
Preface

This is the fifth and final volume of a series of studies produced by the Faith and Church Study Unit of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. The first two (also published by The Paternoster Press and Baker Book House) dealt respectively with hermeneutical issues relating to the doctrine of the church (*Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*), and with the doctrine itself (*The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*). Recognizing the worldwide interest in 'spirituality', the third dealt with prayer: *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*. The fourth, *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, sought not only to untangle some of the contorted lines of debate over justification since the majestic Reformation (not least those of recent years), but to show the relevance and applicability of justification to the promulgation of the gospel in various cultures around the world.

This final volume of the series (it is 'final' only in the sense that my responsibilities as Convenor of this Study Unit have now come to an end, and the direction and leadership of the Unit now fall to new hands) tries to respond to current interest in worship. Much of this, we fear, focuses on the mere mechanics of worship; relatively little has sought to establish a biblical and systematic theology of worship, and in that light attempted to critique and revise current practices.

That, at least, was the aim of this volume when it was first envisaged. I am only too aware how far short of the ideal we have fallen. The disagreements of the members of the Study Unit have not been papered over. I can only say that they are less severe and nuanced now than when we began our studies, and I would like to think that if we had more time we would have achieved still greater unanimity. I am sorry, too, that we did not have better worldwide representation. Two scholars, one from India and one from West Africa, proved unable to devote the time to this project that would have assured better coverage. Nevertheless, in its attempt, and partly in its execution, this book represents a fresh effort to think through Scripture on the subject of worship, and then to apply our findings to the way we actually think about worship and gather for congregational worship in various parts of the world. I cannot imagine that anyone will agree with all the opinions here expressed:

equally, I cannot imagine how anyone could come away from this book without having horizons enlarged and thought clarified.

As with the first four volumes in the series, so here: members of the Study Unit agreed to write chapters in advance of a meeting where all the papers were subjected, paragraph by paragraph, to discussion and critique. That was where a certain degree of uniformity was hammered out; on so sensitive an issue, where the ecclesiastical traditions that have nurtured us have often (and sometimes unwittingly) achieved near-canonical status, it is not surprising that we did not always convince one another. It was gratifying to me to observe how much common vision we came to share, and especially to acknowledge the degree of courtesy and honest listening that were present, even in the midst of strongly felt opinions. These discussions were summarized in written form, and members revised their papers in that light. The task of editing the revisions fell to me – yet another place where the indulgence of the members was greatly appreciated.

On a rather mechanical note, I should perhaps explain that where a contributor thought it wise to provide bibliographical information on his or her topic, beyond what was actually cited in the essay, a bibliography has been appended. Where the only bibliography relating to an essay was already cited in notes, no separate listing at the end of the essay was permitted.

The meeting itself took place in the autumn of 1990 in Cambridge, England. Once again Tyndale House provided the excellent facilities, while members and friends of Eden Baptist Church provided most of the hospitality. One of the elders of that church, Mr Stan Blake, saw to all the local logistics, an unenviable task he expertly discharged.

I should mention that, as with other volumes in this series, moneys are put aside to assist in the translation and publication of any part of these books in areas of the world where the church has little money. Applications from recognized Christian institutions may be made in the first instance to the Publications Working Group of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

Working on this book has convinced all of us not only that we need to understand worship better, but that we ought to worship better. As one of the contributors notes, God is not seeking true worship, but true worshippers (John 4:23). If in God's mercy this book contributes to the growth and multiplication of true worshippers, we shall be satisfied with our labours.

Soli Deo gloria.

D. A. CARSON

1

'Worship the Lord Your God': The Perennial Challenge

D. A. CARSON

According to Matthew and Luke, the devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him 'all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.' The gauntlet he threw down before Jesus invited apostasy as it promised glory: 'All this I will give you if you will bow down and *worship* me.' Jesus' answer was unequivocal: 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "*Worship* the Lord your God, and serve him only"' (Matt. 4:8–10; cf. Luke 4:5–8).

This was not an invitation to change styles of 'worship' – to move, say, from pipe organ to guitars. In fact, it was not properly an ecclesiastical or corporate matter at all. It was private and personal; more importantly, it dealt with the fundamental question, the question of ultimate allegiance: Whom do you serve?

This, surely, is where all questions about worship must properly begin. The critical issue is not the techniques of worship, or the traditions of worship, still less the experience of worship, but who is being worshipped, and who is worshipping. The Puritans understood the point, connecting worship with true godliness:

Worship comprehends all that respect which man oweth and giveth to his Maker. . . . It is the tribute which we pay to the King of Kings, whereby we acknowledge his sovereignty over us, and our dependence on him. . . . All that inward reverence and respect, and all that outward obedience and service to God, which the word [viz. 'godliness'] enjoineth, is included in this one word worship.¹

If the heart of sinfulness is self-centredness, the heart of all biblical religion is God-centredness: in short, it is worship. In our fallenness we constrict all there is to our petty horizons. I think of all relationships in terms of their impact on me; my daydreams circle around my own life and circumstances; my goals and hopes invariably turn on my place in the universe. Such profound self-centredness may result in wild cruelty that the world thinks of as social pathology, or it may result in religious cant: it may issue in war and racism as masses of little people who want to be first exploit and harm others

who want the same thing but may lack the means, and it may issue in piety and discipline full of self-satisfaction and fervour. Still the demon SELF marches on. The sign that self is broken is true worship: God becomes the centre, the focus of delight, the joyfully acknowledged King, the Creator, the Redeemer. In this sense, none but the transformed can truly worship – and they too discover how much more transformation is still needed. Thus all worship becomes an eschatological sign, a marker of what will be in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness, when the children of God have been 'glorified' (Rom. 8:30), and God is all in all. In anticipation of that day, and 'in view of God's mercy', we offer our bodies 'as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God', for this is our 'spiritual worship' (Rom. 12:1).

Unfortunately, however, in much of the world the term 'worship' has been restricted in a number of ways. This would be of minor importance – after all, words regularly change their meaning with time – were it not for the fact that 'worship' has become attached to a fair bit of ecclesiastical practices. When we want to reform 'worship', we really mean we want to reform certain ecclesiastical practice. But if the modern word 'worship' is now associated with a lot of ideas with little biblical warrant, then those who wish to reform theology and practice by the Bible must pause and ask some basic biblical questions before following any of the siren voices that beckon.

At the risk of oversimplification, we may discern three approaches to 'worship' that are, finally, reductionistic, and that would greatly benefit from larger, biblical-theological categories:

1. The most common tendency restricts 'worship' to what happens in a corporate setting when a number of Christians gather together for a 'service'. The word may then be further restricted to what happens in only *part* of that 'service': we have 'worship', and then we have the sermon; we assign part of the service to a 'worship leader' or a 'worship team', and then another part to the 'preacher' or 'pastor' or 'minister'. The implications are unambiguous. Worship has nothing to do with Christian life all through the week, but only with corporate activity during a designated hour or so. Or worse, it refers to only a part of that designated hour, when *we* are actively voicing something *corporately* (in songs, prayers, liturgical responses, corporate Bible reading, and so forth). At this point 'worship' is something *we do*, where the *we* ensures its corporate nature, and the *do* ensures corporate *activity*. One thinks of the engaging title of a book by Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb*.²

2. Another approach to worship during the past few decades, especially in North Atlantic countries, has been to ransack the New Testament for any hint of liturgy, and thereby to establish afresh the importance of more formal liturgy today. Thus passages such as Phil. 2:6–11 and Col. 1:15–20 are thought by many to be quotations from early Christian hymns; some of the responses in Revelation are judged to be drawn from liturgies actively used in the churches; 1 Peter is thought by some to be something akin to a baptismal liturgy. Moreover, we are told, the church established many of its practices by modelling itself on the ancient synagogue, and since the synagogue system had developed its own liturgies, *a priori* we must assume that the church followed suit.

But the evidence turns out to be very slender. It has been repeatedly shown that all the evidence for liturgy in the Jewish synagogue system is considerably

later than the New Testament documents: we simply do not know what a synagogue service looked like in the first century. Most scholars today rightly reject the notion that 1 Peter is a baptismal liturgy. And if, say, Col. 1:15–20 is a hymn well-known to the church, and something Paul is quoting (certainly quite possible, though hard to prove), it says nothing about the kind of 'service' from which it was drawn.

More importantly, these studies – both the more practical approaches of the first reductionism, and the more theoretical approaches of the second – are so heavily focused on *congregational* worship, i.e. what happens when the church meets together, that it ignores the overwhelming tendency in the New Testament to associate 'worship' terminology with the full range of Christian life and thought and experience. At its worst, it so narrows down to what *we* experience, or what *we* do, or how *we* participate, or what *we* should sing, that we return to self-centredness by another route. A little over a century ago, it was not uncommon to find Christians in some traditions asking after a sermon, 'How did you get on under the Word?' Now we ask, 'How did you enjoy the sermon?' Now the latter question is extended: 'How did you enjoy the worship?' (i.e. the rest of the service apart from the sermon). Worship can be rated according to our degree of enjoyment. It is part of the *genus* 'entertainment industry'.

Should we not remind ourselves that worship is a *transitive* verb? We do not meet to worship (i.e. to experience worship); we aim to worship *God*. 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only': there is the heart of the matter. In this area, as in so many others, one must not confuse what is central with byproducts. If you seek peace, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find joy. If you seek holiness, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find holiness. If you seek experiences of worship, you will not find them; if you worship the living God, you will experience something of what is reflected in the Psalms. Worship is a transitive verb, and the most important thing about it is the direct object.

All this was better understood in an earlier age:

It is a principle deeply fixed in the minds of men that the worship of God ought to be orderly, comely, beautiful and glorious. . . . And indeed that worship may be well suspected not to be according to the mind of God which comes short in these properties. . . . I shall add unto this, only this reasonable assertion . . . viz, That what is so in his worship and service, God himself is the most proper judge. If then we evince not that spiritual gospel worship, in its own naked simplicity, without any other external, adventitious helper or countenance, is most orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious, the Holy Ghost in the Scripture being judge, we shall be content to seek for these things where else, as it is pretended, they may be found.

. . . In the spiritual worship of the gospel, the whole blessed trinity, and each person therein distinctly, do in that economy and dispensation, wherein they act severally and peculiarly in the work of our redemption, afford distinct communion with themselves unto the souls of the worshippers. This is the general order of gospel worship, the great rubric of our service. . . . If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or if it go not unto God as a Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship. This is the great canon, which if it be neglected, there is no decency in whatever else is done in this way. And this in general is the glory of it. . . . Acting faith on Christ for admission, and on the Holy Ghost for his assistance, so going on in his strength; and on God, even

the Father, for acceptance, is the work of the soul in this worship. That it hath anything more glorious to be conversant about, I am yet to learn. . . .³

3. Almost in reaction against these tendencies, a number of scholars have argued that whatever it is that the church in the New Testament gathers for, it is *not* for worship. The worship language of the New Testament, they argue, is tied restrictively to *all* of life; it is simply not tied to what goes on in the Christian assembly. There we read of instruction and of mutual edification, but not of worship. To think otherwise is to be bound to the cultic focus of pre-Christian times.

But one must ask if this is a new reductionism. If the New Testament expands the horizons of worship to embrace all of life, does it intend to exclude those times when Christians assemble together? Is there nothing to be learned from the apocalyptic vision of what occupies the saints when they gather around the Throne? Do the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) serve *exclusively* to edify the saints mutually?

It appears, then, that recent discussions about worship have tended to be either minimally biblical and primarily pragmatic, or narrowly biblical and without adequate integration with inner-canonical development of major themes. The temple of Solomon had choirs: what does that say to us today? The old covenant specified the nature of the priesthood that could offer sacrifice: how do such specifications fare, or in what ways are they transmuted, under the new covenant? Is it appropriate to think of church buildings as 'tabernacles' or 'temples'? If so, why? If not, why not?

The fact of the matter is that none of these and a host of related questions can be responsibly answered apart from the careful articulation of biblical theology – theology that sorts out how the parts of the Bible hang together. Suddenly the subject of worship becomes complex, the more so because by and large the contemporary church has not disciplined itself to think in biblical-theological terms. When one starts asking questions about, say, the relationship between the covenants, one is immediately embroiled in historic questions about law and grace, circumcision and baptism, Sabbath and Lord's Day, and a host of more recent debates that turn, often in unrecognized ways, on the way one reads the Bible as a whole book – in short, on biblical theology.

In modest measure, that is what the second and third chapters of this book attempt. The authors themselves would be the first to acknowledge the preliminary nature of their work, but the results are fascinating and important. They become the backdrop for the rest of the chapters in the book.

Chapters 4 through 12 describe and usually offer some critique of the traditions of worship in various Christian bodies around the world. We might have cast our net still more widely; some will be daunted by the breadth already displayed. It may help to draw attention to several features of these chapters.

First, in every case what 'worship' means in some particular tradition is taken up by those associated with that tradition. We did not ask a Presbyterian cessationist to describe and criticize the worship traditions of the charismatic movement – or vice versa. We did not ask a Latin American Baptist to describe and criticize the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* – or an Anglican to describe and criticize Free Church traditions. In each case, we

have provided an 'in-house' look. The advantage, of course, is that each view of what 'worship' means is set forth in its most attractive form. That is valuable if we are to understand one another and avoid alien stereotypes. It does not mean we will always agree; it does mean we will be better able to grasp how some of those within these traditions perceive what is going on.

Second, each writer was asked not only to describe but also in some measure to offer thoughtful critique of his or her own tradition, *on the basis of the biblical theology attempted in chapters 2 and 3* of this book. The degree to which this was successful you must judge. Speaking editorially, I can assure you that the revised drafts were far more sensitive to the weaknesses of the traditions they represented than the first drafts – owing, no doubt, to the strenuous debate and exposure to the biblical papers. In two or three of the revisions, writers have taken exception to some of the emphases or details in the biblical papers, and justified their views: again, the measure of success achieved must be carefully weighed by the reader.

Thirdly, although there was a fair bit of mutual criticism, in good spirit, at the meeting, we did not invite contributors to offer written criticisms of the stances adopted by others. That would have been a logical next step; it would also have made this book too long. Perhaps, too, such an exercise would have been more than some of us could have borne. But the thoughtful reader cannot help but be fascinated by the way, say, that Clowney deploys Scripture in seeking to establish (and delimit!) the regulative principle ('Presbyterian Worship'), and the way that Alistair Brown deploys Scripture in defence of 'Charismatically-Orientated Worship'. One cannot help thinking about how each would reply to the other in print. And this, of course, is not the only pair of polarities in the book.

Fourthly, even where there was widespread biblical and theological agreement (and eventually more agreement was achieved than might be suggested by these introductory remarks), one cannot escape the conclusion that not a few practices in *congregational* worship have been moulded rather more by cultural and historical factors than some have thought. As the articles by Houghton and Méndez make clear, it is no accident that the charismatic flourishes in Latin America but not in Japan or Madagascar. The paper by Yri makes clear the extent to which classic Lutheranism has defined itself by its historic emergence from Roman Catholicism. What, then, does reformation of our worship by the Word of God look like in various cultures of the world? How *should* cultural factors be shaped by Scripture? These questions, it must be said, have been addressed only peripherally in this book.

Fifthly, in the final revisions most of the essays in this section attempt some comment on the relation between, on the one hand, biblical evidence that under the new covenant, worship first and foremost means God-centred living in every area of life and thought and action and relationships, and, on the other, the demands and constraints of *congregational* worship. But clearly much more work needs to be done on this relationship.

The final essay attempts some theological synthesis, and provides the title for the book. Worship as adoration of God is a distinctive activity; it embraces both understanding and emotions, the whole person in the presence of the God of creation and redemption.

Worship is an act of the understanding, applying itself to the knowledge of the excellency of God, and actual thoughts of his majesty. . . . It is also an act of the will, whereby the soul adores and reverenceth his majesty, is ravished with his amiableness, embraceth his goodness, enters itself into an intimate communion with this most lovely object, and pitcheth all his affections upon him.⁴

Even so, this does not mean turning away from the world. It involves, rather, the right perception of how God relates to the world, and the world to God. In such a framework, worship, embracing both adoration and action, is nothing but the outworking of God-centredness in the individual and corporate experience of the people of God.