

Reader's reactions

George MacLeod

Only One Way Left

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I can't remember when I first read this book, but it has affected every part of my life and ministry, not just my conduct of worship.

In reading his chapter 'Christ as High Priest in the midst of the congregation' I first began to realise that worship was not a random selection of words and songs, not a 'hymn sandwich', but that each part of the service had a crucial contribution to make in nurturing our understanding of God, and of life.

I discovered how worship inspires us in our walk with Christ, and that the Spirit not only alters our consciousness, but imparts the desire and the capacity to live in the will, and in the Kingdom, of God.

It is a challenging book, which though written for a different time, and a different context, is remarkably pertinent to our current situation. It makes us think again about a range of subjects -



our personal devotions, the role of the congregation, the sacraments, mission, the need for community for support and accountability, church governance, and more.

Every service follows a pattern, or should; it prevents the worship being personality driven, or becoming shallow.

I do not follow slavishly what Dr MacLeod recommends, but it provided for me a template, enabling me to learn from others, and to incorporate new ways of developing worship that honoured the seriousness of the undertaking of leading others in the worship of Almighty God. ‘Woe betide us if the people come to church, and we are not prepared,’ my friend and colleague Leith Fisher once said.

‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all’ was my call to worship throughout my ministry. Grace is what we always need, in any situation, and grace is what God always gives.

The first part of worship is praise to God our Creator and Father, for the world we live in, and the life we’ve been given. The opening praise gathers us together before God.

But in drawing close, we become more conscious of where we have fallen short, gone wrong, hurt others, been hurt. Therefore we confess our sin, and the sin of the world; and ask for mercy, forgiveness; and the grace to be able to forgive ourselves.

We praise God for life, but admit that our lives are not all they might be. There is beauty, and there is brokenness.

That’s how life is.



In the second part of the service we focus on the second person in the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the word made flesh. We have the scripture readings, the Good News. Life doesn't have to be the way it is, there is an alternative, there are choices, 'Come to me, follow me, rest in me'. The sermon attempts, God being our helper, to explain and apply the Word. God is saying today 'I can help you, I will help you, I can heal you, your life can be transformed, I have a purpose for your life that is far better than anything you can ask or think... come to me.' If in the first part we open our hearts to God, in this God opens his heart to us, because he loves us. If the first part is about life as it is, this is about life as it could be, and as it will be. The new life in Christ.

The third part of the service is our response. The Christian life is always a response. 'Do I believe this? Do I want to take up this offer, this call, this challenge?' The offering at this point is of course simply an indication of how we are responding.

The prayer following is one of dedication, and thanks, and intercession for everyone who is bowed down - the poor, the blind, the prisoner, the broken-hearted - by life.

This part of the service is inviting the Holy Spirit to move in our lives, and in the life of the world.

In this Trinitarian pattern hymns are selected appropriate to the sequence (as in CH4), revealing the pilgrim's progress of where we are to where we might be, and continuing the 'conversation' with God. In the first and third part of the service the minister speaks on behalf of the people to God (the priestly role), in the central section the preacher speaks on behalf of God to the people (the prophetic role).



Worship concludes with the commission to go and live this new life so that others are drawn to experience the love of God in their own lives.

And we do not go alone, we go as people who are being changed, and blessed.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.



Additional Resources

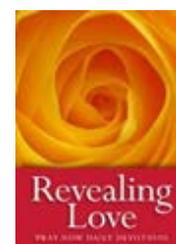
Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Revealing Love](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#).



Starters for Sunday



[Starters for Sunday](#) offer a range of suggested material which can be used each week for individuals and congregations to develop. All of the material is written by people who are experienced in leading worship regularly though not all are ordained.

Music Resources

For some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music resource [Different Voices](#).



Preaching Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

