

Book Reviews

Bradshaw, Paul F. *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice: Second Edition*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010. 112 pp. \$19.95.

Clearly and briefly articulating the complexity of issues surrounding the study of Early Christian Worship (ECW) is a daunting task. The scant and fragmented nature of early Christian worship sources, when carelessly handled, can produce a myriad of problematic notions when aiming to grasp the topic. In *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*, Paul Bradshaw offers a concise and reliable summary of the development of ECW in the first few centuries. Bradshaw is an important scholar in the area of ECW and an abundant contributor of material in this realm of study. He was a long-time professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame and has several books and multiple articles credited to his name.

Bradshaw articulates his central thesis in the brief prologue to the work. He states that the intent of the book is not so much to present an account of *what* the early Christians practiced in their worship, but rather to recount *why* and *how* they arrived at the practices they did and the manner in which they performed them. Bradshaw offers for speculation why the early Christians chose their particular forms and practices and not others. He also encourages the reader to consider how certain practices provoked development of theology, as well as the reverse of considering how theology influenced practice (vii). Bradshaw develops his argument by way of exposition and analysis of the major rites of ECW explaining their origin and development. The work is not a chronological history that progresses sequentially through time. Instead, he takes what he considers the three central concerns for understanding ECW, that being Christian initiation, Eucharist, and liturgical time, and develops each topic systematically.

The first section focuses on Christian initiation from its New Testament origins until the fourth century, building the discussion

by evaluating differences based on location (Syria, Jerusalem) and through explanation of primary documents and figures. In particular, he describes various aspects and images incorporated into the rite such as the preparation (18), the renunciation (18–19), and the triple immersion (20). Bradshaw illustrates how by the fourth century the common baptismal process became a synthesis of traditions borrowed from the previous centuries. The primary difference in the post-Constantine era is that whereas in an earlier era baptism was seen as a completion of the conversion process, by the fourth century one would undergo baptism with hopes of bringing about their conversion (23).

The second section addresses the complex topic of the Eucharist and guides the reader through the pre-Christian Jewish origins towards an early-medieval understanding of the Table where the Eucharist evolved into a work of the clergy and not of the people. Bradshaw demonstrates how the theology of the Eucharist gradually became more robust: beginning by developing a strong focus on anamnesis and epiclesis (49), towards early traces of viewing the Eucharistic elements as the literal incarnate Christ (56), and leading to the concept that the Eucharist is a memorial sacrifice of Christ (67). Each of these theological developments and their liturgical counterpoint seem to emerge in tandem with one another. The final section explains the overarching context and ordering of liturgical time. Bradshaw offers an understanding for the sanctification of time through incorporation of daily prayer, the origins of Sunday worship, the primary liturgical seasons and gradual formation of saint commemoration days. In doing so Bradshaw shows how the eventual crystallization of set days, patterns, and seasons grew out of doxological convictions, eschatological anticipation, and theological developments.

The strength of this work is in its comprehensive yet succinct manner of presenting the information, arguments, and theories surrounding the central issues of ECW. Bradshaw exercises self-awareness of the details he is omitting on the topics at hand. One may perceive the brevity as a weakness, but Bradshaw makes this limitation known early in the work. Moreover, the appealing quality of this book is how it is contrasted with Bradshaw's other work. Bradshaw is a profound contributor, but for the lay reader much of his writing goes into such detail with incredible adherence to proper methodology that it can verge on being cumbersome to read. This work, on the

other hand, stays on the surface but is substantiated with a strong cognizance of the complexities of the details while applying the sound methodology for which Bradshaw is known. Lastly, his chosen manner for structuring the work, developing topics rather than presenting a sequence of events, helps the reader recognize the relevance for today's church regarding initiation, Eucharist, and liturgical time.

In sum, *Early Christian Worship* serves as an exceptionally beneficial exposition and introduction to understanding the primary issues of early Christian worship that brings forth a vivid and clear historical account of worship in the first few centuries. For those who want to proceed in their study, Bradshaw provides several helpful sources. And for those who have no further interest in early Christian worship, they will still have received an informative and edifying resource.

Braden J. McKinley

Taylor, W. David O., ed. *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010. 204 pp. \$14.99.

Conversations regarding arts programs in Protestant churches can be challenging if the participants are unsure how to assimilate successful, God-honoring instruction that incorporates the arts. David Taylor approaches this issue, with the inclusion of other authors, and broadly covers discussion on the importance of utilizing the arts in ecclesiastical ministry. The authors draw from their varied experiences in arts ministries to include practical steps in implementing the arts into daily activities of the local church. Taylor articulates a clear purpose of the book by stating, “[This book] aims to inspire the church, in its life and mission, with an expansive vision for the arts” (21). Art genres included in his vision consist of music, dance, drama, media, and other various forms of visual art. The intention of this book is to help pastors and artists learn to speak the same language so meaningful conversations can lead to a presence of the arts in the church. Although each author approaches the issue of ecclesiastical art inclusion from varied points, the narrative carries similar themes with each writer offering a healthy view of arts ministries.

Taylor incorporates other contributing authors, including Andy Crouch, John D. Witvliet, Lauren F. Winner, Eugene Peterson, Barbara Nicolosi, Joshua Banner, and Jeremy Begbie. These authors offer opinions and research from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestantism. The diversity in experiences allow each author to speak from personal ecclesiastical understanding regarding positive and negative interactions with the arts in the church.

Banner, Peterson, and Taylor draw from their knowledge with artists and art programs in their churches, with Banner citing an arts program he developed within the walls of his church in the late 1990s. Peterson further recalls personal encounters with artists in his ministry, culminating with his charge to pastors to make friends with the artist, and Taylor highlights the dangers that arts ministries can expose, aiding both the peculiarities of the artist and perceived lack of support from the pastor, for the betterment of the congregation. All three pastors reference personal relationships with artists in their churches, and they encourage arts ministers to learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before, both in mistakes and successes, allowing the Spirit to guide them into future arts involvement in the local church.

Witvliet and Begbie represent the academy with their experiences as musicians and seminary professors. Witvliet challenges the reader to “express, challenge, and deepen our corporate acts of worship” (47), referencing multiple genres of art and how they can be utilized correctly as liturgical art. He focuses on the role of an arts ministry in the gathered body of believers, arguing that the arts in “corporate acts of praise, confession, lament, thanksgiving, proclamation, baptism, and Eucharist” (47) serve to “elevate, deepen, and sharpen each of these basic sensory actions and prime them as acts of worship” (55). Begbie points the discussion into the future by illuminating six healthy ways the church can use art through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His charge is for artists to understand the history and importance of Scripture so their art will reflect the beauty of God.

Lastly, Crouch, Nicolosi, and Winner discuss their involvement with the church as artists themselves. Crouch examines the intersection of arts and society, believing that God created culture as a gift for Adam in the Garden and that we today continue to create it, with a poignant question raised regarding if the reader believes God

created culture as a gift (36). Nicolosi considers her involvement within the film industry, providing examples of what beauty is and is not, and Winner centers her topic around the importance of beautiful art in daily life and considers the view of art in Protestant churches, as she was raised in the Jewish tradition.

Taylor has compiled an excellent resource for ministers desiring to include the arts in their church. However, when including authors from such varied backgrounds, the methodology and emphasis in ministry initiatives can cause confusion to the reader in knowing how to proceed. Further, when comparing the tone of each author, the reader must reconcile personal experiences from some authors (pastors and artists) versus research significance from others (professors). By being aware of these issues, the reader will be able to assimilate the given information into a manageable approach to begin (or continue) arts ministry in the local church.

For the Beauty of the Church examines the positive and negative sides of utilizing arts ministries and provides multiple personal testimonies from both pastors and artists. The dialogue that is read between these pages can be inspirational to the reader, providing courage to pastors in learning how to communicate with artists. This communication, as noted in almost every chapter, is vital for “casting a vision for the arts” in the local church.

Kim Arnold

Bradshaw, Paul F., and Maxwell E. Johnson. *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011. 222 pp. \$29.95.

Until the late sixteenth century, the idea of a liturgical year did not exist, in terms of each of the celebrated feasts and festivals as a unified whole; therefore, tracing the history of the origin of the various celebratory events in the church year proves quite complex (xiii). In *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson present the history of the celebrations of the church as they emerged in history: from the Lord’s Day to the commemoration of saints. This book was intended to be a successor to that of Thomas Talley’s 1986 *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*;

however, the authors do not agree with all of Talley's arguments. First of all, from the table of contents the reader notes that the structure of the book does not follow the liturgical year, which automatically points to the authors' aim to present the feasts and seasons in a historically chronological method, beginning with the Lord's Day as it was the earliest to be celebrated. Bradshaw and Johnson follow by dividing the book into parts, because,

Christians in antiquity did not view the various festivals, fasts and seasons that they experienced through each year as forming a unity, a single entity, and indeed those events themselves did not emerge in any planned or co-ordinated fashion but instead as a number of entirely unrelated cycles, with the result that they tended to overlap or conflict with one another. (xiii)

The cycles covered by the authors include Sabbath and Sunday, Easter and Pentecost, Lent and Holy Week, Christmas and Epiphany, and finally martyrs and saint commemorations. The cycles that seem to hold the most overlap are Easter, Lent, and Epiphany, and Bradshaw and Johnson present their clarifying arguments on the cycle of Lent that so often causes confusion between the two outlying seasons of celebration.

Whereas the commonly held understanding of the origin of Lent once was a gradual backwards expansion from the Paschal baptism, Bradshaw and Johnson argue that "we can no longer speak of a *single* origin for Lent but, rather, of multiple origins for this period, which in the fourth-century post-Nicene context become universally standardized and fixed as the '40 days' that have characterized pre-paschal preparation ever since" (90). The authors argue that Lent should not be confused with the Holy Week fast, which they establish as occurring historically earlier than Lent as "an independent preparation of the faithful for the imminent celebration of Pascha itself" (91). The elucidation between the overlap of the two fasting seasons and their origins occurs when the Paschal celebrations are identified as originating prior to the practice of Lent fasting—a task that Bradshaw and Johnson present clearly with evidential support in this text.

A few of the other notable contributions Bradshaw and Johnson make in this text include their section regarding the origin of

worshipping on the Lord's Day as well as the section on the shift of focus in the paschal triduum from the death of Christ to his resurrection. On the topic of the Lord's Day, Bradshaw and Johnson argue that the "adoption of the Lord's day by early Christians was not as a replacement for the Jewish Sabbath understood as a divinely mandated day of rest," but that it was the day of the week when God's people assembled for worship (13). They state instead that the Lord's Day was an eschatological day of worship, commemorating the *parousia* "which was intended to permeate the whole of a Christian's daily prayer and life" (13). The authors also discuss the shift of focus from Christ's death to his resurrection, celebrated on the Lord's Day, Sunday, of the paschal triduum, which also began the shift of "the interpretation and meaning of Pascha, from 'passion' to 'passage' – the passage from death to life" (60). Small shifts in the development of these cycles impacted the ones following it historically and those that overlap each other in the liturgical year – these shifts are what Bradshaw and Johnson bring to light and clarify for those longing for more understanding of the roots underlying the seasons celebrated in the church today.

While this book is quite concise and possibly digestible by those curious about this topic, I would suggest that it is more accessible for those within the academic/theological realm, including students, ministers, and theologians. Bradshaw and Johnson have compiled a worthy addition to the bookshelf of any liturgical scholar seeking answers to questionable and long-held tenets regarding the origin of the liturgical year.

Lyndsey Huckaby

Jensen, Robin M. *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. 256 pp. \$28.00.

"Baptism is not only a bath. . . . Baptism is also the restoration of the lost paradise" (212). In *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, Robin M. Jensen, Patrick O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, traces the history of baptism beginning with the apostles through the fifth century. While many histories present

material in chronological order, Jensen's history is thematically arranged around the imagery found in the rituals (e.g., oil-anointing), visual expressions (e.g., catacomb art), and theological writings. Jensen's central goal is to thoroughly document the early church's dependency on imagery to reinforce and relay God's truth. In doing so, the author effectively appeals to the reader's "imagination by offering a collection of both textual and material data that both informs and inspires" (4).

Jensen argues that Christian baptism has always been about cleansing and salvation. In its most basic form, it is a bath, but more specifically it has to do with cleansing from sin. John the Baptist proclaimed the need for "forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). When he saw Jesus, he exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But for the early church, baptism did not start with John (8-10), and "almost any narrative that involved water could be a type of baptism." Cyprian asserts that "every reference to water in the Holy Scriptures is a prophetic allusion to baptism" (16). The most obvious baptismal allusion in the Old Testament was the story of Naaman (25).

Incorporation into the body is also an important part of baptism. While modern believers often view baptism as public profession, for the early church "the ritual of baptism was a closed, secret rite. Those who received it were initiated into an exclusive group that allowed them entry to the similarly private table fellowship" (63). Early Christian images like the fish (often caught in a net) and flock of sheep reflect this herd mentality (69). Even the sign of the cross performed at baptism is thought to have been viewed as a mark of identifying with the group like the branding of cattle (79).

The Spirit's works of sanctification and illumination was a major part of baptism. By the fourth century, anointing with oil (which represents the Spirit) regularly accompanied baptism (93). A symbol that occurred often in early Christian art was the dove. Just as the dove appeared to Noah at the *baptism* of the earth, so did the Spirit appear at the baptism of Christ (117). In some early Christian communities, we find milk (or cheese) and honey being consumed as a ritual for neophytes (127). As a picture of the sanctification and illumination the Spirit offers, the ancient world viewed milk as a sign of wisdom and perfection (115).

Rooted in Paul's teaching that believers are "buried therefore with him by baptism into death" (Rom 6:3-11), baptism as a symbol of dying and rising was also common. For this reason, baptism was especially common during Easter (141). Early Christians found affinity with imagery such as the pagan Phoenix, the mother's womb, and white garments.

"The ritual of Christian baptism not only effects the cleansing, incorporation, enlightenment, and regeneration of an individual . . . it recalls the moment when all creation began and foreshadows the unending moment when all creation will be transformed" (177). As with Paul's teaching to the Corinthians, early Christians saw eschatological meaning related to baptismal imagery in rivers, weddings, the number eight (*ogdoad*), facing east, and nude baptism. According to Jensen, "The ritual of baptism reconstructs creation's mythical, primordial beginning and interrupts the ordinary cycle of birth and death" (212).

An area that needs attention is the suggestion that believers may be genderless in the resurrection, which is proposed as possible motivation for the practice of nude baptism (181). If Paul did, in fact, intend for the church to neutralize gender (Gal 3:27-29) as Jensen suggests, then Paul himself did a poor job of doing so (see Eph 5:22-33 and 1 Tim 5:1-2). Jensen admits that the early church authors "stress the loss of socially identifying markers in baptism (e.g., social class, ethnicity), but genderlessness is not as prominent in their thinking" (182). This topic is addressed in the portion dealing with baptism as a picture of the restoration of Eden; what the author fails to note is that the distinctions of male and female (Gen 1:27) and the establishment of marriage between the man and woman (Gen 2:23-25) occurred in Eden before the fall.

Jensen's Catholic presuppositions do manifest in places throughout the work. For instance, the opening chapter is called "Baptism as Cleansing from Sin and Sickness" (7), which seems to reveal that the author holds the Catholic position of the redemptive necessity of baptism. This will be problematic for non-Catholic readers, but this work is still valuable for its thematic collection of the historical data. Jensen is a fair-minded scholar, not blindly defending Catholic practice. For instance, she points out that the use of candles in the liturgy is not well attested in literature predating the early Middle Ages (128). Another obstacle for readers who hold to *Sola*

Scriptura is that Jensen does not seem interested in resolving the conflict that occurs between biblical practice and post-apostolic practice. She tends rather to view the practice of the early church as equally authoritative to *Scripture*.

Robin M. Jensen is an insightful historian and a delightful author. *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity* is an important contribution for helping today's church understand the same church that existed two thousand years ago. I recommended this book as an aid for understanding the place of sacrament and art in the life of the early church.

Daniel Webster

Covington, David A. *A Redemptive Theology of Art: Restoring Godly Aesthetics to Doctrine and Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018. 316 pp. \$24.99.

Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder but is instead in “the eye of the *Beholder*” (25, emphasis added). In his first academic book, David A. Covington argues that sin has tainted our perceptions of beauty, and we need a redeemed vision to see beauty rightly: as God sees it. Covington teaches at Westminster Theological Seminary and had a career as a Christian recording artist prior to entering academia.

Covington presents this book as a “Bible study and biblical theology of aesthetics” (23). He moves away from a conversation of “aesthetic *properties* to one of aesthetic *perceptions*, especially God’s aesthetic perception” (61, emphasis added). Following a transactional ontology, he defines aesthetics as “a conversation between the maker’s intention, the character and properties of the work, the impression made on the receiver’s sense, and his affectional response” (38). Covington finds *Scripture* as his starting place for aesthetics, which he admits leads him to “depart from the historical brand of philosophy” of aesthetics (29). He does so because he claims “the Bible teaches . . . an entire theology of aesthetics and passions” (21). He frames this theology of aesthetics around the story of redemptive history, “creation, fall, redemption, consummation” (178), and finds key insights from the Genesis creation account.

The author begins with what he calls the “glory triad,” which he finds first in Genesis 1–3 and then echoed throughout Scripture. The glory triad consists of the three elements of God’s goodness as displayed in God’s creation: beauty, truth, and power. Genesis 1–3 depicts this triad in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “pleasing to the eye,” “good for food,” and “desirable for gaining wisdom” (63–64). He uses this triad throughout his book as the grounding framework for his argument. Confusingly, Covington cites another author who equates the same three elements of the Tree of Good and Evil with the Platonic Triad of truth, beauty, and *goodness* (73), but he never explains why he chose his “glory triad” over the Platonic Triad.

Covington then moves to the aesthetic consequences of sin, God’s plan for redeeming our aesthetics, and finally the path for individuals to restore their aesthetic vision. Covington rests his theology of aesthetics on an unspoken Calvinistic hamartiology of sin leading to total depravity. Sin has distorted man’s sense of beauty to the point of complete aesthetic blindness for the unredeemed just as it has utterly distorted his sense of power and truth (105). After establishing sin’s blinding aesthetic consequences, Covington then proposes the prescription: extending the Gospel and redemption to the realm of beauty. A redeemed person can develop a redeemed aesthetic sensibility. With a redeemed aesthetic vision that “comes to us immediately and gradually” (144), the believer can find redeeming qualities in all artworks and all aspects of creation: even those that the original artists did not intend to bring glory to God. A redeemed aesthetic asks not: “*What* would Jesus watch?” Rather, it asks: “*How* does God see this?” (110). Covington argues that, as our aesthetics are redeemed, we will see that “God reveals himself in everything, so God’s people can make God-centered meaning from everything” (178). In doing so, he makes the theological appeal for what Peter Leithart models in his 2015 book *Traces of the Trinity*. While Leithart compellingly *demonstrates* a redeemed aesthetics, Covington *advocates* the need for one.

A Redemptive Theology of Art would serve well for an in-depth Bible study for Reformed lay people. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions and response activities suitable to individual or communal learning. However, the book lacks the academic rigor expected of a scholarly biblical theology. Many of his biblical citations

work well as analogies for his arguments but buckle under the pressure of proof he places on them. For instance, he precariously bases his argument that “sin distorts [aesthetic] vision in three ways: it hijacks, it fragments, and it darkens” (94) on a speculative interpretation of the three sons of Lamech: Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain. Due to his evil lineage, Covington rejects the Bible’s claim of Jubal as the father of music, deeming him a “awkward founder of a cultural movement” (61). He calls Lamech’s sons “pioneers of our distortion” as they each specialized in one of the three aspects of the glory triad and sought to master it (93). Shockingly, Covington criticizes mastery of a field to the point that he maligns academics despite holding a DMin (91). Finally, Covington’s argument against unredeemed aesthetics has two more glaring problems. First, he criticizes others’ application of common grace to a theology of aesthetics (47–49, 191–92). Second, he fails to mention the theology of the *Imago Dei* and how it informs humanity’s aesthetic understanding.

Despite these shortcomings, Covington makes many great points. More importantly, he presents a compelling trinitarian argument for God-centered and God-filtered aesthetic perceptions. However, due to weaknesses like those highlighted above, *A Redemptive Theology of Aesthetics* likely will only persuade those already aligned with Covington’s Reformed position. To convince non-Calvinists would require a more robust theological and philosophical work: a work I hope Covington will write.

Jordan Covarelli

Okholm, Dennis. *Learning Theology through the Church’s Worship: An Introduction to Christian Belief.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 242 pp. \$14.84.

Students of theology may attest to the difficulties inherent in learning theology through a firehose during the course of their formal training. Theological concepts, given the sheer number to be covered in a limited time, can easily drift into the abstract. In his book, *Learning Theology through the Church’s Worship*, Dennis Okholm argues that theology is best learned and understood in the context of a worshipping community whose liturgy helps its members to view

the world through a Christian lens (xii). He offers an introduction to systematic theology that presents each of the systems of theology in the context of one of the parts of the traditional Christian liturgy. Okholm arrived at his own ecclesiastical context along a winding path from Baptist and Pentecostal, to Presbyterian, and finally to the Anglican church (xi). He currently teaches at Azusa Pacific University and Fuller Theological Seminary and has written widely on theology, apologetics, and spirituality.

Okholm begins by defining both liturgy and theology since the interaction of these is central to his systematic theology. Liturgy is “ophthalmology” in the sense that it teaches the believer to see the world as God intends (Chapter 1), and true theology is studying God with the awareness of his presence – or theology with prayer (Chapter 2). He ties liturgy and theology together thus: Bibliology corresponds to the act of hearing and responding to Scripture in the liturgy (Chapter 3), Theology Proper to the reading of the Apostles’ Creed (Chapter 4), Christology to Christological reflection upon the Creed (Chapter 5), and Creation and Providence to the prayers of the people (Chapter 6). He seems to treat Anthropology and Hamartiology together in relating them to the time of confession (Chapter 7). The Liturgy of the Table, Okholm argues, displays Soteriology in the “absolution” (Chapter 8), Pneumatology in “epiclesis” (Chapter 9), and Ecclesiology in “passing of the peace of Christ” (Chapter 10). Finally, the dismissal rehearses the doctrine of Eschatology (Chapter 12).

Okholm’s foundational concept of liturgy as “ophthalmology” suggests that church leaders must carefully consider how the activities in their church gatherings shape belief. The structuring of these gatherings should help church members make sense out of life in God’s world. One way he suggests this might be done is through a liturgical calendar that outlines the metanarrative of Scripture (42). Elements of the liturgy that highlight God’s providence over creation shape worshipers’ view of the world as belonging to God (111ff), rehearsing confession and assurance reminds them that they are sinners (127), and a constant return to the work of the cross reminds them that their access to God is through the work of Christ alone (153ff). More than existing to provide an uplifting spiritual experience, weekly services are for shaping and strengthening belief – for correcting spiritual myopia (2–3).

One of Okholm's strongest points is in relating Bibliology to the Liturgy of the Word (45). Just as the Liturgy of the Word is the umbrella category that includes various aspects of the Christian worship service, so Bibliology is the foundation for the study of Christian theology. If Christian worship consists primarily of hearing and responding to Scripture, worshipers' understanding of what the Scriptures are will directly impact each of the elements of their worship. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God authoritative for life, they will engage in worship differently than if they believed it to be merely the words of men. Likewise, Bibliology has great influence on the approach to the other doctrines. If worshipers believe Scripture to be the authoritative and complete self-revelation of God, they will base the study of theology primarily on what Scripture says (65-67).

Perhaps the weakest point in this book is the claim that liturgy has determined the dogma of the church. Though he promises to demonstrate this at the outset (xii), Okholm fails to prove that doctrine has arisen or should arise from liturgy. He expands momentarily on this idea, appealing to the *lex orandi lex credendi* principle in chapter 2, but this treatment may not be clear enough for the beginning student of theology, who seems to be his target reader (19-22). Furthermore, Okholm fails to caution his readers on the pitfalls inherent to liturgy shaping theology. Liturgy shaping theology should prompt careful reflection as to whether the outcome is faithful to the written Word.

Also, Okholm's connection between the dismissal and Eschatology seems forced (209ff). Although knowledge of last things should add a sense of urgency to the believer as he leaves the gathering, this sense of urgency should apply to all aspects of the believer's life. Why not connect Eschatology to the Lord's Table? We recall the words of Paul that in the celebration of Communion we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26, ESV). A correlation could also be drawn to the liturgy as a whole when the author of Hebrews urges the believers to continue in their confession, relationships, and church attendance "all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:25). Eschatology brings an urgency to the gathering of the church as much as to its dismissal.

Learning Theology through the Church's Worship is a thought-provoking introduction to systematic theology that would prove useful to seminarians and worship leaders alike. Okholm presents

theology in the context of a worshipping community and thereby reminds his readers that the task of theology is not simply academic. Theology determines the structure and content of church gatherings so that in worship the church members “see” theology played out and their faith is strengthened.

Stephen Lounsbrough

Bevins, Winfield. *Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. 219 pp. \$16.99.

Winfield Bevins, an experienced church planter, recognized speaker, passionate pastor, and the director of church planting at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, emphasizes an unusual phenomenon in this book: an increasing number of young adults attracted by the ancient liturgy, a liturgy “infused with historic Christian practices and rooted in creedal theology” (back cover). To uncover the reasons behind this movement, Bevins interviewed pastors and arranged conversations with the younger generations across the United States. As a result, Bevins discovers that “liturgy, when rightly appropriated, is one of the best ways for us to make disciples in a postmodern context” (22).

The author divides the book into three parts. The first part focuses on the reasons younger generations found unexpected excellent worship experiences in traditional liturgy. The second part evaluates various ways that lead young adults to embrace liturgy (21). The third part emphasizes how liturgy provides practical principles applicable to a Christian’s daily life (21). In part one, he first defines liturgy and the significance of practicing liturgy in orthodox churches. In part two, the author offers more life stories from different churches, backgrounds, cultures, and regions to convey his statement that more young adults show favor toward aesthetic beauty from ancient times and in structural traditional worship services (100–102). In part three, with different testimonies from various mission grounds, the author stresses the benefits that a biblical worship liturgy could bring to a Christian’s daily life, such as helping Christians grow the habit of a rhythmical life (172). Throughout the book, the author bolsters his thesis by drawing connections between the

phenomenon and the importance of the liturgy, sharing testimonies to show the impact liturgy could make on young adults and churches, and referencing the early church fathers' writings and classical Christian compositions to stress the value of traditional liturgy.

This book's advantage is that the author straightforwardly illuminates the significance of liturgy and draws a good connection between the liturgy and postmodern young Christians, which brings hope for postmodern churches concerned about decreasing attendance in young adults. In this postmodern society, churches may learn from this book and apply appropriate liturgy to their churches for mission purposes. A good understanding of the younger generation's urgent spiritual struggles is essential to minister to them and draw them back to church. The author holds this essential understanding and employs a proper worship liturgy to evangelize the younger generation. In chapter two, the author displays how a proper worship liturgy could help modern young adults, who often struggle with postmodern identity crisis, find strong identity in Christ and how the participatory nature of liturgy provides a unique worship experience that attracts young adults (48–53). Moreover, the author also offers various testimonies made by young adults and pastors from the mission field worldwide to demonstrate the effectiveness of applying proper liturgy in worship. The significant spiritual influences of liturgy and its effectiveness in increasing church attendance provide strong motivation for church leaders to adopt the worship liturgy the author describes.

One aspect that makes the central argument weak is that the author does not provide enough biblical references to support his thesis. Although the question raised by the author focuses on "*what* is the allure of liturgy for a new generation," presenting the "*why*" and revealing the ultimate root of the answer is still necessary (18). Throughout the book, there are only a few direct quotations from Scripture. Instead of offering biblical or theological references about liturgy, the author employs the form, content, nature, and practical effectiveness itself as the ultimate reason and foundation for his argument (22–23). If the author inserted one or two chapters to lay the biblical foundation and drew an explicit connection between liturgy and Scripture's teaching, the main argument would be more convincing. The ultimate reason to practice traditional liturgy should be

rooted in Scripture, not in the increasing number of worshipers or the visible benefits it could bring to the church.

I would recommend this book to pastors and worship leaders who have a sound biblical foundation as an introductory book to recognize the importance of practicing traditional worship liturgy. This book shows clearly that traditional liturgy has elements that form congregations' minds and spiritual lives biblically. It contains more biblical truth in the program, teaches valuable doctrinal prayers to the congregation, requires more participation, and draws more Christians back to church, especially young adults. At the same time, I would also remind readers that the primary purpose of applying traditional liturgy in the worship service is to elevate the truth and biblical teaching, not to attract the next generation.

Leyi Ling

Bond, Douglas. *God Sings! (And Ways We Think He Ought To)*. Scriptorium Press, 2019. 270 pp. \$14.99.

Amid the prevalence of an entertainment ethos of worship in the “postmodern, post-Christian, and post-biblical culture,” true worshipers cannot but welcome a biblically grounded perspective of worship (92). *God Sings!* provides them with its unique perspective that as our worship to God is a response to his revelation to us, so our singing in worship is to be a response to his singing over us. As Zephaniah 3:17 says, “[The Lord your God] will exult over you with loud singing.” Douglas Bond is the author of more than 30 books, adjunct instructor in church history, director for the Oxford Creative Writing Master Class, leader of church history tours in Europe, and hymn writer. Well epitomizing his versatility in these roles developed for more than two decades, this book contends that congregational songs in contemporary worship saturated in an entertainment ethos should be recalibrated to those in a biblical ethos of worship.

Bond opens his discussion of our sung worship by presenting its biblical grounds: congregational singing should be done with reverence and awe as manifested in Hebrews 12:18 and in response to God's singing over us as demonstrated in Zephaniah 3:17, and singing should correspond to the nature of his voice represented in Psalm

29. He criticizes the prevalent contemporary worship music for its man-centered view resulting from the emphases on church growth and cultural relevance and its theologically and poetically poor song lyrics. He explores the nature of the entertainment ethos of contemporary congregational songs and idolatry worship, contrasting them with the scripturally grounded regulative principle of worship. For substantiation, he compares the popular song “10,000 Reasons” and some of David’s psalms. For solutions to entertainment ethos-saturated songs of a repetitive and shallow nature, he urges lyricists to return to the authority of the Bible for more substantive content with theologically rich poetry, suggests hymns by Isaac Watts as a prototype for contemporary worship songs, and advocates the restoration of hymnals in worship.

God Sings! is another book on the war between theocentric worship and anthropocentric worship with the focus of congregational songs. However, it is unique in itself. Throughout the book, Bond’s erudition as author of scores of books and his expertise in creative writing, church history, and hymn writing are well interwoven, providing a variety of lenses through which to look into the focal issue—congregational singing in an entertainment ethos: biblical and theological grounds, entertainment, pragmatism, poetry, music, congregation, lyricist, composer, cultural and literary influence, historical and developmental account, textual analysis, liturgy, idolatry, psalm, hymn, hymn writing, and hymnal. These lenses give the reader a holistic view of the main issue of the book.

Another uniqueness of *God Sings!* is its attempt to combine theory and praxis. In general, books and articles concerning worship gravitate toward theoretical discussion. Bond’s personal experience as a hymn lyricist enables him to provide practical suggestions such as criteria for writing a good hymn in chapter twelve, though they are heavily focused on discussion with theological and poetic principles. Nevertheless, it is desirable to see writings on worship in any form be accompanied by praxis-related resources applicable to corporate worship.

God Sings! reads like a narrative of high fluidity, though inundated with detailed information as well as anecdotes or quotations from theologians, philosophers, poets, hymn writers, and musicians. In addition, not simply discussing issues biblically and theologically, he interweaves historical accounts and explications of song samples,

from biblical poetry and traditional hymns to contemporary worship songs. It is essential reading for those who seek to sing in corporate worship in a biblically prescribed manner, including musicians, both from a biblical ethos of worship and an entertainment ethos, pastors, Christian song lyricists and composers, and laity.

Myunghee Lee

Cherry, Constance M. *Worship Like Jesus: A Guide for Every Follower*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. 129 pp. \$17.99.

Attempting to navigate the endless array of available books on worship can be overwhelming, especially to new believers. Discovering authors and publications that adhere to sound biblical principles and doctrine can be challenging even for the well-read theologian or theology student. *Worship Like Jesus: A Guide for Every Follower* is a book that fulfills both of these issues. Its author, Constance M. Cherry, has a DMin from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a professor of worship at Indiana Wesleyan University. Writer of *The Worship Architect* and *The Music Architect*, Cherry provides a “worship discipleship” guide for believers with the intention of instigating an internal transformation so they are more discerning and involved in worship, moving them from observer to participant. Cherry discusses the challenges of modern worship, asking the reader to question how Jesus would worship today, and how a deeper understanding of initiated worship by God can be gained by using Jesus Christ as a model, examining his approach and participation in worship (xi).

Cherry lays out this title in a clear and succinct fashion, maintaining a similar structure throughout all eight chapters. She poses a key question at the beginning, a chapter topic description and explanation, followed by a key question and deliberation of how Jesus practiced these elements, and then closes with a reflection section, an action, and a prayer. These elements all serve to keep a solid cohesion throughout the book, and the lesson style format ensures that the reader feels a sense of disciple growth and development through each section. Cherry explains that worship is “the heartbeat of the relationship between God and believer,” that it is a “highly

transforming event," and that "all Christian disciples are formed *in* worship *by* worship" (xi, 8).

Following the worship wars, numerous changes occurred in worship practices with modern cultural trends being adapted by many churches. Cherry poses the question, who or what are we imitating when we adapt our practices of worship (9)? Cherry approaches her entire book from the perspective of "How would Jesus worship?," using him as the model for worship as he plays the significant roles of receiver, mediator, and leader of Christian worship (43). She states that modern worshipers need to focus on what Jesus would do within these worship changes, and how would he approach and participate in worship. Cherry describes the current *modus operandi* of worship, focusing on how the definition of God has become blurred, with worshipers often choosing either polytheistic, narcissistic, relativistic, or ambiguous worship to fulfill their needs (28, 29). Through Scriptural use she expounds on the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, clarifying that Jesus "worshipped God and God alone," evident by his prayer life and his speaking the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9 (33). Cherry continues by then addressing the age-old debate of Jesus's incarnation, the nature of his humanity and deity, stating that he was both of the Triune God and of humanity, and that simultaneously, "both dimensions are portrayed at once" (43).

With strong liturgical practices being neglected in many churches, through these lessons of discipleship, Cherry encourages the reader to follow a liturgical year or "kingdom calendar," which will "allow us to reorient our lives" and "worship with the whole story of God over time" (65). She discusses gifts of worship that God has given mankind, highlighting the necessities and benefits of corporate worship for believers and how "communal worship takes corporate worship to a deeper level" (89, 112). Through Cherry's repeated use of excerpts and examples from Scripture, she constantly brings the reader's focus back to God's laws and mandates, ensuring that there is no confusion about the elements of worship, which is vital for new believers to understand due to the constant change found in today's churches.

One of the most important points highlighted by Cherry is the value that Jesus places on "authentic relationships and authentic worship." She elaborates by saying that it is incumbent upon

believers to repair broken relationships with each other through forgiveness before coming before the Lord for worship, because “pure relationships are valued for pure worship” (112). When all believers are fully engaged corporately with each other through pure relationships, they “encourage each other to love God more deeply, serve God more devotedly, and care for each other more sincerely” (114). This is the very reason for worship, to serve God wholeheartedly as a church body.

Worship Like Jesus is an excellent resource for examining the elements of worship, transforming the reader’s understanding and approach as to why, how, and who they worship. Cherry provides scriptural evidence to substantiate each element she discusses, focusing the reader on Christ and the central figure of worship, God. She reminds the reader that God is “a wholly relational being” and that worship between Him and the worshiper is “dialogical” in truth and in spirit (72, 73). This “revelation and response” dialogue is the bedrock of worship, upon which Cherry provides excellent guidance throughout for the discipleship of believers, all the while referring them to a comparison between their worship practices and how Jesus would worship (75). In theory, Cherry provides a scriptural compass that serves not only to educate new believers, but also to re-orientate and remind all Christians that the fundamentals of worship remain the same, regardless of what manmade changes occur.

This book would greatly assist pastors, worship leaders, and those connected to ministry work to facilitate change within their congregations. It is a helpful and transformative guide, especially to new believers, and is written with church groups in mind. In the words of the author, *Worship Like Jesus* is “well suited for use by small groups, Sunday school classes, Bible study groups . . . in short, wherever two or three are gathered” (xii). It would make a welcome and educational addition to every church and ministry bookshelf, serving to educate, disciple, and simply remind believers of the nature of worship.

Liz Nolan

Leithart, Peter J. *Theopolitan Liturgy*. West Monroe, LA: Theopolis Books, 2019. 146 pp. \$11.95.

In a time when the distractions and depravities of secular culture are bombarding the liturgical life of the Christian church, an intentional shift toward a biblical theology of worship is more important than ever. Peter Leithart, President of the Theopolis Institute and teacher at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote *Theopolitan Liturgy* to delve into what the Bible says about liturgy and to explore the “analogies among and the intertwinings of three levels of reality: creation, culture, and liturgy” (xii–xiii). Through five thought-provoking chapters, Leithart argues that the church’s liturgy (when shaped by Scripture) is “culture transformed into Kingdom” (xx).

Five overarching themes comprise the chapters of Leithart’s volume: place, dialogue, sacrifice, time, and joy. Through numerous comparisons to Old Testament accounts of the worship practices of ancient Israel, the author surveys how human culture “distorts” these five aspects of creation and how liturgy “corrects, redirects, glorifies, and completes” each of them (xiii). It is important to note from the outset that Leithart has clearly written this book from the transformationalist point of view. In the volume’s preface (and continually throughout the book), Leithart reveals his presuppositions about the church’s role in society. He emphatically states that when liturgies meet the biblical standard, the inevitable result is the consecration and transformation of culture: “the liturgy is culture being Christianized” (xix).

The author’s discussion of place begins in the Garden of Eden. He professes that God’s intent for creating the world was to establish a liturgical space that would be filled with “joyous eternal worship” (3). The Garden was to be a “sanctuary for God’s image” and a dwelling place for his presence (4). Just as God’s creation begins as worship space in the book of Genesis, it also ends in a worship space in the book of Revelation, with a “shout” and “radiating waves of praise” surrounding the Lamb of God (7). Because the biblical narrative begins and ends with sacred space, Leithart asserts that “man’s purpose is to transform creation into sanctuary” (14).

In the second chapter, Leithart begins his discussion of dialogue by noting that one of the first things that Scripture reveals

about God is that he speaks. His first words “let there be light” enable a response from creation. In the same way that God “initiates the liturgy of history” by his spoken word, the grand liturgy will end with a pronouncement of his final word of judgment. The whole of human history “is suspended between God’s first and final word” (28–29). Leithart also points to a “redemption” of dialogue that occurs within liturgy as language is “Christianized, infused, and corrected by the Scriptures” (39).

The strengths of this book are found in the statements that are fully consistent with Scripture. Leithart writes that God’s character is reflected in what he has spoken; his words are altogether true, authoritative, powerful, and accomplish exactly what he intends: “when he makes a promise, we should trust it. When he says something is true, we should believe it. When he commands, we should obey . . . everything in our lives is shaped by how we answer his words” (27). When speaking of the actions and content of liturgy, Leithart effectively notes the significance of thanking God for his Word during corporate worship. In many church traditions, after a passage of Scripture is read aloud, the reader will say “The Word of the Lord,” to which the congregation responds in unison with the words “Thanks be to God.” Leithart rightly observes that “no matter what word he speaks, no matter how shattering or startling, the liturgy trains the church to say, ‘Thank you.’ It’s more than etiquette. It’s a confession of faith” (44).

Although such statements are true and useful, the book also contains a number of esoteric passages that are superfluous and do not always align with Scripture. Throughout the narrative of the book, the author’s words often wax strangely mystical, as seen in the following passage: “The God who creates the universe as a cosmic temple is himself an eternal divine temple. God is a dwelling for God. . . . God is our liturgical space. . . . *He* is redeemed space, the one safe place in a world of displacement” (20–21). Although Leithart’s text is filled with Scripture references and symbolism, extraneous embellishments such as these read as theological stream of consciousness and greatly distract from his biblically faithful observations.

Another example of theological haphazardness occurs in the preface, in which the author states that the church’s liturgy, and even the Bible, are “incomplete” without culture: “Studied in private, the Bible doesn’t do its temple-building work. The Bible can’t be all it’s

supposed to be outside the liturgy” (xiv–xv). Such a statement is inconsistent with the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture and elevates liturgy to an almost idolatrous state. The Word of God stands eternally complete, entirely unaffected by the action or inaction of human beings. As Psalm 19:7 reveals, “the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.” The Apostle Paul instructs in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Despite the unusual tangents taken by Leithart, he does make other statements of value throughout the book. When describing the church’s worship, Leithart declares that the forms of liturgy “are acceptable only if they conform to God’s word” (71). Regarding time, he states that when the church conforms to the rhythms of the world, “she becomes worldly at a fundamental level” (99). In his discussion of joy, Leithart rightly notes that it is God who “always initiates worship” in the church (112).

Leithart’s thesis that liturgy is “culture transformed into Kingdom” is a discussion well suited for seminary and university classrooms. While Leithart brings many interesting points to consider, the nature of the church’s liturgy is best understood and developed through the biblical commission to make disciples—to form worshippers.

Holly M. Farrow

Aniol, Scott. *Draw Near: The Heart of Communion with God.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020. 90 pp. \$15.00.

In this little book, Scott Aniol, associate professor of church music and worship at Southwestern Seminary, beautifully pictures the Christian life as one characterized by authentic worship, genuine abiding, and faithful communion with the Triune God. In doing so, Aniol enables us to see afresh the importance of drawing near to God, the priority of sharing with other believers in corporate worship and community, as well as the significance of regularly partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

Building on Hebrews 10:22, Aniol expands on the exhortation to "Let us draw near." He notes that the idea of drawing near is a translation of a term that means more than just a casual coming toward something. This exhortation to draw near means coming to the one, true, and living God. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author compares the idea of drawing near to Old Testament worship practices as indicated in terms like "holy place," "the veil," "high priest," "sprinkling," and "cleansing." Drawing near, Aniol maintains, is the essence of worship, the heart of communion with God.

Aniol provides wise theological framing of his subject, focused on the worship of God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, and enabled and energized by the Holy Spirit. The book is built around eight perspectives on the meaning of communion with God, including "the call to," "the basis of," "the meaning of," "the heart of," "the strengthening of," "the fruit of," "the threat to," and "the recovery of communion with God."

Recognizing that worship is central in the existence and continuation of the church as presented in the New Testament, Aniol extends the trajectory of thought found in the writings of W. T. Conner, the Southwestern Seminary theologian who so greatly influenced the Southwestern community and Southern Baptist life during the first half of the twentieth century. Finding themes of continuity between the Old and New Testaments, Aniol uses the book of Hebrews as a bridge to find elements of Christian worship that are similar to those found in the Old Testament.

Aniol highlights the centrality of the Christological orientation that forms and informs New Testament believers. Readers are led to see that the risen and exalted Christ gives a new depth and content to the worshiping community. Moreover, the church's worship is influenced by the Holy Spirit. Fitting and acceptable worship can only be offered by and through the Holy Spirit. Building on these priorities and the continuity of the Scriptures, Aniol emphasizes the importance of community, including the proclamation of the Word of God, the importance of *koinonia*, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Each reader will find portions of this book that are more applicable for his or her own Christian journey. I personally found Aniol's emphasis on the Lord's Supper to be quite valuable. The Supper provides a vivid reminder for believers of the One who provided our

redemption and who is coming again. The celebration of the Supper is central to the church's worship and thus should be a regular and frequent occurrence for the believing community, providing enablement and guidance for our shared worship of the Triune God, leading to fellowship, service, ministry, and outreach. In doing so, the church is reminded that it does not exist merely for itself but for the world. Aniol encourages believers to reflect on their call to discipleship, recognizing that the church has a missionary task that is not optional.

While thoroughly practical and pastoral, readers will find guidance that is shaped by Scripture and deeply informed by theological conviction, leading to paths of faithful Christian living designed to honor and exalt our majestic God. In all of these things, we find implications for Christian fellowship and unity, enhanced discipleship, and a winsome witness before a watching world. Believers will be refreshed, renewed, strengthened, and encouraged by reflecting on the thoughtful insights offered in this fine work.

David S. Dockery

Cruse, Jonathan Landry. *What Happens When We Worship*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. 200 pp. \$18.00.

Every so often a book warrants the thought in my mind, "I wish I would have written this book." Such is the case with *What Happens When We Worship* by Jonathan Cruse, pastor of Community Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Cruse's primary concern is Christians who find worship boring; the solution to this problem, Cruse argues, is not that worship needs to be made more interesting, rather, Cruse insists that we find worship boring because "we are not aware of what is happening when we worship" (3). Thus, Cruse argues that "something *is happening* when we worship. Something happens *to us*, something happens *between* us and the people we worship with, and, most importantly, something happens *between us and God*" (1).

In Part 1 (chapters 2-7), Cruse explains a theology of worship from Scripture that will answer the book's central question. Part 2 (chapters 8-13) explores the various elements of a worship service

that enact worship's purpose. Part 3 (chapters 14–15) encourages believers to consequently prepare their hearts for worship based on this more robust understanding of why we gather and how what we do in corporate worship accomplishes the purpose.

Cruse argues that in corporate worship we meet with God, shaping us into worshipers, which is the most important thing we will ever do. This transformational meeting is a regular renewal of our covenant with God, where we are reminded again both of our sinfulness and God's faithfulness to remain true to the promises he has made to us in Christ. In corporate worship, we renew our commitment to obey God's commands, and we enjoy communion with other saints with whom we share union in Christ.

This understanding of what happens when we worship informs each element of the service from the call to worship, to confession of sin and declaration of pardon in Christ, to the preaching of God's Word and feasting around God's Table, to the final benediction. For each of these elements, Cruse presents practical, meaningful definitions:

- God calls us to the most important work imaginable, hears our plea for help, and promises to be with us and accept us despite our inadequacies. (83)
- God, week in and week out, puts to death the old self of sin through the law and brings to life and sustains a new creation in Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. (94)
- By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus speaks through his ordained servant, saving sinners by the spoken word to the glory of God. (108)
- Through the Lord's Supper, God's Spirit strengthens our faith, hope, and love in the finished work of Jesus Christ as believers really and truly feast on him. (124)
- God blesses his people by confirming that his name is on them for good in Christ, and thereby strengthens them to serve him in the week ahead. (142)
- God has gifted us with song that we might have a fitting way to praise him for his work, pray to him with our deepest needs, and proclaim to one another the sanctifying truths of the gospel. (150)

A thorough understanding of these significant realities that take place each week we gather for corporate worship, Cruse suggests, should lead us to intentional preparation and heartfelt engagement in the service. We won't chase after excitement or entertainment; rather, we will be satisfied with the simplicity and "ordinariness" of what we do, recognizing that truly extraordinary things are happening by the Spirit of God. He concludes in the final chapter with very practical advice for how we can prepare and engage in light of these truths.

Cruse's argument is both biblically rich and historically grounded. He offers nothing "new," per se; rather, what Cruse presents is an important and necessary corrective to the expressionist worship so common in modern evangelicalism, and he does so in a winsome, clear, and practical presentation. The one quibble I have is not so much a disagreement as a wish for an addition. Cruse's chapter on singing is very good, but he emphasizes the importance of singing as a response and as a proclamation of truth, while neglecting a discussion of music's formative power. Music in worship does not merely help us express toward God, it also forms our expressions.

This book will become required reading in several of my classes. It is easy to read – suitable for laypeople, pastors, and students – but deeply profound and enriching. I wish I would have written this book.

Scott Aniol

Hooper, William L. *Congregational Song in the Worship of the Church: Examining the Roots of American Traditions*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. 312 pp. \$36.00.

"The Hebrew people were not the first to worship, but they were the first to worship Yahweh," writes William L. Hooper in his book *Congregational Song in the Worship of the Church* (x). Hooper is the former dean of the School of Church Music at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, long-time worship pastor, and prolific author on church music and worship. Some of his other writings include *Church Music in Transition* (1962), *Ministry and Musicians* (1982),

and *Worship Leadership for the Worship Leader* (2007). Additionally, he has written several instructive books on music theory fundamentals and numerous church music cantatas.

In this latest work, Hooper provides a chronological survey of church worship through congregational song in which he asserts the voice is the “primary instrument used in worship” and has been from “ancient times until the present” (273). The author limits the scope of this book to the use of the voice in corporate worship. The book outlines how worship evolved to its twenty-first-century state in America by looking at each period through the lens of the people, events, and ideas formative to congregational song in worship.

Hooper devotes a chapter of the book to each of the commonly accepted periods of church history. He organizes each chapter around three main questions:

1. How and why has song been used as a sacred ritual activity in worship?
2. Who and what determines when and how a song is appropriate for worship?
3. What were the biblical and theological criteria that inform the discussion? (ix)

First, this book excels in answering two of the author’s organizational questions for the book—the *how/why* and the *who/what* of congregational song. For example, chapter two, “Congregational Song in the Old Testament,” begins by depicting the instruments the Israelites used as they came out of Egypt. Next, it describes the practice of old covenant worship. The chapter describes the Hebrew canticles, the order of worship, major feasts, instruments, musicians, and the prophet’s musical role (50–57). Subsequent chapters apply this level of detailed exploration to the early church, Reformation, the English tradition, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the twentieth-century American tradition. Whether briefly highlighting the wind or string instruments of Old Testament worship or differentiating between the various types of gospel music, *Congregational Song* gives the reader a comprehensive view of the crucial figures and ideas that formed each significant period of western church history.

Second, Hooper argues effectively that congregational song is a “ritual action” to be viewed similarly to “prayer or Scripture

reading" (ix). He shows the church gathered and sang in each of the periods of church history. And at the end of each chapter, he invites the reader to reflect on these practices and consider how these periods and their particular issues relate to modern worship practice. However, Hooper does not answer with the same detail and purpose the last of his organizational questions given in the preface.

The book's premise is that a historical survey of congregational song can help the reader understand how American worship traditions developed. While giving ample historical context to periods of music surveyed, the book leaves the reader without a clear understanding of what overarching biblical principles and methods should govern congregational song. The author does not promise to give any sense of "finality" in response to every question raised (x). Instead, Hooper concludes that the final answer to these questions remains "elusive" in determining what songs are appropriate for worship or what the theological context should be in deciding what songs are used in congregational worship (274). Furthermore, this book begins with a prehistoric, non-biblical origin of worship practice. While this view may be growing in popularity, it remains a controversial topic. By starting here, Hooper causes some unnecessary distraction from his otherwise strong historical overview. The reader must then decide how to process the author's analysis in light of this foundational issue.

When church music and worship today seem to undervalue or ignore historical worship practice, this book provides a useful entry point towards understanding this essential practice and its implications. *Congregational Song in the Worship of the Church* offers a historical survey of past church worship practice that would benefit seminarians, college students, and interested readers.

Jarrod Richey

Lott, R. Allen. *Brahms's A German Requiem: Reconsidering Its Biblical, Historical, and Musical Contexts*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020. 512 pp. Hardback, \$117.28.

Despite almost universal modern assessments of Johannes Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem) as a

deliberately secular choral treatment of death, R. Allen Lott, professor of music history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, meticulously demonstrates that “the *Requiem* is not theologically or doctrinally inclusive but instead adroitly summarizes the unique Christian view of death, grief, and an afterlife” (2). Along with being one of the most performed choral works from the nineteenth century, Brahms’s *Requiem* is notable for the fact that unlike a standard Latin mass for the dead, the composer used exclusively texts from Luther’s German translation of the Bible. Yet Christ is not explicitly named, leading most modern scholars to conclude that Brahms did not intend his *Requiem* to be a Christian work but rather a humanist composition inclusive of all creeds. In contrast to this recent consensus, Lott presents his case through evaluating early writings about the work, investigating how audiences understood it during the first fifteen years of performance, and in-depth textual and musical analysis, providing a definitive conclusion that a Christian understanding of this beloved nineteenth-century choral masterpiece “is not only allowable but the most rational one to adopt” (2).

Lott lays an interpretive foundation for his analysis in Chapter One, arguing for a “course correction to a path that has been focused primarily on Brahms’s enigmatic objectives” (13) since “intention does not trump execution” (14). Therefore, determining whether the *Requiem* is a Christian work should be decided based on how the original audiences would have understood the intertextuality of the biblical texts Brahms chose and how he set them musically (37). The broader contexts of those passages, along with that of the sacred music traditions within which Brahms composed his work, strongly suggest Christian theological implications.

Lott introduces those implications with an exegesis of the biblical texts in Chapter Two, which he argues “embody unambiguous Christian positions that are distinct from other religious traditions” (60). He demonstrates that, despite common claims, the *Requiem* is certainly about Jesus Christ since Brahms quotes Jesus’s own words (61) and other texts that mention or allude to Christ without naming him (64). “These multiple references to Christ,” Lott contends, “inherently make the *Requiem* a Christian work” since “Christ’s identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world are the most distinguishing features of Christianity that separate it from all other religions” (67). Further, “Brahms’s text includes unambiguous

references to Christian doctrines that are not commonly held" (72), including explicitly Christian understandings of creation, redemption, resurrection, and the afterlife, each of which provides uniquely Christian comfort and promise of joy in the face of death. "Only simple ignorance of or willful disregard for the details of the text," Lott concludes, "can justify a universal interpretation of the *Requiem*" (93).

If Lott's biblical exegesis were not enough to convince skeptics, he demonstrates in Chapter Three that "the first commentators . . . consistently read and heard [the *Requiem*] as a piece upholding common Christian beliefs" (98). Based on the fact that "religion continued to be a vital element in nineteenth-century German life" (101), "it should not be surprising that listeners experienced the *Requiem* with its purely scriptural text as a Christian work" (110). Lott provides numerous statements by critics, musicologists, and theologians of the time who clearly identified it as Christian, even Protestant (120), and its classification "as a specimen of church music, which could only refer to settings of doctrinally orthodox texts, verify the recognition and acceptance of the work's Christian content" (133).

In Chapter Four Lott examines one of the most frequently cited "proofs" of the *Requiem's* supposed universal focus, a letter written by conductor Karl Reinthaler prior to its 1868 premiere in Bremen, wherein he stated, "For the Christian consciousness it lacks the point around which everything revolves, namely, the redeeming death of the Lord" (171). Lott demonstrates that this one statement taken out of context does not account for the fact that Reinthaler made other comments in his letter supporting a Christian interpretation and repeatedly programmed the work for Good Friday performances (178). In fact, such explicitly Christian programming continued for years by others; Lott demonstrates that "more than one-fourth of the early performances of the *Requiem* occurred during Holy Week, indicating a perceived resonance between the work and an important Christian observance" (184).

Lott presents what he considers "the most important hermeneutical guide to the *Requiem*" – musical analysis – in Chapter Five, explaining that "Brahms set his *Requiem* text sympathetically, convincingly, dramatically, and, above all, with an earnest devotion to sacred music traditions" (230). In particular, Brahms alludes in the *Requiem* to several well-known sacred works, most notably Handel's *Messiah*. Lott argues that "the general similarities between the

Requiem and *Messiah* as well as several areas of textual overlap and interrelatedness encourage a Christian perspective on the *Requiem*" (277), which he explores at length. Finally, Lott meticulously traces Brahms's "musical devotion to scripture as a composer and his continuation of longstanding practices," leading listeners "to accept the revered, traditional interpretation of the biblical text" (319).

In the final analysis, Lott provides an overwhelmingly convincing, substantively documented case for a Christian interpretation of Brahms's *Requiem*. Indeed, as Lott notes, "modern scholars seem to impose a set of guidelines for assessing the *Requiem* that are not followed for any other musical work, not even the other choral works of Brahms" (327), in an attempt to substantiate a universalist claim. Far from being a dry musicological monograph, Lott's extensive analysis is engaging and even devotional, and though his musical analysis requires some competency in music literacy (especially in Chapter Five), theologians and even lay Christians would find this work fascinating. Perhaps Lott's treatment will cause skeptics and Christians alike to consider anew that "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

Scott Aniol

Ruth, Lester. *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. 132 pp. \$19.99.

In a world where churches increasingly have to choose between traditional and contemporary services, *Flow* by Lester Ruth offers a way for liturgists to synthesize these seemingly divergent streams. Lester Ruth, a research professor of Christian worship at Duke Divinity School specializing in the history of contemporary Christian worship (CCW), stands well qualified to propose such a paradigm for worship planning. While *Flow*'s bibliographic information lists Ruth as the book's sole author, the book identifies six of Ruth's Duke Divinity School students as contributors to the work: Zachary Barnes, Andrew T. Eastes, Jonathan Ottoway, Adam Perez, Glenn Stallsmith, and Debbie Wong. This collective of scholars draws from Justin Martyr's *First Apology* fresh insights into how early Christians worshiped and connects those insights to CCW elements. *Flow*

argues that ancient Christian worship expressions possessed qualities similar to CCW and offers ways that biblically faithful liturgists can incorporate modern expressions of these qualities into a four-fold service order of Gathering, Word, Table, and Sending.

The book easily divides into two sections, each paralleling a different audience. The introduction and first three chapters have a theoretical focus that will interest scholastic readers. They explore the theological and historical rationale for practicing ancient Christian worship in a contemporary way. The remaining six chapters have a practical nature that appeals to liturgists. They give real-world tips on how to apply the ancient-contemporary concepts in traditional services.

In the introduction, Ruth provides the historical motivation for his thesis: a missed opportunity in the 1990s for two different worship renewal movements to work together in revitalizing worship in mainline Christian worship. Ruth identifies these two movements as the official mainline denominational liturgical reform movement that re-introduced the four-fold order and the CCW renewal that emphasized informality and cultural relevance. Ruth then lays out the argument for how contemporary and ancient worship frameworks overlap. He finds in Justin Martyr's summary of Christian worship gatherings allusions to not only the acts of the historical four-fold order but also to three attributes of worship that more closely align with CCW expressions: "open-ended time, extemporaneity, and an understanding of worship as a flow of actions" rather than objects (7). He argues that as church structures developed, lectionaries formalized, and liturgical works codified, worship became increasingly scripted and these three flow attributes disappeared.

After Ruth's opening chapters, the remainder of *Flow* is written by Ruth's Duke Divinity school students. Zachary Barnes provides a historical overview of how "flow" became indispensable in contemporary worship, from its origins in the 1970s Vineyard movement to its twenty-first century advocates. Next, Adam Perez proposes an experiential – and subtly Pentecostal – understanding of the four-fold order where services are "encounters with God" (29). The rest of the book offers examples of how to plan corporate worship that is both relevant to contemporary culture and authentic to historical/biblical principles. The authors outline methods to incorporate flow into worship planning, music, spoken elements, and visual

technology. The book concludes with two chapters and two appendixes that give additional resources for the ancient-contemporary liturgist.

Flow aims to bring ecumenical harmony; therefore, it adds a welcome voice to the growing field of worship studies. Where other worship scholars critique contemporary worship's short-comings – and often rightfully so – Ruth and his contributors offer a historical-theological argument for the acceptance of some CCW elements while stopping short of championing the CCW movement as a whole. They propose and model the possibility of divergent forms of worship finding a biblically and historically rooted synergy. However, the authors do not address the concerns often raised by four-fold liturgists surrounding the fittingness of contemporary artistic forms for corporate worship. Instead, Ruth and his students assume that intentionally using these artforms and “flow” qualities to support the message of the gospel in a worship service will result in the artforms increasing worshiper engagement rather than serving as entertainment.

The main limitations of this book rise from its brevity (only 132 pages) and narrow scope (it only gives examples from a United Methodist context). When the authors give examples of how to incorporate flow into musical and technological elements, their examples always depict the most traditional four-fold order services and assume little-to-no preexisting knowledge of technology from the reader. They do not provide examples of more advanced techniques. Therefore, this book has only a few rings of influence. It will most benefit liturgists and worship students of the United Methodist church and to a lesser extent those of other denominations that follow a traditional order but seek to incorporate CCW elements. Finally, worship leaders and students in a contemporary context can benefit from *Flow* by deconstructing its lessons and applying them in a retrograde fashion. Indeed, a fruitful companion work to *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* would be a book subtitled *The Contemporary Way to Do Ancient Worship*.

Jordan Covarelli

Taylor, W. David O. *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020. 230 pp. \$24.99.

In his book *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life*, W. David O. Taylor, assistant professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, explores the Book of Psalms through a lens of emotional honesty, so Christians can discover a more “transparent, resilient, and fearless life of faith.” Taylor believes that when people open their hearts, becoming intimate and vulnerable before God, devoid of deceit and secrets, is “the only way to be made holy, whole and wholly alive” thus allowing humanity to derive the greatest benefit from the psalms (xxiii).

Taylor launches *Open and Unafraid* by introducing the reader to the historical background, poetic devices, and content found within the psalms. He explains that through honesty and prayer, the psalms provide a Christological dialogue between God and mankind, as individuals and as a community. The subsequent chapters guide the reader through specific themes in the psalms via assorted narratives, many of which are taken from the author’s personal experiences. Divulging these personal experiences make the reader more connected emotionally to the chapter content. Each chapter concludes with questions for reflection, general exercises, and a closing prayer, all of which revolve around the chapter’s central theme. These aspects are present in every chapter and maintain a cohesive thread throughout the book, while also providing excellent discussion points for church groups.

Athanasius believed that the psalms enabled people to become whole before God and whole in their true selves. The psalms are filled with imagery that stir up “all the emotions we are ever likely to feel (including some we hope we may not), and they lay them, raw and open, in the presence of God” (9). Taylor explores this myriad of human emotion along with definitive topics such as sadness, anger, and joy, encouraging the reader to contemplate that they are “never alone in their sorrows, angers, doubts, joys, thanksgivings, or questions about life and death” (xxi). By confronting and challenging the emotions found within the Psalter, in particular lament or imprecatory psalms, Christians expose their emotional vulnerabilities to God for reformative healing (88). As Taylor states, “The psalms invite us, thus, to stand in the light, to see ourselves truly and to

receive the reformatory work of God through the formative words of the psalmist, so that we might be rehumanized in Christ" (3). It is through the light of the psalms that the brokenness of man can be revealed and reshaped.

As the author moves through various topics, he focuses on the recurring theme of God's reformatory work through scriptural examples. By referring to Scripture in conjunction with the psalm subjects, Taylor guides the reader to focus firmly on both Jesus and God's Word, reminding them that the Psalter "embraces the praise of saints and sinners" and that God is the great creator and "the ultimate source of joy" (96-97). Just as God is the beginning and the end, the Psalter mirrors God's creation by opening with two psalms that reflect the beginning of the book of Genesis and closing with "a vision of the entire cosmos at praise" (175). Psalms are the "heart song of Jesus" and by approaching and praying them with honesty, Christians trust "they will open up a space in our hearts to give and receive the steadfast love of God, from whom no secrets are hidden" (xxv).

Taylor provides fresh and current commentary on twenty-first century events, demonstrating that the psalms are just as relevant to the human condition today as they were when originally written. In his chapters on enemies, justice, and death, he urges Christians to speak honestly about their adversaries and "lament the brokenness" of their own lives, while recognizing that Jesus underscores every decision with the command to love and pray (117). Injustice is not defined by any one parameter, and the psalms detail prayer repeatedly, prayer that is needed today for global events such as the displacement caused by Boko Haram in Nigeria, the contamination of the water supply in Flint, Michigan, and the child sex abuse accusations of the Catholic Church (122). The psalms are not passive; "prayer and worship require something of us: doing justice." Justice is only mediated through Jesus, who is "the Good Shepherd who defends the vulnerable" and is "the perfect justice of God" (127, 130).

Open and Unafraid is an excellent book for those wishing to explore the psalms more stringently and honestly, delving deeper into their emotional content. This book is not intended for light reading but requires readers to be actively engaged at all times. The centrality of Christ in the Book of Psalms causes Christians to examine their hearts more closely. If Jesus is the song leader then His people need to have an honest and open dialogue with Him. The author

highlights this dialogical nature of worship, showing how, through this dialogue, the psalms mold and shape hearts, thoughts, and action. Taylor never shies away from discussing the light and dark emotional elements found in the Book of Psalms; in fact he welcomes and embraces them all for discussion. These elements allow humanity to “give voice to the whole anatomy of the soul” (45).

The amount of biblical references that Taylor includes within each chapter can be a little overwhelming, but he succeeds in challenging readers both intellectually and emotionally, guiding them to be candid in their examination of the psalms. The inclusion of the chapter exercises makes *Open and Unafraid* ideal for use within church groups and ministry training. Seminary students will also find the recommended resource list and chapter notes highly informative.

Liz Nolan

Fujimura, Makoto. *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. 184 pp. \$26.00.

“It is impossible to have faith without imagination” (89). So claims artist and author Makoto Fujimura in what he considers his life work, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. Fujimura, a world-renowned artist, writer, and culture influencer, has received numerous awards for his previous books including the Aldersgate Prize and the 2014 “Religion and the Arts” award from the American Academy of Religion. This newest book gracefully weaves together discussions of vocation, loss and renewal, post-industrial worldviews, the New Creation, and worship and witness in a postmodern society.

Fujimura writes like he paints. His larger paintings have sixty to eighty or more layers of paint applied to them to create the deep luminosity they reveal to the patient viewer. Likewise, throughout *Art and Faith*, he repeatedly returns to many key themes, adding layer upon layer of insight. And yet, the book never feels redundant. Each layer, like each layer of his paintings, adds a new level of brilliance to his argument. Every page brings clarity, nuance, and depth to previously planted ideas.

While *Art and Faith* has several interweaving theses, Fujimura binds them together in a single sentence at the start of his book: "Imagination gives us wings to create, but it is through Christ's tears and the invitation to the feast of God that we can be partakers of the New Creation" (3). The book explores these three insights. First, our postindustrial culture desperately needs imagination in our faith and witness. Fujimura claims: "modernist assumptions that verifiable knowledge is the ultimate path to truth have overlooked the fact that mystery and beauty are at the core of knowledge" (83) and "it is through our imagination that God reaches us" (85). Second, as symbolized by Jesus's tears at Lazarus's tomb, God does not merely fix our hurts; he sits with us in our pain, values our wounds, and renews us. Using the Japanese art of Kintsugi as an artistic metaphor, Fujimura says, "it is precisely through our brokenness and fissures that God's grace can shine through, as in the gold that fills fissures in Kintsugi" (52). And third, God patiently partners with human creativity to reveal himself and to make the New Creation. This is most deeply evidenced by God's "use of our ability to make bread and wine to reveal Jesus's resurrected presence" to us at the Eucharist (73). Fujimura explains the biblical promise at the heart of his Theology of Making is that "not only are we restored, we are to partake in the co-creation of the New [Creation]" (46).

If, as Emily Dickinson once said of poetry, art "tells the truth but tells it slant," then *Art and Faith* tells theological truth but tells it slant. It does not give a systematic theology of art or making. Instead, a work of art all its own, *Art and Faith* models a deeply Trinitarian, renewed look at the things of God, life in him, and New Creation. Fujimura combines diverse artistic inspirations like Kintsugi, Nihonga, T. S. Eliot, and Mark Rothko with theological influences like Ellen Davis, N. T. Wright, and Jürgen Moltmann. In doing so, he invites both contemplation and action, both meditation and making. Rather than argue doctrinal axioms, Fujimura models his theological perspective: he creates a work of literary art that exemplifies "the arts need to cast good spells [from which we get the word 'gospel'] into a world that is dying and cynical" (137).

Additionally, *Art and Faith* makes a strong epistemological argument. Much theological writing in the last several centuries springs from the age of modernism and industrialization. From these perspectives, society and theology have adopted utilitarian

emphases that Fujimura attempts to correct. In a postmodern world where rational apologetics falls flat, Fujimura proposes that “instead of debating, Christians ought to be involved in Making. . . . not to ‘prove’ God’s existence, but to affirm the source of creativity and imagination, [God himself]” (85–86). Fujimura asks: “What if . . . imagination is seen as necessary . . . for our faith journeys” (87). He then proposes: “the analytical and the intuitive, the rational and the emotional, the active and the contemplative: these are not dichotomies or dualities to each other, but they are complements” (110). The artist’s mind and body offer imaginative and somatic knowledge that brings fresh perspective to doctrinal truths.

Art and Faith is a rare example of an academic book with universal appeal. Theologians of all denominations would benefit from the rich creative insights it offers. Christians of all walks and theological training will find the book’s tone and concepts approachable and refreshing. Artists of all faiths and worldviews would be encouraged and challenged by the book’s wisdom. Furthermore, by addressing a “theology of making” rather than one of “creativity,” this work broadens its audience from artists and theologians to every human being. Since everyone makes something, “we are all artists” (149), and “the Artist calls us little-‘a’ artists to co-create, to share in the ‘heavenly breaking in’ to the broken world” (90–91). With *Art and Faith*, readers cannot help but catch flashes of New Creation bursting into their hearts.

Jordan Covarelli

Merker, Matt. *Corporate Worship: How the Church Gathers as God’s People*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 176 pp. \$14.99.

Understanding the true purpose of the gathering of believers in worship is a challenge for many evangelical churches today. As Matt Merker points out, knowing the reason of worship begins with discerning the purpose of the local church. He believes that “a biblical view of the local church informs all the practical aspects of putting a worship service together” (27). Thus, his book answers the questions of who gathers, why they gather, what they do when they gather, and how they structure their gatherings. Merker states that “corporate

worship is the responsibility of every church member" (29), and he continues his emphasis on the responsibility of the worshiper throughout each chapter.

Chapter one poses the question of who is to gather for worship, which Merker answers as the local church "is an assembly of blood-bought, Spirit-filled worshipers who build one another up by God's Word and affirm one another as citizens of Christ's kingdom through the ordinances" (35). Further, he sees the local body of believers functioning as "An Outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven" (35), "A Holy Temple" (38), and "The Body of Christ" (41). In his second chapter, Merker inquires why believers must gather, and responds by stating that "a local church is an assembly" and if a church "never meets, it is no church at all" (46). In continuing to emphasize a biblical view of the local church, he additionally comments that meeting as a body "isn't just something churches *do*. A meeting is, in part, what a church *is*. God has saved us as individuals to *be* a corporate assembly" (46). Lastly in addressing the question of why we gather, Merker's third chapter answers why God gathers believers, and asserts that "God gathers us unto his glory, for our mutual good, before the world's gaze" (61).

Having answered the questions of why a church gathers, Merker addresses the questions of how a church gathers in his fourth and fifth chapters. He states in chapter four that "God, by his Word, governs what the local church should do when it gathers" (78), which he furthers by expounding on the purpose of the regulative principle of worship and the importance of applying it in worship practices. Chapter five focuses on liturgies, through which Merker considers specific elements and patterns of worship services. He provides a couple of sample liturgies in this chapter and lists even more in his Appendix.

Merker's final two chapters answer the questions of how the church participates in the gathering and how congregational singing impacts the assembly. Both chapters include suggestions on how to incorporate all believers in different elements of the liturgy, about which Merker writes that the "various *somebodies* of the congregation unite into *one body* to receive and share the ministry of the Word, and the Spirit builds them up together into maturity" (130-31). As in previous chapters, Merker addresses the function of the local church and

states that “a deep understanding of the local church is often what’s missing when churches don’t sing” (134).

Throughout his book, Merker quotes other worship writers and theologians, including Bryan Chapell, D. A. Carson, C. S. Lewis, and Marva Dawn, to name a few. Merker helpfully addresses the topic of corporate worship, focusing on biblical and liturgical traditions as discipleship-forming practices. He often provides illustrations from his own worship leading experiences, helping the reader to understand practical ways in which to employ the methods he addresses.

In his discussion on liturgy in chapter five, however, Merker makes the statement that the “actual content of each element of the service matters more than the order in which they are arranged” (102). He later states that “if we care more about the order of service than the content of each element of the service, we may ironically end up neglecting the proclamation of the gospel” (103). Although Merker makes these statements, almost every liturgy example he cites follows a similar pattern, which includes a Call to Worship, Praise, Confession, Assurance, Opening of the Word, Response, Benediction. Merker seems to undermine his point that the order of the elements of the service does not matter by providing examples that all broadly follow the liturgical examples found in Scripture. Ultimately, his point is to care more for the content of the element rather than the placement of the element in the liturgy, but his argument could be stronger if he would eliminate this idea completely or provide more explanation on where liturgies are found in Scripture, thus regulating why biblical liturgies broadly follow the structure mentioned above.

Overall, Merker’s book would make a tremendous resource for evangelical churches wanting to understand and employ more reformed worship liturgies. *Corporate Worship* serves as a basic primer for instructing those that are unfamiliar with biblical worship practices. Merker rightly concludes “*Who* the church is shapes *how* it worships. And corporate worship, in turn, shapes the church” (151).

Kim Arnold

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