

# Artistic Theologian

ISSN 2324-7282

Published by the School of Church Music  
at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
P.O. Box 22390  
Fort Worth, TX 76122

## DESCRIPTION

*Artistic Theologian* (ISSN 2324-7282) is an evangelical theological journal published annually at [www.ArtisticTheologian.com](http://www.ArtisticTheologian.com) by the School of Church Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. It focuses on issues of worship, church music, aesthetics, and culture for Christian musicians, pastors, church music students, and worship leaders.

## EDITORS

Scott Aniol | Editor-in-chief  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
saniol@swbts.edu

R. Allen Lott | Associate Editor  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

David M. Toledo | Associate Editor  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Robert Pendergraft  
Jessica Wan

## ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Articles for the journal should be about 4,000 to 9,000 words and should be submitted to the Editor-in-chief. Articles follow Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) for proper stylistic format. They should be submitted electronically as an email attachment using Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx extensions) or Rich Text Format (.rtf extension). Additional style guidelines are available on our website.

## BOOK REVIEW SUBMISSIONS

Book reviews for the journal should be between 700 and 900 words and should be submitted to the Editor-in-chief.

© 2016 by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. ISSN 2324-7282. Readers are free to print and circulate this publication in digital form without further permission, but they must acknowledge the source and not change the content.

[www.ArtisticTheologian.com](http://www.ArtisticTheologian.com)

# Contents

Editorial: “Thus Says the Lord”: Biblical Worship in Contemporary Practice .....	1
<i>Scott Aniol</i>	
Commentary: Partial Psalmody.....	3
<i>T. David Gordon</i>	
Ultimate Mystery: The Disappearance of Holy Scripture from Evangelical Worship.....	9
<i>Paige Patterson</i>	
Baptism as Worship: Revisiting the Kiffin/Bunyan Open-Communion Debate.....	17
<i>Matthew Ward</i>	
Implications for Worship from the Mount of Transfiguration .....	32
<i>Scott Connell</i>	
Music, Culture, and Vain Repetition: Matthew 6 in its Context.....	53
<i>Steven Winiarski</i>	
Abstracts of Recent SWBTS School of Church Music Doctoral Dissertations.....	62
Book Reviews .....	65
Book Review Index.....	81

## Editorial

# “Thus Says the Lord”: Biblical Worship in Contemporary Practice

Scott Aniol<sup>1</sup>

God’s revelation is the basis and foundation of everything in Christian life and ministry. God’s inspired Word is the ultimate standard for what Christians believe, how they live their lives, and especially the manner in which they approach God in worship. Since worship is to God, for God, and about God, God alone has the prerogative to determine how he will be worshiped.

This conviction, characteristic especially of children of the Reformation, is based on several key biblical truths: First, Scripture itself teaches that it is sufficient and uniquely authoritative (2 Tim 3:16–17). If the Word of God is sufficient to perfectly equip Christians for every good work, then surely the Bible is sufficient for contemporary worship.

Second, Scripture is filled with examples of God rejecting worship that is not explicitly founded upon his own revealed will. Whether it was the Hebrew people mimicking the pagan nations in the way they approached God (Exod 32:1–10), sons of the High Priest offering “unauthorized fire” to the Lord (Lev 10:1–3), or religious leaders adding extra-biblical regulations to worship (Matt 15:8–9), God always condemns those worship practices that he has not explicitly prescribed.

Third, the biblical emphasis on liberty of conscience limits the authority of church leaders to introduce in corporate worship only what God’s Word allows. The New Testament is clear that when it comes to spiritual matters, since “each one should be fully convinced in his own mind,” only that which God has clearly prescribed for worship may bind individual consciences in a corporate worship setting (Rom 14:5–6).

It is for these reasons, especially the final one, that dependence upon the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God in matters of worship is actually quite liberating. Far from being unnecessarily restrictive, depending on the Word of God to regulate Christian worship gives confidence to church leaders and congregants alike that how they are approaching God in worship is both pleasing to him and ultimately what will draw them progressively into a deeper relationship with God.

This fourth volume of *Artistic Theologian* is not a themed issue, but providentially every article relates to this matter of the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word in worship. The first two articles address God’s Word *in* corporate worship. T. David Gordon provides commentary on the use of psalms in corporate worship, arguing that when Christians sing psalms, they should not sing only parts of a psalm but should consider the full literary and theological context. Paige Patterson diagnoses the enigmatic disappearance of Scripture in

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Aniol, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Worship Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Editor-in-Chief of *Artistic Theologian*.

the corporate worship of evangelicals today, offering suggestions for making sure to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim 4:13).

Next, Matthew Ward explores how early English Baptists’ commitment to pure, biblically regulated worship impacted their debates over whom they would welcome into church membership. The final articles exegete two passages of Scripture, drawing conclusions from them for contemporary practice. Scott Connell studies the transfiguration of Christ and its implications for worship. Steven Winiarski investigates the original meaning and intent of Christ’s exhortation against “vain repetition” in Matthew 6 and questions how it should be applied to singing in worship today.

This issue of *Artistic Theologian* serves as a model for how Christians should approach matters related to corporate worship: rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Worshipers of God should know God’s revelation, read it regularly both individually and corporately, understand it in its original context, and actively apply it to every aspect of their worship practice.

We hope that you will benefit from this issue, and we welcome both article and book review submissions for our next volume, scheduled for publication in April of 2017. The deadline for submissions is October 1, 2016.

## Commentary

# Partial Psalmody

T. David Gordon<sup>1</sup>

Within the Reformed tradition, there has been considerable discussion of the question of exclusive psalmody (the belief that the Church of Jesus Christ should sing in worship *only* canonical psalms). There has been less discussion of the propriety of what I call “Partial Psalmody,” singing portions (or even snippets) of psalms but not in their entirety. I think we should discuss this question also, ideally with the same mutual respect and charity with which we discuss exclusive psalmody. I ordinarily object to Partial Psalmody, on grounds I will mention below. Let me say beforehand that contemporary worship music is the graver offender here. Exclusive Psalmist communions, such as The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), frequently sing partial psalms, breaking biblical psalms into several portions, and singing each of those as its own separate part of a service of worship, ordinarily to different tunes.<sup>2</sup> But at least the parts of psalms they sing are *larger* parts, whereas in the contemporary worship music it is common to sing very small portions.

I write this because I often bump into people who say to me, “Well surely you cannot object to people singing straight from the Bible, do you?” And, of course, I say that I do *indeed* object, and they look at me as though I were a Martian. On such occasions, I almost never have opportunity to explain myself, so I just get into my UFO and fly back to Mars. But there is a rationale for my objection to Partial Psalmody, and I record that rationale here, for whomever may be interested.

### Argument Ad Absurdum

First, the argument *ad absurdum* is a useful tool: push an argument farther than its proponents do, to its logical conclusion, and you may find a problem with the argument itself. The argument *ad absurdum* tests the logic of an argument by following it to its ultimate conclusion. So, here are two admittedly *ad absurdum* arguments (the second not so absurd, because it, in fact, is done) to reveal the problem.

Suppose we were to sing the following chorus, repeated several times: “There is no God, there is no God; there is no God, there is no God . . .” (supply your own catchy music here; I recommend well-known Jewish wedding music; if you prefer, you could supply the

---

<sup>1</sup> T. David Gordon, PhD, is Professor of Religion and Greek at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 150 canonical psalms in the RPCNA psalter, only seven are sung in their entirety: 12, 80, 83, 92, 124, 129, and 142. See the chart comparing the older and newer versions at <http://www.crownandcovenant.com/v/vspfiles/assets/images/PsalterComparisonTable.pdf>.

melody to “My hope is built on nothing less”). Even though these words come directly out of Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, we would not select just those words to sing, because their context refutes them (“The fool hath said in his heart, “There is no God.”). That is, we could, however clumsily, select some words from the Bible that actually say something different (or, in this case, the exact opposite) from what the passage actually teaches.

Consider this chorus: “This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” This one is technically not *ad absurdum*; people actually do this.<sup>3</sup> What is the evident meaning of such a chorus? Something like this: “God is sovereign over his entire created order, and he has made this particular day for his own benevolent and wise purposes. Realizing this, we should rejoice, and take pleasure in his good will and wisdom.” Right? This may be how the chorus is understood, but it is not what the psalm says. Here is what it says in its context:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps 118:22–24)

This was a well-known psalm (known as “the Hallel”), ordinarily sung at the Passover feast. Indeed, there is a good case to be made that this was the psalm Christ sang with his disciples after instituting the Lord’s Supper (“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives,” Matt 26:30). Similarly, this is a commonly cited psalm in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:32–33; 1 Pet 2:4–8). The apostles routinely refer to the crucified Christ as the stone that the builders rejected. The Lord’s “doing,” here, is *not* his general work of providence in sovereignly establishing every earthly day, but his special work of *redemption* that requires his Son’s suffering. Indeed, the earlier parts of the psalm also call attention to his suffering:

<sup>10</sup> All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! <sup>11</sup> They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! <sup>12</sup> They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! <sup>13</sup> I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. . . . <sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

It is “marvelous in our eyes” that the rejected, suffering Christ is then raised to become the cornerstone of the Christian faith. *This* is what we are called to rejoice in by this psalm: the day when the rejected stone became the cornerstone, when the dying Christ became the rising Christ. So, to sing about God’s *providence* from a psalm that sings about God’s *redemption*

---

<sup>3</sup> This chorus appears in nearly forty hymnals, including: African American Heritage Hymnal #108, Baptist Hymnal 1991 #359, Baptist Hymnal 2008 #571, Celebration Hymnal #209, Chalice Hymnal #286, Church Family Worship #319, Church Hymnary (4th ed.) #194, Complete Anglican Hymns Old & New #691, Hymns for Today’s Church (2nd ed.) S. #28, Lead Me, Guide Me (2nd ed.) #305, Lift Every Voice and Sing II: An African American Hymnal #219, Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship #118K, Psalter Hymnal (Gray) #241, Sing and Rejoice!: New Hymns for Congregations #118, Sing Joyfully #84, Songs for Life #3, The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook #841, The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration #590, The New Century Hymnal #84, The United Methodist Hymnal #657, The Worshiping Church #801, Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of The United Church of Canada #412, Worship and Rejoice #652.

is not really to sing the psalm. We sing (some of) the *words* of the psalm but not its *message*, its words but not its word. What we sing, in such a case, is not what the Israelites sang, nor what the apostles sang, nor, in all likelihood, what our Lord sang before his betrayal.

## The Literary and Theological Integrity of the Psalms

The psalms are carefully composed and, with one or two exceptions, show remarkable literary unity: They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. To extract portions from that literary unity, at a minimum, shows disrespect for the composition as a whole (like listening only to the opening measures of the second movement of a symphony), but may also *misconstrue* what is being conveyed (as in the example of Psalm 118, above). This is true of all genres of psalms, but more significant to some than to others. The hymns of praise, for instance, constitute the second most-common genre of psalm, and they almost always have at least two parts or aspects: the call to praise, and the *grounds* for that call. Indeed, the grounds for praise in the hymns of praise are not only just as important as the call to praise, they are *more* important and actually constitute the larger part of those particular psalms. Here is an example from Psalm 97:

### First Part: Call to Praise:

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

### Second Part: Grounds for Praising God:

<sup>2</sup> Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. <sup>3</sup> Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. <sup>4</sup> His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. <sup>5</sup> The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

In this case, the earth itself, and specifically the coastlands, are called to praise God (v. 1) *because* he reigns judicially over all the earth: righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (2). Though he has delayed his final judgment, he will indeed judge the earth one day, in a furious judgment that is likened to lightning (4), and mountain-melting fire (3, 5), because God will remove from his kingdom the insurrectionists against it in a display of power that will cause the earth itself to tremble (4).

The substance of the hymns of praise is primarily the *reasons* God is worthy of our praise. If we were to sing just the first portion (the call to praise), we would be calling ourselves, others, or the created order itself to praise God, but we would not be supplying any *reason* to do so. Failure to offer an impetus would alter the very *nature* of biblical hymns of praise, which do not call people to praise without reasons. Further, since no reason is provided for the praise, the praise is not truly corporate; each believer, at some intuitive level, supplies his or her own ground for the praise, but the congregation itself is not offering unified praise to God for a common reason. Indeed, younger or less-well-instructed individuals

may even supply erroneous reasons for praising God (such as, not inconceivably, praising him because he loves everyone and will never judge his created order in fury).

The psalms have not only literary unity but also theological integrity. This integrity is true of other genres of the psalms also, but I will mention just one other, to make the point. Of the sub-genres of the psalms, the largest is the lament. Seventy-three (roughly half) of the biblical psalms are laments. Laments can be very complex, and some have as many as seven parts (Invocation, Plea for help, Complaint(s), Confession of sin or assertion of innocence, Imprecation, Expression of confidence in God, and Hymn or blessing). Others only have a few of these parts, but what makes the lament so significant theologically and liturgically are two parts: the complaint itself and the expression of confidence in God. That is, the psalmist candidly (often intensely) describes his complaint/lament, but he also expresses confidence in God. Like Job, as it were, his lamentable circumstance does not cause him to lose trust in God; to the contrary, he expresses trust *in the midst of* his situation. Effectively, the lament proclaims: "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15).

Suppose we sang just the complaint, or just the expression of trust. This would change the fundamental nature of what lament does, by separating the two parts that together constitute its religious and liturgical genius. The complaint, without trust, is just whining; the trust, without the complaint, could seem to be "fair-weather Christianity," as it were. Many of the praise songs I have heard remove the expression of trust from its context of despairing lament, and in so doing just become, in my opinion, a trivial chorus that is entirely different in its religious meaning from a biblical lament.

After our first daughter Marian had died of leukemia, one of my wife's favorite hymns became even more special to us. Among its verses were these:

Whate'er my God ordains is right: his holy will abideth;  
I will be still whate'er he doth; and follow where he guideth;  
He is my God; though dark my road,  
He holds me that I shall not fall:  
Wherefore to him I leave it all.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: though now this cup, in drinking,  
May bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it, all unshrinking.  
My God is true; each morn anew  
Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,  
And pain and sorrow shall depart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: here shall my stand be taken:  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet I am not forsaken.  
My Father's care is round me there;  
He holds me that I shall not fall:  
And so to him I leave it all.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Rodigast, 1675; translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1863.



From the lips of a grieving mother, the words are very different than they are from someone whose children are all healthy. Expressing trust when grieving differs from the same sentiment when all is well. When, therefore, we remove heart-breaking lament from our expressions of trust, we fail in several ways:

- We fail to praise and thank our God whose grace is always sufficient in those difficult moments;
- We fail to prepare ourselves for such moments when they occur;
- We may suggest to others that a life of faith will always be smooth sailing.

Therefore, unless a person is extremely skilled literarily and theologically, the selection of some of the words *from* a psalm, taken from their context, could constitute a very *different* song altogether. My observation has been that we have not had many such individuals since Isaac Watts. One of my psalms students several years ago decided to write his paper on laments in contemporary worship music, and he studied the little book of songs we use in the chapel services here at the college. He did not find a single lament. Half of Israel's songs were trusting laments; none of ours are. If my friend (and former colleague) Gordon Fee was right ("You show me a church's songs, and I'll show you their theology"), our religion/theology is not that of the Bible any more. What is worse, by using words *from* the Bible, we do not even realize it.

For years, I have suspected that there are at least two different kinds of people (I see each in myself) who refer to themselves as "Bible-believers." One such individual is like Francis Schaeffer (*He Is There and He is Not Silent*), someone who is so grateful that God's last words to his creation were not those recorded in Genesis 3: "Cursed be you because of this." This first person recognizes both his own individual folly and the collective folly of a rebellious race, and delights in the great reality that God has not abandoned us entirely to our folly, but has continued to speak in Holy Scripture, shedding light on our dark paths. Such a person longs for whatever beams of light shine from God's revealed Word. A second individual has read some portions or snippets from the Bible from time to time, and had discovered that he sometimes happens to agree with those snippets. However, his opinions are not much changed by the Bible, and he does not labor much to uncover its actual meaning. Some of its words remind him of what he already knows and believes, and when that occurs, he is happy to cite those words.

These are two very different kinds of people, though both are known as "Bible-believers." Perhaps we need another expression so that we could distinguish these people. Isaiah spoke to those who "tremble at his word," which might be a helpful designation. Who, among us, *reveres* God's address to a fallen race? Who, among us, *treasures* what he discloses to us whose sin has dis-merited such disclosure? Who, among us, *trembles* when God speaks, regarding his revelation with loving *fear*? If, by God's grace, any of us ever found ourselves in that category from time to time, we would not be content just to snatch from Scripture a snippet or two that reminds us of our current opinion; we would study Scripture carefully to discover what it actually says and conform our opinions (and practices) to those revealed there.

The issue here is whether the Word will shape us or whether we will shape the Word. Will the Word dictate to us what the content of our praise should be, or will our sensibilities

sift through the Word as they do through a restaurant menu, selecting only what we regard as appetizing? One of the surest ways to *avoid* the latter is simply to leave the psalms with their literary and theological integrity intact. One of the surest ways to *commit* the latter is to permit ourselves to pull a given string of words from a psalm, like a piece of paper from a fortune cookie, with no regard for its contextual meaning.

I myself am not an exclusive psalmist; I believe the apostle Paul required that the Christian churches sing about Christ (Eph 5, Col 3), not merely about the Old Testament *types* of Christ. But when/if we do elect to sing canonical psalms, we should exhibit some deference to their literary and theological integrity, and not cut them up into dismembered parts.

# Ultimate Mystery: The Disappearance of Holy Scripture from Evangelical Worship

Paige Patterson<sup>1</sup>

The Southern Baptist Convention, identified by most as the largest Protestant denomination in America, revised its confession known as *The Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) in June of 2000. A blue-ribbon committee chaired by Adrian Rogers and including Richard Land, Chuck Kelley, Al Mohler, and Jerry Vines—among others—worked diligently to rid the 1963 revision of the old New Hampshire Confession of the neo-orthodox language that had infiltrated the document at several points. After one of the most interesting debates in Baptist history, lasting more than an hour, the convention approved the changes by a vote of better than 95% of the thousands of registered messengers. The article on the Bible is Article I and reads as follows.

## I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is himself the focus of divine revelation.<sup>2</sup>

While I commend the committee and the convention for the admirable work on the confession, one of the finest succinct confessions in history in my opinion, I fear that I cannot be so effusive about other aspects of the confession and its aftermath. Of course, to some degree most creeds and confessions, in addition to attempting to represent the perspective of the adopting body, are also inevitably contextual, responding to the needs and questions of the era. Nevertheless, the BFM is also notable for the absence of an article on worship and no mention whatever of the importance of the reading of Scripture in the assemblies of the congregations.

This rather appalling absence of a declaration about worship, and particularly the use of Scripture in worship, is not easy to explain. David Toledo, presenting a paper examining

---

<sup>1</sup> Paige Patterson, PhD, is President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX.

<sup>2</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message" (BFM 2000); accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

the growth of Calvinism in Southern Baptist circles to the Colloquium on Baptist Church Music at Baylor University, concluded in this way:

Upon examination, it appears that churches prescribing to Calvinist theology place a greater emphasis upon the reading of Scripture in worship, the teaching of theological doctrine in their music, and the role of the Senior Pastor in guiding the worship of the church. These churches appear to be effectively communicating their doctrinal distinctions to their members during the corporate worship service. This in turn appears to lead to a greater majority of their churches enthusiastically participating in corporate worship, while remaining intellectually engaged in the process.<sup>3</sup>

As a non-Calvinistic, intensely evangelistically oriented Baptist, I am not at all happy with his conclusion. The problem is that Toledo's perspective is more often right than not. Although Mohler represented the Calvinistic strand in Southern Baptist life, the vast majority on the committee that revised the document were from the more evangelistic segment, which we usually call the Sandy Creek tradition. But lest I be too hard on Southern Baptists, this event is only illustrative of a loss of the Word of God in the worship practice of many evangelicals.

For example, *The Book of Common Prayer* claims that one of the primary reasons for its existence was so that the congregations would read through most of the Bible in a year. The Preface explains the benefits of the public reading of Scripture in the early church and laments its subsequent decline:

For they so ordered the matter that all the whole Bible, or the greatest part thereof, should be read over once in the year, intending thereby that the clergy, and specially such as were ministers of the congregation, should, by often reading and meditation of God's Word, be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the truth. And further, that the people by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in the Church should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion. But these many years past this godly and decent order of the ancient fathers hath been so altered, broken, and neglected by planting in uncertain stories, legends, responds, verses, vain repetitions, commemorations, and synodals that commonly when any book of the Bible was begun, before three or four chapters were read out, all the rest are unread.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, Franklin Segler and Randall Bradley complain about the status accorded Scripture in the Free Church tradition.

---

<sup>3</sup> David M. Toledo, "The Growth of Calvinism among Southern Baptists in the Twenty-First Century and Its Effect upon Baptist Church Music" (paper presented at the Colloquium on Baptist Church Music at Baylor University, Waco, TX, 25 September 2009), 16-17; accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/98389.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> John E. Booty, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 14-15.

The free churches boast, “We are a people of the Book,” and yet there is great neglect of the Bible. People fail to read it regularly in private; in many homes the Scriptures are rarely read. Even in public worship services, the reading of the Bible is often neglected; only a brief scriptural passage is read in an entire worship service. When the Bible is read, it is often read carelessly and hurriedly.<sup>5</sup>

Assuming that such analyses are accurate, how did large segments of the evangelical church find themselves in such a morass? And where is the path of recovery for a more vital and knowledgeable Christianity in the future? In the remainder of this essay I will attempt to discover some of the etiology for this malady and then venture a few elementary, yet hopefully helpful, approaches to the restoration of Scripture to its preferred standing in the congregation.

## **An Etiology of the Apocryphization of Holy Scripture**

As you know, *apocrypha* means “hidden.” So I coined an expression to describe the strange journey of Holy Scripture to relative obscurity in evangelical churches. How could it happen that the preachers, pastors, and theologians who fought the most determinedly against the careless exercise of historical-critical methodology and the assignment of error to the Bible have proceeded to make the sacred Scriptures virtually apocryphal?

**(1) Public reading of anything has been rendered difficult by a general reading deficit among the public.** Universities routinely complain about the poor reading skills of students arriving from high schools, and, of course, they are seeing the best. My own experience confirms this problem in two ways. The youngsters that matriculate in our college and often even those coming from the university into our graduate program demonstrate considerably less linguistic acumen than the students I was receiving in my first presidency 40 years ago. Vocabulary is severely circumscribed, and grammar is as foreign to most of them as a red-headed American in a barber shop in China.

The second observation arises from the fact that at Southwestern we continue to have chapel three days a week. Four years ago, deeply convicted about the subject matter in this paper, we began using students to read the Scriptures publicly, and we have been reading through books of the Bible ever since. Occasionally, I am satisfied with the alacrity of the oral interpretation and once in a great while I am ecstatic. Yet as often as not, I want to punch the fellow next to me and ask, “Who died?” I hold no animosity toward any of these sweet kids because I know that they are victims themselves. But I do declare that some of them can read about the fall of the walls of Jericho in such a manner that one prays to be taken out in the collapse.

**(2) Fantasy games on phones and computers have created a serious inability among our people to reason and to imagine.** Virtual reality is just what it claims to be.

---

<sup>5</sup> Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 129.

Shooting enemy soldiers in the comparative safety of an armchair in one's bedroom has as much to do with the reality of stomach-wrenching fear as bullets whiz by and shells explode around you as riding a virtual bull has to do with a four-legged bovine in a real rodeo arena. When the capacity to reason is jettisoned and the imagination is blunted, how can a person successfully live in the text, experiencing the diachronic leap necessary to grasp the drama and message of the text?

**(3) Performance-based worship has increasingly strangled participatory involvement or redefined participation as "listening."** I am not here to be a critic of contemporary music. As I never tire of reminding my older pastor friends, there was a day when "The Old Rugged Cross" was a contemporary hymn. But the movement from choirs to "praise teams" and from orchestras to a couple of guitars and a percussionist in a cage is not a grand march toward using the talents and gifts of all in worship. And standing for all hymns does not fully satisfy my criteria for anything other than aching feet. I recently asked a precocious 15-year-old standing next to me, "Son, why do you folks stand through all the songs? That is difficult for me since I have to keep standing while I preach." Looking somewhat disdainful, he said, "You have to do something. You can't sing the songs." But my real point is that churches have too often moved to performance mode rather than worship mode. The elusive standard needs to include participation in meaningful ways for all, and extending hands to heaven while walling the eyes into the back of the head and attempting to look pious has little to do with participatory worship.

**(4) Evangelical fascination with definition and declaration has become a substitute for an actual embracing of the words and ways of God.** I just wish that I had \$50 for every document I have been asked to enhance with my signature over the last 15 years. Southwestern would now be as wealthy as Harvard. I do not deny some value to such documents. After all, Luther was able to generate more than the average excitement with the document that he nailed to the door in Wittenberg. I simply want to venture the suggestion that getting our people into the Word of God to the point that they begin seeing things as God sees them might be a better use of our time.

In his rather profound monograph, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship*, Scott Aniol observes, "Indeed, anyone who claims to hold to the sufficiency of Scripture for faith and practice must be willing to apply the Bible's principles to every situation whether or not that situation is explicitly addressed in the pages of the Bible. To fail to do so is to deny the profitability of the Word of God."<sup>6</sup> A corollary of Aniol's point is that if one is serious about the sufficiency of Scripture, the public reading of the Word must be advanced to primary importance.

**(5) Entertainment has replaced thoughtful meditation as the art of the church.** Now please do not misunderstand. I think it is a sin to be boring. There is no inherent evil in making things interesting. Yet unlike the world, that is not the object of the worship of the church. And, on top of that, the church really cannot compete with the world in the arena of

---

<sup>6</sup> Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2009), 21.

entertainment. She has neither the money nor the reason to do so. But what the church has that the world knows nothing about is the Word of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and the presence of the crucified Christ.

**(6) Finally, while multiple translations of the Bible, in some ways, are desirable, this endeavor has engendered havoc in the memorization and the public reading of Scripture.** We now boast of everything from the Cotton Patch Version of the New Testament to the Jerusalem Bible. Who can blame our people for being confused? They not only have no idea what to read privately, but if the Scripture is to be read publicly, unless they read from the screen, they will often be as lost as the sheriff's guard searching for Robin Hood in Nottingham Forest. Memorization? Forget it. No one has any idea what version with which to invest his time. Besides, tomorrow there may be a new translation that you like better. The public reading of Scripture is only one thing that suffers.

## **Proposed Solutions**

These perspectives provide little more than a cursory view of the problem. However, while much more could be said, the solution is more important than an analysis of the problem. Therefore, I offer beginning thoughts for a way forward.

**(1) Evangelicals must recapture the confidence that God actually speaks through his Word.** The soft sciences, particularly psychology, seem to have persuaded evangelicals that sophisticated answers to life's problems, which were unavailable to the race prior to Sigmund Freud, are now the psychosomatic solutions we covet. The public reading of the Scriptures as well as text-driven preaching will continue to languish until congregants embrace the solutions embodied in the Bible. In discussing the similarities and dissimilarities between the religion of Israel and other nations of antiquity, Scott Aniol concludes that the confidence of the Jews in the reliability of the Old Testament revelation sets Israel apart from the nations.

The secular (and higher critical) views over-emphasize the similarities between biblical worship and that of the ANE [ancient Near East] while ignoring the overwhelming differences. Most starkly, these views fail to recognize the fundamental contrast between the worldview of ancient Israel and that of other nations. Positing the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and God as Creator and Revealer provides the most satisfying explanation for the evidence. All nations had a common ancestry in Adam, and God's self-revelation was part of their heritage, thus accounting for any similarities in worship practice that exist.<sup>7</sup>

This same kind of confidence in Scripture should characterize evangelicals today and set them apart from the unbelieving world.

---

<sup>7</sup> Scott Aniol, "Worldview Bias and the Origin of Hebrew Worship, *Answers Research Journal* 8 (2015): 358. Also available at [https://assets.answersingenesis.org/doc/articles/pdf-versions/arj/v8/worldview\\_bias\\_Hebrew\\_worship.pdf](https://assets.answersingenesis.org/doc/articles/pdf-versions/arj/v8/worldview_bias_Hebrew_worship.pdf) (358).

**(2) The churches must develop a cadre of persons who labor publicly to read Scripture well.** By reading well I do not intend to advocate the theatrical, but I do insist that the reading of Scripture be done with pathos. In his monumental work, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Hughes Oliphant Old notes this: “The main drift of the lectionary is clear. It is a serious attempt to guarantee the reading of the whole Bible through in the course of a year in such a way that the literary integrity of the different books is respected and the context of each passage is evident.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, those who publicly read Scripture must do so in a way that respects the literary and contextual integrity of the text.

**(3) People must be taught that hearing the voice of the Lord in Scripture is just as much a part of worship as singing, praying, or preaching.** In my own life I have reached the point where often I receive more instruction from the public reading of the Bible than from the preaching that differs rather substantially in the consistency of insight provided. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that hearing from Scripture alone is essential for godly worship. The preacher needs to be as accurate in his assessment of Scripture as possible; but he, being human, will certainly err. The Scriptures read aloud represent the unfiltered voice of God.

In *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Christopher Ellis takes note of this perspective among early Baptists in Great Britain.

Born out of the “radical reformation” in which the Bible was placed in the hands of all Christians, Baptist spirituality needs to be understood within the polarity of scripture and experience. The reading of scripture has been the source of Baptist worship practices but is also central to the content of worship. In particular, preaching has tended to dominate the other elements of worship, and even the most famous Baptist preacher, C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892), urged his students not to demote the rest of the service in favor of the sermon. The dominance displays both a desire for instruction in the faith and a concern to proclaim the gospel challenge so that new people may come to faith.<sup>9</sup>

**(4) In order to speak adequately to life’s problems and their solutions, the tandem of the reading of the Word and the explanation of the Word in preaching must be magnified.** In a sense, I recognize that this is a restatement of the previous suggestion, but I do so to focus on the two assignments together. “Worship” seems too often defined as “music.” While music is invaluable to the effective worship of God, to think of worship in this way misses the critical role of hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). It also runs the risk of inverting the pyramid and suggesting that what we say (or sing) to God is more important than what he says to us.

Perhaps I can be forgiven at this point in taking issue with the designation “worship leader” for the minister of music. If he is a “minister” and music is his medium, he is certainly

---

<sup>8</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 157.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Ellis, “Baptists in Britain,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 570.



“a worship leader” but not to the exclusion of those who read Scripture, pray publicly, or preach. The risk in identifying the one who leads music as “the minister of worship” is that this gets translated to many as meaning that “singing” is worship—then comes the preaching.

**(5) Preachers need to discover that the essence of productive homiletics is found in assisting people by helping them to read the Word of God.** This is the simplest definition I know for biblical preaching. My loftiest experiences in worship occur when something arises from the exposition of Scripture, searching my heart in a fresh fashion, convicting my soul, enlarging my understanding of God, or creating a widened perspective on the grace of Christ. Such happenings should not be novel in preaching but rather the fulfillment of reasonable expectation. While such wonderful moments often arise in preaching, just as often they are the product of public reading of Scripture.

**(6) Vocalists, choirs, praise teams, and instrumentalists must be asked to focus on the clear development of biblical themes and lyrics.** How many times have you heard a well-meaning vocalist say, “Do not listen to the music. Just focus on the words.” Then why not simply read the words? No, the music adds an artistic and beautiful context to enhance the reception of the word, and great music serves that function perfectly. When the musical form obscures the biblical message, whether that form is classical, rock, country, or gospel, then the selection or the artist or both need to be excluded from the program of future worship. This conclusion is not to deny a place for music as a magnificent art form to be appreciated for its grasp of the beautiful, but it is to say that worship demands more.

**(7) Even public prayer, while certainly the sincere expression of the heart to God, should be bathed in scriptural concepts and led frequently by leaders familiar with the texts of Scripture.** For an introduction to biblically informed prayer, have a convicting look at Alexander Maclaren’s *Pulpit Prayers*. Consider only the beginning prayer laced with allusions and citations from Scripture. Then compare this with prayers you commonly hear today.

O Lord! Our Light and our Salvation, help us, we beseech Thee, to enter into, and abide in, the secret place of the Most High; and may the shadow of the Almighty be our covering defence [*sic*]. Help each of us to set our love upon Thee, to bring thoughts and affections and purposes to Thyself, and to think as Thou dost teach us, to love as Thou hast loved us, to do and will as Thou dost command us, and so may we live in union with Thyself, and our word-worship in this place be in harmony with our consecration of life in our daily work.<sup>10</sup>

American evangelicals cannot endure the biblical illiteracy being spawned by the failure to read publicly and frequently the Word of God. An orthodox statement of creed or confession is important but is no substitute for hearing the voice of God. In the hearing of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *Pulpit Prayers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 1.

Word, issues are addressed that no preacher would ever think to address. The sickness of the souls of our people would be healed, and the answer to responding to the culture will be discovered. God would be honored and Christ exalted. This use of Scripture in worship will require patience since our people have seldom been nurtured in this discipline. May God grant it to be so.

# Baptism as Worship: Revisiting the Kiffin/Bunyan Open-Communion Debate

Matthew Ward<sup>1</sup>

Baptists in America have very strong feelings about the conditions for church membership. In this article, I want to focus on one: believer's baptism by immersion. My current church constitution lists as a requirement for church membership baptism by immersion on repentance of sin and profession of faith. The same qualification appears in both the Philadelphia and New Hampshire confessions of faith, in Pendleton's *Baptist Church Manual*, and in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. Indeed, many Baptists in America consider believer's baptism by immersion to be a non-negotiable prerequisite for local church membership—but perhaps not as many as did a generation ago. Some significant Baptist churches have begun accepting members without that requirement, and that trend will certainly continue. Indeed, I broached this subject with some colleagues in Britain, and they were confused by my intention because they have nearly unanimously removed that condition from their constitutions. It is no longer a debate for them.

This development raises the question: Should this matter simply go by the wayside, another casualty of the inexorable march toward uniformity (or perhaps pastor fatigue)? I know that my pastor has been through several weeks of this discussion with an individual from a Church of Christ background who is presenting herself for membership. Both my wife and I were confronted (blindsided?) with this matter when, as new Christians, we desired to join a Baptist church for the first time. In America, at least, many churches deal with the matter of “rebaptism” on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup> It is a critical matter worthy of continued attention. To remind us of its importance and perhaps refresh our perspective, I would like to call our attention to one of the first times it was debated publicly in its modern sense—the open-communication debate between seventeenth-century English pastors William Kiffin and John Bunyan—and recast it in the context they considered, as a matter of worship. To Kiffin and Bunyan, the crux of the open-communication debate was whether baptism should be considered an act of individual worship or the church's worship. They revealed baptism to be a critical intersection of ministry, theology, and worship. Their answers to the question could well inform our understanding of this matter and its significance today.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Ward, PhD, is Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church, Thomson, GA with responsibilities over education and music. His PhD is in Free Church studies.

<sup>2</sup> I should point out that the term “rebaptism” is a part of the confusion today. When Baptists use this term with prospective church members, it likely (if unintentionally) validates that person's earlier sacramental experience and raises questions of purpose. In truth, we do not “rebaptize”; we baptize for the first time. We do not believe that anything other than an intentional believer's baptism by immersion is biblical baptism, as the confessions of faith listed above state. Obviously, this is not only a pastoral concern but a profound issue for theology and ecclesiology, most of which is beyond the scope of this article.

Two definitions need to be clarified if we are to follow the original debate correctly. First, I would venture that most Baptist readers would associate the term “communion” with the Lord’s Supper. They would assume “open-communion” in the title of this article is the issue of whether Baptist churches should allow Christians who have not been baptized as a believer by immersion to join them at the Lord’s Table (this is where we get the distinctions of “open-communion,” “close-communion,” and “closed-communion”). That is a very important discussion, and Kiffin certainly argued that unbaptized individuals should not be admitted to the Lord’s Table, but the primary issue was actually church membership, of which the Lord’s Supper was a function. Bunyan himself explained, “[B]y the word Communion I mean fellowship in the things of the Kingdom of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> And by “the Kingdom of Christ,” Bunyan and many of the authors of that day meant the church.<sup>4</sup> Kiffin, who argued that baptism should be necessary for church membership as this article will explain, said of any man united with Christ “and being baptized, they have a Right to Church Fellowship, and the Lords Supper, &c.”<sup>5</sup> “Fellowship,” and by extension “communion,” is the rough equivalent of what we mean by “membership” today. “Open-communion” was the practice of accepting unbaptized individuals into church membership and thus to the Lord’s Table.

Second, the term “worship” probably has a different sphere of meaning to readers today than it did for Kiffin and Bunyan. Without denying that worship was spiritual, devotional, and personal, they usually referred in their writings to worship in its public, instituted, and corporate sense. As a result, their discussions of worship focused primarily on timing and order of church services, “a great part of it lying in nothing else but the right and Orderly Administration of Ceremonies.”<sup>6</sup> While the Anglicans accepted those ceremonies instituted in the Book of Common Prayer, the Baptists and other nonconformists only acknowledged those instituted by Christ: the ordinances. Kiffin explained that he so heavily priori-

---

<sup>3</sup> John Bunyan, *A Confession of my Faith, And A Reason of my Practice* (London: n.p., 1672), 48. That the terms “communion” and “fellowship” are similar to our word “membership” can be further inferred by Bunyan’s statement, “Mixed communion polluteth the ordinances of God” (*Ibid.*, 58). The Lord’s Supper is understood to be a benefit of church fellowship.

<sup>4</sup> For example, an early Baptist confession of faith that Kiffin signed said, “Christ hath here on earth a spirituall Kingdome, which is the Church” (*The Confession of Faith, Of those Churches which are commonly [though falsly] called Anabaptists* [London: n.p., 1644], Article XXXIII).

<sup>5</sup> William Kiffin, *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church-Communion* (London: G[eorge] Larkin, 1681), 151. In further support of my contention, Kiffin conversely noted that unbaptized individuals should be excluded from “immediate Church-Fellowship” (*Ibid.*, 19).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. In this section, Kiffin claimed to be citing Henry Lawrence, Oliver Cromwell’s former council president. In the work in question, otherwise anonymous, Lawrence clarified that we should always think of worship in terms of institution because the only valid worship was that instituted by Christ, which was “solemn and stated for the church, the whole church, at all times and seasons, according to the rules of his appointment” ([Henry Lawrence], *Of Baptisme* [Rotterdam: n.p., 1646], 106). Lawrence’s understanding simply echoed the earlier Puritan William Bradshaw, who preached, “For indeed the outward worship of God, doth consist only of Ceremonies, that is, outward demonstrations of inward Worship” (William Bradshaw, *Several Treatises of Worship and Ceremonies* [London: n.p., 1660], unpaginated section). Bradshaw originally published these treatises in 1604-5 arguing against nationally imposed ceremonies.

tized the ordinances precisely because he desired to “Worship the Lord according to his prescrib’d Order.”<sup>7</sup> Readers today probably think of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the ordinances, but Kiffin actually meant everything commanded by Christ for his church. For example, in a work published the same year as his own, Kiffin’s longtime colleague Hanserd Knollys specifically listed prayer, reading Scripture, preaching the gospel, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and singing as “Gospel-Ordinances.”<sup>8</sup> Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were set apart as the “shaddowish, or figurative ordinances,” which Bunyan esteemed for their unique purpose, “both which are of excellent use to the Church, in this world; they being to us representations of the death, and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> “Worship” in this article thus refers to the outward, corporate actions of a church, and both of the men in question desired to tie those actions directly to the Lord’s commands.

## Origins of the Open-Communion Debate

The two foci in this debate have traditionally been John Bunyan’s *Differences in Judgment about Water-Baptism, No Bar to Communion* (1673) and William Kiffin’s *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church-Communion* (1681). Kiffin (1616-1701) was considered by his peers to be one of the fathers of the Particular Baptist tradition in London (the other being Hanserd Knollys). A merchant by trade, he joined the important non-conformist London church led by John Lathrop, who was succeeded by Henry Jessey in 1637. Jessey believed that baptism should be an individual’s decision and not a compulsory factor in church membership (i.e., “open-communion”), causing Kiffin and those who disagreed with Jessey to form their own churches. Leaders of at least four of the seven churches adopting the foundational First London Confession of Faith in 1644 were once part of Jessey’s church, and Kiffin’s church on Devonshire Square became known for its strong stance on closed-communion. Notably for our purposes, John Bunyan printed the entirety of Jessey’s defense of his position in *Differences of Judgment*.<sup>10</sup> Bunyan (1628–1688), though most famous for his still-beloved

---

<sup>7</sup> Kiffin, *Sober Discourse*, Epistle to the Reader.

<sup>8</sup> Hanserd Knollys, *The World that Now is; and the World that is to Come* (London: Tho Snowden, 1681), 70-76. The confession of faith Kiffin signed in 1677 labeled those actions as the “parts” of a church’s worship, but that word was a function of their olive branch to the Presbyterians and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Individual signees regularly used “ordinance” when referring to the “parts” of worship in their own writings; see *A Confession of Faith. Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677), Article XXII. Henry Jessey, a pastor cited at length by Bunyan, called the ordinances the “wayes and meanes of divine worship, of Christs appointment” (Henry Jessey, *A Storehouse of Provision to further Resolution in severall cases of Conscience* [London: Charles Sumptner, 1650], 9).

<sup>9</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of My Faith*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> See the requirements for church membership in *Confession of Faith* [1644], Articles XXXIII, XXXIX, and XL. Jessey later clarified that he supported believer’s baptism by immersion—he spoke highly of an Independent who came under conviction of baptism, and he himself was baptized by Knollys in 1645—but he

allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was a popular preacher and pastor in Bedford who endured years of imprisonment for defying the Crown's religious claims of authority. He was also a prolific author whose works were printed in London, bringing him to the attention of his non-conformist brethren to the south.

The debate over open-communion was much larger than either Kiffin or Bunyan. Kiffin certainly had to deal with it throughout his pastorate because it regularly surfaced in the writings of those connected with Jessey's church. Indeed, in question was the nature of the church itself. Church leaders defined the church by two parameters: matter and form. The "matter" of a church was someone "professing faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ"; the "form" of a church was "that by which these are united and knit up together in one fellowship."<sup>11</sup> Everyone agreed on those definitions in general but interpreted them in different ways. For example, the form of a church could refer to any number of things. Was a church united by its profession of faith? Its baptism? Its covenant? Many of the leaders we now call "Baptist" concluded believer's baptism by immersion to be the form of a church. One of Jessey's apologists, a pastor by the name of Praisegod Barbone, rejected such a claim. On the one hand, it implied that Christians must be rebaptized every time they changed churches.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it left the nature of the church in a liturgical (i.e., related to worship) no-man's land. If the essence of baptism were in the form of the ceremony, then any ceremonial error (such as failing to immerse the crown of the head) would invalidate the entire baptism: "then is their Baptisme, their Church, and all their actions, nullities and voyd, having error attending them, as they will confesse and must doe."<sup>13</sup> But if the essence of baptism were not in the form, then sprinkling or baptism of infants should be valid. Either way, the Baptist conclusion was untenable, and Barbone's determination lay in viewing it as a ceremony of worship.<sup>14</sup>

---

wanted it to be entirely voluntary with no hint of compulsion. In his mind, Peter's sermon in Acts 2 established the clear sequence that his hearers first "professed themselves to be one body with them in Christian Worship" and *then* Peter explained baptism to them (Jessey, *Storehouse of Provision*, 127-45).

<sup>11</sup> John Spilsbury (one of the defecting pastors), *A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme* (London: n.p., 1643), 41. Jessey offered the most generic description, "Where is *matter* and *forme*, there is a true Church; the *Matter* of a true Church, to be Saints visibly; the *Forme*, a gathering of these out from the world and *joyning of them together* to worship the Lord in truth" (Jessey, *Storehouse of Provision*, 102).

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that, coming from opposite perspectives, both Spilsbury and Jessey concluded that the first baptizer in an area did not even have to be baptized for this reason (John Spilsbury, *Gods Ordinance, The Saints Priviledge* [London: M Simmons, 1646], 10; Jessey, *Storehouse of Provision*, 59).

<sup>13</sup> Praisegod Barbone, *A Discourse Tending to prove the Baptisme in, Or under the defection of Anti-christ, to be the Ordinance of Jesus Christ* (London: Benjamin Allen, 1643), 20. Barbone agreed that believer's baptism by immersion was the proper form of baptism, but he could not from that conclusion invalidate every other baptism in England.

<sup>14</sup> Note that Jessey believed that a mutual covenant between the members was the form of a church. He came to this conclusion through the hypothetical scenario of three men becoming Christians on a deserted island and then desiring to become a church. He believed that their mutual commitment to worship the Lord correctly together made them a church (Jessey, *Storehouse of Provision*, 68-69). Barbone and Bunyan, on the other hand, concluded that what qualified a man for membership in the universal church must also for a particular church: a true profession of faith; see Praisegod Barbone, *A Defence of the Lawfulness of Baptizing Infants* (London: M. Bell, 1644), 36-37; John Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment about Water-Baptism, No Bar to*

This led Kiffin's colleague, John Spilsbury, to offer an astounding (and to Barbone confounding) compromise, "For answer to this, I must distinguish in Baptisme between the truth in the doctrine of Baptisme, and the outward administration of the same."<sup>15</sup> The doctrine of baptism, including the mode and subject, belonged inviolately to God; the administration of baptism, its ceremonial use in worship, belonged to the church as defined by her covenant. This protected Baptists both from doctrinal deviation and an unbearable liturgical precision. However, not all Baptists were satisfied with his compromise, which is why the First London Confession held its identifiably vague tensions about the nature of the church. William Kiffin believed that baptism was the form of the church; John Spilsbury had just concluded from his debate with Barbone that baptism could *not* be that form. The lingering issues established in this early controversy—the distinction between the church and the individual, and the relationship between the church and her ceremonies—greatly illuminate the course of the open-communion debate and demonstrate its significance to churches today.

### The Course of the Open-Communion Debate

The basic impetus for open-communion, namely that a church accept as members those who had been sprinkled as infants or not baptized at all, had occupied Bunyan for some time. He first put his conclusions in print in *A Confession of My Faith* (1672). Defending his "practice of worship," Bunyan began by indicating those with which he would and would not hold church fellowship (communion). To Bunyan, a church was a "community of visible Saints"; such sainthood was determined by their faith, experience, and conversation, and not their baptism.<sup>16</sup> He did not, as he would later say, *despise* believer's baptism, but he did not see it as a delineator of a visible saint or child of God.<sup>17</sup> This was a pastoral concern, "That if there be any Saints in the Antichristian Church [i.e., the Anglican Church], my heart, and the

---

*Communion* (London: n.p., 1673), 12, 50. They argued that men through their imperfect understanding of Scripture could not completely destroy God's work in creating a church.

<sup>15</sup> Spilsbury, *Treatise Concerning Baptisme*, 41. Spilsbury even joined Kiffin's church sometime around 1647. This is not to say that Spilsbury in any way minimized baptism. He said clearly that "the ordinance of baptisme instituted by Christ is so essentiall to the constitution of the Church under the new Testament, that none can be true in her constitution without it" (Ibid., 32). His use of the word "true" generated no small backlash against the Baptists. In his response to Spilsbury, Barbone introduced a secondary distinction between the "being" and "well-being" of a church, "there being difference, as before, betwixt a thing and the corruption that attends it." To Barbone, man could not destroy God's church through his error (Barbone, *Defence of Baptizing Infants*, 4, 7, 10). Interestingly, Knollys would follow this distinction, saying, "The Well-Being of a *particular* Church of Saints, doth *principally* consist in three things, viz. Oneness, Order, and Government," which by Order he meant worship ("the Administration of God's Sacred Ordinances"), membership, ordination, and discipline (Knollys, *World that Now is*, 50, 52).

<sup>16</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of my Faith*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 41.

door of our Congregation is open to receive them, into closest fellowship with us.”<sup>18</sup> But his view had a sharp theological edge:

That touching shaddowish, or figurative ordinances; I believe that Christ hath ordained but two in his Church, viz. Water baptism and the Supper of the Lord: both which are of excellent use to the Church, in this world; they being to us representations of the death, and resurrection of Christ, and are as God shall make them, helps to our faith therein; But I count them not the fundamentals of our Christianity; nor grounds or rule to communion with Saints: servants they are, and our mystical Ministers, to teach and instruct us, in the most weighty matters of the Kingdom of God: I therefore here declare my reverent esteem of them; yet dare not remove them, as some do, from the place, and end, where by God they are set and appointed; nor ascribe unto them more, then they were ordered to have in their first, and primitive institution: Tis possible to commit Idolatry, even with Gods own appointments.<sup>19</sup>

Of great note was his final accusation, that the Baptists essentially worshiped baptism as an idol. In no uncertain terms, he had turned the famous anti-Anglican statement, “the ceremonies are idols to Formalists,”<sup>20</sup> against them. In other words, the Baptists treated baptism the same way Anglicans treated the Prayer Book. That made them idolaters, respecting “more a form, then the spirit, and power of Godliness.” Furthermore, because God had not established a law making baptism a “wall of division,”<sup>21</sup> the Baptists had carried themselves with the same arrogance as those who imposed the Anglican ceremonies.

The first man to respond to Bunyan was Thomas Paul, Kiffin’s one-time co-pastor who wisely secured a preface to his book, *Some Serious Reflections* (1673), from Kiffin. Paul recognized the end to which Bunyan’s line of argument proceeded:

I perceive *Moses* is more beholden to you then [*sic*] Christ; the Servant then [*sic*] the Son, if *Moses* Law in his Moral precepts, be the onely bounds of a Christians Holiness or Sanctification, under the Gospel, for what end, then are all those Gospel-Commands, especially in instituted Worship, they are in your cense of little use to us: obedience to them doth not add to our Holiness, therefore a breach of them, by that rule, must be no part of our sin.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of my Faith*, 132. He used a powerful mantra, “*God hath received him, Christ hath received him, therefore do you receive him*” (Ibid., 92).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>20</sup> George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland* (n.p.: S. I., 1637; reprint, Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1993), 198.

<sup>21</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of my Faith*, 116–17.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Paul, *Some Serious Reflections On that Part of M. Bunions Confession of Faith Touching Church Communion with Unbaptized Persons* (London: Francis Smith, 1673), 6.



In other words, assuming Christ had ordained baptism to be part of the church's instituted worship—which was the Baptists' primary understanding of the purpose of the ordinances—Bunyan had thus rendered all ordinances irrelevant. If it did not matter to Christ whether or not his church obeyed him in baptism, it would equally not matter if they prayed, preached, or shared the Lord's Supper. Bunyan was manipulating Christ's worship in the very way by which he accused the Baptists.<sup>23</sup>

For any who might believe this but a minor element of a more important debate, consider Bunyan's harsh and direct response to Paul in his quickly released work, *Differences in Judgment* (1673):

But that I practise Instituted Worship, upon the same account as *Paul* did Circumcision, and shaving, is too bold for you to presume to imagine. What? Because I will not suffer Water to carry away the Epistles from the Christians; and because I will not let Water-baptism be the Rule, the Door, the Bolt, the Bar, the Wall of Division between the Righteous, & the Righteous; must I therefore be judged to be a Man without Conscience to the Worship of Jesus Christ? The Lord deliver me from Superstitious, and Idolatrous thoughts about any [of] the Ordinances of Christ, and of God.<sup>24</sup>

A strong, underlying theological current in England during this time, Puritanism, had as its primary impulse the purity of worship; Baptist, Independent, Presbyterian, all alike desired nothing more than to worship God purely in their churches, and Bunyan put himself squarely in that stream. But Thomas Paul had caught a position that Bunyan left vague, and Bunyan had no choice but to clarify its true implication: “[Baptism] is none of those Laws, neither any part of them, that the Church, as a Church, should shew her Obedience by. For albeit that Baptism be given by Christ our Lord to the Church, yet not for them to worship him by as a Church.” Bunyan recognized, as both Barbone and Jessey had a generation before, that the Baptist position would “un-church” every paedobaptist church. He was unwilling to allow the form of a ceremony that kind of power.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> In Bunyan's response to that accusation, he did not back down from his assertions or their implications: “The act of Water-baptism hath not place in Church-worship, neither in whole nor in part; wherefore pressing it upon the Church is to no purpose at all. Object. *Why may you not as well say that Edification is greater than breaking of Bread?* Answ. So it is, else that should never have been Instituted to edifie withal; that which serveth, is not greater than he that is served thereby. Baptism and the Lord's-Supper both, were made for us, not we for them; wherefore both were made for our Edification, but no one for our destruction. But again, The Lord's-Supper, not Baptism, is for the Church, as a Church; therefore as we will maintain the Church's edifying, that must be maintained in it” (Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 52).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 50. Bunyan reiterated this point multiple times, ensuring no misunderstanding on the part of his reader. “As to those Commands that respect God's Instituted Worship in a Church, as a Church, I have told you that Baptism is none of them” (*Ibid.*, 15). “That Water-baptism giveth neither being, nor well-being to a Church, neither is [it] any part of that Instituted Worship of God” (*Ibid.*, 50). “There are some of the Ordinances that, be they neglected, the being of a Church, as to her visible Gospel-Constitution, is taken quite away; but Baptism is none of them” (*Ibid.*, 87). However, Bunyan also added a rather inconsistent caveat: “God also doth thus [have patience] with respect to his Worship in the Church, he commands all and every whit of his will to be done, but beareth with our coming short in this, and that, [and] another Duty” (*Ibid.*, 75).

The crux of the matter was the Puritan interpretation of the definition of worship, in this case outward, corporate, instituted worship. Instituted by whom? Not the Crown, but only Christ. A Puritan reaction to Anglican ceremonialism led those who had this Puritan impulse (including Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians) to adopt a Reformed paradigm often called the “regulative principle of worship.” Distancing themselves from “book worship,” they acknowledged only those ceremonies of worship instituted and practiced by Christ and his apostles. In their words, the New Testament must be “the sole Canon and rule of all matters of *Religion*, and the worship & service of God whatsoever.”<sup>26</sup> As motivation, they insisted, “In the matters of Worship, God stands upon little things.”<sup>27</sup> This put Bunyan in an interesting position. In the first place, he desired pure worship as much as anyone, and he acknowledged the regulative principle as the measuring stick for that purity; he considered himself a Puritan in the same way the paedobaptist Independents and Presbyterians did. In the second place, he agreed with Baptists that true baptism was believer’s baptism by immersion. He acknowledged that baptism in the New Testament followed a profession of faith, and its mode taught the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,<sup>28</sup> and those who had been baptized as infants had fallen short in this obedience. But in the third place, he did not believe that “water-baptism” made one a Christian any more than failure to be baptized derailed one’s salvation. As a pastor, he argued “that thousands of thousands that could not consent thereto, as we have more gloriously [to believer’s baptism by immersion], then we are like to do, acquitted themselves and their Christianity before men, and are now with the innumerable company of Angels.” A church could only protect its purity by observing the visible sainthood (“faith and holiness”) of its members, and the ceremony of water-baptism could not help it do so.<sup>29</sup> He thus concluded that the Baptists had made more of baptism than they ought, idolatrizing it.

However, Bunyan still had to harmonize those three contentions, and his solution as noted above was quite unexpected and ingenious. To justify removing baptism as a bar to church communion, Bunyan removed baptism as an act of church worship. The Puritan impulse for pure church worship did not apply to baptism. This is the most significant and overlooked development in the open-communion debate: Bunyan declared baptism to be an act of *individual* worship and therefore not liable to the so-called regulative principle. Bunyan

---

<sup>26</sup> Bradshaw, *Several Treatises of Worship and Ceremonies*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel-Worship, or, The Right Manner of Sanctifying the Name of God in General* (London: Peter Cole, 1658), 11, cited in Kiffin, *Sober Discourse*, 50. Burroughs was a Westminster Independent and pastored two significant churches in London. His sermons were published posthumously.

<sup>28</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of My Faith*, 76-77, 91, 87-88[2]. After page 95, the typesetter accidentally reset the page numbering to 86; this citation comes from the second instance of pages 87 and 88. Historians argue whether or not Bunyan should be considered a Baptist based on his conclusions in this debate and the fact that he never explicitly endorsed believer’s baptism by immersion. Bunyan may not have used those words, but he clearly supported the theology behind them. Those coming to him out of the Anglican Church came unbaptized. I consider Bunyan a Baptist just as Jessey is considered a Baptist.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 70. “A visible Saint he is, but not made so by Baptism; for he must be a visible Saint before, else he ought not to be baptized” (*Ibid.*, 76).

identified himself fully in step with the prevailing nonconformist thoughts about church worship: "Although we receive Members unbaptized, we leave not God's Instituted Worship at uncertainties, especially what he hath commanded us as his Church; we only profess our want of Light in some things."<sup>30</sup> Once a Christian had sufficient personal light with respect to baptism, he should be baptized; otherwise, he should be left alone about it. As personal worship, the primary purpose for baptism was "That their own Faith by that figure might be strengthened in the death and resurrection of Christ."<sup>31</sup> Coercing a baptism availed nothing.

Importantly, Bunyan appended Henry Jessey's defense of the open-communion position. Jessey argued that by making water baptism the form of the church, Baptists had set baptism in the place of the Spirit. Whereas the Spirit united professing believers into the body of Christ, water baptism only divided—"pulling in pieces what the Spirit hath put together."<sup>32</sup> The fruit of their emphasis, namely their many schisms and arguments, should give Baptists pause. But Jessey went a step further along lines that Barbone had earlier explored. Baptist insistence on water baptism set them up for liturgical collapse:

It must be confessed, That if exact Practice be required, and clearness in Gospel-Institution before Communion; who dare be so bold as to say his hands are clean, and that he hath done all the Lord Commands, as to Institutions in his Worship? and must not confess the Change of Times doth necessitate some Variation, if not Alteration either in the matter or manner of things according to Primitive Practice, yet owned for true Churches, and received as visible Saints, though ignorant either wholly or in great measure, in laying on of hands, singing, washing of feet, and anointing with oyl, in the Gifts of the Spirit, which is the *Urim and Thummim* of the Gospel?<sup>33</sup>

Baptists were not at all uniform in these other practices, some of which were expressly identified as ordinances (it must not be overlooked that the laying on of hands and singing were inordinately destructive to the British Baptist tradition precisely for this reason). Why should baptism receive treatment these other ordinances did not? Those endorsing open-communion did not thereby despise baptism; they simply were unwilling to give it more weight than God himself had. Closed-communion Baptists mirrored the error of the paedobaptists who had built a case for infant baptism where God had not, thus violating the second commandment by "making the likeness of things of their own contrivance, of force with Institutions in the Worship of God." He warned Baptists to reconsider their hard stance, "lest while we look for an Example, we do not overlook a Command upon a mistake."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of my Faith*, 76. He later clarified, "He therefore that doth it [be baptized] according to his light, doth well; and he that doth it not, or dare not do it for want of light doth not ill; for he approveth his heart to be sincere with God" (Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 95[2]).

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 113.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21, 112. Note that Bunyan had earlier readily admitted willingness to overlook an example to the opposite end (*Ibid.*, 78).

It took William Kiffin nearly a decade to issue his famous response to Bunyan, *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church Communion* (1681), because he did not feel worthy of such a weighty matter. This work was far more than a defense of believer's baptism; it was a definitive declaration of Baptist beliefs about worship. The opening of his preface bore the crux of his argument: "What was Praiseworthy in those Primitive *Christians*, to whom the Apostle *Paul* writes, 1 *Cor.* 11. 2. Can be no Blemish, but really a Duty in other Christians, in after times, to imitate." The apostle Paul wrote about preserving traditions, by which Kiffin understood him to mean doctrines, ordinances, instructions, and institutions. But Kiffin singled out one specific area in which he stood against "Romish Opinion": "in matters related to Divine Worship." The greatest audacity of man and bane of Christianity was "Additions and Subtractions in the Worship of God, which are imposed as Magisterially as if enstamp with a Divine Character." There was no greater affront to God than to violate his given order of worship, and the honor of God in worship could not be compromised; "I have no other design, but the preserving the Ordinances of Christ, in their purity and Order as they are left unto us in the holy *Scriptures* of Truth; and to warn the Churches *To keep close to the Rule*, lest they being found not to Worship the Lord according to his prescrib'd Order he make a *Breach* among them." If water baptism was given by Christ to the churches and passed down by the apostles, then Christians should certainly not be ashamed of it, lest Christ be ashamed of them in due turn. Furthermore, no Christian should be found wanting in that rule of worship because his very baptism was itself an initiation into God's "Service and Worship" and the "Foundation of all our Faith and Profession."<sup>35</sup> Kiffin could not even countenance the question; man's very relationship with God was at stake.

To begin, Kiffin believed that Bunyan built his argument against a straw man. Barring the door of the church did not bar the door of heaven any more than being baptized produced salvation. Simply because he would not receive an individual into church membership did not mean that Kiffin would refuse to show Christian love and charity. Rather, church fellowship required a different layer of communion. At the very least, someone joining a church should agree with and submit to that church's perspective on the ordinances. If a church allowed a significant disagreement (such as the propriety of believer's baptism) not to affect church membership, "does not such a practice plainly suppose that it is unnecessary?"<sup>36</sup> The larger argument was that Kiffin indeed believed that baptism was necessary for the church to worship God because Christ gave baptism to the church for that purpose. Of all ordinances Scripture was explicit about baptism: "Here we have the Order of Gospel Administration, not only Commanded, but Practised. First they Preached; and such as were Converted, were Baptized; such as were Baptized, walkt in Church-Fellowship, &c. Breaking of Bread and Prayers." Christ never indicated a separate way of admitting church members, therefore admittance by baptism must still be in force.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Kiffin, *Sober Discourse*, To the Christian Reader, and Preface (neither paginated). He repeated his statement about baptism as an act of sacred initiation and dedication on page 100 and attributed it to John Owen.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 21-22, 13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 89.

In multiple places, Kiffin turned Bunyan's argument against him. Bunyan did not accept infant baptism; he believed that people coming into his church with that background were coming unbaptized. But nowhere in the Bible was "unbaptism" approved or baptism considered unnecessary. Bunyan's position was the human invention, not the Baptists'. If baptism could be shown as an act of the church's worship, Bunyan would thus be proven the idolater. But Kiffin did not want the paedobaptists to believe themselves exempt from his argument. Infant baptism was not commanded or practiced in the Bible, which meant that it was also a human invention. The same argument used against "unbaptism" would demonstrate that infant baptism was idolatrous. Kiffin's conclusion was unequivocal:

From the whole of what hath been said, we may Infer these Corollaries or Inferences,

1. That God hath Prescribed a particular way and method in which he will be Worshipped.

2. That he is so tender and nice therein, that the least Variation from his own Stated Order will not be allowed by him, which appears by the punishment of such as Transgressed, and the praises given to such as kept his Ordinances and they were Delivered unto them, mentioned at large before.

3. That to swerve from the Lords Institutions, and Invert his Order, has a direct Tendency to Destroy all Modes of Worship, and consequently all the publick and solemn Exercise of Religion, in as much as the same Reason by which one Ordinance may be changed, or Discontinued, will equally prove the change or Discontinuance of any, yea of all at long Run.

And if the first Churches might not be Constituted without this Ordinance of Baptism, neither may those that succeed them, because the same Reason that made Baptism necessary to them, makes it also necessary to us. For Gospel Order settled by Apostolical Authority and Direction, as this was, hath not lost any of its native worth and efficacy, or obliging Vertue, by any Disuse or Discontinuance occasioned by any, but ought to be the same to us now, as it was to them in the beginning of such Order; especially considering the day wherein we live, many indeavouring to bring in their own Inventions into the Worship of God, which should make all Christians be more careful and Zealous to Cleave to the Institutions of Jesus Christ, as they were first Delivered by the holy Penmen, and the Practice of the Primitive Christians.<sup>38</sup>

Baptism was indeed an act of the church's worship blessed by Christ: "*Baptism* is not only ordained and ratified by the great Law-giver, as well as the Supper, but that it is dignified with as *Spiritual Encomiums* as any Gospel Ordinance can be."<sup>39</sup> To Kiffin, the open-communion debate was not merely about a requirement for church membership; it was about preserving God's church and maintaining man's relationship with God:

Because it preserves the Beauty of the House of God: For whatsoever is prescribed by the Lord Jesus, with respect to his Worship, is full of Beauty, Harmony, and Order, every thing

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 57-59.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 26.

answering its respective end, and what is signified thereby: and as Grace shines in its lustre in the orderly exercise thereof; so do the Ordinances of Christ: For as Regeneration is the first work of God upon the Soul, in order to the exercise of the Graces of Christ given, so hath he appointed Baptism, as that which is the first Ordinance to be Practised.<sup>40</sup>

The gospel of Christ provided more than a way to eternal salvation, it offered a means by which man could enjoy a relationship with God in this life. For that man then to decide to modify God's gracious means smacked of an impudence incompatible with a regenerated spirit. Baptists were not the idolaters; those who made optional believer's baptism by immersion were.

### **The Significance of the Open-Communion Debate**

As stated in the introduction, some Baptist churches have begun questioning whether or not baptism should be a condition for church membership. Placing this debate in its original form, as a matter of the church's worship, should help us re-ascertain its significance. First and foremost, it gives the debate an importance that might otherwise be missed. Bunyan and Kiffin did not think questions about baptism a quaint disagreement; they worried about the nature of the church and the relationship between God and man. Bunyan believed that the Baptists had turned the ordinance of baptism into a wall of division God did not design it to be. Kiffin believed that Bunyan had turned a clear command of God's worship into an option by misunderstanding its purpose as an act of the church's worship. There were two relationships in the background of this debate: that between the church and the individual, and that between the church and her ceremonies. To Bunyan, the individual preceded the church. An individual's standing before God came before any rule created by a church, and an individual's worship must be treated separately from that of the church. As an act of individual worship, baptism was not subject to the rules applying to the church. Kiffin soundly disagreed. To Kiffin, baptism lay at the intersection of individual and church worship, and both individual and church were under the Word of God. Neither an individual's desire nor a church's grace could set aside God's rule for worship, which clearly included baptism. To Bunyan, the church must be separated from her ceremonies, or ordinances. He felt that the Baptists were unfairly punishing individuals for a former church's ceremonial failures. Such an error could not somehow invalidate that entire church; every church has erred in some way. Kiffin again disagreed. To Kiffin, a church was her ceremonial action. Excusing any church's clear error in a matter so precious as God's worship set a dangerous precedent. A church desiring to be a church of God must carefully and unceasingly seek to perform only those actions God has given them by which they must worship him.

Second, identifying baptism as an act of worship highlights the hermeneutical dimension underlying the debate. I earlier mentioned what is often called the regulative principle of worship, that only those acts commanded or practiced in the New Testament are lawful in worship. Its traditional counterpart, the normative principle of worship, drew the ire of Kiffin:

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 38.

It is supposed, That whatsoever is not forbidden in Scripture, is Lawful; and so the Receiving of Believers that are not baptized to the Supper, being not Prohibited, is therefore Lawful.

Now that this is a Pernicious way of Argument, has been largely Demonstrated about the beginning, as tending to bring all Humane Inventions into Gods Worship, to which we refer . . . and I very well remember, That the Old Nonconformists who faithfully followed the Lord according to the Light they had received, rather than they would kneel at the Sacrament, thought it their Duty to forbear the Practice of that great Ordinance, giving this as their Reason: To leave (they say) the Practice of Christ and his Apostles in the manner of Receiving the Sacrament, and to follow the Practice of Men, in a posture Invented by Men is not safe.<sup>41</sup>

Kiffin, like many others of Puritan leanings in England, verbally embraced the regulative principle (as his first corollary argues), and that was his dominant means of biblical support. Jessey and Barbone, as described above, saw a great error in such a proposed hermeneutic: Scripture did not address every condition of every ordinance. Every pastor in every church had to infer circumstances of the ordinances for use in a church's worship. Bunyan noted that denying the Lord's Supper to any Christian for any reason other than personal examination was itself a violation of that hermeneutic. Kiffin's response, that every known circumstance implied "an express prohibition of the contrary,"<sup>42</sup> satisfied him but probably not Bunyan because Bunyan, too, claimed to follow the regulative principle. Both parties saw significant inconsistencies in the other's hermeneutic, which becomes apparent when the context invokes a term such as "regulative principle." This debate addressed the nature of the church *and* the nature of Scripture. It clarified that the parties involved had a theological priority *prior* to Scripture: a desire to rightly know and worship God. Their use of Scripture followed that priority.

Finally, the open-communion debate forces a church to explain the relationship between baptism and membership. Bunyan complained that Baptists made baptism the initiating ordinance into church membership. However, their hermeneutic could not support such a conclusion because there was no testimony in Scripture of the idea; in fact, there were examples of people being baptized in Scripture without mention of a church (the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and Lydia).<sup>43</sup> Thomas Paul explicitly denied believing or teaching that baptism was the initiating ordinance into church membership. Rather, "consent ON all hands" made someone a member of a church and not baptism. Kiffin then explored the implications—if baptism was not into a local church, then what was it? His solution was simple: believers "should still be Planted together by Baptism, not into this or that particular Church,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 120-21. Those who sided with Bunyan pointed out that the Bible never commanded forbearing the Supper, which makes that nonconformist practice itself an example of the normative principle.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>43</sup> Bunyan, *Confession of my Faith*, 70-75.

but into that one Church of Christ, which is distributed into several parts and particular Societies.”<sup>44</sup> Because believer’s baptism by immersion was the only acceptable form of that ordinance of God’s worship, Kiffin’s vision clearly meant one great Baptist church in each city.<sup>45</sup> Considering the current day’s geographic mobility and proliferation of denominations, Kiffin’s conclusion likely sounds naïve, even alien. Yet it is a perfectly consistent conclusion from his theological concerns. Indeed, this debate opens questions that are significant and forces us to pursue their answers.

## Conclusions

If a reader has not considered some of these questions before, they might seem daunting, but that is why I find the open-communion debate so important. Matters of worship cannot and must not be separated from matters of theology, in particular hermeneutics and ecclesiology. Modern attempts to do so have created a mixture of church services, some of which may not be traceable to any sort of biblical precedent. What should we think of the questions raised in this debate? To begin, what is the form of a church? What is it that turns a group of Christians into a church? Jessey, Barbone, and Spilsbury are right: baptism cannot be that form for all of the reasons they gave above. Consider the wide variety of baptismal ceremonies in Baptist churches today: different configurations of baptisteries, even pools and ponds; different words used on the part of the person baptizing and being baptized; different responses by the congregation; different timings, placements, and everything else. Clearly, we have separated the doctrine of baptism from the ceremony of baptism. And most Baptist churches accept “transfers” of membership from other Baptist churches. Likewise, a profession of faith cannot be the form of a church, else that would render local churches indistinguishable in a New Testament sense. Yet many Baptist churches still consider a profession of faith and baptism to be critical parameters for a church. That leaves Spilsbury’s conclusion, that faith and baptism are elements of the covenant that binds the people into a church of God. His solution allows for the variety of baptismal ceremonies and makes a place for paedobaptist churches that have erred on major elements of that ceremony (mode, participant, and purpose).

The New Testament clearly teaches believer’s baptism by immersion, and it is understandable why Kiffin would elevate its importance in his own ecclesiological environment. But it was also unnecessary. Bunyan clearly built a straw man of false dichotomies; salvation should not be conflated with church membership. Baptism does not have to be made the very form of a church to be prioritized. This is where the context of worship should really help us today. One of the most important tasks given to the church is the pure worship of God. That means our church covenants should highlight corporate worship according to the New Testament patterns. Because baptism is a part (and I would go so far as to agree with Kiffin that it is the foundational part) of every church’s worship, there can be no mistake about its place in that covenant. Does this leave space for our ceremonial diversity? I believe it does. And it

---

<sup>44</sup> Paul, *Some Serious Reflections*, 4; Kiffin, *Sober Discourse*, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Not surprisingly, Hanserd Knollys held a similar position (Knollys, *World that Now is*, 8, 44, 45).



also gives us necessary and appropriate doctrinal parameters for that diversity. Baptism is given to the church as a means by which it worships God. While Bunyan was correct that individuals are not baptized *into* a local church, his conclusion that baptism had little to do with that church (and everything to do with that individual) was not. In baptism, the individual declares faith in Christ and the church affirms; the individual follows Christ and the church enables; the individual symbolically enters new life in the Kingdom and the church symbolically receives on behalf of that Kingdom. It is an act that should give a local church a unique sense of unity with all churches of God on earth. Because Bunyan believed baptism isolated Baptists from other Christians, he concluded that the “one baptism” in 1 Corinthians 12 could only be salvation.<sup>46</sup> But we do not have to be so cynical. Baptism can and should be a beautiful picture of unity—union of the individual with Christ, of the individual with the Church, of all churches with one another—but all within the doctrinal parameters of what God has declared right for his worship.

Baptism should not be minimized or neglected. Certainly, churches should not make decisions about it based on expediency, public pressure, or some other form of worldly input. Rather, it should be treated as an act of the church’s worship. The debate related above should make it clear that doing so opens a myriad of possibilities for that church. Tracing all the implications, only some of which were examined above, will be a challenging but fruitful endeavor for church leadership, if only because it forces that leadership to identify the rules by which it makes decisions for worship. Let baptism retain its rightful place as a foundational act of worship to the glory of God. And let that place solidify the reason why Baptists acknowledge believer’s baptism by immersion.

---

<sup>46</sup> Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, 28-30.

# Implications for Worship from the Mount of Transfiguration

Scott Connell<sup>1</sup>

The Mount of Transfiguration has long been considered one of the most mysterious events in the New Testament (Matt 17:1–13; Mark 9:2–13; Luke 9:28–36). Some source-critical scholars have considered it no more than a symbolic (non-historical) story created to demonstrate the Messiahship and deity of Christ. Others have believed it to be an ecstatic vision experienced either by Peter or even Christ himself. Still others have considered it a misplaced resurrection narrative out of chronological order in the synoptic gospels.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for attempting to explain *away* the miraculous nature of this event are predictable, though still unnecessary.

According to John McGuckin, whose work surveys the first eight centuries of attempts to interpret this event, the dominant approach of the church fathers (and that of conservative scholars today) is that of a supernatural historical event reflecting a high Christology. It was a marvelous revelation for the disciples on that mountain. McGuckin describes it as “an epiphany of the essential deity of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Webber writes, “The transfiguration seems to be a preview of the Resurrection, and a verification of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah.”<sup>4</sup> Kent Hughes explains, “This is not only a declaration about Christ, but a prophecy of what was to come.”<sup>5</sup> The event held implications for the present as an affirmation of Christ’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Connell, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Music and Worship Leadership and Program Coordinator for Worship and Music Studies at Boyce College, the undergraduate school of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> The ecstatic vision or dream interpretation was advanced primarily by Albert Schweitzer (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906], 380ff.) but has been long since discredited. The more influential view is that of the misplaced resurrection narrative identified with Rudolph Bultmann (*History of the Synoptic Tradition* [New York: Harper and Row, 1963], 249) and decisively rebutted by Robert H. Stein in “Is the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8) a Misplaced Resurrection Account?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 79–96. For a summary of these and other contemporary views, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 434–35.

<sup>3</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 1–4. McGuckin surveys the broad spectrum of interpretations regarding this event as held in the first 800 years of church tradition generally and by various early church fathers of the same period specifically.

<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, The Complete Library of Christian Worship, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 199.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 17.

deity, but also for the future as a preview of the coming kingdom. The presence of Moses and Elijah in the revelation also communicated a compelling perspective upon the past.

Many approaches to understanding this event lean heavily upon its parallels with a similar theophany that Moses experienced on Mt. Sinai in the Old Testament (Exod 24–34) and therefore may be seen as a *type* foreshadowing this occasion.<sup>6</sup> The effort of discerning additional implications for worship is aided by considering both of these episodes as worship events.<sup>7</sup> Each demonstrates an occurrence of worship as man encounters *unveiled* deity in a theophany and Christophany, respectively. Each also serves as a prototype for authentic worship relative to the covenant in which the incident is centered. Mt. Sinai is the locale where the old covenant was established and its cultic practice of worship formally inaugurated. As I will demonstrate, the Mount of Transfiguration is a unique event in the New Testament that seems to reflect a physical manifestation of the spiritual type of worship encounter that Jesus explains in John 4. It prefigures the future glory that will be revealed to all believers in eternal worship, the fulfillment of which our temporal worship is a pattern today (Heb 8). “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). Comparing Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration establishes priorities of earthly worship that point toward heavenly fulfillment. Contrasting the two experiences highlights the distinct implications of the latter for Christian worship.

## Mt. Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration

Few commentators discuss the Mount of Transfiguration apart from its seemingly undeniable connection points to Mt. Sinai. Parallels between the two include (1) the number in the party;<sup>8</sup> (2) the reference to six days between a key previous event and the encounter;<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Some critical scholars see these parallels so significant as to consider the Sinai narrative as a literary archetype to the Mount of Transfiguration (McGuckin, *Transfiguration of Christ*, 13).

<sup>7</sup> While the event of the Transfiguration occurred chronologically before the cross and resurrection, it is generally agreed by commentators that the event itself was a foreshadowing of the glory that will be revealed as a result of the new covenant (Rom 8:18, 2 Cor 4:17). Therefore, the disciples were permitted to briefly behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, which makes it a partial fulfillment of 2 Cor 3:18, which serves as a premise for this paper: the work of the cross permits worshipers to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. While the disciples’ revelation in this event was still external (as it was for Moses in Exod 24 and 34), the full revelation taught in 2 Corinthians is an unveiling of the heart, affording the revelation of Christ in the internal temple of the heart, where the religious affections are at work. These revelations occur “from glory to glory” until the final day of full glorification, which will be both external and internal. The Mount of Transfiguration serves as a helpful model for new covenant worship due to its similarities with Moses’ encounter with God, but also its distinct differences due to the now centralized role of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> The *named* members of the Sinai party are Moses with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John. Moses also took seventy of the elders of Israel (Exod 24:9).

<sup>9</sup> Matt 17:1 and Mark 9:2 seem to many commentators to be reminiscent of Exod 24:9–18, where the cloud covered Mt. Sinai with the glory of God for six days. “And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud” (Exod 24:16b). Using the reference point in the synoptic gospels, the event that occurred six days earlier in Caesarea Philippi included Jesus’ prediction that “there are some standing here who

(3) the place of the encounter with God (i.e., a high mountain); (4) the manifestation of the presence of God's glory in the midst of his people (i.e., the "tabernacling" of his presence); and (5) the transforming effects of that manifestation upon the people involved.<sup>10</sup> The main difference between the two is the presence of Christ in his incarnated form and the degree of effect upon the attendees. Therefore the differences between the two accounts must be considered to be due to the illuminating light and transforming power of fulfillment of Jesus as the new Moses, and the new covenant that Jesus came to ratify. Both undergird the New Testament experience even though the cross and resurrection are still to come.<sup>11</sup> It is a preview for the disciples of the glory of Christ (2 Pet 1:16) demonstrated in the resurrection, the ascension, and second coming, and is therefore reflective of new covenant worship in spirit and truth that will one day be fully experienced, but even now is experienced in part (Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:9–12, 1 John 3:2).

The implications for corporate worship presented here will be founded in part upon Paul's discussion in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18. In this passage, Paul contrasts the two covenants and argues that the new covenant is greater because it alone has the power to unveil the glory of God in the face of Christ for believers and therefore the power to conform them to the image of Christ. Based upon this text, it will be argued below that this will be the effect of worship when it is Christ-centered and gospel focused, which are the primary implications for worship from the transfiguration event.

---

will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matt 16:28). Luke uses Hellenistic reckoning of time by indicating that it was eight days later (Luke 9:28).

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Stein writes of the parallels between these two events: "The imagery [of the Mount of Transfiguration] draws heavily from the OT, in particular from the theophany to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus. Some of the OT images that parallel Luke's account are a mountain on which revelation takes place (Exod 19:3), the alteration of Jesus' face (Exod 34:29), the glory of the Lord (Exod 24:16), a cloud (Exod 24:16; 33:10) . . . and fear (Exod 34:30)" (*Luke, The New American Commentary*, vol. 24, ed. David S. Dockery [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 282). Joel B. Green writes, "In Luke's model readers may well recognize his use of what have become stock expressions or conventional patterns borrowed from and based on the OT story of the Exodus (esp. Exod 24–34)—for example, the presence of companions, the setting on a mountain, the explicit mention of Moses, Jesus' change of countenance, reference to tents (or tabernacles), the cloud, the motif of fear, the clear allusion to Deut 18:15 ('Listen to him'), and the Lukan summary of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah having to do with his 'exodus'" (Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997], 377–78). Green later refers to the "profusion of echoes of the story of exodus in this co-text." "The term itself is used in the LXX and Hellenistic Jewish literature with reference to the exodus from bondage in Egypt" (ἔξοδος) (382).

<sup>11</sup> The overtones of the gospel in this encounter are not subtle. Specifically, the supernatural appearing of Moses and Elijah representing the fulfillment of the law and prophets in Christ, and their discussion of Christ's "departure" (e.g., *exodus*) are clear references to the gospel events that are central to this encounter and the new covenant. Joel B. Green writes, "Thus, by way of such motifs as the recognition of Jesus as God's Son, the presence of a heavenly voice, prayer, Jesus' glory, drowsy disciples, the importance of 'sight,' the clouds, the presence of 'two men,' and so on, one may recognize in the transfiguration account echoes of earlier and later scenes in the Gospel and Acts: the baptism of Jesus, his temptation in the wilderness, the confession of Peter, his agony in the garden, the resurrection, the ascension, and the anticipation of his parousia." In a related footnote Green explains, "These connections are also widely noted" and cites four other sources for support (Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 379). More regarding these allusions to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ is demonstrated below.

## Two Mountains of God<sup>12</sup>

### Mount Sinai and the Old Covenant

In some ways, the nature of worship's development—as well as the entire redemption story—can be summarized simply in the two accounts of Mt. Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration. In Exodus 19, the people of Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai having recently been delivered from the bondage and oppression of Egypt in a stunning and miraculous manner. They had been delivered for the purpose of worshiping and serving God, but were shortly wandering in the desert, complaining and longing to return to captivity. God had initiated this deliverance through an exiled Israelite who had experienced his own encounter with the God of Israel in a profound way on the same mountain. Moses' extraordinary calling from God at the burning bush on Mt. Horeb (Exod 3) served as the impetus to return to Egypt as God's agent of deliverance for his people.<sup>13</sup> Under his leadership, Israel learned of God's character and power through the devastating display of the ten plagues in Egypt (including the death of the firstborn son and the institution of the Passover). They also experienced the miraculous deliverance from Pharaoh's army by the parting of the Red Sea; the miraculous provision of their physical needs in the wilderness with manna from heaven and water from the rock; and a stunning defeat of Amalek through the simple human means of Moses holding his hands up with the staff of God over the battle, with some assistance (Exod 7:1–12:51; 16:1–17:7; and 17:8–16). Through all of this, Moses came to be seen as the central figure and leader among the people of Israel and serve as a *type* of Christ in the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> He

---

<sup>12</sup> Gen 8; Gen 22; 1 Kgs 18; Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:10–13; and Exod 19 and 34. There are several references in Scripture to the mountain of God, most to Mount Horeb/Sinai. This is the mountain where God first called Moses; where Aaron was told by God to go to meet Moses to prepare for deliverance; and then where God brought the people of Israel back from captivity to enact his covenant with them. It was the mountain where they met God. See Exod 3:1, 4:27, 18:5, 24:13, Ps 36:6, Ps 68:15, and Ezek 28:14. Peter would later refer to the site of the Mount of Transfiguration as the “holy mountain” where the deity of Jesus was revealed and they heard the voice of God (2 Pet 1:18).

<sup>13</sup> John I. Durham writes of the two encounters at Sinai in Exod 3 and 19–40: “Theophany and call are brought together in the narrative dealing with Moses for the same reason they are brought together in the narrative dealing with Israel in Sinai. Theophany describes the advent of God's presence; call describes the opportunity of response to that Presence. Theophany provides both stimulus and authority for response; response, despite choice, is virtually inevitable following theophany” (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 29). Here is found the fundamental principle of worship order—that of revelation and response. Durham continues, “Indeed, the experience of Moses in 3:1–12 is an exact foreshadowing of the experience of Israel, first in Egypt, then in the deprivation of the wilderness, and finally at Sinai. In each of these narratives, the Presence-response pattern is fundamental. In the climactic narrative of the Book of Exodus (perhaps also the climactic narrative of the entire OT), chaps 19:1–20:20 and 24:1–11, this pattern is the shaping factor” (30).

<sup>14</sup> “Typology is the interpretation of earlier events, persons, and institutions in biblical history which become proleptic entities, or ‘types,’ anticipating later events, persons, and institutions, which are their antitypes” (Don McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002], 162–63). See also Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 1852). Fairbairn writes, “The existence, then, of such a relation [of type and antitype] pre-supposes and implies . . . that the things of the gospel, which constitute the antitypes, are

was a prophet and priest for the nation. As they gathered around Mt. Sinai, “the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.’”<sup>15</sup> Regarding this event John Durham declares, “The Advent of Yahweh’s Presence at Sinai is the formative event of OT faith.”<sup>16</sup>

During the time at Sinai, God spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”<sup>17</sup> Moses made two requests of God as this extraordinary time at Sinai came to a close: (1) “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here”; and (2) “Please show me your glory.”<sup>18</sup> God responded positively to both requests and when Moses finally returned to the people after forty days on the “mountain of God,” his face shone from having been in God’s presence. He had to put a veil over his face because the skin of his face shone and the people were afraid to come near him.<sup>19</sup> God had allowed Moses to see the “afterglow” of his glory, which had transformed his appearance and gave him faith to move forward with God’s presence. Its effect seemingly went no farther than this. Remarkably, God eventually allowed Moses to look upon the glory of God with an unveiled face in the Tent of Meeting—

---

the great objects on which the mind of God was from the first directed for the good of his church; and that, to prepare the way for the introduction of these grand and ultimate objects, he placed the church under a course of training, which included among other things instruction by types, or designed and fitting resemblance of what was to come” (40).

<sup>15</sup> Exod 19:9. The authority of Moses as prophet and priest was confirmed by the voice of God in the hearing of his people. It was God’s intention that the people would listen to him. Similarly, the same voice affirmed the greater role of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration: “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!” (Luke 9:35).

<sup>16</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 259. Durham explains, “The form of the entire Sinai narrative sequence has been determined by a single factor. That factor is also the reason for the attraction into and onto the Sinai narrative sequence of a variety of material having to do primarily with the requirements of the covenant and the media of worship, and secondarily, with the special role of Moses and those who extend Moses’ contribution. This factor is of course the gift of Yahweh of his Presence to Israel. From beginning to end, and in both its positive and its negative features, the Sinai narrative sequence, and indeed the Book of Exodus of which it is the important center, is linked to the Advent of Yahweh’s Presence to Israel at Sinai.” This event is “the supreme event of Exodus” (260).

<sup>17</sup> Exod 33:11. According to R. Alan Cole, “Numbers 12:8 explains the meaning of this phrase. God will speak to Moses ‘mouth to mouth,’ that is to say, not in dreams and visions, but clearly and directly . . . He thus stands at the beginning of a long process of God’s revelation, which will culminate in the ‘suffering servant’ of Isaiah 53, and which will find its fulfillment in Christ” (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2, ed. Donald J. Wiseman [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1973], 235).

<sup>18</sup> Exod 33:15, 18. Of the request to see God’s glory R. Alan Cole writes, “Moses’ prayer is to see the *kābôd*, the manifested glory (literally ‘weight’) of YHWH. This is a prayer to see God as he is: but in these terms, it is impossible . . . For a full revelation of what God is like, man must wait until Jesus Christ (John 14:9)” (Cole, *Exodus*, 235).

<sup>19</sup> Scott Hafemann explains, “Moses’ mediation of God’s glory permits his presence to remain in Israel’s midst without destroying her. In this regard, Moses’ veiling himself is an act of mercy. At the same time, the very fact that Moses must veil his face is an act of judgment because of the hardness of Israel’s heart. This veil not only preserves Israel from being destroyed; it also keeps her from being transformed” (Scott Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 148).

“Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out” (Exod 34:34)—but he was the only one at this time to do so. A greater covenant and great high priest would be needed for God’s people to be able to worship in spirit and truth. In effect, a greater Moses would come to provide a greater worship.

## The Mount of Transfiguration and the New Covenant

When Jesus took his disciples up the high mountain, God also came in a thick cloud just as at Sinai. Just as God spoke to Moses so that the people could hear and believe him, God also spoke to Jesus so the disciples could hear and believe him. This was a greater affirmation for Jesus here than for Moses at Sinai. God demonstrated not only that he spoke with Jesus, but also that Jesus was his Son with whom he was pleased—a reiteration of the affirmation from Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3. He directly commanded them to “listen to him.” The writer of Hebrews puts forth this comparison: whereas Moses served as the type and initial mediator of worship between God and his people, Jesus became the great High Priest and eternal mediator of worship. Moses was the type and Jesus was the fulfillment, even as Sinai was the old covenant shadow while the transfiguration reflected a new covenant reality—all of God’s people could now behold the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The Mount of Transfiguration reveals the greater glory of the new covenant and its central figure.<sup>20</sup> Jesus took his disciples up a mountain to pray, and they returned having experienced a far greater manifestation of the presence of God. While more clarity came later, they encountered a revelation of what God’s people would have in worship under the new covenant. They experienced far more than any before them and in some ways more than any on earth did after them. On the Mount of Transfiguration, the earthly priest (i.e., Moses as a type of Christ) supernaturally appeared, but then disappeared, because the greater

---

<sup>20</sup> Robert Stein explains regarding what actually happened here: “There are three main explanations. (1) The preexistent glory of the preincarnate Son temporarily broke through the limitations of his humanity (cf. Phil 2:6–9; John 1:14b). (2) A glimpse of the future glory of the risen Christ is given to the disciples. Even as the first passion prediction (Luke 9:22) does not end in an announcement of death but in the promise of resurrection, so the discussion of Jesus’ departure is followed by a glimpse of the glory awaiting him at the resurrection (24:26; cf. also Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 1:21). (3) A glimpse of the glory of the Son of Man at the time of the parousia is given to the disciples. In support of the last explanation is the fact that the glory of the Son of Man at his parousia has just been mentioned (Luke 9:26; cf. also 21:27, where Luke referred to ‘cloud,’ as in 9:34–35, rather than ‘clouds’ as found in Mark and Matthew). Also 2 Pet 1:16–18 clearly understands it in this manner. Although the last explanation is the primary understanding of the event for Luke, elements of the second may also be present” (Stein, *Luke*, 283). With regard to worship, this event is an unveiling of the glory of Christ, who is the full representation of God (Heb 1:3, Col 2:9, and 2 Cor 4:4, 6). Joel Green writes, “As Jesus promised (Luke 9:27), these apostles have now seen, if only for a moment, the consummation of the kingdom for they have seen the Son, the Chosen One, Jesus, in his glory” (Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 379). It demonstrates the past and future brilliance of this glory in a unique moment that breaks into the incarnated present as well as the critical role of the gospel and its reward for new covenant worshipers by revealing (i.e., “unveiling”) the glory of this Christ. This glorious Christ is the object of worship and it is by his incarnation that the way is opened. As Jesus said, “But the hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

priest had come.<sup>21</sup> Rather than a priestly representative who would enter God's presence on behalf of the people, the disciples were worshipers who encountered the glory of God directly in the face of Christ. Additionally, while the effects of Moses' encounter with God's glory had to be veiled and ultimately faded, the effects of the disciples' encounter with God's glory was with unveiled faces and grew continually brighter until the day of their own glorification, when they went to the place where Jesus intercedes and finally worship him face to face. The ultimate goal and fulfillment of the new covenant they glimpsed on the mountain-top that day was the work of internal transformation that leads to external encounter in the presence and glory of God.<sup>22</sup>

While Moses had to veil his face until the glory faded because the people were afraid, the disciples for a brief moment saw the veil pulled back revealing the glory that the Israelites could not look upon. Moses experienced a fading glory on behalf of the people, but the disciples experienced an eternal glory that had previously been hidden from their understanding, but would ultimately become their eternal reward because of the gospel.<sup>23</sup> This reward is being shared with all those who embrace the gospel. The Israelites feared the glory they beheld, but the disciples desired to look deeper and longer. The glory of God as displayed in Christ is both accessible because of the gospel, and it is captivating. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This external experience of the disciples at the transfiguration is a type of first fruits and preview

---

<sup>21</sup> Robert Stein comments on Jesus' intent here. Luke twice mentions that Jesus went up onto the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28 and 9:29). "This second reference to Jesus' praying adds even more emphasis to this theme" (Stein, *Luke*, 284). Joel Green endorses the same priority: "With Luke's emphatic reference to Jesus at prayer, the backdrop is complete. The importance of this last note is difficult to overstate. Not only is prayer mentioned twice, but this reference follows hard on the heels of the parallel reference in v. 18, where prayer is represented as the setting for divine disclosure. In fact, through the use of the participial form, Luke has it that *while Jesus was* praying he was transfigured (cf. 3:21–22)" (Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 379; emphasis Green's). The reason for this ascent was to commune with God in prayer and worship, just as it was for Moses at Mt. Sinai. The role of prayer is heightened in this account.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Stein here comments, "The transfiguration was not from the outside in but from the inside out. Jesus' 'person' was transfigured before his clothing. Both Matthew and Luke referred to Jesus' face shining 'like the sun' (Matt 17:2). It is difficult not to see in this some allusion to Exod 34:29–35 (cf. also 2 Cor 3:7–13). Moses' glory, however, came from the outside" (Stein, *Luke*, 284). Unlike Moses, the disciples did not return with glowing faces as occurred at Sinai. However, it is likely that their hearts "burned within" as a future experience with the glorified Christ would produce (Luke 24:32). The new covenant transformation of believers is patterned after Jesus' transfiguration—from the inside out.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 4:4, 6. John Piper writes regarding 2 Cor 4:4, 6, "This is one of the most remarkable descriptions of the gospel in the whole Bible. There is nothing else quite like it. It defines the gospel as 'the gospel of the glory of Christ'" (John Piper, *God Is the Gospel* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005], 59). He continues, "Let's be clear that we are talking about the *gospel* in these verses. The fact that Paul does not mention the facts of Christ's life and death and resurrection does not mean he has left them behind. They remain the historical core of the gospel . . . . When Paul speaks of 'the gospel of the glory of Christ,' he means that the events of the gospel are designed by God to reveal the glory of Christ. This is not incidental to the gospel—it's essential. The gospel would not be good news if it did not reveal the glory of Christ for us to see and savor" (61–62).



of the gospel and the internal worship in spirit and truth that it allowed.<sup>24</sup> Today's worship should point toward the final fulfillment of something akin to what the Mount of Transfiguration displayed. The events and truths of the gospel are irrevocably connected to this type of worship experience. When they are emphasized, their design by God is to "reveal the glory of Christ."

## Implications for Worship

R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Mark states regarding the event on the Mount of Transfiguration:

For a brief moment the veil of his [Jesus'] humanity was lifted, and his true essence was allowed to shine through. The glory which was always in the depths of his being rose to the surface for that one time in his earthly life. Or put another way, he slipped back into eternity, to his pre-human glory. It was a glance back and a look forward into his future glory.<sup>25</sup>

The glory revealed in this incident, and in the kind of worship that this experience foreshadowed, is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ, who is now the central figure of worship. He is not just the access for worship as its great high priest and the mediator of the greater covenant, but he is also the object of worship and the worshiper's eternal reward. The desire in worship should now be to enjoy the glory found in Christ. In John 17:3 Jesus states, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." One day the veil of this life will be removed forever and God's people will know even as they are now fully known.<sup>26</sup> Until that day of unhindered access to the full knowledge of God,<sup>27</sup> worship in this life allows glimpses into this ultimate reality. This has a profoundly

---

<sup>24</sup> It is also a preview of the ultimate fulfillment of the work of the gospel and worship when worship once again becomes external. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *Mark*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> See 1 Cor 13:12. This knowledge is more than an intellectual understanding; it is a relational awareness and connection. It is a spiritual knowledge at the level of the religious affections that creates orientation, disposition, and pursuit of its end. Jonathan Edwards explains, "There is a twofold understanding or knowledge of good, that God has made the mind of man capable of. The first, that which is merely speculative or notional . . . The other is that which consists in the sense of the heart: as when there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing . . . Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness . . . When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension . . . which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that is excellent" (Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], 414).

<sup>27</sup> "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will

transformative effect upon man. It rightly orders things for man because it operates upon the affections to restore the image he was created to have. This process continues “from one degree of glory to another” until we are “conformed into the same image.”<sup>28</sup> This was the experience of man in the garden before being affected by sin. This is what God intended for man by creating the garden and setting man in the midst of it to enjoy the glory of God unhindered.

This is what the occurrence on the Mount of Transfiguration foreshadowed. It was a foretaste of the resurrection’s triumph and a preview of what worship would be when Christ, who had come to serve as the one true mediator between God and man, destroyed the veil. Worship now reveals transforming glory as it had always been intended to do. At the blazing center of new covenant worship is Christ and his gospel.

## Implication #1—The Centrality of Christ and His Gospel

While Peter, James, and John were asleep, Jesus prayed to the Father as he often did. What the disciples awoke to see was what the Gospel writers described reflectively as seeing “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom,” “the kingdom of God com[ing] with power,” and simply “the kingdom of God.”<sup>29</sup> Peter would later describe his participation in the experience as the disciples having been “eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet 1:16). John would also reflect, “We have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This was a Christ-centered worship encounter for which they had no parallel in history. Just as Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4, worship was changing. It was changing because the Messiah had come just as he had revealed to her in the same encounter (John 4:26).

As with Moses on Mt. Sinai, Jesus’ face began to shine. In addition, his clothes became brilliantly white as he was transfigured or, more literally, “metamorphosed”<sup>30</sup> before the disciples. The veil was being briefly, but remarkably, pulled back—allowing a glimpse into the

---

be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:3–5).

<sup>28</sup> See 2 Cor 3:18. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. writes, “In the deepest recesses of who they now are, at the core of their being—what Paul elsewhere and more frequently calls the ‘heart’ (e.g., Rom 1:24; 2:29; 8:28; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 3:2–3)—believers are no longer turned away from God’s glory but are drawn toward it and even into it in a transforming way” (Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “The Glory of God in Paul’s Epistles,” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 149).

<sup>29</sup> Matt 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27. Craig Blomberg believes this verse is “best taken as . . . a reference to Jesus’ transfiguration—the very next event described” (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22, ed. David S. Dockery [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 261). Robert Stein also suggests this as the most logical understanding (Stein, *Luke*, 280). Both assert this verse, having been preceded by a verse regarding the Second Coming of Christ in glory by both Matthew and Luke, makes it clear that the Transfiguration is a preview of the Second Coming, thus linking the concepts of the “coming of the kingdom of God” with the glorification of the Son. One cannot occur without the other. They are the same event.

<sup>30</sup> μεταμορφῶμαι is a rare Greek verb that occurs only four times in the N.T.: Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration (Matt 17:2); Mark’s account of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2); Paul’s explanation of the transformation that occurs in believers by beholding Jesus (2 Cor 3:18); and his account of spiritual worship’s

eternal reality of the nature of Christ. The glory of God in Christ was being unveiled in a brief yet overwhelming way. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. The Scripture does not indicate how the disciples knew who they were, but somehow it was very clear to them. Both had had previous conversations with God on mountaintops—Moses on Mt. Sinai and Elijah on Mt. Horeb, where the Lord told Elijah to go “stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord” who appeared as a “gentle whisper.”<sup>31</sup> Both had been shown God’s glory. Their presence has a multitude of meanings, but none more compelling than what Jesus later revealed to two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection when he taught them the gospel: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”<sup>32</sup> Webber comments,

The presence of Moses and Elijah is of special importance, for they were the two major symbolic figures of Israel’s prophetic faith. As the last two verses of the Hebrew prophetic canon make clear (Mal. 4:4–5), together they framed the history of the covenant given at Mt. Sinai; it was through Moses that the covenant was established, and Elijah was to restore the covenant bonds lest the curse of its violation take effect. Their appearance with Jesus in his transfigured glory is an affirmation that the gospel of Jesus Christ, however much it may have seemed anathema to the established Judaism of the first century, arose out of the very heart and essence of the covenant faith of Israel.<sup>33</sup>

Moses as the great lawgiver and Elijah as the great prophet represented the totality of the old covenant. Their submission to the Lord was symbolic of the resignation of the old covenant and consummation of the covenant that Jesus came to secure. The new covenant both fulfilled and replaced the old covenant that Moses and Elijah represented and that fulfillment was portrayed in this profound revelation of their conversation with the glorified Christ. Luke explains that the subject of their conversation was the manner of the fulfillment—the cross (i.e., the gospel). “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”<sup>34</sup> Hughes writes,

---

ability to transform believers by the renewing of their mind (Rom 12:2). Simon S. Lee explains, “Outside the NT, the verb occurs in Philo’s description of Moses’ transformation” (Simon S. Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration and the Believer’s Transformation: Studies of the Transfiguration and Its Development in Early Christian Writings* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 81).

<sup>31</sup> 1 Kgs 19:11–12.

<sup>32</sup> Luke 24:27. Robert Stein writes, “The presence of these men represent the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah)—cf. Luke 16:29,31; 24:27 . . . The reference to these ‘two men’ ties together the transfiguration, resurrection (24:4), and ascension (Acts 1:10). The presence of Moses and Elijah refutes the incorrect guesses about Jesus’ identity given in Luke 9:8, 19” (Stein, *Luke*, 284). This also affirmed Peter’s confession that Jesus indeed was “the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” who had come to fulfill all of the law and the prophets through the gospel.

<sup>33</sup> Webber, *Biblical Foundations of Worship*, 199.

<sup>34</sup> Luke 9:30–31. The term “departure” is *exodus*, which seems to refer to his death (“which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”), his resurrection (which is supported by the passion prediction in Luke 9:22), and ascension (which Luke 9:51 seems to support—“When the days drew near for him to be taken up,

They were talking about the cross and Jesus' death! The tense indicates that this was an extended conversation. They, the chief representatives of the Law and the Prophets, were carrying on a conversation with Jesus, who himself said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17).<sup>35</sup>

Worship in spirit and truth will of necessity include this central reality that Christ revealed to the Samaritan woman. She said she knew Messiah was coming. Worship now must include the reality that the Christ has not only come, but that in worship, Jesus is that One (John 4:26). It must also include clear references to the reason he came and the means by which worshipers can see him in worship—the gospel! It is the gospel that reveals his nature and deity (2 Cor 3:18–4:6).

## **Implication #2—Worship as Beholding and Delighting in His Glory**

Peter's comments at this point are potentially misunderstood. While the gospel writers all indicate that he made these comments "not knowing what he said," that does not mean that there was not any value to what he said. In some ways, what Peter said brings insight as to how he perceived the event as an ultimate worship event. The first part of his comment was that the experience was profoundly good. "Master, it is good that we are here" (Luke 9:33). Being in the presence of the glorified Christ in worship is a wonderful place to be. It caused them to lose all concern for the "demon-possessed valley" that they had left below and would have to return to. In the presence of such "grace and truth" as John described it, the "image of God" in man finds the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment that he was created to know. It is the pleasure of the garden recaptured and the hope of glory renewed. Luke explains quite simply in Luke 9:32, "Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory." It was at this point of the experience that Peter declared their delight to be there.

The second part of Peter's comment explains why he did not know what he was saying and that he would later, with greater understanding, be grateful that Jesus did not grant his request. "Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."<sup>36</sup> Most commentaries emphasize the effect of Peter's act as equating the level of status of Moses and Elijah with that of Jesus. This certainly is part of Peter's error but there is likely more. Even though Peter had just heard six days earlier Jesus' first declaration of his earthly purpose to go to Jerusalem to die, he seems to have lost sight of that in this moment (as he would later do again). He did not yet grasp the necessity of future events that must take place for gospel

---

he set his face to go to Jerusalem."). Stein writes, "Moses and Elijah did not 'inform' Jesus of the details of his 'exodus,' for by 9:22 he already knew them. They were present rather to illustrate Jesus' fulfillment of the divine plan in the OT, i.e., he fulfilled the law and the prophets. This verse prepares the reader for 9:51ff" (Stein, *Luke*, 285). The correlation to Moses and the Old Testament "exodus" are evident.

<sup>35</sup> Hughes, *Mark*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 9:33. Part of the problem here is "that Peter erred in equating Jesus with Moses and Elijah. In contrast to Moses and Elijah, who were God's servants, Jesus is God's Son, the Chosen One" (Stein, *Luke*, 284).

enactment and fulfillment. However, he well understood the depravity and deficiency suffered from past events of rebellion and alienation by Israel. The glory had departed from the temple and Israel's worship life held no court in the presence of God. It had become empty ritual and practice even where there was an honest attempt to follow the old covenant practices. But with the life that God's presence gave, and with the hope of glory apparently now restored, Peter seemed to think, just as Moses and the Israelites set up the tabernacle to house the glory of God in the wilderness, "that it is good that all of the participants can preserve this moment for some length of time."<sup>37</sup> While not realizing this would prevent the fulfillment of the greater covenant, he seemed to see it as a greater fulfillment of the old covenant and a restoration of the kingdom to Israel—an eschatological event!

It was seemingly a good desire in his glory-saturated stupor, but a shortsighted and misinformed one. Accommodating his request would prevent the fulfillment of the gospel plan of redemption and the greater eschatological goal, which is apparently why Jesus remained silent. What Peter was still realizing, but had not yet fully grasped, was that in Jesus the presence of God had "tabernacled" among them. Again, referring to John's description, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). While the Mount of Transfiguration was significant, it was just a step in the process of God's more wonderful plan for worship restoration and the exaltation of Christ. Honoring Peter's request would prolong, if not prevent, the fulfillment of the cross and the resurrection's greater glory. Mediation of the new covenant was still required so that the gospel could be "good news" to a much wider world through the exaltation of Christ.<sup>38</sup> Until the ratification of the new covenant, worshipers could only hope to gaze through a veil upon a fading glory from a distance rather than truly behold it and be transformed by it. The new covenant had to be secured and the Holy Spirit had to be poured out upon Abraham's sons and daughters.<sup>39</sup>

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the people of God would become the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19). Peter would later come to understand and teach this great truth to God's people. "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). Worship would no longer be a matter of time and place, but of "spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Peter's comments provide insight into how the disciple perceived and valued what was happening

---

<sup>37</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 264. The Greek word σκέvé is the same word used for "tabernacle" or "booth." While some commentators view this as Peter's attempt to connect the event to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39-43) and its implications that the final age has come in which God and Christ will now dwell with men (Rev 21:3-4), others believe it to be his desire to see some type of restoration of the glory of God to the temple. In either case, Peter is making a statement about worship. He just does not understand believers have "a building from God, a house not made with hands" for their eternal dwelling place with God and for worship (2 Cor 5:1).

<sup>38</sup> Phil 2:8-9 proclaims the necessary progression: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name."

<sup>39</sup> Even the disciples' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration was more like Moses' than what worshipers today experience. They gazed upon the glory of God in the incarnate Christ, which was unique. But they did so with human eyes rather than a transformed heart. It was an external experience that foreshadowed the internal reality.

as it was happening—it was a worship event unlike any other—one that he wanted to savor. Nevertheless, God’s ways are higher and he directly intervened in the moment to direct Peter’s attention away from the magnitude of the event to the person of Jesus.

### Implication #3—The Keeping of Time in Worship

At this point in the narrative a most inexplicable thing occurred. A cloud overshadowed them.<sup>40</sup> D. A. Carson points out that the “cloud” is associated “in both OT and intertestamental Judaism with eschatology . . . and with the exodus.” The fact that Matthew points out that the cloud was “bright” is “a detail that recalls the Shekinah glory” and is “the more fundamental idea of the presence of God.”<sup>41</sup> The disciples clearly realized that this was not a meteorological event and they became terrified. The first recorded appearance of this particular manifestation was almost 1,500 years before on Mt. Sinai. It was the same *cloud* that passed by Moses when he asked God to allow him to “see his glory” and he was allowed to see its afterglow. However, he was not allowed to enter it. It was the same *cloud* that surrounded Mt. Sinai so that no one could approach the mountain; that later filled the tabernacle to such a degree that Moses could not enter it; that led the children through the wilderness, and years after filled Solomon’s temple on Dedication Day so that the priests could not enter it. And it was this same *cloud* that Ezekiel saw rise from the Cherubim and move to the threshold of the temple because of Israel’s apostasy, then slowly move over the east gate of the temple to disappear over the Mount of Olives, not to be seen again for 600 years.

There had been no recorded sight of it since Ezekiel’s day but at this moment, with no advance warning, it came upon these three disciples and enshrouded them. It was the *shekinah* glory<sup>42</sup> of God, and the view from below must have looked similar to the scene previously on Mt. Sinai as the top of this mountain became capped with the glory of God. Only one other person in history had been inside that cloud before. Moses was allowed to enter it to receive the old covenant tablets and to commune with God. The priests were not allowed to enter it. The people were not allowed to come near it. Since the veil was placed in the Holy of Holies to cut off the intimate presence once known in the Garden of Eden, it had been hidden completely or fearfully viewed from a distance. Now the disciples were in the cloud!

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert Stein explains, “The divine presence comes upon the scene in the form of a cloud, a common symbol of the presence of God (Exod 16:10; 19:9; 24:15–18; 33:9–11; 40:34; 2 Sam 22:12; 1 Kgs 8:10–11; Ezek 10:3–4; Ps 18:11). Clouds are also a means of taking people up to heaven (Acts 1:9; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 11:12) and are associated with the parousia (Mark 13:26; Matt 24:30). In Luke 21:27 Luke used the singular ‘cloud’ rather than the plural found in Mark 13:26 and Matt 24:30, tying the parousia more closely to the transfiguration. He also used the singular ‘cloud’ in Acts 1:9” (Stein, *Luke*, 286).

<sup>41</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 438. Carson references W. L. Liefeld (“Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. L. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974], 170) for support of the latter point.

<sup>42</sup> The *shekinah* glory is a reference to the visible glory of God. See Richard R. Melick Jr., “The Glory of God in the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, and the General Epistles,” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 103.

What was the difference now? Why could the people not come near the cloud on Sinai but Peter, James, and John could stand in the midst of it on the top of this mountain? Why were the priests, even after all of their preparations of ritualistic cleansing, unable to enter the temple on that day when the cloud descended, but these three disciples were not struck dead as it engulfed them? And why could Moses (the “friend of God”) not enter the Tent of Meeting when this presence filled it, but these men, who would soon flee at Jesus’ arrest and in at least one case deny him publicly three times, became the first people on earth to ever behold the manifestation of the glory of God in the person of Christ? It was because of the presence of the one who brought them into the cloud. It was a gift of the mediator to share this with them in worship and a brief taste of what he was going to accomplish on their behalf (and that of all new covenant worshipers). That gift included a preview of the future glory that they would one day experience in his presence. The accompanying presence of Moses and Elijah demonstrated the elements of the past that had necessarily preceded this event. While worship occurs as a present revelation of the deity of Christ, it rests upon the gospel’s past events and points toward its future hope. There is a timelessness associated with worship that gives orientation to the worshipers’ existence in this lifetime.

#### **Implication #4—The Necessity of the Word of God in Worship**

A voice came out of the cloud, proclaiming, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35). Matthew expresses the message of the voice a little differently, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 17:5). Both phrases—“Chosen One” and “in whom I am well pleased”—indicate favor bestowed upon Christ that no other has ever possessed. It is not the disciples who are pleasing to God. In fact, it is more likely that when they heard the command to “listen to him” in the manifest presence of a holy God, every instance of not having listened to him flooded their minds and grieved their hearts. This may be the explanation of the terror that came next as the penetrating light of God’s presence pierced their darkness. The compulsive human response to the holiness of God is well described by Isaiah’s experience of the exalted Lord in Isaiah 6: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa 6:5). While Peter indicated that it was good for them to be there at the beginning of this episode, this quickly changed. When the cloud overshadowed them and the voice spoke from the cloud, Matthew explains, “they fell on their faces and were terrified” (Matt 17:6). It no longer seemed good to be there, and there was no more desire to build tabernacles. Now the problem of worship became real, and the need for Christ’s finished work was made plain.

The centrality of Jesus’ role as mediator in this experience and indeed in all of worship is poignantly portrayed in the next verse: “But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”<sup>43</sup> Moses and Elijah had disappeared, and there only remained Christ. This singular focus upon Christ in this narrative serves in an allegorical fashion to demonstrate a theological imperative. “For

---

<sup>43</sup> Matt 17:6–7. Commenting on this verse Blomberg explains, “‘They saw no one except Jesus’ reads more literally, *They did not see anyone but Jesus only*. The word *only* (*monos*) comes at the end of the sentence for emphasis. The disciples must focus on Christ alone. He will prove sufficient for their needs” (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 264).

there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Bob Kauflin undergirds this point in his book *Worship Matters*, “Worship itself cannot lead us into God’s presence. *Only Jesus himself* can bring us into God’s presence, and he has done it through a single sacrifice that will never be repeated—only joyfully recounted and trusted in.”<sup>44</sup>

There is only one primary means by which worshipers may listen to Christ, as the disciples were instructed to do and later instructed the church to do as well. It is the word of God. In Ephesians 1:17 Paul prays for the church at Ephesus “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” The unveiling of our hearts accomplished by the gospel includes the related imagery of the ability of them to see (2 Cor 4:4): “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” It is in the words of Scripture that worshipers *see* Christ. They are the means by which worship’s mediator and object are revealed and understood so that worshipers may “listen to him.”

## **Implication #5—The Transforming Power of Worship**

When the disciples made their way back down the mountain, Jesus was able to explain things to them that they had not previously understood. There had been questions about who Jesus was, when Elijah would come, and Jesus’ proclamation of the necessity of his death and resurrection. While their comprehension was not perfect, Matthew writes that after this experience “the disciples understood.”<sup>45</sup> When Peter wrote of this event later in his second letter, he revealed some of this comprehension Jesus gave them:

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain (2 Pet 1:16–18).

The experience of the revelation of the glory of Christ had opened their eyes to new understanding, encouraged their faith in the face of opposition, and permanently changed the course of their lives. Peter, James, and John were not perfect, but they went on to be instrumental in advancing the kingdom of God that they had just seen revealed. Their preach-

---

<sup>44</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 74; emphasis Kauflin’s.

<sup>45</sup> Matt 17:13. Though Jesus told the disciples to keep silent about these events until after his departure, their reference to “what they had seen” in Luke 9:37 expresses the impact of the event. Stein writes of this phrase, “The verb is an intensive perfect, which indicates that this scene produced lasting effects on the disciples” (Stein, *Luke*, 287).



ing of the gospel expanded the kingdom into new areas of the world and helped many become worshipers. More than anything else, they became followers of Christ. This experience and many others in the presence of Christ would continually transform them into his image and empower them to be like him as they became a part of his body. Webber concludes,

The transfiguration of Christ, together with his resurrection, embodies the promise of a corresponding transformation for those who are his. The same Greek word used for Jesus' transfiguration is used by Paul for the transformation of the life of the believer (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), and John promises that "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).<sup>46</sup>

It is not the experience alone that causes such transformation, at least not on the surface. An experience without meaning has little value, but an experience with meaning and significance is a transforming event. This is not the first time they have encountered the information that Jesus was God's Son. In fact, Peter had already confessed this belief the previous week. However, this is the first time they have seen the evidence of his deity in such a profound manner linked to their understanding. The miracles were amazing, but many saw the miracles and turned away later. Jesus taught as one having authority, but many could not understand the teaching or came to conclude that the teaching required a change of life for which they did not possess the faith to implement. While the miracles and the teaching were necessary components of Jesus' ministry, what changed on that mountain was the degree of faith in the disciples as they beheld the manifestation of the teaching in the deity of Christ. The miracles and the teaching were signs and words to point back to the person of Christ and who he truly is. The disciples experienced the person of Christ in a manner that changed them. It could be said that this was the incarnation of Christ in their worship experience. Christ being glorified before their eyes served to reveal his deity and Lordship in their lives. This produces the glorious byproduct of worship—it infuses faith and transforms its participants as "Word becomes flesh!" It is in this manner that religious affections are at work in worship. The Spirit operates upon the affections to reveal the person of Christ to the unveiled heart of the worshiper.

### **Implication #6—The Necessity of a Gospel Focus in Worship**

In contrasting the experience of Moses on Mt. Sinai with the experience of the Mount of Transfiguration, the gospel focus of worship becomes more evident. While both were experiences of the manifested presence of God, only one was tethered to the new covenant and its fulfillment of the old covenant. While Mt. Sinai foreshadowed a more glorious access to God's presence, the Mount of Transfiguration demonstrated that a time is coming and now is! 2 Corinthians 3 elaborates on the necessity of the gospel to see Christ.

---

<sup>46</sup> Webber, *Biblical Foundations of Worship*, 200.

## Beholding the Glory of the Lord—2 Cor 3:7–18

There is a very significant difference between the two events that Paul highlights in his second letter to Corinth. This passage lies at the scriptural foundation for this study's understanding of transforming worship. It arises from the profound difference between the old covenant, which was a weaker covenant, and the new covenant that Hebrews speaks of as the "better covenant" (Heb 7:22). That difference is the presence of Christ's role in the new covenant, and that is why New Testament worship is also Christ-centered worship. At Mt. Sinai a Passover and an Exodus made the experience possible. In the Gospels, however, the fulfillment of these "types" is now present. Sinclair Ferguson points out in his commentary, "[Jesus'] death would be the new Passover; the salvation of his people would be the new Exodus."<sup>47</sup> Jesus' role precipitated a new worship. In *Created for Worship*, Noel Due states, "In a very real sense this is the goal of the process of redemption, just as it was in the Old Testament exodus. God brought Israel out from the bondage of Egypt that they might serve/worship him. God's mercies have brought this new humanity out from the bondage of its idolatry, legalism, guilt, fear, and the judgment of God's wrath, to serve him in a new and living way."<sup>48</sup> The typology of Sinai and the Old Testament is instructive and inspiring, but the difference Jesus makes is extraordinary. Jesus' perfect work on the cross and subsequent resurrection ratified a new covenant and new access to the presence of God—"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Cor 3:16).

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the two covenants. The old covenant he calls "the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone," which came with such a glory that "the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of it" (2 Cor 3:7). He then asks the question, "Will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?" (2 Cor 3:8). He continues to elaborate on this comparison between "the ministry of condemnation" and "the ministry of righteousness." If the former had glory, then the latter has exceeding glory. In fact, in comparison it makes the former really seem to have "no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it" and "much more will what is permanent have glory" (2 Cor 3:9–11). The degree of the glory is one difference in the two covenants and is demonstrated by the presence or absence of the veil. Moses had to put a veil over his face, and as a result the Israelites could not gaze upon the glory of God. Even then, it was a fading glory. It was a fading glory because apart from Christ they could barely glimpse the "afterglow" that Moses had seen in the cleft of the Rock. Even in that, they were fearful and could not approach that glory, just as they could not approach or enter the cloud. Even to this day, "whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their heart. But when one turns to the Lord (the *rock* Moses had been hidden in), the veil is removed." Those who are hidden in Christ have the veil lifted. Which leads to Paul's conclusion: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 136.

<sup>48</sup> Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 185.

<sup>49</sup> 2 Cor 3:15–18. John MacArthur explains, "The veil of a hardened heart made them think they could save themselves. Causing them, therefore, to miss the meaning of both covenants . . . It is only when 'a person

Those who are in Christ can look upon the glory of God because of Christ. And not only can they enter the cloud of God's glory, but when they gaze upon the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ, they are transformed (or transfigured) into that same glory. They are conformed to the image of Christ, who is the exact representation of the invisible God (Heb 1:3). In worship, when God's glory is revealed in Christ, worshipers are transformed into this same image. Christ-centered worship is transforming worship. One cannot look upon the glory of God and remain the same. John Piper states, "The primary way to become more and more like Christ is to lift the veil and fix your gaze on his glory and hold him in view. . . . In other words we are transformed into his image by looking at his glory. You become like what you constantly behold."<sup>50</sup> Philip E. Hughes, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, draws the connection between 2 Corinthians 3 and the Mount of Transfiguration:

Further light is thrown on this passage when we consider what took place on the occasion of the transfiguration of Christ. On that mountain height Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ, but it was *Christ alone* who was transfigured with heavenly radiance before the eyes of Peter, James, and John. It was *his* face that shone as the sun and *his* garments that became white and dazzling. It was of *him alone* that the voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." And thereafter the disciples saw no one, *save Jesus only*. It is he who abides. The glory in which Moses and Elijah appeared was not their own but Christ's glory—the glory which he had had with the Father before the world was (Jn. 17:5). Just as in the wilderness the glory which shown from Moses' face was the reflected glory of Yahweh, so too on the mount of transfiguration the glory with which he was surrounded was the glory of the same Yahweh. Christ's alone is the full, the abiding, the evangelical glory. To turn to him is to turn to the Light of the world. To follow him is not to walk in darkness, but to have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).<sup>51</sup>

Simon S. Lee in his work, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believer's Transformation*, also shows similarities between the transfiguration accounts and 2 Corinthians 3. Specifically, "both draw on Moses Transformation account in Exod 34."<sup>52</sup> There appears to be a triangulation of these three passages (Sinai, Transfiguration, and 2 Cor 3) with the new covenant interpretation given by Paul in this passage. Whereas, Moses is the only one who experiences

---

turns to the Lord' (cf. Isa. 45:22) that 'the veil is taken away' . . . Paul borrowed the image of salvation as a 'veil' being 'taken away' from Moses' unveiling himself in God's presence: "Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take off the veil until he came out" (Ex. 34:34). Moses removed his veil because he wanted a direct vision of God's glory. So it is with sinners who turn to God through Jesus Christ. "The veil is taken away' and they have a clear vision of the glory of God reflected in the face of Jesus Christ" (John MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003], 112).

<sup>50</sup> John Piper, "Summer is for Seeing and Showing Christ," *Desiring God*, June 11, 1995, accessed 29 November 2011, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/summer-is-for-seeing-and-showing-christ>.

<sup>51</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 112–13; emphasis Hughes'.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believer's*, 80.

transformation in Exodus 34; and Jesus' appearance is the only one transfigured on the high mountain; "For Paul, however, the transformation experience is not limited to a special few . . . but instead becomes the normal experience for believers as a result of their exposure to the glory of Christ."<sup>53</sup> Lee continues,

It is also interesting to notice the strong δόξα motif in 2 Cor 3–4 and in the transfiguration story, which is clearly from the Mosaic transformation tradition. While this particular use of the word δόξα is not paralleled elsewhere in Paul, it is one of the most important themes of the transfiguration story. Paul insists on the far greater glory which accompanies his New Covenant ministry and as a result of his unveiling of the Gospel of the Lord of glory, "we all" are enabled to see the glory. This revelatory experience of the glory, according to Paul, comes from God's new creation activity of spreading "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6). The reference to "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" finds its narrative parallel especially in Luke's version of the transfiguration story. Luke refers to Jesus' altered face in 9:29 and associates it with the δόξα in 9:31; and the three disciples are said to witness the δόξα in 9:32.<sup>54</sup>

John Calvin noted the role of the image of God in man when exposed to the glory of God. "Observe, that the design of the gospel is this—that the image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us during our whole life, because God makes his glory shine forth in us by little and little."<sup>55</sup> This is the effect of the greater covenant. Finally, R. Kent Hughes explains,

Moses' temporary exposure to the glory of the Lord worked a mighty transformation in and upon him. But the new-covenant ministry of Paul is even more transforming because our exposure is constant and continuous (there is no veil). And more, it works in the reverse order of Moses' experience, first by effecting a *moral* transformation into God's image . . . The change is progressive, so that willing exposure to the sunlight of God's presence will burn his image ever deeper into our character and will. And ultimately, at Christ's appearance, we will undergo a *physical* transformation in glory. This is what Paul's ministry offered, and this is the grand and great difference between his and Moses' ministry.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believer's*, 82. For a collection of essays on the theological concept of the δόξα (i.e., glory of God) as part of the Theology in Communities series, see Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 187.

<sup>56</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 80. See also Isa 25:7: "And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations."

G. K. Beale in *We Become What We Worship* writes, “People resemble what they revere, either for ruin or restoration. God has made all people to reflect, to be imaging beings. People will always reflect something, whether it be God’s character or some feature of the world.”<sup>57</sup> Commenting on several New Testament passages, Beale applies his thesis to sanctification:

Thus to be “transformed [*metamorphoō*] by the renewing of your mind” in Romans 12:2 is the virtual equivalent to “becoming conformed [*symmorphos*] to the image of [God’s] son” in Romans 8:29. Such an equivalence is pointed to further from observing the combination of “renewal” and “image” in Colossians 3:10: “you have put on the new man who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” . . . (also Eph 4:22–24). Similarly, 2 Corinthians 3:18 affirms that those who want to be near the Lord will take on his likeness.<sup>58</sup>

This idea of transformation (i.e., “metamorphosis”) that results from beholding divine glory in worship events such as those described in the transfiguration and in 2 Corinthians 3 is also used in relation to a life of unceasing worship described in Romans 12:1–2.<sup>59</sup> The connections between the two are once again quite clear as what takes place in the event is inextricably linked to what takes place in life. In this way, the event becomes a source of empowered lifestyle worship.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646), an English Puritan and Congregationalist, helpfully summarizes the truths set forth here in his work, *Gospel Worship*:

This is that which the happiness of the church is set out by in Revelation 22:4: “They shall see his face and his name shall be in their foreheads.” This is the privilege of the church. And that it is such a blessing to draw nigh to God you may see from Ephesians 2:18: “For through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto God the Father, and now, Paul says, “Ye that were strangers and foreigners are made fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,” and verse 13: “but now by Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ,” and you have access through Christ. So our coming nigh to God is such a privilege as cost the blood of Christ. . . . And by drawing nigh to God often, you will come to increase your graces abundantly. How will your graces act? The presence of God will draw forth the acts of grace as the presence of the fire draws

---

<sup>57</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 284.

<sup>58</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 218; emphasis Beale’s.

<sup>59</sup> John MacArthur explains, “The phrase ‘are being transformed’ translates a present passive participle of the verb *metamorphoō* and refers to believers’ progressive sanctification. The Christian life is a continual process of growing into the ‘image’ of the Lord Jesus Christ, ascending ‘from’ one level of ‘glory’ to another” (MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, 116). Other similar passages that do not reference this specific word but indicate the same process are Rom 8:29, 1 Cor 15:49, 51–53, Phil 3:13–14, 21, Col 3:10, and 1 John 3:2.

forth out heat. So the presence of God will draw forth our graces. And by this means we come to live most holy lives.

We read that Moses was upon the mountain forty days with God, and when he came down his face so shone that the people were not able to bear it. What's the reason? It was because he was so near to God. Would you have your faces shine in a holy conversation before men? Converse much with God, be often with God, be near to him and that will make you shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We find it so with some who converse much with God: There is a shine upon their very countenances. . . . "You shall have many who love to be in God's presence so that they think on it overnight and long for the time when it comes. I am never better than when I am with God. I think when I get into God's presence, either in prayer or any duty of God's worship, I find my heart warmed and quickened. They are ready to say with Peter, "Master, it is good being here."<sup>60</sup>

This is what the gospel brings to worship because it focuses us on Christ—the mediator and object of new covenant worship—as the image of the invisible God. In his face is found the all-satisfying and transforming glory of God. Emphasizing these aspects of Christian worship inspires all worshipers to proclaim with Peter, "Lord, it is good that we are here."

---

<sup>60</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*, ed. Don Kistler (1648; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 44–46.

# Music, Culture, and Vain Repetition: Matthew 6 in its Context

Steven Winiarski<sup>1</sup>

There are many different views on the relationship between church and culture. One extreme believes that the church should look nothing like culture and operate as a counter-cultural movement. This view tends to accuse recent worship music of being guilty of vain repetition, which Jesus condemns in Matthew 6:7. However, this view often does not want a counter-cultural church, but rather a church that preserves the culture of a previous generation instead of embracing the culture of the current one. What pastor hasn't heard questions and statements such as "Why are we singing that 7/11 chorus (a chorus with 7 words sung 11 times)? Why are we singing this new song with these new instruments? It causes us to look like the world! What's wrong with our old hymns?"

The other extreme believes that the church should fully embrace culture and operate with all the current cultural concepts of both style and practice. This view accuses more traditional music of being outdated and irrelevant to the current culture. Its proponents say things like, "I can't emotionally connect with that kind of music!" or "Hymns don't make me feel anything, therefore it has no value to me." This can take an anything goes approach, thus ignoring Matthew 6:7.<sup>2</sup>

Both these groups, whether they realize it or not, are not fighting over repetition, but rather are wrestling with the relationship between worship and culture. The hymns that were sung on the day when the elderly woman first came to Christ, when she was married, when her children were dedicated to the Lord, and sometimes when her spouse has died, hold special value to her because it is how she has interacted with God in each of those times. In the same way, the younger generations are interacting with God through different songs with a different sound and style. If both groups were to recognize this, then the argument over whether modern music is vain repetition or not becomes a non-issue and the conversation can shift to an honest discussion about the culture of the church as a whole and what music is appropriate for that church's culture.

Repetition, of course, is not the only element of contemporary worship music that some people find inappropriate. Melodies and rhythms that are challenging for congregations to sing, instrumentation that embraces more popular sounds, and lyrics reflecting shallow or heterodox theology are others. The frequent repetition of texts, though, is perhaps the

---

<sup>1</sup> Steven Winiarski holds a PhD in New Testament from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary and currently serves as an associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Northeastern Baptist College in Bennington, Vermont.

<sup>2</sup> These questions and statements of both views are based on recent conversations expressed by individuals in actual churches and in college and seminary classrooms.

most easily identifiable offense and one that has long been the object of complaint and satire. And it is the one element addressed specifically by Christ.

What then does Jesus mean when he condemns vain repetition? This article will argue that repetition becomes vain when it is used with bad motives. Bad motives for repetition include any attempt to use music and repetition to elicit a purely emotional response, to gain a personal audience, or to manipulate God. Repetitious music sung with the right motives, however, can lead the congregation to true worship and praise of God, Christ, and the Spirit. When this happens, the song becomes more than a song, but functions as a prayer.

This approach allows for a variety of freedom in choosing music that fits the culture of an individual church. Different age groups, ethnic groups, and people from different geographical areas connect with different styles of music, worship, and prayer structure. Further, no one testimony is the same. Some believers have connected with the Gospel because of God's love, other his mercy, others his forgiveness, and so on. Because each congregation is unique, the culture as demonstrated in prayer, worship, and music should also be unique.

As with any practice within the church, the Word of God should serve as the guide to music and repetition. While Scripture does not directly address the use of repetition in music, it does give some specific commands in relation to prayer that relate to music as it is used as prayer. This brief review will attempt to establish the meaning of vain repetition in its context. It will offer a brief analysis of the themes of kingdom and righteousness in the beginning of Matthew, the context of the beatitudes, the place of Christ in reference to the law, the role of the "You have heard it said" statements, and finally an evaluation of the meaning of vain repetition. On the basis of those findings, this article will offer some suggestions on the relationship between vain repetition, music, and culture within the church.

## **Kingdom and Righteousness in Matthew**

Throughout Matthew's Gospel, he emphasized the themes of kingdom and righteousness. In terms of narrative development, the plot moves forward once the author establishes the main character and how the reader can anticipate his function throughout the rest of the story.<sup>3</sup> In Matthew, Jesus is the main character who functions as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. Such titles would have evoked thoughts of the golden ages of Israel and spurred hope of the expected Messiah and coming King who would establish God's kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

As the plot develops, Matthew establishes that Jesus not only has the right pedigree to be king, he has the birth signs of a king. From the virgin birth to the star that led the wise men, Jesus' birth was like no other. In the midst of the coming of the wise men, Matthew introduces a form of role reversal. The wise men come to Herod, the king of the Jews, seeking

---

<sup>3</sup> H. J. Combrink, "The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 34, no. 1 (1983): 75.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Keener argued that in a first-century environment "the masses would surely interpret messianically one who promised an imminent kingdom and the meek inheriting the land, as well as implied a central role for himself in its inauguration." Thus Jesus, as Son of David, establishes to this audience Jesus' right to rule and inaugurate this expected kingdom. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 62.



Jesus, the baby born king of the Jews. Thus, Matthew infers that Jesus is the true King of the Jews who will bring in God's kingdom, not Rome's kingdom. He is king of the Jews, but not only just the Jews, but of all those who will seek him, even the pagan wise men.

Matthew further demonstrates the uniqueness of Jesus by showing God's blessing upon him in his baptism. Matthew 3:16-17 states,

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."<sup>5</sup>

Matthew moved Jesus from Son of Abraham and David to "My beloved Son." Jeffrey Gibbs argued that Matthew's use of this title is better understood as a reference to Israel. As such, Matthew, from the birth narrative forward, demonstrates Jesus as the antitype or recapitulation of Israel as a whole.<sup>6</sup> While the themes of recapitulation have a strong presence in the beginning of Matthew, "My beloved Son" still functions as a demonstration of Jesus' uniqueness in the eyes of God. Thus, Jesus may well be the recapitulation of Israel, but he is the better Israel and the better Son with better privileges, mainly those of authority and kingship, which Matthew further establishes through Jesus' preaching (as one not like the scribes, but with authority) and healings, and ultimately through the forgiveness of sin. Following his baptism, Jesus went out preaching the kingdom. If Jesus the king has come, then God's kingdom has begun, a theme that Matthew develops at every stage of his Gospel.

If the king has come and the kingdom has begun, then Jesus, as king, has the right to establish the rule of his kingdom. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus expected/demanded righteousness. Matthew refers to righteousness twenty-eight different times. In many of these instances, Jesus contrasted his demands for righteousness with the cultural expectations of righteousness. Thus, in Matthew 1:19, Joseph is considered righteous for not wanting to bring public shame to Mary although it would have been his legal right to do so.<sup>7</sup> Jesus as king, however, demands more than outward obedience to the law, but a righteousness that exceeds it, a righteousness with right motives in both the realms of the heart and of the mind.

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 3:13-17)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (July 2002): 514.

<sup>7</sup> J. J. Pilch rightly noted that "by law, Joseph is entitled to return Mary to her father and expose her to death . . . But Joseph is an honorable man and determines to divorce her leniently" (J. J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997], 11). Matthew Marohl further argued that Joseph's act of righteousness was done, not to uphold his own righteousness, but to keep Mary's righteousness intact through the divorce process (Matthew Marohl, *Joseph's Dilemma: "Honor Killing" in the Birth Narrative of Matthew* [Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008], 37).

## Matthew 5:3–11: The Blessed

Matthew 6:7 is part of a much larger pericope, which begins in Matthew 5. Throughout this section, Jesus challenged cultural norms with behavioral expectations and heart attitudes. In 5:3–12, he challenged the cultural position and value of the lowly by granting them position and value in God’s kingdom. They are called blessed. Recent scholarship has sought to define *makáριοι* (μακάριοι; “blessed”) in terms of happiness.<sup>8</sup> Popular Christian magazines have latched onto this idea and, in doing so, explain how living in accordance with cultural norms will never make a person happy.<sup>9</sup> While this may be true, Matthew 5 does not emphasize a person’s feelings, but rather his position and value in relation to God on the basis of their behavior as it relates to God’s demands.<sup>10</sup>

Some have chosen to avoid this type of emotional language by using the idea of fortune.<sup>11</sup> This gives the idea that the individuals are somehow lucky through circumstances out of their control or well off through their own behavioral achievements. The context, however, does not allow for this interpretation. Jesus was preaching on both the demands and expectations of the kingdom of God. The groups mentioned all have a position and a value within God’s kingdom because their behavior and attitudes have matched the expectations of God, the King. Thus, it is God, the King, who is granting these groups their value and position. He is the one who has made them *makáριοι*.<sup>12</sup> The ones whose position and behavior that culture rejects (e.g., the poor, meek, merciful, peacemakers), God the king will bless.

## Matthew 5:17–20: Christ and the Law

In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus again challenged cultural norms by contrasting the established religious standards with the standards of God and his kingdom. Thus, his statement concerning the abolishment of the law versus its fulfillment must be understood (at least in

---

<sup>8</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 2, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 155-56.

<sup>9</sup> Johannah Reardon, “What Does It Mean to Be Blessed,” *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/theology/what-does-it-mean-to-be-blessed.html> (accessed April 24, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 78.

<sup>11</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 193.

<sup>12</sup> In his argument against *makáριοι* meaning blessed by God, R. T. France noted that the usual term for blessed by God is *eulogetos*, not *makáριοι*. He believed that “‘Congratulations to . . .’ would convey much of the impact.” This view, however, misses the association with the individuals, their reward in relation to the kingdom, and the king. It is God’s kingdom that the *makáριοι* belong to, thus it is hard to imagine anyone or anything that is providing the blessing other than the King himself, allowing for a meaning of “blessed.” See R. T. France, *Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 160-61.

part) as a demonstration of his consistency with the law and his inconsistency with the religious culture that surrounded the law.<sup>13</sup> This concept comes into sharp focus in verse 20. If Jesus was in line with the Old Testament Law (v. 17) and he was advocating for strict adherence to it (vv. 18–19), then Jesus should have granted the Scribes and the Pharisees the highest positions within the kingdom of God. Yet, Jesus stated, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20).

The challenge to religious cultural norms is obvious. Jesus does not want the amount of righteousness demonstrated by those who have assumed the mantle of the most outwardly self-righteous. Instead, he wants the people to beware of the practices of such people (6:1) and demonstrate righteousness that exceeds their own. It must be pointed out that verse 20 does not just look forward, but also serves as a summary statement of Jesus’ previous thoughts.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Pharisees were not wrong to uphold the law. They were wrong to do it in such a way that ignored the weightier issues of the law (Matt 23:23).

### The “You Have Heard It Said” Statements

Both in Matthew 5 and Matthew 23, Jesus went on to describe exactly what he was demanding. In both passages, Jesus demonstrated that true righteousness involved not just external actions with regard to the law (which of course were still demanded), but rather the motives behind the actions. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus emphasized justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In Matthew 5, Jesus offered six “You have heard it said” statements, with each one offering an antithesis that speaks to the motives behind the law being addressed. The command to not murder and harbor anger is interpreted in light of Jesus’ commands of love and reconciliation.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> J. Daryl Charles argued that “While some in the Christian community might be inclined to believe that the commandments are no longer valid, ‘on the other side of the street,’ most likely in the synagogue (23:2, 6), there are debates raging between the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Oral tradition, that is, the ‘fence around the law,’ has had the effect of obscuring the true meaning of the commandments (see Mark 7:8-13). In a day when halakhic interpretation was en route to being absolutized, it was the ‘abrogators’ of the law who were to meet the force of Jesus’ fury (hence, the material in Matt 23:1ff.). Stringent Pharisaical interpretation of the law (not to mention ‘lawlessness’) was to be rejected, and it is the distortions in these traditions that must be addressed—*Ēkou sate hoti errethē. . . eg ō de legō hymin and purged* (5:21-48). The stress on continuity in 5:17-18 is important for interpreting the ‘antitheses’ in 5:21-48; it is not the Torah itself that Jesus rejects, rather the *halakah*, the oral tradition and interpretation, that have come to surround the law” (J. Daryl Charles, “Garnishing with the ‘Greater Righteousness’: The Disciple’s Relationship to the Law [Matthew 5:17-20],” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 [2002]: 8).

<sup>14</sup> F. P. Viljoen, “Righteousness and Identity Formation in the Sermon on the Mount,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69 (2013): 6.

<sup>15</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 228.

The command against adultery and lust is interpreted in relation to Jesus' commands to completely remove sin from practice. Craig Blomberg noted that "Christians must recognize those thoughts and actions which, long before any overt sexual sin, make the possibility of giving in to temptation more likely, and they must take dramatic action to avoid them."<sup>16</sup>

Jesus' statements concerning divorce and remarriage flow from his commands concerning lust. In a culture that allowed the husband to divorce his wife for any displeasurable reason, Jesus maintained the seriousness of upholding the marriage relationship. John Nolland stated, "Marriage is not a contract to be cancelled when no longer convenient but rather, as testified to in Mal. 2:14-16, a covenant relationship that calls for sustained faithfulness."<sup>17</sup> This leads to Jesus' statements concerning oaths, which he interprets in relation to God's demands for truthfulness. A person should do what he says, without needing an elaborate oath, simply because he is a person of truthfulness. Once again, there is great continuity between Jesus' demands and Old Testament obligations and discontinuity with the religious culture of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus' final two "You have heard it said" statements revolve around the relationship between an individual and his enemy. Once again, Jesus interprets these commands in relation to his demands for love. Jesus demanded love for not just those who it was socially acceptable to love, but also for an enemy. Two notes need to be made here. First, Jesus compared the one who loves only those who it is socially normal to love with the tax collectors and the Gentiles. Both groups were reviled by Jesus' audience. Tax collectors were Jews carrying out the bidding of Rome (sometimes at a dishonest rate) at the expense of their kinsmen. Thus, they were considered "among the most apostate Jews."<sup>19</sup> There are possibly two connotations to the term "Gentiles." On one hand, the Jews despised the Gentiles because they were considered unclean and, in the words of Craig Keener, "immoral, idolatrous, and often anti-Jewish pagans."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the term has a political meaning as well. Israel had been waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver them from the rule of the Gentiles. Chief among the Gentiles in this time was Rome, whose rule, according to Philip Esler, exhibited "three essential characteristics" of colonialism: "first, political control over subject peoples backed up by

---

<sup>16</sup>Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 109.

<sup>17</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 247.

<sup>18</sup> See Don B. Garlington, "Oath-Taking in the Community of the New Age (Matthew 5:33-37)," *Trinity Journal* 16 (1995): 139-70.

<sup>19</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 5:46-47.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

overwhelming military force; second, the voracious extraction of economic resources; and third, an ideology legitimating these processes conveyed by discourses of various kinds.”<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not Jesus was conjuring up thoughts of their uncleanness or their political hatred (or both), Jesus’ mention of these two groups moves beyond the comparison between them and his audience to the direct ramifications regarding love. Who is the enemy his audience hates the most? The tax collectors and the Roman pagans. And yet, Jesus is demanding that his audience love even them. Once again, Jesus moved his audience from the mere demands of the culture to the demands of God, who sees the motives and the heart.

## Hypocrisy and Specific Practices

Jesus moved from the motives behind specific commands to the motives behind specific practices, mainly, giving, praying, and fasting. In all three pericopes, Jesus warns against following the pattern of the *hypokritēs* (ὑποκριτής). The term *hypokritēs* refers to an actor who takes on a role or puts on a mask for the sake of the show.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Jesus saw the Pharisees participating in acts glorifying themselves that should have brought glory to God.<sup>23</sup> It is not that giving, praying, and fasting are wrong; these are acts that Jesus expected to occur with some regularity (when you pray, when you fast). *Hypokritēs* occurs in Matthew fifteen times, in Luke three times, and once in Mark. This amount of usage in Matthew’s gospel as compared to the other gospels demonstrates Matthew’s continual desire to express the demands of Jesus on the motives of his hearers.

What is the meaning of “vain repetition” in the midst of this context? The term *battalogéō* (βατταλογέω) has a base meaning of stammering, speaking with many words, or babbling. It is a hapax legomenon, only occurring here, and is also rare in secular use as well, making the context of Matthew 6 the key in determining meaning.<sup>24</sup> Much like 5:20, Matthew 6:7 both summarizes Jesus’ previous statement (don’t babble on for the sake of gaining personal attention, i.e., with wrong motives like the Pharisees) and moves his audience forward to his following statement (don’t babble on for the sake of coercing God, i.e., with wrong motives like the Gentiles). Instead, the individual should pray with a proper understanding of God (the Father who knows our needs before we ask).

---

<sup>21</sup> Philip F. Esler, “Rome in Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John K. Riches and David C. Sim (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s. v., “ὑποκριτής,” by Ulrich Wilkins.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), s. v., “ὑποκριτής,” by H. Giesen.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), s.v., “βατταλογέω,” by H. Balz.

## Matthew 6:7: Culture, and Music

Matthew introduces Jesus as the king who has the right to demand a new kind of righteousness with new expectations and requirements. Throughout Matthew 5, 6, and 7, these new expectations are made on the heart. These heart demands include a proper understanding of relationships, fasting, and prayer. While music is not specifically mentioned in this passage, music as praise and worship in church settings can and often does serve as communication between God and the congregation, putting it in the category of prayer. After all, in praise the congregation is magnifying God, and in worship the congregation is bowing down before him. If he is King and he has the right to set the expectations and requirements, then all that is done in a church setting should conform to these new commands of righteousness, including music and culture.

The issue at hand is not repetition per se, but rather repetition with wrong motives. Some have argued that music should be safeguarded by not allowing any sense of drastic repetition. Prohibiting repetition in order keep it from becoming vain establishes a demand of music that Jesus does not, thus putting the church in danger of judging righteousness based on external appearances. Such a view is no better than the attitude of the Pharisees and would be just as hypocritical. We recently baptized a new believer and added her to our church fellowship. After Sunday School one day, she asked why we Baptists do not recite the Lord's prayer. It was explained that the Lord's Prayer was a model to be followed, not repeated in vain. As the service was about to start, she looked at her bulletin and noticed that we were singing the Doxology as we usually do each Sunday. She turned to me and asked, "why is it not OK to recite the Lord's Prayer in repetition because it might be said in vain, but it is OK to sing the doxology each Sunday? Couldn't that become just as vain?" The hypocrisy of safeguarding certain things but not others based on cultural traditions fails to follow Jesus' commands. Throughout this passage, Jesus addressed his culture's understandings and safeguards around God's law. The "But I say to you" statements addressed these safeguards by moving past the external appearances and gave new commands that moved to the motivation of the heart. If Jesus is the king and he has given new commands, then his commands are the only safeguards that matter.

There are, however, valid reasons to take care when using songs with repetition. Matthew 6 does not give a license to sing whatever song in whatever way a worship leader or congregation desires. Instead, it demands that the church implements practices of music and worship that are consistent with the teachings of Matthew 6. Jesus warns against hypocrisy, which in terms of music equals choosing songs and singing them with wrong motives and meaningless repetition. Once again, the new King has set new demands that move from external practices to the internal motives.

In order to avoid hypocrisy and meaningless repetition, the leader should ask himself two questions. First, "What is the theological basis or spiritual truth being emphasized?" If it is not based in truth, then do not sing it. The King has come, revealing himself, his nature, his purpose, and his commands. The songs we choose to sing should reflect this revelation. If theological accuracy cannot be maintained in worship, then it misrepresents the King's revelation, nature, purpose, and commands, leading to hypocrisy.

On the other side, if it conforms to truth, then it can and should be sung with the appropriate motives and attitudes. This allows for great freedom as a congregation determines which music style to use, whether as a declaration or as a prayer, whether spontaneous or

prepared, as well as in worship, prayer, and other congregational practices. The church should always rely on the new King and his new commands, not personal preferences, to establish what is and is not sin.

Second, the music leader should ask, “What am I trying to accomplish in the hearts and minds of the congregation?” If a song sung in a certain way is used purely to elicit a conjuring of internal emotion, personal attention, or manipulate God, then do not sing it. There is no doubt of the connection between music and emotion. The song leader, however, should never seek to disengage the mind from the heart in song and style choices. Jesus does not want just emotional connection or intellectual knowledge. Jesus wants hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. In other words, he wants all of us in all our actions, even in song. As the leader uses songs with repetition, I suggest he take the time to challenge the congregation to hold onto their intellectual knowledge of the theological truths being expressed as the music also engages their emotions.

By asking these two questions, the song leader can guide his congregation to worship in theological truth and with the right motives. The congregation can then effectively move from vain repetition, which is hypocritical and follows the pattern of the Pharisees, to biblical worship in both spirit and in truth.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout Matthew, Christ is king. Since he is king, he has the right to dictate his demands for righteousness. Matthew 5–7 sets up Jesus’ definition of righteousness as righteousness that stems from right desires, attitudes, and motives, which is contrasted with the cultural understanding of righteousness exhibited by the Pharisees. Thus, vain repetition does not mean no repetition, but rather repetition or babbling with wrong motives, either to gain the attention of others or to gain the attention of God.

In order to avoid babbling, the music sung should maintain theological accuracy, allowing worship to be consistent with the nature and character of God. In order to avoid the hypocrisy of wrong motives, worship should seek to connect the heart with the mind, allowing for the whole person and congregation to use their songs as more than just songs, but as authentic prayer.

This understanding allows for great freedom when it comes to the church’s use of culture, especially as it relates to music. While there are valid reasons to be cautious, if a song speaks theological truth and it is sung with right motives, then it enters into the realm of prayer and worship that is in both spirit and truth. Let the leader choose songs that truly lead the congregation to worship (bow down) and praise (magnify) God, Christ, and the Spirit.

# Abstracts of Recent SWBTS School of Church Music Doctoral Dissertations

## **A Performer's Study of Selected Movements in Sonata Form for Organ by Paul Hindemith, Vincent Persichetti, and Petr Eben**

Jeffrey Gordon Brummel, DMA

The purpose of this document is to present a performer's study in preparation for a doctoral lecture recital. The three composers in this study employed neo-classical principles in the selected compositions. The composers that were selected were exposed to the organ-building trends that occurred in the early and mid-twentieth century. The exposure to these organ-building trends influenced the composer's organ compositions selected in this document, especially regarding organ registration.

The first chapter is in two parts. The first part illustrates organ-building trends in the early and mid-twentieth century in Europe and the United States. These organ-building trends progressed concurrently with the evolution of the sonata form in neoclassicism. The second part explains the structure of the sonata form in the Classical period. Then, it is compared to the sonata form as it is employed in neo-classicism.

The next three chapters each contain a composer's representative work of a neo-classical sonata form written for the organ. For an informed interpretation of the selected sonata form movements in this study, the formal structures and various aspects of performance practices were discussed. The second chapter examines the first movement from *Sonata No. 1* by Paul Hindemith, who was among the earliest of the neoclassical composers in Germany in the twentieth century. The third chapter focuses on American composer Vincent Persichetti's complete *Sonata for Organ*, Op. 86. The fourth chapter studies the last movement, *Finale*, from *Nedelni hudba* (Sunday Music) by the Czech composer Petr Eben. The fifth chapter is the conclusion, summarizing the study presented in this document.

## **A Credobaptist Defense for Including Children in Corporate Worship through a Biblically Appropriate Application of Developmental Psychology**

Robert Brian Pendergraft, PhD

The participation level of children in the corporate worship gatherings of credobaptist churches varies greatly. Some churches have children present for the entire service, while in other churches the children never enter the sanctuary. The purpose of this dissertation is to survey the biblical references, historical precedence, and educational advantages of including children in the weekly corporate worship gathering of the local church. Upon



discerning principles from each of these areas, this document will answer the challenges to including children in worship that are raised by those finding it more beneficial to segregate children into a separate worship environment. After this defense, the dissertation argues that in light of Scripture, history, and educational psychology, the most appropriate place for children to be on Sunday is in the corporate worship service with their parents.

Following an introductory chapter, chapter two examines scriptural references referring to children in both the Old and New Testaments and also referring to corporate worship in both Testaments. This exercise demonstrates that parents are to be the primary instructors of children in spiritual matters, and that throughout Scripture some of that instruction has taken place during corporate worship where all ages were present.

Chapter three traces the history of the place of children in the worshiping community from the time of the early church through the present. Though worship practice is not universally consistent, this survey demonstrates that children have been included in worship with their family for most of church history.

Chapter four presents a framework in which secular psychology may be applied in the church and then examines educational and developmental psychologists whose ideas are beneficial for application in the church setting. It draws principles from the work of Piaget, Erickson, Kohlberg, Vygotsky, and Bruner that are then applied to the concept of children in worship in the later chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter five considers arguments against the inclusion of children in the corporate worship of the church. It also addresses churches that include children in worship but make no effort to meaningfully integrate them into the worship service.

Chapter six provides a synthesis of the principles drawn from each area examined and then applies those principles to the different ages that comprise the church. It also presents suggestions for areas of further research.

## **The Cantic Settings of Edmund Rubbra: A Conductor's Study**

Aaron M. Rice, DMA

Edmund Rubbra is widely known in Great Britain as a symphonist of the twentieth century who also composed some in the realm of sacred choral music. In the United States, he is less widely known and his choral works are infrequently performed. He composed five cantic settings to fulfill various ecclesial and municipal commissions from 1949 to 1962. These valuable settings provide choral ensembles with modern, aurally accessible, material for services in the Anglican tradition as well as sacred choral music for concert use.

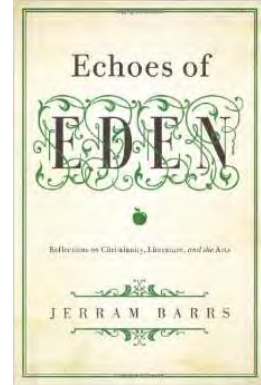
The document that follows contains a choral conductor's analysis of Rubbra's five cantic settings, *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, Op. 65, *Festival Te Deum*, Op. 71, *Festival Gloria*, Op. 94, and *Te Deum*, Op. 115. Chapter one gives a biographical account of Edmund Rubbra's life, including information about his compositional influences and details about the development of his compositional style. Chapters two through five are devoted each to a different opus. These chapters are written in two parts: historical/theoretical analysis and performance considerations based upon the analysis. Included in the historical/theoretical analysis is an observation of that particular cantic setting by Rubbra in context with similar settings by his immediate predecessors and contemporaries in twentieth-century England. The

first half of each chapter includes a thorough examination of the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, formal, and accompanimental characteristics found in the canticles. The section in each chapter that assesses the performance considerations for that canticle setting includes thoughts on intonation, rhythmic precision, conducting gestures, line/color, and textual emphasis. The final chapter explains common style characteristics found among the canticle settings as observed in the historical/theoretical analysis of the previous chapters. Further information is given in closing about a conductor's considerations for appropriate programming of Rubbra's canticle settings.

## Book Reviews

***Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts*, by Jerram Barrs. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 192 pp. \$17.99.**

“The arts need no justification; they are good gifts of God, a basic part of the creation order. Our calling is simply to be thankful for these gifts of sub-creativity” (22). Jerram Barrs makes this bold statement at the end of his first chapter, immediately disclosing his philosophical stance on art. He writes this book as a directive to a Christian philosophy of the arts, expressing how he thinks every Christian should interact with, and consider the beauty of, the arts. Barrs argues that all humanity realizes the fallen reality of its nature and longs for redemption, and this is reflected in good art. His thesis states, “All great art will echo these three elements of Eden: (1) Eden in its original glory, (2) Eden that is lost to us, and (3) the promise that Eden will be restored” (26). He attempts to prove this by looking at several examples of literature he believes exhibit these characteristics. A professor at Covenant Theological Seminary since 1989, Barrs teaches apologetics and outreach. His education consists of a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Manchester and a Master of Divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary, where he currently works. He is a multi-published author, specializing in arts and literature.



Barrs’s book can be divided neatly into two major sections. The first five chapters represent a detailed, outlined philosophy of the arts from a Christian perspective. In the final five chapters, Barrs turns his attention to demonstrating his philosophical assumptions through examining specific examples of literature.

In chapter one God is portrayed as divine creator with humanity made in his image as sub-creators. Barrs also makes an argument against asceticism that will be outlined more thoroughly below. Chapters two and three present the artist as an imitator of God in creation and the specific calling on the life of a Christian artist. The reader is supplied with criteria for judging the arts in the fourth chapter, while the fifth connects the “Echoes of Eden” to general revelation found in biblical passages such as Romans 1.

The second section of the book focuses on exemplifying these “Echoes” by analyzing the life and works of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, a specimen of contemporary literature in the *Harry Potter* series, the world-view communicated by Shakespeare’s works, and the works of Jane Austen. After these illustrations, Barrs uses an appendix in an attempt to debunk an argument that would unravel his perspective on *Harry Potter*—that of Dumbledore’s homosexuality. The book includes a general index and an index of Scriptures cited.

Barrs elaborately presents the approach Christians should have to evaluating the arts. One of the snares he warns against is that of asceticism: the avoidance of indulgences. While condemning this philosophy, Barrs consistently elevates the use of myth in literature. Barrs

defines asceticism as the belief that it is unspiritual or sinful to find pleasure in our creaturely lives (17). He quickly rejects this concept as heresy and attempts to display creativity through art as a creation of God and thus good, stating, “The teaching that it is sinful to enjoy the gifts of creation is deeply blasphemous because it is a rejection of God’s own valuation of creation” (17). This ideal, he argues, can easily lead to an idolatry of self-righteousness if not kept in check and has been a temptation throughout the history of the church.

This attitude is combated by Barrs’s insistence that God values his creation. He called it “good” from the beginning, but asceticism rejects God’s evaluation while faulting his work with corrupting mankind (17). Christians should esteem God’s handiwork on the same level he esteems it if they are to recognize the echoes of Eden hidden, sometimes unconsciously, in the very base of human constructions (18). Since beauty can and should be observed and enjoyed, asceticism is a fallacy.

Barrs specifically acknowledges beauty in the form of literature and myth. He depicts Lewis and Tolkien in particular as lovers of myth and legend. Growing up enraptured by myths, the unbelieving Lewis was intrigued by Tolkien’s insistence that the gospel works in a similar manner to myth (93). The idea that created myths contain a kernel of truth underneath their unworthy outer husks was fully expounded when Tolkien wrote an essay that states, “The Gospels contain . . . a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain marvels—particularly artistic, beautiful, and moving” (107). Thus, when these men used myth as a method of communication, they were attempting to convey specific life truths on a base level of comprehension. The writings penned by both of these literary giants reflect the Bible’s account of creation, the fall, and God’s great work of redemption: the echoes of Eden cloaked in myth causing the reality of salvation to be evident to readers (117, 135).

The philosophy of the arts presented in this book is articulated masterfully with references to Scripture and conclusive arguments. Barrs is well read, and his deep appreciation for literature is evident. He discusses aspects of the stories examined and the lives of those who created them in great detail. However, his love for these works often overshadows his arguments.

Redemptive themes are often presented within the literature examined. Despite the lack of explicit Christian faith or worldview, the “Echoes of Eden” are contained in literature due to general revelation. However, Barrs proceeds to cause confusion as he labels certain authors Christian due to the “Echoes of Eden” found in their works. This weakens his argument by confusing general revelation with faith-driven intentions. For example, discussing Shakespeare, Barrs is quick to point out the lack of information available on the great playwright today but later labels him a Christian just as quickly due to the content of his material (155). He approaches J. K. Rowling in a similar manner by defending her decision to disclose that Dumbledore is homosexual. He explains away this blatant portrayal of sin by quoting that Dumbledore is ashamed of his past and there is no suggestion of sexual involvement between him and his partner (193–94). Barrs defends the claim of Christian content in Rowling’s work by dismissing this comment as a distraction from liberal criticisms. These examples succeed in depicting a fallen nature and a longing for redemption but shroud them so deeply in sinful actions that the behavior is almost glorified.

Barrs’s book should be read by any Christian seeking to formulate a Christian understanding and philosophy of the arts. The information is accessible, while simultaneously profound. However, Barrs lets his zealous adoration for his favorite literature overshadow some

very real problems in the end. These problems should not necessarily inhibit Christians from enjoying the presented literature, but care should be given to not simply label writers as Christian or say they write from a Christian worldview due to the presence of redemptive qualities within the work.

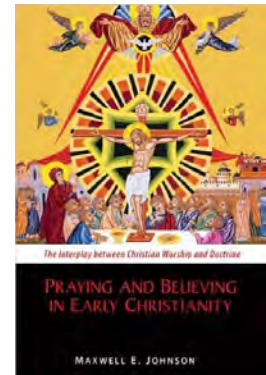
Despite the shortcomings of his arguments concerning the content of the examined fantasies, Barrs's enthusiasm for literature is contagious, causing the reader to desire to study the works discussed. As believers, we should not be surprised to find redemptive themes within artistic works whether they are created by Christians or non-Christians because God created humanity with an inner longing to be redeemed, and he has shown himself to all through the work of his creation.

Ben Little

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine*, by Maxwell E. Johnson. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013. 148 pp. \$19.95.**

Prosper of Aquitaine once wrote that "the law of prayer should establish a law for belief" (2). This idea of prayer, or liturgy, informing and establishing belief is often stated by the shorthand expression *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which means "law of prayer, law of belief." In this book, Maxwell E. Johnson explores whether liturgy influenced doctrine in the early church, or vice-versa, by analyzing the early church's doctrines of soteriology, the Trinity, Christology, and the worship of Mary. Johnson is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, professor of liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, and the author of more than fifteen books about liturgy. Johnson desires to show that "liturgical prayer does have a privileged place" in the development of doctrine (23). However, he also concedes that doctrine informs doxology throughout the history of the early church. Thus his main conclusion is that there has been a "creative interplay between praying and believing" (128) since the genesis of the early church, and that *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* both equally shape each other.



In chapter one, Johnson examines the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith and concludes that this doctrine was influenced by the liturgy of the early church. He shows how Augustine used the practice of infant baptism to defend the doctrine of original sin, and he gives examples of prayers and canons that prioritize grace in salvation. Then, in chapter two, he analyzes how prayer was used as a defense of orthodox Christology and Trinitarianism and how both heretical groups and orthodox groups adapted their liturgies after the councils of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon. In chapter three, he seeks to prove that the worship of Mary played a role in the buttressing of orthodox Christology. Johnson then in chapter four looks to history to give examples of how liturgy should shape ethics as well as doctrine and presents in chapter five the final understanding of his study.

Interestingly, Johnson does not present his thesis until the final chapter. In the first four chapters, he examines various issues and shows that sometimes the *lex orandi* shapes the *lex credendi*, sometimes it has minimal effect, and sometimes the *lex credendi* shapes the *lex orandi*. For example, he explains how the rites of baptism convinced Augustine of "the

obvious need for all candidates—both adults and infants—to be liberated from sin, death, and the devil" (4). Additionally, both Augustine and Prosper appeal to the church's ritual supplications for grace as their main argument against Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism (8).

Johnson also demonstrates how prayer directly to Christ affected the theology of Christ and God early on in church history. He sifts through various views on prayer in the early church and concludes along with Larry W. Hurtado that "Jesus was given a place that linked him with the one God in unparalleled ways" (30). Johnson cites the New Testament (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20), the *Didache*, Ignatius of Antioch, a third-century eucharistic prayer, and prayers from the Syrian East, which are all directly addressed to Christ as God (30–31). He also quotes the *Gloria* and *Te Deum* as evidence of liturgical prayer to Christ even before the Council of Nicea (46). Later, he states that the arguments of Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea regarding the baptismal and doxological addresses to the Holy Spirit are what led to the final version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (64).

However, in other instances, Johnson concludes that liturgy had a minimal effect on doctrine. In fact, in the case of the development of the doctrine of Christ's two natures in one person (90), the reverse of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is true. To reflect the teaching of the hypostatic union, which was articulated at Chalcedon in AD 451, the adoration of both of Christ's natures was incorporated into the eucharistic liturgy of Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Justinian I (AD 527–565) (92).

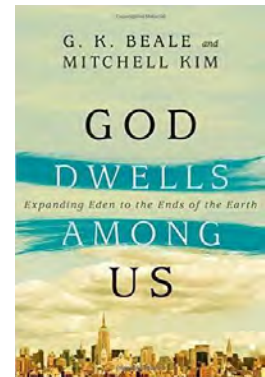
By the final chapter, Johnson very cogently proves that liturgy played a major role in shaping the early church's doctrine. He also shows that "doctrine checks doxology just as much as praying assists in the shaping of believing" (140). Yet there are some weaknesses in the book, too. First, it is difficult to connect chapter four to the rest of the book. His conclusion that the "*lex orandi* of the eucharistic sacrifice . . . may well be shaping again not only the *lex credendi* but also the *lex agendi*, the self-offering of Christians in the world" is biblically and historically veracious. However, this chapter seems to be somewhat tangential to his thesis. Also, he often quotes an entire document, such as *The Canons of the Council of Orange*, which has 25 articles and occupies five pages of text (9–13), to make a simple point. Finally, he sometimes cites heretical and apocryphal documents, such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, and tries to purport them as "orthodox" just to prove his arguments (80).

Johnson's conclusions about Christian worship and doctrine in the early church are supported by his vast research and quotation of primary sources and modern patristic scholars. However, by paring down his quotations and analysis to what is truly pertinent, he could have produced a more concise, cohesive, and convincing work. Despite this excess, Johnson still has given to graduate students and liturgical scholars helpful analysis of the interplay between liturgy and theology.

James P. Cheesman  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*, by G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 211 pp. \$17.00.**

Gregory Beale is currently a professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he is the occupant of the J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament. Mitchell Kim is the senior pastor of Living Water Alliance Church as well as a writer and blogger. *God Dwells among Us* is the result of Kim producing a sermon series based on an earlier book by Beale and then converting the series into book form. The purpose of the book is to trace Eden as both the prototype of communion with God and the goal of creation throughout time, from the fall to Eden's restoration in the New Jerusalem. It argues that Eden is the divine sanctuary where God dwelt with his people, whose purpose was to expand Eden, and thereby the presence of God, to the ends of the earth. After man's disobedience, the story of humanity is God's plan to restore the universe to the state of Eden.



The opening chapter defines Eden as the first temple and place of God's presence, arguing that it was God's intent for Adam to expand Eden to encompass the whole earth. The second chapter explains that the cultural mandate to be fruitful and multiply is a command to expand Eden through worship as God's image-bearers. The third follows this commission after the fall through the patriarchs, while the fourth defines the tabernacle of Israel as a "remix" of Eden, allowing the presence of God to travel with his people even during their exile in the desert. The fifth chapter explores the promises through the prophets that Eden would be restored, while the sixth describes Christ as the new temple to replace the failed one in Jerusalem. The seventh chapter presents the church as the continuation of Christ in replacing the temple, while the eighth continues that line of reasoning to establish Christian believers as priests of that temple. In chapter nine the temple is expanded to encompass all of the cosmos. Finally, the authors suggest some reasons that readers may not have considered this interpretation, while the eleventh chapter lays out some practical consequences for the church.

The authors present their thesis with extensive biblical support. Eden as a sanctuary and temple is established through several references, including Ezekiel 28, where Eden is referred to as containing "sanctuaries" and being the "Holy mountain of God" (18). They analogize the river flowing out of Eden to the river flowing from the throne of God in Revelation (21), showing a gradation of holiness from the river's source, to its banks, to flowing out to the four corners of the earth, reflecting the layers of the temple and the layers of Eden. The book then establishes Adam as the "priest" of this temple, having been given the duty to "work it and keep it" (24), including a duty both to guard it against outside intrusions and to expand the garden (35). Having failed in the first duty, and thus in the second, mankind is expelled from the garden, and sin has instead filled the earth through the descendants of Adam. The authors then argue that through the patriarchs, God established little spaces of "sanctuary" by revealing himself to them. His presence thus spread beyond one locale, establishing pockets of God's presence until the coming of the tabernacle and then the temple, when it is again condensed into one sacred space (46–48). The authors then describe the tabernacle as "Eden remixed" in a context of sin, and by extension, a type of the entire cosmos. They draw parallels between the seven days of creation and seven biblical speeches



about the tabernacle (61). They cover Christ establishing himself (84), and then the church (100), as the new temple. They then argue that the church must grow through the word of God being taken out by “image-bearers” into the world and continuing the cultural mandate given to Adam by expanding the temple-church (104–6). By extension, if the church is a temple, then believers are the priests, an argument supported by passages referring to Christians as a royal priesthood, who dwell in his presence as caretakers of the temple (113). Finally, they move to the eschatological temple, where the Holy of Holies has been expanded to encompass all of the cosmos. They argue that the “new heaven and new earth” of Revelation and the “new Jerusalem” are both referring to all of the cosmos (137–38).

Certain points are well supported scripturally, including the concept of Eden as a sanctuary of God, Christ as the Temple (literally “God with us”), and the church as a temple/priesthood. All of these are rather explicitly contained in Scripture, and the authors give ample citations for their point.

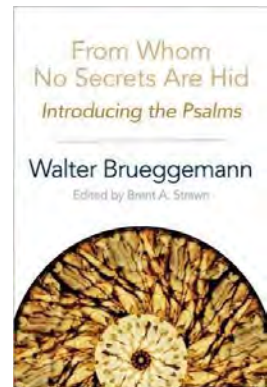
However, there are a few weaknesses in this book, a couple of which are underlying fundamental disagreements, while the rest are rather small complaints. If the temple prophecies are all fulfilled in the church, what is left for Israel? The authors seem to imply that the church has simply and completely replaced Israel, snatching away the promises to Abraham. Second, the metaphor of Eden seems a bit forced at times. While the original material referenced the temple, this book focuses more on Eden, and seems to imply that God is limited to Eden and the Holy of Holies and reliant on man to expand the boundaries of his realm. Third, the role of the priest as “witness” to the outside world is never really discussed, leaving the practical application somewhat vague. As to the smaller issues, the authors state that the serpent was “outside” the Garden (25), yet we have no reason to think it was originally “outside” at all. The area outside Eden is called “chaotic” and “inhospitable,” yet God called it “good.”

Overall, this book has some intriguing and useful points concerning the concept of viewing the Bible through the lens of the temple. It should be accessible to pastors and those with education but veers often enough into academic writing that it may be slightly difficult for the layperson, though by no means impossible.

Erik Danielson  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, by Walter Brueggemann. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. 194 pp. \$23.75.**

The Psalms have been a staple in corporate worship, Jewish and Christian, for thousands of years. However, do believers today understand the theological depth of these songs and how the ancient songwriters express emotions and situations that are accessible even today? The highly respected Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has written an introduction to the Psalms titled *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*. Brueggemann explains the deep meanings and accessibility of these Scriptures and songs to all people to strengthen their individual faith and “lead common church practice to greatly expand the repertoire of Psalms that are utilized in worship” (xi). His thesis guides his analysis—the Psalter in its entirety articulates





all the deep secrets of the individual human heart and of the community, ranging from the highest to the absolute lowest emotional states. Therefore, the Psalter can and should be used in its entirety within the corporate worship of the church.

Chapter one is a broad introduction to the Psalms themselves, identifying the entire book as a script meant to be read fully, ranging from gratitude and praise to lament and complaint. Then in chapter two, which is an independent lecture presentation, Brueggemann describes the counter-world of the Psalms, a fulfilling world created by YHWH that counters every fear and uncertainty of the human world. Chapters three through sixteen delve into specific psalms and groupings of psalms. The analysis includes but is not limited to Psalms 29 and 68 (YHWH as the warrior king), psalms of praise, Psalm 104 to the Creator, psalms that seek God's engagement such as complaints and petitions, psalms of violence, the unique companionship of Psalms 22 and 23, the confession of Psalm 51, the breadth of Psalm 73, wisdom psalms and the specific thankfulness of Psalm 30, 107, and 116.

The author establishes his argument in the *Preface*, but chapters one and two contain the bulk of the argument itself. In chapter one, Brueggemann introduces the overall shape of the Psalter, ranging from the experiential extremes of gratitude, praise, lament, complaint. This range of experiences is the same with believers today. The Israelites were human, just as believers are now, and they recorded their songs to the LORD so that later generations could "reperform" these songs as an outflowing of their relationship with YHWH. In addition to the experiences within the Psalms, Brueggemann identifies two theological foundations throughout the book—covenantal Torah obedience and the faith and continuation of the Davidic line looking forward to its eternal completion. The author asserts, "The God who commands Torah is the God who exercises generative sovereignty over all creation" (7), and this God is the same today as in the days of the ancient Israelites. Believers today can benefit much from interacting with and "reperforming" the psalms of God's chosen people.

Brueggemann continues his argument through addressing the counter-world of the Psalms—believers desire to use the Psalms because "[they] voice and mediate to [them] a counter-world that is at least in tension with [their] other, closely held world" (9). The world of today is one of many significant problems. However, as the Israelites knew and recorded, the Psalms establish a counter-world, "[in] which YHWH presides in reliable fidelity . . . the transformative attentiveness of God" (15). In this counter-world, people must depend on God for every part of their existence. The author argues that this counter-world "refuses to let [people] live in the thin world of anxiety, greed, self-sufficiency . . . [etc.]" (26) because the primary character of this counter-world is YHWH himself. People still struggle and question him, as is clear throughout the Psalter, but YHWH is faithful and worthy of trust. Therefore, as his children, believers can and should use all of the psalms to interact with this almighty God.

The specific analysis of psalms validates Brueggemann's argument and clearly communicates the covenantal relationship between the people of God and YHWH himself. For example, in Psalm 104, the psalm-writer praises YHWH for creating life and providing for his creation in any and every situation. Brueggemann draws in the Hebrew text often, and in Psalm 104, the *ruach* of YHWH "[is the] generous, life-initiating, life-sustaining gift of vitality without which no creature can live" (9). The author also incorporates non-Psalmic Scriptures to strengthen the meaning of the texts, such as Isaiah 42:5–6 and Ezekiel 37:1–14, which praise YHWH as creator and sustainer.

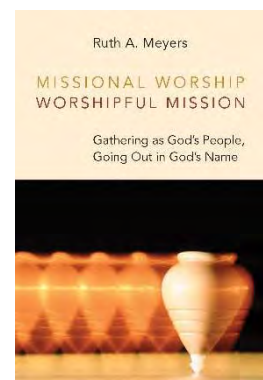
However, regarding the covenantal relationship between YHWH and the Israelites, Brueggemann attributes too much power to the people and deemphasizes the transcendence of YHWH above all creation. Within many of the Psalms, the people strive “to get God’s attention and to motivate God’s engagement. . . . These prayers assume that . . . God does not know until it has been said aloud” (87). Regarding petitions and requests of the people, Brueggemann asserts “The assumption . . . is that if God can be moved to act, all will be well” (87). Additionally, I must contend with the author’s analysis of God’s divine vanity. While YHWH is a jealous God and, as creator, deserves all praise, Brueggemann writes, “God wants to be well thought of by other gods and by other peoples” (90). The author interprets this psalmic literature through the lens of emergent monotheism; therefore, YHWH is the all-powerful God of Israel but not the one and only true God. This belief is also apparent in the author’s explanation of Psalms 29 and 68, the Canaanite hymns of praise. Brueggemann claims, “In its Israelite context, the divine name has been altered to YHWH . . . a determined effort to displace the name and marking of Baal” (37). While I understand this use of poetic imagination and imagery of YHWH as a warrior king who conquers Baal, I do not believe that YHWH was or can ever be in a contextual position; he was, is, and will always be the LORD over all creation, transcendent, the one and only true God.

While I do not agree with the author’s theology of the emergent monotheism of Israel, Brueggemann argued his thesis very well. The entire Psalter should be used in corporate worship to strengthen the faith of believers and as a tool of emotional expression and response to YHWH’s work in their lives. This volume is helpful for a deeper understanding of the Psalms, but the reader must have a strong foundation of faith and have experienced the power of YHWH in their lives. I would not recommend this book to a new believer; however, I would highly recommend it as a deeper study on this immense and powerful book of Psalms.

Melissa Jackson  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going Out in God’s Name*, by Ruth A. Meyers. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014. 242 pp. \$21.74.**

Ruth A. Meyers earned an undergraduate degree in special education from Syracuse University, a Master of Divinity from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, and a Master of Arts and Ph. D. in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame. She is the Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgical Studies at Church Divinity School of the Pacific. In *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, Meyers aims to shed light on the “missional” church. Through her writing, Meyers desires to prove to the reader that worship and mission are not separate categories but are of the same category and flow in and out of each other. Meyers believes that this should inform the church’s Sunday morning public worship liturgy to educate and form the congregation to take part in God’s mission, *missio Dei*, as an extension of public worship and return to public worship as a result of taking part in *missio Dei*.



After an introductory chapter of her thoughts on the connection of worship and mission, Meyers defines the terms that she will use continually throughout this book. These terms include worship and liturgy, and we are also introduced to two forms of visual aid Meyers uses to help make the connection between worship and mission, the “Möbius strip” and the spinning top. With these definitions and aids in place, Meyers then proceeds to explain how worship and mission are connected throughout different parts of common church liturgy. These common parts of liturgy include the gathering of the people, proclaiming and responding to the word of God, praying for the world or intercessory prayer, enacting reconciliation, celebrating communion, and going forth in the name of Christ. Throughout each of these common parts of church liturgy, Meyers informs the reader of her observations on these liturgical parts and how she has concluded that each of these can be and is linked to mission. To conclude her book, Meyers gives the reader tips that she believes will be helpful in planning a missional worship service.

The organization of this book lent itself well to the explanation of how each portion of the worship service can be connected to mission. The strength of organizing the book this way was that it started with this simplest portion of worship, the gathering of the people, and progressed into the meatier portions of worship, such as the reading and response of the Word and intercessory prayer. Another strength to Meyers’s argument is that in each chapter, she breaks down the section of the liturgy being discussed and shows how that section not only points the worshiper back to God’s mission but also how it would, if properly addressed, educate and form the worshiper into thinking about how that translated into going out and taking part in God’s mission outside the church. Thus, Meyers clearly demonstrates through many means the flowing of worship into mission into worship.

This is most evident in her chapter on intercessory prayer. When intercessory prayer is included in the liturgy of the worship service, “the assembly joins in the prayer of Christ for these needs and concerns and so participates in Christ’s priestly ministry. Offering intercession for the needs of the world is thus a form of participation in God’s mission” (108). Meyers adequately shows how participating in intercessory prayer allows the worshiper to take part in God’s mission by showing his reconciling love toward the world.

There are some points where Meyers seems to contradict herself. One instance of this is seen first on page fifty-two where Meyers points out that she was on the commission that was developing resources for blessing same-sex marriages. Scripture clearly points out the sinfulness of same-sex relationships. Looking beyond this issue and relating it to Meyers’s argument, the idea of blessing same-sex marriage can be seen as showing God’s love to the sinful world. So on the one hand, it can be seen as taking part in God’s mission to reconcile the world. However, a dilemma arises when the connection of blessing same-sex relationships to worshipful mission is attempted. If worship is lifting praises and giving glory to God, how can one praise God and give glory to him through the condoning of a sinful behavior? The logic does not follow to fit both sides of Meyers’s argument.

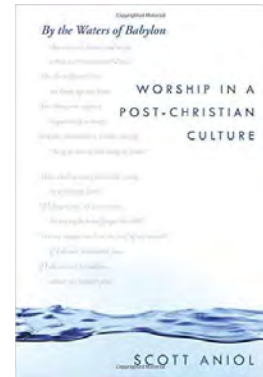
This book can prove to be a valuable resource for both those who participate in worship and also those who lead worship. While there are a couple of theological issues that would concern most evangelical Christians, the overarching line of thought of missional worship is valuable. This book would also provide a great platform for discussion among

those studying worship and the missional movement. In the end, Meyers' book was well organized, informative, and useful.

Matthew Stringfellow  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture*, by Scott Aniol. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2015. 211 pp. \$17.99.**

“Corporate worship must contribute to the goal of making disciples so that they might worship God acceptably by leading people to draw near to communion with God through Christ by faith using appropriate cultural expressions” (179). Scott Aniol is assistant professor of ministry and worship and chair of the music ministry department in the School of Church Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Aniol’s purpose for writing *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* is to answer the question of how Christians can worship correctly and fulfill their gospel-sharing commission in a post-Christian America. His aim is to prove that “the most missional worship is that which seeks to glorify God in making disciple worshipers by communicating God’s truth through the use of appropriate cultural forms that are regulated in Scripture” (177).



Aniol opens with an in-depth description of the missional movement’s history, theology, and relationship to surrounding cultures. Next, he explains the most prevalent views of how Christians should interact with the surrounding culture, and he expresses a biblical definition and understanding of culture. Then, Aniol defines worship according to Scripture, and he explains how corporate worship affects missions. The author closes with his support for the regulative principle, and the implication and application of his thesis.

Aniol explains how cultural forms can be biblical by arguing that “the New Testament terms most closely resembling both cultural anthropologists’ and missional authors’ definitions of ‘culture’ are those related to behavior” (95). By explaining how the biblical terms related to behavior are akin to the anthropological definition of culture, Aniol is able to expose what forms of culture are appropriate for worship. After conversion a person’s conduct will completely change. Aniol considers Christians a “new race” (94). As a new creation believers carry a different behavior or culture than that of nonbelievers.

Aniol argues that corporate worship shapes the behavior and imaginations of the congregants. He states that “corporate worship . . . actually helps to shape the behavior . . . of God’s people” (147). Because Christians are a new nation or people, they behave in homogeneous ways. This behavior should be holy, and it should be “taught through the process of discipleship” (149). The liturgy disciplines the congregant by teaching him how to live the holy life demanded in Scripture. Worship also shapes the imagination. Aniol describes imagination as the way humans “interpret facts” and “make sense of truth” (154). The form of the liturgy should be chosen based upon “the criterion of whether or not they are true—whether or not they correspond to God’s reality as it is communicated aesthetically in his word” (159). Aniol’s argument that corporate worship shapes the Christian’s behavior and imagination decidedly shows how disciple worshipers are formed through the truth proclaimed in the liturgy.

The author defends his thesis by supporting the regulative principle. He states that “worship should be regulated by Scripture similarly to Israel rather than a simplistic motivation to ‘contextualize’ to the surrounding culture” (162). He argues that all the necessary instructions for worship are found in Scripture and that God rejects all elements of worship not found in the Bible. He defends the use of the regulative principle with the story of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–3) and the story of the golden calf (Deut. 9:16). Aniol also believes that a change in a form of worship could lead to the change in a prescribed element of worship. He states that “since the Bible comes to us from God as inspired content and form, Scripture should govern both aspects of corporate worship” (172). Aniol markedly defends his thesis by explaining how both the forms and content of corporate worship are regulated in Scripture.

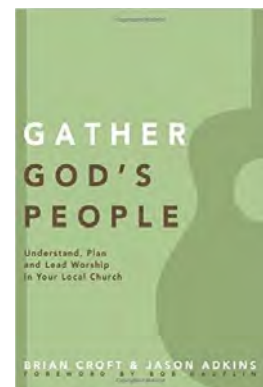
*By the Waters of Babylon* is immensely biblical and thoroughly historical. Aniol supports his argument well, and his thesis and progression through the book are succinct. He is fair in his description of the missional movement despite his clear reservations and disagreements. His argument that biblical words related to behavior are akin to the anthropological definition of culture is particularly valuable, and his position that liturgy shapes the congregants is equally robust. Though extremely well written, the author could have offered more explanation in a couple of areas. The “sanctificationist approach” to culture is a great concept, but the reader desires a more detailed explanation (115–16). Likewise, common grace, as viewed by different cultural approaches, needs elucidation (75; 78).

Aniol does a superb job writing this timely book. *By the Waters of Babylon* is a great addition to the academic fields of liturgy, cultural anthropology, and theology. It is highly recommended to all interested in culture and worship, specifically those in charge of planning the liturgy.

John Gray  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Gather God's People: Understand, Plan, and Lead Worship in Your Local Church*, by Brian Croft and Jason Adkins. Practical Shepherding Series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 144 pp. \$12.99.**

“These practices are the central elements of worship: the preaching of God’s word, praying in accordance with God’s word, singing what coheres with God’s word, and seeing God’s word through the ordinances” (45). Brian Croft, Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and Jason Adkins, Associate Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church, made this statement in *Gather God’s People: Understand, Plan, and Lead Worship in Your Local Church*. Their purpose is to sharpen leaders’ understanding of biblical corporate worship in the local church. The authors attempt this by explaining in detail the regulated means of grace and demonstrating how these biblically mandated means should be used in planning and leading corporate worship.



The book opens with an explanation of the theology, elements, and spirituality of corporate worship. Next, the authors provide a guide to planning worship through the reading, praying, and singing of the Word. It closes with a section devoted to leading readings, prayers, singing, and the ordinances in corporate worship.

Croft and Adkins explain how the reading of Scripture is an element regulated by the Bible. They state that “the New Testament, and specifically the apostle Paul, envisions God’s word audibly present throughout Christian worship” (33). The authors also explain how to plan this regulated element. They believe it is best for the readings to align with the sermon, and use a variety of “Testaments and genres” (59). The length of the reading and the congregation’s ability to link the reading with the sermon should also be considered. They also give advice on leading Scripture reading: “Whatever your church’s polity, the service leader should be recognized as a leader in the mold of Hebrews 13” (86). This gives the leader credibility to give instruction to the church. It is important that the leader reads “loudly, clearly, and slowly” (87). He should also understand the text pronunciation and sentence flow. Since God’s word commands the public reading of Scripture, the local body should include this element in cooperate worship.

In addition to Scripture reading, congregational song is a biblical element of worship. The authors argue that “Scripture insists and informs congregational singing” (40). The congregation’s song should reinforce Christian doctrine and virtue, and it should encourage the church. In planning congregational song, the leader should attempt coherence with the sermon: “Song choices can drown out the message of the sermon or they can amplify the word based charge for God’s people” (74). It is mandatory that a song contain biblical doctrine, and articulation of the gospel should be considered in planning. The planner should also take into consideration the tradition of the church’s hymnody. To lead this element, the leader should be “affirmed by the congregation” and “gifted by God” (96). The authors believe that the song leader should be a man because it is a position of spiritual leadership. Ordination and affirmation help to bring authority to this position.

Corporate prayer is also regulated in Scripture. The authors argue that “corporate prayer finds both its charge and content in God’s word” (37). Prayers should be offered for authorities, confession of sin, times of crises, and for conversion of the unregenerate. The authors’ church plans an opening prayer, mid-service prayer, offertory prayer, and concluding prayer. They plan a variety of prayers including pastoral prayers and prayers of confession. In planning the mid-service prayer, they attempt to align it with the sermon and consider the congregation’s needs. Clarity, projection, length, and speed are important in leading cooperate prayer. They state, “In order to make a prayer as clear and accessible as possible, service leaders should engage in at least some preparation prior to the service” (90).

The authors thoroughly explain all the regulated elements of corporate worship. The large quantity of Scripture and the practical application to planning and leading the service accomplish their goal. Explaining the discipleship quality of congregational song could have strengthened their argument. The authors’ interpretation of hymns and spiritual songs as songs other than psalms (42) needs evidence. The claim that the music leader could be the duty of a deacon needs biblical support (96).

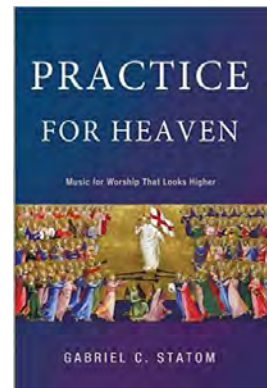
This book would be a great asset to any involved in the planning and leading of corporate worship. A list of the appendices includes: “Reintroducing Psalm Singing,” “Psalms Set to Familiar Tunes,” “New Songs/Old Tunes,” and “Church Covenant Hymn.” This book is a concise guide to corporate worship, and it contributes to the fields of Christian worship and ministry.

John Gray  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



***Practice for Heaven: Music for Worship That Looks Higher*, by Gabriel C. Statom. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015. 148 pp. \$19.**

A common phrase used among musicians is, “practice makes perfect.” As one practices for anything, the goal is to become better at doing something so that the final performance of the practiced actions may be the best possible. This idea lies behind *Practice for Heaven* by Gabriel C. Statom, Director of Music at Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The author states that he wants this book to “help musicians develop a philosophy of church music that is grounded in biblical and theological understanding that suggests the role of music in corporate worship should transport the worshiper to the heavenly throne of our God.” Essentially, we are to practice for worship in heaven while here on earth, so we should strive to do it as closely to what heaven looks like.



*Practice for Heaven* is divided into three parts, discussing the following general topics: What We Know about Worship, Music in Worship, and Church Music that Aspires. Part One is a historical and biblical survey of worship and what it has looked like throughout the ages. From a biblical perspective, Statom covers the glimpses into heaven available in the Bible and what we know about worship after the return of Christ. Part Two discusses the musical aspects of worship on earth and begins to compare them to what was discussed about heavenly worship in Part One. The author treats multiple aspects of music in worship including choral, instrumental, and corporate worship music with a brief section on the content within the music. Part Three summarizes the book by discussing common faults in church music and attempting to add some practical application. Then a brief conclusion explains how churches should form their worship philosophies.

The author begins to support his thesis by presenting to the reader historical knowledge and traditions that have been included within the church liturgy throughout the ages. Statom also discusses the various pictures of heaven that are given in the Bible such as Isaiah 6 and Revelation. He argues that it is not the place of the worshiper to decide how to come into God’s presence and that worship is primarily for the glory of God and not for the pleasure of mankind (39).

Part Two is where Statom begins to more thoroughly discuss the musical aspects of worship and mention which considerations should be given when deciding how to form a worship service. One of his concerns has to do with the lack of congregational participation that occurs during the music portion of a service. He attributes this to decline in school music education, perfectionism, individualism, and sound amplification. One of his solutions for counter-acting this fault in congregational participation is to incorporate choirs within the worship service to “hold a standard for corporate singing” (59). Statom also highly supports the use of the organ because it is a versatile instrument that can easily play the melody of a tune and support the congregation as they sing (62).

Part Three takes a more practical approach to music in worship. Here, Statom discusses many common faults that occur with regard to music in worship. An example of this is in his chapter on “Pragmatism in Church Music.” This chapter lists the four most common misunderstandings that are related to pragmatism: an external or mechanical interpretation

of worship, an individualistic interpretation, an emotional uplift interpretation, and a performance interpretation. He makes clear that while these four misunderstandings are not directly pragmatic, they are related to pragmatism in some way. The first one focuses on “what works,” and this can be anything from getting people into the worship service or using the worship service as a means of evangelism. The second puts too much focus on the individual worshiper, which Statom argues creates a narcissistic attitude. Third, an emotional uplift is too entertainment focused. Last, a performance *interpretation* implies that the form of the worship service can be structured based on beliefs and options, which give way to relativism. Statom concludes with a short section on what he believes the philosophy and identity of the corporate church should look like based on the biblical and historic findings presented in his book.

Overall, the author has some good points and if one digs deep enough, he can find theological truth in many of his arguments. For example, Statom makes it very clear that all music that is written in the name of Christianity is not to be used within the realm of corporate worship (94). The advent of commercialized Christian music, he argues, has blurred the expectation of what the purpose of music in worship is. The expectation of coming to church to hear a “performance” is becoming more common. He is also right in saying many songs written in contemporary forms are not suitable for corporate worship for various reasons, ranging from tessitura to rhythmic complexity.

However, there are many weaknesses throughout this book. The first apparent weakness is the lack of editing. Many times there are grammatical errors and block quotations that are not formatted correctly. While the book is written in a clear, easy-to-read fashion, these careless errors make the book unnecessarily confusing to read. Often, the usage of quotations makes the book feel disjoint, as if little thought were put into the flow of the text.

Aside from these editorial considerations many of Statom’s arguments seem weak and unsupported. Within the book, Statom mentions that the guitar is not suitable for use in corporate worship in a larger setting. Assuming only one guitar is used with no amplification he would be correct. However, based on his rationale for the qualities that must be present in an instrument on page 63, his argument falls short. Statom quotes Terry Johnson on the following attributes necessary for an instrument used in corporate worship: “1) Loud enough to effectively support and yet not overwhelm the singing; 2) sophisticated enough to distinctively sound each note; and 3) appropriate, as determined by its inherent qualities and associations.” With amplification, a guitar is sufficient in volume and a skilled guitar player can play the melody of a song effectively. If multiple guitars are used and each play independent parts (rhythm, melody, and bass line), then the congregation can be musically supported. Finally, while it is true the guitar comes with its negative associations, those associations have begun to diminish, gradually making this argument invalid in certain cultural settings.

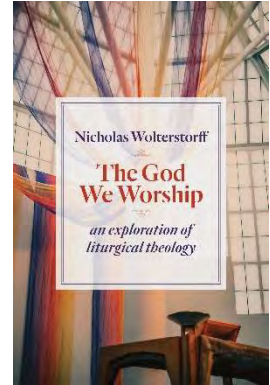
The content covered in this book is important to consider because one should always question what practices are included in a worship service. This book can help ministers of music reconsider how they do things and challenge them to question why they make the decisions they do. Putting aside the editorial mistakes and unsupported arguments, this book is a good launching pad for a dialogue of proper forms of worship and as a reminder to use musical discernment when choosing music of any form for a worship service.

Jesse C. Wigginton  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



***The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*, by Nicholas Wolterstorff.  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 180 pp. \$20.00.**

Nicholas Wolterstorff endeavors to do something that has been almost unprecedented, that is, discovering what is understood but not stated about the God we worship by examining closely the liturgy of the Church. Throughout the course of *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*, Wolterstorff examines in detail the liturgies of the Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed churches largely due to the fact that these liturgies have long withstood the “tests of time” and have a “depth, a richness, [and] a beauty” that he feels is lacking in contemporary alternative liturgies (20). Wolterstorff argues that there is a reason we do what we do in worship and, rather than focusing always on what is explicit, he directs his attention to the underlying understanding of God implicit in worship as what can form or deform the congregation’s explicit understanding of God. Wolterstorff is a distinguished author, professor, and a modern authority in the field of liturgical and theological studies. This book is a revision of the texts of the Kantzer Lectures in Revealed Theology he gave at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2013 (xi).



Wolterstorff structures his argument into nine chapters, with each chapter examining a different aspect of the liturgy to find what is implicit about God in the acts of worship. In the first chapter, Wolterstorff outlines what a Christian liturgy entails, as well as how one should go about understanding God implicit in the liturgies. He states that Christian theology revolves only around “the God Christians worship” (2). He goes on to describe what will be the focus of his project, liturgical theology; Wolterstorff claims that he will in the course of the following 178 pages “[make] explicit the understanding of God implicit in Christian worship,” while supporting this claim by clearly articulating this understanding—explaining, developing, and defending it (2). This first chapter lays the foundation on which Wolterstorff will build his arguments of God implicit in the liturgy in the chapters that follow. Chapters two, three, and four outline the arguments for God found implicit in the liturgy as One who is worthy of worship (ch. 2), One who is vulnerable (ch. 3), and One who participates in mutual address (ch. 4). Chapters five, six, and seven focus on the understanding of God implicit in our addressing God in the liturgy. In chapter six, Wolterstorff takes time to carefully describe the process in which we can know that God listens through a discussion on the usage of analogous extension in describing the qualities of God. He later transitions into the understanding of God as one who speaks in chapter eight, while interacting with different views of God’s revelation from John Calvin and Karl Barth. In the final chapter of the book, Wolterstorff focuses heavily on the understanding of God implicit in the Eucharist (ch. 9), expounding greatly upon the Eucharist by unfolding the statement, “Christ offers himself, and we partake” (150). Wolterstorff appends an afterword explaining the significance of developing a liturgical theology.

Wolterstorff clearly articulates that which is not easy to grasp, perhaps most notably through the repetitious nature of his writing; Wolterstorff continuously revisits previously discussed ideas to further establish the foundation upon which he will build with the introduction of new material. Much of what returns in his writing are the definitions upon which

he elaborates to support his argument. Wolterstorff uses an entire chapter to discuss what he means by “making explicit the understanding of God implicit in Christian worship,” which is obviously most important to reference frequently in the following chapters in order to fully examine this definition (2). Wolterstorff also regularly uses examples from the different liturgies to which he is referring to fully survey the examples of God implicit in each respective liturgy. What proved to be most beneficial in supporting his argument of what is implicit in our understanding of God as a listener was his detailed discussion of analogous extension. He supports the argument in which he states God can in fact listen to our prayers (as well as speak to us) by giving numerous examples of analogous extension and demonstrating how it can be applied to God (106).

Although Wolterstorff is an excellent wordsmith, he does not mince his words when referring to contemporary liturgies; however, he is very faithful to explain why he regards these liturgies (bare as they may be) as lesser forms of liturgy. Also, although Wolterstorff never stated that he intended this book to be a practical source, as a reader I thought that at least the inclusion of an appendix of discussion points would be beneficial to one who does in fact want to reform his church’s liturgy to reflect the understanding of God implicit that he gained from reading this book. That subject, however, may necessitate another volume.

Some would probably argue that this book addresses more of the theological side of worship rather than practical applications of this idea to modern worship; however, Wolterstorff states that when a body of Christians comes together, its worship will most always “take the form of liturgical worship” (9). The Greek word for liturgy (*leitourgia*) means simply “the work of the people.” Therefore, if these two statements taken together are true, this book is full of application as to how the worshiper can rightly understand the crossroads of theology and its practice in the liturgy. With that, I believe this book would be highly beneficial for any reader who seeks to understand what is implicit in our worship actions, especially regarding the God we worship. This book is recommended for all Christian worshipers, as it is vitally important that we understand what we are implying in the gifts of worship we offer to God.

Lyndsey Huckaby  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

## Book Review Index

Aniol, Scott, <i>By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture</i> (J. Gray) .....	74
Barrs, Jerram, <i>Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts</i> (B. Little) .....	65
Beal, G. K. and Mitchell Kim, <i>God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth</i> (E. Danielson) .....	69
Brueggemann, Walter, <i>From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms</i> (M. Jackson) .....	70
Croft, Brian and Jason Adkins, <i>Gather God's People: Understand, Plan, and Lead Worship in Your Local Church</i> (J. Gray) .....	75
Johnson, Maxwell E. <i>Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine</i> (J. Cheesman) .....	67
Meyers, Ruth A., <i>Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name</i> (M. Stringfellow) .....	72
Statom, Gabriel C., <i>Practice for Heaven: Music for Worship That Looks Higher</i> (J. Wiggington) .....	77
Wolterstorff, Nicholas, <i>The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology</i> (L. Huckaby) .....	79