

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 2, Number 11 ♪ November 2007

THEME: Giving Thanks

A Thankful Heart

In his book, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* (in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series, InterVarsity Press, 2002), David W. Pao surveys the central role of thanksgiving not only in the life and writings of Paul, but in New Testament Christianity as a whole, as well as in Old Testament Judaism.

The Essence of Thanksgiving

Pao's fundamental premise is that thanksgiving as understood biblically is, simply stated, "God-centredness" (15). The purpose of thanksgiving, he points out, is not so much to focus on the gift as it is to honor the Giver, and to acknowledge one's dependence on Him as the source of all good things. Hence thanksgiving is at the core of worship, in professing the supreme worth of God (cf. Heb 12:28).

Pao points out that Martin Luther and others identified ingratitude as the root of all sin, drawing upon Romans 1, where unthankfulness is explicitly linked with not acknowledging God's deserved status: "*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him*" (1:21). Hence the proper attitude of the re-

deemed soul is a thankful acclamation of God as God, giving Him the glory and honor which He as the Creator alone deserves.

Pao draws upon other scholars to stress that in the Old Testament, thanksgiving and praise are inseparably intertwined. (See explicit examples of this connectedness in Psalm 35:18; 109:30; Ezra 3:11.) "Thanksgiving and praise . . . merge and become the one and only proper response to God who is the source of all power and goodness" (28). Indeed, we cannot get very far in meditating on God's nature and character before we are confronted with the ways which his power and grace have been made manifest in our lives—hence a sharp distinction between praise and thanksgiving is neither possible nor desirable!

**"The distinction between praise and thanksgiving dissolves in the theology of Paul."
(David Pao)**

The Tenses of Thanksgiving

Pao further structures his book around what he identifies as the essential past, present and future facets of biblical thanksgiving.

Past. Thanksgiving celebrates and commemorates the mighty acts of God in the past. These include the work of creation, but above all His redemptive work through

Christ. In this work the full dimensions of God's glory and grace are demonstrated, and thanksgiving is the only appropriate posture for those who have been the beneficiaries of His saving condescension. And so Paul encourages the Colossians to be always *"giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"* (Col 1:12-14).

Present. There are of course profound ongoing implications to those who have tasted of God's salvation. They are called to a life and lifestyle of thanksgiving. "In thanksgiving, not only do the people count God's gracious acts on their behalf, they also allow him to rule over them" (57). "Thanksgiving . . . is not an isolated act of gratitude. It is to be lived out as a life of worship" (98).

And so Paul exhorts the Colossians: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"* (Col 3:16-17).

Future. Our experience of God's powerful and gracious working on our behalf in

the past, and also in the present, gives us confidence in His continuing provision and care in the future, and in His sure promises concerning our eternal destiny. We can join the Psalmist in crying out, *"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"* (Ps 118:1).

"When thanksgiving is understood as establishing the fact that God is a powerful and faithful God who can and will fulfil his promises, thanksgiving becomes the basis for trusting God in the face of an uncertain future." (57). "In looking back at the gracious acts of the faithful God in history, thanksgiving points forward to God's continued involvement with his people" (126). In looking to our sure future hope (1 Cor 15:50-55, based on Christ's past work, 15:3-5), and its attendant call to faithful living and service now (15:58), Paul exclaims: *"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"* (15:57).

And so the essence of thanksgiving is worship—and the essence of worship is thanksgiving: acknowledging the God of our salvation, and his past, present and future favor towards us in Jesus Christ. Martin Rinkart expressed these truths in the last verse of his great Thanksgiving hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God" (itself a triumphant expression of hope and praise written during a time of terrible plague):

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and Him who reigns
with them in highest heaven:
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore!
For thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

The essence
of thanksgiving
is worship—and
the essence
of worship is
thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING TEXTS

*I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving.
And it will please the LORD better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs.
(Ps 69:30)*

Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing.
(Ps 107:22)

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the Lord, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.
(Ps 100)*

On your feet now—applaud Yahweh!
Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourself into his presence.
Know this: Yahweh is God, and God Yahweh.
He made us; we didn't make him.
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.
Enter with the password: "Thank you!"
Make yourself at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.
For Yahweh is sheer beauty,
all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.
(Psalm 100 in Eugene Peterson, *The Message*)

*Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples,
proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be made known in all the earth.
Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.
(Isa 12:4-6)*

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
 (Rom 7:24-25a)

*Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession,
 and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
 (2 Cor 2:14)*

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people
 it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.
 (2 Cor 4:15)

*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!
 (2 Cor 9:15)*

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,
 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,
 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father
 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 (Ephes 5:18-20)

*Do not be anxious about anything,
 but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
 let your requests be made known to God.
 (Phil 4:6)*

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,
 so walk in him, rooted and built up in him
 and established in the faith,
 just as you were taught,
 abounding in thanksgiving.
 (Col 2:6-7)

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
 give thanks in all circumstances;
 for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
 (1 Thess 5:16-18)*

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God
 fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,
 "We give thanks to you,
 Lord God Almighty, who is and who was,
 for you have taken your great power
 and begun to reign."
 (Rev 11:16-17)

THANKSGIVING PRAYERS

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and lovingkindness to us
and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
That with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages.

Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer)

Father of all,
we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
("Rite A," *The Alternative Service Book 1980* [Church of England])

O Holy Spirit, I thank thee that in fullness of grace
thou hast exhibited Jesus as my salvation,
implanted faith within me,
subdued my stubborn heart,
made me one with him forever.

O Holy Spirit, thou art willing to help my infirmities,
to show me my need, to supply words, to pray within me,
to strengthen me that I faint not in supplication.

(Valley of Vision, 3)

Thank You, Lord that You delight in giving to the undeserving. WE QUALIFY.
(Jerry DeRenzo)

Thank you, Lord, that You are both majestic and powerful (Ps 145:3-6),
and gracious and merciful (145:8).
Thank You that I can see the record of those things in the pages of Scripture,
and in the tracks of my own life.
Only You know the full extent of Your power in me,
and Your mercy towards me.

I will sing of Your praise and honor You and bless You forever and ever!

Amen.

(Ron Man)

QUOTABLES

Thankfulness

“But when you glorify God as God, and are thankful for everything—when you can take up a bit of bread and a cup of cold water, and say with the poor Puritan, ‘What, all this, and Christ too?’—then are you happy, and you make others happy. A godly preacher, finding that all that there was for dinner was a potato and a herring, thanked God that he had ransacked sea and land to find food for his children. Such a sweet spirit breeds love to everybody, and makes a man go through the world cheerfully.”

(Spurgeon, sermon on Romans 1:20-21, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1763.htm>)

“One of the most excellent methods of showing our thankfulness for deliverances is to tell to our brethren what the Lord has done for us. We mention our sorrows readily enough; why are we so slow in declaring our deliverances?” (Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps022.htm>)

“If we are wise, we shall remember (especially in choosing hymns!) that, while it is good to thank God for streams and woods, it is not streams and woods but Jesus Christ that is God’s supreme Gift, and that it is perhaps one of the worst forms of ingratitude to be so occupied with thanking God for his innumerable lesser mercies that we have little time left for thanking him for his supreme Gift.”

(C. E. B. Cranfield, “Divine and Human Action,” *Interpretation* 12:4 [October, 1958]:394)

“We cannot give God anything but praise and thanks, for everything else we receive from Him, be it grace, words, works, Gospel, faith, and all things. Moreover, praising and thank-

ing is also the one proper, Christian form of worshipping God.”

(Martin Luther, quoted by E. M. Plass in *What Luther Says*)

“There is no duty more urgent than giving thanks.”

(Ambrose of Milan, A.D. 338-397)

“O Lord, that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness.”

(William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*)

“We should beware of even turning biblical teaching into an end in itself, whereas the goal of sound doctrine is heartfelt gratitude and thankful obedience.” [cf. Romans 1]

(Michael Horton, *In the Face of God*, 204)

“Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when ye come frequently together in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his ‘fiery darts’ urging to sin fall back ineffectual. For your concord and harmonious faith prove his destruction, and the torment of his assistants.”

(Ignatius of Antioch, A.D. 35-107)

“The practice of thanksgiving at the heart of Christian worship embodies the doxological foundation of human existence.”

(Thomas H. Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” in *Worship At The Next Level*, 55)

“Unthankfulness . . . is of the essence of sin [Romans 1:21].”

(William Nicholls, *Jacob’s Ladder: The Meaning of Worship*, 47)

“Oh how great an evil ingratitude is! It produces desire for vain things, and again produces blindness; and blindness produces idolatry, and idolatry leads to a whole deluge of vices. Conversely, gratitude preserves love for God and the heart remains attached to him and is enlightened. Filled with the light, he worships only the living God and such true worship is followed immediately by a whole host of virtues.”

(Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans 1:21-23*)

“God gives and forgives.
Man gets and forgets.”
(bumper sticker)

“Thanksgiving is at the heart of Christian worship. . . . In worship [we] give thanks to God for our creation and re-creation in Jesus Christ.”

(Donald Stake, *The ABCs of Worship*, 180)

“Thanksgiving is often thought of as simply one form of prayer. Yet it underlies every form. Praise is always a thankful response for God’s grace. Confession gratefully presumes God’s acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Intercession asks for others what one has thankfully received for oneself. Petitionary prayer is but a grateful response to God’s mercies in the past.”

(Donald Stake, *The ABCs of Worship*, 181)

“Gratitude is the heart’s memory.”
(Anonymous)

“Count your blessings,
Name them one by one;
Count your blessings,
See what God has done.”
(J. Oatman, Jr.)

“Some people complain that God put thorns on roses, while others praise Him for putting roses on thorns.”
(Anonymous)

[after being robbed:]

“Let me be thankful, first, because he never robbed me before; second, because although he took my purse, he did not take my life; third, because although he took all I possessed, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”
(Mathew Henry)

“Resentment and gratitude cannot coexist, since resentment blocks the perception and experience of life as a gift. My resentment tells me that I don’t receive what I deserve. It always manifests itself in envy.

“Gratitude, however, goes beyond the ‘mine’ and ‘thine’ and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

“Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of a complaint. I can choose to be grateful when I am criticized, even when my heart still responds in bitterness. I can choose to speak about goodness and beauty, even when my inner eye still looks for someone to accuse or something to call ugly. I can choose to listen to the voices of forgiveness and to look at the faces that smile, even while I still hear words of revenge and see grimaces of hatred.

“There is always the choice between resentment and gratitude because God has appeared in my darkness, urged me to come home, and declared in a voice filled with affection: ‘You are with me always, and all I have is yours.’”
(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 85)

“Until you become thankful, you will never find joy.

“Being thankful is not telling God you appreciate the fact that your life is not in shambles. If that is the basis of your gratitude, you are on slippery ground. Every day of your life you face the possibility that a blessing in your life may be taken away. But blessings are only signs of God’s love. The real blessing, of course, is the love itself. Whenever we get too attached to the sign, we lose our grasp on the God who gave it to us. Churches are filled with widows who can explain this to you. We are not ultimately grateful that we are still holding our blessings. We are grateful that we are held by God even when the blessings are slipping through our fingers.

“Only when we see this are we able to be truly joyful, because then we have made God our joy. We still cherish the blessings, but not because we have to have them. We cherish them because they are our windows into heaven. Gratitude is our ability to see the grace of God, morning by morning, no matter what else greets us in the course of the day.”

(M. Craig Barnes, *Hustling God: Why We Work So Hard for What God Wants to Give*, 155)

“Thou, Lord Almighty, didst give food and drink to men for their enjoyment, that they might give thanks to thee, but us hast thou blessed with spiritual food and drink and eternal light through thy Child.”

(*Didache* 10:3 [2nd century A.D.])

“No gifts have we to offer
For all Thy love imparts,
But that which Thou desirest,
Our humble, thankful hearts.”
(Matthias Claudius, 1782)

“Thou hast given to me so much. . . . Give one thing more—a grateful heart.”
(George Herbert, 1593-1633)

“Thanksgiving is the act by which man acknowledges his dependence upon another: it is therefore the fundamental acknowledgment of the Creator by the creature.”

(William Nicholls, *Jacob’s Ladder: The Meaning of Worship*, 46)

“The communion between God and human beings is reciprocal, but not symmetrical. John Chrysostom puts it thus:

‘God does not need anything of ours,
But we stand in need of all things from him.
The thanksgiving itself adds nothing to him,
But causes us to be nearer to him.’

(Homily 25.3 on Matthew, PG 57.331)”

(Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Praise of God in the Theological Reflection of the Church,” *Interpretation* 39 [1985]:40)

“The Rabbis declare that, in the Messianic Era, all sacrifices will be unnecessary except the thank-offering. All sacrifices shall have completed their educational mission, all save the one inculcating the duty of gratitude. That sacrifice is to continue for ever.”

(T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, 18)

“Therefore we ought to give great thanks to the Lord that he has given us knowledge of the past, and wisdom for the present, and that we are not without understanding for the future.”
(*Epistle of Barnabas* 5.3)

“So it may be said that the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. And to do as we say in the “*Gloria in Excelsis*”: *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnum gloriam tuam*. We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour.”

(J.R.R. Tolkien, as quoted in Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien” Man and Myth*, 211-12)

SING TO THE LORD

Reflections on Congregational Song

Being “Well-Versed”

There is nothing sacred about singing all the verses of every hymn; after all, many of the best-known hymns originally had many more verses than are in common use today, and have already shortened for modern congregations. For instance, cyberhymnal.org has 19 (albeit short) verses for Charles Wesley’s “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (and the website mentions as well that the verse we know as the first was actually verse 7 in the original poem). No one seriously suggests that many of those types of hymns be used in their entirety!

Neither is there anything sacred about consistently singing only the first, second and last verse, or such patterns as sometimes develop. The point is that, like everything else in worship, what we do (or don’t do) needs to be purposefully thought through (though of course there will be situations when expediency has to take over). Here are a couple of issues to keep in mind:

Don’t underestimate the people. Often in contemporary worship, traditional hymns will be used (which is certainly a very positive practice in drawing from “treasures old and new” of the church), but without including even all of the verses found in modern hymnals. Presumably this is done because there is a fear of “too much text” or something like that. If the hymn text is not too archaic or obscure, we can give the people credit for being able to stay with it (especially if there’s a repeated refrain); certainly length should not be an issue, given how many contemporary songs are drawn out. And don’t underestimate how many people in the congregation will be familiar with the hymn: often the volume level of congregations (especially transitional ones) tangibly rise when a hymn is sung—because there is a resonance of familiarity and comfort with these traditional expressions of the faith.

Themes in the hymn. When a hymn is used as part of a thematic section or service, it may well be that only one or two verses deal specifically with that theme. In cases, there is certainly nothing wrong with singing only those verses. In fact, my experience has been that when we break out of the automatic “sing every verse” mode, people tend to pay much more attention to what they are singing, especially if you don’t begin with the first verse, because of the unfamiliar context. (Make sure there is enough of a musical introduction to make it clear what hymn and tune is to be sung).

Length of verses. The average hymn verse takes from about 15 seconds (e.g., “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”) to 40 seconds (such four-line hymns as “Holy, Holy, Holy: and “Crown Him with Many Crowns”). The great Wesley hymn “And Can It Be” is certainly an exception, as its verses last almost a minute each (even when sung in cut time). Not only that, but the melody is not an easy for one congregations to sing, with its wide range and melodic jumps. When all five of the verses found in most hymnals are sing, it can be vocally very tiring for the congregation. It might be better to sing a maximum of four verses in this case; and the verse beginning “’Tis mystery all!” can perhaps be left out without detracting from the power of the text.

Logical transitions. These may be fairly obvious, but I have personally experienced some rather jarring and illogical transitions between verses caused by omitting verses without attention given to what that does to the ongoing flow of the text.

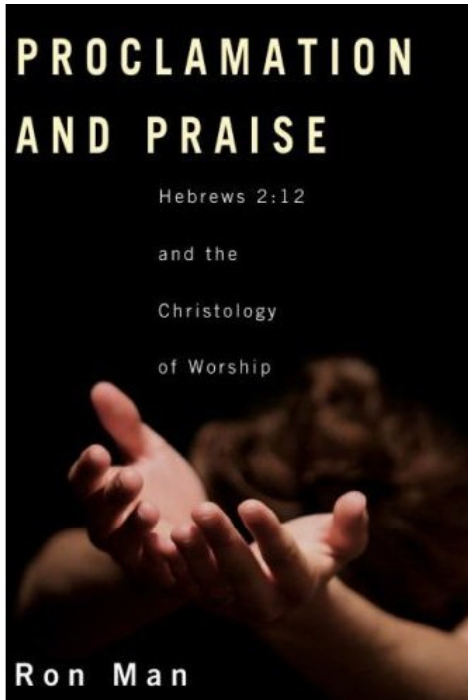
For example, in “Amazing Grace,” the verse commonly used next-to-last ends with the words, “and grace will see me *home*”—i.e., to heaven. Those words are needed to make sense of the beginning of the last verse, “When we’ve been *there* ten thousand years . . .” (Actually, this last verse is not by Newton and was added later, but the sense of heaven was also there in verses now normally omitted.) If we skip to that last verse from what is usually sung as verse 2, and end with “the hour I first believed,” there is no antecedent for “there.” While undoubtedly understandable by most people, especially in light of the familiarity and popularity of the hymn, nevertheless for those thinking about what they’re singing there is a definite *non sequitur*.

Something similar happens with “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” The next-to-last verse, speaking of the final defeat of Satan, ends with the words “one little *word* shall fell him” (i.e., a word of judgment from the mouth of God against the “devils” mentioned in verse 3; c.f. Revelation 19:15,21). That mention is critical to making sense of the beginning of the last verse: “*That word* above all earthly powers . . .”

So, by all means let’s use hymns—creatively, intentionally, reflectively, logically.

BOOK NOOK

JUST PUBLISHED



Proclamation and Praise

Hebrews 2:12 and the Christology of Worship

by Ron Man (Wipf and Stock, 2007)

This book is a biblical and theological study of the role of Christ in leading our worship. The topic of the present ministry of Christ in our midst is an important and often neglected one, and a necessary corrective to our tendency *to do worship in our own strength*. I hope this little book will be a helpful contribution to the discussion.

ENDORSEMENTS

“Ron Man is an able guide into the undiscovered country of one of the most electric, encouraging and important passages on worship. This book is beautifully written, thoroughly researched and deeply drawn from Scripture and the theologians of the Church. Proclamation and Praise sets worship in its eternal context of being the work

of the ascended Christ. Man not only uncovers the common ground amongst proponents of various styles of worship, he takes us further into the heart of worship than many have ever been. This is theology that sings!” (Dr. Gerrit S. Dawson, senior minister, First Presbyterian Church, Baton Rouge; author of *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation*)

“Ron Man has written a compelling account of an undervalued part of Jesus’ story: that he rose from the dead to carry on the Father’s program of redemption among us. Astutely exegeting Hebrews 2:12, he makes a case for a revolutionary view of the church—Jesus is the chief Preacher and Leader of Praise.” (Dr. Reggie Kidd, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary [Orlando]; author of *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship*)

“Insightful, biblical, theologically astute, and well communicated. Ron Man’s presentation of Towards a Christology of Worship is a long overdue treatment of the Hebrews 2 passage. This is a wonderful reminder that Jesus Christ himself is central to our worship. Using evidence gathered from the pages of scripture, the events in history, and the witness of The Church, Man articulates with skill and conviction the truth about Christ being our worship leader.” (Dr. Vernon M. Whaley, Director, Center for Worship, Liberty University; author of *The Dynamics of Corporate Worship*)

The book is available through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), but may be cheaper through the publisher, [Wipf and Stock](https://www.wipfandstock.com) (depending on your shipping options). If you’re interested in the subject but not able to buy the book, you might want to read two articles on the [Articles page](https://www.worr.org) at www.worr.org, “Jesus Our Worship Leader” and “Proclamation and Praise,” which deal with the subject considerably more briefly!

OTHER RESOURCES



There is a report on the Worship Theologians Conference held September 20-22 at the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship at the Center's [website](#). There you can also download the [papers](#) that were submitted by participants for discussion at the conference.

WORSHIP EVENTS

CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



January 24-26, 2008 Grand Rapids, Michigan USA
 sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
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COMING NEXT MONTH:
 CHRISTMAS ISSUE



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