Book Review by David A Ostrander

In partial fulfillment of

CD 701 Worship Arts and Disciplines

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Book by Bryan Chapell

Christ-Centered Worship

Chapell's book is an extensive look at several historical liturgies. He has charts that compare the liturgies of Rome, Luther, Calvin, Westminster, and the contemporary liturgy of Robert G. Rayburn. Chapell's charts that compare the common elements of each liturgy reveal how each tradition contains the gospel message which follows a certain order of service. For example, each liturgy opens with an Adoration (p86).

The historical backdrop of Chapell's book is the reformation. He begins with a history of the reformers and how they changed the Roman Catholic liturgy. They introduced congregational singing and removed the curtain that separated the congregation from the communion table. "Instead of the priest to offer Christ again in sacrifices Luther understood worship as God's gift to the people" (p35). Luther wanted so much to emphasize grace in his service that he removed the traditional readings from the Old Testament and added readings from the gospels (p37). However, the French reformer Calvin, by contrast, both reading, and sermons could be taken from both the Old and New Testament (p50). Calvin wanted communion every week but because of pressure, he decided on a quarterly communion in general (p52). He later instituted weekly communion in Strasbourg. The ministers who gathered at Westminster Abbey had a rich heritage of church traditions to work with when they met in 1616 (p55). The ministers came from every denomination. They came from a common set of practices and beliefs that

would later be known as the Westminster Confession of Faith. But not everything went as smoothly as expected. There were disagreements on how to partake of the Lord's Supper. The Scotts wanted a long table, but the Brits wanted a more formal communion (p58).

What we can take from Westminster is that we can all do things in different ways as long as we are united on the fundamentals of the Gospel. As regards sermon preparation and preaching the minister was encouraged to study from the original languages but "abstaining from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues" when he preached (p62). This is important for today because the minister is called to know their audience. Ministers should strive to make the word understandable to their audience and not talk over their heads as it were.

Chapell strives to be fair to all sides, but it is slanted toward the Reformed perspective. As much as he tries to include contemporary praise and worship his bias is clear. "American traditions were more likely to have developed worship structures to shape the expected expressiveness. By contrast to worship of the charismatic renewal movements lost some of its gospel shapes and became more distinguished by the emotional flow of the service" (p70). That is purely Chapell's opinion. Maybe the opposite is true. The traditional denominations lost their first love and needed charismatic renewal to present the Gospel.

Chapell does well to point out that the New Testament doesn't give an example of how a service should be conducted. He didn't believe this is an accident. The New Testament writers wanted the churches to implement New Testament principles but to have their own identity (p 108). In Chappell's chapter on Re-presenting Christ's story, the context we present the gospel is everything. "Worship defines the community context in which we re-present Christ to his people" (p123,124). What is the answer to the many different styles of music and people's preferences in worship. Chapell does well to advocate for a Christ-Centered approach (p136).

The second half of Chapell lists a valuable resource of Scripture verses for donation, repentance, doxology, and prayer. He gives examples of church services and lists of songs. Chapell also goes over some historical questions that he introduced in the first chapters.

One issue was whether the reading of Scripture in church services was equal to hearing a sermon. Some believed that a sermon should not be preached at all because it is man's word. The Puritans were persecuted, and many ministers were removed from their churches because they preached sermons that didn't conform to the Church of England. Approved pastors were installed and read from a list of authorized Scripture readings (p236). In the chapter on Christ Centered sermons Chapell gives his testimony of how he learned to preach grace. He felt he was being faithful to God's word but was preaching holiness without encouraging his people (p236). The harder he tried to get them to change their ways the worse they became. He says "I needed to learn to preach each text in its redemptive context" (p236).

In conclusion, Chapell has a well-researched book, however, his reformed background is clearly seen throughout his book. There is just too much ground to cover in his book. The first section could easily be expanded and go into greater detail on the history of various church liturgies. Chapell's book gives the reader many avenues for further research but is also a great introduction to the church liturgy.