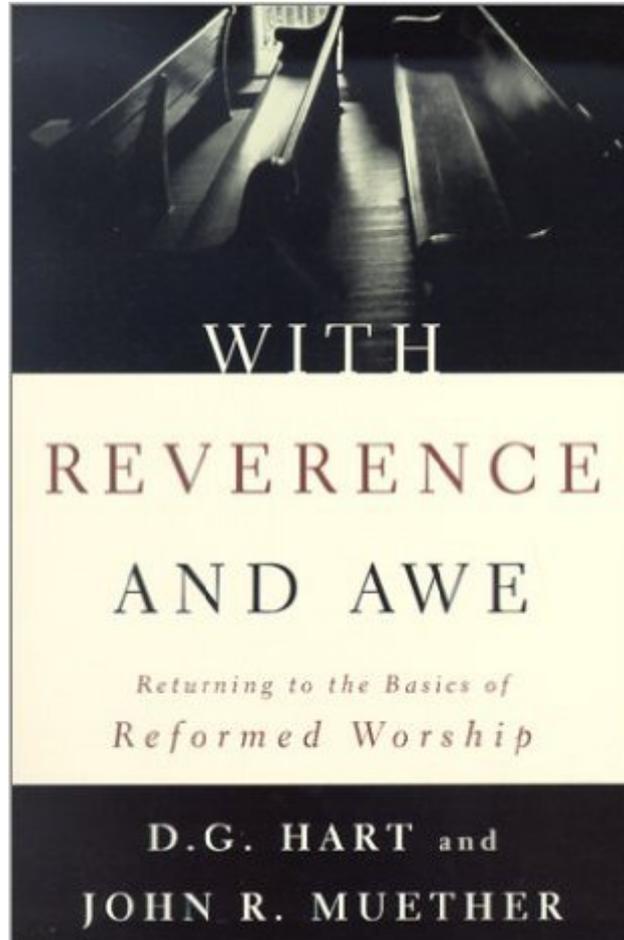


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With Reverence And Awe: Returning To The Basics Of Reformed Worship



Synopsis

"Reformed Christians," write D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, "are increasingly divided over how they ought to worship their God," a situation they regard as urgent. Drawing on Scripture and Reformed confessions and catechisms, the authors answer such questions as these: When are we to worship? How does the regulative principle guide our worship? How does the dialogical principle shape our worship? How do we worship with reverence and joy? What is the place of the means of grace? How do the elements of worship differ from its circumstances? Finally the authors tackle "the most divisive issue"-music.

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Customer Reviews

I would love to have hated the book. TO have found it to be lousy boring writing, with no redeeming value, that way i could dismiss the ideas themselves as the ravings of a madman traditionalist bent only on preserving the archaic past at all costs. Actually i kind of read the first 100 pages or so with this attitude, however the tightness of the argumentation and the mostly soundness of the ideas at least broke through this shell and stopped my mental arguments with the authors long enough to listen. I am Biblically conservative but i am not conservative either politically or socially, my first response to new ideas is almost always to the left, to the progressive, away from traditionalist and conservative explanations. In general i don't really understand conservatives, sometimes they're just plain stupid, often ignorant, always a pain to deal with, however i can profitably read conservative books like this one, if i can hold on to the idea of "the willing suspension of disbelief" long enough to hear their arguments. So if you think i'm predisposed to agree with the book, you're

wrong. So what is the big deal? The book is part of a Sunday School class on Reformed Worship, I've reviewed two other books in the reading list, have more to go. This is the first right side, or traditionalist book I've read on the topic, I don't think I've put quite as many "!" markings in a book in a long time—my questionable point. It is however an excellent source in the reading, I appreciate the authors' positions, as I hope the rest of the review demonstrates. The writing is very well done, particularly the tightness and logicalness of the reasoning. It has the marks of someone who has thought, taught and researched the issue for a number of years, one or two line summaries that act as strong shaping principles (which I'll try to quote below), a progression in argumentation starting with basic principles and arguing towards the disputed ones. You don't have to agree with ideas to appreciate the well done form that they take here, it is a carefully and prayerfully done work that the authors ought to feel proudly about, having done a good and worthwhile job. You can pick up the book anywhere and read a few pages to get the flow of the work and see if you would profit from the time spent reading it, however I think chapter 5 "Acceptable Worship" is the most meaty and my personal favorite. If like me, you read and appreciated J. Frame's *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, this book is a direct assault on those ideas, the pair together are probably more correct than either alone is. So what is it all about? a few notes and pull quotes for reference—

Introduction: originated as Sunday School Lessons at two different OPC's. I personally do not see the usual effects of two writers, I can not tell two different lines of thought or two different ways of writing. how they wrote the book or divided up the task is invisible to me. "Christians seem to have an easy time starting a fight over worship". pg 11 "how ought we to evaluate innovations in our churches?" "where does the Bible encourage us to design worship for outsiders?" pg 12 "Because of the close connection between good theology and appropriate worship, corporate acts of praise and devotion that conflict with Reformed theology must flow from unsound doctrine. In effect our worship provides a barometer of our theology?" pg 14 my first !? notes, of many "this means that we are incapable by our own intelligence, strength, or sincerity of devising God-honoring worship". pg 14

Outlining our Study: first, who is it that worships? when to worship? what is the regulative principle? what is the dialogical principle and how does it shape our liturgy? what is the place of worship in the means of grace? what are the elements and circumstances of worship? our task is to show that such faithfulness to Reformed doctrine also requires loyalty to a certain kind of worship? pg 21

the theme of the book: "We were created to serve God, and our worship on the Lord's Day should be conducted to give him the glory and honor that belong to him along as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer." pg 221.

The Church and the World our churches seem to be more concerned about winning the approval of the world and less on guard against the dangers of conforming to the world pg 26 (in worship) we

leave the world and its cares and duties to enter into God's presence. pg 26the church's otherworldliness, the contra mundum, against the world or fallen humanity in rebellion against God pg 29this internal threat is deadly precisely because it denies the separateness of the church by gradually merging the church with the world under the guise of peace. an all embracing paganism results, Machen warned, when the church forsakes its call to holiness and pursues worldliness pg 30the very act of worship, of assembling in the presence of God, therefore, is simultaneously the church's renunciation of the world. Worship is a subversive and countercultural act of an alien people who, forsaking the world, listen to the voice of her master saying, "follow me". pg 33-342. The Purpose of the Churchthe wrong idea of the church as a means of social or cultural transformation. exercise of social influence, the social gospel, liberal Protestant theology as allowing the world to set the church's agenda. pg 40the task of the church is to exalt its head, to teach only the doctrines he has revealed, to worship him as he has commanded, and to order its life by what he has ordained. pg 41competing models of the church, Christ's command to his disciples in the Great Commission, the starting point to understand the purpose of the church pg 43the misunderstanding of the church and worship as vehicles for evangelism rather than the wider task of making disciples while rejecting the idols of this world. pg 483. A Worshiping Communityin the same way that the marks of the church tell us how to find the true church, so also corporate worship helps us identify the church. worship is essential to the church's identity. pg 55the church that properly worships will be peculiar to the world. its way will seem odd and irrelevant, and its language will sound strange. pg 604. The Holy Day of Worshipwithout financial support from the state churches have been forced to adopt market strategies to grow and develop. pg 64problems with revivalism: chief means for determining genuine spirituality, intense and earnest times of spiritual awakening have been used to distinguish the saved from the lost.the Sabbath is designed to work slowly, quietly, seemingly imperceptively, in reorienting believers' appetites heavenward. it is not a quick fix nor is it necessarily a spiritual high. we all have to return to our day jobs. pg 65the problem of the spirituality of the mountaintop experiences is that no one can live on the mountain. pg 65the distinction between the holy and the profane lies at the heart of biblical teaching about the Sabbath and worship. pg 71Scripture instructs us to distinguish among activities that are holy, those that are inherently sinful, and those that are common or lawful on other days. pg 72"God calls Christians to live holy lives. He calls us to live in the world and to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. He also commands us, at set times and places, to participate in holy things that are distinct from the ways of the world. God has given us a holy meal(the Lord's Supper), holy water(baptism), holy words(preaching), and a holy vocation(the minister of the Word). He has also given us holy time: one day for worship and rest.

Contrary to popular claims, Reformed Christians do believe in a liturgical calendar. But it is weekly, not seasonal." pg 735. Acceptable Worship regulative principle: do in worship only what God requires is a consequence of the 10 Commandments. normative principle: what is not forbidden is permissible. pg 78 Calvin argued that we worship for God's glory, only secondarily for our edification and not in the least for our pleasure. pg 79 it is premised on such unchanging truths as the character of God, the extent of human depravity, and the command to love our neighbor. pg 82 elements are the what, circumstances are the how of worship pg 866. Reformed Liturgy the gathering of God's people out of this world and into His presence. it is impossible to understand public worship apart from the church in its corporate or visible character. pg 91 the premises of Reformed theology-God's sovereignty, creation, and providence: man's depravity; Christ's mediation; the Holy Spirit's saving application of Christ's work; and the centrality of Scripture-should be implicitly present in Reformed liturgy. pg 93 but the principle of covenantal or dialogical worship, following biblical patterns of worship, challenges this distinction by insisting that all of worship is vertical. it is a holy transaction or conversation between God and his people. pg 96 the blessing of vertical worship is sufficient for our edification. we do not need to hear things from each other in worship to be blessed or encouraged or convicted. we need not tinker with the dialogical structure to add therapeutic features that appear to give encouragement and support. pg 977. Leading and Participating in Worship current retreat from clericalism of the Westminster divines is the popular doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. pg 105 listening and appropriating are activities that require concentration and spiritual discipline. pg 1138. Worship with Godly Fear what is permissible in worship, but also what is wise pg 119 so acceptable worship is a dialogue with God that displays awe and godly fear in an appropriate pattern of elements. pg 119 so reverence must always be accompanied by simplicity pg 121 joy-along with a full range of emotions such as grief, anger, desire, hope, fear and love- should find natural outlets in worship. But the need for reverence and gravity dictates that any expression of emotion in worship should be tempered by moderation, self-control, and above all, respect for who God is and an awareness of our place before him. pg 122 the Israelites knew that if God did not consume the sacrifice he would consume the worshipers. pg 1239. The Means of Grace no metaphor is more central to the Bible's description of the Christian life than the idea of pilgrimage. pg 136 transcendence-supernatural-Creation-conservative immanence-natural means-providence-liberals pg 137 outside of the church, no ordinary means of salvation WCF 2:2 pg 138 he who refuse to be a son of the Church desires in vain to have God as his Father. pg 139 Calvin on Gal 4:26 10. Elements, Circumstances, and Form the essentials for Reformed worship, then, are the reading and preaching of the Word, prayer, song, the collection, and the sacraments.

to leave these out of worship or to add to them is to go beyond God's Word. pg 150sermons must be prepared, a warning to extemporaneous preachers, no topical preaching, life can not be divorced from doctrine pg 153yet a dangerous assumption lurks behind the reasoning (worship without form), that genuine devotion and sincere feelings for God can only be expressed adequately when we use our own words, not the words of someone else. pg 154so ecstasy or spontaneity in worship cannot be a measurement of its legitimacy. the only genuine experience in worship is a proper response to God as he has revealed himself in his Word.it is possible for worshipers to deceive others and themselves through counterfeit experiences. pg 155might not the decline of psalm singing and catechism memorizing among Presbyterians indicate the triumph of experience in our worship? pg 15511. Song in Worship hymns drove out the metrical psalms over the course of the 19thC. pg 161prevailing illiteracy over the Psalter in today's churches is a testimony to how much of our Reformed heritage we have abandoned. pg 162a wise approach is to suspect anything that has not withstood the test of time. pg 163worship is the church's renunciation of the world. ... the purpose of the church is discipleship and not merely soul winning. pg 164we should not expect to listen to, much less to sing, the music that we enjoy during the week, a pint that applies wherever our tastes may lie, from country to classical to "contemporary Christian music". pg 165song was chiefly a form of prayer. it was not, as many argue today, a way of teaching the Word in order to communicate theology. pg 166acceptable worship does not come naturally to sinful people. worship involves habits and appetites that are only acquired over time by believers as they mature in the faith by exposure to the means of grace. pg 166form that the elements of worship take ... are shaped by our cultural setting ... an effort to discern the ways in which she is tempted by worldliness, what it means to be set apart from the world and how avoiding worldliness promotes holiness. ... resistance fighters against worldliness, that is, to be a people set apart. pg 169by stressing the subjective experience, the new music eclipses the objective basis for our coming to worship. This is reinforced by the characteristic repetition in the lyrics that atrophies sustained theological reflection on God, on his attributes, and on his works. pg 171Conclusion:reformed worship is founded on the Word of Godreformed worship is theocentricreformed worship nurtures God's people through the means of gracereformed worship is dialogicalreformed worship is simplereformed worship is eschatologicalI think even from these few quotations and notes that the book is a product of careful analysis and prayerful concern with what "doth God require".I'd direct the readers attention to:The Regulative Principle: Scripture, Tradition, and CultureAn Email Debate Between Darryl Hart and John Frameat [...] slash frame_articles slash 1998HartDebate dot htmread it next. even before either of their books if you haven't already done so.I'm not anywhere near the

end of this study. I'm trying not to make conclusions but to listen to the positions and arguments. I like the book, mostly for its organization and skillful presentation of their principles, which I think are clear from the short quotes above. Their Big Point, that the church is against culture is worth keeping in mind, even if it is not quite right.

The authors call this book a "primer" on Reformed worship, and it fulfills that role well. It does not cover the topic of Reformed worship exhaustively, since that would require many hundreds, if not thousands of pages, but it presents the basic ideas behind Reformed worship well. It does not contain very many specific suggestions for the conduct of worship, but it should be possible for the reader to apply the principles described in the book to a wide variety of questions with relative ease. If you are not familiar with the term "Reformed," it refers to the group of Protestant denominations that derive their theology from the works of John Calvin. These churches have historically been dominant in Geneva, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland. In the United States, they are represented today by a cluster of denominations that include the words "Reformed" or "Presbyterian" in their names, such as the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). It does not include those denominations that followed the modernist side in the fundamentalist/modernist debate of the early 20th century, such as the Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA). Some denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), bear some features of the Reformed tradition, while also exhibiting many features of the separate tradition of American evangelicalism. Messrs. Hart and Muenther are from the OPC, and their views are sometimes too limited to that particular denomination, e.g., their discussion of Sunday evening worship. In addition, the work is overly severe in a few places. Overall, however, the book is an excellent and timely call for the Reformed church to pay attention to its worship and to ensure that its worship is thoroughly consistent with Reformed theology.

Do you enjoy reading books that get you to thinking about things differently? Hart and Muether will do this for you on the topic of worship. Have you ever thought about worship as a congregational conversation with God? Or how about the relationship between worship and how the Great Commission is to be fulfilled. So much of today's books on worship are really nothing more than an attempt by the author to defend his/her preferences. Not this one. Hart and Muether with grace, insight and sound theology walk you through New Testament worship in the most refreshing way. I love this book. I wish I could buy a copy for every pastor and worship leader in the country. The congregation that captures the vision for worship that these writers put forth will enter into a world of

praise rarely realized in today's modern church. This is a keeper!

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