

Right or Wrong? High-church liturgy

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Some young adults say they find “high church” liturgy quite attractive. Why do they feel that way? And if we try to satisfy these people, will we turn our backs on important Baptist distinctives?

Young adults ages 18 to 35 comprise what is being called the Millennial generation. Much research has been conducted in order to better understand this large and influential group of our population.

High value on authenticity

A few characteristics of the generation as a whole are that they place a high value on authenticity and desire to be a part of something larger than themselves.

One result of these characteristics includes “over-sharing” in places like social media so young adults can feel they are being completely “real” or authentic. Another effect is Millennials are drawn toward social action and justice causes to feel a part of something bigger.

Many Millennials were reared in church but choose to leave in their young adulthood. With a high need for authenticity, many of these young adults may find seeker-style, consumer-motivated, contemporary-style worship services inauthentic. They feel as though churches are trying too hard to be relevant instead of being real. They also may find consumer-driven models of church to be focused on the maintenance of one individual church rather than being concerned with the larger movement of Christianity.

Rooted in the past

For these disenfranchised Millennials, liturgical worship can provide a sense of being part of a religious expression that has existed thousands of years. Associating with worship from the past allows the sensation of connection to a grand movement of people in the flow of Christianity across numerous generations.

Liturgical worship also has an authenticity about it, since “trying too hard” is difficult when participating in worship activities that have been established for hundreds or thousands of years.

In our free-church tradition as Baptists, some may be leery of liturgical worship. For example, Baptists often value conversational rather than scripted prayers and are more attentive to the Spirit’s leading in worship rather than following liturgical formulaic expressions of worship.

However, understanding God to be mysterious, there is no need for us to limit worship of the transcendent God. God can be communicated with through a prayer that has been reflected upon and written ahead of its voicing, just as God can hear us in spontaneous conversation. God can be experienced by performing a routine prayer or action in worship, just as God’s presence can be felt through a worship action that is completely unique.

God is bigger than our worship-boxes

We always must be mindful God is bigger than our worship-boxes. Our Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of all believers can imply people experience God, faith and worship in many different ways.

The future of Baptists depends upon the involvement of the next generation. In our desire to continue the Baptist tradition in a fresh and vibrant manner, we may find returning to the liturgies of the past could be the impetus that moves us into a meaningful future.

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