

CLASSIC
WORSHIP

With Brethren in Mind

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PETER E. ROUSSAKIS

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Preface

Planning and conducting services of public worship are the weekly privilege and responsibility of pastors. In some congregations a committee or worship team works with the pastor in the planning process as well as implementation. Needless to say, those serving have the obligation to do everything according to sound biblical principles. Very often, if not most often, evangelical pastors and other worship planners and leaders may have not acquired, due to a lack of study in this area of ministry, an awareness of biblical teaching and the historical expressions of it; that is to say, the time-tested principles and patterns of expression which have grounded Christian corporate worship. Especially in evangelical circles, we pride ourselves on consulting scripture for matters of church life, belief and behavior. Yet somehow it would seem by observation, when it comes to worship matters, many proceed with their ministry as though the scriptures were no longer relevant, a contradiction with regard to what they hold for other matters of their faith and its applications and expressions. However, as with most areas or concerns, when individuals read and study or hear a lecture on a particular topic of interest by someone to whom they are attracted and respect, they become convicted about what is said. In short, they become informed. The present volume is intended to provide the kind of information which will help pastors and parishioners to appreciate what the Bible teaches on matters of public worship, and then hopefully apply them and appropriate applications of them in their own contexts of ministry. In other words, a sound biblical foundation and historical perspective is vital for what we do in worship, how we do it, what is included and in what sensible biblically and theologically-informed order.

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The material presented is called *Classic Worship* because, as with any matter, for example telling time, learning the basics is where one must start, acquiring the fundamentals for a full understanding of the matter. Learning how to tell time with a dial and hands helps persons understand and see why there are sixty seconds in a minute, etc. Then when they read a digital clock, they have a more complete grasp of how we mark and read time.

There are some things which are truly *classics*, whether they are novels, musical works or competitions in the history of sport. We can be inspired by them and learn from them as well. They provide us with excellent models. They are what they are because they have employed the *classical* thinking and are the best expressions of their particular media, skill or form. For example, it would be ridiculous to say to a pole-vaulter or tennis player that no longer do they have to learn their skill or practice their abilities in the ways athletes did in the past, that now there is a more contemporary way to execute their skills. There are simply fundamental ways of understanding and practicing their sports. Similarly, through the years I've taught private piano to many people. And increasingly fewer young people and adults do not want to learn the skills or understand them. They simply want to play the way they want to play, without the guided instruction or discipline. Needless to say, such persons have never nor will they ever become good pianists to any significant degree. There are some things which are truly classical in their understanding and expression. In the Christian arena, public worship needs no less attention and care.

Many churches have Contemporary services of worship. Some have Blended services, while others retain more Traditional formats. What follows is *not* a critique against utilizing Contemporary or Blended styles. While the term *classic* may be considered a synonym for that which is more traditional, as we think we understand that today, the intention here rather is to communicate that there are truly *classic*, biblical and historical truths, principles and modes of expression of which all involved in planning and leading public worship should be aware, and upon which they may faithfully base and adapt their weekly services of worship. Not to do so would be shirking their responsibility as

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biblically grounded Christians. The congregation which offers a Contemporary service, either as their sole mode of worship expression or in addition to a Blended or Traditional service, would serve itself and its resultant expression well by employing the *classical* principles and inclusions gleaned from Holy Scripture. To do anything less, to throw the baby out with the bathwater, as the saying goes, would demonstrate a lack of biblical attention and integrity. At the close of the chapter on *Ordering Worship* there are examples of both *classic* and contemporary applications of the biblical principles and inclusions presented.

This work is intended for all those interested in and responsible for the preparation and conduct of public worship, and especially for persons within The Brethren Church, headquartered in Ashland, Ohio. In addition, for the benefit of those outside our immediate tradition and those pastors and parishioners new to this community of faith, this volume is offered as a means of introduction to our worship-related distinctives. There are a number of denominations which have the word *Brethren* in their name. They are not all related.

The Brethren Church is one of several denominations with a common heritage dating back to 1708 in Schwarzenau, Germany, where a group of persons convicted that believers' immersion baptism was the biblical pattern of the rite, formed a new fellowship, many of whom emigrated to eastern Pennsylvania in the early 1700's. While there were several designations in existence in the 1800's, the one which became prominent was the German Baptist Brethren, with many congregations in Pennsylvania and Ohio and in other areas south and west. In the 1880's the parent body experienced division into several groups. Several of the denominations which share their roots in the German Baptist Brethren include the Church of the Brethren, The Brethren Church, the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, the Conservative Grace Brethren Church International, the Old German Baptist Brethren, the Old Order German Baptist Church, and the Dunkard Brethren. This writer is affiliated with The Brethren Church, and the contents herein have Brethren in mind. The rites especially are discussed from our particular historic perspective. Dating and gender references are given in the traditional throughout.

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The material is a combination of sermons delivered at the First Brethren Church of Burlington, Indiana, articles and essays. In the first few chapters are offerings which provide a biblical basis and guidance for *Ordering Worship*. The *Ordering* piece is actually a revised address given at the 2003 Indiana District Conference of The Brethren Church held at the Brethren Retreat Center, Shipshewana, Indiana. Two chapters, *Praying in Worship* and *Praying the Lord's Prayer*, offer an overview of the values of congregational prayers and the pastor's leadership.

The above are followed by a brief article on the values of this writer's long-standing preference for *Preaching with a Manuscript*, a piece which several other denominations have requested to be used in their training courses for pastors. An essay on *Music in Worship*, albeit of a more *classic* perspective, gives a theological basis for what may be offered as local church worship music. Both subjects rightly fall within the context of public worship considerations.

The rites and ceremonies as they are understood and practiced in The Brethren Church are given next, interspersed with matters which must logically occur for the rites to be all we believe they should be, represent, and instill. "The ordinances have been the distinctive features of Brethren devotion and worship...[they] are the supreme worship services of the church."¹ Chronologically arranged according to their expected practice, the *Rite of Dedication* of infants is given first. It includes an introduction to the significance of signing faith in general. *Signing Repentance* provides a description of the biblical understandings of repentance as a prelude to why persons need to make peace with God by receiving Jesus Christ as the Savior of their souls and the Lord of their lives. What naturally follows then is a survey of the language used in scripture for *Making a Spiritual Commitment*.

The chapter on the *Rites of Baptism and Confirmation*, which take place after a person makes a commitment to Jesus Christ, gives an explanation of the meanings of Christian believers' baptism and its Brethren administration as three-fold immersion. Because receiving persons into local church membership usually takes place within the

¹Joseph R. Shultz, "Brethren Ordinances," *Report of the Proceedings of the Brethren World Assembly* (Ambler, PA: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1994), 1. For more on Brethren Worship practices see notes 25, 38, 54, 55, 112, and the Index.

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context of a worship service, an essay on the nature of the *Church and Membership* is included next. Within the message on the *Rite of Holy Communion* are related definitions of the terms sacrament, ordinance, and rite, and the practice of the Brethren three-fold administration of feet-washing, a small meal, and the taking of the bread and the cup as the *Love Feast* of the Holy Communion observance. A separate treatment of the *Rite of Feet-washing* is given because of the very special meaning it has, and because its practice in The Brethren Church is unique among Christian traditions today. The *Rite of Anointing* is also one which Brethren Christians especially value and which is offered to those requesting spiritual strength and wholeness during times of particular stress and physical or emotional infirmity.

Although it is not a public worship matter, *fasting* is practiced by many Brethren individuals and congregations. Along with prayer and study it is one of the classic *spiritual disciplines* and may be thought of as a significant means of private worship. A chapter on *The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting* is therefore included.

Pastors should take their responsibility as shepherds seriously for the ministry of worship. Indeed it is most likely the most important ministry in which we are engaged on a weekly basis; thus the primary reason for *Classic Worship: With Brethren in Mind*.

It is the desire of this writer that the material given will assist pastors and parishioners, and especially those in process for ordination or consecration to Brethren ministry, to have a resource on the subject of worship. The collection may be used as reading for study courses in the parish, particularly in Brethren church membership classes. All is offered with the goal that informed worship planners, leaders, and congregations will be more effective and fruitful in their ambassadorship for Jesus Christ.

Expressions of gratitude are extended to my wife, Phyllis, for her patience and support in life and ministry; to my mother, Dorothy, for her life-long encouragement; to the parishioners of the First Brethren Church of Burlington, Indiana, and The Community Church of Alton, New Hampshire for their positive responses and appreciation for classic public worship; and to several persons in academia who have been

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especially encouraging and influential in shaping my worship and music sensibilities: Hugh T. McElrath and Donald P. Hustad, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Horace T. Allen Jr., Boston University; and Arthur J. Dyck, Harvard University.

P. E. R. Spring 2005

CHAPTER ONE

Making God Number One

The Preamble & The First Commandment—Exodus 20:1-3

And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods besides me.'

Every community which exists must have a code of ethics, a set of principles for behavior, or else it won't be a community. The Ten Commandments, the first portion of the ethical instruction given by God to the Israelites, was not only the foundation code which God intended for the Israelites' successful communal organization and behavior, it was the set of principles upon which all the other regulations and ordinances of the covenant were based. Not only so, because Israel was elected by God to be a kingdom of priests to the world, representing God and his ways to the rest of fallen humanity, we learn, therefore, that the Ten Commandments were intended to be the moral standard to be communicated by Israel to all of the other nations of the planet as the code of ethics for humanity.

These *Ten Words*, as they are referred to in the Hebrew, this group of ten statements, also known as the Decalogue, are the most important principles ever revealed to humankind. They represent the supremacy of God; the impossibility of expressing God in any material form; forbidding the reckless use of the name of God; the honoring of parents, thus emphasizing the importance of the family; viewing human life as sacred; demanding sexual purity and fidelity; and preserving the right of human property.² In sum, the code demands reverence for God and respect for others.

²William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 2.

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Interestingly, the Ten Commandments are actually presented in the same way ancient near eastern treaties were made, including a preamble and then the stipulations; and the language, such as *you shall* and *you shall not*, was the type of usage of such treaties. What we have noted, therefore, is that these ten principles really are a part of a compact, a covenant between God and the Israelites, and by extension of their intention and the Israelites' mission, a covenant with all people.

Preamble

As with the summary of the covenant given in Exodus 19:4-6, the treaty itself begins with a preamble in which God establishes himself as the one who has the authority to present the subsequent covenantal stipulations and obligations. Exodus 20:2 says: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." It was by God's actions that he is known and which confirms his authority.

The name *Jehovah* (Lord) signifies God's authority, and his right to constrain the Israelites in the ways mentioned in the commands. He reminds them of the recent benefits he has bestowed upon them. The purpose of the first commandment, therefore, is that the Lord wills that he alone be pre-eminent among his people.³ Further, the words *I am* (v.2) and *You shall have* (v.3) demonstrate the unique *I-Thou* (I-You) relationship between the Creator and his creation, between God and us. We owe our existence to God. He should be number one in our lives. The preamble then is followed by the first word: "You shall have no other gods [besides] me."

First Commandment

Many people--students, college and professional athletes, sports fans--enjoy the hype of being number one. Some take it so seriously, that if they come in second, they stir up trouble. In some instances, such as the World Cup in soccer, people have rioted, looted, and started stampedes which have led to loss of life. Some fans will let nothing get in the way of attending or watching a game. The Bible tells us that the only one who has the right to be number one is God.

³John T. McNeill, ed. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 382.

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The Jews were specifically warned to have no strange gods, no invented gods. God demanded and demands that his people put off “all impiety and superstition, which either diminish or obscure the glory of his divinity.”⁴ Having a god means accepting and being subject to all the god demands. In forbidding them to worship other gods, God meant they were not to transfer to another what belongs to him, which is our worship, loyalty, love and allegiance.⁵

In Moses’ day there were many gods worshiped by the ancient near eastern civilizations. In one sense we could say our God had competition. For example, the Canaanites worshiped Baal, also called Haddad, a storm god (1 Kings 16:31, 18:18-46). They also worshiped Ashtoreth, a mother goddess of fertility (1 Sam. 12:10). The Moabites worshiped Chemosh, their national god of war (Num. 21:29). The Ammonites worshiped Molech (Zeph. 1:5). The Philistines revered Dagon, a grain god (Jud. 16:23). The Sumerians prayed to Tammuz, a storm god (Ezek. 8:14). In Egypt they worshiped Osiris, the god of death, Isis, the goddess of life, and Re, the sun god. In Mesopotamia they worshiped Enlil, the storm god, Ea-Enki, the god of water, Nanna, the moon god, Ishtar, the god of fertility, Ninurta, the war god, and Tiamat, the god of salt water. Jehovah, the one true God of the universe, said we are not to have any other gods in place of him!

There is a story about a hen and a pig. “[One day] a hen and a pig approached a church and read the advertised sermon topic: ‘What can we do to help the poor?’ Immediately the hen suggested they feed them bacon and eggs. The pig thought for a moment and said: ‘There is only one thing wrong with feeding bacon and eggs to the poor. For you it requires only a contribution, but for me it requires total commitment!’”⁶ Absolute total commitment to God is impossible in this life, for we are all imperfect. If it were absolutely, totally possible to be absolutely, totally committed to God in all things, there would have been no need for God becoming a person to be the debt payer for our

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Michael P. Green, ed. *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 73.

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sins. If total spiritual commitment were possible, then we could earn justification. The Bible teaches, however, that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). We have been saved by God’s grace, “not of works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:9).

In spite of the fact that it is impossible for anyone of us to be totally and absolutely committed to God in all things, that is exactly what God calls us to be. Through Moses God called: “Hear O Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). Jesus, when interrogated by the Pharisees quoted those words as the greatest of God’s commandments. Loving the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength is or should be the professed believer’s spiritual priority. Seeking God, putting God first above self-interest, making God number one, striving for total commitment of one’s being to God, is that to which we are called. Jesus said: “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt. 6:33), and then all other things we need will be given.

At this point I want to mention that in Deuteronomy 5 there is the re-stating of the Ten Commandments. As we know, Exodus in the Bible is followed by Leviticus, which presents the regulations for Hebrew worship. Numbers follows, and it reviews the years of wandering, from the time Israel departed from Sinai until, as a new generation, they reached the Jordan River and were about to enter the promised land. Deuteronomy, which means *repetition of the law*, is a book of instructions for the Israelites. It looks backward to what happened to them when they fell away from God. It looks forward with hope, that if God’s people would turn from their ways and seek God, worship him alone, and live for him, making God first in their lives, they would be blessed.

Deuteronomy consists of a series of addresses by Moses in his later life. The prominent themes are God’s love and the call to total commitment. God’s love for his people is declared repeatedly in the book; for example, in chapter 7:7-8 we read: “The Lord did not set his affections on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath

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he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” That love, we must be quick to point out, was also expressed in chastisement. For as faithful and loving parents desire the development of appropriate character and behavior in their children, and sometimes must discipline them to reinforce the understanding of appropriate character and behavior, so also God chooses to discipline his children. The Israelites were delivered, but unfortunately they had to be disciplined, over and over again.

The first four chapters of Deuteronomy are historical in nature. Moses reviewed Israel’s history after the Exodus and discussed the lessons which should have been learned. He reviewed their travels, their wandering, and lack of faith, Moses’ own failures, and the commissioning of Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. In chapter four the call was given to observe and follow the words and ways of the Lord; for if they did, they would be what God wanted them to be, namely ambassadors, his representatives. Of particular importance, of course, was their refraining from engagement in false worship. Speaking for God, Moses said:

After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time, if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God and provoking him to anger, I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples...But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 4:25-29).

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) commented: “The sin [against the first commandment] which we are most in danger of is giving the glory and honor to any creature which is due to God only. Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed and loved, feared or served, delighted in,

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or depended on, more than God, that [whatever it is] we do in effect make a god of.”⁷

What are some of the other gods which take the place of the one true God in peoples' lives: things, material possessions, money, one's home, even work, a cause, perhaps even one's spouse, a popular figure, another organization, the love of nature, forms of entertainment, one's self? None of these are wrong to care for in and of themselves. We all need and enjoy things. We should all be good stewards of the resources God has given us. We should love our spouses and families, put in a good effort in our work, and have fine, wholesome recreation. However, when any one person, thing or activity usurps the place of number one in our lives, the place reserved for God alone, we are violating the first commandment and insulting God; because in the heart, there's no room for double occupancy. Only one can be number one!

The church is not as strong and productive as it could be most likely because people have divided loyalties. In the words of Joshua I would challenge us: “Choose for yourselves this day whom [or what] you will serve...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15). Other than unavoidable work, incapacitation of some form, or extenuating circumstances, professed Christians should be in worship every single Sunday, or else, it would seem, God is not number one.

In a sense, there's no better mirror to see who we really are, where and what our loyalties are, and whose number one than the Ten Commandments. If we gaze in that mirror, we are faced with ourselves. We see our imperfections and our need for a facelift of the heart, surgery of the soul, the need for an antidote for our sinful nature. Galatians tells us that the law was given, among other reasons, to show us our need for God, and to lead us to trust in Christ (Gal. 3:24), the one who offered himself in our place upon the cross of eternity, that by faith in him we might be acquitted of our sin condition and be empowered by his Spirit to strive in love to emulate his character, which is directly reflected in the Ten Words given to the Israelites. Let's make God and his perfect expression, the Lord Jesus Christ, number one in our hearts and living.

⁷Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary On the Whole Bible* Vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 210.