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Mapping Christian Education, Jack L. Seymour

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Book Reviews

Markus McDowell,

Eleanor Daniel, Editors



Dan Dozier, *Come Let Us Adore Him: Dealing with the Struggle over Style of Worship in Christian Churches and Churches of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 297 pages. Reviewed by Clarence Hibbs.

There has been increasing interest in the worship of the church in recent years, and for those in the Restoration tradition, Dan Dozier has added a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation. He has aimed his discussion at the issue of the styles of worship currently being debated in some segments of the Restoration tradition. This volume is written for the church member who has not been schooled in the study of worship. It is written in non-technical language and is easy to read. A list of questions for discussion at the end of each chapter makes it well suited for a class format.

The book could be said to have essentially two parts. Chapters 1 through 6 focus on the theological and historical background of worship. Chapter 1 calls for a sense of wonder in worship. Dozier asserts that worship must have the character of God at its heart. He critiques the Lockean background of the Restoration Movement, which has emphasized truth and de-emphasized the mystery of God in worship. Further, he argues for the legitimate place for the kind of emotion in worship that is rooted in the hunger for a living relationship with God; he sees the awe and joy of the worshipper as a vital part of the experience

of worship. Chapter 2 defines biblical words for worship and underscores the fact that worship is the fundamental activity of the church, giving everything we do eternal significance. Chapter 3 emphasizes the necessity of a theology of worship. Dozier rightly begins the chapter by reminding us that we have a theology of worship whether or not we know it. Worship begins with an understanding of God, because what we believe about God will determine the nature of our worship. Therefore, worship must always be centered in God and not ourselves. Although he does not state it in so many words, Dozier makes the point that worship that focuses on ourselves is pagan. In the true sense, worship is a response to God that engages our whole being—heart, intellect, and actions. Chapter 4 is a brief review of the biblical background of worship.

Chapters 5 and 6 review the patterns of worship from the early church through the American Restoration Movement. Although brief, these chapters are valuable for church members who have not read extensively in church history. Especially important is Dozier's point that our worship practices stand in a long tradition, influenced by the past as well as the present. However, some conclusions are perhaps too sweeping, such as the assertion that a major cause of the Reformation was the question of worship (107).

The second section consists of chapters devoted to a discussion of the "five acts of worship" the Restoration Movement has used as rubrics for worship. True to the

subtitle of the book, the discussion of singing, giving, preaching and Scripture reading, prayer, and the Lord's Supper is primarily centered on styles of worship. Each chapter offers both a discussion of current practices and suggestions for worship planners. The chapter on singing is well worth the reading, making the point that the content of hymns is crucial to the biblical nature of worship.

Dozier is right in making a strong argument early in the work for a theology of worship, which has been largely missing in the Restoration Movement. In this reviewer's opinion, that is where the discussion should be centered; as long as it remains at the level of style, the church has missed the main point, and will continue to do so. The book would have been stronger if more substantial issues of theological content had been addressed in the discussion of the "five acts of worship," as was done in the chapter on singing.

In the title, Dozier identifies the focus of the book as the struggle over worship styles in both Churches of Christ and Christian Churches (it is assumed that the Independent branch is meant). However, two considerations seem to be missing from Dozier's discussion. The first is instrumental music, which is not mentioned in the chapter on singing. The second is the role of women in the public worship of the church. Undoubtedly, both matters are of vital importance in the ongoing discussion of worship in the Restoration Movement churches.

The beginning point for the study of worship must be the praise of God. Dozier's book has set a good direction. One hopes that subsequent writing will continue to sharpen our appreciation of and deepen our commitment to the substance of our worship of God.

CLARENCE HIBBS is Professor of Psychology at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.

Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 316 pages.
Reviewed by Ruth E. Picker.

Marva Dawn offers a theology of worship that is far more than a manual for worship leaders. Primarily, she challenges the church at large to evaluate the importation of contemporary cultural values into the worship service.

She wants the church to stop being "its own worst enemy" (297). Her analysis of cultural trends calls into question the purposes of evangelism and "chumminess" (97) in present day worship services. Her emphasis, thankfully, moves current worship discussions beyond the irrelevance of rhythmic style.

For Dawn, true worship deems God both subject and object of one's worship. True worship transforms the believer's character. True worship elicits a believing community's response. Hence, she reasons, true worship must never cater to the culture nor to the unbeliever, because such worship changes its subject and purpose from God to man.

Dawn suggests that the church has frequently been guilty of "sloth" (12) in reaching out. However, she cautions that in our zeal to reach out to the seeker, we can get caught up in consumerism. She believes it is not too late to ask better questions about why we do what we do.

Dawn admits that some see her as elitist and liturgical. She remains unabashedly liturgical because of her belief in the need for a systematic teaching of the whole Scripture and because of her belief in the comprehensive view of the whole person as worshipper. Her attack on many contemporary practices is based on their failure to contain all of the important biblical elements of worship. She decries the lack of lament, confession, and forgiveness in most worship services today. She also worries about the lack of opportunity for memory that is created for the young believer. When content is new every week, no creases are worn in the believing brain for the moment of struggle or tragedy. In her very direct and practical voice, Dawn suggests that we must teach children and all congregants what systematic worship means.

Dawn scrutinizes the elements of present culture that are empty and even false. Her book is much more than analysis of cultural ills, however. She offers practical helps for those who wish to avoid flimsy worship. In one chapter, she analyzes the lyrics of popular choruses, pointing out the one-track focus on individual praise of some and tracing the "muddled" theology of others. It remains clear that she has no problem with variety of style as long as the content is meaningful and true—as long as it offers God a chance to give "himself to us in worship. [For] as we receive God's presence, our character is formed" (126).

Dawn also discusses preaching. Once again her provocative words challenge us. She says, "Worship ought to kill us" (265), and "Reduced speech leads to reduced lives"

(233). Here, too, God must be the subject. When he is the subject, the believer's character and the community's response will blossom.

Dawn is relentless. She even analyzes the acoustics, the architecture, the icons, the postures of worshippers—and their silences. Without silence, God cannot be part of the worship. Worship must be two-way communication. One cannot extol God's worth without letting him get a word in edgewise.

Dawn's rhetoric is spicy, her arguments strong and sensible, her own experience in leading worship notable. Her questions about motives of corporate worship are valid and crucial.

I highly recommend this book to Christians who have always held up truth as their banner. We should read her book, not because Dawn is an experienced musician, a Ph.D. in Christian ethics, or a noteworthy author. We should read it because it is theologically sound and desperately needed.

RUTH PICKER is Professor of English, Communications, and Christian Education, Minnesota Bible College, Rochester, Minnesota.

David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 156 pages.

Reviewed by Eleanor A. Daniel.

Ng and Thomas, in *Children in the Worshiping Community*, tackle the perplexing, perennial question, What do we do with children during worship? It is a question for every Christian community, one that the authors address with helpful insight as they question the practice of isolating children from the larger Christian community for worship.

The authors organize the book into nine short chapters, with two appendixes and a resource bibliography at the end. The first chapter, "Children and Worship: Problems and Possibilities," presents several scenarios that demonstrate the "problems" often experienced when children worship. The authors point out that "choosing to worship regularly with our children and other Christians today calls for a disciplined commitment" (2). They assert that "we follow a Lord who placed children 'in the midst of them'" (3), but they also acknowledge that "when

children and adults join together, there are problems. Children may bother adults and adults may restrict children" (9). Confronting and proposing solutions to those problems provide the content for the last half of the book.

The second chapter is entitled "The Faith That Calls Children to Worship." In this chapter, the authors lay out a rationale for including children in the worship experience of the entire community. Their primary reasons are that the gospel is for all ages and that children need a sense of belonging to the community. They assert, "Children belong with the worshipping congregation because worship is a corporate action" (22); they develop strong arguments to support their assertion.

The third chapter, "The Children That Faith Calls to Worship," is largely a review of the characteristics and learning capability of children.

The final five chapters, "Leading Children into Worship through the Home," "Teaching about Worship in Graded Groups," "Leading Children into Worship through Music," "Planning for Children in Worship," and "How a Pastor Relates to Children," are full of practical suggestions for how to plan and develop worship services that include children, how to teach children at home, and how to teach children and parents to worship together. These chapters are must reading for any minister or Christian education leader. Whether the church plans corporate worship experiences for children or provides graded experiences, the suggestions in these chapters include helpful suggestions that no Christian educator should miss.

The appendixes—especially the one that provides sermon resources applicable to all age levels—offer particularly practical help as well.

Ng and Thomas have raised questions that every congregation should confront. Readers may not agree with all of their conclusions. Many, for example (this reviewer included), are not prepared to eliminate every graded worship experience for children. Yet the questions are real; many parents and church leaders are raising the same questions, though not so systematically. Each individual congregation may resolve the questions a bit differently than Ng and Thomas suggest. But as a congregation works to find its own answers to the questions raised, its worship ministry will surely be enhanced.

ELEANOR A. DANIEL is Dean and Professor of Christian Education at Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 138 pages including notes.

Reviewed by James Riley Estep.

Mapping Christian Education is Jack Seymour's most recent undertaking to describe the topography of the Christian education field at the close of the 1990s. Similar to an earlier book (*Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*, with Donald E. Miller in 1982), the book is a collection of essays depicting the predominant approaches to contemporary congregational Christian education.

As a purely descriptive piece, Seymour's work excels. Borrowing Mary C. Boy's metaphor of a "topographical map," Seymour endeavors to describe contemporary Christian education as it appears in congregations. The book is not designed to advocate a specific approach to Christian education. Rather, Seymour's intention is to portray Christian education at work in various congregations and to guide the reader in determining which approach is best suited for his or her own congregation. He focuses on what Christian education *is*, not what it *ought to be*.

Seymour begins by identifying four approaches to contemporary Christian education in the church: Social Transformation, Faith Community, Educating Persons, and Religious Instruction. He then uses four criteria to describe the approaches: the mission of the church, the role of the faith community, the understanding of the person, and the place of instruction. Each approach is outlined in relation to six categories: Goal, Teacher, Learner, Process of Education, Context, and Implications for Ministry, all conveniently summarized in a chart (21).

The book opens with a definition of Christian education in the broadest possible terms. Seymour defines it as the "context in which people engage life with the great traditions of faith, religious experience, and the resources of our culture. We seek to know what our lives mean in light of God and how we are called to participate in God's grace, love, and hope in the midst of life" (11). For Seymour, Christian education is a combination of context and the act of meaning-making. The four contemporary

approaches to Christian education are the possible ways that a congregation can attempt to provide that context and facilitate reflective activity.

In comparison with the earlier book, *Mapping Christian Education* has three distinct features that make it far more beneficial and functional for the Christian educator. First, unlike the 1982 volume, the current book focuses on approaches to Christian education within a congregational context. It concludes with specific recommendations for the congregation's educational ministry in light of contemporary sociological and congregational realities. Second, Seymour, in collaboration with Margaret Ann Crain, provides an assessment instrument (chapter 6). The three-page inventory asks a set of ten completion questions that reflect the four approaches described in the book. The inventory provides the Christian educator with not only a self-assessment instrument, but an instructional device as well. Finally, Seymour discusses the role of the professional Christian educator in establishing a context and process of learning that will facilitate Christian formation (chapter 7).

Mapping Christian Education does provide the Christian educator with an ethnography of contemporary Christian education. As a descriptive piece, it cannot be faulted. Yet it is the descriptive nature of the work that limits its potential value. While Seymour formulates a map of what contemporary Christian education *is*, he has no basis to move to what Christian education *ought to be*, though he does attempt to address its future. Upon what basis does Seymour project such an image of Christian education? He does not engage in the necessary theological reflection required to move from a descriptive to prescriptive posture; thus his prescriptive piece is somewhat shortsighted and indecisive. Nevertheless, his book is a helpful combination of the theoretical foundations for Christian education and the practical realities of implementing Christian education in the congregation. It can prove a helpful resource for a local Christian education board.

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