

A Living Tradition: On the Intersection of Liturgical History and Pastoral Practice
David Pitt, Stefanos Alexopoulos, and Christian McConnell (editors)
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In *A Living Tradition*, David Pitt, Stefanos Alexopoulos, and Christian McConnell have brought together a diverse group of mentors, former students, and colleagues of Rev. Dr. Maxwell E. Johnson with a festschrift in his honor. Throughout his career, Johnson has been committed to idea that history can provide a clearer picture of current Christian practice. The contributors of this volume also share in this commitment of bridging liturgical history and contemporary practice. *A Living Tradition* is thus an attempt to show why liturgical history is important for understanding current Christian identity and practice.

The contributors attempt to navigate between history and practice through the use of several approaches. Some attempt to show how figures from liturgical history were also liturgical pastors. Others investigate how liturgical history has shaped contemporary practice. Finally others show how liturgical history helps one understand current liturgical practice. The result is an impressive array of methods from several excellent liturgical scholars.

These essays are divided into themes that include introductory essays, the liturgical year, Christian initiation, and the Eucharist. A few exemplary articles from each section will offer a clear sense of the tone and argument of this text. The introductory essays from Paul F. Bradshaw and Robert F. Taft are excellent and set the tone for the rest of the book. Bradshaw rightly argues against the normative status of historical research, promoting instead a balanced position between history and culture. Historical research must show careful attention to “the nature of symbolism, to contemporary culture and to the psychology of worship (18).” Taft’s essay importantly reminds scholars of the dangers of romanticizing other traditions at the expense of one’s own. Taft encourages the Latin-Catholic West to look “once again into the riches of its own storehouse, to bring out from it things both old and new (39).”

The second section includes three essays that explore history as it relates to the liturgical year. These include an exploration of the Jewish roots in Christianity liturgy, the double commemoration of St. Nicholas in Armenia, and a look at St. Cyril as a liturgical pastor. The most impressive essay of this section is Ruth Langer's look at the intersections between the Jewish and Christian liturgy. Her work with Bruce Morill, SJ found that the parallels between the Jewish and Christian liturgical calendars were superficial. Instead the differences between liturgies help provide a better perspective of each tradition. Langer's essay was inspired by a course she co-taught with Morill on the Jewish and Christian liturgical years. She provides the syllabus for this course, thus giving scholars a look into how such a course might be constructed.

Section three explores history and Christian initiation. These essays provide an excellent look into key historical issues related to baptism across several traditions. There are several excellent essays in this section. Walter D. Ray's essay, "Baptismal Images, Baptismal Narratives," is a fascinating look at images of marriage in early baptismal liturgies. Ray concludes that the image of marriage demonstrates one's union with Christ the Bridegroom that conveys a "sense of totality and permanence" (134). Jeffrey A. Truscott's essay, "Luther's Pastoral Approach to Baptism," provides a convincing argument that Martin Luther's baptismal theology was a pastoral theology that "focused on the meaning of baptism for the church and for the individual Christian" (136). Truscott shows the influence that justification by grace through faith alone had on Luther's interpretation of baptism. Truscott argues that Luther provides an example for "the theological formation of pastors and the consequent need to be more concrete and practical" (152). Lizette Larson-Miller concludes this section with a look at the increased importance of naming those about to be baptized. Larson-Miller argues that more emphasis should be given to the names of the Triune God so that the "baptized child is immersed and forever marked as a participant in the name, and therefore the very essence, of the Trinity" (191). A shift back from the individual to the Trinity might provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be named a Christian.

The final section includes essays related to the Eucharist. Anne McGowan's essay investigates the role of the ancient epiclesis in light of its diversity today. She convincingly demonstrates how the role of epiclesis differs historically across traditions. She hopes that this diversity will "inspire openness toward a greater variety of prayer patterns and a broader range of theological resonance within which eucharistic epicleses might legitimately be interpreted" (254). Stefanos Alexopoulos concludes this collection with the use of a case study that explores the issue of congregation participation in Byzantine worship. Using liturgical history as a lens, Alexopoulos presents an important argument for the recitation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer in an Orthodox liturgical setting.

A Living Tradition presents some impressive scholarship, however it does have several shortcomings. The difficulty and narrow focus of some essays limits its accessibility. A general audience, especially those not immersed in liturgical history, will miss the practical implications of these essays. To be appreciated as a whole, *A Living Tradition* requires extensive knowledge and

understanding of ancient liturgical history. This is a major problem for text that promises to be important for both academic theologians and pastoral ministers. Thus the book must be judged in light its stated goal to “consider the ways in which liturgical history informs contemporary understandings and beliefs” (ix). Regrettably it does not deliver on this promise. As a collection of essays aimed at connecting historic patterns of worship with contemporary practice, the book’s academic tone narrows the audience. Not enough is done to bridge the gap between scholarship and material that pastors will immediately find useful. One would have to be both a liturgical scholar and pastor in order to make the connections. Thus *A Living Tradition* succeeds as a liturgical history, less so as a pastoral and practical theology. The first essay by Bradshaw does the best job in exploring the correlation between liturgy and practice. In other essays it is hard to determine any practical implications. *A Living Tradition* is an excellent work of scholarship that does not quite live up to its pastoral and practical potential.

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