

Basden, Paul, ed. *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views*. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

Review

The current climate that surrounds the topic of worship can at best be described as "confusion" and at worst be described as "war." The reality of the diversity in worship is well established on both biblical and historical grounds. On this basis, the authors of this volume attempt to give each evangelical voice an opportunity to state their case and examine the views of other authors.

In chapter one, Paul Zahl makes the case for a "formal-liturgical" approach to worship. According to Zahl, "formal worship means dignified service that is not governed by the spontaneity of the moment of the spontaneity of the officiant" while "liturgical worship means prescribed worship, service that is required for a given occasion."¹ For Zahl, the key to worship is the primacy of the Word of God in the service. Hence, the governing principle for "formal-liturgical" worship is the explicit and implicit regulation of worship as revealed by scripture alone.

In chapter two, Harold Best states his case for a "hymn-based worship" approach. Essentially, Best argues for worship that is rooted in "text" as opposed to form. The result is a well-crafted chapter that does little to further the case of exclusive hymnody, but instead puts the focus on the lyric over against any particular music style. In chapter three, Joe Horness addresses the matter of "contemporary music-driven worship." The essence of this chapter is Horness' focus of "connecting the worshiper with God." Admittedly, Horness believes that the approach of contemporary worship best engages the heart of the worshiper. Among other things, Horness explains "contemporary" in terms of instrumentation and music style; hence, contemporary "music-driven" worship.

In chapter four, Don Williams introduces the reader to "charismatic worship." After a brief historical sketch of charismatic worship, Williams writes about the "Trinitarian" theology that drives charismatic worship while spending a majority of the time considering the Holy Spirit who Williams believes is often neglected in other worship traditions. In chapter five, Robert Webber attempts to describe "blended worship." According to Webber's definition, "blended worship is a synthesis of the liturgical and contemporary worship renewal movements of the twentieth century."

In chapter six, Sally Morgenthaler concludes the book with a presentation on "emerging worship." Essentially, Morgenthaler describes the "core of emerging worship services" as "encounters with God born out of a dual passion for a theological rootedness and a deeply transforming connection with a radically deconstructed culture."

The book ends with a conclusion by Paul Basden that summarizes the views of all the other authors while providing very succinct critiques of each. The conclusion of the book is much like the assumption that began the book: there is a diversity of worship styles and no particular style or approach is universally right or practiced.

¹ Pg. 23

Summary

Without trying to be reductionistic, the focuses of the aforementioned approaches to worship can be summarized in the following list:

- Formal-liturgical worship is focused on order.
- Hymn-based worship is focused on text.
- Contemporary worship is focused on connection.
- Charismatic worship is focused on experience.
- Blended worship is focused on synthesis.
- Emerging worship is focused on contextualization.

Admittedly, there is much more to each one of these styles than the specified focus from the list above, yet, these different focuses help to summarize the predominant thrust of the author's writing.

Evaluation

Many of the elements that are described in these models claim to be taken from scripture, yet, any brief survey of the scriptures shows that many times the reader must be aware of the difference between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive. For instance, there is much to learn about Christian worship from the book of Acts, yet one must be careful to observe what is normative. In the best sense of the word, the earliest stages of Christian community were "communist," in that, they lived together and shared most if not all of their earthly goods. Now, if one is going to attempt to be consistent about their claims of practicing biblical worship, then they must formulate a system of interpretation that explains why they observe some examples of worship in the scriptures while neglecting others. In this regard, most of the authors failed to provide warrant for why their practice/approach was more biblical than the other approach. In particular, the formal-liturgical view claims to be based on the Bible, yet very little defense is given for why worship should be "dignified and prescribed"² over against more natural³ and spontaneous examples of worship. This, of course, is not to say that the formal-liturgical approach is inherently wrong, but rather that Zahl failed to make a compelling case for why his approach is the most faithful to scripture. This is probably due in no small part to the reality that there are several things that can be associated with the formal-liturgical approach that has no real correspondence to scriptural practices.

As mentioned above, most authors failed to provide biblical warrant for their approach to worship, but most should not be forced to mean all. Of the articles that were the most profitable, Harold Best's presentation of hymn-based worship was the "best" in the volume. Though it would have been easy to assume that Best was going argue for a strict hymnody, his focus was actually on the content of the text and the need for order as prescribed by text. Fortunately, Best shows great care and balance when arguing for the need for text-driven worship by showing how no particular approach can or will escape traditionalism. On page 60, Best writes, "The passage of time turns it (any worship approach) into a tradition, however new or 'contemporary' it might seem to be." This reality is vital to remember when engaged in debate regarding the superiority of one approach over the next.

² Pg. 23

³ The term "natural" comprehends worship as a "way of life" as opposed to an event to be experienced at a set time and in a set way.

As for other approaches in the book, Horness' chapter was helpful but not persuasive. Particularly ironic is the fact that the Willow Creek movement has acknowledged the weakness of their model since the publication of this book. Any worship approach that is somewhat structured around the fleeting and constantly changing whims of mankind will be doomed to failure. Furthermore, music, itself, does not connect people with God, but rather, the Spirit who attends His Word draws people closer to Christ for experiential times of worship and adoration. "Music-driven" is at best a poor model.

In Williams' chapter, he makes some good points regarding charismatic worship, yet his insistence and focus on the Holy Spirit seems a little misplaced considering the fact the Holy Spirit is constantly working to glorify Christ. Best graciously takes Williams to task on this matter on page 158 when he writes, "There is, however, a bit of ambiguity as to whether charismatic worship rest in a Pneumocentric Christology or a Christocentric Pneumatology." Best's comment is profoundly helpful and well worth the price of the book simply because the modern-day Christian's understanding of the economy of the Godhead is almost non-existent. The church of Jesus Christ need more men like Best who have a clear head on theological matters with a heart of grace and compassion to other brothers and sisters.

Webbers' chapter would have taken first prize for the worst chapter in the book if it had not been for Morgenthaler's chapter on "emerging worship." Webber went to great length to try and find biblical warrant for his "synthesis" between liturgical and modern approaches of worship, but at the end of day, failed to present a coherent chapter. Webber may well be write, but it is hard to tell on the basis of what was written. Lastly, Morgenthaler's chapter is indicative of the emergent⁴ church movement as a whole. Rather than focusing on the clear and objective truths of scripture, Morgenthaler would have her readers believe that best medium of communicating the truth is art and culture instead of preaching and teaching. Though there is little doubt that Morgenthaler holds the orthodox views of Christianity, her suggestions do more to skew and camouflage the clear and irreducible truth of scriptures into figures of art and culture that by their very nature are open to a world of interpretation. Best was right, it is difficult to "craft a useful response to this chapter."⁵

Recommendation

Though there are more important works on the issues that surround worship, this volume is probably the best available and most helpful resource for finding summaries of the views contained in this book. If one is looking for a one-stop resource that does not get bogged down into the minutia, this book is for them. If one is looking for a comprehensive resource, this work would represent a good introduction to the issues and possibly help them find other resources that explore each approach to worship in a more detailed manner.

⁴ The term "emergent" acknowledges a difference between the terms "emergent church" and "emerging church." The "emergent church" is much more institutional in that it is related to movements like the "emergent village" and figures like Dan Kimball, Rob Bell, and Brian McLaren. On the other hand, "emerging church" refers more to an approach than to a systematized ideology.

⁵ Pg. 233