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Worship Old and New, Robert Webber

Dwight Robarts

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JACK REESE, EDITOR

I watched my young son in a specialty store recently. He is into cowboy things—hats, boots, guns, holsters, the works. (Not his father's choice of fixations, but not all things can be controlled). His attention was riveted on a pair of chaps and a leather western vest. Just his size. His eyes looked at me imploringly. I recognized the look.

It was my look. How many times I had thrown that same look at my wife—or, for that matter, she at me. Usually just after figuring the family finances. But, you see, I was just in the bookstore, and there is this book... If we only had a little more cash in the account... There are so many books I really need!

I have almost stopped reading book reviews for that reason. I am like a starving man at a Sunday buffet. Everything looks so inviting. Yet, I am convinced, over the long haul, a book review section may be the most valuable part of any journal—if it directs the reader to books on the cutting edge, seminal works, evocative books that affect the way one sees the world...and God in the world. Knowing about those books can make a difference in personal growth and ministry.

The reviews in this section are not so much meant to prompt your purchases as to provoke your thinking, to provide insights and resources for ministry. In general, they will grow out of and support the main topic of each quarterly issue. Often, however, other unrelated works will be included because of their value in equipping Christians for specific ministries. (Because of my personal interests and those of many of our readers, helpful resources in preaching will often be reviewed here.)

Dwight and Charmé Robarts begin these reviews by discussing two very influential books by Wheaton professor Robert Webber. Dr. Doug Brown reminds readers of a great Christian classic by Søren Kierkegaard, a work that can re-shape our worship life. I then review in brief seven books of or about worship. Finally there is my discussion of a recently published book on preaching.

Jack Reese teaches Homiletics at Abilene Christian University. He has graduate degrees from A.C.U., Oklahoma, and received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. He previously served as the Minister for the Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas.

Worship Old and New, by **ROBERT E. WEBBER**. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, 256 pp.

Am I wrong or is there a growing restlessness over worship in our churches? In every church I have been a part of at least one voice has complained that the worship assembly was too boring, too predictable, too formal or informal, too unpredictable, or too unsettling. If the voice became a chorus, the leadership might tinker with the order of worship -- another song or two here, a prayer there -- but the restlessness continued.

Robert Webber's, **Worship Old and New**, is written by one who has a deep concern for worship. Webber, who teaches at Wheaton, has also written **Worship is a Verb** (Waco: Word Books, 1985) and **Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church** (Waco: Word Books, 1985 -- also reviewed in this issue).

Worship Old and New is a primer on worship. Webber deals with the basic issues of public worship such as the biblical foundation for Christian worship in both testaments, the theology of worship (a point that seems to me to have been overlooked to a large extent in our discussions of worship in Churches of Christ) and the role of time, space and sound (which will probably seem the most distant of his discussions). The book concludes with nine proposals for improving worship in the local church and some suggested models for an order of worship that reflects a biblical theology of the assembly.

The author contends that the restlessness in many conservative churches over worship is the result of "historical amnesia, the infiltration of rationalism, emotionalism or entertainment, and a failure to keep a balance in all aspects of church life," including worship, teaching, evangelism, fellowship and compassion. Many churches' anti-historical bias prevents them from initiating genuine renewal of worship. Webber says their failure to study how churches in the past have tried to apply the biblical teaching about worship imprisons these churches in their own culture and cuts them off from a helpful resource for worship renewal. While history is helpful Webber believes the primary resource for worship renewal is the Bible.

Webber is not so concerned with what we

in the churches of Christ have called "acts of worship." His concern is the biblical and theological underpinnings of what the church does in public assembly. Webber sees the responses of worship, such as prayer and the Lord's Supper, as probably arising from a motivation deeper than just the reproduction of a pattern. Biblical worship arises from a sense of the majesty and mystery of God. Biblical worship is, according to Webber, focused on Christ who has come to man as a redeemer/savior so that we might be brought to the Father. Biblical worship is of necessity a community event where the church, led by the Spirit of God, remembers the work of salvation through such tangible symbols as communion and giving.

Webber understands worship as a response of trust and obedience that prepares the church for ministry to the world. It also looks beyond the present world to the hope of God's people for the future. Such an understanding of worship prevents churches from caving in to the temptation to entertain instead of growing into a deeper understanding of the biblical meaning of worship. Webber believes a failure to understand this prevents worship renewal. This "failure to understand and practice public worship" requires a "turning away from all shallow and uninformed approaches to worship."

This book would be extremely helpful to elders, preachers and worship committees who struggle with leading God's people in worship each week. It is most valuable in guiding the development of a framework or context for worship as well as providing direction for a renewal that avoids the resort to quick fixes that often characterize attempts to deal with dissatisfaction over worship. Another helpful feature of the book is the end notes and the annotated bibliography which point to more lengthy discussions in other sources.

Webber's book serves as a needed call and guide to a deeper understanding of the thrill and peril of our weekly encounter with our holy God.

Dwight Robarts
Ft. Walton Beach, Florida

Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church, by **ROBERT E. WEBBER**. Waco: Word Books, 1985. 171 pp.

"What is truly spiritual is believing what you are told. A questioning spirit is a doubting spirit and a doubting spirit comes from an unbelieving heart." Webber here quotes one of his students at Wheaton who was speaking of past experience in a fundamentalist college. The young man's statement expresses the mentality that stifles religious questioning and in essence promotes "mouthing faith that lacks integrity." This mentality is at the core of Webber's initiative to walk the Canterbury Trail from the evangelical tradition to the Episcopal church.

His book is divided into two parts. The first is a chronicle of his own spiritual journey and the second contains the testimonies of six other sojourners. Throughout all, careful attention is given to extol the strengths of evangelicalism. Webber is particularly sensitive in describing his own pilgrimage with due respect for his heritage and in fact declares the beauty of blending the traditions.

Considerable attention is given to the comfort that attends containing God in a system, thus Webber's deference to those who either resist religious change or who seem never to imagine it. His own discomfort with a fixed faith based on memorization and adherence to institutional thought sent him from familial faith into searching faith and gradually to owned faith. It is this faith that responds to God in worship, not merely as weekly event but as life experience.

The rejection of a rationalistic view of God gives way to a return to mystery which is at the heart of Webber's journey. This sense of mystery refuses to "put God in a box" and then expound on him at each assembly. Rather, it waits for God to reveal himself in the quiet of worship. Mystery neither intellectualizes nor emotionalizes the worship experience.

Participation in the sacraments of the church affirms the mystery of God in the universe. For Webber these are signs of God's continued activity in the human realm and they speak again of the specific work of Christ on our behalf. The section dealing with sacrament is particularly informative and refreshing as it reveals a view of these practices that are often

cast in disdain by those who think rituals by their nature can only become empty. Though given other names in different traditions, any sacrament has potential to become profane.

The great benefit of this book is not to call us to Webber's odyssey into the Anglican tradition. Rather it is to call us to faithfulness in worship, where God encounters us, is present with us -- yet is still God, still mysterious. It is in the dynamic experience of worship that the person of God can seek healing for the eternal church.

Charme Robarts
Ft. Walton Beach, Florida

Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing, by **SOREN KIERKEGAARD**.

Human beings are reasoning beings, in whom God has implanted a thirst for eternity (Eccl. 3:11). When this truth has been treated as an adequate expression of our humanity, heresy has been born. (Heresy, among other things, is the extreme assertion of some truth). "Dare to think" created the occasion for such heresy within the Enlightenment societies, the United States being but one example. The same distortion found a home in theological traditions ranging from Protestant Liberalism to our Restoration heritage. Worship provides a laboratory within which to observe (and experience) the fruit.

A gifted Danish author spoke prophetically against the rationalistic heresy that had blanketed Copenhagen, including the Christian Church. His aim -- "to sting," "to wound from behind" in order to pry free "solitary individuals" from the religious slumber and lifestyle distractions absorbed from "the crowd" (a "sink of cowardice"). For them, he wrote some twenty "edifying discourses," **Purity of Heart** being the first translated into English. Alerted to their epistemological and spiritual distance from God, these tender worshippers received from Kierkegaard prodding "from the wings" designed to enhance the impact of coming before the Lord.

Purity of Heart explores subtle forms of double-mindedness that are easily overlooked. Kierkegaard takes the confessor full circle, beginning and ending with "Man and the Eter-

nal." From barriers ("the reward disease") to price ("readiness to suffer all" and "the exposure of evasions") to the question "What then must I do?" -- he probes the believer's struggle to selflessly will one thing -- God's kingdom. The prayer, which shares the book's title, puts the reader in his sights (and permits a taste of Kierkegaard):

Father in heaven! What is a man without Thee! What is all that he knows, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if he does not know Thee! What is all his striving, could it even encompass a world, but a half-finished work if he does not know Thee: Thee the One, who are one thing and who art all! So may Thou give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing: to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that will only one thing. In prosperity may Thou grant perseverance to will one thing; amid distractions, collectedness to will one thing. Oh, Thou that givest both the beginning and the completion, may Thou early, at the dawn of day, give to the young man the resolution to will one thing. As the day wanes, may Thou give to the old man a renewed remembrance of his first resolution, that the first may be like the last, the last like the first, in possession of a life that has willed only one thing. Alas, but this has indeed not come to pass. Something has come in between. The separation of sin lies in between. Each day, and day after day, something is being placed in between: delay, blockage, interruption, delusion, corruption. So in this time of repentance may Thou give the courage once again to will one thing. True, it is an interruption of our ordinary tasks; we do lay down our work as though it were a day of rest, when the penitent (and it is only in a time of repentance that the heavily-laden worker may be quiet in the confession of sin) is alone before Thee in self-accusation. This is indeed an interruption =. But it is an interruption that searches back into its very beginnings that it might bind up anew that which sin has separated, that in its grief it might bring to completion that which lies before it. Oh, Thou that givest both the beginning and the completion, give Thou victory in the

day of need so that what neither a man's burning wish nor hid determined resolution may attain to, may be granted unto him in the sorrowing of repentance: to will only one thing."

Doug Brown
Memphis, Tennessee

In Brief

The reader may find the following books excellent resources on worship. (JR)

The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics are Related, by **WILLIAM WILLIMON**. Nashville: Abingdon, 1983. 238 pp.

Few voices over the last decade have addressed the subject of Christian worship with as much clarity and insight as Willimon's. In this profound and influential book, Willimon emphasizes the power of ritual—not only in its effect on the individual in assembly, but more specifically in its effect on a person's ethical behavior in the world. He argues for a strengthening of communal ritual (praying and believing, baptism, the Lord's Supper, preaching, marriage and promise-making, and offering)—rituals that are a primary determinant of the Christian's ethical life.

Worship and Spirituality, by **DON E. SALIERS**. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984. 114 pp.

In a rather brief book, Saliers supplies me with enough new ideas concerning the Christian worship experience to fill a notebook twice the size. Every page evokes new possibilities. According to Saliers, the key to worship and spirituality is remembrance. It is remembrance, with all its hebraic nuances, that empowers worship during perplexing times. Especially helpful is his discussion of symbol and the "hidden languages," "living" baptism, and the importance of remembering God to the world.

Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience, by **JOHN E. BURKHART**. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982. 162 pages.

In a lucid discussion of the nature of Christian worship, Burkhart examines "the Lord's assembly," "the Lord's day," "the Lord's feast," "the Lord's service," and "the Lord's welcome." He provides a rationale for worship that is simple, biblical, and suggestive.

Participating in Worship: History, Theory, and Practice, by **CRAIG DOUGLAS ERICKSON**. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox: 1989. 223 pages.

Those reared in a "free church" tradition (like Churches of Christ) will find themselves in unfamiliar territory from the outset of this book. The context and language is that of mainline liturgical Protestantism. Yet the call to active congregational participation in the Sunday assemblies is an important corrective to the passive audience tendencies of the free church congregations. Many will find Erickson's premise and specific worship suggestions fresh. The book may evoke a wide range of worship responses that can find an appropriate place in our assemblies.

Pattern in Early Christian Worship, by **ALLEN CABANISS**. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989. 112 pages.

For several years in journal articles and his own Presbyterian tradition, Cabaniss has been arguing for a re-focusing on patterns in congregational worship. This book on the liturgy of the early church is the culmination of his work. Though at times his writing is disjointed and pedestrian, Cabaniss provides several clear windows into the world of the early church (and even into the worship life of Israel). Ministers and worship leaders may find some jewels amidst this rough-hewn rock.

Last Supper and Lord's Supper, by **I. HOWARD MARSHALL**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. 191 pages.

Anyone seriously interested in re-examining the contemporary practices of the Lord's Supper service in our churches would do well to start here. Beginning with a discussion

of religious meals in the ancient world, Marshall explores with depth and keen scholarship Jesus' last supper with his disciples and its implications in the early church. This is not a popular-level book. Some may find it tough reading at times. But those willing to invest the time will find in it some surprising conclusions and a treasury of ideas.

Prayers, by **MICHEL QUOIST**, translated by Agnes M. Forsyth and Anne Marie de Commaille. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963. 179 pages.

One of the finest devotional works of the last half of this century, Quoist's *Prayers* is fast becoming a classic. The brief prayers, translated from the original French, are at times breathtaking. One cannot read them quickly. Every sentence penetrates. His words frolic then devastate, indict then encourage, words and metaphors alive with poignant meaning. These prayers seize the spirit. Appropriate for private meditation or public worship, they carry the power of one both vulnerable and confident before his God, speaking with terror and bold adoration in the presence of a holy God.

Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible, by **THOMAS G. LONG**. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989. 144 pp.

Two developments in homiletic thought have significantly affected the process of sermon construction in recent years. One, championed by Fred Craddock, is the use of inductive rather than deductive sermon strategies. Works advocating inductive models have multiplied rapidly over the last fifteen years. The other development, less extensively discussed but equally important, is the study of the form of the biblical text in determining the form of the sermon. The two developments are not unrelated. Craddock, for example, discusses the need to pay attention to text form in his earliest homiletic text, *As One Without Authority* (1974). But only recently has this issue been adequately addressed.

Thomas Long, professor of preaching at Princeton University, has been at the forefront of this concern for several years. In this latest book he suggests that inadequate attention has been given by preachers not in "what the . . . texts say but . . . [in] how the texts say what they say" (p. 11, emphasis his). Poetry and miracle stories, for example, "come at' the reader in different ways." One who preaches needs to develop sermons "sufficiently nuanced to recognize and employ these differences in the creation of the sermon itself."

In the first two chapters, Long defines an approach to sermon construction that is sensitive to biblical genre. He underscores the relationship between the form of a text and its funda-

mental meaning. He encourages an awareness of literary devices employed by biblical writers and the effect they achieve. He leads the readers through a process in which the sermon, in a new setting, says and does what the text says and does in its setting. In the remaining chapters he discusses preaching from several literary genres: the Psalms, Proverbs, narratives, the parables of Jesus, and the epistles.

Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible is relatively brief and tightly written. It has every indication of being a landmark book within the field of homiletics. And for preachers whose roots are in a movement concerned with "doing Bible things in Bible ways," this book could prove to be invaluable.

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