



INTRODUCTION

Tell me a story, Aunt Dinelle,” are words I have heard repeatedly since the time my oldest nephew could talk. Passed down to his brother and sisters, the hunger for stories continues and is almost certainly a part of any visit to their home. These stories, generally made up on the spur of the moment, are neither literary masterpieces nor particularly clever. They are usually quite fanciful, however, and always include the escapades of my nieces and nephews. Even when we grow up, we never seem to lose the desire to hear a good story.

A biblical study reveals that worship involves, at its roots and heart, a story. Far from being distant and irrelevant, this story gives us reason to rejoice, to praise, to hope, to give, to belong, to lament, and most importantly, to respond.

Because it is God who always takes the initiative, Christian worship is best discussed in the terms of *response*. In worship we respond to God and this is true of the whole of liturgy, whether it be praise, thanksgiving, supplication, or repentance, whether it be Eucharist or baptism, or liturgical prayer or the celebration of the Church’s year. If this is so, worship must be seen in the context of saving history, which is the record of the divine initiative. (Crichton, 9)

I have chosen to consider our response to certain attributes of God. The possi-

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bilities, of course, are infinite, but these particular pictures of the Divine evoke certain responses in Scripture that give us something concrete to consider.

The story of worship begins with creation. It winds its way through God's redemptive plan and the incredible gift of forgiveness. At the center stands Jesus Christ, the One and Only, who makes worship in spirit and truth possible. This story is still being written, and will not culminate until we stand before the Throne "lost in wonder, love and praise."¹ Our part of the story includes confession and repentance, offering and thanksgiving, praise and remembering, belonging and serving, all prompted by the work of the Holy Spirit.

This book is a journey through this story. It is an attempt to offer a study, primarily of corporate worship, viewed through the lens of biblical history.

There is no attempt in the following pages to "define" worship, because in Scripture worship is not so much defined as described. Throughout history God's people have worshiped, both when gathered and scattered, corporately and privately, in a myriad of ways.

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I believe in "whole-life worship," and would prefer another term to describe what we do when we gather on Sunday morning. A good choice is the word "liturgy," but many in the Christian Church distrust the word. Derived from the Greek, *leitourgia*, which means "service" or "work of the people," liturgy simply denotes what we do as the gathered people of God.

It is hoped that the reader will recognize that while the biblical principles presented here transcend culture, every body of believers finds itself in its own unique story, and church leaders must do their part in applying these principles to his or her own context.

*⁸Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.*

*⁹Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.*

*¹⁰Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.*

*¹¹Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always.*

*¹²Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced. . . .*

*²³Sing to the LORD, all the earth;
proclaim his salvation day after day.*

*²⁴Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

*²⁵For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.*

*²⁹ . . . ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.
. . . worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*

*³⁴Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.*

*³⁶Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.*

Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the LORD."

1Chr 16:8-12,23-25,29,34,36