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BOOK REVIEW

Glenn Packiam. *Worship and the World to Come: Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020. x + 216 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-8308-4931-4. \$35.00.

During the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, a sense of despair has slowly crept into the milieu of many churches, weary of online worship, ever-changing restrictions, and the social unrest (politically and otherwise) that has marked the past year. This despair leads our churches to an important question: how does the church's worship impart and engender hope? Thankfully, Glenn Packiam's *Worship and the World to Come* offers preliminary and helpful reflections on this question.

As an accomplished worship songwriter, author, pastor, and researcher, who is a visiting fellow at St. John's College, Durham University and an adjunct professor at Denver Seminary, Packiam writes as a practitioner-researcher. The study emerges from Packiam's practice as a work of practical theology that focuses on the theme of hope in contemporary worship. Utilizing a mixed quantitative-qualitative methodology, Packiam seeks to describe the "encoded hope of contemporary worship songs and the experienced hope of contemporary worship service" (6), offering reflections and suggestions for how the church might be led towards an increasingly robust (eschatological) hope in the days ahead.

Packiam divides the book into four parts. Part one, "Setting the Stage," begins with an adept overview of the field of practical theology. Utilizing the work of Ballard and Prichard, Cameron et al., Osmer, and Ward, Packiam contextualizes the present work as practical theology. He specifically utilizes Cameron et al.'s four voices of practical theology—normative,

espoused, operant, and formal—as an operating paradigm for his investigation. However, unlike Cameron et al., Packiam argues that priority of “speech,” as it were, ought to be given to the formal and normative theological voices. Packiam offers an introduction to this field for those unfamiliar with its contours. He also develops a convincing apologetic for the use of the social sciences in practical theological research and his particular use of phenomenology and ethnography in the study. Chapter 2 situates the work within the frame of contemporary worship practice. Tracing the contemporary worship movement’s foundations from Pentecostalism and church-growth missiology, Packiam overviews the development of three core worship paradigms: worship as mission, worship as formation, and worship as encounter. The discussion of these paradigms includes an overview and general critique, showing the strengths and weaknesses of each and how they continue to shape contemporary worship practice. These paradigms should not be considered monolithic, whereby a church must choose one to the exclusion of the others. Instead, they are paradigmatic; churches often choose to highlight one but the others should also be present in the church’s worship. Indeed, as Packiam comments, “when a particular way of approaching congregational worship is emphasized to the exclusion of the others, distortions occur and damage abounds” (46).

Part two, “Hope and Eschatology,” develops the book’s key themes, namely by defining hope sociologically, defining *Christian* hope specifically, and discussing influential theologians’ conceptions of Christian hope. Packiam uses these to offer a correction to some of the errant or incomplete beliefs about the telos of creation that have thrived in evangelicalism and to define creedal Christian eschatological hope so that it can be studied in practice. In Chapter 3, Packiam describes four models of hope—cognitive, affective, virtue ethics, and phenomenological—highlighting their use in the project as methods for interpreting the collected data. Chapter 4 moves from hope in a general sense to a specifically Christian conception of hope, in other words, describing Christian eschatology, which Packiam argues is grounded in the resurrection. Packiam refers to this as creedal Christian

hope in reference to the Nicene creed, which solidifies the importance of the Nicene tradition's normative voice throughout the study. Finally, Chapter 5 brings the formal theological voice into view by summarizing the eschatological theological visions of Moltmann and Wright, whose theologies of divine presence (Moltmann) and divine faithfulness (Wright) give theological footing to the worship paradigms discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, Moltmann's view thickens Packiam's description of the pentecostal or "encounter" model, whereas Wright's view thickens the description of both the reformed "formation" and evangelical "mission" models of worship.

The third section, "Evangelicals, Worship, and Hope," begins to bring the study's many threads together. Packiam utilizes data gathered about worship songs and from focus group interviews from Presbyterian and Pentecostal churches to reveal how hope is espoused, encoded, and experienced in evangelical worship songs and services. Chapter 6 introduces the two churches in which Packiam did field research, and describes the espoused theology of hope in North American churches broadly alongside of these two churches specifically. Chapter 7 utilizes ritual theory to code language in popular worship songs, titles, and impressions which were gathered via a national (US) survey of worship leaders. Breaking down the data along national/presbyterian/charismatic lines, Packiam demonstrates that hope in contemporary worship songs heavily focuses on "immediacy and intimacy and lacks a future orientation and narrative sense" (140). This focus on immediacy and intimacy means that the experience of hope within worship services can often exist no matter the content of worship songs. Indeed, Chapter 8 convincingly argues, that hope in contemporary Christian worship songs is not creedal in so much as it is circumstantial. In other words, hope in contemporary worship is tied to the circumstances of the worshiper and worshipping community as they seek to experience God's presence and remember God's faithfulness.

The book's final section, "The Spirit and the Church," offers a concluding theological reflection and suggestions for ministry practitioners. Chapter 9 offers a pneumatologically focused reflection which rightly names the Holy Spirit's role in the

experience of hope in worship. The Spirit, Packiam argues, effectuates spiritual formation, empowers mission, and animates the church's practices. Furthermore, Packiam concludes that worship songs need not be about hope to be hopeful; instead, they simply need to make Christians aware of God's empowering presence. Finally, Chapter 10 offers practitioners a variety of ways to bring insights from the study to bear through sermons, songs, and the design (or order) of worship services.

Much is to be commended about this work. The survey of practical theology in Chapter 2 is a short and accessible introduction for anyone seeking to get their bearings in this still-maturing field of theological study. This chapter may prove especially helpful for new students entering into the field, as Packiam's footnotes are an invaluable resource pointing to scholars and works that are considered important to the ongoing development of this discipline. The theological reflection on the Holy Spirit's role in worship in Chapter 9 is also rich and applicable well beyond the topic at hand. Indeed, Packiam's reflections on the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual formation, mission, and the church's practices is a powerful reminder for pastors and ministry leaders that these things, and their effectiveness, are up to God's Spirit working more than they are up to our working. Furthermore, Packiam's overviews of worship models and paradigms throughout the book will provide clarity for many practitioners. It offers language to describe worship practice while also revealing blind spots where one's worship model needs balancing for the sake of the church's mission, formation, or ability to encounter God. Indeed, my own practice as a pastor is now indebted to Packiam's thoughtful reflections in each these areas, and will be shaping my pastoral practice for years to come.

However, some aspects of the study are found to be wanting. First, the study's use of focus groups and its gathered dataset were puzzling. While the two churches Packiam focused on provided rich reflections on their experience of worship, it was surprising that Baptists—who accounted for 43 percent of respondents to Packiam's national survey—were not included as a focus group. Yet the presbyterian dataset, which had a corresponding focus group, accounted for only 5 percent of responses. Had it

been taken into account that Presbyterians are, generally speaking, considered “mainline,” and the Presbyterian and mainline responses been utilized together, these responses would have accounted for 30 percent of those received. This would have offered a more meaningful dataset for coding and drawing conclusions. With the addition of a Baptist focus group, these three groups would have been representative of the vast majority of denominations represented in the survey responses, which in turn would have made the study’s conclusions more widely applicable.

Another aspect of the study which could have been bolstered was its use of the Bible. Given that Scripture was described as normative in the opening chapter, I expected to see the Bible brought into the study throughout. However, rather than regular and direct scriptural engagement, Packiam engaged texts sparingly and often indirectly through the work of other theologians. Indeed, nearly half (47 percent) of the references listed in the book’s Scripture index occur in the Chapter 9 theological reflection (19 percent on one page alone). Given the number of Baptists who responded to Packiam’s survey, and many Baptists’ general aversion to creeds, the work’s normative use of the Nicene creed rather than Scripture (at least explicitly) may produce a roadblock for some who would otherwise benefit from reflecting on the study’s insights. Indeed, evangelicals view biblical engagement as an important part of theological work. The lack of direct biblical engagement may cause the work to be treated with more suspicion than warranted.

Related to Packiam’s use of Scripture in this work, two points must be noted. First, developing a biblical theology of hope in worship was outside the purview of this work. This should temper the expectations for biblical engagement in this work specifically, as well as in practical theological works more generally. Relatedly, sparse biblical engagement is symptomatic of practical theology as a field of study. The use of Scripture in practical theology is a topic that continues to garner, and indeed requires, further conversation and debate.

Finally, a word of caution to lay readers and ministry practitioners is required. This book was adapted from Packiam’s

doctoral dissertation of the same name. Due to this, some of the chapters are difficult to read, often using a series of complex terms together. While Packiam does a good job of defining terms for the reader, their use will be a distraction to those not looking to engage with dissertation-level academic material.

However, none of these should dissuade you from engaging with this book. Indeed, *Worship and the World to Come* is timely and profitable. More than merely being thought-provoking, which the book certainly is, Packiam offers ministry practitioners and practical theologians tools for theological reflection on hope, how it is understood, and how it is experienced in our worship. At a time when many are experiencing hopelessness, the importance of the topic of hope in worship cannot be overstated. This study encourages imagining approaches to worship that can strengthen Christian eschatological hope and further shape churches as outposts of God's hope-filled Kingdom.

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