time is not unfolded along a straight line adding irrevocably to each other the successive periods which compose it. Past and present are merged. A real actualization of the past in the present becomes possible. (34)

I might quibble with von Allmen if he is speaking about collapsing time and entering into a timeless event, but the language doesn't necessarily need to be taken that way. The memorial takes place after the historical even, but makes the benefits of that event present in the participation.

So, this rite brings the past into the present in our re-enactment. We are joined to that once-for-all historical event by our present participation in the worship of the Church. But the past comes rushing into the present and also becomes a promise, thus looking to the future.

Christian worship anticipates the future

In the original institution as recorded by Matthew, Jesus told his disciples that he would not drink anymore from the fruit of the vine until he drinks it anew in the kingdom (cf. Mt 26.29). Jesus instituted the meal *anticipating* the future in which the meal would be enjoyed again. Paul alludes to this same anticipation when he says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor 11.26). The effects of the work of Jesus are seen in their future implications. We partake in part of the future feast in the present time.

Christian worship connects past and future in the present

In our memorial worship we understand Jesus not simply as having worked in the past and one day he will work again in the future. Rather as we participate in Christian worship, we acknowledge that his past work has present application. Based upon his past work, Jesus has an ongoing work of intercession. Hebrews 7.25 makes this quite clear: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." This ongoing work of intercession looks toward a future in which all things will be brought to their appointed end. But for the present, all of these things are pulled together and we presently enjoy what Christ has done and what Christ will do, in one sense.

Once again von Allmen is helpful. Continuing his thoughts on the Biblical teaching of a memorial specifically related to the Passover and the Eucharist he says:

This implies that every one, as he calls to mind the deliverance from Egypt, must realize that he is himself the object of the redemptive act, to whatever generation he belongs. When it is a question of the history of redemption, the past is reenacted and becomes present. Thus, similarly, at each Christian act of worship and so—within the perspective of the NT—at every Eucharist, those who participate learn that they are themselves the

objects of the redemptive action of the cross. (34)

Christian worship is historical. Not just in the sense of occurring at a particular point in time, but also in sense that the actions of God in our salvation in the past and the future are made present realities. We tend to look beyond all the actions of worship to the greater reality of worship as if the actions of worship were not all that important. Our actions are almost exclusively seen as *pointers* to what God is *really* doing. What we need to understand is that these historical actions in our worship are not some kind of levers that we work in order to get to the substance behind the substance. God is acting in water, bread, wine, speech, handshakes, spoken prayers, *etc.* These historical events that occur in our worship *are* God's saving acts for His people. God has saved us, is saving us, and will save us. This is nothing more than the language of the apostle Paul.

The Westminster Standards understand this teaching in Scripture concerning the elements in Christian worship when they connect the “ordinary means of salvation” with “the Word, sacraments, and prayer” (WLC 154; WSC 88 - WLC 154 What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation? A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.”) The mediation of the benefits of Christ are given to us in these acts. We, like the children of Israel to whom the gospel was preached in the wilderness, must respond in faith (cf. Heb 4.1-2). Certainly, there are invisible aspects that are wrapped up in these actions. But just as a husband hugging his wife cannot be reduced to a purely physical or purely invisible action, so these historical actions in worship cannot be sliced and diced into meaningless oblivion.

Christian worship is historical. The Liturgical Year is an expansion of the implications of this. The gospel is proclaimed through the calendar. This is not merely the transference of ideas from one head to another. This is the historical gospel of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. The Liturgical Year—the calendar defined by worship—is useful in making the history of redemption come to life in the ongoing life of the church.

Redemption is historical. Worship is historical. Our entire faith is woven into the tapestry of history. The church for nearly two thousand years has recognized this and has defined the calendar around it. We would follow wisdom when we do the same.