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A Reader's Guide to Worship and Liturgical Studies

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A Reader's Guide to Worship and Liturgical Studies

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A Reader's Guide to Worship and Liturgical Studies

David Kneip

Abstract: The history of writing about worship in the Christian tradition is almost as old as the tradition itself, and it shows no sign of abating anytime soon. As a result, readers may find it difficult to know where to begin reading, and how to evaluate books that are popular or otherwise available to them. This annotated bibliography aims to assist readers in navigating the huge field of Christian publishing in worship studies, both by offering specific book recommendations and by demonstrating some of the different sub-categories that one might examine in attempting to choose what to read or study. The list aims to include both classic and contemporary literature, including some of the most recent publications.

Introduction¹

One could argue that, after books of and about the Bible, books about worship are among those with the longest history in the 2,000 years of the Christian tradition. From early instructions about baptism or the Lord's Supper, to medieval collections of prayers, to Martin Luther's translation of the Latin mass into German, to the countless hymnbooks published over the last 500 years, there has been a steady stream of books on worship throughout Christian history. As a result, to discuss books about Christian worship is to enter a large and complicated conversation.

Happily, this long tradition has continued unabated into our own day, as the continued flow of print media in the late 20th and early 21st centuries includes a great deal of work on Christian worship. Further, the tradition has continued to grow, especially with the advent of contemporary Christian music over the last 50 years, along with the questions about worship that development has engendered. As someone who has been leading worship in churches for over 30 years, I can absolutely affirm that

¹ I am grateful to Ron Bruner, the editor of *Discernment*, for encouraging me to submit for publication the work represented by this article. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who read and commented upon the article; their assistance has undoubtedly improved the final product, but of course all errors remain my own.

this continued growth is a blessing for the *church*, but it can create a difficulty for the interested *reader*; the field is so wide, it can be hard to know where to start exploring. Internet search engines, whether on their own or embedded within shopping websites, provide far more than one reader can sift, and of course the priority in which those results are presented can be invisibly shaped by search engine optimization tools, user reviews, and/or sponsorship deals with publishers. As a result, based on my experiences leading worship and over a decade of teaching worship to undergraduate and graduate students, I have created the reader's guide that follows. My goal is to help readers of *Discernment* approach the literature in worship studies with a greater degree of knowledge, so that they can plan wisely their reading and purchasing of books in this field.

A note on methodology: in what follows, I have organized the reader's guide with a variety of categories in mind. I begin with five suggestions of where a reader might begin, and then I proceed to more specific sections on biblical backgrounds, historical insights (noting specifically the books that provide access to primary sources), theological reflection, practical application, and books that give introduction to the academic study of liturgical and worship studies. Each section has at least five books in it, so that the reader has multiple works to consider, and each section is arranged alphabetically so as not to dictate priority of value. Finally, in a footnote in the conclusion, I offer one last set, not of recommendations, but of recent publications that I have my own eye on, if the reader is interested in the most up-to-date options.

It is important to note, however, that almost all of the books included here are valuable for multiple reasons. As a result, while I have placed each book in its appropriate section according to my judgment of its *greatest* strength, I have also indicated *other* strengths present in each book in bold type at the end of the citation and before the annotation. Those strengths correspond to the sections of the reader's guide: a book may include insights about worship in the **Bible** or in church **History** (including possessing a special focus on **Primary** sources), provide reflections on **Theology**, have intentional application for worship **Praxis**, and/or serve **Academic** study well. For example, Daniel Block's book below is *primarily* about the biblical backgrounds that lie behind our current practices of worship, and so I have classified it there; however, it also has strengths in theological reflection and in Block's comments about contemporary praxis, and I have noted those strengths as well. I do use one other abbreviation to acknowledge the reality that not all the books here are appropriate to put in the hands of laypeople or congregants, whether because of focus or tone.

As a result, I use the term **Laypeople** to indicate books that I think are appropriate for congregants or non-specialists.

Finally, given the size of the field, it will likely be obvious (if perhaps surprising) that there are important books missing from this list. I have not attempted to restrict myself to one Christian tradition in the books I have included here, nor to a single time period or set of publishers. As a result, given the limitations of space, this list cannot possibly be exhaustive, even as it attempts to be reasonably comprehensive. First, there are the books that, despite my education and experiences, I simply have not encountered or have accidentally overlooked; I hope that the reader will forgive such omissions. Second, there are those authors and books that I know about but have just not yet had time to engage; were I to write a second edition of this reader's guide in five years, I would hope that they would appear with greater reliability. Two examples from this group are the great Don Saliers, who published prolifically but primarily in the 1980s and 1990s, and thus was more of an influence on those I have read than on my own thinking; and the Lutheran scholar and pastor Frank Senn, who continues to write extensively but whose denominational heritage does not match my own or that of any of my educational institutions, thus lessening the likelihood that I would have encountered his work at depth. Third, there are *other* books written by authors I have included below. Some authors are quite prolific, others not so much; further, some have written on a variety of topics, while others have focused their work on worship studies. As a result, while I cannot give a blanket recommendation of *all* the work of *all* the authors, readers can often continue to benefit from their thought by searching for other books by the same authors. That said, I do occasionally indicate other books by a given author that might be of interest to readers. Fourth, there are not as many women on this list as there might be, and there are certainly not as many authors of color as one might wish. That reality is primarily reflective of the state of higher education in past decades, since it is typically more senior scholars who write widely read books; one hopes that, in ten to twenty years, there will be many more volumes written by women and people of color. Finally, and in a different vein, there are many worship-related books that are hyper-practical and/or devotional in nature. These books are typically written for a general audience, and they are often extremely useful in ministry contexts; however, many of them are not academic in any way, nor do they have an academic audience in mind. Combined with the fact that they are generally quite straightforward about their aim and purpose, this means that prospective readers can usually read the covers and the table of contents to reliably judge the value of the book;

thus, they do not need a guide to help them understand the books in question. That said, many of these books are incredibly good and deserve reading and consideration.² Happily, despite the absence of books from these five categories in what follows, there still exists a gold mine of resources for individuals interested in reading good, deep, theologically robust books about worship. My hope is that the more than four dozen books described below can provide a list that is comprehensive without becoming unwieldy, and that it can be useful for readers of *Discernment*.

Good Places to Start Reading

Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) **Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Cherry's volume is the best current book of which I'm aware of in terms of the practical, week-to-week nuts and bolts of planning worship. As an educated Methodist with pastoral and teaching experience (and a student of Robert Webber, who has multiple entries below), she can speak to both the "high-church" and the "low-church" among us, and many of her suggestions are equally useful across that traditional divide. There is an excellent theological introduction, along with considerations of music, prayer, and the traditional "four-fold structure" of worship that Robert Webber has written so much about. The reader should note that this annotation concerns the *first* edition of this book. There is a recently published second edition that is not in view here, but that does include a new appendix concerning the various forms of live-streamed worship that have become necessary and common during the COVID pandemic. Also, Cherry has published companion volumes to this book, one focused especially on music and one on "special services" like weddings, funerals, child dedications, etc.³

² Three quite good examples from the last decade are Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), for its earnest, forthright, and biblical encouragements to make worship a central part of our entire lives; Stephen Miller, *Worship Leaders: We Are Not Rock Stars* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), for its thoughtful discussion of various aspects of a worship leader's identity; and Sam and Sara Hargreaves, *Whole Life Worship: Empowering Disciples for the Frontline* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017), for its many creative ideas for enacting traditional Christian worship practices in contemporary ways.

³ Constance M. Cherry, *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016); idem, *The Special Service Worship Architect: Blueprints for Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, Holy Communion, and Other Occasions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

William Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Dyrness's book is different, in that it is definitely geared toward laypeople... and yet not just any laypeople. He certainly presumes a bit of interest in the subject, which of course is welcome to us as learners. But he also wants to help his reader make connections between all the sources of Christian theology – Scripture, history, theology, praxis, and culture – giving good voice to each. I especially find his comments on *spirituality* and worship compelling, in that we often talk much more about denominational distinctives or the various continua of modern discourse (liberal-conservative, traditional-progressive, etc.) while not always knowing some of the things that bind us together *across* those seeming divides. This book equips us to deepen our conversations with the less theologically educated individuals in our contexts, both as we inform them and also give them resources for their *own* investigation.

Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008) **Theology, Praxis**

Several years ago, I took a straw poll among worship leaders in my own city, asking them which book about contemporary worship I should adopt for my undergrads; Kauflin's volume was nominated three times more than any other! It focuses on the character and task of worship leaders, beginning with quite personal chapters, moving on to a discussion of what worship leaders actually do, and then including several chapters on "healthy tensions" that worship leaders must keep balanced. It is not perfect by any means, but it has much to commend it, including both the author's transparency and also his broader influence, which means that people "out there" are reading it. Readers who are not regular worship leaders themselves may find especially interesting Kauflin's final section on some "constituencies" with whom worship leaders must connect, including pastors and ministers.⁴

Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

⁴ Kauflin has written a more recent book, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015], and while I have not yet read it, I have heard quite positive reviews.

Robert Webber was essentially the “dean” of worship studies in North American Protestant circles, writing and speaking copiously on the subject. He was the originator of the concept of “blended worship” (see below), but one of his most-read books is this one. It is a broad introduction to worship, parallel to the introductions below by Ruth Duck, James White, and Susan White. Webber’s book’s strengths lie in its readability and “pitch” (it can easily be handed to educated laypeople), as well as the resources that he provides for continued study (e.g., the endnotes in each chapter). As a good Protestant, Webber starts with the “biblical foundations” of worship, following that section with others on a theology of worship, a history of worship, and the practice of worship. I highly recommend this book as part of a balanced diet of reading on worship.

James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) **Bible, History, Praxis**

White’s thin volume is still the best and most accessible short history of Christian worship. For a *deeper* consideration of many topics, I refer you to the volume edited by Wainwright and Westerfield Tucker below, but White is an excellent starting point. His presentation is clear and logical: he takes the church era by era, beginning with the earliest centuries, proceeding through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, and ending with the churches “of modern times” (i.e., approximately the 1970s and 1980s). Further, his categories remain the same in each chapter (e.g., preaching, church architecture, etc.), so that if one prefers not to read era by era, one can read topic by topic simply by flipping a few pages. In all cases, of course, one can go deeper, but this is still an wonderful overview.

Biblical Backgrounds

Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014) **Bible, Theology, Praxis, Academic**

Block’s volume is the best recent survey of what the Bible has to say about worship in both the Old and New Testaments. It is especially intended for a seminary-educated audience; there are many transliterated words from Hebrew and Greek (as well as some other languages). It is also very nicely organized in terms of its categories; the reader can linger for some time on one topic, while giving perhaps less attention to another one. I appreciate the various diagrams and images that are here, too, along with the full biblical “coverage” that one would

expect of an evangelical production. But probably the biggest reason I like this book is that it attempts to combine good biblical scholarship with deep theological thinking and reflections for contemporary life and worship; it is not simply a rehearsal of the biblical data nor a theological volume without scriptural moorings. In other words, it reflects what so many want to do: to think deeply *about* Scripture and also *with* Scripture, with a view toward what can happen in Christian communities today.

John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2002)

_____ and Greg Taylor, *Down in the River to Pray: Revisioning Baptism as God's Transforming Work*, rev. ed. (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2010)

_____, Johnny Melton, and Bobby Valentine, *A Gathered People: Revisioning the Assembly as Transforming Encounter* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2007) **Bible, Theology, Praxis**

I would be remiss if I published a reader's guide in an ACU-published journal without this set of volumes from an imprint of ACU Press. John Mark Hicks is one of the leading theologians in the fellowship of the Churches of Christ, and this trilogy of books emerges from his long engagement with Scripture, the history of the Stone-Campbell movement, and the lived reality of worship in our churches. Two of the three were also written with practicing ministers, thus increasing their depth of connection with contemporary churches. The reader who is familiar with the Churches of Christ will not be surprised to find deep engagement with the Old and New Testaments, and also with contemporary pastoral realities. But perhaps that reader will be pleasantly surprised to find some historical reflections as well, which provide useful context to bridge the author's comments on the biblical and the practical.

Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) **Bible, Academic**

This little book is a classic representative of mid-20th century work on worship matters. Martin mines the New Testament, considering what it says about worship matters and what that can tell us about worship in the earliest churches. Introductory chapters set the theological and historical stage, and then the bulk of the book is about specific areas in worship, like singing, the use of creeds or confessions of faith, material offerings, and the sacraments. Readers from the Stone-Campbell tradition will especially appreciate Martin's two chapters on baptism

that appear late in the book. For those who want a close look at New Testament texts that focus on worship, Martin is an excellent resource.

Ben Witherington III, *We Have Seen His Glory: A Vision of Kingdom Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) **Bible, Theology, Praxis**

Witherington is a New Testament scholar and a pastor, and that combination comes out in this winning little book. The book seems to be a series of essays on the topic of worship in light of the New Testament, in parallel to three books that he published in 2007 on baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the use of the Word in worship.⁵ Rather, his focus here is more on worship and the kingdom of God – both in the Bible and now. Some parts of the text are good for sharing with interested lay readers – say, in a Bible class – but others are more oriented to ministers in their studies. The overall content and Witherington's writing style make for a good, thoughtful read.

N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) **Bible, Laypeople**

This book is oddly marketed, in that it was originally a "Tom Wright" production for a small Christian publisher in England – thus betraying that its intended audience consists of laypeople rather than scholars. However, when it was reprinted in the USA, it became an "N.T. Wright" book, suggesting that it is deeper and more scholarly than it is. In fact, despite the depth of the topics in question – the praise-worthiness of God, and our call to reflect God's image in the world – it is much more like Wright's "For Everyone" series on Scriptural texts, in that it is easily readable, easily recommendable to interested laypeople, and deceptively simple. As is typical with Wright's popular-level books, there is incredible depth lurking behind his everyday analogies, and readers of all levels will benefit from this slim volume.

Historical Insights

Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002) **Bible, History, Academic**

⁵ *Troubled Waters: Rethinking the Theology of Baptism, Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper*, and *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (all in Waco, from Baylor University Press).

This work by Paul Bradshaw is a landmark in late-20th century worship studies. Readers from the Stone-Campbell tradition will be familiar with our traditional reading of the New Testament that is positivistic and non-critical; by the mid-20th century, this positivistic look at the ancient sources had extended to newer discoveries of worship texts from the first five centuries. Bradshaw, however, presents a readable, critical view of these ancient texts, helping us sort out what we can actually know (historically speaking), how well we can know it (epistemologically speaking), and what we cannot know with certainty. The chapters cover a variety of worship-related topics, including post-New-Testament matters like the Christian calendar and various rituals for ordination. Baptism provides a case study for his fundamental thesis that there was much greater diversity in the early church than is often acknowledged.

Joseph A. Jungmann, *Christian Prayer through the Centuries*, translated by John Coyne, S.J., new ed. by Christopher Irvine (New York, NY, and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2007) **History, Theology**

This book is a reprint edition by Paulist of the original from 1968. It is a slim volume full of deep insight, as the author attempts to trace the development of prayer practices from the earliest Christian centuries into the modern era. Historians often note that it is hardest to write “history” on the contemporary age, simply because we do not know what will last, endure, and be held valuable beyond our own generations. As a result, the real historical “meat” of the book ends in the early modern era, but he does include tentative observations on the past 150 years or so. This will be very useful for those especially interested in various Christian practices of prayer.

R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, ed., *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3rd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical/Pueblo, 1990) **History, Primary, Academic**

This book is essentially a compilation of Eucharistic prayers from the early church through the Reformation. There is almost no comment other than editorial introductions to the various texts, but it is helpful both for those who are interested in the history of Christian worship and for those who are interested in reading or using historical prayers in their own worship or that of their ministry context. I have used the prayers found here in study, in worship planning, in talking about the Lord’s Supper with others who may be interested about how things

were done “back then,” and for other purposes. This book is indispensable for those who want to explore the Eucharist from a historical perspective.

Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Sacraments and Worship: The Sources of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012) **History, Theology, Praxis, Primary, Academic**

No collection of books on worship would be complete without at least one entry by Max Johnson. An ordained Lutheran pastor, he has been teaching and writing at Notre Dame for many years, especially on the history of the liturgical tradition. This book is part of a series from Westminster John Knox that is dedicated, as the publishers say, to providing “resources for the study of major Christian doctrines.” As such, the book is not intended to be comprehensive but is rather an entrée to primary sources that illuminate Christian thinking about worship. Johnson begins with an introduction and then provides several long chapters, each on an important worship topic. The body of the text focuses on first liturgical theology, then baptism, the Eucharist, the “Service of the Word,” other occasional services, and finally the church calendar and daily prayer. Generally speaking, the chapters proceed historically, demonstrating the thought of the church early on and proceeding through the various stages of church history. Its greatest strength is as an *introduction*, giving readers the opportunity and resources to go deeper on these texts as they will.

Robert F. Taft, S. J. *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992) **History, Theology, Praxis**

Robert Taft is another “must have” member of any reading list on worship matters. Taft was for decades the dean of worship studies regarding the Christian East. This booklet is a short, readable contribution, providing exactly what the title suggests and what is not found elsewhere in this reader’s guide: a short history of the “Byzantine Rite,” that is, the liturgical ritual of the Orthodox churches. No chapter is longer than 15 pages, and each contains endnotes for readers who desire to go deeper. For readers who want more of Taft, I would recommend the less widely published, but in no way less valuable, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2001). This book is an anthology of many of Taft’s published essays, but with significant revisions and

updates, and it gives readers insights into conversations about worship in both the academy and in other branches of Christianity.

Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) **History, Theology, Primary, Academic**

This book is present in this list on its own merits and also as a representation of the riches available from the Pueblo imprint of Liturgical Press, now part of their larger Liturgical Press Academic initiative. While the Jasper/Cuming and Whitaker volumes on this list demonstrate the value of having access to annotated *primary* sources, Talley's book is an excellent example of *secondary* scholarship on those sources. The subject of the book, the Christian year, is one that many Protestants are slowly re-discovering, many through the gateway of Advent, and Talley's book provides a critical study of its historical origins. Worth the price alone is his discussion of the origins of Christmas, which can be useful in conversations with skeptics who dismiss Christianity as just an absorber and adapter of pagan rites. Other Liturgical Press volumes that do similar work on different topics are Enrico Mazza's *The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer* (1995) and Paul Bradshaw's *Rites of Ordination: Their History and Theology* (2013).

Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, translated by William Storey and Niels Rasmussen (Portland, OR: Pastoral, 1986) **History, Primary, Academic**

This volume is incredibly helpful for those wanting to investigate primary sources from the medieval period. There is a whole range of material here, including introductions to the topic and to specific texts, bibliographies of modern secondary works, lists of critical editions, and fuller descriptions of specific texts. It is an interesting read (in parts) for those curious about the history of medieval worship, but it is not particularly gripping as a narrative. Rather, it is more a book for scholars that also works for folks dipping their toes in the water.

E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed. revised and edited by Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical/Pueblo, 2003) **History, Primary, Academic**

This volume is rather like the "baptism counterpart" to Jasper/Cuming (see above). It has a nice introductory essay followed by *many* different examples of baptismal liturgies from the early and medieval periods. Some are more particular in their time and geography (e.g., some of the

examples from ancient Syria), while others are more developmental in scope (as in the section on Rome, which spans several centuries through the Middle Ages). All in all, this is an indispensable sourcebook for those interested in exploring resources about baptism from the first 1500 years of the Christian tradition.

Theological Reflection

Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003) **Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Best is a longtime professor, composer, and performer of church music. He has also served as an administrator and pastor, thus giving him great insight into worship from a variety of perspectives. I like this book for two primary reasons. First, it includes significant reflection on the arts from the perspective of one who is both an artist *and* a teacher/theologian – without relinquishing either “hat.” Second, his notion of “unceasing worship” is compelling to me, especially in light of our culture that is so *worshipful*... but of things that we would call “idols.” There is much more here to commend it, but those two items alone are worth the price of the book.

Kimberly Bracken Long, *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009) **Theology, Praxis**

Written from a mainline perspective, Long’s volume unpacks the biblical analogy of the church as the body of Christ, applying it to “presiding” in worship (her term). After two introductory chapters, Long considers how we use our hands, feet, eyes, mouths, and (ultimately) hearts for the sake of the body of Christ. In addition to its content, this book offers two things not typically present in many volumes on worship. First, Long includes more affect in her presentation – not in the sense of focusing on “feelings” rather than the cognitive, but rather in encouraging worship leaders of all sorts to pay attention to their own emotional lives. Second, she encourages us to notice what we do with our *bodies* in leading worship – again, not just to the cognitive, or to the content of what we are saying, praying, or singing. As a member of a fellowship that has focused its reflection on cognitive matters in worship, at the expense of the affective and the embodied, this book provides a useful corrective.

Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, translated by Matthew J. O’Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) **Bible, Theology, Praxis**

Corbon's book is rather different from most of the other entries in this reader's guide, not least because it is written by a French Catholic priest. It is also written as a reflection on worship from within the structures of the liturgy itself, an approach I find deeply thought-provoking. In other words, Corbon is writing as a Catholic and from a life that has been lived with the liturgy; it is not written "from above" or in a detached way. That said, the book does not merely situate itself "within" the liturgy; like the mass itself, it looks back to its biblical roots and forward to its lived reality among congregants. These characteristics are visible perhaps most strikingly in his connections with both the church year and the specifics of the Sunday mass, as well as in his final section about how worship connects with daily life.

John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010) **Theology**

Davis's book is a deep lament concerning our lack of awareness of God's continued presence in our lives and worship services. He writes specifically for evangelicals, in whose contemporary services there seems to be so much that is self-serving when it claims to be God-honoring, and much that focuses on the self rather than on the God who is the source of all strength and life. The chapters are long, and the tone is sometimes acerbic, but the book is deeply thought-provoking on a topic that rings very true in the context of much contemporary worship.

Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) **Theology**

For many readers, Dawn burst on the scene with her book *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). This book continues that tradition by thinking deeply, theologically, and spiritually about worship as it often occurs in our churches and as it interacts with the culture(s) in which we live. This particular volume includes reflections on Scripture, culture, community, character formation, and discipleship, in addition to some sermons that allow us to think about these topics in a different way. Dawn is always a useful resource for those willing to be challenged and wanting to think.

Jonathan Linman, *Holy Conversation: Spirituality for Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) **Theology, Praxis**

Linman is a Lutheran pastor and teacher, and his volume is extremely deep and well thought-out. The book is dedicated to the question of

whether *lectio divina* practices might be used as a schema for understanding Christian worship. Linman's thesis may not be convincing at an overall level, but the individual portions of the book are *well* worth the price of the volume. His first part takes up the question of spirituality and worship (see also Dyrness above), while the last three quarters of the book consist of "meditations on the Mass," in which Linman bounces back and forth between practices of *lectio divina* (meditation, contemplation, etc.) and the Lutheran Divine Liturgy (reading, prayer, sending, etc.). The book is more appropriate for individual reflection or group discussion than as a textbook, but it is undoubtedly compelling.

J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009) **Theology, Praxis**

Readers who receive catalogs from theological book publishers will likely have noticed various series that attempt to consider important topics from different viewpoints (e.g., Zondervan's Counterpoints series, IVP's Spectrum Multiview books, etc.). These books function as a written form of a panel discussion; various authors present different sides to a particular issue or topic, and then the other "panelists" respond in print to each other's primary (and much longer) contribution. There have been a few of these that consider matters of worship, but my favorite among them is this volume, edited by Pinson.⁶ While the primary chapters are of widely varying length (ranging from 25 to 64 pages), the categories are relevant for many readers: liturgical worship, traditional evangelical worship, contemporary worship, blended worship, and emerging worship. The "panelists" are usually generous with one another, and they do a good job highlighting areas of commonality and areas of conflict. This volume is very helpful in helping us understand the views of those we disagree with, or whose worship is very different from ours, and by demonstrating ways we can speak with one another charitably about such an important topic.

Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis**

⁶ For a similar book but on a more specific topic, see Gordon T. Smith, ed., *The Lord's Supper: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

A book of uneven quality, the Segler/Bradley volume has its value in providing scholarly thoughts from a conservative Baptist perspective (one not often represented in worship publications). Some of the chapters seem to be addressed more to pastors and church leaders, while others are more (or equally) appropriate for laypeople. Nevertheless, there is much to commend to Bible-honoring readers, as the authors take much that has been learned through the long Baptist tradition of the “Minister of Music,” and they combine it with a deep attention to Scripture and its theological implications. As an example, I often use their chapter on worship *space* with my undergraduates, as it hits on both theology and practice in a way that is helpful for my students.

James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)

_____, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013)

_____, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017) **Theology, Praxis**

Smith is one of the premier Christian philosophers writing today, especially insofar as he is writing for lay audiences and from a Protestant perspective. Others have written much more about these books, about Smith, and about his particular perspective. So, I will simply say here that he is interested in the interaction of our culture(s) and our Christian commitments, especially in the ways that the things we *do* shape how we *think*. As a result, we need a robust consideration of our worship *practices*, and we can also think more broadly about our public activities as part of our worship of God. Like Best (above), he encourages us to think about worship in a broader way; unlike Best, there is more specific engagement with the world we live in, thus challenging us as we think about what and how we worship.

Laurence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982)

_____, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)

_____, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Laurence Hull Stookey writes from a Methodist perspective, and he combines many of the blessings that Methodists have to offer those of us who are outside of that fellowship. From Methodism's roots in the

Anglican tradition, Stookey gives us deep theological and spiritual reflection on living church liturgy, including the church year. From its connections with Wesley and a very personal style of preaching, he encourages us to “apply it to our lives.” And from its broad connections with Protestantism, Stookey invites us into deeper thought about the two fundamental Protestant sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), as well as the practice of the Christian year.

Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) **History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Not long after it became popular in the 1990s, Webber’s “blended worship” approach began to fall on hard times, as worship planners began to use it simply to meet “quotas”: as long as there are the same number of old hymns and new songs, then people should be happy, right? But as in most corporate bodies, quotas and compromises often just mean that everyone gets the chance to be equally unhappy. As a result, Webber shifted to thinking in terms of what he called an “ancient-future” approach – bringing the resources of the Christian past into conversation with the contemporary church. This particular volume of Webber’s focuses on the Christian year, and it is one of the best books I know of on that topic, *especially* insofar as it can be used by laypeople. Webber assumes more of an awareness of the lectionary than of the year itself, although overall his desire seems to be to deepen Christians’ awareness of what they have been doing in their churches. But the best part of the book, by far, is his continual focus on how the Christian year can impact our spiritual lives. In other words, it is about the *opportunity* that the church year provides for Christians who want to draw closer to Jesus.

Practical Application

Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013) **Theology, Praxis**

Duck’s book is one of the best modern books I have found in the category of “books one might find in a seminary class on worship,” not least because she is both a teacher of worship and a creator of it herself (as a songwriter). It takes up many important topics, emphasizing some while focusing less on others, and it seeks the noble goal of integrating praxis with biblical and theological foundations. However, it comes from a mainline perspective, which means that some of her starting

points may be unusual for some readers, and she may highlight or diminish various topics in surprising ways; expected topics may include the Lord's Supper and prayer, while unexpected ones may include diversity and healing services. I choose to think of her as a cherished member of a "ministers' alliance" – someone with whom I may not always agree, but whose expertise and breadth of knowledge makes her contributions invaluable.⁷

Zac Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Zondervan, 2016) **Bible, Theology, Praxis**

Zac Hicks has a diverse background in worship leading (as he describes to some degree in the book), and that diverse background serves him well in this book. It begins with a call to worship leaders to recognize that they serve in a pastoral role, whether they know it or not. In other words, they are not just leaders in music or song, but rather they help to shepherd the church due to their work in leading the church's hearts by means of worship. The rest of the book, then, is Hicks's unpacking of sixteen roles that a worship leader plays; some are expected, like serving as evangelists or prophets, and others are less so, like being morticians or "tour guides"! The book closes with a heartfelt reminder of the importance of Jesus as the ultimate worship leader.

Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson, *Work and Worship: Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy* (Baker Academic, 2020) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Kaemingk and Willson situate their book in the larger "faith and work" movement, noting the power of that movement in helping individuals connect their daily work with their discipleship as Christians. However, the book arises from their contention that there has not been a parallel move to connect daily work with Sunday *worship*. For many Christians, their work activities are not only incredibly different from the things they do on Sundays (like singing, or sitting and listening to a speaker), but they are also profoundly different from the agrarian or military work described in Scripture. In their book, Kaemingk and Willson begin with deep theological and experiential reflections on this challenge

⁷ A second edition of this volume has also appeared in 2021, also published by WJKP; I have not yet been able to peruse the new edition, but some additions I notice from the table of contents include sections about contemporary conversations on race, interfaith understanding, and online worship, as well as an expanded forward-looking chapter at the end.

before mining the Christian tradition for help. After providing chapters engaging the Scriptures and the early church, the authors close with a constructive section, focusing on the Lord's Supper, "gathering" elements, and "sending" elements as places in worship that possess great potential for making meaningful connections between work and worship.

Gail Ramshaw, *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Ramshaw's book is one of the few on this list that has recognizable "textbook-like" features, like vocabulary words that are highlighted in the margins, "next steps" for interested readers at the end of each chapter that go beyond just more reading material, and a plethora of images throughout the volume. As a result, I have used it in my undergraduate teaching with good success. It is not allied with any particular denominational strand of Christianity, although readers from the historic, Reformation denominations will likely find much ripe fruit here, given its rich theological and historical reflection. Stone-Campbell readers will appreciate the chapter dedicated to baptism, while also (like me) wishing that there were a parallel chapter on the Lord's Supper. I think the book's greatest contribution is its focus on the lived reality of worship, including insights from corresponding academic disciplines. Ramshaw includes chapters on worship as ritual, with insights from ritual studies; on symbols in worship, with insights from semiotics; and on worship that takes place "between Sundays," with insights from cultural anthropology.

Lester Ruth, ed., *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020) **Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Lester Ruth is one of the leading scholars of contemporary worship movements, both in practice and in its history (see footnote 9 below, in the conclusion to this article). This edited volume of his builds in many ways on Webber's notion of "ancient-future" (see above), but it reads that impulse through the lens of contemporary music, concerts, and worship. In these, "flow" is important; more specific terminology is found in the second chapter of the book's introduction, where "an open-endedness of time" and "extemporaneity in prayer" are described and discussed, among other aspects of contemporary worship. Chapters 5-7 will likely be most valuable for many leaders, as they provide practical

suggestions about how the idea of “flow” can impact music, various kinds of speech in worship, and visuals (including color and video). Rather oddly, chapters 8-9 are included with these in the third section of the book as “body chapters,” when they function more as concluding remarks or appendices (in addition to those already present). Nevertheless, this book is thought-provoking, primarily in the ways it blends past practice with contemporary trends.

Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) **History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

This book is obviously also in the “ancient-future” track and came a bit later than the one noted above. It is not unlike some of the things Webber says in *Worship Old & New*: that our worship must be rooted in the history of God’s saving acts among his people. As such, the first half of the book is about that story and how it connects with worship; the second half then takes up particular worship *activities*, including our prayer, our Table fellowship, and the Word.⁸ As a result, of the books by Webber included in this reader’s guide, it may be the one most strongly oriented toward *praxis*.

James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis**

White’s book is the classic in the genre of “broad introduction to Christian worship,” already represented in this guide by Duck and by Webber’s *Worship Old & New*. White’s special contribution is his high-church Methodist/Episcopal perspective, which may make this volume a bit more appropriate for a seminary audience. Nonetheless, his constant attention to the pastoral implications and challenges that arise with various Christian worship practices, as well as his useful inclusion of historical insights, make this book a valuable addition to any worship bookshelf. For those familiar with White’s *Brief History* (see above), that book does not contain *different* material to what is found here; rather, it is an expansion of the comments in this volume.

⁸ In 1998, Webber published a slim volume entitled *Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old and New* (Nashville: Abingdon). This book is not a replacement of it, in that the format and contents are quite different, but in some ways it replaces it on the bookshelf. What *Planning Blended Worship* did for leaders in the 1990s, *Ancient-Future Worship* may do for leaders in the 2000s – perhaps in consultation with the Lester Ruth and Constance Cherry books noted above.

Susan J. White, *Foundations of Christian Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006) **Bible, History, Theology, Praxis, Laypeople**

Another good introduction to Christian worship, White's book has a bit of a different approach when compared with some of the others, mainly in the ways that she groups her topics. Her opening chapter about different ways of approaching the study of worship (history, Scripture, social sciences, theology, etc.) is quite interesting, and the sections on "contemporary challenges to Christian worship" are quite good, along with her case studies in worship. As always, it is not unhelpful to read an overview of a familiar topic from a new perspective, and so I have included it here.

Academic Study

Alexis Abernethy, ed., *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) **Theology, Praxis, Academic**

In addition to possessing a variety of essays about worship, theology, and the arts, this book's greatest contribution may be the insight it gives into recent social-scientific work on worship. It is part of an intriguing series coming out of Calvin College and Baker Academic which seeks to examine worship from a variety of perspectives. The essays here are of varying quality and interest, of course, but I find compelling the attempt to understand what is actually "going on" in worship, not so much from a neurocognitive perspective (that work can be found elsewhere) but rather from congregants' own reporting. While the book is not one I would put in the hands of laypeople, it could be quite valuable for ministers as they think about how they talk about worship in their ministry context(s).

Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, ed., *The Study of Liturgy and Worship: An Alcuin Guide* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press [Pueblo], 2013)

Theology, Praxis, Academic

This book is a recent production that introduces what scholars who study liturgy at the doctoral level encounter. The chapters are brief, truly a "guide" rather than a comprehensive resource. The purpose of this book is manifold: to give resources for further investigation (the "Further Reading" section at the end of each chapter), to give vocabulary for talking about worship "things" in a scholarly way, and to demonstrate the many different connections that modern scholars are

finding between worship and other “church matters.” For those who want some of the latest *scholarly* thought on various topics in worship, this book will be an excellent choice.

Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, S.J., ed., *The Study of Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) **History, Theology, Academic**

This is a classic work of liturgical scholarship; in some ways, it is the precursor to the volume edited by Wainwright and Westerfield Tucker (see below). It begins with a long essay on a theology of worship, before proceeding to a section of many chapters on the historical development of liturgy leading up to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. There are then sections on specific areas of liturgical study: baptism/initiation, the Lord’s Supper, ordination rites, daily prayer, the church year, and what they call the “setting of the liturgy.” The latter involves various ceremonies, church music, liturgical language, architecture, and priestly vestments. The book ends with two essays that are reflections on liturgy from a pastoral perspective. Much of the scholarship has been updated since this book’s publication, but it can still be read with profit – especially its individual essays – for the deep learning and reflection that its authors present.

Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014) **Bible, History, Theology, Academic**

McGowan’s volume can function as a kind of companion to Bradshaw’s *Search for the Origins* (see above), in that it considers much of the same material but from the perspectives of the social sciences and theology. The book is simply organized, beginning with an introduction and continuing with chapters on meals, the “service of the Word,” music, Christian initiation, prayer, and ways of worshiping with time. Always conversant with other secondary sources, the book is more scholarly than appropriate for a lay audience, but it is very readable and thus perfectly appropriate for advanced students.

Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, ed., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) **History, Theology, Academic**

This Oxford volume is a massive production of nearly 1,000 pages, thus contributing to a rather high price for purchase. However, it is quite

useful as a type of “handbook” – the kind of thing that one can pull off the shelf to simply peruse at leisure or to get a good introduction to a particular topic. The 34 essays included approach the study of worship from a variety of angles: some are more historical in focus, some more denominational, some more geographical, and some a combination of these. Each essay provides good depth to its topic; they average 25 pages apiece, including footnotes and a bibliography for further exploration. Finally, there are *many* black-and-white images and diagrams here, in addition to 31 color plates that connect with various chapters. In other words, this is an excellent reference book, but it is more like a handbook than an encyclopedia.

Conclusion

I began this reader's guide noting the continuing wealth of material being published in our day; I conclude by noting that I do not foresee it abating anytime soon, especially with the continued growth of online publishing, and because of the enduring interest of Christians in worship. As a result, as soon as this readers' guide is published, it will be at least partially out of date! Further, if I spent time attempting to read all the new books that are being released, the time it would take to read and annotate would result in more books being published, and the cycle would never end. With that, I draw my remarks to a close, and I return to my reading. I hope that this reader's guide inspires you to join me in reading, gives you more and better things to read, or both.⁹

⁹ The reader may be curious which books I plan to read next. Here are five of the newest books that have come to my attention, which I have not yet had time to read but which would surely be on the list if I were to publish a follow-up to this reader's guide in 12 months' time: David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021); Nathaniel Marx, *Authentic Liturgy: Minds in Tune with Voices* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2020); Michael Neale and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Way of Worship: A Guide to Living and Leading Authentic Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020); Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong, *A History of Contemporary Praise and Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), which is an expansion of their 2017 volume from Abingdon entitled *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*; and Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021).

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