Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views

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EXPLORING THE WORSHIP SPECTRUM

6 VIEWS

- Paul Zahl
- Harold Best
- Joe Horness
- Don Williams
- Robert Webber
- Sally Morgenthaler

- Paul E. Engle series editor
- Paul A. Basden general editor
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BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Paul Zahl: Revised Standard Version

Harold Best: Various versions

Joe Horness: New American Standard Bible

Don Williams: Various versions

Robert Webber, Sally Morgenthaler, Paul A. Basden: New International Version
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INTRODUCTION

Paul A. Basden

Worship is once again hitting the big time, getting its due, coming into its own. Whether or not that is a good thing, you will have to decide for yourself. But it certainly is not a new thing. Throughout Christian history, public worship has attracted attention, stimulated discussion, and even provoked contention. Christ-followers have debated controversial issues—when and whom to baptize, how to observe Holy Communion, how often and how long to preach—only to watch those debates degenerate into rancorous fights and full-blown schisms. For example, Eastern and Western churchmen fought over the role of icons in worship, eventually dividing Christendom; Calvinists killed Anabaptists over the baptism question; Luther split with Zwingli over the meaning of the Lord’s Supper; Puritans separated from Anglicans over the priority of the preached Word. Worship wars have been ugly before. Will history repeat itself?

Today’s worship debates center mostly on these overlapping questions:

• Should adoration of the one true God express itself in one true way of worship?
• Since God is one and longs for his people to be one, should our public worship be more unified than diverse?
• Does the freedom of worshipers compromise the integrity of the One we worship?
• Does worship preference reflect our legitimate freedom in Christ or our selfish sinful nature?
• Simply put, does God want all people to offer public worship to him in more or less the same way? Or does God affirm and bless all of our approaches that seek to give him glory and honor? And if he blesses some and not others, what are his criteria for rejecting those approaches that do not make the grade? (And while we are at it, why has he not been clearer about communicating the grading scale?)

No one in his or her right mind wants to fight over worship. Keeping debates civil requires clarity and humility. Both of these qualities can be enhanced if we will look at worship through the eyes of theology, the Bible, and church history.

THROUGH THE EYES OF THEOLOGY

Worship is inherently theological. It is primarily about God. Specifically, it is about how Christ-followers offer to God their love, gratitude, and praise. Several theologians have served us well by defining public worship in ways we can understand. For example:

• “True worship is that exercise of the human spirit that confronts us with the mystery and marvel of God in whose presence the most appropriate and salutary response is adoring love.”
• “Christian worship is the glad response of Christians to the holy, redemptive love of God made known in Jesus Christ.”
• “Worship, in all its grades and kinds, is the response of the creature to the Eternal.”
• “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.”
• “Worship is . . .
  • To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,
  • To feed the mind with the truth of God,
  • To purge the imagination by the beauty of God,
  • To open the heart to the love of God,
  • To devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Notice the underlying commonality: Worship is our response to God’s holy nature and redemptive acts. God’s love evokes our love. But having agreed on that core conviction, we find that these definitions of worship begin to diverge. Some emphasize God’s mystery, others his revelation; some stress God’s holiness, others his loving-kindness; some are monotheistic, others Christocentric, still others Trinitarian.

The conclusion? There is no ideal definition of worship. No one has defined worship so completely as to plumb the depths of this divine-human encounter. To make matters more interesting, ancient creeds and modern confessions of faith have not settled on a single orthodox understanding of and approach to worship that has won the approval of Christians worldwide. There is no Chalcedonian formula for corporate worship.

Many believers say, “If you will just read your Bible, you will see how God wants his people to worship. (And it’s usually the way I worship!)” What exactly does the Bible say about worship?

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE BIBLE

A brief glance at worship in the Bible provides significant clues about how we should understand and practice it. Abraham built altars and offered sacrifices to God as a way of thanking him for making and keeping promises that one day Abraham would be a blessing to all nations. During the Exodus, Moses continued to build altars and offer animal sacrifices, but he introduced new elements as well: singing, festival days, reading God’s covenant, sprinkling worshipers with the “blood of the covenant,” receiving offerings, and building a tabernacle.

King David revolutionized Israelite worship. It all began when he located the long-lost Ark of the Covenant and brought it to Jerusalem, leading the joyous procession by dancing in such an undignified manner that it ultimately cost him his marriage. That “honest to God” mind-set led him to write songs for corporate and individual worship that have lasted for centuries as the Psalms. He organized Israel’s worship by assigning the priests and Levites to be ministers of temple worship, appointing them as gatekeepers, musicians, and treasurers.

As Israel’s worship matured and evolved, idolatry and immorality were lurking in the shadows. The people preferred
to worship false gods of their own making—which they could see and manipulate—rather than worship the one true God whom they could not control. So God sent prophets to judge his people and to call them to heartfelt worship and righteous living. Persistent disobedience led to permanent judgment as God sent pagan nations to defeat both Israel and Judah, destroy the city of Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple, and thrust many of the survivors into exile.

During the next five and a half centuries (587 B.C.—4 B.C.), worship changed dramatically. Sacrifice and music all but disappeared. In their place emerged three practices: reading the Torah, saying prayers, and reciting psalms. Keeping the Torah in all its detail became the goal of worship. Upon returning to the Promised Land, the Israelites formed houses of instruction and worship called synagogues. The synagogue service included a call to worship, extended prayers, recitation of the shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), Scripture readings, and a sermon. It also became the transition from Old Testament worship to New Testament worship.

To the chagrin of many Christians, nowhere in the New Testament can we find a full description, detailed order, or divinely ordained style of worship. Instead what we find are pointed reminders to gather together as believers in order to engage in several practices that summarize worship: praying, singing, reading and preaching and teaching Scripture, collecting offerings, baptizing, and observing the Lord’s Supper. But no prescribed approach is sanctioned as God’s favorite. Instead we see diversity early on.

- When we read about the early church in Acts, we discover that the first believers in Jerusalem gave priority to the apostles’ teaching, Holy Communion, prayers, and communal living;
- When we turn to Paul’s earlier letters, we find him correcting—not rejecting—the charismatic impulses of Corinthian worshipers, encouraging them to speak in tongues, interpret tongues, sing in the Spirit, and perform miracles;
- When we look at Paul’s prison letters, we notice that worship in the Asia Minor churches of Ephesus and Colossae consisted primarily of singing, teaching, and thanksgiving.

Whoever looks to the New Testament for liturgical uniformity meets just the opposite. Within thirty-five years of Jesus’ death and resurrection we can discern at least these three distinct patterns of worship in the early church.

To summarize: The Old Testament reveals varying emphases in worship in different periods in Israel’s history, while the New Testament unveils varying approaches to worship based on different locations and cultures. If we turn from the Bible to church history, I wonder what we will find.

> THROUGH THE EYES OF HISTORY

The spontaneous praise and preaching of the New Testament house church evolved into structured two-part worship by the second century: the service of the Word and the service of the Table. This represented a fusion of the synagogue service and the Upper Room meal. It also introduced a formal approach to worship foreign to the New Testament. Once Christianity was legalized and legitimized early in the fourth century, public worship moved from simple homes and assembly halls to elaborate cathedrals and sanctuaries. Worship increasingly began to reflect secular culture.

During the next millennium (A.D. 500—1500), worship changed dramatically. Clergy became actors, laity became audience, and priests performed the worship: reading the Scriptures, offering prayers, handling the elements of the Mass. The Eucharist assumed exclusive priority, overshadowing all other acts of worship commended by the Bible. In essence, “God had become unapproachable; Christ’s death had become unintelligible; the Spirit’s power had become unavailable.” Few similarities remained between the simple, heartfelt, participatory worship of the New Testament and the formal, lifeless, priest-led service of the Mass in the medieval church.

Several church leaders stepped forward in the sixteenth century to reform worship and reground it in the Bible. Chief among the reformers was Martin Luther. Luther abhorred the sacramentalism of his own Roman Catholic faith and sought to return the church to Word-centered worship. He replaced the standard seven sacraments with just two: baptism and Eucharist, both interpreted Christologically. He also stressed the importance of biblical preaching as a sign that the church was to be captivated by Holy Scripture alone.
Luther’s friend, Ulrich Zwingli, was more radical in his approach to change. Believing that nothing in our sinful world could truly communicate the beauty of God’s spiritual world, Zwingli rejected music and musical instruments (especially organs!). He dramatically parted ways with Luther over the Mass, convinced that the words of institution—“This is my body”—must be interpreted figuratively since the earthly elements of bread and wine could not be vehicles of divine grace.

Several years later, a new reformer, John Calvin, offered a moderating approach to their two extreme views. While he despised the empty, unbiblical ritualism of Roman worship, he wanted to avoid the excesses of Zwingli. He is best remembered for regarding the Mass as communion with the Lord, whose presence was dynamically active at the Supper; preferring divinely authored psalms to humanly written hymns; and stressing weekly exegetical preaching of the Bible.

While Calvin and Luther thought Zwingli went too far, some did not think he went far enough. A group of radical reformers emerged in central and northern Europe, known disparagingly as Anabaptists. They rejected infant baptism in favor of believers’ baptism, state religion in favor of church-state separation, and the Old Testament in favor of the New Testament.

At the other end of the spectrum was the Church of England, the Anglicans, who appreciated royal privileges and retained numerous Roman formalities. The reformation of the Church of England came primarily through its archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who compiled the Book of Common Prayer as the primary resource for church worship. Based squarely on the Bible, it reacquainted scores of believers with the Psalms, the Gospels, and Paul’s letters—all in their own language.

If Roman Catholicism could not escape worship reform, neither could Anglicanism. Puritans sought to change the Church of England so they could remain members in good conscience, while Separatists became impatient and bolted from the flock to offer worship that was built more on Scripture than on tradition. One hundred years later, the brightest lights in the reform of Anglican worship were John and Charles Wesley. They organized spiritually hungry Englishmen into small groups of genuine biblical community where they studied the Scriptures, listened to lay preaching, sang joyfully, and served the poor. By the time the Wesleys died at the end of the eighteenth century, worship in Europe was fragmented: one could find formal Romanists and Anglicans, semiformal Lutherans, less formal Calvinists and Puritans and Separatists, and informal Zwinglians, Anabaptists, and Wesleyans. Worship in America would show even more variety.

The earliest colonists in the New World brought their Anglican, Puritan, and Catholic faiths with them. Worship along the East Coast largely mirrored worship in Europe. But once the East Coast was settled, Americans moved west across the frontier. The religion that sprang up in this context was unexpectedly different; it became known as revivalism, named after its dominant emphasis on personal conversion via revival services. Frontier worship did away with formalities. Out went prayer books, educated ministers, and pipe organs. In came brush-arbor tents, song services, evangelistic sermons, and extended public invitations. In the process, the aim of worship changed dramatically. Worship was no longer for God. It was for the lost sinner who needed to be saved. The shadow of revivalism remains in much of our current worship practices.

While white Americans were worshiping out in the open as free men and women, black Americans were worshiping in private as slaves. If America’s original sin was institutional slavery, then slavery’s salvation was black worship. How slaves who were unjustly treated could accept the religion of their masters is beyond explanation. But the worship that was birthed in the midst of this evil and suffering has become a doxological treasure within American Christianity. Marked by dynamic and exciting preaching, lively audience participation, emotionally powerful music, heartfelt prayer, and otherworldly hope, these services called downtrodden slaves to patiently await the day when justice and goodness would prevail.

Pentecostal worship built on African-American worship, capturing its emotionality and adding an expectation of the Holy Spirit’s immediate intervention into everyday life to bless, heal, and empower. Paying almost exclusive attention to the charismatic passages in Acts and 1 Corinthians, Pentecostals rejuvenated glossolalia (speaking in tongues), recovered body life in worship so that every member had a part to play, and reveled in prophecy, miracles, and singing in the Spirit.
SIX VIEWS OF WORSHIP

Theology, Bible, and history all unite in this witness: Worship has never been practiced in all places by all people in one way. God is too profound and people too diverse for that to happen. The question now becomes: Can we identify specific ways that people are worshiping today and explain why they are the most common approaches?

Some years ago I realized that the world of worship was changing rapidly and looked very different from what I knew growing up. That observation led me to visit numerous churches, participate in multiple worship services, and experience the richness of divergent liturgies and doxologies. At the same time, I began to read every book on worship that I could find. This time of hands-on exploration and academic research coincided with a request for me to teach a course on Christian worship at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University. Eventually I put my thoughts on paper. The result was The Worship Maze: Finding a Style to Fit Your Church.

Soon after the book's publication, I realized that many people still failed to "get it." They were so busy defending their own approach to worship as "God's obvious preference" that they could never see the blind spots in their thinking. Then another idea occurred to me: Why not invite representatives from the most prominent schools of worship to present their views in a format where both strengths and weaknesses would be readily apparent? Why not provide a forum for interactive dialogue among scholars and practitioners who know their particular world of worship inside out? Thus was born the idea for Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views on the Church’s Worship.

Concluding that followers of Jesus Christ in North America are currently expressing their worship to God through six major approaches, I decided that my next task was to enlist capable writers who would clearly represent these views in an irenic spirit. God blessed the church in providing the authors who have contributed to this work. They are renowned for their leadership, writing, and speaking on worship. The contributors and their topics are the following:

Paul Zahl, Formal-liturgical worship
Episcopal rector

Harold Best, retired music professor
Traditional hymn-based worship

Joe Horness, worship leader
Contemporary music-driven worship

Don Williams, Vineyard pastor
Charismatic worship

Robert Webber, theology professor
Blended worship

Sally Morgenthaler, consultant and speaker
Emerging worship

Each chapter summarizes a particular view of worship. The author explains the philosophy and practice inherent in this approach, examines its strengths and benefits, and acknowledges its limitations. Then each of the other five authors responds from his or her specific viewpoint by celebrating commonalities, suggesting inconsistencies, and highlighting blind spots. By the time you finish reading this book, you will understand the richness of worship as practiced in six major traditions as well as recognize clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant approaches to worship in today's world.

It has ever been the case that worship is multiform, not uniform. God is not threatened by this reality—he ordained it; he expects it; he glories in it. As followers of him who said, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), we should celebrate every honest attempt to express love and devotion to God. Concurrently, our commitment to truth calls us to offer humble critique whenever we believe that a worship style has failed to provide a faithful expression of praise and sacrifice to God.

This book intends to be a forum where this kind of healthy dialogue can take place. May God use it to renew his people—the body of Christ—and make our worship more and more worthy of the One who deserves our all.
Introduction Notes

7Ibid., passim.
8Ibid., 44–45.
9(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
Chapter 6: Emerging Worship Notes

Proposal: Sally Morgenthaler

1From a 2002 telephone poll of 500 Internet users. Poll source: Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington, DC. www.pewinternet.org
3From interview with author.

CONCLUSION

Paul A. Basden

Insights into the mystery and majesty of worship, like the ones found in the preceding pages, make me realize again the profound truth uttered by the apostle Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:33–36).

The truth that grasps me, that will not release me, is this: God is past finding out, more powerful and holy and gracious than we can imagine, beyond our highest thoughts, deeper than our most intense emotions. Yet he calls us to worship him. Such is the challenge before us: We humans—mortal, flawed, fallen creatures that we are—offer our worship to God—the eternal, perfect, all-wise Creator and Lord. No wonder we approach worship a little differently from one another! Given our paltry perspectives, how could it be otherwise? When it comes to understanding how to worship God, the limiting and leveling factor facing every one of us is this: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then
we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Until we see face to face, our worship will always be partial. Until we know fully as we are fully known, our worship will always be incomplete. We may intend to worship God to the best of our ability as long as we have life on this earth, but we might as well embrace the fact that our approaches to this awesome task will differ. Hence there are several views of worship. We have highlighted six in this book.

Each of these views reveals vital truths about corporate Christian worship, and each raises critical questions about style and substance. Let us consider them one at a time.

FORMAL-LITURGICAL WORSHIP

Paul Zahl reminds us that worship should be vertical, biblical, and Godward. No element of worship should creep into a service without having to pass this one-question test: “Does it accurately reflect Bible truth about God, Christ, and humans?” But Zahl invites debate by equating “Bible-based verticality” with the formal-liturgical approach. When he suggests that services should be dignified, formal, and predictable, does that logically follow from his commitment to biblical, God-oriented worship? Or does he merely prefer the Anglican style because it is his heritage or it suits him best? While several Christian traditions historically have advocated and defended this approach as the biblical way to worship, we are living through a time when many Christians are finding bondage, not freedom, in liturgical forms. When they attend a formal-liturgical service and rise and sit and genuflect and say the creed, they sense that they are “strangers in a strange land.” They may find the otherness of God in such a service, but they feel too out-of-place to sense his concern.

What is the future of formal-liturgical worship? Don Williams answers that its user-unfriendly bias means that its audience is graying and shrinking. Robert Webber counters that its emphasis on divine transcendence means that it is reaching the younger generation, who are desperately seeking more than a sound bite when it comes to God. As for me, I think formal-liturgical worship will have to adapt stylistically—not theologically—to our changing culture, or it may become nothing more than a historical relic.

CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

With contemporary worship seemingly taking over in church after church, Joe Horness cuts through the heated debate to explain its appeal and popularity: It speaks in a familiar tongue. It uses “the language of this generation to lead people into authentic expressions of worship and a genuine experience of the presence of God.” Why should worship be in the language of the common people? The New Testament was originally written in koine (common) Greek. It tells the story of Jesus, who came to earth in the form of a common Jewish man. Nonetheless, contemporary worship leaders must avoid the trap of planning their services or gauging their effectiveness solely by pragmatic or popular standards.

Because contemporary worship is mostly defined by contemporary music, we should listen carefully to Paul Zahl’s caution

TRADITIONAL HYMN-BASED WORSHIP

Harold Best claims that “we were created worshiping” and that whether we worship the one true God or any of a hundred false gods, we cannot not worship. That insight alone explains the appeal of contemporary seeker services, the passion of charismatic services, and the dignity of more formal approaches. Best then highlights an approach to worship that centers on the hymn, or “texted song,” where biblical truth is expressed in musical form. He rightly values the theological richness of hymnody and disparages the paucity of depth in much contemporary worship music. His warnings should be heard and heeded by worshipers of every stripe.

But is hymnody a litmus test for wholesome worship? Can meaningful worship occur without hymns? Joe Horness and Don Williams are right to ask if eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry-in-song is automatically the best musical vehicle for carrying twenty-first-century Christians into the presence of God in worship. Best commends newer hymns by modern hymn writers, but he apparently has little use for praise choruses. I hope he remains open to the Holy Spirit’s surprises. I think we are witnessing the gradual merger of contemporary choruses and modern hymns. If that process continues, new choruses and new hymns will eventually become virtually indistinguishable.
that such music easily passes from intimate feelings toward God to intimate feelings that have nothing to do with God—and may have a lot to do with our sinful nature. And Robert Webber is on target when he reveals that the performance side of contemporary worship tends to move us into the realm of works and out of the realm of grace. Excellence can go by another name—perfectionism—that denies grace altogether. Let contemporary church leaders beware: Performance-driven worship leads to a treadmill mentality where we think God rewards us for our hard work. And that means the death of worship in Spirit and in truth.

CHARISMATIC WORSHIP

Don Williams points out that worship without the Spirit is dead. The goal of charismatic worship is for "worshipers to experience some measure of the full life of the triune God, including the Holy Spirit." His reminder that "every revival births new music" places the emergence of new praise choruses in the "surprising works of God" category. It also breathes new hope into the future of worship songs.

The pervasive problem of charismatic worship, however, seems to be charismatic theology. It can all too easily "pole-vault over Calvary on the way to Pentecost" (Zahl) and ignore both the problem of and the solution to sin. The necessary conjoining of Spirit and Word is often ignored, resulting in too much "God told me to do this or that" (Best). Sally Morgenthaler's quaip that "uninterpreted weird language is a problem" may make us smile, yet it reminds us that sign-oriented worship still has to battle a built-in bias to celebrate the Spirit's visible outward manifestations over the Spirit's quiet inner working. Charismatic worship will be more faithful to Scripture if it relinquishes control of the outcomes in worship, allows the Spirit to "blow wherever it pleases" (John 3:8), and rejoices in the Spirit's role as the Counselor who testifies about and points to Jesus—especially his victory through suffering.

BLENDED WORSHIP

Robert Webber does the church a true service when he reminds us that "worship is both divine and human." It is divine in that God's grace stands behind worship, motivates worship, and empowers worship. In that sense, worship is all about God. Yet it is also human in that we, the worshipers, must recognize his worthiness and give expression to that recognition in ways that are pleasing to him. There can be no worship that is solely God-centered as long as we humans are doing the worshiping.

But this is not the only paradox Webber espouses. He also commends worship that exists in tension—what he calls a synthesis of the liturgical and contemporary worship renewal movements of the twentieth century. What he describes (and what I have experienced in services he has designed and led) is "blended" only in the broadest sense of the word. If percentages were used, these services are twenty-five percent contemporary and seventy-five percent liturgical. The result? A doxological building that bears the distinct design of liturgical worship (lots of order and formality), with a few window treatments purchased at a nearby contemporary worship store (a couple of praise choruses). Blended worship that fully embraces both formal-liturgical and charismatic styles—in a one-hundred percent/one-hundred percent fashion—may be found in the recently formed Charismatic Episcopal Church, which unashamedly celebrates both Anglican liturgy and charismatic gifts. But I do not think Webber intends to go that far in his blend. If not, can his approach escape the fate of so many formal-liturgical churches—namely irrelevance, decline, and death?

EMERGING WORSHIP

Sally Morgenthaler uncovers the cultural manifestations of human sinfulness, especially the impact on those who have grown up in a post-Christendom, postmodern world. Her passion to reach out to this alienated generation calls all churches and leaders to realize that Christianity is one generation away from extinction. The question her chapter evokes is this: Does her approach to worship truly lead people to "engage . . . with the person and the continuing works of God through Jesus Christ?"

While Morgenthaler's theology is solid, her doxological proposals are more "iffy." Can, or should, a church employ every new cultural or artistic expression as a vehicle of worship? If so, does that not "prescribe an exhausting regimen of living absolutely in the moment" (Zahl)? More important, is there not a high probability that the clarity of the Word will get lost in the
shuffle of moving "from exhibit to exhibit" (Williams)? Certainly that would not be Morgenthaler’s goal—but it could become the result. Emerging worship, porous as it is toward postmodern culture, will risk its effectiveness if it uncritically adopts current art forms as vehicles of God’s voice but fails to elevate the preached Word of God above them all.

"YES, BUT ..."

In reading these chapters, my mantra became "yes, but ..." (also known as "almost thou persuadest me"). I always found much that I agreed with, yet I sensed that only a portion of the truth came to light. My conclusion? The human worship of God is too profound to be captured in one particular approach. The reasons are many and have received lively discussion in the chapters and responses. These include:

*Past versus Present*—Which is more important: "The faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3) or "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32)? We value the past because so much revealed truth has been transmitted over so many years from previous generations to our own. Indeed, awareness of this is why Paul wrote, "For what I received I passed on to you" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Tradition is clearly important! But even as we stand on past truth, we also look for God to do new things in the present. He clearly states, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:18–19) Balancing the known value of the past with the promising value of the present is a major challenge for today’s churches.

*Bible versus Culture*—Is there a way to exegete both Bible and culture so that worship is the beneficiary? Studying the Bible leads to certain conclusions about worship, such as the priority of prayer and praise and preaching. But Scripture never suggests specifically how we should do those things; we have freedom in the Spirit to decide the form of our doxology. Studying culture can provide insights into the forms that best communicate to those who seek to worship God and understand our message. So here we have another paradox to explore.

*Permitted versus Forbidden*—Since the Bible does not regulate many, perhaps most, of the forms of worship, how do we know what is permitted and what is forbidden? As Jesus-

followers we want the written Word of God to guide us in matters of faith and practice, and that includes worship. If we were under the old covenant, we would turn to the Pentateuch and find our outline for corporate worship there. But as children of the new covenant we must find our direction in the words of Jesus and the apostles—and they are strangely quiet on the details of worship. Wisdom suggests that we permit in worship anything that connects people to God in a vital way and that we forbid only what tarnishes God’s reputation or violates Christ’s love or glorifies human egos. This cannot be easily codified, but requires discernment and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

The answers to these questions will inform, probably even determine, one’s worship.

**THE FUTURE**

The doxological spectrum is blessedly broad, with Christ-followers offering their multiform worship in a heavenly variety of types and styles. Thankfully, the six views offered in this volume point to the full-bodied richness of united worship that we will offer to the Lord on that final day. Then we shall gladly join the chorus of “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them,” and sing with one voice and one heart:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)

Amen. [Maranatha!] Come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20)