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*A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership*  
Volume 9 • Number 3 • Summer 2000

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### *CELEBRATING THE SABBATH*

Bruce A. Ray

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing (2000)

125 pages, paper, \$8.99

It was a very hot Saturday in June. Sitting in the shade of the truck and enjoying a slow drink of cold water I listened to the discussion. There had been an equipment breakdown and we weren't going to get all of the hay out of the field before dark. "Are we going to work on Sunday?" was the question up for consideration. Rain was forecast for Sunday night and Monday morning.

The final decision has been lost in my memory, but I do recall a comment made by my grandfather, "The last time we worked on Sunday, nothing went right. The machinery kept breaking down. It's just not a good idea to work on Sunday." I remember my grandfather's comment sounded more like a bad luck omen than something distinctly Christian, more like tossing salt over a shoulder than a fervent commitment to uphold "the law of God."

In the years since those "hay days," I've encountered a full-spectrum rainbow of opinions regarding Sunday protocol. What's acceptable to do on Sunday and what's taboo depends on who you're talking to and when you're talking to them. In college, I had friends who wouldn't watch television on Sunday, but would go to the student center and play billiards.

Later I met couples who thought it definitely wrong to work on Sunday, but they went to restaurants and paid other people to work for them. (Regarding the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," would they apply the same logic: It would be wrong for me to choke my disagreeable neighbor, so I'll hire someone else to do it?) And I once observed "ox-in-the-ditch" die-hards work to restore air conditioning on a hot July Sunday. Is air conditioning a necessity?

Throughout the years, as I contemplated the inconsistent and bewildering varieties of Sunday codes and ethics, I searched the Scriptures for clarification. I discovered, to my dismay, this isn't an easy subject. Commentaries and confessions have enough diverse opinions to try both mind and patience. As a result, many of us are still waiting for the definitive resource on this subject. That's why Bruce Ray's new book piqued my interest.

*Celebrating the Sabbath* is a readable, creative book. Pastor Ray's good-humored approach to the topic comes through in the very first chapter, "McSabbath." Various other chapters such as "Sabbath or Lord's Day? Old Testament Roots" and "Sabbath or Lord's Day? New Testament Flower and Fruits" establish a pulpit flavor. But in spite of its enjoyable style, content and scope are disappointing. Ray, himself, admits: "If you are looking for the final, definitive, answer-every-question book on the Sabbath, that will overcome every objection and convince every doubter, this isn't it" (7). He's right. It isn't even an "answer-most-of-the-questions book."

Ray faces his audience with the assumption that they are already essentially in agreement with his Sabbath-Lord's Day presuppositions, or at least sympathetic to them. Undergirding for his reasoning is limited to a declaration of the continuity between the two covenants (95). A summary of this position is found in the following paragraph:

The Old Covenant sign of circumcision is transformed into the New Covenant sign of baptism. The Old Covenant Passover is transformed into the New Covenant Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-20 and parallel passages; see also 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). The Old Covenant temple is transformed into the New Covenant temple: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5; see also 1 Corinthians 3:16). And The Old Covenant Sabbath is transformed into the New Covenant Sabbath (or Lord's Day) by the resurrection of the Lord of the Sabbath from the dead (43).

While the transformations of Passover to Lord's Supper and temple to living stones have supporting Scripture texts, the declaration that Sabbath transforms to Lord's Day has no supporting text. A footnote regarding this absence says: "There is no text which explicitly says this. The reader should consider the evidence that follows and judge whether or not it agrees with the Scripture" (121). The same hermeneutic is used for circumcision transforming into baptism<sup>1</sup> and for Sabbath becoming Lord's Day. Ray confirms there are no explicit texts that validate this transformation. There are, however, texts contrary to such assumptions that must be explained. These explanations are where this present work falls short.

One of the problem texts for Sabbath-Sunday is Colossians 2:16-17. Some regard this text as teaching that the observance of certain days is an *indifferent* matter for Christians. Ray's assessment is otherwise: "Did Paul intend to do what Jesus did not, and abolish the Sabbath? Certainly not" (95). Because he asserts the continuity between old and new covenants, he cannot have Paul meaning what he appears to mean.

Ray attempts to fortify his position by insisting that Jesus taught the continuing validity of the Sabbath:

The relationship between the Old Covenant and the New is not one of identity, but one of progressive continuity. This means that while the specific day and form of sabbath observance have changed in the New Testament, the principle of Sabbath keeping remains basic to biblical faith and life (95).

In an earlier claim, Ray asserts: "Jesus came to restore the law, including the fourth commandment, not to dismantle it (see Matthew 5:17-20)" and "Jesus blasted the Pharisaic Sabbath, but in doing so he did not harm the biblical Sabbath at all. Indeed, he liberated it, restored it, and filled it full of meaning once again" (73). His analysis of Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount, though traditional, is not convincing. While he later admits difficulties with the Puritan approach to Sabbath (107-110), he essentially agrees with the Puritan hermeneutic. Thom Smith in writing about problems within Puritanism observes,

The Puritans, in their failure to see the progressive development of the Bible, coming as it does to the climax in Jesus Christ, did not give adequate place to the supremacy and finality of the Lord Jesus as the prophet and law-giver of the New Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Can it be, as Ray asserts, that Jesus merely restored an appropriate meaning to the Old Testament law? Or is this an example of diluting "adequate supremacy"? Did Christ come as a maintenance worker to resurface and restore the track so that we wouldn't have to trip on the potholes of past Sabbath problems? Or did he come as a Victor to run the track for us because we couldn't do it ourselves?

The best interpretation of these difficult verses says that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment. The antithesis is not between "abolish" and "keep" but between "abolish" and "fulfill."<sup>3</sup>

New Testament scholar, Douglas Moo, points out the specific difficulty as it relates to the Sabbath question:

An even thornier problem for those who would elevate the Decalogue to the status of eternal moral law is presented by the Sabbath commandment. Thus, in general, it is notoriously difficult to know from the Old Testament itself which commandments should be placed in the category of "moral" and therefore eternally binding in the form *in which they were first given*.<sup>4</sup>

Ray contends that "when we consider the organic and progressive nature of biblical revelation, we are not surprised to discover that the Sabbath and the Lord's Day are one in essence, just as the acorn and the oak are one, even though they differ in form" (42).

Of course, one could argue the acorn must yield up itself before an oak can grow. So, despite his intention to clarify the Sabbath-Sunday issue, Ray simply stirs the murky waters of the debate. The absence of supporting Scripture in this work, which is intended to defend the cause of Sabbath-Sunday, actually gives credence to doubt rather than assurance.

Hebrews seems plainly to assert that the conclusion of the Sabbath observance is in the work of Christ.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs" (Hebrews 4:8-11).

Is this text declaring that the promise of God is the Sabbath rest we now enter? Is it a dual promise, not only of rest

from our own works, but also rest in the work of Christ?

In addressing this Hebrews text, Ray asserts that the word *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 can mean "Sabbath-keeping" (51-52 and 95) and should be interpreted that way. Though there is some etymological justification for this translation based on a related verb used in the Septuagint, this is a prime example of using bare etymology to arrive at a questionable interpretation or to support a previously held position. Context is also determinative in understanding the meaning of words and sound hermeneutics is incomplete without this element. Muscling Christian Sabbath-keeping into this text is simply bad exegesis.<sup>5</sup>

Ray uses Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees over the Sabbath as proof texts verifying the continued importance of Sabbath standards. This would carry more weight, but he fails to take into account that Jesus was living under and fulfilling the Old Covenant. Christ's task was to observe the Law perfectly. His obedience was not in the flawed Pharisaic way but in the Law's true intention. He kept it because we had proven we could not. But nowhere does Jesus teach that the Sabbath would somehow be transformed into another observance after his death and resurrection.

Unfortunately, Ray neglects to deal at all with one key problem text for the Sabbath/Lord's Day thesis: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord" (Romans 14:5-6a). Any discussion of the Sabbath question is incomplete without inclusion of this key text. In his discussion of Christian liberty, Paul appears to teach that the observance of specific days is a matter of conscience, not a matter of commandment.

Ray writes: "The Sabbath is admittedly a problem for many Christians" (112), and, the problem is "the rebellion

in our hearts. . . . On the inside we still resist God's right to rule over us" (113). The believer who finds a problem with this Sabbath and Lord's Day equivalence is regarded as inconsistent at best and sinfully rebellious at worst. Does the following sound like rebellion?

The entire Mosaic law comes to fulfillment in Christ, and this fulfillment means that this law is no longer a direct and immediate source of, or judge of, the conduct of God's people. Christian behavior, rather, is now guided directly by "the law of Christ." This "law" does not consist of legal prescriptions and ordinances, but of the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles, the central demand of love, and the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

So, after listening to yet another voice expounding Sabbath propriety, I'm still waiting for an epiphany regarding the subject. And on hot weekend days I still occasionally find myself a spot of shade, enjoy a slow drink of cold water, and ponder the Sabbath question. And I smile because my grandfather's declaration may be as hermeneutically sound as the declarations of more learned minds: "The last time we worked on Sunday, nothing went right. . . . It's just not a good idea to work on Sunday."

DOUGLAS SHIVERS  
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#### Notes

1. I admit I do not find this argument regarding circumcision/baptism convincing. What is amazing to me is that others reject this reasoning on baptism but accept it on Sabbath/Lord's Day.
2. Thom Smith, "The Perils of Puritanism," *Reformation and Revival Journal*, Volume 5, Number 2, (Spring 1996), 89.
3. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebel, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984), 8:143.

4. Douglas Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Wayne Strickland, ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 337 (emphasis in original).
5. Ray cites support from both Joseph A. Pipa and A. W. Pink for this interpretation.
6. "The Law of Christ," 343.

### **THE READING AND PREACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

Hughes Oliphant Old

Volume One: The Biblical Period  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998)  
383 pages, paper, \$35.00

Volume Two: The Patristic Period  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998)  
481 pages, paper, \$42.00

Volume Three: The Medieval Church  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1999)  
646 pages, paper, \$45.00

Rarely does a set of works so encyclopedic, yet so genuinely helpful to serious students of worship, come along. Hughes Oliphant Old is both a minister of the Gospel and a noted author. He is a member of the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey, and the author of more than a half dozen other important works, most in the field of worship and pastoral ministry.

Old clearly states his aim for this multi-volume series (which is still in progress) and he sets the bar high enough to make his work a serious challenge for fresh research. He writes, "So, then, the purpose of this work is to come to an understanding of how preaching is worship, the service of God's glory" (1:7). How did preaching differ from one age to another? What difference did it make for the life of the

Church? How did Christians, and ministers, view the work of preaching the Word of God in terms of the corporate gathering of the congregation? This focus not only drives Old's work but also wonderfully harnesses his energies in a magnificent way.

The scope of this study is also clearly stated at the beginning of volume one. He writes, "Not all preaching is worship in the same way. As this study has progressed, several genres of preaching have appeared, and these different genres suggest still different approaches to our basic question" (8). Old observes that five particular genres have appeared and reappeared throughout the history of preaching. These are: (1) expository preaching, (2) evangelistic preaching, (3) catechetical preaching, (4) festal preaching, and, (5) prophetic preaching. Several minor genres are mentioned but do not play a major role in this study. (e.g., funeral sermons, saint's day sermons, and biographical sermons, which could form one genre and alms preaching, or fund raising sermons, which could form another. In addition, penitential and missionary preaching could form still another genre. Old treats all of these as different *aspects* of evangelistic preaching.)

The definitions that Old provides for each of these five genres are quite helpful. Consider the first, as an example. Expository preaching, often discussed and frequently misunderstood in our day, is defined as "the systematic explanation of Scripture done on a week-by-week, or even day-by-day, basis at the regular meeting of the congregation" (9). Old argues that this practice goes all the way back to the synagogue, long before the time of Jesus, where the Law was read each Sabbath. The reader would complete a section of Scripture and then pick up at the next service exactly where he had left off at the previous one. An illustration occurs within the Old Testament when Ezra gathers the people at the water gate and reads the Word, offering expla-

nation of the reading. With the establishment of the Christian Church the Law and the Prophets were still read in congregational gatherings. (Paul exhorted Timothy to give himself to the public reading of Scripture.) And, Old argues (10), the Gospels make it clear that Jesus was himself an expository preacher.

The value, however, of Old's insights regarding the various genres of preaching is not simply to be discovered in definitions, as clear and helpful as these are. The real value, especially for those of us who have majored on expository preaching, is to see that other legitimate types of preaching are also clearly biblical and historical. Too many evangelicals, in our own day, argue that *only* exposition, as seen in week-by-week sermons straight through biblical books, is valid. The result of this rigid methodology is tragic! We have thousands of churches in the United States that hear such expository sermons weekly and are content to "hear the Word" without doing much about what they hear. They sit and soak in the Word's content but with little obedience to the Word's imperatives. Clearly there is room for, and need of, the other four genres of preaching. And Hughes Old's massive survey should convince any serious reader that there is not only a place for these genres but a *need* for all of them.

Old begins this survey by taking us to the roots of Christian ministry—in the worship of Israel. Sadly, few modern students of preaching and its relationship to worship take us to this *necessary* beginning point. His overview of Old Testament preaching and worship is brilliant. He is keenly aware of the developing field of biblical theology and interacts with its results helpfully. From these roots (covered in about 100 pages) he then brings the reader to "The Preaching of Christ and the Apostles." Here, in 130 pages, he opens up the entire New Testament as it relates to his subject. This is wonderful material and well worth the

book in itself. The third section of the first volume covers the second and third centuries of the Christian era. From the *Didache* and Justin Martyr's *Apology* he moves through Tertullian's preaching to Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

The second volume treats the preaching of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church, from Augustine to Gregory the Great. There is much here that most readers will find engaging, even surprising, I predict. The third volume covers the period of the Church after the Fathers, and prior to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Again, most ministers and lay people, at best, have a superficial (even incorrect) idea of Christian preaching prior to Luther. We think little good preaching was happening, only the celebration of ceremonies. Hughes Old will open your understanding and impact your preaching in ways that will deepen and mature your own work.

William Edgar, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), offers an endorsement on the back of volume two that I must quote to give you an idea of just how much a respected conservative scholar values these important volumes.

Studying these volumes is like walking around a great cathedral: every section, however distinctive, unites in a grand design whose aim is to restore preaching to its rightful place. This multi-volume work is easily *the best history of preaching ever written*, one that will serve generations of those whose faith comes by hearing. But far more, this work is *the best defense of preaching available*: it proves that in every era, though with astonishing variety, *the ministry of the Word is central to the worship of God* (emphasis mine).

Until now the history of preaching has not received the kind of scholarship these volumes provide. We have several

popular and useful volumes that survey the field but these volumes are both magisterial and wisely crafted. We must reunite preaching, and its relationship to public worship, with the related disciplines of biblical theology and historical practice. Hughes Oliphant Old does this. Though these volumes could be used as textbooks for classes on worship and preaching, it would be a great shame if this is the only way they are used in evangelical circles. Pastors, I urge you, indeed I humbly implore you, get these volumes and read through them systematically. They will repay you wonderfully, and you might develop into a much better preacher as result. God knows we need better preachers in the modern Church if we are to see the beginning of modern reformation.

EDITOR

**DOXOLOGY: THE PRAISE OF GOD IN WORSHIP,  
DOCTRINE, AND LIFE**

Geoffrey Wainwright  
New York: Oxford University Press (1984)  
609 pages, paper, \$19.95

Wainwright is a Methodist minister and professor of systematic theology at the divinity school of Duke University. This work, first published in England in 1980 (when the author was at Queen's College in Birmingham), is described by Wainwright as both "a systematic theology written from a liturgical perspective" and as "a theology of worship" (Preface). He rightly discerns the profound and necessary connection between worship and doctrine, and seeks to show that interdependence throughout the book.

Not for the faint of heart, this is heavy and difficult reading—the author often goes off into pretty dense, philo-

sophical reasoning. The book shows an incredible depth of erudition and scholarship (There are 1,141 endnotes covering 121 pages!), and the author demonstrates a remarkable grasp of historical documents, theological works, and hymnology, often bringing them to bear on one another.

For all of Wainwright's sophistication, his treatment often takes on a warmly orthodox, even evangelical, tone. For instance, he speaks of "the living God who is the gracious initiator of our personal relationship with himself" (16). And he states that "by feeding on the Word of God, the believer is changed according to God's character" (18). He is also not afraid to use biting and witty irony to point out the shortcomings of certain scholarly approaches to Scripture: for instance, he takes Bultmann and his demythologization to task; rather than a way to get at the kernel of truth underneath, as Bultmann insists, Wainwright prefers the suggestion that "the peeling of an onion offers a more appropriate model for the process of demythologization: one peels away each layer until finally there is nothing left, though one has cried a lot along the way" (193).

Wainwright gives us an important discussion of the *lex orandi, lex credendi* principle. He points out that, grammatically as well as in practice, this principle can be read in two ways: "worship influences doctrine, and doctrine worship" (218). In fact, he states, "much of the present book is taken up with explorations of that interplay" (218). He sees such an interplay as important and healthy—in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic church, which "characteristically appeals to existing liturgical practice for proof in matters of doctrine" (218). In fact, the Reformation showed it to be a two-way street, for Protestantism does not consider its worship or its doctrine infallible, whereas the Roman Catholic church makes that claim for its dogma and, in essentials, its liturgy" (219).



Generally Wainwright shows a lot of respect for the authority of the Scriptures and evaluates views and liturgical practices in light of the Word. (Astonishingly, as a Methodist he shows considerable sympathy for believers' baptism as a legitimate rite [141-42, 310-14].) However, at times he also shows an unnerving spiritual eclecticism—as when he advocates readings “from another religious tradition” in Christian worship (174).

Aside from such problematic broadening in certain areas, the primary drawback to the book for even well-read pastors and laymen is the thickness of its prose and argumentation. Yet it is a valuable resource for the depth of its research and, being very well-indexed, can also serve as a useful reference. Probably its major contribution is its consistent stress upon intertwining the worship of the church with its beliefs—a crucial reminder in our day, when too often worship has little substantial doctrinal underpinning, and the crucial God-centeredness and God-directedness of both worship and doctrine are easily forgotten. In that sense, *Doxology* helpfully points us back to the end-all, be-all for the church (as the subtitle suggests): *The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*.

RON MAN  
Germany

### CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC: A BIBLICAL DEFENSE

John Frame  
Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed  
Publishing (1997)  
212 pages, paper, \$10.99

Frame, something of a “renegade” Presbyterian (he now teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in

Orlando), has in other writings taken on the traditional Reformed understanding of the so-called “regulative principle.” He claims to subscribe to the principle, which states that only that which God overtly approves in Scripture for worship may be used in our services. Yet he insists that Scripture is vague or silent on a lot of the particulars concerning worship (for example, at what hour on Sunday worshipers should convene, or what type of music should be used), and that therefore there is necessarily a good bit of freedom of form allowed for within the general guidelines established by the regulative principle.

Frame states his objective for the present work thus: “In this book I would like to try to sort out some of the issues surrounding CWM (his abbreviation for Contemporary Worship Music, in contra-distinction to the more performance-oriented category of Contemporary Christian Music) and to defend a limited use of it in Christian worship” (1). He develops throughout the book his case for the conclusion that “it would not be right to abandon traditional hymnody entirely in favor of CWM. But CWM may, and should, in my judgment, play a significant role in the worship of the church” (1-2). Frame’s contention, which he is quite successful in demonstrating, is that the criticisms of CWM, though having some validity, are often grossly overstated and overgeneralized. Some relevant general theological points which Frame makes regarding worship are:

- 1) A mixture of transcendent and immanent images and references in worship is reflective of the full scope of God’s relationship with his people.
- 2) The vertical dimension of worship is primary (worship is for God), but it is important to recognize that worship will inevitably include a horizontal dimension and employ human creativity.

- 3) "It would certainly be unscriptural to say that since worship is directed toward God, it doesn't matter whether the worshipers understand it or not. We do not glorify God if we fail to communicate on the human level" (18).
- 4) It is not unbiblical for worship to have an evangelistic aspect, though that is not its main focus.
- 5) Corporate worship should reflect both the unity *and* the diversity inherent in the body of Christ.
- 6) Scriptural commands to love one another and defer to one another apply to the selection and use of church music. (But of course it must go both ways.) "To be mature is not to demand one's own way" (27). "Are we seeking to have it our way or to serve our brothers and sisters?" (25). And here is a fascinating perspective: "We should resolve that if anyone in the church is to be offended over a mere matter of taste, it should be us rather someone else." How rarely such counsel (reflective of Philipians 2:3 and other passages) is followed!

Frame lists the following virtues that he finds in much CWM: God-centeredness, scripturality [sic] (the setting of actual Scripture texts or texts expressing scriptural truth), freshness, and communication. He also deals fairly with criticisms that are often raised against CWM (as they are against contemporary worship in general): subjectivism, humanism, anti-intellectualism, psychologism, professionalism, consumerism, pragmatism, and "temporal chauvinism" (only what's new is good).

Frame also tackles head-on the concerns of many about the contemporary church, such as the business/profit angle of the Christian music industry, the church growth movement and marketing techniques, and pragmatism and

entertainment values. He is honest about the problems caused by these influences; but he is certainly right in decrying those who dismiss *every* instance of worship music which may be termed "contemporary" because of supposed associations with, and contamination by, those influences. There are indeed disturbing trends, especially in the performance/recording side of the Christian contemporary music industry. (A sober assessment of the problems may be found in Candi Cushman's article "Salt or Sugar?" in *World* [May 13, 2000], 18-23.) But it is simply not true that *every* contemporary song is so tainted, or that *every* contemporary Christian musician is motivated solely by profit, or is shallow theologically. (Notable exceptions could be mentioned, such as Michael Card, Steve Camp, Twila Paris, and others.) Rather than operating on a "guilt by association" basis, we need to resist the straw-man approach and bring godly wisdom and discernment to bear in evaluating each piece of CWM *on its own merits*. And we need the humility to acknowledge how bound up we all are in our own tastes and preferences—indeed, no one is completely objective.

Again, this is not to deny that problems exist among the offerings of CWM—but Frame makes an excellent case that each song deserves to be judged on its merits. He gives specific examples that contradict every one of the criticisms which are leveled across the board at CWM as a whole. (A colleague of this reviewer once incisively pointed out that, after all, "the *Hallelujah Chorus* is pretty repetitious too"!)

Given Frame's rightful condemnation of sweeping generalizations, it is ironic to see him fall victim to the same kind of reasoning when he characterizes contemporary worship as "primarily a celebration of the Resurrection" with "a huge emphasis on joy, celebration," whereas he claims that traditional worship "tends to focus on our pre-Resurrection relationship with God. God is more distant,

more disapproving. . . . As a kind of re-enactment, at least, we need to be saved from sin again by believing in the gospel and finding forgiveness" (80). Frame certainly does not want CWM to be evaluated with that sort of broad-brush characterization.

One may not agree with Frame's arguments at every point (nor be ready to endorse every song which passes muster with him), yet the fact remains that he has made a constructive contribution to the current worship debate by exhorting us to be honest, fair, consistent and rigorously biblical in our assessment of materials for worship. Rather than cavalierly dismissing whole categories of music as "obviously" unfit for worship, perhaps we should give them a chance to prove themselves (or not, as the case may be). God is certainly accepting of a vastly wider range of worship offerings than any of us are—or presume him to be!

RON MAN  
Germany

### *RETURN TO WORSHIP: A GOD-CENTERED APPROACH*

Ron Owens (with Jan McMurray)

Nashville: Broadman & Holman (1999)

210 pages, paper, \$12.99

Ron Owens is a speaker, songwriter and musician. He has also traveled widely for over thirty years, the last nine as Henry Blackaby's associate in the office of Prayer, Revival, and Spiritual Awakening at the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Years and travel do not necessarily make for a good book. In this case it does.

Owens believes that the "who" question in worship is far more important than the "what" question. He is concerned that most of the contemporary interest in worship is

not driven by a large, Christ-centered, biblical vision of God. The results are tragic. Widely held contemporary worship practices are popular but not necessarily biblical. We assume too much about worship. The solution is to get God back into the focus of our thoughts and practices.

During his teen years Owens spent considerable time in Switzerland, where he first developed the practice of writing letters. From this practice he began to think and meditate. This experience would eventually lead him to decide that this book on worship should be written in an epistolary form. Some of the letters in the book are directed to the Church at large, others to specific groups, while still others are written to individuals.

The first letter defines worship in an address to the Church of our day. Listen to Owens' words and you will get the sense of what he is trying to do.

Often when people think of worship, their minds immediately turn to music. They think of music styles and talk of the type of "worship" or music they "like." To them, worship is seen only in the context of music. When I ask people about worship in their church, they usually respond with something like, "We have contemporary worship," or "Our worship is traditional," or "We have blended services." All of these responses describe the kind of music they have. This raises a foundational question we must answer if we are really serious about worshipping God acceptably: What does the Scripture teach us about worship (3)?

Owens gives an overview of the two primary Old Testament words for worship (*shachah* and *abad*), and then the one New Testament word (*proskuneo*). He concludes, that worship is, when all else has been said, "a bowing of the heart before our God" (5). He concludes, accurately I believe, that "As wonderful as music is, the truth is we don't

have to have music to worship" (5). The failure to understand this properly influences everything else we do in contemporary worship. "We seem to imagine him [God] as being on our level, yet nothing could be further from the truth" (7). "It's not surprising that the world should attempt to bring God down its level. But we cannot allow the tendency to do so to go unchallenged when it occurs within the church" (7).

Thirty-seven letters in all are included in this useful, easy-to-read volume. None are much more than six pages long. Each builds on the previous letter and each keeps the reader's attention. The first fifteen letters are specifically addressed to the Church at large. Included in this section are titles such as: "God's Plumb Line for Worship," "The Imaging of God," "Worship as a Lifestyle," "Worship and the Glory of God," and "The Role of Submission in Worship." The last twenty-two are addressed to worship leaders. Here we have letters with titles such as: "The Pastor's Role as Worship Leader," "The Primacy of Prayer in Worship," "The Priority of Preaching in Worship," "Restoring *Selah* to Worship" (a very helpful letter), and "Adrenaline Highs or the Holy Spirit?"

In addition to the thirty-seven letters there are four appendices, each of which deals with a practical subject; e.g., a choir covenant, a checklist for worship leaders, twenty-four questions to ask yourself in order to prepare for the Lord's Supper, and the modern embrace of entertainment as a poor substitute for true corporate worship.

The final letter urges a "Returning to Worship" by those who lead the church. Practical, heart-searching applications are included. Owens concludes, fittingly:

In light of these examples . . . let me pose several questions. Is there debris that needs to be removed from the corporate life of your church before acceptable worship can be offered?

Have you or your church become satisfied with substitutes for the reality of God's presence in your worship services? Are you spending more time pumping up than in praying down? Have you or your church lost your song? Christians who do not have a song or who do not desire to worship have a heart problem. Does the altar of prayer need to be rebuilt in your own life or in the life of your church? God help us as his people to be as ready and willing as King Hezekiah and Asa to take whatever steps are necessary to become a people of whom it will be said: "Surely God is in their midst" (188).

I highly recommend this useful book as a resource for all who lead the Church.

EDITOR

***AT THE CROSSROADS: AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC***

Charlie Peacock

Nashville: Broadman & Holman (1999)

219 pages, cloth, \$15.99

In the past decade or so, contemporary Christian music has enjoyed amazing popularity and unbelievable financial success. In 1996 total sales of popular Christian music reached a new high of \$538 million (33 million units). In 1997 sales jumped to 44 million units! And, in 1997, Christian singer and songwriter Bob Carlisle had the top-selling CD in America! Amy Grant, dc Talk, Jars of Clay, Kirk Franklin, and a host of other Christian artists are successful in both the Christian marketplace (?) and the modern music mainstream.

At the same time, there are problems. Recently the industry was shaken by the openly unscriptural divorce of Amy Grant from her musician husband of many years. And in 1997, the People's Church of Salem, Oregon, cancelled its plans to sponsor Jesus Northwest, a major Christian music festival it operated for twenty-one years, by confessing: "We humbly repent before the Lord and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ for inadequately representing Christ in our ministry, message and methods" (15). But this type of honesty is clearly still the exception. This industry booms and, though critics have arisen, few bother to question it honestly.

Enter into this muddled, but highly popular, scene Nashville artist Charlie Peacock. Charlie is truly an insider to the Contemporary Christian Music arena. Besides being an award-winning artist himself, he is a producer, songwriter, and teacher whose songs have been recorded by well-known contemporary artists such as Amy Grant, dc Talk and Russ Taff. What makes a person write such a frank and hard-hitting book? The answer appears to be sound theology mixed with deep concern. I say theology, because Peacock actually affirms the importance of central biblical truths; and deep concern because he feels deeply about his subject and wants to speak to his friends and associates.

In terms of theology Peacock acknowledges, in the opening pages, his debt to Francis and Edith Schaeffer. The influence of Schaeffer can be seen on page after page of the book itself. He also adds thanks to other theologically-formed individuals such as R. C. Sproul, Dick Keyes, Quentin Schultze, Os Guinness and Michael Horton. It is evident that Peacock has thought deeply, read widely, and applied what he has learned to himself and his industry.

Peacock aims his concern at the artists, industry, and audience of Christian Contemporary Music (henceforth, CCM). He adds, "I have also hoped that professors, teachers,

parents, youth workers, and pastors would find it helpful as well" (2). He begins his story by telling us how the CCM industry arose and how it reached the present moment, which he believes to be the "crossroads" for an entire industry. For those who do not know the major artists, the labels, the compelling sound, or the historical development of CCM, this alone is worth the price of the book.

Peacock also states his purpose precisely: "The primary mission of this book is to explain the need for repentance, rethinking, and reimagining in spite of evidence of jewels scattered among the dross" (4). Even more to the point, he adds, "The purpose of this book is to isolate from CCM's historical beginnings those theologies and ideologies which have shaped and influenced artists, industry, and audience demonstrably more than all others. Once isolated, the aim of the book is to reveal how these powerful and enduring ideas have essentially formed an ad hoc philosophy of Christian music, informing and defining CCM artistry, industry, and audience from the beginning to the present" (4). Putting the industry and its music up against the perspective of the present Kingdom of Christ in the world, Peacock finds it wanting, to say the least! He refers to this as "a comprehensive Kingdom perspective," or what some call a worldview—"a way of thinking about life and the world that is informed by the Scripture" (4). He is consistently able to make his points, in passionate and clear ways, but always with a tearful eye gazing upon those he knows and loves. His self-stated mission is to exalt Christ and the teaching of Scripture, not to attack personalities or friends. Borrowing from Eugene Peterson, he says that he prays his words will reveal him to not be "a bystander criticizing or a turncoat propagandizing, but . . . an insider agonizing" (3).

One of the features that makes this book so valuable, even beyond those who have any personal interest in the

subject, is the careful way with which Peacock shows the reader that CCM is really the child of broader evangelicalism. It reflects the life and culture of the churches and ministries from which it has arisen. (I still recall several friends of mine, who were Christians and former Major League Baseball players, similarly noting that their industry reflects, in microcosm, the world of society at large!) The perspective that Peacock aims for "Cultivate[s] a comprehensive Kingdom perspective—God's people in God's place, under God's rule—and mak[ing] life choices based on this perspective" (8).

Peacock gives the reader clear, readable, and interesting surveys of the Jesus Movement (in the 1970s) and the history of CCM (Chapter 6 is actually titled: "CCM'S History: Of Baptists and Folk Musicians"). These chapters are followed by one titled "In Search of Theology." Those involved in this industry may *need* this book more than most of us but all will *profit* by the author's development of a theology of art, work and Kingdom life that permeates these pages. How does my everyday work relate to Christ's Kingdom? Why do I do what I do? How do financial profits relate to what I do and how I do it? For whom do I do the work I do, day in and day out?

This is a readable, balanced, well-conceived and highly effective book. The critical angle will trouble many of those who *most* need to hear the author's thesis. Pastors, parents, and other church leaders should not let this criticism keep them from reading Peacock's outstanding book. This is an easy book to read, but it is also an important one for all who influence the Church or who respond to what is so obviously influencing the Church.

EDITOR