

Chapter 1



WORSHIP UNDER THE WORD

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The Challenge

To construct a theology of worship turns out to be a difficult task. In addition to the ordinary difficulties associated with constructing an informed, balanced, and reasonably comprehensive theology of almost any biblical theme, the preparation of a theology of worship offers special challenges.

1. At the empirical level, the sad fact of contemporary church life is that there are few subjects calculated to kindle more heated debate than the subject of worship. Some of these debates have less to do with an intelligible theology of worship than with mere preferences for certain styles of music (older hymns versus contemporary praise choruses) and kinds of instruments (organs and pianos versus guitars and drums). Other flash points concern the place of “special music” (the North American expression for performance music), congregational singing, liturgical responses, clapping, drama. All sides claim to be God-centered. The moderns think the traditionalists defend comfortable

and rationalistic truths they no longer feel, while the stalwarts from the past fret that their younger contemporaries are so enamoured of hyped experience they care not a whit for truth, let alone beauty. Sometimes one senses that for many there are only two alternatives: dull (or should we say “stately”?) traditionalism, or faddish (or should we say “lively”?) contemporaneity. We are asked to choose between “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever more shall be, world without end,” and “old is cold, new is true.” The one side thinks of worship as something we experience, often set over against the sermon (first we have worship, and then we have the sermon, as if the two are disjunctive categories); while the other side thinks of worship as ordered stateliness, often set over against all the rest of life.

In fact, the issues are more complicated than this simplistic polarization suggests. One must reckon with the propensity of not a few contemporary churches to reshape the corporate meetings of the church to make them more acceptable to every sociologically distinguishable cultural subgroup that comes along—boomers, busters, Gen Xers, white singles from Cleveland, or whatever. Although one wants to applaud the drive that is willing, for the sake of the gospel, to remove all offenses except the offense of the cross, sooner or later one is troubled by the sheer lack of stability, of a sense of heritage and substance passed on to another generation, of patterns of corporate worship shared with Christians who have gone before, or of any shared vision of what corporate worship should look like. This in turn generates a swarm of traditionalists who like things that are old regardless of whether or not they are well founded. They cringe at both inclusive litanies and guitars and start looking for an “alternative to alternative worship.”¹

Moreover, to gain perspective on the possible options, one must reflect on some of the historical studies that examine the worship practices of some bygone era, sometimes explicitly with the intention of enabling contemporaries to recover their roots or rediscover past

1. The quip is from Martin Marty in his foreword to Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

practices.² Intriguingly, many of the new nontraditional services have already become, in some churches, entrenched traditions—and, on a historical scale, arguably inferior ones.

What cannot be contested is that the subject of worship is currently “hot.” The widespread confusion is punctuated by strongly held and sometimes mutually exclusive theological stances that make attempts to construct a biblical theology of worship a pastorally sensitive enterprise.

2. The sheer diversity of the current options³ not only contributes to the sense of unrest and divisiveness in many local churches but leads to confident assertions that all the biblical evidence supports those views and those alone. Contemporary attempts at constructing a theology of worship are naturally enmeshed in what “worship” means *to us*, in our vocabularies and in the vocabularies of the Christian communities to which we belong. Ideally, of course, our ideas about worship should be corrected by Scripture, and doubtless that occurs among many individuals with time. But the opposite easily happens as well: we unwittingly read our ideas and experiences of worship back into Scripture, so that we end up “finding” there what, with exquisite confidence, we know jolly well *ought* to be there. This is especially easy

2. To mention a few quite diverse examples: Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford: University Press, 1993); James McKinnon, ed., *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Horton Davies, *The Worship of the American Puritans, 1629–1730* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); idem, *Worship and Theology in England*, vol. 1, *From Cranmer to Baxter and Fox (1534–1690)*; vol. 2, *From Watts and Wesley to Martineau (1690–1900)*; vol. 3, *The Ecumenical Century (1900 to Present)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Cf. James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); J. G. Davies, ed., *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); Gordon S. Wakefield, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Period*; vol. 2, *The Patristic Age*; vol. 3, *The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–99).

3. See, for instance, the useful analysis of Mark Earey, “Worship—What do we think we are doing?” *Evangel* 16/1 (Spring 1998): 7–13.

to do when, as we shall see, the semantic range of our word *worship*, in *any* contemporary theory of worship, does not entirely match up with any one word or group of words in the Bible. What it means to be corrected by Scripture in this case is inevitably rather complex.

The result is quite predictable. A person who loves liturgical forms of corporate worship often begins with Old Testament choirs and antiphonal psalms, moves on to liturgical patterns in the ancient synagogue, and extols the theological maturity of the liturgy in question. A charismatic typically starts with 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. A New Testament scholar may begin with the ostensible “hymns” of the New Testament and then examine the brief texts that actually describe some element of worship, such as the Lord’s Supper. And so it goes. It is not easy to find an agreed-upon method or common approach to discovering precisely how the Bible should re-form our views on worship.

That brings us to some of the slightly more technical challenges.

3. Unlike *Trinity*, the word *worship* is found in our English Bibles. So one might have thought that the construction of a doctrine of worship is easier than the construction of a doctrine of the Trinity. In the case of the Trinity, however, at least we agree on, more or less, what we are talking about. Inevitably, anything to do with our blessed triune God involves some hidden things that belong only to God himself (cf. Deut 29:29); nevertheless, in terms of the sphere of discussion, when we talk about the doctrine of the Trinity we have some idea to what we are referring, and we know the kinds of biblical and historical data that must feed into the discussion. By contrast, a cursory scan of the literature on worship soon discloses that people mean very different things when they talk about worship. To construct a theology of worship when there is little agreement on what worship is or refers to is rather daunting. The task cries out for some agreed-upon definitions.

But although the word *worship* occurs in our English Bibles, one cannot thereby get at the theme of worship as easily as one can get at, say, the theology of grace by studying all the occurrences of the word *grace*, or get at the theology of calling by examining all the passages that use the word *call*. Of course, even in these cases much more is involved than mere word study. One wants to examine the context of every passage with *grace* in it, become familiar with the synonyms,

probe the concepts and people to which *grace* is tied (e.g., faith, the Lord Jesus, peace, and so forth). We rapidly recognize that different biblical authors may use words in slightly different ways. As is well known, *call* in Paul's writings is effective: those who are "called" are truly saved. By contrast, in the Synoptic Gospels the "call" of God means something like "invitation": many are *called* but few are chosen. Still, it is possible to provide a more or less comprehensive summary of the various things the Bible means by *call* simply by looking at all the examples and analyzing and cataloguing them. But the same thing cannot be done with *worship*, not least because for almost any definition of worship there are many passages that have a bearing on this subject that do not use the Hebrew or Greek word that could be rendered by the word *worship* itself. Moreover, the Hebrew and Greek words that are sometimes rendered by the English word *worship* sometimes mean something rather different from what *we* mean by worship. So we cannot get at this subject by simplistic word studies. We shall need to arrive at definitions that we can agree upon.

4. Constructing a theology of worship is challenging because of the different kinds of answers that are provided, in this case, by biblical theology and systematic theology. This observation is so important and lies so much at the heart of this chapter that a fuller explanation is warranted.

I begin with two definitions. For our purposes, *systematic theology* is theological synthesis organized along topical and atemporal lines. For example, if we were trying to construct a systematic theology of God, we would ask what the Bible as a whole says about God: What is he like? What are his attributes? What does he do? The answers to these and many similar questions would be forged out of the entirety of what the Bible says in interaction with what Christians in other generations have understood. We would not primarily be asking narrower questions, such as: What does the book of Isaiah say about God? How is God progressively revealed across the sweep of redemptive history? What distinctive contributions to the doctrine of God are made by the different genres found in the Bible (e.g., apocalyptic literature, parables, poetry, and so forth)?

By contrast, *biblical theology* is theological synthesis organized according to biblical book and corpus and along the line of the history

of redemption. This means that biblical theology does not ask, in the first instance, what the Bible as a whole says about, say, God. Rather, it asks what the Synoptic Gospels say about God, or what the gospel of Mark or the book of Genesis says. It asks what new things are said about God as we progress through time.⁴ Biblical theology is certainly interested in knowing how the biblical texts have been understood across the history of the church, but above all it is interested in inductive study of the texts themselves (including such matters as their literary genre: for instance, it does not fall into the mistake of treating proverbs as if they were case law in some insensitive, proof-texting approach), as those texts are serially placed against the backdrop of the Bible's developing plotline.

How, then, do these considerations bear on how we go about constructing a theology of worship? If we ask what worship is, *intending our question to be answered out of the matrix of systematic theology*, then we are looking for “whole Bible” answers—that is, what the Bible says as a whole. That will have one or more effects. On the positive side, we will be trying to listen to the *whole* Bible and not to one favorite passage on the subject—say, 1 Corinthians 14. At its best, such attentiveness fosters more comprehensive answers and fewer idiosyncratic answers. On the other hand, if we try to read the whole Bible without reflecting on the distinctions the Bible itself introduces regarding worship, we may end up looking for the lowest common denominators. In other words, we may look for things to do with worship that are true in every phase of redemptive history and thus lose the distinctive features. For example, we might say that worship is bound up with confessing the sheer centrality and worthiness of God. That is wonderfully true, yet it says nothing about the place of the sacrificial systems in Old Testament worship or the role of the choirs David founded, and so forth.

Alternatively, if we use the whole Bible indiscriminately to construct our theology of worship, we may use it idiosyncratically. For

4. That the *order* in which something is revealed may be extremely important if we are to understand the Bible aright is made very clear in chapters like Romans 4 and Galatians 3, where the apostle's argument several times turns on which events happened first.

instance, we note that the temple service developed choirs, so we conclude that our corporate worship must have choirs. Perhaps it should—but somewhere along the line we have not integrated into our reflection how the Bible fits together. We do not have a “temple” in the Old Testament sense. On what grounds do we transfer Old Testament choirs to the New Testament and not an Old Testament temple or priests? Of course, some of the church fathers during the early centuries did begin to think of ministers of the gospel as equivalent to Old Testament priests. The New Testament writers prefer to think of Jesus as the sole high priest (see Hebrews) or, alternatively, of all Christians as priests (e.g., 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 1:6). But even if we continue to think of contemporary clergy as priests, sooner or later we will have to ask similar questions about many other elements of Old Testament worship that were bound up with the temple—for example, the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement and of Passover. All Christians understand these sacrifices to be transmuted under the new covenant, such that they are now fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ.

But the point is simply that the “pick-and-choose” method of constructing a theology of worship from the whole Bible lacks methodological rigor and therefore stability. Thus, constructing a theology of worship out of the matrix of systematic theology may actually *define* what we mean by “worship.” The methods and approaches characteristic of the discipline (more precisely, they are characteristic of the discipline of the kind of systematic theology that is insufficiently informed by biblical theology) will to some extent determine the outcome.

If we ask what worship is, *intending our question to be answered out of the matrix of biblical theology*, then we are looking for what distinct books and sections of the Bible say on this subject and how they relate to one another. Inevitably we will be a little more alert to the differences; in particular, we will be forced to reflect at length on the differences one finds when one moves from the Mosaic covenant to the new covenant (on which more below). The dangers here are almost the inverse of the dangers of a systematic approach. Now we may so focus in a merely descriptive way on this or that corpus that we fail to construct an adequate theology of worship. For a theology of worship erected out of the matrix of biblical theology must still be a “whole

Bible” theology in the sense that the diverse pieces must fit together. Loss of nerve at this point will produce description with antiquarian interest but no normative power.

To summarize: The construction of a responsible theology of worship is made difficult by strongly held and divergent views on the subject, by a variety of linguistic pressures, and by the sharp tendencies to produce quite different works, depending in part on whether the theologian is working out of the matrix of systematic theology or of biblical theology.

Toward a Definition

Before pressing on to a definition, it may be worth taking two preliminary steps. First, it is worth thinking about our English word *worship*. Both the noun and the verb form have changed in meaning significantly over the centuries. Although from the tenth century on the word *worship* often had God as its object, nevertheless from the 1200s on it was often connected with the condition of deserving honor or a good reputation or with the source or ground of that honor. Chaucer, for instance, can say that it is a great worship to a man to keep himself from noise and strife. Knights win worship by their feats of arms. In the fifteenth century a “place of worship” may be a good house, and a “town of worship” is an important town. By easy transfer, worship came to refer to the honor itself that is shown a person or thing. That usage goes back a thousand years, and it is by no means restricted to God as the object. For example, in the marriage service of the old English Prayer Book the groom tells his bride, “With my body I thee worship”—which certainly does not make her a deity.

In all such usages one is concerned with the “worthiness” or the “worthship” (Old English *weorthscipe*) of the person or thing that is revered. From a Christian perspective, of course, only God himself is truly worthy of all possible honor, so it is not surprising that in most of our English Bibles, “worship” is bound up either with the worship of God or with the prohibition of worship of other beings, whether supernatural (e.g., Satan in Matt 4:9) or only ostensibly so (e.g., the sun).

What makes this even more difficult is that there are several underlying words in both Greek and Hebrew that are sometimes rendered “worship” and sometimes not. In other words, there is no one-to-one relationship between any Hebrew or Greek word and our word *worship*. For example, the Greek verb *proskyneō* is rendered “to worship” in Matthew 2:2 (“We saw his star in the east and have come *to worship* him”). Herod too promises to “go and *worship* him” (2:8), though certainly he is not thinking of worship of a supernatural being. What he is (falsely) promising is to go and pay homage to this child born to be a king. However, in the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:26, when the servant turns out to be bankrupt and his family is threatened with slavery, he “*fell on his knees [pesōn . . . proskynei]* before [his master]”: certainly there is no question here of “worship” in the contemporary sense. Thus, our word *worship* is more restrictive in its object than this Greek verb but may be broader in the phenomena to which it refers (regardless of the object). In any case, the construction of a theology of worship will not be possible unless we come to reasonable agreement about what we mean by *worship*.

The second preliminary step that may prove helpful is to reflect on a few books and articles that exhibit one or more of the challenges involved in writing a theology of worship. Each of these pieces is competent and thoughtful. If I raise questions about them, it is not because I am not indebted to them but because this interaction will help to establish the complexities of the subject and prepare the way for what follows.

Andrew Hill has written an informative book whose subtitle, *Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church*, discloses the content.⁵ Most of its chapters are devoted to one element or another of worship in the Old Testament: the vocabulary of worship in the Hebrew canon; the nature of the “fear of the Lord” (which Hill ties to personal piety); historical developments; the sacred forms, sacred places, and sacred times of worship; sacred actions such as the lifting up of the hands; the roles of priest and king in worship; the place of the

5. Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise! Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

tabernacle and temple; and the significance of the Psalms and of artistic decoration for worship. Hill concludes his book by trying to establish the legitimate connections between these Old Testament patterns and New Testament worship. Six appendices include treatments of the Hebrew religious calendar, sacrifice and music in the Old Testament, and the use of psalms for today's church. The book is full of useful information, thoughtfully presented.

One may quibble about this or that point, but for our purposes the greatest questions arise out of Hill's last chapter. He argues that Jewish patterns of worship were stamped on the nascent church primarily by two means. First, the synagogue structure and liturgy were largely duplicated by the early church. For example, Hill says, a typical synagogue liturgy, both ancient and modern, runs as follows: call to worship (often a "psalmic blessing"); a cycle of prayers (focusing especially on God as Creator and on God's covenant love for Israel); recitation of the Shema (Deut 6:4–9) and other texts (Deut 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41), which served as both a confession of faith and as a benediction; a second cycle of prayers, usually led by someone other than the ruler of the synagogue and including both praise and petition along with the congregational recitation of the Eighteen Benedictions; Scripture reading (including translation if necessary and even brief exposition) from at least one passage in the Torah, one in the Prophets, and perhaps one from the Writings; a benediction (often from the Psalms); the sermon; and the congregational Blessing and Amen. Following W. E. Oesterley,⁶ Hill then ticks off the various ways in which the early church allegedly mirrored synagogue practices in its own worship: call to worship, credal affirmation, prayer, reading and exposition of Scripture, and so forth. Hill adds a few additional links: a covenant community gathering for worship, baptism, the concept of corporate personality within the community, alms collection/monetary offerings, liturgical benedictions, and lay participation.⁷

Second, Hill appeals to typology. The New Testament writers read the Old Testament as an incomplete and still-imperfect revelation that

6. W. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of Christian Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 111–54.

7. Hill, *Enter His Courts*, 232–33.

is fulfilled in the new covenant and reread the sacred text from a christological perspective. Hill briefly notes some of the obvious typological connections: the sanctuary of the Mosaic covenant becomes the sanctuary not made with hands (Heb 9:1–23), the “sacrificial worship” of the Mosaic covenant by the single sacrifice of Christ (Heb 9:23–10:18), and so forth. From this Hill infers that the book of Hebrews in particular “provides a window into the spiritual principles implicit in Old Testament worship.”⁸ For example, “the Old Testament prophetic charge to do justice and love mercy instead of offering animal sacrifice takes on new meaning in light of Paul’s command to the believer in Christ to be a living sacrifice (Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; cf., Rom 12:1–2).”⁹

A plethora of questions arises. On the first point, the relationship between the church and the synagogue: (1) To what extent does the synagogue liturgy reflect Old Testament theology? Our actual sources for synagogue liturgy postdate the New Testament, emerging from a period of systematic reflection *after* the fall of the temple and the rise of Christianity. At this point the synagogue no longer exercised the relatively restricted role it occupied while the temple was still the center of the Jewish world; the synagogue now necessarily replaced it. Inevitably there arose important and influential theological strands that had to compensate for the loss of the temple and with it the loss of the entire sacrificial system. Oesterley’s work is now very dated, and much scholarship since then has warned against anachronism. Jewish lectionaries, for example, come from a period later than the latest New Testament writing.¹⁰ (2) By the same token, we have no detailed *first-century* evidence of an entire Christian service. Doubtless there are things to learn from the patristic sources, but they should not be read back into the canonical sources. Certainly the New

8. *Ibid.*, 237.

9. *Ibid.*

10. If all we are saying is that early church corporate worship mirrored the synagogue in (1) reading the Scripture; (2) singing; (3) praying; and (4) a homily, that is doubtless true. It is the attempt to ground entire liturgical structures in the New Testament or in first-century Jewish synagogues that proves so elusive and finally so anachronistic.

Testament documents do not themselves provide a “model service” of the sort advocated by Hill (however admirable that model may be), nor do they command that the church adhere to a synagogal liturgy (of whatever date). (3) At least some of the parallels Hill finds between the synagogue and the early church—a covenant community gathering for worship, monetary offerings, lay participation—are either so generic as to be meaningless (What religion does not collect money? How many religions foster some form of lay participation?) or at least raise some fundamental questions about the implicit definition of worship. Under the new covenant, for instance, is it true to say that the community gathers for worship? I shall return to that question in a moment.

On the second point, the nature of typology, although I heartily agree that a properly defined typology lies at the heart of a great deal of the New Testament’s use of the Old, slight adjustments in one’s understanding of typology or in the exegesis of particular texts will result in a rather different theology of worship from the one Hill is advocating. For instance, while some interpreters think of typology as an interpretive method that provides us with nothing more than “spiritual principles” (which presupposes an atemporal relationship), others—myself included—think that several forms of typology embrace a teleological element, a predictive element. In that case, one must ask what those Old Testament patterns of worship are *pointing toward*. This shift in interpretive priority tilts toward biblical theology.

Turning from Hill’s important work, we may more briefly reflect on several other discussions of worship of very different complexion. Many studies have focused on the theme of worship in a particular biblical corpus—on some element of the Psalms,¹¹ on a critical Old Testament chapter,¹² or on Matthew,¹³ Hebrews,¹⁴ or

11. E.g., Terence E. Fretheim, “Nature’s Praise of God in the Psalms,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 16–30.

12. E.g., John W. Hilber, “Theology of Worship in Exodus 24,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 177–89.

13. E.g., Mark Allan Powell, “A Typology of Worship in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 3–17.

14. E.g., John Dummill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 75 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Revelation.¹⁵ Inevitably, such essays vary considerably. Some are contributions to the theology of the particular book; others are attempts to get behind the book to the worship patterns and priorities of the ostensible community served by the book. Until such studies are integrated into a larger sweep, they have the important but limited function of opening our eyes to aspects of worship we might overlook, even though they cannot themselves impose a unified vision. Thus, we may value one of the observations of Marianne Meye Thompson regarding the book of Revelation:

Worship serves the indispensable function of uniting us with “all the saints,” living and dead. In fact one of the most important things that worship accomplishes is to remind us that we worship not merely as a congregation or a church, but as part of the church, the people of God. John reminds his readers that their worship is a participation in the unceasing celestial praise of God. So too, the worship of God’s people today finds its place “in the middle” of a throng representing every people and nation, tribe and tongue.¹⁶

Perhaps the volume that most urgently calls for thoughtful evaluation is the biblical-theological study written by David Peterson.¹⁷ His important book not only traces out the development of worship in the Old Testament but also highlights the vivid contrast introduced by the New Testament. From Moses on, the heart of Old Testament worship, Peterson insists, is connected with the tabernacle and then with the temple. But what is striking about the New Testament is not only that Jesus is explicitly worshiped and that the theological impulses of the New Testament documents draw many Old Testament strands into Jesus himself (thus he is the temple, the priest, the Passover lamb, the

15. E.g., Donald Guthrie, “Aspects of Worship in the Book of Revelation,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church*, Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement Series, vol. 87 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1992), 70–83; Marianne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992): 45–54.

16. Thompson, “Worship,” 53.

17. David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992). See also the early essays in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

bread of life) and thereby necessarily transmute Old Testament patterns of worship, but that worship *language* moves the locus away from a place or a time to all of life. Worship is no longer something connected with set feasts, such as Passover; or a set place, such as the temple; or set priests, such as the Levitical system prescribed. It is for all the people of God at all times and places, and it is bound up with how they live (e.g., Rom 12:1–2).

We shall briefly survey some of the evidence below; it is very impressive. But one of the entailments is that we cannot imagine that the church gathers for worship on Sunday morning if by this we mean that we then engage in something that we have not been engaging in the rest of the week. New covenant worship terminology prescribes *constant* “worship.” Peterson therefore examines afresh just why the New Testament church gathers, and he concludes that the focus is on mutual edification, not on worship. Under the terms of the new covenant, worship goes on all the time, including when the people of God gather together. But mutual edification does not go on all the time; it is what takes place when Christians gather together. Edification is the best summary of what occurs in corporate singing, confession, public prayer, the ministry of the Word, and so forth. Then, at the end of his book, Peterson examines his own denominational heritage (Anglican) and enters a quiet plea for continued and proper use of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

It will soon become obvious that I am very sympathetic to much of Peterson’s exegesis. Especially in his examination of praise vocabulary and the “cultic” vocabulary in the New Testament—words for priestly service, sacrifice, offering, and so on—Peterson is very convincing. I am not sure he always captures the affective element in the corporate worship of both Testaments; moreover, I shall suggest a slight modification to his way of thinking of the meetings of the church.

With respect to his attachment to the *Book of Common Prayer*, he is of course following the great Anglican Richard Hooker, who argued that where the Bible neither commands nor forbids, the church is free to order its liturgical life as it pleases for the sake of good order. If Hooker’s principle is followed, Peterson says in effect, let the ordering be done well with rich theological principles in mind. Yet one must

wrestle with the competing claims of Hooker's principle and the Presbyterian Regulative Principle (on which more below). Furthermore, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that there is something of a "disconnect" between Peterson's conclusions on the Prayer Book and the rest of his work. By this I do not mean that his judgments on Anglican worship are inappropriate or theologically unjustified. Rather, the bulk of his book is supported by close exegesis of Scripture and is testable by the canons of exegesis, while the material on the Prayer Book is necessarily disconnected from such exegesis and therefore has more of the flavor of fervently held personal opinion (regardless of how theologically informed that opinion is). Moreover, after so vigorously defining new covenant worship in the most comprehensive categories embracing all of life, Peterson finds he wants to talk about what we shall call corporate worship in the regular "services" of the church after all.

Peterson, of course, allows that when the people of God gather together corporately, they are still worshipping. What he insists is that the *distinctive* element of their corporate meetings is not worship but edification. Inevitably, there are some who go farther. Observing not only how "cultic" language is used in the New Testament to refer to all of Christian life, and noting the lack of any mention of worship when the New Testament writers provide purpose clauses as to why the people of God meet together, these scholars conclude that we should *stop* thinking of "worship services" and meeting together "to worship" and the like.¹⁸ They make some good points, but a good part of their argument turns on a definition of worship that is tightly tied to cultus.

So I must come to a definition. After the definition, much of the rest of this chapter will be an exposition of that definition, followed by some practical suggestions.

18. See, with various emphases, I. Howard Marshall, "How far did the early Christians *worship* God?" *Churchman* 99 (1985): 216–29; A. Boyd Luter Jr., "'Worship' as Service: The New Testament Usage of *latreuo*," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (1988): 335–44; and the discussion between John P. Richardson, "Is Worship Biblical?" *Churchman* 109 (1995): 197–218; *idem*, "Neither 'Worship' nor 'Biblical': A Response to Alastair Campbell," *Churchman* 111 (1997): 6–18, and Alastair Campbell, "Once More: Is Worship 'Biblical'?" *Churchman* 110 (1996): 131–39.

Definition and Exposition

Robert Shaper asserts that worship, like love, is characterized by intuitive simplicity (everybody “knows” what worship is, just as everyone “knows” what love is) and philosophical complexity (the harder you press to unpack love or worship, the more difficult the task).¹⁹ Worship embraces relationship, attitude, act, life. We may attempt the following definition:

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.

Doubtless this definition is too long and too complex. But it may provide a useful set of pegs on which to hang a brief exposition of the essentials of worship. This exposition is organized under an apostolic number of points of unequal weight that arise from the definition.

1. The first (and rather cumbersome) sentence of the definition asserts that worship is “the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God.” There are two purposes to this phrase. First, the inclusive “all” reminds us that worship is not restricted to human beings alone. The angels worship; they are commanded to do so, and in a passage such as Revelation 4, they orchestrate the praise offered in heaven. Among other things, this means that worship cannot properly

19. Robert Shaper, *In His Presence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 13.

be defined as *necessarily* arising out of the gospel, for one of the great mysteries of redemption is that in his wisdom God has provided a Redeemer for fallen human beings but not for fallen angels. The angels who orchestrate the praise of heaven do not offer their worship as a response borne of their experience of redemption. For our part, when we offer our worship to God, we must see that this does not make us unique. The object of our worship, God himself, is unique in that he alone is to be worshiped; we, the worshipers, are not.

Second, by speaking of worship as the proper response “of moral, sentient beings,” this definition excludes from worship rocks and hawks, minnows and sparrows, cabbages and toads, a mote of dust dancing on a sunbeam. Of course, by understandable extension of the language, all creatures, sentient and otherwise, are exhorted to praise the Lord (e.g., Ps 148). But they do not do so in conscious obedience; they do so because they are God’s creatures and are constituted to reflect his glory and thus bring him glory. In this extended sense all of the created order “owns” its Lord. As all of it now participates in death and “groans” in anticipation of the consummation (Rom 8:22–23), so also on the last day it participates in the glorious transformation of the resurrection: our hope is a new heaven and a new earth. In this extended sense, all creation is God-oriented and “ascribes” God’s worth to God alone. But it is an *extended* sense. For our purposes, we will think of worship as something offered to God by “all moral, sentient beings.”

2. Worship is a “proper response” to God for at least four reasons. First of all, in both Testaments worship is repeatedly enjoined on the covenant people of God: they worship because worship is variously commanded and encouraged. God’s people are to “ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (1 Chr 16:29). “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Ps 95:6–7). “Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps 100:2). When he was tempted to worship the devil, Jesus insisted, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matt 4:10). It follows that the worship of any other god is simply

idolatry (Ps 81:9; Isa 46:6; Dan 3:15, 28). It is a mark of terrible judgment when God gives a people over to the worship of false gods (Acts 7:42–43). In the courts of heaven, God has no rival. No homage is to be done to any other, even a glorious interpreter of truth: “Worship God” and him alone (Rev 19:10).

Second, worship is a “proper response” because it is grounded in the very character and attributes of God. If worship is repeatedly enjoined, often the link to the sheer greatness or majesty or splendor of God is made explicit. In other words, the “worth” of God is frequently made explicit in the particular “worth-ship” that is being considered. Sometimes this is comprehensive: “Ascribe to the LORD *the glory due his name*” (1 Chr 16:29; cf. Ps 29:2)—that is, the glory that is his due, since in biblical thought God’s name is the reflection of all that God is. That text goes on to exhort the reader to “worship the Lord *in the splendor of his holiness.*” That is tantamount to saying that we are to worship the Lord in the splendor of all that makes God God. Like white light that shines through a prism and is broken into its colorful components, so this truth can be broken down into its many parts. Many elements contribute to the sheer “Godness” that constitutes holiness in its purest form. Thus, people will speak of “the glorious splendor of [his] majesty” (Ps 145:3–5). If 2 Kings 17:39 commands the covenant community to “worship the LORD your God,” it gives a reason: “it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.” But all of the focus is on God.

Third, one of the most striking elements of God’s “worth-ship,” and therefore one of the most striking reasons for worshipping him, is the fact that he alone is the Creator. Sometimes this is linked with the fact that he reigns over us. “Come, let us bow down in worship,” the psalmist exhorts, “let us kneel *before the LORD our Maker*” (the first element); “*for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture*” (the second element) (Ps 95:6–7). If we are to worship the Lord with gladness (Ps 100:2), it is for this reason: “It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3). Nowhere, perhaps, is this more powerfully expressed than in Revelation 4. Day and night the four living creatures never stop ascribing praise to God: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to

come” (4:8). Whenever they do so (and we have just been told that they never stop), the twenty-four elders “fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever” (4:10). Moreover, “they lay their crowns before the throne” (4:10), an act that symbolizes their unqualified recognition that they are dependent beings. Their worship is nothing other than recognizing that God alone is worthy “to receive glory and honor and power, *for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being*” (4:11, italics added). Worship is the proper response of the creature to the Creator. Worship does not create something new; rather, it is a transparent response to what is, a recognition of our creaturely status before the Creator himself.²⁰

Fourth, to speak of a “proper response” to God calls us to reflect on what God himself has disclosed of his own expectations. How does God want his people to respond to him? Although God always demands faith and obedience, the precise outworking of faith and obedience may change across the years of redemptive history. Suppose that at some point in history God insisted that believers be required to build great monuments in his honor. For them, the building of such monuments would be part of their “proper response” precisely because it would have been mandated by God. Once the Mosaic covenant was in place, the people of Israel were mandated to go up to the central tabernacle/temple three times a year: this was part of their proper response. What this means for members of the new covenant is that our response to God in worship should begin by carefully and reflectively examining what God requires of us under the terms of this covenant. We should not begin by asking whether or not we *enjoy* “worship,” but by asking, “What is it that God expects of us?” That will frame our proper response. To ask this question is also to take the first step in reformation. It demands self-examination, for we soon discover where we do *not* live up to what God expects. This side of the Fall,

20. This is the sort of theme that is often movingly treated by Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). But because she does not set her discussion within the context of biblical theology (see below), she rather consistently reduces worship to what we have called “corporate worship.”

every age has characteristic sins. To find out what they are by listening attentively to what the Bible actually says about what God demands will have the effect of reforming every area of our lives, including our worship. Cornelius Plantinga makes the point almost as an aside:

If we know the characteristic sins of the age, we can guess its foolish and fashionable assumptions—that morality is simply a matter of personal taste, that all silences need to be filled up with human chatter or background music, that 760 percent of the American people are victims,²¹ that it is better to feel than to think, that rights are more important than responsibilities, that even for children the right to choose supersedes all other rights, that real liberty can be enjoyed without virtue, that self-reproach is for fogies, that God is a chum or even a gofer whose job is to make us rich or happy or religiously excited, that it is more satisfying to be envied than respected, that it is better for politicians and preachers to be cheerful than truthful, *that Christian worship fails unless it is fun.*²²

3. We worship our Creator-God “precisely because he is worthy, *delightfully so.*” What ought to make worship delightful to us is not, in the first instance, its novelty or its aesthetic beauty, but its object: God himself is delightfully wonderful, and we learn to delight in him.

In an age increasingly suspicious of (linear) thought, there is much more respect for the “feeling” of things—whether a film or a church service. It is disturbingly easy to plot surveys of people, especially young people, drifting from a church of excellent preaching and teaching to one with excellent music because, it is alleged, there is “better worship” there. But we need to think carefully about this matter. Let us restrict ourselves for the moment to corporate worship. Although there are things that can be done to enhance corporate worship, there

21. At this point Plantinga refers to an essay by John Leo, who has observed that “a lot of Americans qualify for victim status in multiple ways: they are victims of AIDS, the press, rock music or pornography, warped upbringing, anti-nerd bias, public hostility toward smokers, addiction, patriarchy, being black, being white, belonging to male bonding groups that beat drums in the woods, and so on” (“A ‘Victim’ Census for Our Time,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 23 November 1992, 22).

22. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 126–27 (emphasis mine).

is a profound sense in which excellent worship cannot be attained merely by pursuing excellent worship. In the same way that, according to Jesus, you cannot find yourself until you lose yourself, so also you cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship and pursue God himself. Despite the protestations, one sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship *worship* rather than worship *God*. As a brother put it to me, it's a bit like those who begin by admiring the sunset and soon begin to admire themselves admiring the sunset.

This point is acknowledged in a praise chorus like “Let’s forget about ourselves, and magnify the Lord, and worship him.” The trouble is that after you have sung this repetitious chorus three or four times, you are no farther ahead. The *way* you forget about yourself is by focusing on God—not by singing about doing it, but by doing it. There are far too few choruses and services and sermons that expand our vision of God—his attributes, his works, his character, his words. Some think that corporate worship is good because it is lively where it had been dull. But it may also be shallow where it is lively, leaving people dissatisfied and restless in a few months’ time. Sheep lie down when they are well fed (cf. Ps 23:2); they are more likely to be restless when they are hungry. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus commanded Peter (John 21); and many sheep are unfed. If you wish to deepen the worship of the people of God, above all deepen their grasp of his ineffable majesty in his person and in all his works.

This is not an abstruse theological point divorced from our conduct and ethics. Nor is it an independent point, as if there were two independent mandates: first of all, worship God (because he deserves it), and then live rightly (because he says so). For worship, properly understood, shapes who we are. We become like whatever is our god. Peter Leithart’s comments may not be nuanced, but they express something important:

It is a fundamental truth of Scripture that we become like whatever or whomever we worship. When Israel worshipped the gods of the nations, she became like the nations—bloodthirsty, oppressive, full of deceit and violence (cf. Jeremiah 7). Romans 1 confirms this principle by showing how idolaters are delivered over to sexual deviations and

eventually to social and moral chaos. The same dynamic is at work today. Muslims worship Allah, a power rather than a person, and their politics reflects this commitment. Western humanists worship man, with the result that every degrading whim of the human heart is honoured and exalted and disseminated through the organs of mass media. Along these lines, Psalm 115:4–8 throws brilliant light on Old Covenant history and the significance of Jesus’ ministry. After describing idols as figures that have every organ of sense but no sense, the Psalmist writes, “Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.” By worshipping idols, human beings become speechless, blind, deaf, unfeeling, and crippled—but then these are precisely the afflictions that Jesus, in the Gospels, came to heal!²³

Pray, then, and work for a massive display of the glory and character and attributes of God. We do not expect the garage mechanic to expatiate on the wonders of his tools; we expect him to fix the car. He must know how to use his tools, but he must not lose sight of the goal. So we dare not focus on the mechanics of corporate worship and lose sight of the goal. We focus on God himself, and thus we become more godly and learn to worship—and collaterally we learn to edify one another, forbear with one another, challenge one another.

Of course, the glories of God may be set forth in sermon, song, prayer, or testimony. It is in this sense that the title of one of Mark Noll’s essays is exactly right: “We Are What We Sing.”²⁴ What is clear is that if you try to enhance “worship” simply by livening the tempo or updating the beat, you may not be enhancing worship at all. On the other hand, dry-as-dust sermons loaded with clichés and devoid of the presence of the living God mediated by the Word do little to enhance worship either.

What we must strive for is growing knowledge of God and delight in him—not delight in worship per se, but delight in God. A place to begin might be to memorize Psalm 66. There is so much more to know about God than the light diet on offer in many churches; and genuine believers, when they are fed wholesome spiritual meals, soon delight all the more in God himself. This also accounts for the importance of

23. Peter Leithart, “Transforming Worship,” *Foundations* 38 (Spring 1997): 27.

24. *Christianity Today*, 12 July 1999, 37–41.

“re-telling” in the Bible (e.g., Pss 75–76). Retelling the Bible’s story line brings to mind again and again something of God’s character, past actions, and words. It calls to mind God’s great redemptive acts across the panorama of redemptive history. This perspective is frequently lost in contemporary worship, where there are very few elements calculated to make us remember the great turning points in the Bible. I am thinking not only of those bland “services” in which even at Easter and Christmas we are deluged with the same sentimental choruses at the expense of hymns and anthems that *tell the Easter or Christmas story*, but also of the loss of hymns and songs that *told individual Bible stories* (e.g., “Hushed Was the Evening Hymn”). Similarly, whatever else the Lord’s Table is, it is a means appointed by the Lord Jesus to remember his death and its significance.²⁵ The Psalms frequently retell parts of Israel’s history, especially the events surrounding the exodus, serving both as review and as incentive to praise. Paul recognizes that writing “the same things” may be a “safeguard” for his readers (Phil 3:1). Written reminders may stimulate readers to “wholesome thinking” (2 Pet 3:1), for Peter wants them “to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior” through the apostles (3:2). In this he mirrors Old Testament exhortations, for there we are told that we must remember not only all that God has done for us, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, carefully passing them on to our children (Deut 6, 8). All of this presupposes that retelling ought to prove formative, nurturing, stabilizing, delightful.²⁶ Equally, it presupposes that even under the terms of the old covenant, everything that might be embraced by the term *worship* was more comprehensive than what was bound up with the ritual of tabernacle and temple.

Perhaps it is in this light that we ought to wrestle with the importance of repetition as a reinforcing pedagogical device. If mere traditionalism for the sake of aesthetics is suspect, surely the same is true of mere innovation for the sake of excitement. But there must be some

25. Cf. Tim Ralston, “‘Remember’ and Worship: The Mandate and the Means,” *Reformation and Revival* 9/3 (2000): 77–89.

26. Cf. Eugene H. Merrill, “Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 27–36.

ways of driving home the fundamentals of the faith. In godly repetition and retelling, we must plant deeply within our souls the glorious truths about God and about what he has done that we will otherwise soon forget.

4. “This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made.” The brief glimpse afforded of human existence before the Fall (Gen 2) captures a time when God’s image-bearers delighted in the perfection of his creation and the pleasure of his presence precisely because they were perfectly oriented toward him. No redemptive provisions had yet been disclosed, for none were needed. There was no need to exhort human beings to worship; their entire existence revolved around the God who had made them.

At the heart of the Fall is the self-love that destroys our God-centeredness. Implicitly, of course, all failure to worship God is neither more nor less than idolatry. Because we are finite, we will inevitably worship something or someone. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky was not wrong to write, “So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find someone to worship.” Yet because we are fallen, we gravitate to false gods: a god that is domesticated and manageable, perhaps a material god, perhaps an abstract god like power or pleasure, or a philosophical god like Marxism or democracy or postmodernism. But worship we will. Most of these gods are small and pathetic, prompting William James to denounce the “moral flabbiness born of the exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess *success*.”

Worse yet, we stand guilty before God, for our Maker is also our Judge. That might have been the end of the story, but God progressively discloses his redemptive purposes. As he does so, he makes demands about what approach is acceptable to him, what constitutes acceptable praise and prayer, what constitutes an acceptable *corporate* approach before him. Thus, worship becomes enmeshed, by God’s prescription, in ritual, sacrifice, detailed law, a sanctuary, a priestly system, and so forth. Three important points must be made here.

First, the changing and developing patterns of God’s prescriptions for his people when they draw near to him constitute a complex and

subtle history.²⁷ The first human sin calls forth the first death, the death of an animal to hide the nakedness of the first image-bearers. Sacrifice soon becomes a deeply rooted component of worship. By the time of the Mosaic covenant, the peace offering (Lev 17:11ff.) was the divinely prescribed means of maintaining a harmonious relationship between God and his covenant people. The sin offering (Lev 4) dealt with sin as a barrier between the worshipers and God. This sin offering was a slaughtered bull, lamb, or goat with which the worshiper had identified himself by laying his hands on its head. When the blood of the victim, signifying its life (Lev 17:11), was daubed on the horns of the altar, symbolizing the presence of God, God and the worshipers were united in a renewed relationship. Under the terms of the prescribed covenantal relationship, there could no longer be acceptable worship apart from conformity to the demands of the sacrificial system. By this system, God had prescribed the means by which his rebellious image-bearers could approach him. "Worship was thus Israel's response to the covenant relationship and the means of ensuring its continuance."²⁸

There were many variations both before and after Sinai. In the patriarchal period, clans and individuals offered sacrifice in almost any location and without a priestly class. The Mosaic covenant prescribed that offerings be restricted to the tabernacle, a mobile sanctuary, and that they become an exclusive prerogative of the Levites; but both restrictions, especially the former, were often observed in the breach. With the construction of Solomon's temple, covenantal worship became more centralized, at least until the division of the kingdom. The high feasts brought pilgrims onto the roads by the thousands, going "up" to Jerusalem, the city of the great king. Choirs were in attendance, and musical instruments contributed to these festal occasions. Worship was powerfully tied to cultus.

The division of the kingdom and the spiraling degeneration of both Israel and Judah soon broke up even this degree of uniformity. The

27. See the relevant sections of Peterson, *Engaging with God*; Y. Hattori, "Theology of Worship in the Old Testament," in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, 21–50.

28. J. G. Davies, "Worship," *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 851.

exile dispersed the northern tribes to sites that made access to the temple impossible; in due course, exile reached the kingdom of Judah and witnessed the utter destruction of the temple. The revolution in thinking that accompanied this obliteration of the central reality of the cultus is shown in many Old Testament texts, not least in the vision of Ezekiel 8–11, where it is the exilic community—not the Jews remaining in Jerusalem who are about to be destroyed along with the temple—who constitute the true remnant, the people for whom God himself will be a sanctuary (11:16). Such realities relativize the temple and with it the covenantal structure inextricably linked with it. The same effect is achieved by promises of a new covenant (Jer 31:31ff.; Ezek 36:25–27). As the author of Hebrews would later reason, the promise of a new covenant made the old covenant obsolete in principle (Heb 8:13). The restoration of a diminished temple after the exile did not really jeopardize these new anticipations, for neither the high-priestly line of Zadok nor the Davidic kingdom was ever restored.

Thus, the first point to observe is that however enmeshed in cultus, sacrifice, priestly service, covenantal prescription, and major festivals the worship of Israel had become, that worship kept changing its face across the two millennia from Abraham to Jesus.

Second, there is no reason to restrict all worship in ancient Israel to the cultus. The Psalms testify to a large scope for individual praise and adoration, even if some of them are addressed to a wide readership and even if some were intended for corporate use in temple services. The Old Testament provides ample evidence of individuals pouring out their prayers before God, quite apart from the religion of the cultus (e.g., Hannah, Daniel, and Job).

Third, and most important, a remarkable shift takes place with the coming of the Lord Jesus and the dawning of the new covenant he introduces. Under the terms of the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood has been replaced: either we are all priests (i.e., intermediaries, 1 Peter), or else Jesus alone is the high priest (Hebrews), but there is no priestly caste or tribe. Jesus' body becomes the temple (John 2:13–22); or, adapting the figure, the church is the temple (1 Cor 3:16–17); or the individual Christian is the temple (1 Cor 6:19). No church building is ever designated the “temple” (e.g., “Temple Baptist Church”).

The pattern of type/antitype is so thorough that inevitably the way we think of worship must also change. The language of worship, so bound up with the temple and priestly system under the old covenant, has been radically transformed by what Christ has done.

We see the change in a well-known passage like Romans 12:1–2. To offer our bodies as “living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” is our “spiritual act of worship.” In other words, Paul uses the worship language of the cultus, except that his use of the terminology transports us away from the cultus: what we offer is no longer a lamb or a bull but our bodies. We see the change again in another well-known passage. Jesus tells us we “must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). This does not mean that we must worship “spiritually” (as opposed to “carnally”?) and “truthfully” (as opposed to “falsely”?). The context focuses our Lord’s argument. Samaritans held that the appropriate location for worship was at the twin mountains, Gerizim and Ebal; Jews held that it was Jerusalem. By contrast, Jesus says that a time is now dawning “when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. . . . God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (4:23–24). In the first instance, then, this utterance abolishes both Samaria’s mountains and Jerusalem as the proper location for the corporate worship of the people of God. God is spirit, and he cannot be domesticated by mere location or mere temples, even if in the past he chose to disclose himself in one such temple as a teaching device that anticipated what was coming. Moreover, in this book—in which Jesus appears as the *true* vine, the *true* manna, the *true* Shepherd, the *true* temple, the *true* Son—to worship God “in spirit *and in truth*” is first and foremost a way of saying that we must worship God *by means of Christ*. In him the reality has dawned and the shadows are being swept away (cf. Heb 8:13). Christian worship is new covenant worship; it is gospel-inspired worship; it is Christ-centered worship; it is cross-focused worship.²⁹

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we discover that Paul could think of evangelism as his *priestly* service (Rom 15). Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). We offer a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15),

29. On all these points, Peterson, *Engaging with God*, is very good.

not a sacrifice of sheep. Our worship is no longer focused on a particular form or festival. It must be bound up with all we are and do as the blood-bought people of God's Messiah. We offer up *ourselves* as living sacrifices. Augustine was not far off the mark when he wrote, "God is to be worshiped by faith, hope, and love." This is something we do all the time: under the terms of the new covenant, worship is no longer primarily focused in a cultus shaped by a liturgical calendar, but it is something in which we are continuously engaged.

To sum up: "This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly responds to the redemptive provision that God has graciously made." But because of the location of new covenant believers in the stream of redemptive history, the heart of what constitutes true worship changes its form rather radically. At a time when sacrificial and priestly structures anticipated the ultimate sacrifice and high priest, faithful participation in the corporate worship of the covenant community meant the temple with all its symbolism: sacrificial animals, high feasts, and so forth. This side of the supreme sacrifice, we no longer participate in the forms that pointed toward it; and the focus of worship language, priestly language, sacrificial language has been transmuted into a far more comprehensive arena, one that is far less oriented toward any notion of cultus.

5. Nevertheless, so that we do not err by exaggerating the differences between the forms of worship under the Mosaic covenant and under the new covenant, it is essential to recognize that "*all* true worship is God-centered." It is *never* simply a matter of conforming to formal requirements. The Old Testament prophets offer many passages that excoriate all worship that is formally "correct" while the worshiper's heart is set on idolatry (e.g., Ezek 8). Isaiah thunders the word of the Lord: "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the LORD. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. . . . Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. . . . When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. . . . Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!" (Isa 1:11–17). "Will

you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe'—safe to do all these detestable things?' (Jer 7:9–10). "Without purity of heart their pretense of worship was indeed an abomination," says Robert Rayburn. "Even the divinely authorized ordinances themselves had become offensive to the God who had given them because of the way they had been abused."³⁰

This may clarify a point from Peterson that can easily be turned toward a doubtful conclusion. Peterson rightly points out, as we have seen, that the move from the old covenant to the new brings with it a transmutation of the language of the cultus. Under the new covenant the terminology of sacrifice, priest, temple, offering, and the like is transformed. No longer is there a supreme site to which pilgrimages of the faithful must be made: we worship "in spirit and in truth." This transformation of language is inescapable and is tied to the shift from type to antitype, from promise to reality, from shadow to substance. But we must not therefore conclude that, apart from instances of individual worship, in the Old Testament the formal requirements of the cultus exhausted what was meant by public worship.

In any legal structure there has always been a hierarchy of priorities. Jesus himself was quite prepared to deliver his judgment as to which was the greatest commandment in "the Law": "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37; cf. Deut 6:5). It follows that the greatest sin, the most fundamental sin, is to *not* love the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and mind. The connection with worship, as we have defined it, is transparent. We cannot ascribe to the Lord all the glory due his name if we are consumed by self-love or intoxicated by pitiful visions of our own greatness or independence. Still less are we properly worshipping the Lord if we formally adhere to the stipulations of covenantal sacrifice when our hearts are far from him. To put the matter positively, worship is not merely a *formal* ascription of praise to God: it emerges from my

30. Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 19.

whole being to this whole God, and therefore it reflects not only my understanding of God but my love for him. “Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (Ps 103:1).

Thus, the transition from worship under the old covenant to worship under the new is not characterized by a move from the formal to the spiritual, or from the cultus to the spiritual, or from the cultus to all of life. For it has *always* been necessary to love God wholly; it has *always* been necessary to recognize the sheer holiness and transcendent power and glory and goodness of God and to adore him for what he is. So we insist that “*all* true worship is God-centered.” The transition from worship under the old covenant to worship under the new is characterized by the covenantal stipulations and provisions of the two respective covenants. The way wholly loving God works out under the old covenant is in heartfelt obedience to the terms of that covenant—and that includes the primary place given to the cultus, with all its import and purpose in the stream of redemptive history; and the implications of this outworking include distinctions between the holy and the common, between holy space and common space, between holy time and common time, between holy food and common food. The way wholly loving God works out under the new covenant is in heartfelt obedience to the terms of that covenant—and here the language of the cultus has been transmuted to all of life, with the implication, not so much of a desacralization of space and time and food, as with a sacralization of all space and all time and all food: what God has declared holy let no one declare unholy.

There is a further implication here that can only be mentioned, not explored. In theological analysis of work, it is a commonplace to say that work is a “creation ordinance” (the terminology varies with the theological tradition). However corrosive and difficult work has become this side of the Fall (Gen 3:17–19), work itself belongs to the initial paradise (Gen 2:15), and it continues to be something we do as creatures in God’s good creation. That is true, of course, but under the new covenant it is also inadequate. If everything, including our work, has been sacralized in the sense just specified, then work itself is part of our worship. Christians work not only as God’s creatures in God’s creation, but as redeemed men and women offering their time, their

energy, their work, their whole lives, to God—loving him with heart and mind and strength, understanding that whatever we do, we are to do to the glory of God.

This does not mean there is no place for corporate gathering under the new covenant, no corporate acknowledgement of God, no corporate worship—as we shall see. But in the light of the completed cross-work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the language of the cultus has necessarily changed, and with it our priorities in worship. What remains constant is the sheer God-centeredness of it all.

6. *Christian* worship is no less Christ-centered than God-centered. The set purpose of the Father is that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father (John 5:23). Since the eternal Word became flesh (John 1:14), since the fullness of the Deity lives in Christ in bodily form (Col 2:9), since in the light of Jesus' astonishing obedience (even unto death!) God has exalted him and given him "the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:9–10), and since the resurrected Jesus quietly accepted Thomas's reverent and worshiping words, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), contemporary Christians follow the example of the first generation of believers and worship Jesus without hesitation.

Nowhere is the mandate to worship the Lord Jesus clearer than in the book of Revelation, from chapter 5 on. In Revelation 4, in apocalyptic metaphor, God is presented as the awesome, transcendent God of glory before whom even the highest orders of angels cover their faces. This sets the stage for the drama in chapter 5. There an angel issues a challenge to the entire universe: Who is able to approach the throne of such a terrifying God, take the book in his right hand, and slit the seven seals that bind it? In the symbolism of the time and of this genre of literature, this is a challenge to bring to pass all God's purposes for the universe, his purposes of both blessing and judgment. No one is found who is worthy to accomplish this task, and John the seer is driven to despair (5:4). Then someone is found: the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is also the Lamb—simultaneously a kingly warrior and a slaughtered Lamb—emerges to take the scroll from the right hand of the Almighty and slit the seals. But instead of approaching the

throne of this transcendent and frankly terrifying God, he stands in the very center of the throne, one with Deity himself (5:6). This sets off a mighty chorus of worship addressed to the Lamb, praising him because he is *worthy* to take the scroll and open its seals (5:9). What makes him uniquely qualified to bring to pass God's purposes for judgment and redemption is not simply the fact that he emerges from the very throne of God, but that he was slain, and by his blood he purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (5:9). In short, not only his person but his atoning work make him uniquely qualified to bring to pass God's perfect purposes.

Thereafter in the book of Revelation, worship is addressed to "him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb," or some similar formulation. For in our era, Christian worship is no less Christ-centered than God-centered.

7. Christian worship is Trinitarian. This point deserves extensive reflection. One might usefully consider, for instance, a Trinitarian biblical theology of prayer.³¹ But for our purposes it will suffice to repeat some of the insights of James Torrance. He writes:

The [Trinitarian] view of worship is that it is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father. That means participating in union with Christ, in what he has done for us once and for all, in his self-offering to the Father, in his life and death on the cross. It also means participating in what he is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world. There is only one true Priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. There is only one Mediator between God and humanity. There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours. It is the offering by which he has sanctified for all time those who come to God by him (Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14). . . . It takes seriously the New Testament teaching about the sole priesthood and headship of Christ, his self-offering for us to the Father and our life in union with Christ through the Spirit, with a vision of the Church which is his body. . . . So we are baptized in the name of the

31. See, for instance, the important essay by Edmund P. Clowney, "A Biblical Theology of Prayer," in *Teach Us To Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1990), 136–73.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit into the community, the one body of Christ, which confesses faith in the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and which worships the Father through the Son in the Spirit.³²

This is very helpful, especially if it is not taken to refer to what must pertain only at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday morning. The justifying, regenerating, redeeming work of our triune God transforms his people: that is the very essence of the new covenant. New covenant worship therefore finds its first impulse in this transforming gospel, “which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers.”

8. Christian worship embraces both adoration and action.³³ By referring to both, I do not mean to reintroduce a distinction between the sacred and the common (see section 4 above). It is not that we withdraw into “adoration” and then advance into “action,” with the former somehow gaining extra kudos for being the more spiritual or the more worshipful. We are to do everything to the glory of God. In offering our bodies as living sacrifices, which is our spiritual worship, we do with our bodies what he desires. Indeed, there may be something even more aggressive about this “action.” As Miroslav Volf puts it, “There is something profoundly hypocritical about praising God for God’s mighty deeds of salvation and cooperating at the same time with the demons of destruction, whether by neglecting to do good or by actively doing evil. Only those who help the Jews may sing the Gregorian chant, Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly said, in the context of Nazi Germany. . . . Without action in the world, the adoration of God is empty and hypocritical, and degenerates into irresponsible and godless quietism.”³⁴ Conversely, Christian action in this world produces incentive to adore God (i.e., 1 Pet 2:11–12).

32. James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 20–22. This book often proves very insightful, even though in my view Torrance sometimes attacks a Zwinglian view of the Lord’s Supper that is little more than a straw man.

33. See especially the essay by Miroslav Volf, “Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, 203–11, to which I am indebted for some elements of this section.

34. *Ibid.*, 211.

On the other hand, *mere* activism is not a particularly godly alternative either; for like active evil, it may be impelled by mere lust for power, or mere commitment to a tradition (no matter how good the tradition), or mere altruism or reformist sentiment. To resort to periods of adoration, whether personal and individual or corporate, is not, however, to retreat to the classic sacred/profane division, but it is to grasp the New Testament recognition of the rhythms of life in this created order. Jesus himself presupposes that there is a time and place for the individual to resort to a “secret” place for prayer (Matt 6:6). The church itself, as we shall see, is to gather regularly.

In short, precisely because Christian worship is impelled by the gospel “which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers,” precisely because the ultimate triumph of God is a reconciled universe (Col 1:15–20), our worship must therefore manifest itself in both adoration and action.

9. Similarly, if the New Testament documents constitute our guide, our worship must manifest itself both in the individual believer and in “corporate worship, which is offered up in the context of the body of believers.”

This corporate identity extends not only to other believers here and now with whom we happen to be identified but also to believers from all times and places. For the fundamental “gathering” of the people of God is the gathering *to God*, “to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come *to God*, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:22–24; emphasis added). The local church is not so much a part of this church as the manifestation of it, the outcropping of it. Every church is simply the church.

Thus, whatever it is we do when we gather together—something still to be discussed—we do in the profound recognition that we believers constitute something much bigger than any one of us or even any empirical group of us. We are the church, the temple of God

(1 Cor 3:16–17).³⁵ One of the entailments of such a perspective is that, however much we seek to be contemporary for the sake of evangelistic outreach, there must also be a drive in us to align ourselves with the *whole* church in some deeply rooted and tangible ways. What it means to be the church was not invented in the last twenty years. The demands of corporate rootedness must be melded with the demands of living faithfully and bearing witness in a particular culture and age.

The New Testament speaks of the gathering or the coming together of the people of God in many contexts (e.g., Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6, 30; 20:7–8; 1 Cor 5:4; 11:17, 33–34; 14:26).³⁶ “The church in assembly not only provides encouragement to its members but also approaches God (Heb 10:19–25),” writes Everett Ferguson.³⁷ But this could equally be put the opposite way: the church in assembly not only approaches God, but it provides encouragement to its members. Even in Ephesians 5:19 we speak “to one another” when we sing; and in Colossians 3:16, the singing of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” is in the context of teaching and admonishing one another—part of letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” This means that the purist model of addressing *only* God in our corporate worship is too restrictive. On the other hand, while one of the purposes of our singing should be mutual edification, that is rather different from making ourselves and our experience of worship the *topic* of our singing.

10. This body of believers strives “to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples.” This will be true in the arena of conduct, to which the Apostle Paul devotes so much space. Again and again he exhorts his younger colleagues to help believers learn *how* to live and speak and conduct themselves.

But my focus here will be on the church in its gathered meetings. What does the New Testament mandate for such meetings, whether by

35. The context shows that in this passage the temple of God is *the church*, unlike 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, where in quite a different figurative usage the temple of God is the body of the individual Christian.

36. See the important work of Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), esp. 231ff.

37. *Ibid.*, 233.

prescription or description? Is it the case, under the terms of the new covenant, that it is *wrong* to say that our purpose in coming together (for instance, on Sunday morning) is for worship? Some, as we have seen, reply, "Yes, it is clearly wrong." Nor is this some newfangled iconoclasm. William Law, in his justly famous *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, written more than two centuries ago, insists, "There is not one command in all the Gospel for public worship. . . . The frequent attendance at it is never so much as mentioned in all the New Testament." In the light of the New Testament's penchant for deploying all the old worship terminology in fresh ways, no longer bound up with temple and feast days but with all of Christian living, to say that we come together "to worship" implies that we are *not* worshipping God the rest of the time. And that is so out of touch with New Testament emphases that we ought to abandon such a notion absolutely. We do not come together for worship, these people say; rather, we come together for instruction, or we come together for mutual edification.

Yet one wonders if this conclusion is justified. Of course, if we spend the week *without* worshipping God and think of Sunday morning as the time when we come together to offer God the worship we have been withholding all week (to set right the balance, as it were), then these critics are entirely correct. But would it not be better to say that the New Testament emphasis is that the people of God should worship him in their individual lives and in their family lives and then, when they come together, worship him corporately?

In other words, worship becomes the category under which we order *everything* in our lives. Whatever we do, even if we are simply eating or drinking, whatever we say, in business or in the home or in church assemblies, we are to do all to the glory of God. That is worship. And when we come together, we engage in worship in a corporate fashion.

Some are uncomfortable with this analysis. They say that if worship is something that Christians should be doing all the time, then although it is formally true that Christians should be engaged in worship when they gather together, it is merely true in the same sense in which Christians should be engaged in breathing when they gather together. It is something they do all the time. But the analogy this makes between worship and breathing is misleading. We are not com-

manded to breathe; breathing is merely an autonomic function. But we are *commanded* to worship (e.g., Rev 19:10). And although it is true that the technical language of worship in the Old Testament is transmuted in the New from the cultus to all of life, there are odd passages where the language also refers to the Christian assembly (e.g., *proskyneô* in 1 Cor 14:25).

Moreover, just as in the light of the New Testament we dare not think we gather for worship because we have *not* been worshipping all week, so also it is folly to think that only part of the “service” is worship—everything but the sermon, perhaps, or only the singing, or only singing and responses. The notion of a “worship leader” who leads the “worship” part of the service before the sermon (which, then, is no part of worship!) is so bizarre, from a New Testament perspective, as to be embarrassing.³⁸ Doesn’t even experience teach us that sometimes our deepest desires and heart prayers to ascribe all worth to God well up during the powerful preaching of the Word of God? I know that “worship leader” is merely a matter of semantics, a currently popular tag, but it is a popular tag that unwittingly skews people’s expectations as to what worship is. At very least, it is misleadingly restrictive.³⁹

38. Scarcely less bizarre is the contention of some that we should distinguish between services for worship and services for teaching (e.g., Robert E. Webber, in a generally helpful book, *Worship Old and New* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 125, 194).

39. Perhaps this is the place to reflect on the fact that many contemporary “worship leaders” have training in music but none in Bible, theology, history, or the like. When pressed as to the criteria by which they choose their music, many of these leaders finally admit that their criteria oscillate between personal preference and keeping the congregation reasonably happy—scarcely the most profound criteria in the world. They give little or no thought to covering the great themes of Scripture, or the great events of Scripture, or the range of personal response to God found in the Psalms (as opposed to covering the narrow themes of being upbeat and in the midst of “worship”), or the nature of biblical locutions (in one chorus the congregation manages to sing “holy” thirty-six times, while three are enough for Isaiah and John of the Apocalypse), or the central historical traditions of the church, or anything else of weight. If such leaders operate on their own with little guidance or training or input from senior pastors, the situation commonly degenerates from the painful to the pitiful. On this and many other practical and theological points, see the wise and informed counsel of David Montgomery, *Sing a New Song: Choosing and Leading Praise in Today’s Church* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House and Handsel Press, 2000).

So what should we do, then, in corporate worship so understood? Although some might object to one or two of his locutions, Edmund Clowney provides one of the most succinct summaries of such evidence as the New Testament provides:

The New Testament indicates, by precept and example, what the elements of [corporate] worship are. As in the synagogue, corporate prayer is offered (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1; 1 Cor. 14:16); Scripture is read (1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Th. 5:27; 2 Th. 3:14; Col. 4:15, 16; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16) and expounded in preaching (1 Tim. 4:13; cf. Lk. 4:20; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 4:2). There is a direct shift from the synagogue to the gathering of the church (Acts 18:7, 11; cf. 19:8–10). The teaching of the word is also linked with table fellowship (Acts 2:42; 20:7, cf. vv. 20, 25, 28). The songs of the new covenant people both praise God and encourage one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:15; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 5:9–13; 11:17f; 15:3, 4). Giving to the poor is recognized as a spiritual service to God and a Christian form of “sacrifice” (2 Cor. 9:11–15; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16). The reception and distribution of gifts is related to the office of the deacon (Acts 6:1–6; Rom. 12:8, 13; cf. Rom. 16:1, 2; 2 Cor. 8:19–21; Acts 20:4; 1 Cor. 16:1–4) and to the gathering of believers (Acts 2:42; 5:2; 1 Cor. 16:2). The faith is also publicly confessed (1 Tim. 6:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 13:15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3). The people receive God’s blessing (2 Cor. 13:14; Lk. 24:50; cf. Num. 6:22–27). The holy kiss of salutation is also commanded (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). The people respond to praise and prayer with the saying of “Amen” (1 Cor. 14:16; Rev. 5:14; cf. Rom. 1:25; 9:5; Eph. 3:21 etc.). The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are explicitly provided for. Confession is linked with baptism (1 Pet. 3:21); and a prayer of thanksgiving with the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:24).⁴⁰

One might quibble over a few points. Some might say that explicit *permission* must be opened up for tongues as restricted by 1 Corin-

40. Edmund P. Clowney, “Presbyterian Worship,” *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson, 117. Cf. also Hughes Oliphant Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology: Some Thoughts on the Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Michael B. Thompson, “Romans 12:1–2 and Paul’s Vision for Worship,” in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology*, ed. Markus N. A. Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), esp. 129–30.

thians 14, for example. Still, Clowney's list is surely broadly right. But observe:

a. To compile such a list is already to recognize that there are some distinctive elements to what I have called "corporate worship." I am not sure that we would be wise to apply the expression "corporate worship" to any and all activities in which groups of Christians faithfully engage—going to a football match, say, or shopping for groceries. Such activities doubtless fall under the "do all to the glory of God" rubric and therefore properly belong to the ways in which we honor God; therefore, they do belong to worship in a broad sense. Yet the activities the New Testament describes when Christians gather together in assembly, nicely listed by Clowney, are more restrictive and more focused. Doubtless there can be some mutual edification going on when a group of Christians take a sewing class together, but in the light of what the New Testament pictures Christians doing when they assemble together, there is nevertheless something slightly skewed about calling a sewing class an activity of corporate worship. So there is a narrower sense of worship, it appears; and this narrower sense is bound up with corporate worship, with what the assembled church does in the pages of the New Testament. Yet it is precisely at this point that one must instantly insist that this narrower list of activities does *not* include all that the New Testament includes within the theological notion of worship in the broader sense. If one restricts the term *worship* to the list of church-assembly activities listed by Clowney, one loses essential elements of the dramatic transformation that occurs in the move from the old covenant to the new;⁴¹ conversely, if one uses the term *worship* only in its broadest and theologically richest sense, then sooner or later one finds oneself looking for a term that embraces the particular activities of the gathered people of God described in the New Testament. For lack of a better alternative, I have chosen the term *corporate worship*—but I recognize the ambiguities inherent in it.

41. This, of course, is the use of the word *worship* found in most older studies or in recent studies that do not take into account the redemptive-historical developments within the canon. See, for example, D. E. Aune ("Worship, Early Christian," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6.973–89), who ties worship to such activities and responses as these: acclamation, awe, blessing, commemoration, confession, doxology, fear, hymn, invocation, offering, praise, prayer, prophecy, prostration, sacrifice, supplication, and thanksgiving.

b. It is worth reflecting on how many of the items listed by Clowney are related, in one way or another, to the Word. Joshua is told that the Word will be with him wherever he goes if he but meditates on the law day and night, careful to do everything written in it (Josh 1:5–9). The book of Psalms opens by declaring that the just person is the one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night (Ps 1:2). Jesus asserts, in prayer, that what will sanctify his disciples is the Word (John 17:17). Doyle puts his finger on this integrating factor:

The characteristic response we are to make to God as he comes to us clothed in his promises, clothed with the gospel, is faith. In the context of the New Testament's vision of what church is to be, this faith most appropriately takes the form of confession. To each other we confess and testify to the greatness of God. We do this by the very activity of making God's Word the centre of our activities—by reading it, preaching it, making it the basis of exhortation, and even setting it to music in hymns and praise. The Spirit uses all this, we are assured, to build us up in Christ. Praise is integral to our activities in church, because it is another form of our response of faith. It is part of our whole life of worship, but only one part of it.⁴²

What this also suggests, yet again, is that an approach to corporate worship that thinks of only *some* of the activities of assembled Christians, such as singing and praying, as worship, but not the ministry of the Word itself, is badly off base. Worse yet are formulations that are in danger of making “worship” a substitute for the gospel. It is not uncommon to be told that “worship leads us into the presence of God” or that “worship takes us from the outer court into the inner court” or the like. There is a way of reading those statements sympathetically (as I shall note in a moment), but taken at face value they are simply untrue. Objectively, what brings us into the presence of God is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If we ascribe to worship (meaning, in this context, our corporate praise and adoration) something of this power, it will not be long before we think of such worship as being meritorious, or efficacious, or the like. The small corner of truth that such expressions hide (though this truth is poorly worded)

42. Robert Doyle, “The One True Worshipper,” *The Briefing*, (29 April 1999), 8.

is that when we come together and engage in the activities of corporate worship (including not only prayer and praise but the Lord's Supper and attentive listening to the Word, and the other items included in Clowney's list), we encourage one another, we edify one another, and so we often *feel* encouraged and edified. As a result, we are renewed in our awareness of God's love and God's truth, and we are encouraged to respond with adoration and action. In this subjective sense, *all* of the activities of corporate worship may function to make us more aware of God's majesty, God's presence, God's love. But I doubt that it is helpful to speak of such matters in terms of worship "leading us into the presence of God": not only is the term *worship* bearing a meaning too narrow to be useful, but the statement is in danger of conveying some profoundly untrue notions.

c. Although the *elements* Clowney lists are obviously the elements of corporate worship mentioned in the New Testament, there is no explicit mandate or model of a particular order or arrangement of these elements. Of course, this is not to deny that there may be better and worse arrangements. One might try to establish liturgical order that reflects the theology of conversion, or at least of general approach to God: confession of sin before assurance of grace, for instance. Nevertheless, the tendency in some traditions to nail everything down in great detail and claim that such stipulations are biblically sanctioned is to "go beyond what is written" (to use the Pauline phrase, 1 Cor 4:6).

It is at this point that perhaps I should comment on some Reformed parodies of popular evangelical corporate worship services. One that is circulating nicely on the Web at the moment is several pages long: there is space here to include only some excerpts:

Fellowshippers shall enter the sanctuary garrulously, centering their attention on each other, and gaily exchanging their news of the past week.

If there be an overhead projector, the acolytes shall light it.

The Minister shall begin Morning Fellowship by chanting the greeting, "Good Morning." Then shall not more than 50% and not less [*sic*] than 10% of the fellowshippers respond, chanting in this wise, "Good Morning." . . .

The Glad-handing of the Peace: Then may the Minister say: “Why don’t we all shake hands with the person on our left and on our right and say ‘Good morning.’” . . .

The Reading: Then shall be read an arbitrary Scripture passage of the Minister’s choosing, so long as it does not relate to the time of the Church year. . . .

And much more of the same, becoming progressively more amusing. But before we laugh too hard, we should perhaps analyze why this is funny. It is amusing because there is an obvious clash between the categories of traditional, liturgical worship (with copious references to acolytes “lighting” something, chanting, slightly dented allusions to traditional segments of the service, etc.) and the sheer informalism of much evangelical corporate worship. But the plain fact of the matter is that the liturgical template on which the evangelical informalism has been grafted in order to construct this amusing piece *has no particular warrant in the New Testament*.⁴³

This is not to deny that experience may teach us better and worse ways of leading corporate worship, or that there may be profound and interlocking theological structures that undergird certain decisions about corporate worship. It is to say that the New Testament does not provide us with officially sanctioned public “services” so much as with examples of crucial elements. We do well to admit the limitations of our knowledge.

d. There is no mention of a lot of other things: drama, “special” (performance) music, choirs, artistic dance, organ solos. Many churches

43. It is at this point that I have most trouble with Robert E. Webber, *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994). Webber usefully describes the corporate worship practices of a great breadth of traditions and appreciates them all, movingly writing of his own participation in many of them. Unfortunately, he offers very little biblical or theological justification for his choices and recommendations, other than that he felt God was disclosing himself through this or that service. The theological rootlessness and subjectivism of the book are stunning, even though they are partially hidden behind transparent piety. In some ways his later book, *Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old and New* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), is better. What a lot of people mean by “blended worship” is not so much a blend as a lumpy stew. Webber is helpful in moving us beyond our narrow horizons without succumbing to painful dissonance.

are so steeped in these or other traditions that it would be unthinkable to have a Sunday morning service without, say, “special music”—though there is not so much as a hint of this practice in the New Testament.⁴⁴ Some preferences are conditioned not only by the local church but by the traditions of the country in which it is located. The overwhelming majority of evangelical churches in America, especially outside the mainline denominations, offer performance music almost every Sunday. The overwhelming majority of denominationally similar churches in Britain never have it.⁴⁵

Occasionally attempts have been made to justify a “bells and smells” approach to corporate worship on the basis of some of the imagery in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 5, for instance, incense is wafted before God by the elders, and the incense is identified as “the prayers of the saints.” Granted that this is an instance of the rich symbolism of the Apocalypse, does it not warrant us to introduce similarly symbol-laden realities as aids to corporate worship? But this reasoning is misguided on several fronts. So much of the symbolism of this book’s apocalyptic is deeply rooted in the Old Testament world. In this case, it calls to mind passages such as Psalm 141:2: “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” In other words, the comparison is drawn between David’s private prayers and the central institutions of the tabernacle

44. By “special music” I am including not only the solos and small groups that a slightly earlier generation of evangelical churches customarily presented but also the very substantial number of “performance” items that current “worship teams” normally include in services. These are often not seen by the teams themselves as “special music” or “performance music,” but of course that is what they are.

45. There are many entailments to these cultural differences beyond the differences in the corporate services themselves. For example, Britain, without much place for “special music” in corporate worship, does not have to feed a market driven by the search for more “special music.” Therefore, a great deal of intellectual and spiritual energy is devoted to writing songs that will be sung congregationally. This has resulted in a fairly wide production of new hymnody in more or less contemporary guise, some of it junk, some of it acceptable but scarcely enduring, and some of it frankly superb. By contrast, our addiction to “special music” means that a great deal of creative energy goes into supplying products for that market. Whether it is good or bad, it is almost never usable by a congregation. The result is that far more of our congregational pieces are dated than in Britain, or are no more than repetitious choruses.

(and later temple)—which is precisely what is done away under the new covenant. One avoids the obvious hermeneutical quagmires by patiently asking the question, “So far as our records go, did Christians in New Testament times use incense during corporate worship?”

e. Historically, some branches of the church have argued that if God has not forbidden something, we are permitted to do it, and the church is permitted to regulate its affairs in these regards in order to establish good order (the Hooker principle, mentioned above). Others have argued that the only things we should do in public worship are those that find clear example or direct prescription in the New Testament, lest we drift from what is central or impose on our congregations things that their consciences might not be able to support (the Regulative Principle, also mentioned above).

To attempt even the most rudimentary evaluation of this debate would immediately double the length of this chapter. Besides, these matters will surface again in later chapters. But four preliminary observations may be helpful. First, historically speaking, both the Hooker principle and the Regulative Principle have been understood and administered in both a stronger and a more attenuated way, with widely differing results. Some have appealed to Hooker to support changes far beyond the appropriateness of prescribing or forbidding vestments and the like; others have appealed to Hooker in defense of a church-ordered prayer book. Some have appealed to the Regulative Principle to ban all instruments from corporate worship and to sanction only the singing of psalms; others see it as a principle of freedom within limits: it recognizes that we are not authorized to worship God “as we please” and that our worship must be acceptable to God himself and therefore in line with his Word. In short, both the Hooker principle and the Regulative Principle are plagued by complex debates as to what they mean, today as well as historically.⁴⁶ For many of the

46. For example, the Regulative Principle, well articulated by the Westminster divines, opposed the introduction of new *observances* in worship but does not deny culturally appropriate arrangements of the *circumstances* of worship—which has generated no little debate on what is meant by “circumstances.” See the discussion in Clowney, “Presbyterian Worship,” 117ff.; and John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and*

protagonists, their interpretations are as certain, as immovable, and as inflexible as the Rock of Gibraltar. Second, it must be frankly admitted that both the Hooker principle and the Regulative Principle have bred staunch traditionalists. Traditionalists who follow Hooker argue that according to this principle the church has the right to *regulate* certain matters, and endless innovation is a denial of that right. So stop tampering with the Prayer Book! Traditionalists who follow the Regulative Principle not only tend to adopt the simplest form of public worship but tie it to traditional forms of expression (e.g., they will always find fault with psalms set to contemporary music, preferring the metrical psalms sung centuries ago).⁴⁷ Third, both camps have also bred pastors who are remarkably contemporary, thoroughly evangelical in the best sense of that long-suffering term, and innovative in their leading of corporate worship. In the Anglican tradition, for instance, one thinks of John Mason's duly authorized "experimental service" in Sydney, which deserves circulation and evaluation among evangelical Anglicans;⁴⁸ in the Presbyterian tradition, one thinks of Tim Keller in New York (but here I will say little for fear of embarrassing a fellow contributor). Fourth, for all their differences, theologically rich and serious services from both camps often have more common *content* than either side usually acknowledges.

f. There is no single passage in the New Testament that establishes a paradigm for corporate worship. Not a few writers appeal to 1 Corinthians 14. Yet the priorities of that chapter are set by Paul's agenda at that point, dealing with *charismata* that have gained too prominent a place in public meetings. There is no mention of the Lord's Supper and no mention of public teaching by a pastor/elder—even though other passages in Paul show that such elements played

Truth (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), though on the latter, cf. the review by Leonard R. Payton in *Reformation and Revival* 6/3 (1997): 227–35.

47. On these and related points, see John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997). See also Lee Irons, "Exclusive Psalmody or New Covenant Hymnody?" at <http://members.aol.com/ironslee/private/Psalmody.htm>.

48. John Mason, *A Service for Today's Church* (Mosman: St. Clement's Anglican Church, 1997).

an important role in the corporate meetings of churches overseen by the apostle.

g. First Corinthians 14 lays considerable stress on intelligibility. The issue for Paul, of course, is tongues and prophecy: his concern is to establish guidelines that keep undisciplined enthusiasm in check. Frame⁴⁹ applies the importance of intelligibility to the music that is chosen. Although that is scarcely what the apostle had in mind, I doubt that he would have been displeased by the application. Nevertheless, there are complementary principles to bear in mind. Paul speaks of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” We may debate what is the full range of musical styles to which this expression refers, but psalms are certainly included—whether they are judged intelligible for our biblically illiterate generation or not. Corporate meetings of the church, however much God is worshiped in them, have the collateral responsibility of educating, informing, and transforming the minds of those who attend, of training the people of God in righteousness, of expanding their horizons not only so that they better know God (and therefore better worship him) but so that they better grasp the dimensions of the church that he has redeemed by the death of his Son (and therefore better worship him)—and that means, surely, some sort of exposure to more than the narrow slice of church that subsists in one particular subculture. The importance of intelligibility (in music, let us say) must therefore be juxtaposed with the responsibility to expand the limited horizons of one narrow tradition.⁵⁰ Incidentally, the punch of this observation applies both to churches trying to be so contemporary that they project the impression that the church was invented yesterday and to churches locked into a traditional slice that is no less narrow but rather more dated.

49. *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, passim.

50. One wishes, for instance, that more leaders were aware of a work such as Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel. An Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music in Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). This is not to suggest that every church should try to incorporate every tradition: there is neither adequate time for, nor wisdom in, such a goal. But if we are to transcend our own cultural confines, we ought to be making a significant attempt to learn the traditions of brothers and sisters in Christ outside our own heritage.

11. Numerous matters cry out for articulation in greater detail—the various functions of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament, for example. But the primary focus of this section is to demonstrate and illustrate ways in which the body of believers in corporate worship strives “to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples.”

Properly understood, this takes place “to bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation.” In other words, the richest conformity to new covenant stipulation is not some Marcion-like rejection of the Old Testament but the fruit of a biblical-theological reading of Scripture that learns how the parts of written revelation interlock along the path of the Bible’s plotline. The result is a greater grasp of what God has revealed and, ideally, a deeper and richer worship of the God who has so wonderfully revealed himself.

12. At the same time, such worship is an “anticipation of the consummation.” The climax of the massive theme of worship in the book of Revelation lies in chapters 21–22. The New Jerusalem is built like a cube—and the only cube of which we hear in antecedent Scripture is the Most Holy Place. In other words, the entire city is constantly and unqualifiedly basking in the unshielded glory of the presence of God. There is no temple in that city, for the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. God’s people will see his face.⁵¹

But we must conduct ourselves here in the anticipation of this end. Biblically faithful worship is orientated to the end. Even the Lord’s Supper is “until he comes” and thus always an expectation of that coming, a renewal of vows in the light of that coming. As Larry Hurtado has put it:

More specifically, Christian worship could be re-enlivened and enriched by remembering the larger picture of God’s purposes, which

51. Cf. N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7: “The great multitude in Revelation which no man can number aren’t playing cricket. They aren’t going shopping. They are *worshipping*. Sounds boring? If so, it shows how impoverished our idea of worship has become. At the centre of that worship stands a passage like Isaiah 33: your eyes will see the king in his beauty; the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler, the LORD is our king; he will save us. Worship is the central characteristic of the heavenly life; and that worship is focused on the God we know in and as Jesus.”

extend beyond our own immediate setting and time to take in all human history and which promise a future victory over evil and a consummation of redeeming grace. Apart from a hope in God's triumph over evil, apart from a confidence that Jesus really is the divinely appointed Lord in whom all things are to find their meaning, Christian acclamation of Jesus as Lord is a stupid thing, refuted and mocked by the powerful, negative realities of our creaturehood: the political and economic tyrannies, religious and irreligious forces, and social and cultural developments that make Christian faith seem trivial and our worship little more than a quaint avocation.⁵²

Some Practical Conclusions

The brief list in this concluding section is suggestive rather than comprehensive. Much more practical wisdom is provided in the remaining chapters of the book.

1. If the line of argument in this chapter is biblically faithful, we ought to avoid common misunderstandings of worship. Ferguson identifies four of them: an external or mechanical interpretation of worship, an individualistic interpretation, an emotional uplift interpretation, and a performance interpretation.⁵³ We might add interpretations that restrict worship to experiences of cultus and, conversely, interpretations of worship that are so comprehensive that no place whatsoever is left for corporate worship.

2. Hindrances to excellent corporate worship are of various sorts. For convenience, they may be broken into two kinds. On the one hand, corporate worship may be stultified by church members who never pray at home, who come to church waiting to be entertained, who are inwardly marking a scorecard instead of participating in worship, who love mere tradition (or mere innovation!) more than truth, who are so busy that their minds are cluttered with the press of the urgent, who are nurturing secret bitterness and resentments in the dark recesses of their minds.

52. Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 116.

53. *The Church of Christ*, 227–29.

On the other hand, corporate worship may be poor primarily because of those who are leading. There are two overlapping but distinguishable components. The first is what is actually said and done. That is a huge area that demands detailed consideration, some of which is provided in later chapters. But the second component, though less easily measurable, is no less important. Some who publicly lead the corporate meetings of the people of God merely perform; others are engrossed in the worship of God. Some merely sing; some put on a great show of being involved; but others transparently worship God.

It is worth pausing over this word “transparently.” By asserting that “others transparently worship God,” I am indicating that to some extent we can observe how well we are being served by those who lead corporate worship: their conduct is “transparent.” The way they lead must in the first instance be marked by faithfulness to the Word of God: that is certainly observable, in particular to those who know their Bibles well. But the way they lead can be measured not only in terms of formal content but also in terms of heart attitudes that inevitably manifest themselves in talk, body language, focus, and style. Some pray with strings of evangelical clichés; some show off with orotund phrasings; others pray to God out of profound personal knowledge and bring the congregation along with them.⁵⁴ Some preach without punch; others speak as if delivering the oracles of God.

What is at stake is authenticity. Some wag has said that Americans work at their play, play at their worship, and worship their work. But 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.

3. The question of authenticity in corporate worship intersects with some urgent questions of contemporary evangelism. *First*, one of the passions that shapes the corporate meetings of many churches (especially in the “seeker-sensitive” tradition) is the concern for evangelism, the concern to tear down barriers that prevent particular people

54. I am referring now, of course, not to a particular style, but to a Spirit-anointed authenticity that in large part transcends matters of style.

groups from coming and hearing the gospel. The “homogeneous unit” principle, at one time associated with particular tribes, has now been extended to generations: busters cannot be effectively evangelized with boomers, and so forth. But somewhere along the line we must evaluate what place we are reserving in our corporate life for tearing down the barriers that the world erects—barriers between Jew and Gentile, blacks and whites, boomers and busters. How does our corporate life reflect the one new humanity that the New Testament envisages? Is there not some need for Christians from highly different backgrounds to come together and recite one creed, read from one Scripture, and jointly sing shared songs, thereby crossing race gaps, gender gaps, and generation gaps, standing in a shared lineage that reaches back through centuries and is finally grounded in the Word? This does not mean that everything has to be old-fashioned and stodgy. It *does* mean that those in the Reformed tradition (for instance) do well to wonder now and then what would happen if John Calvin were an “Xer.”⁵⁵

Second, one of the most compelling witnesses to the truth of the gospel is a church that is authentic in its worship—and here I use the word *worship* in the most comprehensive sense but certainly including corporate worship. A congregation so concerned not to cause offense that it manages to entertain and amuse but never to *worship God* either in the way it lives or in its corporate life carries little credibility to a burned-out postmodern generation that rejects linear thought yet hungers for integrity of relationships. Because we are concerned with the truth of the gospel, we must teach and explain; because we are not simply educating people but seeking to communicate the glorious gospel of Christ, the authenticity of our own relationship with him, grounded in personal faith and in an awareness not only of sins forgiven and of eternal life but also of the sheer glory and majesty of our Maker and Redeemer, carries an enormous weight.

4. Not every public service can fruitfully integrate everything that the New Testament exemplifies of corporate meetings. Not every meeting will gather around the Lord’s Supper, not every meeting will

55. That line comes from Scot Sherman, “If John Calvin Were an ‘Xer’ . . . Worship in the Reformed Tradition,” *re:generation* 3/1 (Winter 1997): 22–25.

allow for the varied voices of 1 Corinthians 14, and so forth. But that means that, in order to preserve the comprehensiveness of New Testament church life, we need to plan for different sorts of meetings.

5. In every tradition of corporate worship, there are many ways in which a leader may greatly diminish authentic, godly, biblically faithful worship. Those in more liturgical traditions may so greatly rely on established forms that instead of leading the congregation in thoughtful worship of the living God, the entire exercise becomes mechanical and dry, even though the forms are well-loved and well-known expressions that are historically rooted and theologically rich. (Consider the pastor who, right in the middle of holy communion, interrupts his flow to tell the warden to shut a window.) Those in less liturgical traditions may retreat into comfortable but largely boring clichés: the freedom and creativity that is the strength of the “free church” tradition is squandered where careful planning, prayer, and thought have not gone into the preparation of a public meeting. Indeed, such planning may borrow from many traditions. I recently attended a Christmas service in a Reformed Baptist church in which there were not only the traditional Christmas Scripture readings and Christmas carols, but the corporate reading, from the prepared bulletin, of the Nicene Creed, the prayer of confession from Martin Bucer’s Strasbourg Liturgy, and a prayer of thanksgiving from the Middleburg Liturgy of the English Puritans.

6. Small ironies surface when the essays in this book are read together. Sometimes churches that have the strongest denominational heritage of liturgies and prayer books, aware of the dangers of mere rote, and newly alive to the demands of biblical theology, become the vanguard that warns us against mere traditionalism. Knowing how Old Testament terminology has so often been abused when it has been unthinkingly applied to the church, they become nervous about using the term “sanctuary” when referring to the biggest room in the church building and will never speak of a “service.” Conversely, churches from the most independent traditions, aware of the dangers of open-ended subjectivism and spectacularly undisciplined corporate meetings, and newly alive to the glories of public worship as a reflection of entire lives devoted to the living God, incorporate increasing solemnity, liturgical

responses, corporate readings, and the like. They do not hesitate to use terms like “sanctuary” and “service”—not because they associate such terms with either Old Testament structures of thought or with sacramentarianism, but (rightly or wrongly) out of respect for tradition.⁵⁶

But perhaps the most intriguing irony is how much the best of the corporate meetings of *both* traditions, matters of terminology aside, resemble each other in what is actually said and done. Nowadays, the actual shape of a Sunday morning “service” (meeting?) varies more *within* denominations (from the seeker-sensitive party to the charismatic party to the more Reformed party) than *across* denominations when comparing similar parties. For those (like the writers of this volume) committed to “worship under the Word,” minor differences in terminology and strategy surface here and there, while the fundamental priorities are remarkably similar, as is also the shape of their Sunday morning meetings.

7. Not long ago, after I had spoken on the subject of biblical worship at a large metropolitan church, one of the elders wrote to me to ask how I would try to get across my main points to children (fourth to sixth graders, approximately ages ten to twelve). He was referring in particular to things I had said about Romans 12:1–2. I responded by saying that kids of that age do not absorb abstract ideas very easily unless they are lived out and identified. The Christian home, or the Christian parent who obviously delights in corporate worship, in thoughtful evangelism, in self-effacing and self-sacrificing decisions within the home, in sacrificial giving for the poor and the needy and the lost—and who then explains to the child that these decisions and actions are part of gratitude and worship to the sovereign God who has loved us so much that he gave his own Son to pay the price of our sin—

56. One correspondent pressed further and asked what would happen if we could somehow put all our histories and traditions to one side and begin from scratch and then tried to label and speak of our corporate life, judging only by the terminology and theology of the New Testament. I take his point—but that is precisely what we cannot do. All of us speak and think and interact within a historical context, a context that needs reforming by the Word but that cannot be ignored. Moreover, I wonder if my interlocutor would like to construct all of his theology without benefit of historical insight, good and bad.

will have far more impact on the child's notion of genuine worship than all the lecturing and classroom instruction in the world. Somewhere along the line it is important not only to explain that genuine worship is nothing more than loving God with heart and soul and mind and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves, but also to show what a statement like that means in the concrete decisions of life. How utterly different will that child's thinking be than that of the child who is reared in a home where secularism rules all week but where people go to church on Sunday to "worship" for half an hour before the sermon.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps 95:6-8).