

“Traditioning” in the Vineyard: A Pastoral Value for Sacramentality.

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Introduction.

Of primary concern for pastors is spiritual formation, the combination of “nurturing and discipleship.”¹ As Jeffrey Greenman has stated, spiritual formation involves “our continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith for the sake of others.”² If the Vineyard is *anything*, we are a community of people hungry for the work of the Spirit; thus, spiritual formation would appear to be a primary concern, *especially* for *Vineyard* pastors.

This commitment to spiritual formation raises crucial questions: *What practices has the Church Universal collectively embraced in the pursuit of spiritual growth? How might Vineyard churches become more intentional toward creating (and maintaining) spiritually formative cultures? What can be embraced from other Christian traditions in order to “thicken”³ our borrowed commitment to creating space for and an experience of spiritual transformation via the work of the Holy Spirit?*

This paper is an attempt to provide a pastoral, i.e., practical and somewhat anecdotal, combination of observations and suggestions toward a robust value for the Eucharist as it brings together sacramentality⁴ and spiritual formation.

Adulting as the Vineyard.

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel and Jim Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 10–11.

² Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, eds., *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2010), 24.

³ See Joseph E. Gorra, “Worship, Ecclesiology and the Public: Implications of Thick vs. Thin Concepts” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Vineyard Scholars, Minneapolis, MN, April 27, 2012), for an excellent paper on the need to “thicken” Vineyard theology.

⁴ I realize defining “sacrament,” “sacramental,” and “sacramentality” poses a challenge. As it is outside the scope of this paper, I agree with Thiselton’s definition, “eventful enactments or actions,” as found in Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 510.

Much has been said about the “newness” of the Vineyard,⁵ as the Vineyard movement is relatively young compared to other denominations and ecclesial movements within the Great Tradition. Yet the Vineyard has a developing history and clear values/distinctives, theology, and practices. We are, I believe, a Christian tradition within other Christian traditions that has unique perspectives on theology and praxis, largely in development and response to our understanding of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, it is no longer adequate to suggest that the Vineyard is simply Evangelical Charismatic, as we have been (and should be) influenced by a growing number of Christian approaches and spiritualities *beyond* Evangelicalism and Renewal. The Vineyard has, for a number of years, been “adulting” by engaging with other traditions and, as John Wimber recommended, trying to “take the best and go.” As the Vineyard continues to mature and develop, as well as discover and understand our own history, the need to move beyond simply “vineyardizing”⁶ existing theological approaches becomes more and more significant.⁷ We must both “drink from our own wells,”⁸ as James K. A. Smith has suggested, and critically engage with other traditions and theologians in order to offer constructive approaches to the global Church.⁹ I believe the Vineyard has much to offer the Body of Christ, but do we actually know what we have to offer?

An apparent concern¹⁰ we must face is how we can (1) maintain our ecclesial identity and corresponding practices (not to mention *improve* or *better articulate* our theology and praxis)

⁵ Cf. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Ruth, *Worshiping with the Anaheim Vineyard*, 16-18.

⁶ See Vineyard pastor Rich Nathan’s comments on “vineyardizing” in his article “Introducing Vineyard Institute,” last modified June 10, 2015, <http://www.richnathan.org/article/introducingvineyard-institute/>.

⁷ E.g., it can be argued that some of the theological models that some in our movement have “borrowed” and “vineyardized” actually undermine our theological commitments (e.g., Dispensational theology).

⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Kindle Location 176.

⁹ This was a significant part of Smith’s challenge to the Vineyard at the Society of Vineyard Scholar 2011 meeting.

¹⁰ This concern is raised well in Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000).

while (2) being open to new moves of the Spirit. How might the Vineyard continue to be its authentic self while also being open to sovereign and spontaneous outpourings of the Spirit and further theological development? What can we implement into the life our local churches that continues to root us in our pneumatological kingdom identity while also shapes and forms us to be responsive to God's Spirit and the Spirit's transformative work? How can we be rooted and grounded while remaining flexible and yielding?

Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan makes a helpful suggestion toward addressing these challenges and questions:

“A community that seeks consciously to preserve its own values and way of life is more likely to be open to change as it faces new challenges than one that has no *explicit* traditions... when values are embodied in a clearly defined and coherently developed system of thought, we can become more self-critical... In short, hazy theology is the bearer of a dead traditionalism, while a clearly articulated theology makes possible a living tradition that is responsive to change.”¹¹

Chan goes on to suggest that “traditioning is by nature a communal affair.”¹² All ecclesial contributions are done by individuals *as members* of the community and the specific *role* of ecclesial leaders is to “help the community define itself and its role in the larger society” as well as to “make explicit what is implicit among the less articulate or literate members of the community.”¹³ As “the best theologians are church theologians, those who theologize *from and for* the community of faith,”¹⁴ in what follows I want to follow Chan's advice toward defining and articulating why sacramentality and Vineyard theology and praxis are closely related as well as make explicit why the Eucharist must become more prominent in our worship liturgies. This is to suggest that one clear way we can “thicken” our theology and praxis, as well as to avoid being

¹¹ Ibid., 17, emphasis his.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Ibid., emphasis his.

ecclesiological naïve and under-developed, is to dive deeply into sacramentality and allow the spiritually formative sacraments to become more central to our worship experience. The Lord's Table should have more prominence than lights, lasers, and smoke machines.

Vineyard Sacramentality.

Vineyard practices are full of sacramental realities and have many sacramental implications. For example, Jon Stovell noted that:

“... worship in the Vineyard functions sacramentally, as a space in which one can enter the presence of God and experience his blessings and grace in a unique and powerful way, and is consciously understood and practiced as a means of communion with God that anticipates the eschatological communion that is the goal of salvation.”¹⁵

This says nothing of our commitment to laying hands on people, asking for God's “gracelets”¹⁶ to come in the form of “gifts of healings” and “prophetic words.” We live in the eschatological reality of the *future* entering into the *present* with signs and wonders being *physical evidences for spiritual realities*, all inaugurated and enacted by the in-breaking of the kingdom of God via the first coming of Jesus. Vineyard approaches to worship, healing, and the gift of prophecy are infused with sacramental graces, regardless of whether John Wimber or early Vineyard leaders used such descriptive language. If sacraments are “an outward and visible sign of inward and invisible grace,”¹⁷ surely we must acknowledge that God's tangible presence, as experienced by the *charismata*, are signs pointing to the inward and invisible (to the naked eye) work of the Spirit.¹⁸

¹⁵ Jon Stovell, “To Dwell in the House of the Lord: Vineyard Soteriology and Its Praxis in Worship, Discipleship, and Evangelism,” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Vineyard Scholars, Minneapolis, MN, April 27, 2012), 1.

¹⁶ John Wimber's term to describe the *charismata* (spiritual gifts).

¹⁷ Cf. Augustine of Hippo, “On the Catechising of the Uninstructed,” in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 3, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 312.

¹⁸ Consider Jesus' statement in John 3:8 that while the Spirit is unseen, evidence of the Spirit's work is clearly seen.

A Vineyard sacramental approach has numerous strengths.¹⁹ For example, it moves in an ecumenical direction²⁰ as well as serves to better understand and explain the heavenly nature of our eschatological reality. As Hans Boersma has stated, “the church's well-being depends on the recovery of this sacramental tapestry” because sacramental theology provides a framework wherein the earthly realm participates with heaven and the church’s ontological identity as a community of reconciliation, which largely depends on sacramentality.²¹

As the Vineyard has historically been a practice-oriented movement, it appears that Doug Erickson’s observation that the opportunity for developing formal theological Vineyard *ecclesiologies* has begun.²² As we have placed our *practices* at the forefront of our movement, perhaps it is time to (1) evaluate said practices, or in this case, *lack* of practices (i.e., low emphasis on Communion) and (2) develop a robust Vineyard sacramental theology for our ecclesiological identity. We are, quite frankly, a sacramental movement *because* we are a *pneumatological* movement. From top to bottom, our practices acknowledge a variety of graces that are clear indications of the Holy Spirit’s work. In my mind, the implication is that the Vineyard movement has strong ties to sacramentality,²³ regardless of whether we are comfortable with using sacramental language to describe ourselves.

¹⁹ I argued for the development of a Vineyard sacramental theological approach in my 2016 dissertation for the University of Birmingham, “Toward a Vineyard Sacramental Theology: The Pneumatic Relationship between the “Not Yet” and the “Now” (<http://spiritchurchmission.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Luke-T.-Geraty-Toward-a-Vineyard-Sacramental-Theology-The-Pneumatic-Relationship-between-the-Not-Yet-and-the-Now-FINAL.pdf>).

²⁰ This is a *significant* strength in that John Wimber was “a grassroots ecumenist” as “evident in his worldwide renewal conferences” and the Vineyard has always been committed to blessing the Body of Christ, as expressed in Don Williams, “Theological Perspective and Reflection on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship,” *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*, eds. David A Roozen and James R. Nieman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 173.

²¹ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Kindle Location 42.

²² Cf. Erickson, *Living the Future*, Kindle locations 3558-3588. I suggest “ecclesiology” in the plural due to, as Erickson notes, our ecclesiologies needing to be “elastic enough to incorporate global expressions of “what it means to be a Vineyard” in cultures dramatically different from middle-class suburban America.”

²³ Cf. Wolfgang Vondey and Chris W. Green, “Between This and That: Reality and Sacramentality in the Pentecostal Worldview,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19 (2010), 243-264.

Moreover, articulating our sacramental theology challenges us to have a more pronounced understanding of the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, doxology, and the Vineyard's commitment to spiritual formation. In that developing Vineyard theology is *specifically* what Simon Chan suggests will help us to remain "culturally relevant" and responsive to new waves of the Spirit, I suggest that one way in which we can consciously preserve our own values and way of life is to embrace and acknowledge what we already are – *the Vineyard is a sacramental community because we are a movement rooted in the kingdom, pneumatology, and eschatological fulfillment*. Sacramentality, by its very nature, is built into our theology and practices *because* we are a charismatic tradition grounded in the inauguration of the kingdom and its corresponding signs!²⁴

Challenges Present Opportunities.

Mike O'Brien,²⁵ a Vineyard worship leader and song writer, recently indicated that in the Vineyard, Communion "is simply not emphasized in typical gatherings" and that, historically, "the Vineyard has understated the role of Communion."²⁶ In my own experience of visiting dozens of Vineyard churches and engaging with many Vineyard leaders, I have found it common for Vineyard churches to celebrate Communion *monthly* or *irregularly*. Prior to my wife and I stepping into pastoral leadership at the Red Bluff Vineyard, Communion was celebrated at the Christmas Eve service and *rarely* any other time throughout the year. Perhaps an influencing factor to the minimal celebration of Communion within the wider Vineyard movement is related to a non-sacramental view of Communion. This absence of emphasis led Robert E. Webber to

²⁴ I find it significant that we place our "identity" in the Kingdom versus other Renewal Traditions that place their identity at Pentecost. Mark Tindall, pastor of the Blue Route Vineyard Community Church, agrees, so this is legit.

²⁵ See <http://www.themikeo.com> for a detailed list of O'Brien's accomplishments and involvement in the Vineyard movement.

²⁶ Mike O'Brien, "Communion in the Vineyard Church" (paper for History of Worship MWS502 class at The Robert E. Webber Institute of Worship, April 12, 2015), 2-3.

respond to Vineyard theologian Don Williams' chapter on charismatic worship with the following question:

“Why, after touching on nearly every aspect of worship, is there not one single word or reference to the Eucharist? Consider the attention given to the Eucharist in the New Testament and throughout history... Charismatics want to be known as those who rediscover the fullness of biblical worship. So I ask, why do you neglect the Eucharist?”²⁷

Suggesting that the Vineyard has completely *neglected* the Eucharist is a bit pejorative.

After all, the Vineyard Statement of Faith includes a view on Communion and Vineyard churches have celebrated Communion since the movement's birth. Alexander Venter indicates in *Doing Church* that the administration of sacraments is a characteristic of an authentic church²⁸ and Derek Morpew's influential *Breakthrough* includes the helpful appendix “How we break bread.”²⁹ Additionally, in 2015 Vineyard Resources published a booklet on the Eucharist for local churches, *Come to the Table: Experiencing God's Presence in Communion*.

However, there *is* a noticeable absence of emphasis in the writings of John Wimber, Don Williams, and several Vineyard histories,³⁰ not to mention that pesky subjective observation that many (most?) Vineyard churches do not regularly gather around the Lord's Table, receiving the Bread and Cup in low doses. Historically, this low emphasis may have more to do with Wimber's formative years spent amongst Quakers, a Christian tradition that does not celebrate

²⁷ Paul A. Basden, ed., *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 163-164.

²⁸ Alexander Venter, *Doing Church: Building from the Bottom Up* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2000), Kindle Electronic Edition: Kindle Locations 732-743.

²⁹ Derek Morpew, *Breakthrough: Discovering the Kingdom* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Kindle Locations 3666-3780.

³⁰ Cf. Andy Park, Lester Ruth, and Cindy Rethmeier, *Worshiping with the Anaheim Vineyard: The Emergence of Contemporary Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017); Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999); Douglas Erickson, *Living the Future: The Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit in the Vineyard Movement* (Duluth, MN: self-published, 2016).

the Sacraments,³¹ than we realize. While the Quaker influenced emphasis on inviting the Holy Spirit's presence in our gatherings is an essential Vineyard practice, and should remain so(!), the Quaker influence of ignoring the sacraments, not to mention the similar lack of emphasis from our Evangelical and Charismatic roots, has overlooked the role of the Spirit *within* the celebration of Communion and is an influence we need to rethink and, quite frankly, abandon, but I digress.³²

The Vineyard's lack of Eucharistic emphasis, I believe, presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to "thicken" the sacramental theology of an entire movement along with empowering a significant shift in the centrality of Communion in our worship liturgies. The opportunity is found in that given our shared collective value for the work of the Spirit and spiritual formation, sacramental theology already infuses our theology and practices! The Vineyard is simply becoming aware of this reality, as seen in the work being done within the Society of Vineyard Scholars and the shift amongst many Vineyard churches placing the Eucharist as a more central celebration during worship gatherings.

In what follows, I want to lay out two primary reasons why I, as a Vineyard pastor, believe sacramentality and prioritizing the Eucharist are essential for Vineyard churches.

Communion: A Formative Kingdom Practice.

(1) People of God's Presence. As the Vineyard not only *believes in* but actively *seeks* the presence of God, we need to wrestle with *how* God is present in Communion. Might the Holy Spirit grace the church through the Eucharistic? In Communion, disciples "spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death,"³³ thus renewing and refocusing

³¹ "How do Quakers practice baptism and communion?" FAQs about Quakers. Accessed June 19, 2017. <https://www.fgcquaker.org/explore/faqs-about-quakers#Sacraments>.

³² This is not to suggest that there isn't much more to learn from our Quaker roots!

³³ The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXIX.2.

followers of Jesus into the cruciform life. As God's presence is *mediated* by the Spirit's presence found in the Bread and Cup, a powerful way for Vineyard churches to create space for people to encounter God's presence is during Communion. As Clark Pinnock writes, because humans "are embodied and symbol making beings, it is *a priori* likely that God's presence and self-communication will be sacramental and involve a merging of spirit and matter."³⁴ In that Zwingli (and the Free Church tradition) "introduced a metaphysical dualism into our understanding of the ordinances and rejected fifteen hundred years of Christian thinking on the subject,"³⁵ I suggest that we recover our awareness of God's *active* sacramental presence in Communion and, as Pinnock suggested, reject modernity's influence, which "leaves little room for the presence and/or the activity of God."³⁶ To be people of God's presence is to be a people who embrace the means by which God communicates his presence, namely Communion.³⁷ As Thomas Creedy has noted, the Eucharist is a "Kingdom event - looking back and looking forward,"³⁸ deeply resonating with the "present ministry of the Holy Spirit."³⁹ The charismatic celebration of Communion leads to wholeness and healing, both physical and spiritual transformation.⁴⁰

³⁴ Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ This is *not* to suggest that the *only* sacrament that matters is Communion. As with Pinnock, I believe that "the church's life is richly sacramental and evokes God's presence in many ways... there are so many activities that mediate grace," *ibid.*, 13. This includes baptism and I believe that the church *itself* is sacramental in that she is a means of grace to the world.

³⁸ Thomas Creedy, "Gathering for the Lord's Supper - the Table at the Center: Discernment and the Lord's Table: A Kingdom-Lensed analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:17-33," (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Vineyard Scholars, Anaheim, CA, 2013), 5.

³⁹ Thomas Creedy, "Bodies, Brokenness and Bread: Towards a Vineyard Sacramental Theological Anthropology," (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society of Vineyard Scholars, Columbus, OH, 2014), 12.

⁴⁰ In the past fifteen years of pastoral ministry, Communion has been a space in our church's worship liturgies where people have experienced being filled with the Spirit, gifts of healings, prophecy, and, on one occasion, repentance from a long-term adulterous relationship. The Eucharist has been a *powerful* context for the Spirit's transformative work!

(2) *People being shaped and formed.* Worship is, as James K. A. Smith states, “the “imagination station” that incubates our loves and longings”⁴¹ and “our ultimate love/ desire is shaped by practices.”⁴² A *primary* way that the Church has historically had her loves and longings shaped has been via the Lord’s Table. After all, As Paul Wadell has noted, “it is through the rituals and practices of Christian worship that we discern the shape of the Christian life and begin to acquire the virtues and dispositions that are essential to that life.”⁴³ As people in Vineyard churches receive Communion, they are oriented toward tasting to experience the goodness of God, meditate on the death of Christ, and receive spiritual renewal. Additionally, during the celebration of Communion, people are given space to express gratitude to God for Christ’s sacrificial death, space to pursue God’s justice by ensuring that *everyone* is welcomed to the Lord’s Table and that the Bread and Cup are equally distributed, not to mention space for the Holy Spirit to sovereignly distribute gifts of the Spirit,⁴⁴ especially healing and prophecy.⁴⁵ Communion *shapes* Jesus’ followers in many transformative ways as they anticipate the consummation of the kingdom and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.⁴⁶ “The Lord’s Supper,” states Chris Green, “when rightly celebrated, opens our eyes to Jesus, and through and in seeing him rightly we find the Scriptures opened and ourselves inspired for churchly worship and

⁴¹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition: Kindle Locations 85-86.

⁴² James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009), 27.

⁴³ Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2002), 11.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:11.

⁴⁵ It is notable that the Apostle Paul’s teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 proceeds his extended treatment of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12-14. Those within Renewal Traditions have significant reason to connect the sacraments to charismatic experiences! Cf. William L. de Arteaga, *Forgotten Power: The Significance of the Lord’s Supper in Revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2002).

⁴⁶ These themes are found in *Come to the Table*.

mission.”⁴⁷ Not only are we shaped into the image of Jesus, we are formed toward Jesus’ mission.

Conclusion

In considering Vineyard theology and praxis, I believe we are implicitly liturgical⁴⁸ and sacramental and could use a healthy “traditioning” process that serves to more fully embrace the Eucharist and all its Christological and pneumatological benefits. This raises a number of questions: What would it look like if the Vineyard became more robustly forthright about its sacramental framework?⁴⁹ How might our creative spirit seek to include the Eucharist in our worship liturgies in fresh and spiritually formative ways that embrace our love for God’s presence and charismatic gifts, while maintaining our historic identity and values? Might “thickening” our theology and practice of Communion serve toward our need to take Simon Chan’s advice to “tradition” so that more self-awareness can lead to constructive critical development? And might this “traditioning,” along with the regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper, lead to the necessary flexibility required to effectively “do the stuff” in the twenty-first century? As the Vineyard continues to pray “Come Holy Spirit,” I suggest that we join the early church and “devote ourselves... to the breaking of bread”⁵⁰ with the expectation that the Spirit’s presence and graces are experienced around the sacramental Table of Lord Jesus.

⁴⁷ Chris W. Green, ““Then Their Eyes Were Opened””: Pentecostal Reflections on the Church’s Scripture and the Lord’s Supper,” *Pneuma* 35 (2013), 223.

⁴⁸ Cf. Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical?: Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁴⁹ This is not necessarily about using the word “sacramental.” Rather, I am interested in how our theology and practices are *already* sacramental or how practices we previously considered mundane may be spaces where the Spirit communicates God’s grace. Furthermore, sacramentality appears to be a helpful starting point toward understanding liminality in relation to the kingdom of God’s “and” found within our “now *and* not yet” phraseology.

⁵⁰ Cf. Acts 2:42.