



by the Book

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'What is at stake is authenticity. . . . Sooner or later Christians tire of public meetings that are profoundly inauthentic, regardless of how well (or poorly) arranged, directed, performed. We long to meet, corporately, with the living and majestic God and to offer him the praise that is his due.'---D. A. Carson Worship is a hot topic, but the ways that Christians from different traditions view it vary greatly. What is worship? More important, what does it look like in action, both in our corporate gatherings and in our daily lives? These concerns---the blending of principle and practice---are what Worship by the Book addresses. Cutting through cultural cliches, D. A. Carson, Mark Ashton, Kent Hughes, and Timothy Keller explore, respectively: - Worship Under the Word -Following in Cranmer's Footsteps -Free Church Worship: The Challenge of Freedom -Reformed Worship in the Global City 'This is not a comprehensive theology of worship,' writes Carson. 'Still less is it a sociological analysis of current trends or a minister's manual chockfull of 'how to' instructions.' Rather, this book offers pastors, other congregational leaders, and seminary students a thought-provoking biblical theology of worship, followed by a look at how three very different traditions of churchmanship might move from this theological base to a better understanding of corporate worship. Running the gamut from biblical theology to historical assessment all the way to sample service sheets, Worship by the Book shows how local churches in diverse traditions can foster corporate worship that is God-honoring, Word-revering, heartfelt, and historically and culturally informed

Worship by the Book Details

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From Reader Review Worship by the Book for online ebook

Benjamin says

This book pleasantly surprised me. Having left it lying on the shelf for three years, I finally opened it and read the final quarter of the book by Tim Keller. I loved it. I then started at the beginning and read the other three contributors (Carson himself writes about sixty pages, which is the average length of each of the other three contributors). Below I try to summarize some of the content of each and/or what was most salient to me.

Carson's chapter is decidedly theological, as expected. Nothing groundbreaking, but he writes with clarity and insight. Salient in my reading was his discussion of perspective in our approach to the entire subject. Do we approach worship first by asking what it is that God expects from us. Carson says that, in the first instance, what makes worship delightful is God himself. Consequently, deeper worship can only come through a deeper grasp of God's majesty in his person and in all his works (29-31). Again, not a novel thought, but Carson expounds and applies this thought well. Also excellent was his exegesis that worship in spirit and in truth is worship "by means of Christ" (37), that corporate worship has a distinctly horizontal application as well as vertical, and that central to the practice and goals of worship is the Word of God. (While intellectually this last statement seems almost axiomatic, it is disregarded surprisingly well by most churches I have attended.)

Mark Ashton writes about worship in an Anglican context. He makes much of Cranmer's legacy and how Anglicans can regain good that's been lost from Anglican worship since Cranmer's time. Ashton considers how services can model the redemptive story through their liturgy and offers some basic models for doing this. He talks practically about group input to keep worship word-centered, edifying, and accessible while avoiding the pitfall of catering to specific taste. He offers specific advice for various types of services and many elements of a worship service even down to announcements (or "notices" British speech). As a non-Anglican, I found much on which to ruminate in Ashton's chapter.

Kent Hughes chapter was the last I read and seemed less helpful than the others, though that may be due to my having heard many of the same things said by the others and not be a reflection on his content itself. Building on the centrality of the Word, Hughes highlights the connection between the Spirit of God and the Word of God, and how they cannot be separated. For someone who hasn't thought much at all about a theology of worship, Hughes contribution from a free-church perspective, is perhaps the most accessible and widely practical.

Timothy Keller's contribution is quite incisive. He opens by tearing down the distinctive walls built between contemporary and historic worship, dealing with the ideologies behind the worship wars. Excellently, he goes back to Calvin particularly among the reformers to offer a new approach beyond the idea of "blended worship" for what is largely a postmodern society today. Keller directs us to consult the Bible, culture, and tradition together to inform our worship. He criticizes those on both sides of the worship wars who would elevate corporate worship to a position to which it is not entitled. After this discussion, he discusses the traits of reformed worship and three results which should always result from true worship. Finally he gives advice for the worship leader, the liturgy, and the music, followed by sample services with accompanying explanation.

Drake says

One of the more interesting and helpful treatments of corporate worship that I've read to date. As someone who has spent many years serving on worship teams and church choirs, as well as listening to a variety of preachers from different denominations with their own traditions and perspectives on corporate worship, I've always been interested in studying how churches choose to order and conduct their weekly services. The concept of this book is quite brilliant: choose three ministers from three different denominations to lay out their thought-process for how they approach their weekly gatherings, and then have them give specific play-by-plays of sample worship services in their churches. This allows both their similarities and differences to be seen quite clearly by the reader, who can then decide which principles and practices he would deem most helpful in his own context. The opening essay by Carson was excellent and rich with theological and exegetical insights that shed light on the biblical definition of "worship." Out of the three ministers, I found myself agreeing with R. Kent Hughes's "Free Church Worship" model more than the other two approaches due to its Word-centeredness. However, Tim Keller's was the most thought-provoking. His treatment of the modern "worship wars" (Historic Worship vs. Contemporary Worship), his distinction between "Reformed Contemporary Worship" and "Contemporary Reformed Worship," and his thoughts on the impact and usefulness of various styles of music were all very helpful. The chapter that I found myself disagreeing the most with was that of Rev. Mark Ashton; his brand of Anglican worship seemed to lean just a bit too far towards the seeker-sensitive model in my opinion. Overall, this book would be an extremely useful read for anyone serving or leading in their church's corporate worship gatherings; and for those who are not, it can instill a greater appreciation for how much planning and preparation goes on "behind the scenes" every week and how the truths of the gospel can be applied to corporate worship in ways that differ from church to church or culture to culture.

Kenny Wells says

This book is extremely helpful on a biblical, theological and practical level. If you are interested in the topic of worship, lead worship at a local church, or simply want to understand what biblical worship is and various forms of practice in the modern church, you will benefit from this book. D.A. Carson's introductory essay is worth the price of the book!

Pastor Matt says

As I come from a free church background, I found both Kent Hughes' article and D.A. Carson's forward to be helpful and challenging.

Bill says

This was an astoundingly helpful book for me in my role as coordinator of music & worship at our church. Both rigorously theological yet easily practical. D.A. Carson's long introduction was the highlight, but I was impressed as each author discussed their own worship tradition/approach (all different to my own), yet made the broad principles easily apparent. Highly recommend it if you want to give deeper biblical thought to the way you worship in church.

Lee Bertsch says

A compilation of 4 authors. A couple of the sections were rather predictable outlines of basic stuff. But as he has done in other books, the writing of Timothy Keller was very compelling to me. Among other things he got me really interested in Calvin's writings about worship which reflect his insistence that we consult the Bible, our culture, and our historical traditions in the way we construct worship. I also pulled out this quote from C. S. Lewis which I thought was particularly applicable to the way worship songs are written today and the way worship is sometimes led: "Instead of telling us a thing is 'terrible', describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was a 'delight', make us say 'delightful' when we've read the description." We would do well in our selection of songs to skip over those that blather on and on about "Give him glory...oh praise him.." and sing songs that give us substantive thoughts that simply lead us to do that.

Connor Longaphie says

This is nothing special. Pass on this one

Cliff Dailey says

I simply couldn't put this book down. Having a history in serving the church with music and having a mind bent towards management, I found this book insightful and well organized to communicate what corporate worship should be for each congregation. Most importantly, this book addresses how the Bible is clear in certain things about worship and unclear about certain specifics for a corporate service. Carson formed an excellent team to point to the history of the church, their experience - even failures, and most importantly the Bible. I recommend this book even for the layman, for this book has caused me to see the corporate gathering itself as more worshipful to God than before I read this book.

Summary of each contributing author and it's impact on me - not extensive:

- 1) D.A. Carson - a comprehensive and exhaustive definition of the word "worship"
- 2) Mark Ashton - seeing God's Word as the spiritual force in any work man creates (ex: Cranmer's "Common Book of Prayer")
- 3) Kent Hughes - ensuring worship is: a) God-centered; b) Christ-centered; c) Word-centered; d) Consecration; e) Wholehearted; and, f) Reverent. Hughes also emphasizes the necessity in selecting music for a service that is relevant to the Text being biblical, the Tune expressing a specific emotion, and the Fit being appropriate for the congregation at hand.
- 4) Tim Keller - challenging me in what musical excellence for a service should look like. Keller hires professional musicians (even nonChristian) as he notes to be consistent with the Reformed view. I'm currently in disagreement with this as a necessity for a service, but I will continue to look into this aspect over time.

Michael Abraham says

Carson's long introduction was the highlight of this book. He argues that all of life is worship, while also defending the distinction of "gathered worship". Carson's principles come from the Old and New Testaments and provides the proper foundation for the remaining essays.

Other than offering different perspectives, I didn't find the other essays particularly helpful. Hughes and Keller shared what their gathered worship services look like, which was interesting, but they both failed to provide the Biblical rational.

I'll refer back to Carson's introduction, so the book was worth reading.

Olanma Ogbuehi says

I particularly enjoyed the first chapter "Worship under the Word" by Don Carson. Carson is always thoughtful and Biblical, reasoning well, to cause us to question our assumptions about the meaning of "worship" and think about whom and how we worship. The subsequent chapters provided useful insights into how others have thought this through and practically applied it to their own church contexts.

It does seem to come from a broadly Reformed Calvinistic Evangelical perspective. Given this caveat, I think the book could have been enriched by perhaps a focus on a wider perspective of traditions within a Bible believing Christian church. However, what was helpful about this is that some of the historical aspects of using a liturgy, or something like the Book of Common Prayer, were explored. Musical content and style were also explored evenhandedly. I suppose this book would have quite a centrist position in a sense that it does not argue for the exclusive use of a specific creeds, prayer books and musical styles, nor does it argue the need to radically modernise and reform all historical forms of liturgy, and music styles.

I suppose I was perhaps looking for more theological understanding behind "worship" than the book provided overall. Understandably, this would require a longer, more in-depth book and perhaps more serious, intentional and prolonged study into the meaning and purpose and expression of worship in the body of Christ. I was sometimes surprised at the amount of pragmatism that was involved in some of the rationale given by the ministers for certain practices such as Tim Keller's employment of non-Christian musicians. Whilst there was some merit in his argument that church is a place where we should expect and encourage the participation of non-believers, it is my understanding that their participation is to hear the preaching of law and gospel, to come to the knowledge of God. But even if they are excellent musicians and singers, I just don't comprehend how they can be participating in Christian worship in any meaningful sense. If people are so put off by the lack of polish in the musicianship of ordinary Christians, then perhaps this says something about idolatry in their hearts, which is something that is a major concern for Keller.

It is a worthwhile read and its many useful footnotes, have given me the desire to study further other writings present and past about the important subject of Christian worship.

Josh says

This is a great group of essays on what "church worship" should be, giving music its proper place in that

definition. Very thorough, especially Carson's essay, which is worth the price of the book. He builds a case for biblical principles of worship, from both the Old and New Testaments, which, ironically, is different from how people tend to talk about church worship today.

Highly recommended.

Matt Mason says

Created fresh categories for thinking of gathered worship.

Markevans says

This book is an excellent look at three different traditions and how they "do" corporate worship - Anglican (Ashton), Baptist (Hughes), and Presbyterian (Keller). The book is saturated in Reformed theology worked out in different expressions. Don Carson's introductory chapter was a very good discussion on the relationship between all-of-life-worship and the gathered, corporate worship "service." He basically says both uses of "worship" are biblical and important and although there is a difference between the two, they co-mingle and overlap in the life of a Christian. I loved Tim Keller's article the most and thought he had the most helpful assessment of the worship wars and the need for a worship service that holds in tension the desire to be scriptural, traditional, and culturally aware. I thought Kent Hughes' article was great too and it was great in the way it set out some biblical priorities in worship. I identify most with his worship tradition - the free church. I disagreed with Hughes, however, when he wrote that worship music is primarily to serve the "word" or the sermon - I actually think that the declarative nature of singing to one another has a hortatory role just like the sermon - I think good music should preach and good preaching should sing. Mark Ashton, the Anglican, also did a great job of representing the original intention of Cranmer's liturgy; namely, that the set forms in the Book of Common Prayer were originally supposed to breathe life and purpose into worship and were never to be used in service of a dry, sterile traditionalism. This is a great book.

David Varney says

Highly engaging and thought-provoking. Carson's introductory essay is brilliant and should provide the basis for any initial discussion on the theology of worship. The various contributions are insightful.

John says

This is a solid "views" book on corporate worship. Carson gives an introductory chapter, largely defining "worship" and setting the context and expectations for the book. Three writers contribute, Mark Ashton--an Anglican, Kent Hughes--a baptist, and Tim Keller--a Presbyterian. All three contributors give several examples of what their corporate worship gatherings actually look like including a full account of their weekly liturgy.

All three are very solid in most things and contribute significantly to the discussion of what corporate

worship is for and how it ought to be done. They are driven both by biblical text and by tradition. All are predominantly influenced by the Reformed tradition.

Carson helpfully defines worship:

"Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, human worship of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, Christian worship is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and in action, both in the individual believer and in corporate worship, which is worship offered up in the context of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation."

All the writers seek to define weekly Sunday worship services as "corporate worship" in order to avoid the confusion so predominant that "worship" is only a once-a-week thing, or even worse--simply music.

I suspect most readers of this sort of book want to know where the writers fall in the so-called "worship wars." It is somewhat difficult to tell where exactly their sympathies lie, as all the writers seek a sort of "middle way." They setup the poles of the full-contemporary and full-traditional and then seek to find the right balance between the two extremes. Hughes and Keller seem to have a good grasp of what is important in the debate, recognizing that "musical form and style are not neutral" as Keller puts it.

Hughes is especially helpful in critiquing music because his principles aren't so polar in "contemporary" versus "traditional" but gives three criteria, "text, tune, and fit."

Ashton is quite unhelpful in this regard as he basically says music style doesn't matter. His actual position might not be so flippant, but that was the impression he left in his essay.

One of the most helpful sections in the book is when Hughes argues that the church essentially abandoned the traditional liturgical form in favor of the revivalistic method. He calls it the "de-biblicizing of corporate worship" which resulted in "a revivalist message with opening exercises." The structure of corporate worship became: (1) the preliminaries, (2) the sermon, and (3) the invitation."

Keller also has a very helpful portion at the end of his essay. He writes:

"Each piece of music has to be judged on its own merits. Music that people may consider "pop" is acceptable if it can be performed excellently, if the words of its text are rich and doctrinally illuminating, and if it conveys the gospel. We have no broad-based definition of "pop music" that eliminates a piece automatically before we apply these tests. Third, music styles have integrity. As I said before, we do not think it is easy to mix classical and contemporary music equally in the same service. The first obstacle is the instrumentation. We are committed to quality and excellence, but can an organ, brass, and tympani accompany "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" as well as can a guitar and snare drum? On the other hand, can guitar, saxophone, and drum accompany "A Mighty Fortress" as well as organ and brass? The answer in both cases is no. And it would be extremely jarring to go from organ-and-brass to saxophone-and-drum in the same service. The second obstacle is that, since musical style is not neutral, we should recognize that folk/contemporary music

has a frame of reference that is different from Bach. They set different tones. Each one conveys certain theological themes better than the other. One kind of music is better for certain occasions, for certain architecture and settings, and even for certain styles of preaching than is the other. Therefore, we have generally found it best to let one kind of music dominate any particular service. Nevertheless, as I said above, judicious mixing of classical and folk in a service is both possible and desirable. In a HW service, a folk or popular chorus can sweeten and lighten the tone at the end of a time of praise, after a confession of sin, or during the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, the CW service almost has to borrow some historic hymns, since modern choruses tend to harp on the same themes over and over. (It is nearly impossible to find certain themes, like the holiness of God or social justice, in them.) However, to honor the integrity of musical forms, it is best for traditional hymn lyrics either to be put to contemporary tunes or at least to contemporary arrangements."

On the whole this is an outstanding work on what corporate worship is and how to do it "by the book."
