The Oxford History of Christian Worship

Worship Through The Age Of The Church

The Oxford History of Christian Worship is a comprehensive and authoritative history of the origins and development of Christian worship to the present day. Backed by an international roster of experts as contributors, this new book will examine the liturgical traditions of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, and Pentecostal traditions throughout history and across the world. With 240 photographs and 10 maps, the full geographical spread of Christianity is covered, including Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, East Asia, and the Pacific. Following contemporary trends in scholarship, it will cover social and cultural contexts, material culture and the arts. Written to be accessible to the educated layperson, this unique and beautiful volume will also appeal to clergy and liturgists and more generally to students and scholars of the liturgy, Christian theology, church history, and world history.

My Personal Review:
ice solid binding, great illustrations, 900+ pp., really an amazing work.

IDEOLOGY
All mainline Protestants (liberals and neo-orthodox, for lack of a better generalization), progressive Ro. Catholics, or Eastern Orthodox, plus one charismatic from Westmont. The Methodists are the most numerous, but the writers span the Xian family tree (Lutherans, Mennonites, etc.). The only ones left out are Evangelicals (with the exception of the Westmont author). A big group to leave out, but not surprising.

SCOPE: Global, historic (AD 30-present), ecumenical (see above), detailed (34 chapters, over 900 pp.)

Some random thoughts:
Chap. 1 Xian Worship: Scriptural BASIS AND THEO. Frame by Wainwright is exactly what you'd expect from anyone who has read his wonderful book Doxology (1980; systemtics written from a relentlessly LITURGICAL
perspective. All theological concepts are related to worship. Wainwright does a very fine job of introducing a topic as large as worship. He does this by opening with a beautiful plea for Xian worship being founded on the particularity of the Biblical God and as opposed to all idols and so-called gods. This comes off, frankly, as a very Reformed section of the book. About a helpful as anything i have read by others with whom I share more theological opinions (Hughes O. Old, John Frame, etc).

For example, he pulls out of the book of Romans all these familiar passages, showing them to be shot through with liturgical language and cultic terms. I will never see Romans the same way again. Then moves on like it was nothing to a brilliant discussion of Imago Dei and how this means we were made for communion with God and then, of course, made for life in society.

BTW -- this wouldn"t be a modern mainline book if, after brilliantly demonstrating Xian particularity and exclusive claims to God, he didn"t turn around and undermine this with a short but unfortunate nod to universalism (through the benevolent lens of von Balthasar).

Chap. 2 -- Maxwell Johnson. He shows something we all want to fight against -- there was not ONE EARLY CHURCH way to do worship, but several. Some, no doubt, had direct Apostolic roots and others did not. We get ahold of a book like The Apostolic Tradition and we all feel safe -- we can at least hang our hats on it, being right from the pen of Hippolytus of Rome and early 3rd century. So THIS is how the Early Church did liturgy! Well, not really. Lately scholars seem to think its not by Hippolytus (it was anonymous after all), maybe not Roman, and maybe not even 3rd cent. (earliest copies we have are 5th cent.). I am not up on the latest here, but the general point is a muddy one -- there isn"t one ideal liturgy of the Early church out there to be recovered and replicated. Of course, we wouldn't want to anyway. There"s a Holy Spirit and all. But we CAN find some common phrases, elements, themes, to shape and inform our current worship. This chapter is long-winded and a little too detailed, but great.

Chap. 13 on Reformed Tradition in NETHERLANDS was the most surprising to me. I expected alot better liturgy from this tradition. 1553 Micron liturgy has the most bizarre order of worship imaginable. Sermon comes early, announcements after it, then confession of sin, ends with intercession. Only highlight -- very last item before benediction is an exhortation for the poor.

In the exile Dutch church (French speaking) no member could refuse to partake in the Lord"s Supper without good reason (very interesting).

But now things go way down hill. A nat"l synod produces a 1574 liturgy that was much simpler (Puritan) and had no confession of sin. This order remained the same, we are told, into the 21st century, except that teh
confession of faith was replaced with Ten Commandments. Ughh! and the Lord"s Supper was celebrated only 6 times a year.

This same 1574 nat"l synod also decreed no funeral liturgicess, just preaching, since the dead might be honored instead of God. And before each celebration of the meal a censura morum (moral investigation) of members was held by a joint group of pastors, elders, deacons (well, do note at least they were three office, not two). Later synods like Middleburg (1581) did not allow Xmas celebration. Eventually it was allowed with sobriety to prevent idleness. No explicit absolution or declaration of pardon was allowed because the preaching of the Gospel contains enough forgiveness!

In the 17th cent. the very few "liturgical" elements -- creeds, ten commandments, etc. -- all took place sadly in a sort of pre-service. After them, THEN the pastor would enter the church say a prayer and go right into the sermon! The eucharist was supposed to be celebrated 6 times a year but in many cases only happened annually (p. 467). The Reformers would have died. People wore only black. Maundy Thrus and Good Fri were NOT observed in Dutch Reformed churches, and Easter was explicitly to be a sober emphasis on Christ"s DEATH!?

An 1817 synod gave complete liturgical freedom. Freedom from the mess cataloged above would be great, but this also meant freedom from doing any recognizable liturgy. Set forms of prayer, we are told, were viewed as spiritual weakness. A schism occurred in 1834 over this stuff.

20th cent. saw some improvements. Kuyper wrote Our Liturgy in 1911 (Is it available in English?). In 1973 several Protestant denominations (Lutherans, Mennonites, Reformed) came together to write a joint hymnal. (Good idea! How about PCA/OPC link up with AMiA, Missouri Synod, EPC and some others to do the same? Each could still keep their separate ones, but congregations could elect to use the ecumenical one instead of the parachurch ones many use.) Liturgies are reproduced here. Supper finally is celebrated 8-10 times a year (though just 4 times in more orthodox congregations).

After that, chap. 14 on SCOTTISH Reformed makes the Scots look more liturgical and rich. The author here is Duncan Forrester, who was Dean of New College, Edinburgh.

Lots of good insights. Some tragic, some helpful and lovely. The ironic spectacle -- mobs going way beyond Knox and the Reformers in rioting to destroy every imagined vestige of "idolatrie" while the very same people jealously guarded all kinds of old practices the Reformers sought to end (saints" days fairs, certain funeral rituals, etc.). The strong influence of German Lutheran liturgies on Wishart and Geo. Buchanan is interesting.
Knox's 1564 liturgy calls for communion once a month (that's about 40 times too few a year, but better than Holland). Sadly it over-fences, of course. But communion is enveloped in wonderful prayers of "thanksgiving".

Essay is concise and balanced.

Chap. 15 on KOREAN worship is another surprise. They hit two of the three big early missionaroes (Horace Allen and Underwood, but why not Samuel Austin Moffett?). Tell how Nevius' principles and pragmatic concerns (pragmatism ALWAYS messes us up in ways we don't anticipate at the time!) led to a "temporary" low church, revivalist, simple liturgy, which sadly endured despite all efforts at liturgical renewal that began in the 1920s. Not til the 1980s did any of the liturgical impulse get any foothold at all, the authors claim. Only silver lining -- the non-liturgical, seeker-sensitive "open worship" spreading through much of Korean has been resisted by most 21st cent. Presbyterians, we are told. Small consolation.

Chap. 16 on ANGLICANS. The author Bryan Spinks is Yale prof., with an interest in music. This is a long chapter, but (unlike chap. 2) needed to be.

Chap. 21 on PENTECOSTALS written by a Westmont prof differed, to

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