

Gerald C. Liu and Khalia J. Williams. *A Worship Workbook: A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Liturgy*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021. 194 pages. \$26.99.

As many churches implement or consider a post-pandemic reentry into the collective worship space, a number of pastors and worship leaders are re-thinking the value of both in-person and virtual worship. For this reason, *A Worship Workbook: A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Liturgy* by Gerald C. Liu and Khalia J. Williams is an especially timely resource that provides a thoughtful framework for examining liturgical theology and praxis. The volume was created as a liturgically-focused companion to the homiletically-focused, *A Sermon Workbook: Exercises in the Art & Craft of Preaching* by Thomas Troeger and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, and aims to help readers “think, write, and act like a worship leader” (1).

Divided into two parts—“Widening the Worship Imagination” and “Deepening the Work of the People”—the large format paperback workbook is an assembly of brief topical chapters with accompanying questions, exercises, and practices that prompt inward and outward-focused reflections for those seeking a more creative and informed imagination for the worship space. An ambitious project, this work addresses 39 different topics and represents a distillation of a range of scholarship, including liturgical studies, ritual studies, cultural studies, and other areas of academic inquiry related to worship. The material is deep and wide enough to provoke serious reflection on a spectrum of liturgy-related matters, but it is also brief and approachable enough to not intimidate worship leaders who may not be particularly academically inclined. The workbook’s arrangement lends itself both to personal study or group study situations, and is designed such that each chapter is a self-contained unit, so readers can read chapters out of order according to their primary interests or concerns.

In addition to chapters by Liu and Williams, guest contributors address topics in their areas of expertise, such as Ecology and Worship (Leah Schade); Worship, Gender, and Sexuality (Stephanie Budwey); Latinx Wisdom for Wholistic Worship (Lis Valle-Ruiz); Worship and Whiteness (Andrew Wymer); Intercultural Worship (Safwat Marzouk); Chaplaincy: Reimagining Hospital Rituals in the Context of COVID-19 (Emily Lueder); and How Then Shall We Gather? Pastoral Reflections on Virtual Worship (Chris Jorgensen). Other chapter topics include elements of good worship, Jewish roots of worship, liturgical time, tradition, two-pattern worship, scripture and other sacred texts, the sacraments, occasional services, and sacred space, as well as embodied worship, African American and Asian American worship, intergenerational worship, liturgical awe, congregational resistance, the arts, music, relevance, virtual worship, and more.

The challenge of covering such a gamut of liturgical topics in 194 pages is the necessity of brevity, which requires a focused approach to each topic—thus, those who are seeking a more polyvalent or exhaustive exploration of the various topics may want to supplement with additional reading. However, Liu and Williams provide an ample number of resources arranged topically at the end of the book, so anyone seeking further study will have an array of helpful options for their inquiries.

The workbook covers progressive territory and provides challenges that will be refreshing for those who desire to change “liturgy as usual,” who want to reset their “default” worship settings, and who want to engage the pressing social and cultural issues of human existence that affect communal worship. The questions offer in-depth opportunities for leaders to consider their own contexts while thinking through, for example, how gendered language is used in liturgy or hymnody, or what kinds of liturgical rituals that might be incorporated for

responding to racial violence in our communities, or which alternative expressions of eucharistic ritual practice might be lifegiving for their congregations. These kinds of questions will likely be a holy breath of fresh air for some, and an uncomfortable challenge to existing liturgical boundaries for others. Regardless of where leaders and their congregations fall on the conservative-progressive spectrum, the workbook invites them into a space for growth and exploration that can be tailored for worship in particular congregations.

If liturgy is the “work” of the people, Liu and Williams have certainly created the liturgical “workbook” of the people. This book connects worship anamnistically with its roots in Christian history, while also urging it forward toward progressive, imaginative, and creative thinking. This workbook delivers on its promise to challenge and enrich worship leaders to think more broadly and deeply about liturgical space and time, enabling them to minister more intentionally to congregations. It is an important and engaging resource for both novice and seasoned liturgical leaders—whether solo pastors planning their church’s liturgy, or church leaders with full worship ministry teams—seeking a faithful, sacred imagination in theology and practice for their worship.

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