

WORSHIP

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary



SPRING 2001

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INSIGHTS

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Editor: Michael Jinkins

Editorial Board: Scott Black Johnston, Timothy Kubatzky,
Michael Miller, and Randal Whittington

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COVER: "Procession," by John August Swanson, ©1982; 36" by 24" acrylic and gold leaf on canvas; from the collection of the Vatican Museum. Reproduced with permission from the artist.

As the church marches into a new century, what practices of worship will it take along to sustain it on the journey? Which will it jettison to make room for others? Our cover illustration offers a vision of worship that is simultaneously "traditional" and "contemporary." The congregation overflows the bounds of the ancient cathedral; the old, old stories of faith are lifted high, charged with new color and light, and carried out into the world. Concerning this painting, artist John August Swanson remarks, "All ages and walks of life are present in the procession: the elderly, babes in arms, couples walking side by side, children seemingly impatient with the slow progress of their elders, the clergy, and those who walk alone. . . . The eye is dazzled by the complexity of these icons. The memory is challenged to identify with them." Swanson concludes, "Welcome to the procession! What banner or instrument would you like to add to the ones already in it?"

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CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

MASS CIRCULATION

Scott Black Johnston

I do not know who first coined the phrase “worship wars,” but I find it an unhappy label for the yeasty situation in the church today with respect to the primary act of all Christians, namely, worship. That there are a variety of approaches and expectations concerning worship abroad in all expressions of the church today is beyond dispute. Moreover, questions are being raised about how Christians are to worship and what is at stake in the worship of the people of God. That I find all to the good, and I believe much that is happening in congregations today in the area of worship can redound to the enrichment of the church’s life. Rather than a war, I hope what is going on, vis-à-vis the church’s liturgical life, is an authentic struggle or questing to deepen and enrich worship for all who desire to worship God “in spirit and in truth.”

The articles in this issue of *Insights* are thoughtful and useful contributions to that ongoing struggle, which likely should never cease. The lead essays by Professor Stan Hall and Professor Kathryn Roberts provide helpful lenses of tradition *and* contemporaneity, and the coupled lenses of identity *and* covenant. In addition, for the first time in the history of *Insights* we are making available an electronic bulletin board on our website to enable readers to extend the conversation begun by these two authors.

You will also find in this spring issue articles by pastors who are engaged actively and creatively with the struggle taking place. The sharing of such practical and suggestive materials is extremely useful and instructive. I, for one, am overjoyed and excited about the imaginative and appropriate ways pastors and congregations are actively working to enable authentic and empowering worship to take place.

In my own designing, leading, and exploration of the church’s worship, I continue to be inspired and humbled by the admonition of the noted liturgical scholar Dom Gregory Dix who exclaimed, “Let the Liturgy be Grand!” Such requires the participation and work of all God’s people.

Robert M. Shelton
President



WORSHIP AND THE DANGEROUS MEMORY OF THE CHURCH

STANLEY R. HALL



North American Protestantism, and increasingly the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is snarled in what are called “the worship wars.” Certainly it is true that, each year, a larger portion of the first-year class of the seminary brings as their principal referent for common worship a positive experience of some version of “contemporary worship.” Over against this is assumed to be a single alternative, which is called “traditional worship.” There is an important distinction here, but it is hopelessly obscured by an opaque and unhelpful setting of the terms. What are we up to these days, liturgically?

A telling image emerged in a recent comment contributed to the “Forum” of *The Presbyterian Outlook*: “In the current maelstrom around contemporary worship, have you seen from our family any insightful leadership to pastors and sessions struggling to meet the culture with faithfulness to the Scripture and tradition in which we stand? I have not. I find independent voices offering trenchant criticism and useful correctives, but I still have an 1,100-page book that helps me be an inadequate Anglican.”¹ As one of the editors of the current *Book of Common Worship*, I admit to a small wince at this image, while relishing the voice of my friend and first presbytery executive. I do not think that the last generation of liturgical renewal efforts in the PC(USA) has been merely imitative of others, including that old boogeyman, “the Anglicans.” But what is the alternative—in a way that is faithful to the Scripture and to the tradition in which we stand—in the context of our real practices and cultural engagements? That is the

Stanley R. Hall is associate professor of liturgics at Austin Seminary. He received the M.Div. from San Francisco Theological Seminary, the M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame, and served as pastor to Presbyterian churches for ten years. Hall was a consultant for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Common Worship (1993).

most important question for us to try to address, in regards to more than worship, but surely as regards our common worship.

Tradition, properly understood, is the dangerous memory of the church, which offers not an imitation nor mere convention, but calls us to the real challenge of the motto, “A church reformed must always be reforming (being reformed), according to the Word of God.”

But first, I want to tell you a story from my childhood.

REINVENTING ADVENT



Thanksgiving Day at our house was a glad and festive time. But then came December, quiet and dark. While other houses in the neighborhood were already lit up with the preparations for Christmas, our house folded its hands and held its breath and stayed very still. My maternal grandmother lived with my parents and me in those years. When I was very young my grandfather had died just days before Christmas. So our house went into a sort of mourning again, each year, right after Thanksgiving. My grandmother, my father said, was one world-class mourner. She’s Irish, he said, and that seemed to explain it. I understood that I could slip away to the houses of friends to see Christmas, but it was not at our house. Not yet. We had to wait. We had to go just a bit farther, wait a while longer, before we could be glad again. At the time, I didn’t realize that it was all a bit odd, compared to what the other families around us were doing.

My mother and father accepted my grandmother’s heroic mourning, made room for it, just as they had for her in our household. And my mother, Catholic-become-Presbyterian, constructed a fine Christmas out of it all. Late on the 24th of December, we all went to church, the three of us to the Presbyterian church and my grandmother to her church, St. Boniface. When we all returned home, the tree my father had stored in the garage was put up straight away. I got to place the first ornaments on it, the hard-to-break ones that went on low for the joy of the cats. Then I was sent off to bed. In the morning when I raced to the main room, the tree was transformed with its lights and all manner of new and old, store-bought and hand-me-down ornaments. And good gifts.

My grandmother gave us stillness and memory and waiting, my father gave us patience, and my mother drew from her Catholic childhood a memory that Christmas could go much farther than was known to us Presbyterians. So we reinvented our own cautious Advent, our own feast of Christmas, and our own Twelve Days of light in the time of darkness.

But we also gave them away, since all the neighborhood children knew that Christmas got its second wind at the Hall house. By then, my grandmother had chased her daughter out of the kitchen and was expertly baking treats for the children of the neighborhood. Thinking back now, I’m sure that parents up and down the street gave a sigh and a silent thank-you to my folks, for a bit of respite and peace.

Out of the darkness came this marvelous light. On January fifth, my father and I piled up as many of the leftover neighborhood Christmas trees as we could find, in the empty field behind our house. And surrounded by my friends and me and a few stray and curious adults, Dad sent up this amazing fire. So we did Christmas, a light in that

season of darkness, this life that did not deny the memories of our deaths but rather made room for us to live with them. It turned out to be good for us. It was ages later I learned that we kindled the fire on the eve of the Epiphany.

RENEWAL: BY THE BOOK



Remembrance is a constructive act, and it is at the heart of Christian worship. This is the response of memory that gathers us into the mystery of God in Christ, through the Spirit, by the gathering to the Word that is heard, preached, and eaten on the Lord’s Day. Traditions are codified and fenced and adjudicated in many ways, and rightly so. But tradition is first and last practiced, in new places and changing times, with the memories of how it has been done. Contemporary and traditional, in the significant meanings that these two terms promise, must be conjoined in order to characterize worship that is faithful. When separated, tradition falls into mere convention, and the “contemporary” is simply thrall to fashion, power, and market forces.

Reform and change in Christian worship has in our time broken out of the molds of past eras, in that worship renewal strategies are crossing borders in ways that are unprecedented since the appearance of evangelical revivalism in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the “seeker service” model, with its variations, has a great deal in common both theologically and historically with the camp meetings and revival tabernacles that are the genuinely American contribution to the history of Christian worship and architecture.² Pentecostalism from the nineteenth century, with all the charismatic worship forms in the twentieth century, continues to appeal across what once were thought to be rigid social and economic boundaries. Feminist or WomenChurch and Afrocentric worship movements cross even the Roman Catholic and Protestant distinctions.³

The *Book of Common Worship* (1993) requires no apologia, but the agenda on which it is based, which is also expressed in the current *Directory for Worship of the PC(USA)*, does invite a serious consideration. As with other renewal strategies, the liturgical renewal movement crosses over the boundaries of denomination, and hence is vulnerable to a merely imitative failure. But at its center are both thoroughly traditional and genuinely contemporary goals and impulses. It is no accident that the *Book of Common Worship* is respected by liturgists of different denominations, since it is, in effect, also the last product of the twentieth-century liturgical renewal movement and carries the ecumenical character and hope of the last half of the century.

The *Book of Common Worship*, as a voluntary-use resource, is intended to be a big book for the desk and the committee room where worship services are prepared, and only secondarily, if at all, a book for use “in the hand” at worship. The book itself, though worthy, is not as important as the idea it represents and partially embodies: the recovery of memory in a critical process of the inculturation of classic elements of liturgical tradition in the contemporary settings where congregations gather for public worship. Four aspects of such a tradition which is Reformed and also, in the highest sense, catholic and evangelical, are: common order, classic *ordo*, bodily voice and presence, and local catholicity.

1. Common worship in the true sense needs patterns or structures that derive from

and serve to support a common life and calling. Belief and action in Christ is formed in and flows from lives shaped and informed by shared worship over time. Some shared form of common worship is vital for the identity, ministry, and mission of the church. This is the gift of good order, which nurtures, by the Word, life in the Spirit in the circumstances of real human living.

2. A classic *ordo*, or agenda, of the church gathered for worship is grounded in and witnesses to the catholicity of the faith and our evangelical center in Word and Sacrament. Here is the place where recovery of memory, the simple core of Christian worship, emerges in the juxtapositions of the *ordo*.⁴ The Lord's Day and the week; Word and Meal at the heart of the Lord's Day; praise and thanksgiving, but also lament and petition; the gracious sign of baptism, and also teaching to support the baptized in living this grace each day; and cycles of the creation marked throughout the year as being the "ordinary time" that is revealed to be the extraordinary work of God in Jesus Christ, by whose passion and incarnation God is revealed for the redemption of humanity.

These simple two-part structures of the "ordo," set side-by-side, engage memory and hope in proclamation and prayer, and in so doing make possible a recognition of basic unity among communities whose own cultural expressions of liturgical practices rightly acknowledge differences through distinctive and particular languages, movement, music, and art. The idea of a catholic and evangelical *ordo* of Christian worship is also found in the *Directory* tradition of Presbyterianism, as the way of guiding discrete and particular communities in a common worship. It is especially the Lord's Day *ordo*, with Scripture readings set next to the preaching, the Word of the gospel proclaimed set next to the eating and drinking, with prayer and song of thanksgiving never losing the sounds of lament and beseeching—that is the gift of critical recovery of Christian memory in liturgical reform.

3. We Presbyterians—with our witness to the Word who speaks and the Spirit who comes with the Word and brings us to life in faith—need to recover the dimension of symbolic action and speech in worship. The bread and cup by which God gives us the true Word for food, and the washing of new birth that is also our adoption by God and engrafting into the tree of life—precisely this Word and Sacrament are not decorative but essential to the worship of God by the thoughts of the mind as well as the heart. The embodied character of worship is less well explored among us than it should be. The role of music and movement in contemporary worship can be welcomed as a witness, not a worry, to one aspect of the multivalence of sign, speech, gesture, and image in the service of the gospel. With the sacraments, our bodies are washed and nourished by the words of proclamation and blessing, and it is the whole person who is adopted into and nurtured in the body of Christ.

4. Finally, the liturgical renewal movement affirms a catholicity that rejects mere uniformity, and encourages the particularity of confessional traditions and local assemblies at worship. One of the unhelpful illusions we suffer is that of a uniform European American Presbyterian culture. Rather, there are these deep structures of liturgical practice which we share with all who believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. There are distinctively Reformed traditions and practices, memory to be recovered and critically appropriated, that shape our identity in the use of a Christian *ordo* for com-

mon worship. And we should embrace a greater expectation of the local and distinctive character of Presbyterianism and other communities who, by their cultural skills and gifts and through the particularity of their music, ceremony, and speech, witness to that genuinely catholic character of the church reformed and reforming. As Irenaeus noted, in regard to the conflict among Christians over Easter and the way of observation, "the disagreement over the fast confirms the agreement in the faith."⁵

A book for worship can be a help, but no more, and any book could be better. The use of a book, or whatever form liturgical resources may take, will require aspects from all the liturgical strategies in our times, and not just the classic liturgical renewal movement that lies behind and in the *Directory* and *Book of Common Worship*. But our resources will have to be able to serve, and it may well be time to look to how the Big Blue Book has served so far, and how it necessitates being supplemented and interpreted in our practice.

RECOVERED MEMORY



Within the growing ecumenical recognition of a classic *ordo* of worship, as well as in the life of our churches, there is both room and need for memories of Presbyterian practice. And they can be gifts not just for ourselves but also for the communion of the wider church. We will, since it is unavoidable, betray these traditions of our family by recovering and handing them on, but it is time to undertake reform of our common worship. What might that look like?

Alongside the gift of the ecumenical patterns of Scripture readings in worship, the practice of the Reformed churches can be offered. The "lectio continua" of Reformed tradition challenges the skills of preachers and the social patterns of worship attendance, just to mention two realities! But serious recovery of patterns and systems for continuous reading of Scripture, accountable to a canonical structure as well as to a calendar, would serve more than the needs of Presbyterians.

The recovery of Sunday as Lord's Day with Lord's Supper is no imitation of others, but a hearing again of John Calvin, who with pastoral wisdom, adapted to the particular needs of reform in his time, while also recording his opinion that the Lord's Table should be spread at least once a week. Here the character, form, and voice of the blessing prayer at the table, which is by no means limited to the specific models of the current liturgical books, will be of growing interest for the churches involved in sacramental renewal. Reformed and Presbyterian history and theology is a source for this important theological and practical dimension of Sunday as Lord's Day. We have gifts to receive again in these new days, and to share with others. And we can remember forgotten ways of prayer and communion, both for ourselves, and as a gift to the others.

The theology and practice of the baptism of the children of the church, as the proclamation of the gospel in sacramental action, is a memory that never has died among us, but that challenges us to fresh attention. In the light of the global and local situation of the church in the world, what other churches and liturgical strategies show us of a new seriousness in mission and evangelism is a gift we must receive. At the same time, we need to reflect on and recover Reformed insights and Presbyterian practices of the initiation of children in the church as sign of the gospel. Alongside the strong and

substantial rites for baptism that we now have, there needs to be an equally substantial investment in liturgical initiation of children, as being equally a norm and form of the one baptism in Christ. This work can inform and encourage the continuing baptismal formation and renewal of the worshiping assembly, believers and “seekers” (or “hearers”) alike, and in appropriate ways.

The school of Christian prayer is not just Sunday and catechism. It has always also been in daily prayer as well. Alongside the rich corporate and seasonal models of daily prayer, we need to recover something hinted at in the *Book of Common Worship*, but only just hinted. The prayer of the church is found also in the households and prayed by individuals. A pattern of praise, Scripture reading, and prayer for the church, world, and persons in need—this is as much the daily office of the church as are congregational services through the week and year. We could recover what the Scots called “The Family Exercise,” a simple pattern of daily psalm, Scripture reading, and prayer, accessible to a novice and adequate to the more practiced individual, household, or small group. But we will not do this simply by picking some texts from the Bible, but through careful preparation of resources and the attention to the re-introduction of a practice of piety, or spiritual discipline, many wish for but few in the local congregation may still experience with relish or regularity. Memories like this, as they are recovered, must also adapt to the needs of the family.

Common worship, what the church does Sunday and every day through the year, must be embodied and expressed in the skills of the cultures we bring to worship. And the worship of the church must also be faithful to the Scripture and the tradition of the gospel we receive. Contemporary and traditional, necessarily both. But for our worship to be more nearly adequate to the glory of God, and our own desire, we must be moved by our great need, and the world’s need, to undertake the practical theological work of embracing living tradition, engaging a contemporary mission . . . and we begin by the gift of memory, the call of remembering. ☩

NOTES

¹ Charles Ainley Hammond, “Why These Priorities?” in *The Presbyterian Outlook* “Forum,” the online version available at www.pres-outlook.com.

² A number of scholars have shown these connections. See “Evangelism and Worship from New Lebanon to Nashville” in James F. White, *Christian Worship in North America, A Retrospective: 1955-1995* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), and also Gordon W. Lathrop, “New Pentecost or Joseph’s Britches? Reflections on the History and Meaning of the Worship Ordo in the Megachurches” in *Worship*, vol. 72, no. 6, November 1998 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

³ J. Frederick Holper, professor of preaching and worship, McCormick Theological Seminary, is at work on a study of a range of strategies of liturgical renewal in current practice in North American churches, and is dealing with the movements identified here.

⁴ Gordon W. Lathrop is particularly helpful in the recovery of an ordo, as his work builds on the scholarship of the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann and others. For the idea of the ordo, see Lathrop, *Holy Things, A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, as recounted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:24:13. The citation is discussed by Gordon Lathrop, *Holy People, A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Fortress, 1999), 117f.



WHO ARE WE? *Worship and Theological Identity*

KATHRYN L. ROBERTS



Churches are on the run. Faced with aging congregations and dwindling numbers, churches of almost every denomination and tradition are spending more and more time pondering how they can “compete” with whichever church it is that is currently packing them in on Sunday mornings. In looking at the problem, worship practices, such as music and liturgy, are often cited as being, in large part, responsible. So, in an effort to compete, these congregations have “toned down the liturgy,” introduced a large screen, and added a modest amount of sound equipment, thereby bringing a more “contemporary” style to Sunday worship.

Today’s questions regarding liturgy and music are deceptively explosive and have the potential to unite or divide churches, as pastors, committees, and faithful members agonize over this outward expression of their inner commitments. What are currently called “the worship wars” may be seen either as a challenge that has the potential to result in division and rancor, or as an opportunity for encounters whose outcome includes theological clarity and spiritual rebirth.

This concern with worship practices is not recent and is not unique to the church. Ancient Israel, too, grappled with its particularity before God and its liturgical expression of that relationship. Churches today can be comforted in knowing that questions surrounding the form and practice of worship have evoked almost continuous struggle as each new age has contended with many of the same questions. Throughout the liturgical life of Israel and the church, each new generation of worshipers has found the relationship between remaining true to its theological core and fitting its worship to the compelling questions of the day a source of conflict.

Kathryn L. Roberts is assistant professor of Old Testament at Austin Seminary. She received the M.Div. from Colgate Rochester Divinity School and the Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is currently researching a book on worship and the religion of Israel.

The Old Testament provides an early, vivid, and paradigmatic picture of worship reform as it was literally fought out in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. The impetus for these reform movements was the renewal of the Mosaic covenant. Looking at covenant renewal and the fires of reform it ignited in monarchic Judah may be instructive for those in the church today who care about the forms and practice of worship. Worship reform for Christian denominations and traditions currently finding themselves in worship crisis begins with covenant renewal, that is, the individual communion's reclamation and reappropriation of its particular theological identity.

FIRES OF REFORM



The Deuteronomistic¹ reform movement—began initially under Hezekiah and taken up more thoroughly under Josiah—had far-reaching implications for each and every worshiper, beginning in the pre-Exilic period and continuing with God's people long into their scattering throughout the known world (2 Kings 18:1-23:30; 2 Chron. 29:1-35:27).² At the encouragement of what had until that time been a minority party, the temple and palace, under the rule of these two kings, combined forces to attempt a thoroughgoing reform of Yahwism at every level of Judah's worship life.³ In the effort to purify Yahwistic religion, these theologians sought to unify and standardize religious practices. The exclusivism of covenantal theology, as taught in the book of Deuteronomy, mandated that all worship was to be centralized at the place God would choose (Deut. 12), and in eighth- and seventh-century Judah, that place was the Jerusalem Temple. Centralization in Jerusalem meant that the outlying local worship centers, the high places, were officially closed.⁴ The Levites, the cultic personnel who officiated at these sites and often came from families that had served at these shrines for generations, were put out of their livelihoods, and some were even put to death (Deut. 14:27-29; 2 Kings 23).⁵

The Temple was cleansed of offending images. Some were of foreign origin, such as altars for Baal, the storm-god of the Canaanites, asherah poles, and deities imposed by the Assyrian suzerains; others, such as the bronze serpent, had been associated with Israel's very earliest religious traditions. Hezekiah removed the Nehushtan, the bronze serpent Moses had set up in the wilderness for healing those who had the faith to look up to it. This symbol of God's healing power had become dangerous as the people had begun to worship the symbol for its own sake rather than God, whose power it had originally represented (2 Kings 18:4; Num. 21:6-9).⁶ The paraphernalia of private worship—mediums, wizards, household gods, and images—were abolished under the inescapably volcanic flow of centralization. As a result of the reforms, the Jerusalem Temple, under the leadership of the Aaronide priesthood, became the focal point of Judah's worship and religious practice (1 Kings 2:35). Religious festivals in the holy city and pilgrimages to the Temple became an established part of the worship calendar (Deut. 16:1-17; Luke 2:41-51).

Such drastic change did not take place without resistance and conflict. Nestled within the Old Testament are hints of the theological struggle that ensued. In Hezekiah's own time, the voice of an Assyrian emissary presents the minority argument that Judah's troubles with the great foreign power come as a punishment from God for

Hezekiah's bold move in removing the offending high places (2 Kings 18:13-25). During the Babylonian exile, Judeans who had escaped to Egypt complained to Jeremiah that their troubles began with the Josianic centralization and its stringent removal of their favorite deities (Jer. 7:16-20; 44:15-28). The prophet responded that things were in actuality just the opposite: the exile was the result of the very idolatry they were trying to condone. Each group read current events through an opposing theological lens. Due to familial ties with the house of Abiathar, Jeremiah himself was sympathetic to the ousted Levites. In an oracle of comfort, the prophet linked the fortunes of a future restoration of the Davidic dynasty with the revitalization of the levitical priesthood (Jer. 33:17-20).⁷ Taking the opposite view, Jeremiah's contemporary, Ezekiel, himself a priest from the Aaronide line, put Judah's troubles squarely on the shoulders of the Levites and saw their loss of status as a natural consequence of their poor spiritual leadership and sin (Ezek. 44:10-18; 48:11).

COVENANT-CENTERED REFORM



In spite of vigorous resistance and opposing viewpoints, it can be argued that it was the zealotry of these reforms—with their emphasis on the unity of Yahweh and the centralization of worship—that preserved the religion of ancient Israel as it came up against the harshness of the exile and the peoples' ensuing dispersion throughout the known world. The theological center and impetus that drove all parties involved was the covenant offered by God to the people centuries earlier through Moses in the wilderness. The word from God at the mountain stated that in light of such great deliverance, the only reasonable response of the people would be the acceptance of an exclusive relationship. The promise, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Exod. 19:3-8), required Israel to reject the worship of any other god. Israel's God was a jealous god and there were to be no other gods placed before Yahweh in their loyalties (Exod. 20:3). The relationship was to be radically exclusive.

Written as a collection of Moses' "last words" to the assembled tribes before they crossed the Jordan to take possession of the land, Deuteronomy looks back to Israel's salvation from slavery in Egypt, God's provision in the wilderness, and the institution of this unique covenant relationship between Yahweh and the people at Mount Sinai. The book is a final reminder of the congregation's theological heritage and identity in light of its covenantal relationship with God. This look back is proffered as the agenda for the future, as the tribes take possession without Moses' leadership and mediation. "Yahweh our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.⁸ Not with our ancestors did Yahweh make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today" (Deut. 5:2-4). "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone" encapsulates the theology of Deuteronomy and drives the resulting efforts at purification and centralization of worship in the eighth and seventh centuries (Deut. 6:4).

Even with this background of covenantal relationship, Yahwism had devolved into an unrecognizable smorgasbord of religious opportunities and options. The variety of deities available in the Temple and outlying high places had not only eliminated any claims of divine exclusivity, but were successfully pushing Yahweh into obscurity. A century earlier the prophet Elijah had put forward the demand for a choice between com-

peting deities, and the people were unable to see its necessity (1 Kings 18:20-21). The situation had not improved. God's people developed a theological identity crisis. They no longer knew who they were as a covenant community called by God and had therefore lost the identification of their particular theological heritage. At that point, worship became a pragmatic response to the immediacy of the moment. This theology of pragmatism meant that a multiplicity of gods seemed better than one for meeting the needs of their frighteningly out-of-control lives. Worship began to be seen as a means of filling their very real needs, rather than as an expression of the community of faith's identity in God.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF COVENANT



Covenant presumes community and commitment. There is little individualism in the Bible. Israel and the church were communal and related to God in terms of kinship responsibilities. Covenant, then, forces questions of communal identity, by asking, Who are we in relationship to God? As a worshipping people? What is it that makes us unique and how do we express that in worship? Each Christian denomination or tradition has its own particular "covenant" with God which is then to be celebrated in authentic worship. Covenant, as the word is used here, embodies a particular theological tradition's history and confessional theological understanding of God. It is used paradigmatically as a way of identifying what that community "knows" about God.

Covenant also requires commitment to the named theological tradition. It is short on accommodation and pragmatism, requiring instead the long-term living out of relationship with God. Covenant reformation moves communions forward while keeping eyes focused steadily on what God has done in the past, much as one rows a boat. Only looking back can be idolatrous and empty, like worshipping a snake that has lost its meaning. Turning away from the foundations of the past and looking only to the present can mean the abandonment of legitimate modes of worship because they do not please the sensibilities of the greatest number of constituents. "Toned down" liturgy, overhead screens, and praise songs are not good or bad in themselves. It is the theological reflection behind them—or lack thereof—that renders them authentic or inauthentic. Questions regarding the form and practice of worship begin here. They have to do with traditions of the past being reexamined in light of how well they express the fundamental theological identity of the group in its present context. For example, the Reformed theology of worship highlights its communal aspect—thus worship practices that would play up individual expression at the expense of the edification of the community would be suspect. Songs and liturgy that focus on individual experiences instead of pointing toward the person of God and God's mighty acts with the community are empty at best, and dangerous at worst.

The Deuteronomistic reforms centered on covenant provide a guiding light for contemporary churches and communions as they sincerely strive to worship God. Worship is to be a theological enterprise, offering up to God what God is due. When focused on the needs of the community, a theology of pragmatism takes over and wor-

ship loses its way. These are hard questions and will elicit different responses from different traditions as, from their own covenant stances, they ask the hard questions regarding Word and Sacrament. ☛

NOTES

¹ These influential ancient theologians were named by scholars after their covenant theology, derived in large part from the book of Deuteronomy. See Frank M. Cross, "The Themes of the Books of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 274-289 and Richard D. Nelson, "The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 18 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981).

² The reforms begun by Hezekiah were interrupted and reversed during the long and destructive reign of Manasseh, and the truncated reign of his son Amon, before being re-instituted by Josiah.

³ The reasons behind these reforms are complex, originating not only in how and where God's people worshiped, but also in concerns as interrelated and inseparable as the nationalistic and militaristic aspirations of the monarch and the pressing economic needs of the day. These kinds of more "secular" reasons have always been and probably always will be a part of God's people's decision-making processes, even as they grapple with the genuinely spiritual necessities that drive the call for any action the church takes.

⁴ One of the ramifications of such a radical move was the necessity for new rules regarding the slaughter of meat for eating. Previously the meat from domestic animals could not be eaten unless the animal was sacrificed and ritually slaughtered at the local shrine and the meat shared with the officiating priest, thus providing meat for the priests and their families (Lev. 17:1-9). Centralization meant that the ritual slaughter would have to be done in the Temple and if one lived too far from Jerusalem, one's family would have to go without meat for extended periods. To resolve that problem the new legislation provided for the secular slaughter of meat in one's own home, just as wild game had been killed and prepared all along (Deut 12:13-19).

⁵ The high places, mentioned in the editorial evaluations of all of Judah's kings, appear at first reading to be dedicated to foreign gods and therefore idolatrous. Yet, a closer examination reveals that the high places had positive associations harkening back to Israel's ancestors and their worship practices. Samuel worshiped at the high places (1 Sam. 9:12-14). David extols them in his lamentation over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:19, 25; 22:34), and Solomon seems excused from his worship at a high place (1 Kings 3:2-4).

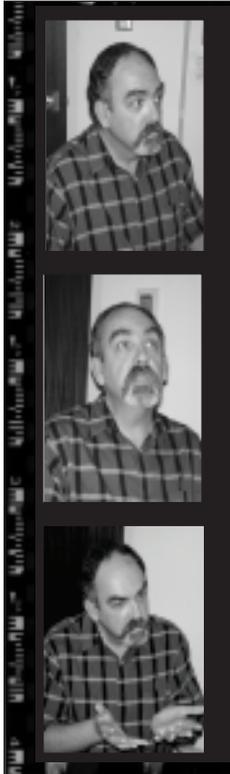
⁶ See Kathryn L. Roberts, "There's a Snake in the Temple," *Windows*, 115/2, Spring 2000, 6-7.

⁷ The promise to the Levites was not to be. They became temple functionaries and acolytes during the Second Temple period.

⁸ Due to regional dialectical differences, Sinai is called Horeb in Deuteronomy.

⁹ The Hebrew is ambiguous and leaves the reader with several other options. Various translations, 6:4 can say, "The Lord our God is one Lord," "The Lord our God, the Lord is one," or "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one." However the credo is understood, all interpretations point toward a theology of the exclusive worship of the Lord.

STANLEY HALL AND KATHRYN ROBERTS: WORSHIP—ALWAYS BEING REFORMED



ONE OF THE THINGS WE MIGHT BE IN DANGER OF LOSING IS THE USELESSNESS OF WORSHIP. I THINK IT'S A WONDERFUL TIME FOR PREACHING AND FOR THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP BECAUSE THERE'S SO LITTLE USE FOR IT ANYMORE.

Both of your articles bring up the quandary that many churches are now facing over “traditional” versus “contemporary” worship. How would you define “traditional worship” over against “contemporary worship”?

Hall: I think it may be helpful not to define either term, at least for a moment. The words “traditional” and “contemporary” are often used as caricatures. So, let’s try to ring the changes on usage. First, *traditional*: old, tired, slow, somebody-else’s-way, just words you have to say, not my words, no feeling, not relevant. Then, *contemporary*: superficial, easy, slick, entertainment, consumer religion, just-feel-good, no theology, entrepreneurial, not caring about the deep theological matters of gospel, church, and mission.

The thing about a caricature is that it works like a heresy: a truth is affirmed without balance or context. I also think those caricatures allow us to justify ourselves. I want to toss those caricatures out and hope we’re all embarrassed.

Now, let’s think again about each: Traditional means handing on the gospel. Do we trust our history? Could we entrust our theological tradition with the same care, anxiety, and hope with which we trust the family and people who have taught us? Could tradition be the memory of the church? Contemporary means that the gospel addresses new times and places, and is not locked in a particular language. The gospel can go to other cultures. Liturgists like to talk about the proclamation of the gospel and fellowship of the table, of the washing and the teaching, all of which come to life in the humanity of different cultures.

Roberts: I think Stan really sets it up right by beginning with those stereotypes, because I can see myself disagreeing with the first one, and wholeheartedly agreeing with the second. And that’s exactly the problem. Contemporary is really any worship that we do now. Whether that’s the seventeenth-century church singing Calvin’s hymns, or the fourteenth-century plainsong, it’s what we do now.

So, what’s at stake when churches consider whether, or how, they will change their worship?

Roberts: Well, that’s really what I’m asking. An individual church has to make that decision for itself. Is it numbers? Is it that we think the church should still be as full as it was in the ’50s, instead of having membership rolls that decline every year? Is that what’s driving change in worship? Is it that people are disengaged from worship? Or that they don’t understand what’s happening in worship so they want to change something? Or that they want to compete with the church down the street for a certain constituency? Then there are the questions that feminists and other cultures have raised about worship. There are questions about language and imagery. What’s at stake is a question each church must answer for itself.

Hall: I think what’s at stake is our role in the gospel. The gospel isn’t at stake. But the usefulness of the church is at stake. North Americans have a problem with “we’re so good at things.” We can be so effective, that it’s almost irresistible to reduce everything to usefulness. Worship, we seem to think, ought to be more useful. In fact, one of the things we might be in danger of losing is the uselessness of worship. Worship is a gift. Knowing God is a gift. The astonishingly absurd thing is that in actual groups of people at worship, with all the embarrassments of denominations and of congregations, one can know God. I think it’s a wonderful time for preaching and for the church at worship because there’s so little use for it anymore.

Kathryn, you write: “Worship began to be seen as a means of filling their very real needs, rather than as an expression of the community of faith’s identity in God.” How do you differentiate between worship that seeks to meet real human needs and worship that is an expression of the community’s identity in God? Don’t these two overlap?

Roberts: The context for what I was talking about in this essay has to do with a pantheon [a temple dedicated to all the gods]. I think a pantheon is a very *practical* form of worship; it allows you to pick and choose from a smorgasbord. So I could come into the holy place today, need a little healing, or need a little fertility, or need some reconciliation, and each god plays a particular role in giving me what I need. Before the reformation of worship in Israel, the Temple and the outlying worship spaces had become places where all kinds of gods were there together and could fill any kind of need that any particular worshiper had.

Pagan worship was “useful,” in other words.

Roberts: Yes. And what the reform did at that time was to strip the Temple bare and to force the people of Israel back to a relationship with one God—which is always chanci-

er because that God may just say “no” to your need. And then you wouldn’t get the healing you wanted, the fertility you wanted, whatever it was. And this relationship that’s expressed in the covenant is a community relationship, it’s not an individual relationship. It’s not just about *my needs*. It’s about me as a member of a larger community in relationship with God. The worship of Israel, after its reformation, emphasized God’s will for my life rather than what I decide I want on any particular given morning at a particular high place or in the Temple itself. My very real needs are important, but only as they are part of a larger community’s worship experience. My needs can be met by God, but they’re also determined by God, not entirely by me.

So, the worship you’re arguing for affirms the freedom of God and the sovereignty of God and the will of God over against what we want or think we need at any particular moment?

Roberts: Yes. And that’s risky because it’s saying that God is going to be God. And I don’t really want God to be God. I want God to be the God I want God to be. And if I have to have four gods in order to make that happen, I would rather. And I think that’s still the modern impulse. We live among a technological pantheon, saying in effect, “I’ll go here for this and I’ll go there for that.” The reformation of worship in Israel calls us back to a relationship that says: “There is one to whom we owe ultimate allegiance.” All the competing claims are still there, but there’s just this one to whom we owe it all. The Bible doesn’t say—until late in the Old Testament—“there are no other gods.” It says “there are no other gods for you.”

Hall: I agree with everything Kathryn says. I find that one of the great gifts of God is that when I receive the bread and the wine in the Eucharist, I leave the table remembering that there are many who don’t have bread and there are many who have too much bread. This act of ritual helps me receive clarity, challenge, and discomfort about a responsibility I have to care for my neighbor. So in a sense worship can help us understand where our needs lie. In worship, in the gathering of the community, it just may be that there is the most profound need: God.

Worship reminds us that we are at God’s disposal, not vice versa?

Hall: We have to remember that sacrifice may be the first human skill. In Christian liturgical speech, it is the irony of sacrifice that comes to the fore. God disposes, and we are at God’s disposal.

Stan, you conjure up memory as a way to help us explore the significance of living Christian traditions as we seek to engage in the worship of God, and you tell us that worship is the church’s “contemporary mission” to the world. How might the deeper memories of the church help us to reform worship to meet contemporary contexts?

Hall: Well, I think we might start with considering the idea that the merely dead in Christ still have something to say to us. And we might do something that’s very strange for early twenty-first-century North Americans: we might imagine a trustworthy history. As a liturgical historian and as a pastor, I found the extraordinarily practical use of history. It challenged me with models of practice that were doing the Christian thing: preaching, baptizing, breaking bread, marking time, but were doing them in different

places and times according to the ways of different people. This history gave me a sense of the great variety around the very simple things we do. It gave me more memory.

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Roberts: Stan’s talking about identity—who we are. And the deep memories of the church help us remember who we are in relationship to God. Because it’s easy to forget who we are. Knowing who I am determines my lifestyle, my morals, my ethics. A clear knowledge of who I am in relation to God answers a lot of questions; whereas if that identity question is murky, I’m much more adrift.

In Deuteronomy it says God made a covenant with us, not our ancestors, with us. Right now, here, today, we’re at this mountain receiving God’s covenant. We do the same things at the table and at the font. We stand there and make the covenant again through sacrament. “Not our ancestors, but we who are alive this day”—that’s a sacramental statement. Along with the dead, and the ones yet to come, we’re in a stream, and it’s all continuous. By cutting off our deeper memories, we become unmoored, just afloat. That’s why I’m concerned with the whole “I’ve gotta be me” mentality. People are really looking for identity, but they don’t realize that identity is rooted in this continuing stream.

Hall: The story from my family was simply a way to get a feel for memory in a household that survived—and survived with some joy—a dark time, by drawing on Christian skills of time-keeping. I think there is a sense in which the family, the household model, can easily become too sentimentalized. But New Testament images both of body and of household tell us to listen to the stories of the ancestors. Then we open up the Old Testament. Again, stories of the ancestors. Which of course, we’re always re-inventing as we need to.

So a part of making use of our memories and traditions, the stories of the ancestors, is our re-invention of them, using them in new contexts?

Hall: For example, much of the seeker service and of contemporary worship is not a new idea. It's at least 200 years old: it's revival. The revival services originated as a way to gather the baptized back into the memory, here, particularly, the memory of the call of Jesus, and to what their baptism had always meant. Christian liturgy is about being available to God in the present moment. So the stories of the ancestors have to be told now as though we'd never heard them and to people who haven't heard them.

Your articles encourage us as pastors and congregants to make theological judgments about worship and about the appropriateness of various kinds of worship. Are there theological criteria that pastors and church members might use to make these judgments? And, if there are, where do we get them and what might they be?

Roberts: One of the things I think is so helpful about the idea of covenant as a paradigm is that it includes the question of identity. But it also requires commitment and it requires community. What is our identity in relationship to God? For each communion that's going to be a different question. Each communion is going to have a different story and a different piece of the puzzle. From that comes the commitment that we make toward worship. For me the theological criterion would be, Is this consistent with who we are and how we have worshiped in the past, and yet, is it where the community is today?

Hall: I think we need to look to the practice of the church, not to find a golden age that never was, because God doesn't give us a golden age. That's at the end. That's eschatology. But there are things Christians do, and one of the gifts I think of the last generation, certainly post-World War II, was the increasing ecumenical dialogue which got past the temptations of uniformity to ask about mutual recognition. Embedded within the history of the church there are certain practices: the reading of the Scriptures with teaching, the washing with initiatory storytelling and companionship, the bread and the wine which is spoken of with thanksgiving as abundance, but the abundance is not at the table simply. Thanksgiving and complaining to God, praise and lament together. Patterns like this could be recognized across Christian traditions without denying difference.

One more question: When you were a pastor, what question do you wish you would have been asked about worship?

Roberts: It's hard to keep focused on the fact that worship is about God and not about what I get out of it, how good the sermon was, whether the liturgy was satisfying, whether the music was good . . . and so on. I wish I had gotten the question: Is this worship pleasing to God?

Hall: The question I would have liked to have been asked was, How can we share this with more people? Simply to worship God is such an amazing gift. I want more people to enjoy it.

LET'S TALK ABOUT WORSHIP



With this issue, *Insights* is piloting a new feature, an **online bulletin board** which our readers can access through the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary website. Like the current issue, the electronic site hopes to foster ongoing conversation about worship. Our desire is to provide a venue in which people can share ideas, ask questions, and make observations related to the topic of this issue. From time to time the authors of this issue's feature articles will drop by the discussion to listen to your comments and add their voices to the conversation. We look forward to reflecting with you on a subject that is at the very heart of our church's life.

Access to this online bulletin board is gained through the seminary's website: **www.austinseminary.edu**.

Simply click on the bulletin board link that presents itself on the home page. After registering, you will be able to access this new feature, read and respond to the ongoing conversations, or perhaps start one yourself.

The online discussion will be open from April 20 to May 18, 2001.

We look forward to your participation in this conversation.

Brant Copeland is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Tallahassee, Florida. He received his B.A. from Rhodes College and his M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. He has written articles for *Reformed Liturgy & Music* and *the Register of the Company of Pastors*.

Martha L. Moore-Keish grew up in First Presbyterian Church, Tallahassee. She received her A.B. from Harvard College, M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, and Ph.D. in theological studies from Emory University. She is currently an associate in the Office of Theology and Worship at the offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly.

BRANT COPELAND AND MARTHA L. MOORE-KEISH

As I took my place in the chair beside the Communion Table last Sunday, young Andrew Corzine came up to me. “Uncle Brant,” he said, pulling on my alb. (I’m not really his uncle, but that seems to be the form of address several children in the congregation prefer in place of “pastor.”)

“Uncle Brant, when will you say, ‘The Lord be with you?’”

“Why do you ask, Andrew?”

He answered with the same five-year-old enthusiasm with which he approaches all his passions—Batman, Superman, and corporate worship.

“Because I want to say, ‘And also with you.’”

I was still pondering Andrew’s reply when the choir arrived (late as usual) and took its place at the other end of our historic sanctuary. Douglass Seaton, our switch-hitting Clerk of Session and baritone-tenor, rang his hand bell. The lively conversations in the old meeting house diminished by a few decibels.

I stood behind the Holy Table and held out my hands, palms up, in a gesture of welcome.

“The Lord be with you,” I said to God’s people.

“And also with you,” they rumbled in reply.

I looked at Andrew. He was holding out his hands, just like me.

Andrew’s enthusiasm for liturgical forms and gestures is not atypical. After twenty-plus years of parish ministry, I have come to appreciate the role that ritual words and gestures can play in forming young disciples as they learn to worship—not in some classroom in an adjacent building, but amongst the body of believers. Children learn to worship by worshipping, long before they achieve cognitive understanding of the content of the faith. In worship, as in many other aspects of life, participation precedes cognition.

Many of us who grew up in the church can remember minute details that have little to do with the apostolic tradition. I can recall the exact sound the ceiling fans made in my grandmother’s church in Coahoma, Texas (something between the buzz of a honey bee and the metallic click of a locust). That sound is almost as vivid as the smell of the butterscotch candies Grandmother kept in her Sunday purse—Presbyterian incense.

I can also remember the pastor shaking my hand on the front porch and the pain associated with old women pinching my cheek. But, growing up long before the days of liturgical reform, I don’t remember a single aunt or uncle (the genuine articles) saying to me, a child of the Covenant, “The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Nor can I remember, even after I “joined the church” along with the other members of my Communicants’ Class, anyone passing the bread of the Supper, calling me by name, and saying, “Brant, the body of Christ given for you.”

Grown-ups didn’t speak to children during worship back then, except perhaps to reproach them for fidgeting. We children didn’t get to take up the offering, either. Or read from the pulpit Bible. Or go into the pulpit to “play preacher” in the empty sanctuary. Or dress up in choir robes. Or play our piano recital pieces on the organ.

I remember these deprivations now. I remember actions I didn’t get to do and the words I didn’t get to say. I remember them because the children in my congregation get to say and do all of those things now. All the better to learn the faith.

In her electrifying keynote addresses to the 2000 Montreat Worship and Music Conferences, Marva J. Dawn reminded her audiences that as old age advances and short-term memory fails, the mind tends to retain the memories of early childhood. I thought of that recently, as I served Communion to an eighty-seven-year-old woman who was near death. She was too weak to lift the plastic cup to her lips and too muddled to remember the name of her pastor of the last fifteen years, but when I began to recite the twenty-third Psalm, she said it right along with me, with perfect King James accuracy.

“What do we want our children to remember on their death beds?” Marva Dawn asked us. The question is worth asking of anyone who plans or leads worship.

The Christian faith uses a specialized vocabulary and a particular collection of images and metaphors, most of them drawn from Scripture. The culture outside the church doesn’t resonate with these metaphors or understand many of these words because they make reference to a reality the culture does not acknowledge. The challenge of Christian catechesis is not merely to translate the specialized language of faith into rough cultural equivalencies. The challenge is to acculturate disciples into a new world altogether, to transform them into native speakers of Christian.

Worship is the primary means of putting on the linguistic garment of salvation. Like any new garment, it might feel awkward at first, but over time, one gets the hang of it. Disciples like Andrew need to learn the words. They also need the practice. How else will they learn?

—Brant Copeland



The Lord be with you. And also with you. This is not just another way of saying “Howdy.” It is a reminder that we are in the presence of Someone who has preceded us, who welcomes us and binds us into a very peculiar sort of community. Does Andrew know this yet? Not enough to articulate it. But he knows that this is the way worship begins: in the name of the Lord, not in the name of Uncle Brant, not even in the name of this congregation which is his home.

In what other ways does this congregation, taking its cue from the *Book of Common Worship*, teach its children to be native Christian speakers?

At the exchange of the peace, Brant extends his hands in a gesture of giving, saying, “The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” As the congregation responds “And also with you,” the children have begun mirroring his gesture, reaching out to him as if to offer a gift. Brant, to complete the exchange, now responds to their offering by bringing his hands to his heart, receiving the peace. This tiny transaction is forming the children (and perhaps even the adults) into an understanding that Christ’s peace is a gift, to be offered and received graciously. Through gesture as well as word, the “passing of the peace” is a real exchange.

The children are also acculturated into Christian faith through generous helpings of Scripture every week. Old Testament, psalm, epistle, gospel: all are read (or sung) every Sunday. Children themselves, as soon as they are confident readers, are regularly invited to read Scripture from the pulpit. By listening and by reading in the context of the community, they learn the stories not only as interesting lessons, but as *our* story.

Even before they can read, children learn the language of faith through the regular responses that punctuate Sunday worship. The Kyrie, the Lord’s Prayer, and the creeds form a familiar rhythm long before children have any clue about the meaning of “incarnate” or “resurrection” or “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Just like practicing soccer moves or scales on the piano, repetition of these responses builds strength and flexibility. The familiar phrases provide vocabulary for their searching questions as they grow up; the same familiar phrases will sustain them in times of crisis. Particularly striking is this congregation’s practice of singing the John Weaver responses during communion each time it is celebrated. They have mastered the complex rhythms and melodic lines so that they can sing with gusto and from memory. I can well imagine that when Andrew begins to lose his memory, he will not only recite the twenty-third Psalm; he will sing out in a quavering voice, “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might . . .”

One Easter when I was in high school, my family shared dinner with another family in the church, old friends who had been a part of First Presbyterian as long as we had. As we stood around the heavily laden table, the father of the other family began, “The Lord be with you.” “And also with you,” we responded. “Lift up your hearts,” he continued. “We lift them up to the Lord.” I didn’t even know I knew these responses by heart until that moment. Suddenly this was not just any table, not just any Easter dinner. It was the table of the Lord. How would I have learned this but by practice? 🍷

—Martha L. Moore-Keish

Warner M. Bailey is pastor to Ridglea Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, Texas. He received the M.Div. from Austin Seminary and the Ph.D. in Old Testament from Yale University. He currently serves as president of the Austin Seminary Association.

WARNER M. BAILEY

Nothing thrills me more than to hear a mother tell me about overhearing her preschool child singing, artlessly, one of the responses he has learned by weekly participation in worship. Or a member asking after the service to speak with me in my office to express profound appreciation for the support received during a personal crisis through participating in worship. Or a young man telling me how a metaphor lifted up in worship struck such a powerful impression on him that it remains a guiding beacon years afterward.

I thank God that God’s Spirit has worked to “seal” human words in worship as divine truth that nurtures lives. However, I also firmly believe that careful leadership of worship is important so that those words can be appreciated in all their reverberations. What follows, therefore, is a list of working principles that have guided my leadership of worship during my last quarter century of ministry.

1. Worship is centered on the Word of God, read and proclaimed. The particular texts for worship govern the choice of hymns and the phrasing of prayers. Worship is cruciform. That is, there are “vertical” and “horizontal” outcomes of worship. The vertical outcome of worship is that God’s glory is exalted and embraced by a community of believers. The horizontal outcome is the formation of a body of worshipers into a community that lives by the graces of the Spirit.
2. The order of public worship clearly guides the worshiper through a structured pattern with elements of adoration, confession of sin, assurance of pardon, praise, and commitment to a life of holiness preceding the reading and proclamation. This is followed by an offering of self and substance, prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, and sending forth.
3. It has been a distinct advantage to our congregation to enjoy a high degree of mutual trust and support between minister, director of music, and organist. This adds measurably to cohesiveness and amplifies the central impact of the service. This collegial arrangement is guided by active committees of the Session whose devoted attention to maintaining high-quality instruments and choral and bell repertoire is greatly appreciated.

4. Congregational hymns are chosen largely from *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, 1990, with the weekly use of the Psalter as a unique contribution of Reformed worship. Six to eight new hymns are introduced each year, and new presentations frequently enhance familiar hymns. The congregation sings an annual cycle of responses. They are repeated with enough frequency for their tunes to become memorized. (Witness, the preschooler's artless singing at home—a worship response!) This past spring our music department produced a compact disc of favorite anthems from our nine graded choirs and hymns chosen and sung by the congregation. This reinforces the ministry of music within the homes of our members.
5. Public prayers are chosen with special attention to their ease of being spoken in unison, the simplicity of expression of theological themes, and their resonance with the full range of the worshiper's spirit, including expressions of both adoration and lament. Public prayers are uttered under the clear expectation of their being powerfully efficacious. Written prayers have the added value of being models for members to use in their private praying.
6. The congregation is repeatedly encouraged to claim its responsibility to actively participate in worship, not only in the conduct of worship, but also in its planning. Cards requesting hymns and sermons are in the pew racks each week, and at least twice each year a deliberate call for "Hymns by Request" and "Sermons by Request" lifts up the community's responsibility of arranging for worship. Time is frequently set aside for the commissioning, recognition, and celebration of the varied ministries of the congregation. Consequently, the celebration of ministries in corporate worship yields corporate commitment to, and affirmation of, diversity.
7. The offering of self and substance takes on vivid dimensions throughout the church year. One Sunday the space around the Holy Table may be filled with stuffed bears to be given as "prayer bears" to a children's hospital. Another Sunday, it might be filled with white paper-covered boxes filled with personal care items for the homeless shelter.
8. I have always maintained that while church school is important for young children, what makes church school come alive is what you do with adults. Conversely, while worship must be meaningful for adults, what you do in worship for and with children is what makes worship come alive. We pay attention to providing tactile moments in worship that bring Christian truth up close to children. Children's choral and bell choirs start appearing in services six weeks after beginning fall practice and continue through spring. We have seized upon the much maligned "children's sermon" time to emphasize an aspect of the central theme for the day. Wireless microphones help the congregation "listen-in" on the conversation. Many times the children are led to reflect upon the musical offering they have just made.
9. Children and parents are educated annually in the meaning of worship with special attention to the meaning of the sacraments. Children who are trained are placed on a schedule to light the candles on the Holy Table, and they are linked with adults to usher and to receive the offering. Youth share their faith in leading worship two Sundays each year.

10. Periodically throughout the year, alternative worship experiences encourage out-of-sanctuary engagements with God's Word. Twice each year we encourage members to come to a Habitat for Humanity building site on Sunday morning for a brief service, three hours spent working, and a picnic. Sunday morning picnics at a retreat center for the entire church family bring creation vividly into worship.
11. Participants in worship can sense a forward thrust to our services through a bold definition of what we do as a witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God. This eschatological dimension is particularly important in our celebration of the sacraments.
12. Ours is a congregation of varied ages and sensibilities. We respect this by creating an early service in our chapel on Sunday that is more reflective, simple, and intimate. For various reasons, members appreciate this time and space.

Most Sunday afternoons, I attempt a telephone conversation with every person who has come to worship at Ridglea for the first time that morning. My conversations repeatedly reveal to me how churches are creating the walking wounded of worship. People are tiring of attempts to "dumb down" worship and to camouflage the gospel by making worship into therapy. People are insulted by stand-offish congregations as much as by sanctuaries that look like television studios. How hungry people are to be reached out to and made to feel genuinely at home. I am gratified when a visitor says, "I haven't felt this at home since I left my home church!" but I am saddened as well.

I plan worship with the idea that it is the "show-window" of God's sovereignty, demonstrated through the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen which is sealed upon the hearts and minds and wills of the congregation through the work of the Spirit; therefore its content is theological. I plan worship with the idea that it is the "show-window" of how Presbyterians think about and feel toward God, toward themselves, and toward the world. That if a newcomer wants to know about the Presbyterian church, he or she should pay attention to its worship; therefore its effectiveness is on the experiential level. I plan worship with the ideathat its setting should be the least threatening threshold for newcomers to cross, that worship is evangelistic; therefore its tone is hospitable. ☛

Libby Carlson Vincent is an adjunct professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and ministry consultant in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She earned the B.A. from U.C.L.A., the M.Div. from Fuller Seminary, and the Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh.

LIBBY CARLSON VINCENT

I.

WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP?

In my Systematic Theology class this past spring, one of my students wrote a position paper on the church titled, “relevant or reverent?” I was intrigued by the title, and as I ruminated over what I would say in the content of this essay, I realized that indeed, contemporary worship in the church is called to be both relevant and reverent.

In order to address the relevancy of contemporary worship, a definition of worship is critical. The *New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language* reminds us that to worship is “to pay divine honors to; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration; to perform religious service to; to adore; to idolize.”¹ New Testament scholar Ralph Martin provides us with a more theo-centric perspective, defining worship as “the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his ‘worthiness’ becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.”² Worship is one of the ways the church proclaims who God is, what God has done on behalf of humanity in Jesus Christ, and offers God the glory he deserves. We cannot be the church if we do not place a primacy on worship.

Having defined worship,³ we must also define the meaning of ‘contemporary.’ For the purposes of this essay, I will define contemporary as that which is modern or current,⁴ and will highlight two areas of contemporary worship I believe to be laudable.

II.

THE “LAUDABLE” ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

Contemporary worship takes seriously the culture in which we live. In an increasingly secularized culture, the church needs to create worship that is both relevant and reverent. The church does not exist to create an interesting venue that is appropriately post-modern and call it worship. Nor are we to live so deeply entrenched in the past that we ignore the reality of the present. In a world where “fewer and fewer people come to church already understanding terms like ‘redemption’ and ‘righteousness’”⁵ the church needs to approach worship, particularly contemporary worship, asking questions like,

How do we speak about God in language that people understand, believer and non-believer alike? and How will we help people draw nearer to God in ways that will help and not hinder?⁶

Contemporary worship acknowledges the challenge of speaking the language of our culture without compromising who God is and what God has done through Jesus Christ. Thus, contemporary worship seeks new means to express adoration to God. Rather than using language that becomes a stumbling block to people because either it is misunderstood or not known at all,⁷ contemporary worship articulates the truth of the gospel using words that make sense in the world in which we live today. Furthermore, contemporary worship seeks to use every avenue to bring individuals into intimacy with God. For example, worship bands employ a variety of instruments, from keyboard to saxophone to harp, knowing that different instruments evoke different responses from individuals. Further resources such as videos, drama, and other types of visual arts open up new ways for those who worship God to know, love, and express their gratitude to their Creator.

Contemporary worship is a powerful means by which men and women can open their hearts to Christ and be conformed to his image. When both the mind and the heart are engaged by worship, the outcome is powerful: God is glorified, we are changed, and God’s kingdom continues to be established.

While contemporary worship values what is modern and current, it also values the role of tradition. Although contemporary styles of worship emphasize that we must use new methods to communicate the truth of who God is, the best examples of this style of worship never “throw the baby out with the bath water.” In fact, contemporary worship recognizes our current generation’s tendency to be both suspicious of—but strangely connected to—the past.⁸

The unique tension that exists in both moving beyond the past yet, at the same time, holding onto the best that tradition has to offer, is the challenge of contemporary worship.⁹ We understand that while the world in which we live today is different than the world of Martin Luther or Charles Wesley, the God whom we serve is constant: our God “never changes or casts shifting shadows.”¹⁰ Contemporary worship never forgets that a core truth we proclaim in worship is God’s faithfulness. A powerful way to proclaim that faithfulness is to bring to the attention of all worshipers pieces of our past that remind us that the God we worship in the present is the very same God the early church worshiped and the God who will be worshiped for all eternity.

One of the most effective ways to value our past is what has been termed the “re-packaging” of tradition: the hymn “Amazing Grace” may be sung, but re-packaged in a rhythm and blues format. Or the Apostles’ Creed is recited during a worship service, but through the venue of song.¹¹ Re-packaging acknowledges that while tradition is important, there are creative ways to teach and express it—ways that become an opening, rather than a roadblock, to effective worship.

III.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In many ways, the style in which worship presents itself often comes down to questions of taste: one worshiper enjoys traditional hymns played on the organ while another appreciates praise choruses played by a band. We believe that a true disciple of Christ is able to transcend taste and find something laudable in all forms of worship!

As Presbyterians, we hold to the truth of the phrase, “reformed and always being reformed.” Implied in this phrase is the belief that while we move forward, we never forget what got us where we are today. Contemporary worship is no exception. May we, as we proceed in the new millennium, give credence and attention to what is Christ-focused and contemporary as we glorify and enjoy God forever. ☩

NOTES

¹ The *New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Delair, 1071), 1148.

² Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), 4.

³ I am aware that there are many definitions of worship. For the purposes of this essay, we will operate under the assumption that all definitions cannot be discussed in the body of this text.

⁴ *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines contemporary as, “in the style of the present or recent times; modern.” From: *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: World, 1972), 306.

⁵ Lee Stroebel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 217-218.

⁶ Dour Lawrence, minister of worship at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, makes the point well when he states that “all worship is contemporary in that it is happening in the present moment. The question is, and always will be, What is our experience in that moment? Were we allowed to sense the powerful presence of God and did we open every sensory avenue to get there?” Electronic mail discussion, October 22, 2000.

⁷ I often think of phrases from hymns such as “here I raise my Ebenezer,” from the hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” or “bring forth the royal diadem,” from “All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name” as good examples of how language can confuse rather than enhance worship. Having been raised in the church, I know full well what these phrases mean. However, my parish experience tells me something different: many worshipers in my congregation knew nothing of the history or relevance of these words; appropriate substitutions can be made that help rather than distract the worshiper.

⁸ Tom Beaudoin states that: “To continue to ‘live theology,’ to practice a thriving irreverent spirituality, Xers can recycle and recombine not only the present pop culture and religious landscape but also the rich past of religious tradition . . . If we are to gain a wider and perhaps even more authoritative and ancient understanding of tradition, we need to open our lives and let our particular religious traditions make serious claims on our lives.” Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 150-151.

⁹ In her book, *Worship Evangelism*, Sally Morgenthaler reminds us that “The culturally relevant church of the '90s and beyond will need to learn to speak fluently out of the American religious lexicon, the vernacular language that has its roots in people's worship experience of twenty or thirty years ago. It will have to discover the lasting, positive church recollections within its community and then incorporate those discoveries, creatively and sensitively, into Sunday morning

or Wednesday night.” (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 136.

¹⁰ James 1:17, *The New Living Translation*.

¹¹ While an associate pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, one of my favorite ways we recited the Apostles' Creed was through a song called “We Believe.” This song took the text of the Creed, re-packaged it in contemporary language and music, making its singing a marriage of tradition and modernity.

Alistair Drummond is pastor of West End Presbyterian Church in New York City. He holds a B.Sc. and B.D. from the University of Edinburgh and a Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He served as a minister of the Church of Scotland in Kelty in the Presbytery of Dunfermline before being called to West End.

ALISTAIR DRUMMOND

At West End Presbyterian Church in the heart of the Upper West Side of Manhattan, we have discovered some important elements of sustainable worship to make participants feel connected.¹ An important legacy of our congregation over the years is the commitment to remain in this location and minister to the changing community, unlike some city churches which have followed their middle-class membership to the suburbs. In a diverse urban congregation like ours, we must weave together global Christian expressions of worship and a variety of root Christian expressions of worship into new expressions which will be authentic to current worshipers. This worship must be at once faithful to a Reformed theology of worship and at the same time accessible to the modern day seeker. It must be inviting, and at the same time surprising and challenging in positive ways. We know, according to Wade Clark Roof and others, that modern seekers are not, for the most part, drawn to institutional religious forms but are questing for an outward spirituality through which to express and explore the implications of an inner awakening or yearning.² This requires in our worship a deep understanding of shape and structure, within which a “broad place”³ in the Spirit may be found. That broad place will allow for surprise and challenge and deep exploration of what the Spirit is bringing to expression in our context.

West End is a congregation of 200 African American, Hispanic, Asian American and European American members and worshipers reflecting some of the diversity of our neighborhood and city. The diversity is at once economic, racial, cultural, and linguistic. We worship in English and Spanish in two services every Sunday, celebrating our unity and diversity in Christ. We have a handful of cradle Presbyterians; many are coming to the Presbyterian tradition as a conscious choice; and many others are coming to our congregation and polity solely as a function of being drawn to this particular worshipping community.

The members who are Presbyterian by choice often maintain that their choice was for a particular form and order and content of worship. For them the challenge is to be liberated by a fresh discovery of the principles of Reformed worship and thereby released from bondage to very particular expressions of the tradition. We also have

members who couldn't care less what Presbyterian means so long as they have a connected experience of God in worship. For them the excitement comes when they discover that the principles of Reformed worship lend strength to the work of exploring what form worship might take. Thus they gain confidence to breathe and imagine new expressions within a clear framework.

One such important Reformed principle comes in the clarion call for the word of the gospel to be heard in the common language and vocabulary of the people. It was Martin Luther, notably, who carried this into various aspects of worship with his liberal use of the music of the common people in the hymnody of the church.⁴ In West End today we hear that same clarion call for a musical language and vocabulary, a leadership language and vocabulary, and a participatory language and vocabulary that are common and contemporary and indigenous to the people gathered for worship. The purpose being to develop a worship that is claimed by all as expressing the “root song”⁵ of the entire worshipping community.

Among the essential elements for a sustainable and connected worship life we have discovered the following:⁶

There is the need to ease the entry of neighbors into the worshipping community. This is more than a warm handshake, words of welcome, and diligent ushering. It affects, among other things, the music played and sung, the accessibility of the form and content of the bulletin, and accessibility of the meaning of each element or portion of worship. Form and content and the conduct of worship must be educative, inducting worshipers into their deeper meaning. This means planning and conducting worship with a conscious thought for the newcomer who may be unchurched. In discussing a similar theme, Gustav Niebuhr describes the mega-churches as having both a large front door and a large back door.⁷ Those exiting the back door are typically in search of a greater liturgical sophistication, a more intentional theological rationale for the shape and content of worship. Expressed tritely, the mega-churches may have all door and no house, and we mainline churches may have all house and no door. In our respective houses of worship, we address similar house building challenges but from very different directions.

Participatory emphasis encourages everyone to bring and express their gifts and spiritual leadership in order to claim the worship experience as their own. This entails allowing even quite recent newcomers to participate in planning and conducting worship, listening for and engaging the gifts and talents that will readily convey to everyone that worship is the work of the people themselves.

The congregation must develop a root song, a hymnody or repertoire of worship forms and expressions that are indicative of what is distinctively and authentically West End at worship. This worship will be indigenous to West End and will grow organically out of the lived worship experiences of the people. In our context this is inevitably eclectic both in style and form, but each piece has come to express, “what works” for us. For example, our passing of the peace is an important and thorough greeting of almost all those in attendance by each other—mingling, greeting, and singing all at the same time. Then there are modern hymns and hymns of particular ethnic origin that have “caught on” and become favorites throughout the congregation, thus becoming part of our root song.

The congregation must develop a culture of openness and transformation first through meeting the “other” in a spirit of openness. Then the congregation must allow worship to be transformed according to the needs of those who are unlike them. For West End this has led to incorporation of a significant number of mentally challenged individuals living in our neighborhood. This openness and transformation is perhaps the most demanding discipline of all, but vital to the growth of the church. It means being appropriately unsettled from the complacency that thinks one’s own needs or the needs of people like oneself are being fully met and, that that being so, all is well with worship. The truth is that for health as well as growth, we all need both the consolation and the challenge in worship. We have found the need to be singing and speaking, preaching and praying in ways that do not necessarily appeal to all of us all of the time. They involve us in being stretched to embrace what may enhance or make possible another person’s worship.

In a wider perspective, we must acknowledge the vast and continual movement of seekers and Christians shifting from church to church. While we may choose to focus on an individual’s need and prerogative to search and shop and change until that need is met, there is another way to see this constant, often unhelpful, churning of people as itself a responsibility of the churches. Every church must make an effort to slow, or even halt, this churning, by a courageous return to the principles of worship. We need a sustained and simultaneous attention to issues of threshold, the otherness, and diversity of needs of potential as well as present members, and authentic expression of indigenous word and sound and style. And all of this is best pursued within a critical but deeply heartfelt re-appropriation, not jettisoning, of a particular Christian tradition, such as our own Reformed Presbyterian one. 

NOTES

¹ By “connected” I mean that, experientially, the worshipers sense the spiritual thread running through the entire service, linking all its parts together; that they readily identify with what is sung and spoken and enacted; that they feel themselves deeply related to one another and to God throughout the experience; and that they have a truly enhanced opportunity to be in conversation with God.

² See *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*, Wade Clark Roof, (New York: Harper and Collins, 1994).

³ Job 36:16.

⁴ The tune “Ein Feste Burg,” for example, was a lilting German folk tune before it was appropriated into the more stolid version we have become accustomed to singing in the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

⁵ The expression “root song” is one developed by my wife Su Yon Pak to describe the depth of inner connection worship must make for each worshiper and for the collective worshiping community. It is related to ideas of the music of one’s heart, and the heart language in which we express our faith or prayer, which may be different from a music or language we more deliberately adapt to or make a conscious effort to enter into.

⁶ In a wonderful weekend visit recently from “The Singers and Players of the Beaches Presbyterian Church” of Ontario, Canada, under the direction of Andrew Donaldson, we experienced a deep and memorable reflection of what we also strive to accomplish. Their congregation, with a

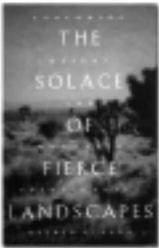
predominantly European Canadian membership in a diverse urban setting, began to develop intentional learning, singing, and playing of global music and hymnody that reflected the languages and cultures of their immediate neighbors in the community. This effort was sustained and refined to ensure an ever-higher standard of authentic sound. This went hand in hand with an increase in participatory conduct and leading of worship. Individuals were encouraged to bring their musical and worship leading talents to expression on a regular basis.

⁷ Gustav Niebuhr, the religion editor of the *New York Times*, spoke at a Lenten Wednesday night study at our church in 1999 as part of a series on Evangelism and Church Growth. His topic was “What Time Is It for Churches in the City?” He discussed the religious landscape of the nation and the opportunity and challenge faced particularly by our mainline church congregations.

THE SOLACE OF FIERCE LANDSCAPES: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality

A Review Essay

WILLIAM GREENWAY



Belden C. Lane, *THE SOLACE OF FIERCE LANDSCAPES*, Oxford University Press, 1998, 304 pages, \$27.50. *William Greenway is assistant professor of philosophical theology at Austin Seminary.*

There are two main styles of theological reflection in the Christian tradition: the kataphatic and the apophatic. Kataphatic theology is the sort of constructive theology one typically learns in introductory theology classes in seminary (*kataphatic* means “according to the image”). Apophatic theology, also called the *via negativa* (“the way of negation”), is a tradition of spiritual theology which emphasizes a non-conceptual awareness of God.

While distinct, the two styles ideally play over against one another in an irresistible and productive dialectic. Kataphatic theology proceeds by developing as rigorous and extravagant a theological vocabulary as possible, while all along confessing its inability to capture the wonders of God. Apophatic theology attempts to foster—beyond the realm of all concepts—an immediate experience of the wonders of God, while all along realizing that limiting concepts inevitably remain in play.

You cannot write a concept-less apophatic theology like you might write concept-rich kataphatic theology. So Belden C. Lane quite rightly offers *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes* as a “performance” of apophatic theology. He intends not so much to give the reader a new way to understand God as to help illuminate new avenues to awareness of God by testifying to his own journey through the *via negativa*. The result is a moving and elegant text which is at once highly learned and intensely personal.

Lane is a Presbyterian minister and professor of theological studies and American studies at Saint Louis University. The catalyst for Lane’s meditations was the slow loss of his mother, who was afflicted with Alzheimer’s Disease and an incurable bone cancer. Caught in the throes of his mother’s bed-ridden final three years, Lane found solace in retreats into fierce desert and mountain landscapes, and in the spirituality of desert and mountain mystics. The book is built from reflections on days spent at his mother’s bedside in the nursing home; on his own attempts to confront his mother’s dying through solitary journeys into the deserts of New Mexico and the Sinai Desert; and on insights gleaned from his extensive readings in apophatic theology.

The *via negativa* proceeds through three defining moments—purgation, illumina-

tion, and union. Lane uses these three moments to structure his testimony. The first moment, purgation, is a process of coalescing self-forgetfulness and a recognition of one’s powerlessness. Self-forgetfulness is familiar to many as the “flow” experienced while playing sports or a musical instrument. It is the duration in which you lose yourself entirely to the game or the music—you “hit a groove” or are “in a zone.” Notoriously, your groove is lost the instant you think about it, for the experience requires self-forgetfulness. A non-threatening and common experience of utter powerlessness comes when you are rendered literally speechless. Your joy or love or wonder or horror is so profound and complete that not only do no words suffice, but any attempt to render the experience in word or image seems an affront. You simply live into the moment, mouth agape.

Here I will digress momentarily, for it is in relation to the experience of being rendered speechless that one best understands the apophatic recognition that all language both limits and exerts power and control over its objects. That is, to the degree that the experience is understood (i.e., interpreted within the story of our lives), it is inevitably rendered, even within our own minds, through historically and culturally contingent—and thus limiting—concepts and images. The fundamental insight of apophatic theology is to recognize the significance of this limitation with regard to our thinking about God, who is utterly beyond our comprehension.

Without understanding, however, any experience is literally inconceivable to us, and thus impossible to integrate into the stories of our lives. Thus there is always a need for image-rich, kataphatic reflection. We simply must attempt to comprehend God. This is the inescapable paradox which contains and restrains all theology: we must continually attempt to speak that which cannot be spoken. This paradox energizes the critical and revitalizing dialectic between apophatic and kataphatic theology.

Purgation, once again, is the process of coalescing powerlessness and self-forgetfulness. I illustrated these with reference to “flow” and “being rendered speechless.” The feeling of flow, however, may not involve any sense of powerlessness, and the experience of powerlessness may not involve any sense of self-forgetfulness. It is only as you imagine these two familiar experiences beginning to coalesce that you gain some sense for the path of purgation.

Many experiences might engender purgation, but desert experiences have proven especially provocative for the *via negativa* (i.e., apophatic theology). Whether you crash alone into rocks and sand a hundred miles from water, or you awaken to find yourself irretrievably caught and dying in an urban nursing home, desert experiences elicit a primordial sense both of self-forgetfulness and of your own powerlessness.

A desert can obviously make you feel powerless, but how does it lead to self-forgetfulness? Whether stranded among the rocks and sand or in the hospital, it would seem that the horror is keyed precisely to an *awareness* of myself and my vulnerability, not to self-forgetfulness. Lane answers that, “We are saved in the end by the things that ignore us.” This is a tough, even counter-intuitive, idea, and Lane explores its complexities throughout the volume. Lane suggests that it is the very indifference of the sands (or the disease) which finally wrests us out of our self-centered orientation.

Imagine stumbling alone and lost through the desert. Even if you force screams of terror and anguish through parched lips, they simply fade away over the indifferent

rock and brush. As a sense of the utter futility of these unrequited cries penetrates to the marrow, the illusion that you are the center of existence begins to be broken. The very indifference of the land or the disease can begin to draw you out from yourself. Finally, forced beyond our ego-driven perspective, we arrive at the point “where terror gives way to wonder” (65). “Only there,” explains Lane, “do we enter the abandonment . . . that is finally necessary for meeting God” (65). It is our desire, our wanting, which stands as barrier. It is only after all hope is lost that truly pure love can be realized. Sheer abandonment is a precursor to pure *agape*.

If purgation is the process of coalescing forgetfulness and powerlessness, then illumination, the second moment of the *via negativa*, comes in living where the coalescence is realized. Resist understanding “illumination” in the style of kataphatic (constructive) theology; “illumination” does not signal, “Ah, now I get it.” It is not sudden new insight or understanding. Illumination is the living out of the coalescence of forgetfulness and powerlessness. It is the path beyond that point where “terror gives way to wonder,” for all thought of self is abandoned, as is every attempt to “make sense” of what is happening (65). Illumination is inhabiting that state of sheer and speechless wonder; it is “waiting in a silence beyond language” (87).

Illumination happens through the ordinary. You continue taking one step after another through the never-ending sand; you continue to endure the daily struggle to eat and defecate and bathe. But you inhabit the same place differently. As the coalescence of purgation is perfected, quiet joy increasingly pervades the silence. Lane reminds us of Teilhard de Chardin’s soft insistence that “the value and interest of life is not so much to do conspicuous things . . . as to do ordinary things with the perception of their enormous value” (97).

Illumination happens through the ordinariness of daily life, and beyond all striving to preserve and distinguish oneself. You continue to struggle out of the life-threatening sands, or against the disease—and in absolute sensitivity to the needs of others, you continue to struggle for justice and the relief of suffering—but your focus is absolutely not on escape, not on any future goal, but radically on the present, on complete attention and openness and connection to all which is immediately at hand. When lost in the desert, the sight of distant water will not unduly quicken your step, for your focus has not been so narrowed. You continue forward but remain focused upon the present and immediate, full of awareness and love for the sheer being of the rocks and the scrub and the lizard that darts to your side. On the far side of purgation, you walk through the ordinary—self-forgetful and without striving, completely attentive, and full of joy and wonder at the sheer be-ing of it all.

This perfection of marveling attention is the perfection of the moments of purgation and illumination and signals realization of the third moment of the *via negativa*, union. As Lane is careful to emphasize, apophatic union is immediately qualified by kataphatic understanding. What is perfected is your attention and concern for all that is other. This implies not a negation of self but an attention and understanding which is not at all indexed to self-concern. Thus the end of the *via negativa* is not retreat to some otherworldly realm. To the contrary, it is characterized by a burning and specific attention to all of creation.

Since the apophatic is informed by the kataphatic, this attention is not blind. Justice and beauty and love are discerned and celebrated, and injustice and pain and hate are discerned and resisted. But now these realities are celebrated or resisted wholly out of concern and love for others, for through purgation and illumination you have been utterly stripped of your ordinarily pervasive and overwhelming concern for yourself. In the moment of union your self is not lost but integrated in a higher relation where love of others and of justice and of beauty is the paramount reality. And at that point beyond all hope, Lane testifies, you find yourself gasped, loved, by God.

Or so I might say. I’m feeling increasingly clumsy and wooden searching for accurate and poetic images. Lane is more poetic than I, but finally all descriptions of illumination and union merely gesture awkwardly toward an experience no description adequately captures. Moreover, it is impossible to leap to an understanding of the moments of illumination and union. This is so because the *via negativa* is an experiential journey, and its first miles must be the experience of purgation (as any desire to leap ahead betrays).

Every reader’s reaction to *Solace* will be definitively indexed to their own most profound experiences of desert—whatever it be, wilderness, hospital, ghetto, or unemployment—and of purgation, illumination, and union. Many will not resonate with all of Lane’s interpretations, but all should benefit from Lane’s searching and brutally honest testimony.

My own most powerful sense of dissonance emerged in relation to Lane’s almost wholly negative depiction of actual deserts. The “desert” metaphor, informed primarily by the purgative dimension of his experience with his mother, eventually overwhelms the physical desert landscapes he explores. This is understandable vis-a-vis the moment of purgation, but in the moments of illumination and union the real, physical desert sparkles as a wondrous reality—no matter how hostile it may be to our needs. But almost wholly absent in *Solace* are passages—like those in Edward Abbey or Barry Lopez—which make us understand, wonder at, and love for their own sakes utterly fierce and (to humans) deadly creatures and landscapes.

Also largely absent is a sense of the way in which natural rhythms and wordless relationships within wilderness quietly yet inexorably invite one beyond oneself and one’s understanding. The rhythms of Lane’s wilderness experiences are too frequently discerned through the meter of a pre-determined liturgical timing, and his descriptions of his wilderness experiences are too often processed through a pre-determined theological rubric. Lane is right that physical deserts do not automatically engender spiritual awareness, but he falls too quickly toward the opposite conclusion that the rhythms of wilderness and encounters with wild animals have no intrinsic revelatory potential.

Finally, while Lane rightly cautions that the apophatic way leads to an increased sensitivity which should empower concrete struggles for justice, his named concerns remain wholly anthropocentric. Concern for justice for all creatures and landscapes, however, is not a secondary effect of illumination and union, but an intrinsic aspect of one’s utterly selfless and burning attention to (i.e., love for) all creatures and creation.

Thus, for instance, one never makes the mistake of thinking fierce landscapes are valuable because they offer us solace.

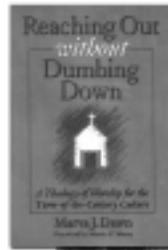
Despite these concerns about emphasis (and my hunch is that Lane would share them), Lane's testimony to apophatic theology should be enthusiastically, even prayerfully, received. *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes* is an important work. Lane's testimony to the profound spirituality of the *via negativa* counters those insidious spiritualities which turn seekers inward with promises of self-fulfillment, peace, and happiness. And his passionate testimony to apophatic reflection itself gently chastens modern theologians for a too-exclusive emphasis on kataphatic theology. In the end, Lane's testimony beckons one not to argument over theological formulations (though he would agree such argument plays a critical role in Christian life), but to reflective engagement with one's own desert experiences. I hope it might lead also to awe and love not only for "fierce" landscapes, but for all the landscapes and creatures of God's wondrous creation. 🌿

Marva J. Dawn, REACHING OUT WITHOUT DUMBING DOWN: A THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP FOR THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CULTURE. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995, 307 pages, \$18.

Marva J. Dawn, A ROYAL "WASTE" OF TIME: THE SPLENDOR OF WORSHIPING GOD AND BEING THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999, 369 pages, \$18.

Reviewed by Kathryn L. Roberts,
assistant professor of Old Testament,
Austin Seminary.

Marva Dawn fires a significant theological salvo in the "worship wars" with her books, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* and *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being the Church for the World*. Her broadside makes it clear that she is on the "traditional" side doing battle against those who are frequently called proponents of "contemporary" worship. Both



books present comprehensive arguments for theology-based approaches to decision-making on the forms of worship, rather than abdication to market-driven responses meant to bolster lagging membership rolls with appeals to the widest possible audience. In *Reaching Out*, Dawn lays out her program through the juxtaposition of the words *culture* and *worship* as she attempts to open the reader's eyes to the influence that culture inevitably plays in any discussion of the forms of worship. The sequel, *A Royal "Waste,"* picks up the author's argument, this time from the direction of theologically motivated worship as the soil from which an eschatological community comes to full flower.

The first quarter of *Reaching Out* lays out what the author sees to be the problem with much of "contemporary" worship: unaware of the potentially destructive influence of secular, self-possessed culture on the ethos of worship, Christians are turning away from biblically centered, theologically focused worship toward crowd-attracting entertainment and feel-good substitutes. The

remainder of the book moves from this look at a culture that tends to breed short attention spans and the need for constant entertainment to what she describes as the culture of worship. This is where the author constructs her theology of worship by not merely presenting a critique of unreflective worship, but creatively offering questions for theological reflection on the nature of God-centered worship.

For Dawn, worship has lost its center. The thesis of the entire enterprise could accurately be summed up as: God is the Subject and Object of Christian worship. This deceptively simple idea gets worked out in numerous enlightening and helpful ways. God as Subject means that we are to keep ever before us the recognition that the Triune God is One who creates, who redeems, and who sustains. Worship that is not centered on the revelation of the glory of the Lord has lost its moorings. Likewise, God as Object of our worship entails offering ourselves back to God in gratitude through acts of public devotion which keep the focus on the mighty works of God, de-emphasizing the worshiper's feelings of joy and comfort in the wake of such deliverance. The Lord gives content to our praise and prayers and is, at the same time, the One to whom they are offered. As such, God as Subject and as Object may necessarily mean radical shifts in liturgy, preaching, and music.

Dawn's theology of the culture of worship circles back around and ultimately puts worship in the service of the culture. The by-product of worship, rather than its intent, is the creation of a subversive community with a lasting attraction. The church that is focused on the Triune God will necessarily cut through the thick fog of contemporary culture, offering an alternative to entertainment-driven, multimedia church. That alternative will be a community of lasting value, the very thing for which many of the disenfranchised are already searching! The wrongly placed goal becomes instead the end result.

Creation of community, the finale of *Reaching Out*, is the thesis and beginning point for *A Royal "Waste."* Through our theologically focused worship of God as our center, the church moves toward the re-creation of an eschatological community. It is

Dawn's contention that the church has let go of the tension between the "already and the not yet," concentrating on the "already" task of the church at the expense of the "not yet." Both are necessary for the proper balance in Christian worship.

Chapters in this sequel volume are organized around sermons written by Dawn for a variety of church settings and occasions. Rather than a sustained continuation of the initial treatise on culture and worship, *A Royal "Waste"* uses the various sermons as jumping off points for introducing responses to earlier critiques, taking the opportunity to address questions and refine previous statements. The book's title is derived from a sermon, "A Royal Waste of Time: A Sermon for Church Musicians on Colossians 3:12-17." Responding to the question, Do we waste our time preparing for worship that fewer and fewer are finding fulfilling? Dawn replies in the affirmative. Worship *is* a waste of time, a royal waste of time, when viewed from human perspectives. Properly focused on God as Sovereign of the heavens and the earth, worship does us no earthly good. "It is totally irrelevant, not efficient, not powerful, not spectacular, not productive, sometimes not even satisfying to us. It is also the only hope for changing the world" (17).

The author argues her positions well, driving them home forcefully. Even though good teaching occasionally has an element of repetition to it, after awhile Dawn's arguments tend to sound a bit redundant, and sometimes, even shrill. She attempts to be impartial in the war between contemporary and traditional, but doesn't quite pull it off. It is clear where her sympathies lie and what she considers to be theologically sound, as well as unsound. It is interesting to note, that in a book committed to being boldly subversive, she resists inclusive language out of a "concern to reach the widest audience possible" (1).

Dawn is a church musician, deeply committed to music as a means of communicating the theological center of the gospel, while at the same time opening the human heart to receptivity toward the Spirit of God. Church musicians, singers, and musical selections are constantly lifted up as helpful suggestions in theologically centered worship.

Yet, interestingly, in neither volume does she acknowledge or address the very real potential that even a very talented music staff may hijack the church's worship through a music program that dominates rather than aids the congregation's participation in worship.

Gerben Heitink, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY.

Trans. Reinder Bruinsma. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993 (German), 1999 (English), 360 pages, \$45. *Reviewed by Cynthia L. Rigby, associate professor of theology, Austin Seminary.*



Heitink's *Practical Theology* is not a book meant to be read cover-to-cover, but a manual that thoroughly and helpfully locates and describes the landscape of practical theology. In an age where the fragmentation of the theological disciplines has become status quo, this work challenges us neither to take for granted the distinctive contributions of the field nor to overlook its continuity with the theological academy as a whole. Heitink's guide explains: (1) why and how "practical theology" emerged as a discipline; (2) the contribution of practical theology as a branch of theology; and (3) the sub-areas and trajectories of the discipline itself.

Practical theology is the most hands-on of any of the theological fields. It is the department, in seminaries, where preaching, liturgy, pastoral counseling, and Christian education are taught. It is the voice that reminds biblical studies, theology, and church history that we are called to engage our subject matter not only in theory but also in practice. It is the discipline that most clearly and consistently manifests an ecclesiastical orientation: practical theology is theology founded self-reflectively in the life and activities of the church.

Because practical theology is ordered according to the church's ministry, it is often the favorite department of pastors who return to seminary to complete doctor of ministry degrees. But for the same reasons that people of the church are drawn to practical theology,

the field often feels distanced by the academic guild as a whole. While the disciplines of theology, church history, ethics, and Bible are welcomed by national organizations whose membership includes scholars from both universities and seminaries, practical theologians often complain that there is no place for them at the table of guilds such as the American Academy of Religion. This is, in

part, because the ecclesiastical focus of the field is off-putting to those who do not want to integrate reflection on religious practice into their scholarly work. It is also because practical theology is too often misunderstood as being interested only in practice, without the deep theoretical reflection adored by academics.

Heitink addresses these issues, making a clear case for practical theology's place in the guild without compromising on its particular relationship to the church. He does this by describing the discipline simultaneously, both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, Heitink shows how practical theology is integrated with all the other theological disciplines, representing them and challenging them not to forget the "practical purpose" which all theology had "from its very beginning," that is: to be "aimed at faith and action . . . to help others believe" (105).

Vertically speaking, Heitink does not lose the distinctiveness of practical theology in the course of describing its continuity with the entirety of the theological encyclopedia. Masterfully, Heitink convinces us that the ecclesiastical focus of the discipline actually bears witness to the locus of all theology; what is distinctive about practical theology is not that it is founded in the church and the other disciplines are not, but that it is uniquely positioned to work in an interdisciplinary way with the theology of the church and the sociological and psychological literature of the secular guild. Because practical theology concerns itself with identifying "God's activity through the ministry of human beings" (7), attention to the character of human beingness, and therefore to the social sciences, comes into play. Practical theology, then, takes

into account the contributions of Weber, Marx, Berger, Fowler, and Freud as well as Barth, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, and Boff (all of whom find their way into Heitink's book).

In Part I of the book, Heitink explains that practical theology emerged as a discipline in response to modernity's emphasis on the role of the subject as interpreter and agent. The idea that one could engage the subject-matter of theology (i.e., God) without taking one's context, opinions, socialization, and psychology into account came to be seen, in the eighteenth century and following, as dangerously naive. Similarly, with the modern rise of science came incredible optimism about the powers of human reason to improve human life. The heinous crimes devised and implemented by human agents in the first half of the twentieth century dampened this optimism, but only punctuated our deepening conviction that our actions make a difference to the shape of the future—for good or for ill. Practical theology, emerging during this era, challenged all theology to recognize its responsibility not only to reflect theoretically, but to shape the world in which we live.

In Part II, Heitink develops his understanding of practical theology "as a theological theory of action," reflecting primarily on the relationship between theory and praxis (the "doing" of theology). It is in this section that Heitink successfully levels the unfortunate caricature of the practical theologian as one engaged in practice without theory, in doing without thinking. On the contrary, he compellingly describes how practical theology has led theology in its refusal to divorce theory and practice, revelation and experience, God and humanity. Citing the first line of Calvin's *Institutes*, Heitink argues that theology is about both "knowledge of God," and "knowledge of

ourselves." Both pondering who God is apart from how our lives are implicated and acting apart from reflecting on who we are in relation to this God represent serious misunderstandings of the theological task.

In his final section (Part III), Heitink offers a very helpful overview of the various "domains of action" comprised by practical theology. "Humanity and Religion" is concerned, primarily, with spirituality; "Church and Faith," with liturgics and homiletics; "Religion and Society," with evangelism. Heitink ends the book with consideration of "practical theology as pastoral theology" (ch. 17). Building on briefer discussions that are interwoven throughout the book, Heitink explores issues including the identity, competence, authority, person, and spirituality of the pastor.

Clearly, Heitink ends this work with reflections on the pastoral calling because he understands that pastors, at best, are consummate practical theologians. Pastors who are interested in reflecting on their identity in this regard will no doubt be assisted by this helpful manual. The chapters on pastoral ministry, coupled with an extensive index, will serve as a manageable way "in" to the rich history and varied paradigms of the practical field. A weak point, for English-speaking readers, is that the extensive bibliography is comprised predominantly by German and Dutch titles (the author's native land is the Netherlands). Nonetheless, this is the most comprehensive manual available on the discipline of practical theology, and will not disappoint either those who want to do in-depth study of the current state of practical theology or those who desire quickly to find out, for example, why there is so much to-do, these days, about "praxis." 🍌

Talk amongst yourselves . . .
To continue the discussion on worship
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MASS CIRCULATION

SCOTT BLACK JOHNSTON

With this issue of *Insights*, Austin Seminary inaugurates a new electronic bulletin board with the hope that it will foster ongoing discussion and serve to connect this institution's widely spread family. In beginning this new venture, the faculty has asked, "How will this bulletin board be used? Will there be rules, principles, standards governing our interactions?" And as we have asked these questions, I have been thinking of my grandparents.

My maternal grandmother was a letter writer. In crooked blue ink, her arthritic hands shaped a steady stream of sentences and paragraphs. Folded, sealed and stamped, her ivory stationery made its way with humbling regularity to the mailboxes of children, siblings, cousins, friends, and grandchildren scattered throughout the United States. Grandma's letters were, in a word, newsy—offering accounts of pies baked, laundry washed, bird species observed, and the status of her vast vegetable garden ("the zucchi-

Scott Black Johnston receives his e-mail at Austin Seminary, where he is associate professor of homiletics. He is a graduate of St. Olaf College, the Divinity School of Yale University, and Princeton Theological Seminary. The author of Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos, Black Johnston is currently researching a book on preaching and afterlife images, which he hopes will be available for mass circulation in 2002.

ni blossoms finally set"). For her, letters were a way of staying in contact. Or perhaps, more to the point, knowing that so many of her family members could no longer stop by to share a cup of weak tea and the news of the day, Grandma used her correspondence to share the rhythms of life with her far-flung beloved. I still have some of her letters.

My maternal grandfather never, to my knowledge, wrote a letter. He was a farmer in Northern New Jersey, and daily drove a truck filled with produce to a market in Manhattan. His was the world of the handshake and the spoken promise. I remember him expressing frustration after receiving a letter complaining about one of the farm's dogs from, of all people, his next-door neighbor. Why, he wondered, was he not personally contacted about the problem? For my grandfather, letters conveyed distance. You couldn't look a letter in the eye. He needed to see people's faces, touch their hands, slap them on the back.

I receive between ten and fifteen e-mails a day. At least half are the technological equivalent of junk mail—solicitations to buy books and CDs, order prescription drugs, or purchase a trip for two to London. I trash these. Then there are the official memos that faculty and administrators circulate making invitations and reminding me of obligations. I make notes in my calendar, and then trash these too. The rest of my electronic correspondence falls into two categories. Into my first (rather broad) category I lump a lot of different genres. There are short notes from students, asking questions about upcoming assignments, apologizing for missing class, or making an observation about preaching. There are requests for guest preaching and teaching. There are messages from friends, colleagues, former students, detailing events both mundane and significant, asking for prayers, expressing sadness and joy. Changed jobs, new babies, broken ankles, lost parents. . . . These are the missives that my grandmother would recognize as letters—full paragraphs oozing with the juice of life. I gather these together (the letters along with the short notes) into the rather narcissistic category: "Composed For Me."

My second category contains things that have been "Forwarded To Me." In sheer volume, this category has come to dwarf the first. If you have e-mail, you know what I mean. Each day my computer repeatedly chimes announcing the arrival of jokes, environmental warnings, political satire, and snippets of ecclesiastical news—all forwarded to me at the touch of a button. I always check to see from whence such pre-packaged tidbits came, knowing that there must have been a thinking person, a friend, a somebody who thought to send them to me. I suppose I should appreciate being included on their list of people-worth-forwarding-amusing-stuff-to list just as I used to appreciate the envelopes that would occasionally arrive from my mother stuffed with nothing other than grocery coupons—mostly ones for cat food. Sure, there was no written note, yet clearly she had me, or at least my cats, on her mind. But with all of this electronic forwarding, as tangible stationery has been replaced by the pushing of buttons—cutting and pasting tidbits, composed by others, destined for mass-mailing—I have begun to wonder. . . . Are we really in "contact" with each other any more? Where is the slap on the back, the touch of the hand, the hint that there are eyes out there into which I might look? Where, at least, is the crooked blue ink?

Perhaps, this is all a bit harsh. For with every worry about the alienating capacity of contemporary technologies come stories about people who use computers and the

Internet to maintain family ties, to find new dialogue partners, and actually to build community. Perhaps, at the heart of the debates surrounding the latest “advancements in communication” is an old, old truism. It is not whether information technologies are inherently bad or good, but it is how we choose to use them that will be our measure.

One of the things that biblical scholars have regularly pointed out about the correspondence that makes up the bulk of the New Testament is that some of the letters seem more personal than others. Take, for example, Romans. Paul addresses this letter to “all God’s beloved in Rome.” This preamble makes Romans sound like a letter meant to be forwarded—passed around from person to person, house to house. The bulk of the letter is anything but newsy. Paul is working through complicated theological issues in a careful fashion. Only at the end of the document does he get personal, offering a laundry list of greetings to specific Roman Christians. Compare this letter to Philemon. Paul’s shortest letter is addressed to the household of a man whom the apostle calls both a “friend” and a “co-worker.” In reading Philemon, I have always had the distinct impression that I had mistakenly opened and was proceeding (even after realizing my error) to read someone else’s mail. How did this brief letter—seeking to secure the slave Onesimus’ freedom—manage to make it into mass circulation? While we do not know the details of how Philemon was preserved, I do like to imagine that Paul’s personal and pastoral note was so life-changing, so important to someone in that household, that it got put in a shoe box under the bed—the one filled with precious photos, the one that you grab first in case of fire. From time to time, I suspect, Paul’s letter would be pulled out, displayed to friends. Why? Maybe to impress visitors with its famous author, but I like to think that it was pulled from its safe location because the recipient felt like this letter might have something to say to people whose names were not on the envelope.

We belong to a community that has included a whole stack of these ancient letters in our canon. Sifting through them, one might conclude that the apostle shared my grandfather’s concern. For even in the most generic of his compositions—documents meant to be forwarded—Paul included heartfelt notes to distant friends, verbal slaps on the back. I wonder, however, if Paul (or my grandmother for that matter) ever realized that in their efforts to connect with family and friends something else might happen. Were they aware of the intimidating fact (after dropping it in the box or pushing the “send” button) that even the most personal of our letters may be forwarded, and forwarded, and forwarded? I do not know if they knew, but I do think they would approve. For such is the nature of gospel—a canon, a shoe-box, an e-mail file cut, pasted, and sent onward, good news tenderly shared in ways that surpass all imagining—crooked blue transmissions of truth. 📧

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