

Ruth C. Duck. *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013. 358 pages. \$24.02.

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from *every nation*, from *all tribes and peoples and languages*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”¹ By the optimal use of this inclusive text in the Introduction, Ruth C. Duck demonstrates the primary focus and purpose for her worship textbook (also its title): *worship for the whole people of God*. Duck acknowledges four liturgical principles growing out of the *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*² as the key foundation for her inclusive liturgical propaganda: transcultural, contextual (both nature and culture), counter-cultural, and cross-cultural. Thus, Duck aims to provide a liturgy textbook that can eventually facilitate each liturgical assembly’s active participation in worship in its own contextualized cultural situation, yet remain widely open to diverse other-cultural expressions of the same transcultural God. She is keenly aware that today’s multi-cultural and inter-denominational worship classroom, not to mention the ecclesial context, demands critical resources.

In order to ease and satisfy that urgent liturgical demand in and out of the classroom, Duck includes fourteen chapters in three interrelated compartmental groups. Chapters 1–3 serve as the foundations of the book, discussing the issues of 1) worship as active participation of the whole people of God and 2) worship in diverse Christian liturgical traditions, including, but not exclusively, African American, Korean/Korean American, Hispanic American, and Euro-American. In this section, we especially see how solid and determined Duck is in her theological understanding of worship *by, with, and for the whole people of God*, regardless of different cultural or liturgical traditions. The second section, chapters 4–9, brings up practical liturgical concerns appearing as general matters in most worshipping communities, such as the worship order, the arts in worship, various forms of prayers, and Scripture readings in relation to the church year. Once again, we read Duck’s passionate dedication to making possible the full participation of the whole worshipping community in all liturgical moments, from initial preparation of worship, through the greeting, up to the benediction, and beyond (living out our worship moments in every reality!). In the third section, chapters 10–13, Duck articulates via her main “whole-people-philosophy” the sacraments and various rites of the church, including marriage, funeral, and the rites of healing and reconciliation, the last being oft-neglected areas in the liturgical study, as she acknowledges. Duck ends the book with chapter 14 for a brief discussion on contemporary worship as an ever-growing new trend in worship today.

Among many, a notable strength of the book is Duck’s compassionate attention to oft-ignored diversity issues of sexual orientation (LGBT), gender equality (esp. the ordination of women), age difference (concerns on children), and mental and physical ability, not to mention the multi-cultural situation of the church today. Duck is so confident that worship for the whole people of God should consciously embrace all these diversity issues as fundamentals in and for worship. In particular, she encourages, not forces, the reader to ponder deeply LGBT issues as perhaps the most critical in today’s liturgical context, even adding an appendix on that matter.

When we read through groups two and three (chapters 4–9 and 10–13), we find that the

¹ Emphasis added, Rev. 7:9 NRSV.

² This *Statement* is the product of an international study group of the Lutheran World Federation at their meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 1996.

multi-cultural dimension and emphasis in worship suddenly weakens. Unlike group one (chapters 1–3) where the propagating voice for openness to and inclusion of multi-cultural worship theology and elements is strong, in later chapters Duck finds her primary liturgical resources for worship planning mostly in European or Euro-American traditions, probably because of the research time and travel limitations (the current volume is already a massive research work!). In even doing so, however, her writing still remains strongly multi- or inter-denominational, introducing a variety of liturgical practices and elements appearing in many western Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. Hence, a reference list for multi-cultural resources and sources in the back will greatly help as a further research and practical guide for the reader.

Overall, the book is just what Kimberly Long in her blurb calls “the most comprehensive introduction to worship for our [multi-cultural and inter-denominational] time.” Especially, Duck’s focused pastoral eyes on the actual liturgical practices of the church throughout the book reward the volume itself as an excellent introductory worship textbook for local seminaries today. In the worship class, it will be very wise to use this book in developing a 14- to 16-week-long curriculum utilizing all fourteen chapters. Specifically, when the worship class is diverse culturally, denominationally, and in gender/sexual orientation, which is a rapidly growing trend in most U.S. seminaries now, the book is a first-rate choice as a main textbook.

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