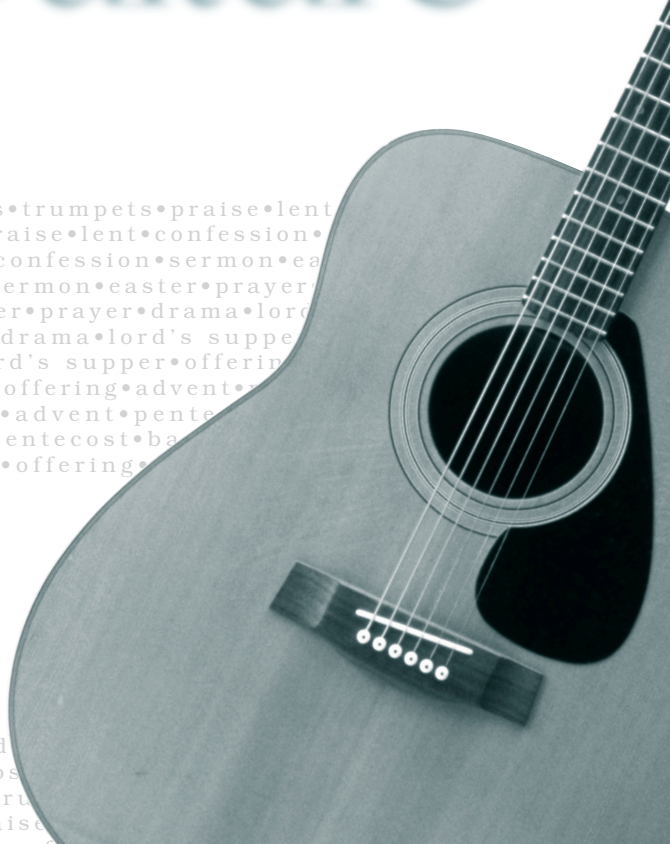


AUTHENTIC

# Worship IN A Changing Culture

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AUTHENTIC  
Worship  
IN A  
Changing  
Culture



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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# A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

*Authentic Worship* is the work of many. It reflects the dedicated efforts of a seven-member Worship Study Committee that prepared a report for the 1997 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. That report forms the core of this study edition.

**Duane Kelderman**, pastor of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, served as principal author. The council of Neland Avenue Church deserves thanks for granting Dr. Kelderman release time from his regular duties to devote to this task.

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Numerous other individuals, both within and beyond the Christian Reformed Church, offered advice, critiqued elements of the report, or otherwise contributed materially to this project. To all these the church owes a hearty debt of gratitude.

## P R E F A C E

*Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture* began as a study report within one denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America. But the issues dealt with will sound familiar to many Christians in many different communions. Though the language is often “in house,” we offer this study in hopes that other communions may also find some help in analyzing the theological and cultural landscape that is home to all North Americans.

When editing the report, one question kept surfacing: Just who is included in all the “we” language—the committee that generated the report? The Christian Reformed denomination? The broader Christian community? The entire North American cultural scene? To this multifaceted question, members of the committee usually had the same response: “Yes.” In that same spirit, the committee did not speak of “Reformed worship,” but rather of “Christian worship,” acknowledging that “like every other worship tradition, the Reformed worship tradition has both received gifts from and given gifts to Christian worship; what it has given has arisen from what it first received” (p. 76).

It is our hope that many within the Christian Reformed Church as well as beyond will find this book helpful in understanding more of what it means to offer God our authentic worship in a changing culture.

Emily R. Brink  
Music and Liturgy Editor  
CRC Publications

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Going to church is a way of life for most people in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). We take worship seriously and are worshipping in increasingly diverse ways. Gone are the days when a simple order of worship printed on the back of the Sunday bulletin sufficed to define the CRC at worship. Congregations are now experimenting with new forms of liturgy, different styles of music, and alternative ways of celebrating the sacraments. CRC worship, once resounding with a heavy Dutch accent, now has become an exuberant chorus of many “tribes and peoples.” Leading worship, once a task reserved for pastors, is now likely to involve a broad cross section of church members as planners and/or participants.

This creative ferment has produced countless conferences and workshops, new denominational committees and publications, much study, and not a few arguments. What should happen in worship, and how? Are there right and wrong ways to worship? Exactly what is *Reformed* worship?

In 1968, synod adopted a landmark report on liturgy that sought to provide guidance on such questions. This report analyzed Christian worship through the centuries, outlined a biblical perspective on worship, and offered a number of models that many congregations today are still using with great blessing. Though not as widely utilized as it deserves to be, the 1968 report remains an indispensable starting point for reflecting on principles and practices of Reformed worship as we approach the twenty-first century.

Two contributions of this 1968 report are particularly noteworthy. First, the report proposes a helpful way of thinking about worship in general. The central thesis of the report states that Christian wor-

ship is a *dialogue* between God and the people of God. God moves toward us in revelation, and we move toward God in response. God comes to us in grace, and we respond in grateful obedience. The story is told, and God's people say thanks. While the concept of worship as dialogue may be open to refinement, the underlying principle remains a sound one. It provides a useful corrective to the conviction that worship is a purely human activity and that worshippers are merely passive spectators rather than vital participants in an active *engagement* with God.

Second, the 1968 report offers a helpful way of thinking about worship in particular. It identifies four core *motifs* (taken from the 1965 Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands) that provide basic criteria for evaluating and reforming contemporary worship. These four motifs are

- *the biblical motif (the Word of God)*. The Bible, although it does not prescribe an order of worship, is the church's basic orientation and authority for worship. The Bible reveals the God we worship and the kingdom established by the crucified and risen Christ. The Bible commands worship, shows us the Christian community at worship, and in its totality gives us the raw material for making certain theological claims regarding worship.
- *the catholic motif (the history of the church)*. The church at worship is organically connected with the body of Christ that has gone before and the universal body of Christ in the present. While tradition alone does not determine worship standards, this motif reminds us that the liturgy of the church is not ours first of all to do with as we please but belongs to the body of Christ. Respect for the enduring structure of Christian worship guards against individualism and gimmickry and helps us distinguish between the essential and the peripheral. History grants us an appreciation for what should be stable in worship *and* for what should be flexible and fluid.
- *the confessional motif (the faith of the church)*. Every church that gathers for worship holds certain beliefs, which it articulates in certain ways. Although formal creeds and doctrinal confessions may not be explicit in worship, what the church believes and how it worships should be integrated. The more self-conscious the church is about this connection, the stronger its worship and its beliefs will be.



- *the pastoral motif (the contemporary needs of the people of God)*. A congregation always worships as specific people here and now. This motif calls worship leaders to ask, “Who are these people worshipping here today? What are their needs? What idols compete for their allegiance? How do they hear what is said?” While the other motifs are born of faith and memory and emphasize the need for stability, this one is born of love and expresses the need for flexibility.

Recently synod commissioned a new study to address the many dramatic changes in worship that have occurred since 1968 and that are reflected in the growing diversity of practices and attitudes found within the Christian Reformed Church today. The result is *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture*, a report adopted by the Synod of 1997, presented here in an edition for study and discussion.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive biblical/theological study of worship, nor is it a “how-to” manual for preparing worship services. At the heart of the report lies a theological reflection upon today’s cultural situation in which we live and worship. It first identifies and explains some of the cultural forces at work in today’s North American church and then reflects theologically upon these forces and the changes they initiate in worship. The goal is to equip church leaders with perspectives and insights that will help them make decisions regarding worship that are biblically and theologically informed as well as culturally discerning.

The central thrust of this report is a unifying one. “Worship wars” and labels such as *traditional* and *contemporary* unnecessarily polarize the church and unfairly caricature fellow believers’ sincere attempts to worship God. This report strives to articulate a biblical/theological center for worship that resists simplistic either/or choices, one that embraces the strengths and critiques the weaknesses of worship at every point of the worship continuum.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS STUDY EDITION**

This study edition is intended for use by anyone with an interest in worship, especially for those who have direct responsibility for the worship ministry of the church (pastors, elders, worship committee members, worship planning teams, and musicians). Although the

report occasionally uses technical language and style characteristic of synodical reports, it has intentionally been written to be thought-provoking and appealing to all church members.

The core of the report consists of two major sections:

- a concise summary of the contemporary cultural forces affecting worship
- a more extended set of theological reflections on the enduring themes and contemporary dynamics of biblical worship.

Numerous questions, quotations, and suggestions for discussion are printed in the margins of these two sections. This material is intended both to stimulate personal reflection and to help prepare for leading and participating in group study. Some questions and quotations amplify specific points raised in the report; some are designed to connect theological principles and elements of cultural analysis; others are addressed primarily to those responsible for evaluating and renewing worship in a particular congregation.

The concluding section contains thirty questions and answers regarding typical issues individuals and congregations struggle with today. The purpose of this section is not to offer a definitive solution to every current problem or to anticipate every future controversy. Rather, the Q&A format is designed to model informed discussion of concrete issues. The goal of this section is twofold: first, to demonstrate how the cultural analysis and theological reflections presented in the body of the report can shape our approach to difficult issues; second, to emphasize that in controversial matters of worship, discernment and wisdom are as important as expertise in culture and worship.

This book can be used as a basis for individual study, for discussion in church councils and committee retreats, or as an adult education text. It is self-guided, and the material can be organized in a variety of ways to fit different needs and occasions. Two possible formats are suggested on pages 10-11. (Report sections and study edition pages are noted in parentheses.)

### **Format One: A Two-Part Overview**

This format will provide a general overview of the report. The Q&A section (section 3) of the report is not included here, although selected questions in the margins of the first two sections will refer you to this section of the report.

#### *Session 1: The Historical and Cultural Context of Worship*

- The 1968 Report (Introduction, pp. 6-8)
- Recent History of Protestant Worship in North America (section 1, pp. 14-19)
- Cultural Analysis (section 1, pp. 20-34)

#### *Session 2: The Dynamics of Biblical Worship*

- Enduring Themes (section 2, pp. 37-49)
- Contemporary Dynamics of Biblical Worship (section 2, pp. 50-75)
- Reformed Worship (section 2, pp. 75-78)

## **Format Two: A Five-Part Study**

This format will permit a more in-depth study of the report in a different order than presented in this study edition. It utilizes all three sections of the report and encourages discussion of local issues.

### *Session 1: Looking Back: Historical Context*

- Reformed Worship (section 2, pp. 75-78)
- Recent History of Protestant Worship in North America (section 1, pp. 14-19)

### *Session 2: Looking Around: Cultural Context*

- Cultural Analysis (section 1, pp. 20-34)

### *Session 3: Looking Inward: Biblical Principles*

- The 1968 Report (Introduction, pp. 6-8)
- The Enduring Themes of Biblical Worship (section 2, pp. 37-49)
- Worship and the Heart (section 2, pp. 50-52)

### *Session 4: Looking Outward: Community and Diversity*

- Worship and Community (section 2, pp. 52-58)
- Worship and Diversity (section 2, pp. 58-68)
- Worship and Evangelism (section 2, 69-75)

### *Session 5: Looking Forward: Challenges and Opportunities*

- Selected Q&A (section 3)
- Local Issues

Obviously these formats can be adapted freely as circumstances dictate. Some proposed sessions and topics might easily be expanded, while others might be condensed or reordered. Parts of one format could be combined with the other—for example, a worship planning retreat might be organized on the basis of Format One but include a localized evaluation similar to the final session proposed in Format Two.

## **Tips for Leading Group Study**

When this book is used for group study, careful preparation by the leader is very important.

### *Before the Session*

- Read the material carefully and consider how it relates to your particular situation. (While the general principles discussed in the report should apply everywhere, specific issues or examples may not apply to your church or group.)
- Review the discussion questions printed in the margins and select those most appropriate for your group. Jot down questions of your own; these are likely to be the most relevant of all.
- Arrange for someone to read Scripture and/or lead in prayer.
- Encourage group members to read and reflect on the material in advance.

### *During the Session*

- Invite questions and comments from the group. You might want to set the context for a discussion by reviewing orally the relevant section of the text (or have participants do so, if they are willing).
- Pace the discussion so that time is allotted wisely.
- Respect everyone's views and give everyone an opportunity to speak. (Some may feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in smaller groups of two or three.)
- Assign people to follow up on questions your group could not answer or on ideas proposed. (At the end of this study edition is a list of resources for additional study and worship planning.)

We trust this report and study edition will be a source of insight and encouragement for all who read it. May the God from whom all blessings flow be truly glorified wherever God's people gather to worship.

SECTION I

Contemporary Forces  
Affecting  
**Worship**

In the last thirty years the Christian Reformed Church has witnessed unprecedented changes in its public worship. Although the 1968 report of the Liturgical Committee was written to respond to increasing diversity in worship practices in the church at that time, that report could assume significant uniformity in CRC worship practices. Today that uniformity no longer exists.

The question in this section is: What happened? What are some of the historical, ecclesiastical, and cultural forces that have led to marked changes in worship in the last thirty years? We have chosen to answer this complex question at two levels:

- First, we offer a brief history of recent Protestant worship in North America.
- Second, we offer some analysis of our contemporary cultural situation.

**RECENT HISTORY OF PROTESTANT  
WORSHIP IN NORTH AMERICA**

**Compare the four major forces outlined on pages 14-19 with the four motifs from the 1968 Liturgical Committee report (see pp. 7-8). How or to what extent do recent changes in worship reflect these motifs?**

The 1968 report began with a brief history of Christian worship, a helpful outline of the major patterns of Christian worship with particular attention to worship in the Reformed tradition. Since 1968 four major forces have served as catalysts for change in Protestant worship generally and CRC worship in particular: the worldwide ecumenical liturgical movement, the charismatic movement, “front door evangelism,” and cultural diversity.

**1. Worldwide Ecumenical Liturgical Movement**

The first catalyst for change has been the influence of the worldwide ecumenical liturgical

movement of the last fifty years, which has involved scholars and church leaders across many denominations in an effort to promote worship renewal based on examples from the early church (second through fourth centuries). In fact, the 1968 report already reflects this influence with its call for congregational participation, the unity of Word and Table, and the recovery of the ancient pattern of thanksgiving at the Lord's Supper. This movement, which should not be confused with *high church* worship, upheld the following goals:

- to open up the riches of the gospel in worship, with particular attention to the death and resurrection of Christ;
- to encourage the “full, conscious, and active” participation of the congregation in worship (defined as follows by the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Roman Catholic Church and adopted by Vatican II in 1963):

*“Christ’s faithful . . . should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s Body. They should give thanks to God. . . . Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other, so that finally God may be all in all”* (Flannery, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, pp. 16-17).

- to recover the ancient pattern of Word and Table as the normal pattern for Sunday worship.

Out of these goals have reemerged the following worship practices:

- the Christian year as an annual narrative recalling of events in salvation history;

**The reforms of Vatican II have exerted enormous influence on worship renewal among Catholics and Protestants alike. Do you consider the Vatican’s definition of “full, conscious participation” valid? Does it describe the worship in your church? Should it? Why or why not?**



See Q&A 25,  
pages 97-98.

- the *Revised Common Lectionary* as a way of promoting the reading of significant portions of Scripture in worship and in preaching the “whole counsel of God”;
- an emphasis on expository sermons;
- the recovery of the ancient prayer of thanksgiving as part of the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper.

**Reflect on your personal experiences of worshiping in other churches and traditions. What, if any, evidence of the four major forces described on pages 14-19 did you note?**

These liturgical reforms have been widely adopted, though in varying degrees, throughout Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. The official published worship resources of many Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations all have in varying degrees reflected these practices, often borrowing liturgical texts, hymns, and patterns from each other. For the Christian Reformed Church, some of these priorities, such as expository preaching, are not new. Others, like the use of the full prayer of thanksgiving at the Lord’s Supper, are a recovery of practices of the early church but are essentially new to the experience of most Christian Reformed congregations.

## **2. Charismatic Movement**

Second, worship in nearly every Christian tradition has been influenced by the charismatic movement. A series of revivals in the late 1960s, which resembled the earlier Pentecostal outpourings at the beginning of the twentieth century, soon led to important changes in weekly congregational worship. Like the liturgical movement, the charismatic movement has emphasized the active participation of all people in worship through active use of the body. Particularly characteristic of the charismatic movement has been the use of both contemplative and exuberant songs of praise and prayer, services of healing, times for ministry and prayer