

INTRODUCTION

John Baigent

After a career in schoolteaching, teaching-training and lecturing in Religious Studies, John Baigent is now engaged full-time in Christian teaching and training in the context of a local church and in a wider ministry.

Worship is high on the agenda of the modern church. And rightly so, because the church is called to be a worshipping people (1 Pet 2:5). In recent years, however, there has been a lot of talk and a plethora of books (see the bibliography at the back of this volume) suggesting that certain sections of the church have only just discovered what worship 'really' is. Worship has been, in the words of A W Tozer, 'the missing jewel of the evangelical church'. The implication is often that the rest of the church still does not know what worship is. We are even told (by some) that unless we adopt certain styles of worship—use modern songs, raise our hands, clap, dance, sing in tongues, etc—we are not fully and freely worshipping.

Brethren find this kind of talk especially provocative. We often pride ourselves on the depth and quality of our worship at the Lord's Table. *We* rediscovered 'open', Spirit-led worship long before these recent upstarts! But in point of fact, what has happened to us is that a way of worshipping which was new, fresh, liberating and exciting 150 years ago has often become a stale, predictable, rigid, joyless routine. A radical reassessment of our congregational worship is long overdue.

The essays in this volume are not simply a Brethren response to the current spate of paperbacks on worship (and certainly not an uncritical swallowing of everything in them!), nor are they a desperate, last-minute reaction to the demands of our young people for lively, contemporary-style worship. They represent the independent fruit of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the state of worship in our churches and a careful and considered re-examination of the teaching of the scriptures.

The first essay began life as a paper given at a CBRF/Partnership seminar entitled 'Declare His Glory: a fresh look at our congregational worship', held at London Bible College on 11 May 1985. In view of the

variety of ways in which *we* use the word 'worship', it tries to discover the *essence* of the biblical concept of worship and determine whether scripture lays down any particular *forms* that our worship should take. (On that same occasion Graham Kendrick spoke on 'Worship today among evangelicals and charismatics', outlining the reasons for current changes and the dangers in contemporary styles of worship. He also led us in a time of modern, informal worship.)

The other essays were all written specially for this review. In the light of the evident flexibility that scripture allows us, Neil Summerton suggests ways in which traditional Brethren practice could be revitalized, made culturally more appropriate and (in fact) become more biblical. As the experience of Glenwood Church, Cardiff (described by Robert Parsons in *Ten Worshipping Churches*) shows, it is relatively easy for a church to adopt a more contemporary style of worship in a 'family service', but it is much harder to change the traditional Brethren-type 'breaking of bread meeting'. Neil's essay begins to point us in the way we need to go.

Gerald West starts from the centrality of the 'breaking of bread' in Brethren church life and discusses the exact relationship between worship and the Lord's Supper. Through a fresh exploration of what the New Testament says about it, he encourages us to widen our understanding of the significance of the act of remembrance.

John Allan deals with three particular methods or means of expressing worship: music, movement and silence. He is quite clear that scripture gives us freedom to use any method or means which *helps* us to achieve the purposes of worship. The implications of this balanced treatment of these topics need to be thoughtfully weighed and then carefully applied in our churches.

'Women in worship' is a *cri de coeur* from Barbara Baigent. She does not *argue* for the full participation of women in congregational worship (that was done to some extent in *Women in the Church, Christian Brethren Review Journal No 33*). Rather, on the basis of the involvement of women in worship in biblical times and since, she *pleads* for women today to be given the same freedom as the men have to take part audibly in congregational worship.

Finally Peter Cousins widens out the discussion and relates worship to the whole of life. From both the Old and New Testaments he shows that God is not satisfied unless his people 'live' their worship.

There is inevitably a certain amount of overlap in the essays in a symposium like this. That is all to the good. It demonstrates the large area of consensus that exists between the writers, particularly on the theological principles relating to worship. But it is equally clear that they would not all necessarily agree on how to put those principles into practice

in any given situation. The fact that they are not presenting a party line makes the substantial agreement all the more impressive.

Above all, this is a practical work. In the past, Brethren writing on worship has been strong on theology and weak on practice. Thus, for example, despite the fact that *The Church*, edited by J B Watson (Pickering & Inglis 1949), was labelled on the spine 'a symposium of principles and practice', it contained virtually no discussion on *how* God might appropriately be worshipped in the 20th century. Clearly the traditional Brethren ways of worship were regarded as non-negotiable.

The writers of these essays believe that each generation needs to discover for itself the best ways of putting into practice and expressing the unchanging principles that are taught in scripture. They will be happy if readers are stimulated to examine their present practice in the light of those scriptural principles and to consider (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) what changes need to be made in their congregational practices so that God's people are better encouraged to bring him the worship which he so desires and deserves.