

Praise for *In Spirit and In Truth*

Here is a book that I can unreservedly recommend to any Christian who is looking for a reliable guide on worship. It is “popular” in the best sense of the word: each short chapter is written in a highly accessible style, focuses on a central facet of worship and ends with some reflective questions; yet, it is solidly grounded in Scripture and what is best in the Christian tradition. Bishop Solomon with his long years of pastoral experience knows what modern Christians desperately need and proceeds to meet that need without intimidating them.

Rev Dr Simon Chan

Former Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology and
currently part-time faculty member
Trinity Theological College, Singapore

Bishop Robert Solomon explores by means of 59 short chapters the meanings, purposes and practices of Christian worship. Scripture, the classic teachings of the church, sacred poetry and hymns, the witness of Christians throughout the ages, and the realities of contemporary life all find a place in these meditations, each of which concludes with a pair of questions that invite deeper reflection. This collection is rich with practical wisdom and spiritual insights that will benefit any reader who desires to become more fully a “true worshipper” (John 4:23-24).

Rev Dr Karen Westerfield Tucker

Professor of Worship, Boston University, USA

In Spirit and In Truth: Thoughts on Worship is a gift to the church. The short chapters plus an “Epilogue: Benediction” contain deep insight, and are the result of a lifetime of ministry, worship, and reflection written in a clear, concise and accessible style offering wisdom to parishioners, seminary students and pastors. Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon knows Scripture! Each short chapter draws heavily upon biblical truth. Bishop Solomon knows the history and theological heritage of the church in its fullness! Citations range from Tertullian to Thomas Merton, Shakespeare to C S Lewis. While rooted in the Wesleyan tradition [drawing upon such prominent Methodist theologians as Richard Heitzenrater, Thomas Oden, Stanley Hauerwas, William Willimon and William Laurence], this is an ecumenical book. Uses for this book range from devotional reflection, Sunday school classes, to seminary courses. You will look far and wide to find so much discerning thought and challenging insights in such a concise and readable form. We are indebted to Bishop Solomon for “speaking the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

Rev Dr C Michael Hawn

University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Church Music
Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas USA

In this anthology of reflections based on scripture verses, sayings, theological concepts and literary images, Bishop Robert Solomon offers his accumulated wisdom on the topic of worship. Armed with insights from his many years of preaching, teaching and writing, Bishop Solomon challenges many of the popular misconceptions that can distort the church’s ministry of worship and undermine the Christian’s relationship with the Triune God. This latest work by the esteemed bishop emeritus will inspire pastors, worship leaders and lay church members to think more deeply about the meaning of Christian worship.

Rev Dr Jeffrey A Truscott

Lecturer in Liturgy and Worship
Trinity Theological College, Singapore

I N
SPIRIT
A N D I N
TRUTH
THOUGHTS ON WORSHIP

ROBERT M SOLOMON



Copyright © Robert M Solomon

Published by Genesis Books
An imprint of Armour Publishing
Block 1003 Bukit Merah Central #02-07 Singapore 159836
Email : sales@armourpublishing.com
enquiries@armourpublishing.com
Website : www.armourpublishing.com

22 21 20 19 18
5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Publisher.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Printed in Singapore

ISBN 978-981-48-0747-0

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Names : Solomon, Robert M.
Title : In spirit and in truth : thoughts on worship
/ Robert M Solomon.
Description : Singapore : Genesis Books, [2018]
Identifier(s) : OCN 1057016504 | ISBN 978-981-48-0747-0 (paperback)
Subject(s) : LCSH: God (Christianity)--Worship and love.
| Spiritual life--Christianity. | Christian life.
Classification : DDC 248.3--dc23

To my grandchildren
Ella, Rebekah, Lukas and Benjamin

Who I pray will become a new generation of
the kind of worshippers
the Heavenly Father is seeking.

Contents

Preface	xiii
Section One: Worship Defined	
1 What Is Worship?	2
2 We Worship the Triune God	6
3 Hallowed Be Thy Name	10
4 The Divine Seeker	14
5 The Fear of the Lord	18
6 What True Worship Looks Like	24
7 Fire and Fireplace	29
Section Two: Worshipping Wholeheartedly	
8 It and Thou	34
9 Praise and Thanksgiving	38
10 Sleepwalking in Church	43
11 Songs of the Faithful	47
12 The Gift of Tears	53
Section Three: The Focus of Worship	
13 Being with Christ	58
14 Encountering Majesty When We Worship	61
15 Look Carefully at the Crucified Jesus	65
16 The Lamb of Heaven	69
17 The Strongest Reality	73

18	The Shadow and the Substance	78
19	The Communion of Saints	82

Section Four: Thinking More Deeply About Worship

20	Living Beyond the Tower	88
21	Puzzling Things We Do at Our Worship Services	92
22	Doing Away with Childish Things	95
23	Gauge Your Language	99
24	Subtle Narcissism in Worship	103
25	The Difference Between Feeling Good and Being Good	107
26	The Queue and the Circle	111
27	The Sect and the Party	115

Section Five: The Word in Worship

28	The Word of God in Worship	120
29	Trembling at His Word	125
30	A Story of the Five Senses	129
31	Principles for Pulpits and Pews	133
32	The Church and a Child's Memory	137
33	The Sermon and the Listener	142
34	Truth, Sold or Told?	146

Section Six: The Sacraments in Worship

35	The Trinity and the Sacraments	152
36	Understanding the Ritual Process	155
37	Heavenly Places	160
38	Thin Places	163
39	Recognising God	167

Section Seven: Worship and Modern Culture

40	A Time to Be Silent	172
41	Amusing Ourselves in Church	176
42	Worship in a Culture of Entertainment	180
43	High Places	185
44	Living in a Pavlovian Experiment	188
45	Technology and Worship	192
46	What If There Is a Blackout in Church?	199

Section Eight: Rectifying Worship

47	The Audience of One	204
48	Mastering Two Prayers	208
49	No-Frills Church	212
50	Waiting on God	216
51	Trinitarian Songs	220
52	Saving Christmas from the Marketplace	224

Section Nine: The Effects of Worship

53	Being and Doing	228
54	God Gives the Growth	231
55	The Line and the Circle	234
56	Second Language	239
57	You Have Not Wearied Yourselves for Me	242
58	The Story Must Live On	246

Epilogue: Benediction	250
------------------------------	-----

Endnotes	253
-----------------	-----

Preface

There are many things we do in life and in the church. We are not sure which of these we will continue in heaven, but there is one thing we know for sure we will do in heaven—and that is to worship God. The visions that the apostle John had of heavenly scenes, as recorded in the Book of Revelation, were replete with the worship of God. The angelic beings will never stop worshipping God (Revelation 4:8), the human elders honoured by God and seated on thrones will get up from their places of honour and, prostrating themselves, lay their crowns before God in grateful and reverent worship (Revelation 4:10-11). A great multitude of those saved by the blood of the Lamb would also join the worship (Revelation 7:9-10; 19:1-8).

The heavenly scenes that were shown to John were so exhilarating that John, seasoned as he was as an aging apostle, fell at the feet of the angelic messenger in a posture of worship. The angel immediately stopped him by saying “Do not do that!” (Revelation 22:9). He identified himself as only a fellow servant of God. Instead he commanded John, “Worship God!” How central the worship of God is and how easy it is to lose the focus of the worship of God and to get it wrong!

We are made for worship, for by worshipping God, we become what we are intended to be—worshippers who bring glory to God. When we do not worship God, we end up worshipping things other than God, and by doing so, our souls become lost and shrivelled. God has made us for worship; we must ensure that we worship God rather than anything else. Anything that takes the place of God, including the self, becomes an idol. And how easily we can end up worshipping manufactured idols!

The same John who wrote Revelation also wrote his First Epistle, which speaks about loving God and others. Declaring that the God revealed in Christ is “the true God and eternal life”, John concluded his epistle by urging his spiritual children to “keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:20-21).

As Christians, we are to worship God both personally and corporately. How we worship God in public will be a reflection of how we are worshipping him in private. And how we worship God will be a reflection of our relational knowledge of the God we worship, and why we worship Him. God is looking for worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24, NLT). Our worship of God must be guided by the truth that has been revealed to us in Scripture and in Christ, it must be real and sincere arising from the depths of our hearts as the Holy Spirit works within us.

What is our experience of worship? How does what we do Sunday by Sunday affect us? Or does it fail to move and change us? If the latter is true, what are the reasons? How can we improve our worship so that it reflects the glory and majesty of the God we worship? St Vladimir of Kiev (958-1015), a pagan Russian ruler who later converted to Christianity, sent envoys throughout the civilised world to explore the religions of the world and to find the best. Their visit to Constantinople impressed them the most as they saw the worship in Orthodox Byzantine churches. They reported, “We knew not whether we were in Heaven or on Earth... We only know that God dwells there among the people, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations.”¹ It is no surprise that with such a glowing report, Vladimir and his people adopted Orthodox worship.

What would people see if they attended our worship services? What would they learn about God and how we worship Him? This book helps readers to think about worship more deeply. It is not a textbook on Christian worship; there are many good books on the topic, with

systematic, historical and practical discussion on the various aspects of worship.² This book is different in that it is a collection of short articles, many of which bring up issues that are related to worship but are written “on the slant”—like the parables, their message comes up on the listener (or reader) obliquely.³

Many of these articles were published by me elsewhere while the rest are new unpublished articles. I have organised them into nine sections dealing with different aspects of worship. These are meant for reading and reflection, either individually or in groups. This would be helpful especially to those who provide leadership in worship and those who support it through various ministries. It would also help the general reader who is interested to think more deeply about worship with a view of enriching his or her worship of God.

The late evangelical scholar John Stott remarked that “True worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable.”⁴ It is the greatest privilege given to us to worship God, and how we worship Him affects the way we live our lives on a daily basis as well as in the long term. May God bless us richly as we seek to worship Him with all our hearts and lives.

Robert M Solomon

s e c t i o n o n e

WORSHIP DEFINED

CHAPTER 1

What Is Worship?

It is interesting what people view as the essential characteristic or element of worship. In the medieval church, the typical worshipper would consider the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) as the most important part of the worship service. In fact, the worship event was (and is still in some traditions) called "mass", a term referring to the Eucharistic celebration. The medieval worshipper could have missed the other parts of the service, including the homily (or sermon), but if he participated in the Eucharist, he would have worshipped God.

Then came the Reformation, which moved the focus to the pulpit and the ministry of the Word. Holy Communion was celebrated periodically but the main event was the sermon. As long as the worshipper heard the sermon, he would have worshipped. Today the situation has changed further. I have been to worship services where the worship leader refers to worship as what happens when the congregation stands up to sing for half an hour to 45 minutes. Once that is done, they take their seats, many of them thinking that they had worshipped God; the rest of the service is considered peripheral to the central act of praising God in song.⁵

In truth, worship is all these things—what we do as we praise God, and what happens when we gather around the Lord's Word and Table. Worship is what happens throughout the service, not reduced to just one part of it.

Archbishop William Temple defined worship in a most helpful way. "For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of *conscience* by His HOLINESS; the nourishment of *mind* with His TRUTH; the purifying of *imagination* by His BEAUTY; the opening of the heart to His LOVE; the surrender of *will* to His PURPOSE—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin."⁶

We must note here that worship focuses on God: His holiness, truth, beauty, love and purpose. In worship, the spotlight, so to speak, falls on God as we behold His nature, character, actions and will. By nature, we are self-centred people, infected with a stubborn and deadly sinfulness, and addicted to everything else except God. The solution and our only hope is not more of ourselves—our strengths, strategies, achievements and ambitions. No, our true hope is to turn to God, who alone can save us. This means that our worship services must focus on God, not on ourselves. He must increase and we must decrease (John 3:30).

Unless our focus in worship is God, we will end up with default processes worshipping ourselves and all that we have made with our hands and minds. When we encounter the living God in worship, we are then enabled by the Holy Spirit to submit ourselves to God in every way. Hence Temple's definition shows how the very characteristics of God affect every aspect of our lives.

God's holiness turns on and energises our conscience. We should come out of our worship services with a conscience that is functioning well as we navigate the dubious and ambiguous circumstances in the world.

God's truth feeds our mind, exposing myths and falsehoods, faulty life scripts and assumptions. It helps us develop the mind of Christ so that we become the people of God's truth. This is necessary if we

are to live faithfully and effectively in a world of lies and falsehoods. What Satan started at the Garden of Eden continues to our day—hoodwinking people with deceitful lies.

It is God's beauty that helps us deal with our polluted imagination. The ancient Israelites were tempted by such sinful imagination that sought after idols. They were going after cheap imitations and destroying their souls in the process. True beauty is in God, and it is the beauty of both character and perfection. When we behold God's perfection (His infinity, holiness, power, knowledge and wisdom) and His incomparable character (His love, mercy, compassion and faithfulness), we would realise how boring and infected our imagination has become. It involves meeting with God and recognising His beauty, not just by singing, "You are beautiful beyond description" but pondering what that means, letting it cleanse our imagination, and making it noble as God intended for us.

God's love, and what more powerful expression of it than on the cross where God stretched His holy hands to show how much He loves us, touches our heart when we truly glimpse something of its reality in our lives. For true impact, it has to be necessarily personal. This was the experience of Charles Wesley who was converted when Scripture touched his heart (as he read Luther's commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians), and he met the Son of God "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).⁷ It was a personal experience where God's love touched a human heart. This should happen in worship.

We come to church with our ambitions and agendas, seeking comfort, fame and success for ourselves. But how terribly short-sighted, confused and mangled they are when we meet God who reveals His purposes for us—something that comes from "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). When we realise this, we are given strength and faith by God to bend our will to His, conceding that His ways are higher than ours and that His will is good, pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2), the safest place in the universe.

True worship seeks the living God as revealed in God's Word and in Christ. When we turn our full attention to Him, His character and His ways, then we will find ourselves changed deeply as God touches every part of who we are. Worship should involve our whole being as we learn to give ourselves wholly to God—that is true worship. Anything less is unacceptable to God and unhelpful to us.

This God-centredness of worship is described in a different way by theologian J I Packer. He deals with the activities that should mark a worship service. "Scripture views the glorifying of God as a sixfold activity: a. praising God for all that He is and all His achievements; b. thanking Him for his gifts and His goodness to us; c. asking Him to meet our own and others' needs; d. offering Him our gifts, our service, and ourselves; e. learning of Him from His word, read and preached, and obeying His voice; f. telling others of His worth, both by public confession and testimony to what He has done for us. Thus we might say that the basic formulas of worship are these: "Lord, you are wonderful"; "Thank you, Lord"; "Please Lord"; "Take this, Lord"; "Yes, Lord"; "Listen everybody!"⁸

When we enter into God's presence in this way, we will never be the same.

Reflection Questions

1. Review William Temple's definition of worship. Which aspect specially speaks to you, and why? What implications can you think of for how the worship services in your church can be improved?
 2. Review J I Packer's description of the worship service. Which of these are done well in your church services? Which of these need further strengthening or correction?
-

CHAPTER 2

We Worship the Triune God

The hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy” has been sung by Christians for two centuries. It was written by an English clergyman, Reginald Heber. Having studied at Oxford University, Heber became a priest in the Church of England, and eventually became, rather reluctantly, the bishop of Calcutta. Heber wrote the lyrics for 57 hymns, but all his hymns were published only after his death. He died unexpectedly and sadly at the young age of 43. His wife, while going through his papers, found the words for the hymn that we now know so well. She passed it on to John Dykes, a composer who set the hymn to music and had it published.

Heber must have based his hymn on Isaiah 6:3, where Isaiah had a vision of God. The heavenly seraphim (angelic beings) were singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” Whether the threefold expression of praise “Holy, holy, holy” (the *Trisagion*, which has been incorporated into the church’s liturgy) is a hint of God’s triune nature, as some scholars have suggested, is a matter for debate. It could very well be, and it is possible, that Heber saw the Trinity in the phrase. Hence, his wonderful Trinitarian hymn.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name,
in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Heber saw the Trinity in the praise and worship of the seraphim. It could also be argued that when Isaiah saw the Lord “high and exalted”, he may have referred, knowingly or unknowingly, to the Son of God, who is also the Suffering Servant. A similar phrase is used to depict God’s Suffering Servant. God spoke, “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (Isaiah 52:13). Jesus applied this to Himself when He said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32; see also 3:14). The early church affirmed this truth by singing, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

Who do we worship when we go to church? Every Christian must ask themselves this question and be able to give a clear and satisfying answer—that we worship the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of this in churches when we sing the doxology, though not all churches sing this.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

It is the last verse of a hymn, “Morning Hymn,” written by Thomas Ken in 1709. An older Trinitarian hymn that many older Christians would be familiar with is *Gloria Patri* (Glory be to the Father).

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen, amen.

The origin of this song of worship can be traced to the 2nd century AD.⁹ It has been sung in churches for almost 19 centuries and is still used in traditional services, though it is slowly, and sadly, being abandoned these days.

In the light of contemporary forgetfulness of such liturgical elements in worship that remind us of the triune God we worship, modern churches need to be extra vigilant in ensuring that their worship services truly reflect the Three-in-One God. In important advice given to worship leaders, liturgical theologian Jeffrey Truscott urges them to be on “their Trinitarian guard” so that worship does not degenerate into “sub-Christian” worship, which is the outcome

of non-Trinitarian worship.¹⁰ Ensuring that worship in the church remains properly grounded in the triune God does not mean that we go about it in a mechanical way, counting how many times we mention the Three Persons in the Trinity together, but how we ensure that our “worship on balance is trinitarian in character.”¹¹

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important for Christians to worship the God revealed in the Bible—the triune God? What aspects of your regular Sunday service remind worshippers of this? Are there missing elements that could be added to strengthen our worship of the triune God?
 2. Think of good “Trinitarian songs”, both old and new, that you wish were sung more often. How should the church teach its members about our faith in the Trinity and how it should shape our worship?
-