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A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

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Reformation
& Revival



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Book Reviews

The Psalms in Worship

John McNaughter, Editor
Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books,
(1992 reprint of 1907 edition).
590 pages, hardbound, \$19.95.

This is one of several dozen reprints that have been done by a new publishing venture in Canada. In this series a number of important books on subjects germane to both reformation and revival have already appeared. These books, and the editorial commendations added by the reprinter, reflect what has come to be known as a Reconstructionist position. A catalog of other books is available from the publisher.

McNaughter was professor of New Testament literature and criticism in Allegheny Seminary in the early part of this century. This book, originally published as an outgrowth of two Presbyterian conventions held in Pittsburgh and Chicago in 1905, addresses the matter of public worship and particularly the use of the psalter. The volume consists of papers read before large gatherings. It is grounded in the doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and follows the belief that the only divinely ordained hymnbook in existence is the inspired Psalms of the Bible.

A Reformed Presbyterian minister offers a contemporary introduction to this edition. He writes:

What is urgent for us today is not simply to return to the divinely inspired hymnbook of the Bible for our worship, needful as that is. It is to return to the religion and idea of worship inherent in the Psalms. Theoretically, the "Regulative Principle" of worship, to which all Reformed Christians subscribe in principle, should persuade us to return to the divinely inspired manual of praise. After all, the singing of

the inspired Psalms has been shown conclusively from the Scriptures to be approved for public worship.

With such an insightful comment this reviewer is in essential agreement, even though the same introduction goes on to argue, consistent with the thesis of this volume, that *only* the Psalms should be sung in worship and that all other singing should, therefore, be excluded. Human compositions, even those based faithfully on biblical truths, are to be excluded because they are not warranted by Scripture. This thesis, still held by a minority of godly and earnest Presbyterians in this country and elsewhere, is ably defended by this volume but, in my mind, serious problems still exist with it.

In an attempt not to create disjunction between the Old and New Testaments this view tends toward a denial of the New Covenant's distinctive theology and practice.

It also fails to exegete Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 properly, though the reader should seriously reflect on the arguments offered by writers of the opinions expressed in this volume.

I find it odd that the exclusive psalmody position leads to a worship of the church under the New Covenant which is unable to use the actual heaven-given name of the Messiah in praise. He was, and is, to be called Jesus, and for a very specific reason (cf. Matt. 1:21). We shall praise Him with and by this name forever and ever. Yet the exclusive psalmody view will not permit us to praise the Lamb with this divinely ordained name of New Covenant meaning!

Though unable to accept the central thesis of *exclusive* Psalm singing in the New Covenant assembly I do find this volume both provocative, useful and, therefore, important!

Editor

Gospel Worship

Jeremiah Burroughs

Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications

(1990 reprint of 1648 edition).

398 pages, hardback, \$19.95.

Don Kistler is doing a great service for the contemporary church, and for coming generations as well, by reprinting a significant number of Puritan titles. In recent years he has begun to modernize and republish some volumes that have never been issued in modern English. This present volume is one such effort. And it is magnificent!

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was a member of the Westminster Assembly, and a noted Puritan preacher at Stepney and later Cripplegate, London. Of him the better known Richard Baxter said, "If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Ussher, all the Presbyterians like Mr. Stephen Marshall, and all the Independents like Mr. Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed." Indeed, the last subject Burroughs preached, which was later published as *Irenicum*, was an attempt to heal divisions. Such a spirit of gospel irenicism is often missing in contemporary efforts toward reformation and should be recovered. Puritans like Burroughs will aid that effort!

Burroughs, better known for his work, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (1650), published this particular book in the same year. It consists of 14 sermons, following a fairly typical Puritan style. The first sermon is based on Leviticus 10:3, which says, "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke of when He said, 'Among those who approach Me I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent." Burroughs draws some profound and plain observations which should be

headed by modern worship leaders concerned with reformation in their local churches. He makes several notes in his applications, such as:

1. That in God's worship, there must be nothing tendered up to God but what He has commanded. Whatsoever we meddle with in the worship of God must be what we have a warrant for out of the Word of God.
2. In the matters of worship God stands upon little things. [By this Burroughs refers to things we count small but which are not small to God at all!]

Later Burroughs notes:

5. That the beginnings of things of high concern sometime meet with great difficulties and interruptions.
6. That those who enter into public places, and especially such places as concern the worship of God, need to have the fear of God much upon them when they first enter into those places.
10. That the holiness of a duty will never bear a man out in the miscarriages of a duty.

Burroughs concludes this message with a warning that strange fire offered in God's service will never be accepted! Would to God that modern worship leaders would even consider this kind of warning.

Each of the following chapters unfolds aspects of worship that make it acceptable to God. A whole section deals, for example, with sanctifying the name of God properly. This concern in itself would revolutionize the trivial practices of our contemporary services. Communion is addressed and how to hear and heed the Word of God. As with Puritans the book addresses the heart profoundly, yet never lacks serious rational thought based upon the Word of God.

Several years ago I heard a member of the ministerial

staff of one of the fastest growing megachurches in the United States answer questions regarding the use of drama in his church. (He was, in fact, the Minister of Drama!) He said, "Don't ask me for a biblical basis for what we do in our church. It works, that is all the basis we need. We are reaching multitudes of people with it!" Burroughs will smash such pagan pragmatism to a million pieces. May such a book be read and pondered by multitudes of pastors and worship leaders.

Editor

Worship in the Presence of God

Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, Editors

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press: Greenville, SC P.O. Box 9279, 29604 (1992).

411 pages, hardback, \$22.95.

This nicely bound volume is a collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practices of worship, written from a very strict Reformed perspective.

The contributors believe that worship is special and dialogical in nature. They also believe, with the Reformed tradition in general, that worship is prescribed in the Word of God, thus not left to human ingenuity and imagination. This extends not just to general principles, which many evangelicals will grant, but to the very *elements* of divinely ordered worship. This book offers a serious contribution to the whole consideration of what God wants us to give to Him in our worship!

There are three sections in the book. First, the nature of worship. Second, the elements of worship. Finally, historic views and the practice of worship. Two appendices are included, one giving information about the contributors to

this volume and the other a majority report from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on the content of worship song. A topical and scriptural index are included as well.

In the section on the nature of worship there is an excellent first chapter titled, "What is Worship?" Herman Hanko, a Protestant Reformed theologian, adds a chapter, "The Fear of the Lord in Worship." A chapter on "Worship in the New Testament" concludes with insightful and useful counsel:

Worshippers before the coming of Christ were meant to inquire into the meaning of the temple typology as it pointed forward to Him, but now believers look to Christ fully revealed as the Savior who has been exalted and has entered heaven itself (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Luke 24:26-27, 44-45). We should not pray with our faces to Jerusalem, hankering after the outward pomp of the temple ordinances. Rather, may we be absorbed with the glory of our Redeemer's intercessory ministry in the heavenly throne room. May we pray toward heaven where Christ mediates so competently for us, and where we enter by believing prayer into the holiest of all. May the worship services in our churches bespeak the efficacy of Christ's priestly ministry in heaven, and the immediacy of our approach to God (p. 73).

Excellent chapters deal with "Christian Liberty and Worship" and "Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed and Viable for Today." One of the more important chapters to consider is, "Second Commandment: The Principle That God Is to Be Worshipped Only in Ways Prescribed in Holy Scripture and That the Holy Scripture Prescribes the Whole Content of Worship, Taught by Scripture Itself." Again, the modern church needs to debate this issue once again. The fact that arguments of this type are no longer with us does not bode well for the recovery of serious, biblical worship in our time.

Under the elements of worship are chapters addressing matters such as the reading of Scripture, preaching, song, prayer, the sacraments, and occasional elements, by which are taken up oaths, vows, fastings and thanksgivings.

The last section delves into some of the historical controversies and views of Protestant Reformers regarding the subject of worship. In some ways it would be well to read this section before reading the part on the elements of worship, for in this way the average reader will at least sense that this has been an important debate whenever and wherever reformation has taken place.

Should God grant the awakening that is needed in the church in the West then I have no doubt that reformation in public worship must both precede such awakening as well as flow out of it. Revival, if it is real and biblical, will not be merely a recovery of feelings and excitement but an outpouring of the Holy Spirit who guides the church in holy worship! This present volume does not satisfy my own desire for a full, solid and balanced treatment of the subject, but it is a useful beginning place and will surely provoke concern for truth and for a renewed submission to the written Word. If you disagree with parts of it, as I do, you will at least be forced to think and develop a more biblical understanding of worship by it!

Editor

Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church

Michael Scott Horton, Editor
Chicago: Moody Press (1992).
353 pages, hardcover, \$17.95.

The increasing variety of theological positions represented

in the many denominations in the United States—all flying the “evangelical” flag—suggests that some day the term will mean very little, and more precise terms will need to be invented.

Beyond this problem, is there the apparent tendency to jump on every bandwagon of popularism without adequately testing the validity of their truth claims in the light of Scripture?

In his introduction to *Power Religion*, Michael Horton says, “This book is not meant to draw lines in the sand between true and false brethren. Rather, its goal is to point out what we believe to be serious distractions from the core mission and message of the Christian faith.” It is a compass to correct our wanderings, to fine tune our direction, to get us back on course again.

The book draws upon the insights of 15 educators, pastors and evangelical leaders. Six sections in the book address the misuse of religion for the purpose of wielding power.

In Part 1 Chuck Colson and Kenneth Myers confront the problem of Power Politics. The issue was very relevant in recent election campaigning, when evangelicals tended to base the success of God’s cause upon electing enough conservative Christians to office so that the power of bloc voting might be exerted, as though the purposes of God’s kingdom are achieved by the power influence of Christians in government rather than by the preaching of the gospel and the witness of the church.

John Armstrong, Donald A. Carson and James M. Boice explore the area of Power Evangelism in Part 2. Armstrong looks at the “Signs and Wonders” movement and “power evangelism,” so-called, while Carson surveys the whole matter of signs and wonders in the New Testament evidence. Boice offers what the editor calls “a better way,” and his convictions about biblical evangelism through the

proclaimed Word of God are worthy of the consideration of every Christian minister.

In Part 3 Bill Hull and Tom Nettles warn against accepting what is mostly a sociologically based, pragmatically spawned effort in the modern Church Growth Movement. Nettles pleads for growth through revival and reformation. According to one survey, there are fewer evangelicals today than 25 years ago when the church growth movement began—hardly a support of the pragmatic yardstick of the church growth movement.

Part 4, which deals with the Power Within phenomenon, challenges the evangelical church’s response to the fields of psychology and psychiatry in recent years. David Powlison, lecturer in practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and a practicing pastoral counselor, deals with the way in which the evangelical church has attempted to integrate psychological theories into its message, often without sufficient biblical scrutiny. In many cases, he believes evangelicals have allowed themselves to be indiscriminately inundated by popular psychology.

Edward Welch, a licensed psychologist, challenges the validity of codependency as a cult of the self. Dysfunctionalism has become a code word excuse for every conceivable problem. He points out that the “good child within,” whose needs have not been met because of some dysfunctional association of the past, is an unbiblical concept. The evangelical church has failed to analyze the theological foundations of codependency, and the result has been the idolatry of the self. A person does not need to accept responsibility for his problem because some dysfunctional other person was responsible. That dysfunctional other is not responsible either because of a previous dysfunctional association, traceable ultimately all the way back to Adam. This interaction regarding the “cult of the self” will give a fresh insight into the clash between the

church's efforts to meet "felt needs" and Christ's response to man's "real needs." It is a stimulating discussion pleading for a careful biblical scrutiny of the popular psychological theories before we so readily and wholeheartedly adopt them into our practice of faith.

The next section of the book explores the milieu of present day evangelicalism that creates a vulnerability to power preachers. The evangelical Christian sub-culture of "Christian" television, radio, publishing, music, "idols," etc., has plied its trade with an increasingly undiscerning audience. While being careful not to paint all with the same brush, Alister McGrath focuses upon the problem of certain media preachers who distort their Christology to allow themselves to elevate themselves to "speak as God rather than speaking for God." He names Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn, and illustrates from their teachings that they indeed have relegated Christ to being less than God the Son. He pleads for a return to Luther's Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and points out the vulnerability of every redeemed human being to the original sin of Adam and Eve who were enticed to become like God. The cult of personality has created the danger of people blindly following those who act and talk like a power elite who have a unique connection with God.

The final section of this stimulating book addresses the prevailing effort of the evangelical church to make God relevant to the contemporary culture. Power switch is the danger of abdicating solid biblical doctrine and theology in favor of relevant methodology. R. C. Sproul comments cogently, "Part of our problem is the disdain for theology that abounds in Christian circles. . . . Perhaps the shift from the character of God and His grace to attempts at relevance is to blame for boredom, as the excitement of last week's meeting wears off by Monday."

If the church of Jesus Christ is irrelevant today, it is

because we have departed from solid preaching and teaching that uphold God and His mighty acts. Says Michael Horton: "The gospel of power is an enemy of the power of the gospel." Let these men challenge us to return to solid theology. As Horton concludes, "The evangelical church must leave power behind; it must speak less self confidently and begin declaring its confidence in God's sovereign grace."

Power Religion will prove to be a good surgical tool to remove some doctrinal cysts that we evangelicals may have undiscernibly developed. It may also be preventive medicine that will encourage us to be more like the Bereans in analyzing the teachings and traditions which we tend to adopt.

Norman P. Anderson
Elk Grove Village, IL

Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel

Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer
Portland, OR: Multnomah Press (1982).
200 pages, paperback, \$8.99.

This volume, part of the Multnomah Press Critical Concern series, begins from the perspective that Spirit-driven worship is largely foreign to the modern church. By combining the insights of a recognized Old Testament scholar (Allen) with the views of a professor of church music (Borrer) the authors bring a refreshingly balanced approach to their subject. Written in a contemporary style, using many illustrations both from the Bible and their personal experiences, *Worship* makes a needed contribution to the study of worship and is especially suited for local pastors and church leaders.

By design, the book is divided into three parts. Part 1 uses four chapters to present the authors' definition of

worship. Part 2 discusses various parts of what the authors call the "program of worship," while the last section presents their views on several aspects of worship ranging from saying "Amen," to body posture in worship, music, architecture, acoustics and much more.

While the book is quite beneficial and accomplishes in some way the goals set by the authors, there are two areas of concern. At first glance, the definition they present of worship is adequate, indeed uplifting. They quote the now familiar statement of William Temple which defines worship by saying:

... to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God (p.39).

Further reading, however, uncovers the authors' opinion that worship is response and therefore is separate from edification. A chart given on p. 57 illustrates clearly that the church's three functions are worship, edification and evangelism. This separation between worship and edification narrows their focus at times to parts of corporate church life which occur either before or after the ministry of the Word. In fact, though not expressly stated, there is an underlying premise throughout the book that preaching has actually been too highly valued in the church and that worship has suffered as a result. In the foreword Bruce Leafblad opines:

It follows that as pastors, we evangelicals have not been much concerned with worship either. In many of our circles the Sunday morning event is considered a "preaching service" in spite of the fact that the official title in the bulletin reads "Morning Worship." Viewing the preacher's singular act of

proclamation as significantly more important than the entire congregation's acts of adoration, praise, confession, thanksgiving, and dedication, is espousing an expensive heresy which may well be robbing many a church of its spiritual assets.

Herein lies a serious and subtle danger. While the situation Leafblad describes does in fact exist, it does not follow that the solution is to castigate the role of preaching, or to somehow imply that worship is a function of the church which is separate from the ministry of the Word. The blame lies not in the overuse of preaching but in the under-preparation of preachers, both in terms of their message and their unswerving commitment to bring God's message with God's power. To assert that preaching can wrongly become more significant than worship is to miss the point: The communication of truth is worship in its highest form! Both the one who proclaims and those who listen and agree declare the worth of God. If preaching ever overshadows true worship then it is not true preaching. Truth that "quicken the conscience" and "feeds the mind" is the divine captain and guardian of true worship. Allen and Borror would do well to stick more closely to Temple, at this point, than to Leafblad. It is interesting that Thomas Watson, the Puritan theologian, in addressing his people on the subject of worship, equates lively worship with lively hearing:

Take heed of drowsiness in hearing; drowsiness shows much irreverence. How lively are many when they are about the world, but in the worship of God how drowsy. . . . In the preaching of the Word, is not the bread of life broken to you; and will a man fall asleep at his food? Which is worse, to stay from a sermon, or sleep at a sermon?

The second area of concern is less weighty, but perhaps

more damaging in a practical sense. The style in which this book is written makes it too easy to disregard. For such a worthy subject a more arresting vehicle is needed. Seldom is the reader set back by lofty declarations of the truths of worship. Many will, unfortunately, read this book in an evening, and begin the next day unchanged. This is not to say that the book is not worthy of greater consideration. In fact, the sincere reader who has begun to recognize the decay of authentic worship, and who forces himself to read this volume slowly, will find much that is worthwhile.

Perhaps the greatest contribution made by the book is summed up in the authors' phrase that "Worship is not an art condition, but a heart condition." They correctly assert that attitude, not activity, lies at the heart of true worship. However, they go beyond the usual discussion to declare that the best worship will also produce the best art, that right attitudes concerning the transcendent God will move the person to excellence in those activities meant to declare the greatness to God. (Allen speaks to the modern critics of large beautiful church buildings by reminding them of the fantastic beauty, even opulence, of Solomon's temple!) In so doing Allen and Borrer are able to declare the usefulness of art, the necessity of beauty, and the responsibility of true worshippers to see the arts as gifts of God meant to be given back to Him. This section is reminiscent of Karl Barth's now famous statement that in struggling to ascend to God we may simply miss Him as He descends to us! Certainly the heavens declare the glory of God, and all that is beautiful bears His resemblance. Allen and Borrer offer a useful reminder that "art will not give birth to true worship, but true worship will give birth to artistic expression."

Many who read this book will come looking to a simple discussion of what worship is. They will find it in the first few chapters. For those interested in the "how to" of corporate worship, Part 2 covers questions of liturgy (which

the authors endorse with some free church modifications), mood (chapter seven is comprised of Allen's wonderful exposition of Psalm 95), and quality. Of particular benefit are the three standards given as a basis for determining the beauty and quality of any worship experience.

The last section of the book presents what appear to be the personal worship preferences of the authors. They argue quite long in favor of raising hands and kneeling during worship, stating that "some of the motions considered excessive may be biblical" (p. 119). They also espouse the necessity of public reading of Scripture and offer several plans for responsive readings, as well as several prepared litanies suitable for occasions ranging from the dedication of an organ to the commissioning of a missionary. The last two chapters discuss music and environment. The section on music is admittedly too brief to cover this controversial subject, but offers a good foundation for assessing the merits of various styles and uses of music in worship. The discussion on environment touches on what to name the building ("sanctuary" vs. "auditorium"), room configuration, instrumentation, sound systems, acoustics and lighting.

Allen and Borrer are to be commended for attempting to cover so much in such a small book. While their treatment does not cover all the questions, nor seize the heart in profound ways, it does make a meaningful contribution to the discussion of worship and will reward the perceptive and careful reader.

David Hegg
St. Charles, IL

Real Worship: It Will Transform Your Life

Warren Wiersbe

Nashville: Oliver Nelson (1986).

191 pages, paperback, \$9.95.

In our age of pragmatism, marketing the church, and “seeker-oriented” worship, Warren Wiersbe’s book, *Real Worship*, is a welcome volume. His basic thesis is that the church in America is suffering from a lack of true, God-centered worship. We need to return to worship that is transformational.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part 1, “An Introduction to Worship,” Wiersbe cautiously defines worship as something that involves the mind, emotions, will and body. It is a response to all God says and does. True worship is both subjective and objective, as we worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. True worship does not use God to get what we want. It is not cheap entertainment, neither is it a something that allows us to escape from our troubles. Rather, we bring our burdens to the Savior. Real worship also involves the element of mystery, and mystery humbles us. We worship a God who has revealed Himself to us, and yet we fall infinitely short of understanding Him. The fear of the Lord is as important in worship as adoration, for His love is a holy love, He is a consuming fire. Worship involves mystery.

Before entering into the second section of the book, Wiersbe cautions the would-be worshiper that transformation can be dangerous. Transformation changes us from within and often carries stiff consequences; old wounds exposed, new wounds inflicted, and those who wish to remain in their comfort zones will be offended.

None of these things, however, should stop us from pursuing the worship of God.

In Part 2, “The Wonder of Worship,” Wiersbe says the church today doesn’t know the wonder of God. The trouble is, we outline, analyze, and chart the Bible; we have tapes, books and study Bibles with applications already drawn for us; we have religious radio and television. There’s no room for wonder! Our society, through the miracle of television, has further dulled our capacity to wonder, as we have watched everything from man walking on the moon to the conception of human life. We must regain the ability to wonder.

In chapter five, he turns to the worship scenes recorded in the book of Revelation and challenges us to wonder. Wonder at the Creator, the Redeemer, the King, the Bridegroom and the church. This section of the book more than any other caused me to be caught up in the wonder and worship of God.

“When the church gathers to worship,” says Wiersbe, “it also gathers to witness. That witness is threefold: to the Lord, to the church itself, and to the world. . . . Of these three, the most important is our witness to the Lord.” This statement opens Part 3, “Worship Involves Witness.” In order to witness to God, we must come as spiritual sacrifices bearing praise, prayer, service, giving, and a broken heart. As for our witness to one another, we should worship not only to be edified, but to edify others. This is often overlooked as we seek the face of God in worship.

Wiersbe then discusses the role of preaching in worship. He says that worship suffers when the sermon contents are sacrificed for the sake of an inflexible outline. He offers instead advice to approach preaching as an act of worship. He explains that the pastor is the messenger whose purpose is not to impress the congregation with his homiletical gifts; it is to bring the congregation face to face with the living God. “When the minister’s study becomes a sanctuary, a holy of holies,” he says, “then something transforming will

happen as the Word of God is proclaimed."

As for those under the hearing of preaching, he encourages the worshiper to hear sermons with penance, contrition, faith, self-consecration and vows of new obedience. "If this is not worship in spirit and in truth," asks Wiersbe, "what is?"

The final part of the book, "Worship Involves Warfare," deals with a much-neglected aspect of worship. Wiersbe says that we need to be aware that Satan wants worship for himself. "Our spiritual worship of God," he says, "hinders Satan's work, defeats his plans, robs him of territory, and increases his hatred of God and God's people." He looks at numerous Old Testament examples of the worship of God, and points out that when Israel was right with God, He fought their battles. When they were out of fellowship with God, they were defeated (see, for e.g., 2 Chron. 20).

The church is a spiritual army, but Wiersbe warns that we may unwittingly be defeated by our neglect of true worship. He cites the Laodicean church who didn't know they were in a state of defeat, and he says that today's church may be in the same situation. Wiersbe points out that in the book of Revelation, the bridge between Christ's messages to the churches (chapters 2-3) and the conflict between Christ and Satan (chapters 6-19) is the bridge of worship (chapters 4-5). If we are to be prepared for warfare, we must linger at the throne of God!

The last chapter of the book brings us back to Wiersbe's original theme. We need transformation in worship. True worship is commanded of God's people, but obstacles such as the apparent success of the church stand in the way. Some of the greatest churches in America know very little about true worship, but thrive numerically. Real worship also poses a threat to power-hungry pastors, performance-centered (rather than God-centered) musicians, and spectator church members.

What will it take to return to true worship? For one thing, it will take a return to personal worship. It will also take time. Time spent in communion with God, and time spent waiting on the Lord and enjoying Him. It will take real transformation from the inside out. It will require people to come to Christ in humility. It will take a return of wonder. It will take sacrifice and discipline. But it will be well worth it.

Warren Wiersbe's book is one Christian's prayer from the heart for the church to take seriously the command to worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. May God in His mercy allow us to return to real worship.

James Rahtjen

Glen Ellyn, IL

Dying for Change

Leith Anderson

Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers (1990).

207 pages, hardback, \$12.95.

Dying for Change is a sincere attempt by the author to encourage the modern evangelical church of America to be relevant and successful in its quest to fulfill the great commission. The motive of the author is noble, but his message is questionable.

The introduction sets the pace by relating "that 85 per cent of America's Protestant churches are either stagnating or dying." The author attributes this crisis in the church to an unwillingness to change with the times, and a stubborn, short-sighted refusal to be culturally relevant. This is stated bluntly on page 17: "Frankly, evangelical Christianity has done well on revelation (the Bible) but poorly in relevance (the culture)." In the ensuing chapters, the author attempts to demonstrate that change is inevitable and necessary. In

chapter 2, for example, a steady flow of statistics reveals sub-topics such as “The Graying of America,” “The Urbanization of America,” and “The Coloring of America,” i.e. the increase of minorities such as Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, etc. “Women and Roles of Leadership” suggests that with women assuming greater roles in the work place and in leadership positions in society, that these same women will demand greater access to “traditionally male positions in the church.” These sub-topics reveal the changing tides in America. For the church to be successful, it must change with its culture. It is assumed and stated throughout the book that if the church does not change, it will spiritually die. It is also assumed through the book that small churches are insignificant.

As an example to illustrate this, the author points to the Metropolitan Tabernacle of London, England. This is an historic church that was built by C. H. Spurgeon over a hundred years ago. The author recalls a visit he made to this church and how sad and disappointed he was with what he saw:

When I visited the Metropolitan Tabernacle on that Sunday in 1972, however, I counted 87 worshipers present, and the speaker lamented how difficult it was to reach the people who lived in the immediate neighborhood. Much had changed in 75 years.

London had changed. The neighborhood had changed. Society and culture had changed. The world had changed. But this church had not kept up with the changes. And it is not alone.

This quote displays the author’s lack of understanding of the British culture. He simply and naively assumes that if the right changes and programs were introduced, a thriving and growing church would have emerged there in London.

In chapter 5, we are given more statistics and graphs along with the conclusions of church growth experts that list the kinds of changes and things that baby boomers want and demand in a church. For example, there must be a minister with good communication skills, a strong ministry of music, advertising, athletics, activities with many choices, ample parking, attractive programs for young adults, higher quality in our facilities and church buildings, a high degree of tolerance and acceptance of diversity, the inclusion of women into leadership, and messages that are highly relational. These are just some of the suggestions given for making the church more relevant.

Many of the author’s ideas and conclusions are questionable to say the least, but the most disturbing of all was the plan he suggests in chapter 12 to educate people on how to change their “dead or dying church.” He challenges people who want to make their church more relevant to “persuade the opinion makers.” A story is related from U. S. history where Daniel Morgan, the commander of Morgan’s Rifles at the battle of Saratoga (October 1777), said to his men:

“Forget the poor fellows who fight for sixpence a day. Concentrate your fire on the epaulet men!”

Epaulets are the ornamental shoulder pieces worn by military officers. So in other words, Morgan wanted his men to aim for the officers, not the rank and file soldiers. As a result of this tactic, the officer ranks of British General John Burgoyne were so depleted that he surrendered (p. 177).

The idea behind this story is simple. Find out who the leaders and people of influence are in your church and persuade them of your ideas, and they in turn will effectively pressure the pastor and elders to make the changes that are needed. This is nothing short of change by subversion. It by-

passes biblical church authority and assumes that those who desire change have a reasonable and biblical basis for the changes they desire. In my own church, a member who read this book became convinced that our church needed change. I was not consulted, but using this idea as justification, this member passed this book around to key leaders in the church to gain support so the church could be led into new patterns for worship and doctrine. Fortunately, this was brought to my attention and steps were taken to prevent a major disaster! This book is a typical example of the current fad that is sweeping America on "church growth."

I do believe the author of *Dying for Change* is sincere in his desire to help challenge the modern church. But I believe his methods and conclusions are seriously flawed for the following reasons:

1. In this entire book, only a few passing references were made to the Scriptures. This is the most obvious and serious weakness of the book. The Word of God is our authority on the church, and yet, in the absence of Scripture here is a book designed in its purpose to tell us how to build a biblical church, but it does not base its suggestions or conclusions on the Scriptures and serious exposition of the same.

2. The author's appeal for the suggestions he gives for change are based entirely on historical references and human leaders. This approach to building a church is thoroughly humanistic, as it looks to secular methodology such as telemarketing, advertising, hi-tech communications, market sensitivity, psychology, and sociology, and a host of other current trends to accomplish the work of God. Whatever results these methods achieve, they are thoroughly explainable and have little or nothing to do with the Spirit of God.

3. The author does not define the duties, the qualifications,

or the characteristics of a church leader from a biblical perspective. Rather, he borrows concepts from the secular business and management world.

4. The author's emphasis on methods rather than message, and on programs, plans, and pragmatism rather than on true spiritual power, leaves us without any safeguard from the modern humanistic reasoning that is destroying so much of our reformation heritage.

5. The author's ideas and concepts for building the church are based on Arminian presuppositions. With little regard for either God's sovereignty or the biblical doctrine of soteriology, the main thrust of this book is on pragmatic human efforts.

6. The author never defines success from a scriptural viewpoint. He just assumes bigger is better.

7. It seems the author's intention is not to build a church of biblical principles, but seeks to reproduce the modern phenomena of what he calls the "entrepreneurial" church smorgasbord kind of Christianity where true reverent worship and serious exposition of Scripture are at a minimum, and programs and entertainment to attract baby boomers are at a premium. Perhaps the author believes this is what constitutes a biblical church.

8. Finally, the author is concerned about the modern church's lack of relevance, yet he never defines what makes a church biblically relevant. True relevance is not merely becoming appealing to the non-Christian culture around us. This is often achieved by watering down our message. But rather, true relevance is communicating the eternal and unchanging gospel to the non-Christian culture in such a way that the gospel's call for repentance and faith is made perfectly clear.

This book is typical of the literature presently flooding the Christian market that guarantees that if dynamic programs and plans are implemented, and that if the right

changes are made, then the church will experience true growth and revival. Sadly, many churches will do what is suggested here, and results will be tabulated. But it leaves much room for question whether or not the results will be biblical, spiritual, and most importantly, pleasing to God.

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The Ultimate Priority

John MacArthur, Jr.

Chicago: Moody Press (1983).

158 pages, paperback, \$6.99.

“**T**his book is a call to personal worship of the thrice holy God. It is a call to a radically different type of living on the part of the believer; to a way of life that seeks to worship God continually—not just on Sunday.” This quote is from the preface of MacArthur’s short but superb book on worship. The author is crying out for a reformation in the way God’s people worship Him. In his own prophetic style the author shares his struggle with contemporary Christian thinking. “The church often seems so pragmatic, so programmed and success-centered. In the process of striving to fulfill our needs and satisfy our desires, the church has slipped into a philosophy of ‘Christian humanism’ that is flawed with self-love, self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-glory. There appears to be scant concern about worshipping our glorious God on His terms.”

Although the chapters are not organized into sections, the book naturally falls into four divisions. Part 1, the first three chapters, is introductory in nature. It deals with *the importance of worship*. In Part 2, chapters four through

seven, the author’s locus is on *the object of worship* and presents several attributes of God. The third and most helpful section of the book, *the nature of worship*, contains four chapters that present a masterful treatment of John 4: 20-24. The final section of two chapters deals with one of the author’s favorite subjects, the glory of God, seen as *the result of worship*.

The book begins in chapter one with a discussion of worship gone awry. The author gives several biblical illustrations when worship is wrong (Lev. 10; 1 Sam. 13: 8-14; 2 Sam. 6: 6-7) and presents a helpful analysis on four kinds of unacceptable worship: the worship of a false god, the worship of the true God in a wrong form, the worship of the true God in a self-styled manner, and the worship of the true God in the right way with a wrong attitude.

In chapter two MacArthur brings out how worship is to be expressed in every act and moment of life. “True worship touches each area of life. We are to honor and adore God in everything” (p. 16).

The most helpful of the three introductory chapters is the excellent discussion in chapter three on the relationship between redemption and worship. “The primary reason we are redeemed is not so that we may escape hell—that is a blessed benefit, but not the major purpose. The central objective for which we are redeemed is not even so that we might enjoy the manifold eternal blessings of God. In fact, the supreme motive in our redemption is not for us to receive anything. Rather we have been redeemed so that God may receive worship—so that our lives might glorify Him That does not mean there is no blessing in salvation for the believer. There is much. . . . But the blessings are in an additional benefit—not the ultimate purpose” (pp. 23-24).

“Acceptable worship demands that God be known—worship cannot occur where the true God is not believed in, adored, and obeyed. The object of our worship must be

right if our worship is to be acceptable. We must consider the God we worship." This opening paragraph (p. 35) introduces a series of four chapters on the existence and attributes of God. There is helpful discussion on God's immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and holiness.

The heart of the book (chapters 8-11) is a very practical treatment of the account of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. The context is discussed at length, explaining the woman's confusion over two differing systems of worship. "Jesus told the woman that the Jewish mode of worship and the Samaritan mode of worship were to be eliminated totally in favor of the divine method of genuine, spiritual worship" (p. 92).

The worship that occurred on Mount Gerizim was enthusiastic heresy. The worship offered at Jerusalem was barren, lifeless orthodoxy. Jerusalem has the truth but not the spirit. Gerizim has the spirit but not the truth. Jesus rebuked both styles of worship when He said, "God is spirit, and His worshiper must worship in spirit and in truth" (pp.115-16).

The focus of these chapters however centers on an understanding and application of John 4:24. Chapter 11, "Worship in Spirit and in Truth," is worth the price of the book. What did Jesus mean by worshiping in spirit? MacArthur says that "The word spirit . . . refers to the human spirit, the inner person. Worship is to flow from the inside out" (p. 117) This is followed by helpful application on how to have a worshiping spirit: We must be yielded to the Holy Spirit, our thoughts must be centered on God, we must have an undivided heart, and we must be repentant.

"Jesus said we are to worship in truth as well, and thus He linked worship inseparably to truth. . . . Worship is a

response built upon truth. . . . We must worship out of an understanding of the Word of God" (p.121-22). The application given here to corporate worship is particularly helpful to men engaged in the work of preaching. Many contemporary preachers are giving more emphasis, in the name of worship, to music, drama and testimonies at the expense of the preaching of God's Word. The author rightly charges,

Our worship must be substantive—based on the Word of God. That elevates the preaching of the Word to the utmost importance in worship. . . . The exposition of the Word, then, is essential to meaningful worship in the assembly of saints (p. 122-23).

In the final section of the book MacArthur gives his definition of worship: "Worship is our innermost being responding with praise for all that God is, through our attitudes, actions, thoughts and words, based on the truth of God as He has revealed Himself" (p. 127). The result of worship is glorifying God.

"Worship As It Was Meant to Be" is the closing chapter. It serves as a summary of the book, dealing with the preparation, hindrances and benefits of worship.

This is an excellent book that deals with the key biblical texts on worship while providing appropriate application. "Reading this book will force you to encounter our God in all His glory. An obedient response will transform you into a true worshiper, fulfilling the ultimate priority" (preface).

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Stepping Heavenward

Elizabeth Prentiss

Calvary Press: Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701.

275 pages, paperback, \$10.00.

The idea of reading a woman's diary is intriguing, and Elizabeth Prentiss has successfully made her main character, Katherine, so real and so vulnerable, that one has to remind oneself that it is fiction! The book consists of Katherine's journal entries from age 16 until near the time of her death.

It is inspiring to read about this young nineteenth-century woman's spiritual journey. Her writings are composed of her thoughts and those of people who have helped her step heavenward. One can easily identify with her struggles to aspire to godliness in the midst of everyday irritations. She recounts her efforts to control her speech, her devotional life, and her selfishness, among other things.

The descriptions of life in the 1800s are so vivid that when one picks up this book, it is imaginable to feel the bumps in the road when riding in a horse-drawn wagon, and feel the pain of a friend dying from a disease that would be easily cured today.

Anyone will be able to appreciate Katherine's penned thoughts. Sometimes she enters them in her journal daily, sometimes monthly, and occasionally there are years between entries. But as one progresses through her musings, one gains insight into the maturing process of the woman. God's grace becomes more and more evident in her with each life-altering experience.

Particularly inspiring to this reviewer was reading about how Katherine changed from selfish to selfless in every aspect of her life, from how she related to her husband to performing tasks she would rather not have done, such as visit the sick and the poor.

I highly recommend this book to everyone. Those who enjoy meaty doctrinal works will find much sound theology in this work. And those who prefer to read just for relaxation and recreation will appreciate the flow of the storyline. It is a difficult book to lay down once you start reading it. It is a very edifying piece of literature.

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