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Reader's Guide: Literary Resources for Worship

Bruce E. Shields

I have been teaching seminary-level courses in Christian worship for nearly twenty years, and I gladly admit that I have not been able to keep up with the flood of publications on worship and related fields. I say “gladly” because the nearly overwhelming flow of books and articles indicates the broad and still growing interest in the activities and foundations of the worship of God.

In what follows, then, I do not pretend to give you an exhaustive survey, since that would exhaust both you and me. What I do hope to do is to point you to enough good, recent works that you will be able to find those which will be most helpful to you and to work out from there if you need to expand your reading.

Reference Works

I begin, as did Craig Churchill in his listings on the Lord's Supper (*Leaven* 3, no. 3 [1995]: 33), with *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Star Song, 1994), edited by Robert E. Webber. I would recommend that any newcomer to the field who wishes to build a library on Christian worship get this seven-volume set first and then compare other works on worship with it. There is enough good information in these eight large books (volume 4 comprises two books) to point most of us to answers to our questions and quandaries concerning worship. Webber has gathered around him a broad-based group of contributors and consulting editors so that the contents are not dependent on even his outstanding expertise. In

addition, he has adapted articles from other sources that are recognized as definitive works in their various fields.

Because Webber's work is such a valuable and helpful resource, I offer here a quick survey of each volume. Volume 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, is a 350-page look at worship in the Bible. The thirty-two chapters are organized under five larger headings. The chapters of part 1 introduce the vocabulary of worship in both Testaments, the names of God, symbolism in worship, sacrifice, the numinous, the concept of covenant, and biblical worship as response to and re-presentation of saving events. Part 2 covers the history and institutions of Israelite, Jewish, and New Testament worship. Part 3 deals with festivals, in three chapters: “The Meaning of Feasts in the Biblical Tradition,” “Festivals of Israel,” and “Biblical Foundations of Christian Festivals.” Part 4 investigates music and the arts. It first explores a biblical philosophy of the worship arts, then looks at Israelite and New Testament worship with respect to musical instruments, the use of psalms and hymns, and dance and banners. Part 5 seeks to establish biblical foundations for Christian worship. It considers charismatic aspects, acts of entrance in traditional worship, the service of the Word, the service of the Lord's Table, and other sacred acts in worship. The volume ends, as do the others, with a listing of works cited and a helpful index.

The material in the first volume is but a foretaste of what appears in the rest of the set. Volume 2 surveys twenty

centuries of Christian worship, from the New Testament to the present. Within the survey are good introductions to Eastern Orthodox traditions as well as to the Western patterns with which most of us are more familiar. Also presented are some movements of worship renewal in the twentieth century. The survey, supplemented by actual liturgies and rather complete bibliographies, is followed by a look at various theologies of worship, two chapters on new directions in worship, and four chapters on preparing for worship renewal.

Volume 3 deals with the renewal of Sunday worship. The first chapter surveys what is happening within many traditions, including all three American streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement. The volume then introduces worship renewal in general and offers over two hundred pages of resources for Sunday worship, including helpful information and suggestions about preaching in as well as planning and leading worship.

Volume 4, over eight hundred pages long, is printed in two books under the title *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*. The first book begins with a survey of music and the arts among contemporary churches, covering the same traditions surveyed in volume 3. It then deals with the theology and history of music in worship and offers practical instruction for planning, composing, choosing, and leading music in worship. The second book deals with the visual arts, drama and dance, and the art of language in worship.

Volume 5 looks at the services of the Christian year, first surveying the practice of the Christian year among the traditions considered in volumes 3 and 4. It then introduces the history and theology of the Christian year and deals with the primary seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, and the season after Pentecost.

Volume 6 covers the sacred actions of Christian worship. It, too, begins with a survey of the practices of a number of traditions before proceeding in part 2 to a discussion of the history and theology of sacred actions, sacraments, and ordinances. Part 3 considers baptism; part 4, the Lord's Supper. Parts 5 and 6 look at actions such as weddings, funerals, ordinations and commissionings, the anointing of the sick, and footwashing.

Volume 7 surveys in detail the ministries of Christian worship. After another general survey, it looks in part 2 at the worshipping community—children, women, and the handicapped in worship; cultural context; and cultural di-

versity. Part 3 gives an overview of the relationships between the various ministries of the church and the ministry of worship. The final part deals in four chapters with worship and the church's mission to the world.

As with any multi-author effort, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* exhibits some lack of consistency in both quality of information and style of writing. Nevertheless, the seven volumes are the standard in the field, now and for the foreseeable future.

If, however, a seven-volume work is not your cup of tea, the best one-volume reference work on Christian worship in English is *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, edited by J. G. Davies. Published by Westminster Press in 1986 to replace the 1972 edition, it includes many new and rewritten articles.

History of Worship

Several important monographs have appeared recently on the history of Christian worship. Among them are two by James White, a Methodist (formerly married to a Disciple of Christ) now teaching at Notre Dame. His *Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) is a very helpful work outlining the development of worship from the New Testament through the medieval church and the Reformation to the present. The book fails to address Eastern Christianity after the time of the early church, but as a study of the roots of Western Christian worship, it is excellent. A companion piece is White's *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). It is full of illustrations of buildings as well as excerpts from ancient and more modern liturgical acts. Paul Bradshaw, White's colleague at Notre Dame, has produced *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Bradshaw's book focuses on the methods to be used in evaluating documents and artifacts related to early Christian worship. In addition to these three books from the nineties, Ralph Martin's *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964/1974) and Oscar Cullmann's *Early Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953, translated by A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance) are still valuable reading. Also, Bard Thompson's *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961) offers the reader complete scripts of outstanding services of worship throughout history.

Bible and Theology

Under this heading I mention four books. *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, by Geoffrey Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), is a systematic theology that focuses on Christian worship. Wainwright, a British Methodist who has taught at both Union Seminary in New York and Duke University Divinity School, brings a refreshingly broad, global perspective to his theology. His decision to relate theology to worship in a systematic way puts him in select company, the most illustrious member of which is Anselm of Canterbury.

David Peterson's *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) surveys the Bible to establish a theology of worship. He begins with the Old Testament, using it as background for a much fuller investigation of worship-related passages in the New Testament. Most readers of *Leaven* would be quite comfortable with—but at the same time, stimulated by—Peterson's approach and conclusions.

A third approach is offered by Don Saliers in his *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). The book is divided into three sections: "Liturgy and Theology," "Liturgy as Prayer," and "Liturgy in Context." In the first part Saliers deals with what he sees as the heart of theology and carries on a conversation with Karl Barth. In part two he deals theologically with the various approaches and purposes of prayer. In part three he attempts to relate worship to various aspects of the human context, such as language, ethics, and art.

A smaller but no less helpful book is *The Bible and Liturgy* by E. H. Van Olst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, translated from the original Dutch by John Vriend). Van Olst establishes the liturgical structure of the Bible, evaluates the use of the Bible in liturgy, and states and expands upon his anthropological assumptions. With that background, he then presents some specific suggestions for services of worship, dealing especially with Easter, the Feast of Tabernacles, and regular Sunday services.

It seems to me that many of our present conflicts with regard to changes in worship patterns or styles stem not just from distinctions of aesthetics, but from a lack of adequate biblical study and theological thought about worship. Any of these books could be used to stimulate our thinking and thus to improve our practice of the worship of God.

Praxis

Under this heading I mention books designed to help worship leaders plan and lead services that involve congregations in the expression of praise to the Creator and Redeemer. Once again, I do not claim that my list is complete—only that I have found these books helpful. I mention first a book whose title should draw people to read it: *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture*, by Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). This book could be listed under theology, but, more than those I have listed above, it shines a light on the present practices of worship and the conflicts troubling the church today in that regard. Dawn is especially concerned that the breaking from nearly all of Christian worship tradition by "seeker service" leaders will, in the long run, do more harm than good. She calls the church to the essential attributes of its worship: keeping God at the center, forming believers' character, and building up the community of faith. At the same time, she discusses all the details of worship, offering very practical suggestions along the way.

Three general introductions to the planning, leading, and practicing of worship that I have found useful come from different perspectives. James White, whom I mentioned earlier, has published a revised edition of his *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). His broad knowledge of the history of Christian worship makes this valuable reading, although most of it would be more helpful to mainline denominational liturgists than to more evangelical readers. Robert E. Webber's *Worship Is a Verb* (Waco: Word Publications, 1985) should be helpful to anyone who wants to consider the basics of Christian worship. His *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) also remains useful. Webber, a professor at Wheaton College (and editor of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, discussed earlier), is an evangelical who has become an Episcopalian because of his love of traditional liturgy. From C. Welton Gaddy, a more traditional evangelical, comes *The Gift of Worship* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992). Gaddy is a Southern Baptist who has put together an extremely well-balanced work on worship. His book will stimulate the advanced reader; it will also prove helpful as a study guide for worship committees or Sunday school classes. It contains enough history and theology to establish a good foundation, but it remains practical enough to keep nearly any reader engaged.

Special Studies

There are too many studies on specific aspects of worship (prayer, music, preaching, the Lord's Supper, baptism, etc.) to cover in this article. But before we close, I want to mention four works from and for the Stone-Campbell movement. Charles Gresham and Tom Lawson have edited into one work—*The Lord's Supper: Historical Writings on Its Meaning to the Body of Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1993)—the writings of a number of Restoration Movement thinkers on the Lord's Supper. Their selections come from J. B. Rotherham, W. R. Robinson, Harold E. Fey, James G. VanBuren, and Byron Lambert. They also include an essay by Lawson himself, "The Eucharist in the Second Century." The work is a valuable call back to our roots for participants in this movement.

A very helpful book, designed as a manual for worship planning and leadership, is *Thankful Praise*, edited by Keith Watkins (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1987). Watkins was aided in this endeavor by Ron Allen, Linda McKiernan-Allen, Michael Kinnamon, and Katherine G. Newman Kinnamon, who were then his colleagues at Christian Theological Seminary. This book is a valuable resource for those seeking help in planning worship services.

Mike Root has written a book from the perspective of the present tension among a cappella churches. He titled it *Spilt Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin: College Press, 1992). Root's book, with fifteen chapters and a brief conclusion, could be easily adapted for small group study in the congregation.

Another book from this perspective is Dan Dozier's *Come Let Us Adore Him: Dealing with the Struggle over Style of Worship in Christian Churches and Churches of Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1994). This work originated as a Doctor of Ministry project for Abilene Christian University, so it is a serious study of worship, offering biblical and historical background material and much good thinking from the standpoint of the Stone-Campbell Movement. The second half of the book deals with the primary activities of Christian corporate worship, ending with a chapter on the total participation of the congregation in worship.

Conclusion

Several recent studies have indicated that worship styles, especially styles of music, represent the single most divisive issue in most churches today. The way Christians have worshipped God has changed continuously since the first Christian Pentecost. Only as believers focus on the basics can we escape the acrimony and infamy of division over worship. These resources can help us to sharpen that focus.

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