

BOOK REVIEWS

New Ways to Worship. The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1980.
Pp. vi + 125. Paperback, £1.75.

The problem in issuing a book with a title like *New Ways to Worship* is twofold. First, if “new” in worship is better than “old”, how do we know it? How do we replace older (and presumably outmoded) liturgical forms with more contemporaneous ones, without merely exchanging one form of captivity (old fashionedness) for another (the cursed need to be “with it” all the time)?

Secondly, the problem of finding language appropriate to the worship of God is ultimately insoluble. No language is ever adequate and no actions perfectly express the praise that is due to God. But since, as Augustine said on a different occasion, it is better to say something than to remain silent, we must continue to struggle with the impossible task—reminting our vocabulary, adapting existing forms, and devising new ways to reach the unchurched and the disenchanged, while not putting aside old ways that still seem familiar and fresh enough to the worshippers who come to church on Sundays.

Thus, the reviewer of a book like this needs to couch any criticism carefully and to recognise that the worship that is offered in spirit and in truth comes in many different forms. All true worship is an *action de grâce*, a graceful and grateful response to the God who creates, redeems, and renews. It is not therefore subject to normal rules of judgment or approbation. Letters printed on a page can never fully express that awareness of God or empowerment of the Spirit which make the vision of God seem a little less dark to the waiting, worshipping community.

This is enough to say about the impossible task to which the compilers of this book have attended, and we can be grateful for their labours. In much that they have written there is good sense and pastoral sensibility. Chapters Two and Three have wise words about permanence in Christian worship and about planning for change. Chapter Four has helpful suggestions for different parts of the Sunday service. And the orders for evening worship (pp. 53-56), Pentecost (pp. 97-102), and married couples (pp. 108-110) seem to express most effectively what the compilers are aiming at.

But hard questions must also be asked. If a congregation is to be truly attentive to the Spirit that is the breath of God, will the blowing up of a balloon (p. 1) be a symbolic act that is anything like proportionate to the gift of that Spirit? And will crunching “crisps and apples” (pp. 4, 68, 78) in any adequate way express that eating of the bread of heaven, of which St John writes in his Gospel?

Much in the book lacks freshness and much else needs fuller theological reflection. It is time to get rid of sexually exclusive language

(e.g. pp. 49, 104); and severely dated or musically effete material will fail to satisfy the Gospel command, that we worship God with all our mind. (Stony silence seems to me the only appropriate response to the bidding on p. 92 to sing "The Old Sanhedrin had a Committee", to the tune *Old Macdonald*. Neither the tune nor the words help me, at least, in any way to do justice to an ancient and honourable court of the Jews, let alone to ponder on the sheer and awesome grace of God.) At least two of the orders for the Lord's Supper have what in charity can best be described as a diminished sense of the eucharistic presence (pp. 51, 72). And if the compilers want to bring incense into Reformed or Protestant worship, why do they not do it honestly—and in ways other traditions would recognise, for example, by censuring the Bible as it is read or the holy table where the bread and wine are laid—rather than bring it in to the Good Friday service to symbolise apparently the rest in the tomb?

To speak only of the United States, at present two models of revival or renewal can be found in the churches, and from both we may learn something. Conservative churches are growing all over the country by turning (as revivalism typically has turned) to gospel preaching, gospel songs, and the building up of a sense of community and solidarity. By contrast, liturgical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church has moved beyond the stage of post-Vatican II experimentation to a rediscovery of what Romano Guardini (I think it was) called "the growing edge of tradition". In this way of renewal the best in the old is rehabilitated and linked creatively to the best in contemporary art forms.

From these two quite different kinds of renewal Reformed and Protestant churches may better learn what to accept and what to discard, how to blend gospel and tradition in communities which, for all their failures, seek to live by the gospel of God and sing God's praise with faith and intelligence. *New Ways to Worship* has not done the job it tried to do. And perhaps it undertook an impossible task. Yet its very failure may help us if it points beyond its own inadequacies to the empowering which comes from the Spirit who frees and makes all things new.

ROSS MACKENZIE, Gainesville, Florida.

A Book of Services. The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1980. Pp. 189. £3.50.

This volume, prepared by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the United Reformed Church, very properly reflects the traditions of two formerly separate denominations. The blend is generally less apparent in the text of services than in the rubrics, where the still dis-united reformed reader encounters unfamiliar phrases like "the platform party" in the context of an ordination service. One comes across some unfamiliar practices as well: the reception of members from other churches; a vow

to be made by godparents at an infant Baptism after the parental promises; the laying on of hands by "two or more elders" during the ordination of elders; the blessing of a civil marriage in the context of public worship (can many couples really ask for this?). There is also a strange service for "The Dedication of Parents and the Blessing of Children", to be used by church members who do not wish to have their children baptised. Although it is stated that this act is not a substitute for Baptism, it is difficult to see how it can avoid creating confusion about Baptism in the minds of many in the congregation.

Like *The Book of Common Order* (1979), *A Book of Services* envisages a Lord's Day celebration of both Word and Sacrament as the norm for the church catholic and reformed. There is in fact only one full Sunday service in the whole book, but a number of variations and permutations, including material for the Christian Year, are gathered into its text so that at first glance it seems to be a service running to 28 pages. This lay-out is helpful to the reader in his study, but in worship must lead to an almost continuous turning of pages.

The language is straightforward and of a consistent standard. "Thee" and "Thou" have been dropped altogether, although not "beseech" or "thereto". Inevitably there are idiosyncrasies which not all users will be happy to reproduce: a certain quaintness in describing marriage as "the fulfilling of human love in mutual honour, so that husband and wife may know each other with delight"; an elusive train of thought in one version of the Thanksgiving—"Blessed are you for the light of our eyes and for the air we breathe"; and a less than adequate description of Christ in the same prayer as "that unforgettable man". But it is notoriously difficult to provide a widely acceptable norm for prayers in contemporary language, and in this respect the book is on the whole markedly successful. If it fails to produce many striking or arresting turns of phrase, it manages to avoid many that are jarring or fanciful. This is a more positive achievement than it sounds, in a book intended to be influential in establishing norms. *A Book of Services* provides material which the Church of Scotland spreads over three volumes—*The Book of Common Order*, *Prayers for Sunday Services*, the *Ordinal and Service Book*. The Committee has wisely opted for the idiom most likely to please most of the people most of the time.

There are useful introductory notes on the order of worship, although many would take issue with the statement that "it does not matter" in what order minister, elders and congregation receive communion. There is strangely little encouragement for the use of Creeds, in spite of frequent assertions that the United Reformed Church is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Ample scope, however, has been provided for other forms of congregational participation. It is good to see an order and other guidelines being given for a Service of Healing, and the difficult issues raised by Christian initiation have been well dealt with, though it is something of a surprise to discover in the Sunday order of worship that "Special Acts, such as Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, may take place" between the intimations and the

intercessions. The Marriage Service allows the very logical option of bringing the scripture readings and address to an early point in the service, before the exchange of vows; but the devotional material for the wedding service is disappointingly slight, the only note of praise or thanksgiving being sounded as an optional extra which may follow the blessing of the couple. The Joint Liturgical Group's lectionary is provided, along with a statement of the theme for each Sunday, and there is a welcome calendar of Psalms for use with the lectionary each week.

All in all, the Doctrine and Worship Committee has fulfilled its task ably, and produced a book which is likely to be formative within the United Reformed Church for many years. Its value will not be confined to ministers or members of that church. Others of the Reformed Communion will find in it much that is useful and refreshing, to supplement the aids provided by their own denomination.

DAVID M. BECKETT, Largs, Ayrshire.

Art in Action, Toward a Christian Aesthetic. Nicholas Wolterstorff. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980. Pp. x + 240. Paperback, \$9.95.

The functions of art in all civilisations except our own, according to Professor Wolterstorff, have been as varied as human activity itself. The creation, use and effects of the arts down the ages demonstrate the social context which, he considers, has always been its purposive core until recent times. This art of activity, or art in action as he calls it, has been less and less in evidence during the last 200 years in Western civilisation. Instead "Our Institution of High Art" has imposed an eccentric and elitist doctrine of art for art's sake on an unsuspecting and increasingly bemused public. This has led to a separation between fine art and life which he believes is philosophically and theologically unacceptable.

What we are now left with is a monopoly of art whose sole aim is perceptual contemplation for aesthetic satisfaction. Hence the rise of the impersonal public art of the museum, gallery and concert hall with its ultimate conceptual absurdities such as John Cage's anti-art de-aesthetical work "4.33", in which the pianist sits at the piano with hands raised for 4 minutes 33 seconds without striking a note. There are exceptions to this trend such as Eliot, Auden, Rouault, Messiaen and Penderecki, but by and large artists have succumbed to the dominant dogma of aesthetic contemplation, as propounded by the anti-Calvinist secular elect.

The response of the Christian artist to this situation is to see himself as a responsible servant and not as a heaven-storming Prometheus. The

post-Enlightenment image of the artist, like Gauguin, as a self-absorbed individualist struggling to express himself unfettered by any responsibilities, must be rejected. Instead the image of the Christian servant must lead the artist into the cultivation of his gift on behalf of nature, man and God. In this threefold responsibility he finds freedom to enjoy and be delighted by God's world of colour, textures, shapes and sounds. This is the location of the context, purpose and meaning of art and also of its legitimate participation in the redemptive shalom of God.

Chapters on Fittingness, World Projection and Aesthetic Excellence spell out how this responsibility can liberate the Christian artist from, and yet still enable him to participate in, "Our Institution of High Art".

Although Professor Wolterstorff's sources are at times unexpected and arresting, much of his thesis has already been covered more succinctly by Hans Rookmaaker and Francis Schaeffer. It is nonetheless worth reading, as a variation on the theme. His style is often laborious and without the relief of a single illustration the going gets heavy. Nevertheless, he makes many important points and argues them powerfully.

GORDON STRACHAN, Edinburgh.

The Gospel at Infant Baptism. Frederick Levison. The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1980. Pp. xvi + 127. Paperback, £1.95.

Fred Levison has performed a valuable service for ministers by producing this book of short talks given at baptisms. When ministers sometimes take the opportunity to miss out the children's address when there is a baptism, it is refreshing to find one who in his ministry preceded the sacrament with a talk about its meaning. While Mr Levison says that he always placed the sacrament near the beginning of the service and before the sermon, these talks could just as easily be given when the baptism comes after the preaching of the word. It is important that word and sacrament go together, and while it is not always possible to relate the sermon directly to baptism, a brief talk can be given specifically about the sacrament. The talks in this book are addressed primarily to the parents, but also to the congregation who have a responsibility for the Christian nurture of children.

The present confusion in the Church of Scotland about infant baptism surely points to the need for teaching about the sacrament to be given a more prominent place. These talks illustrate one method of providing such teaching, and Mr Levison shows how effectively it can be done. The talks are short, and would each take only a few minutes to deliver, yet each one says something important about the meaning and application of infant baptism. There are over 100 talks in all, most of which could be

used for any Sunday in the year, but 32 are related to “times, seasons, and occasions”. The latter group cover the main festivals of the Christian Year and other special services and circumstances, including a talk when the child belongs to a one-parent family, and one when a parent and child are being baptised at the same time.

Underlying the talks is the priority of God’s grace in the sacrament—his love, his promise, his decision—which come before any response on our part. Another prominent theme is the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables us to respond in faith. In this welcome book the reformed doctrine of infant baptism is faithfully presented in a clear and attractive way.

DOUGLAS M. MURRAY, Edinburgh.