

[Review] *Let Us Draw Near: Biblical Foundations of Worship*, by Ron Man



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I finished the last page of this book as my plane descended through the smog of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. I traveled there to help lead our first Indonesian ethnoarts facilitator workshop. We spent a week teaching the participants the fundamentals of exploring local artistic expressions, songwriting, facilitation skills, participatory methods, research, and more.

Near the end of the workshop, an Indonesian colleague and I reflected on what we could improve for next time. She mentioned something crucial we had overlooked in our preparations: Though we read from the scriptures, prayed, and sang each morning, we never discussed theological and missiological foundations for worship. As we interacted with the participants, we recognized the need to address the “why” of local arts. Why are the arts and worship important? Do local artistic expressions matter to God? As workshop facilitators, what is our ultimate motivation for cocreating with communities across the Indonesian archipelago? I realized that the book I had just read, Ron Man’s *Let Us Draw Near*, provides a long-awaited resource for needs like this.

The book’s structure comprises eight parts, gathered into theological and scriptural foundations, followed by a historical survey and cultural considerations. The final sections discuss applications—mostly transcultural—for both Western and global contexts. Man notes, however, that “the book does not deal a lot with specific *practices*, because its focus is on identifying unifying principles that transcend cultures and ecclesiastical traditions” (xxviii). In the concluding section, the author summarizes his twelve principles for biblical worship, which condense the book into a concise, coherent summary.

The book clearly explains foundational biblical concepts with extensive supporting scripture references. It uses simple, straightforward language and gets to the point. Among several recurring motifs, the revelation–response worship dynamic between God and God’s people features most prominently. Though missiology doesn’t form the primary focus of this book, the close intertwining of worship and missions means ethnodoxology frequently appears.

Let Us Draw Near defies easy categorization. In one sense, it gives a meticulous overview of biblical worship. However, Man mixes thoughts and recommendations from his years of experience teaching these topics in various global settings, meaning the book is more complex than a survey. Some material may seem familiar to those who have encountered his work in the past: the text compiles many of Man’s lectures, articles, and presentations into a systematic arrangement accompanied by extensive references.

Most of the book is intentionally transcultural. Some discussions (such as the “worship wars”) are more specific to the Western cultural perspective. Still, Man describes them with numerous scripture references so the reader can apply these ideas to their sociocultural context. Many chapters and sections can stand alone, and the reader can work through them extemporaneously based on which topics are most relevant at the time. To that end, the indexes are a priceless resource.

The thorough Subject Index (547) allows readers to find what they need for more specific topics not mentioned in the Table of Contents. It includes themes, individuals, and additional sub-listings for more detail. The Scripture Index (557) is a second helpful tool: Man has provided exhaustive scripture references for every topic in the book, and this index can reverse-search places in which the author has discussed a particular passage as it relates to worship. Although I worked from the ebook for this review and appreciate the ability to search for words and phrases quickly, I also recommend the print version for ease of flipping back and forth between pages.

Scripture references and quotes from others appear within the text, avoiding the need to check excessive footnotes or consult a Bible. While this makes the book thicker, it saves time by removing the need to look elsewhere. Including extensive quotes is invaluable, allowing the reader to decide whether a resource is worth pursuing.

Man writes from a Reformed perspective and frequently quotes notable figures from that movement, such as John Piper. For me, this perspective does not detract from the book’s usefulness for readers of other backgrounds; Man intends to unify. He cultivates shared Christian beliefs and scripture, adhering to a broadly acceptable framework. This book does not purpose to cause controversy; it stands as a valuable compendium of collected truth designed for all.

Let Us Draw Near is an excellent resource for students of worship and ethnodoxology and would be at home in many class syllabi. Ron Man’s teaching experience is evident throughout; most of the book is easily adaptable for various pedagogical contexts, ranging from academic to practical. It abounds in simple lessons and resources that could have enhanced my recent training workshop with minimal preparation. I recommend the book as a starting point for further research because of its breadth and how much the author has gathered from other resources. The references are extensive enough for readers to branch off into any worship-related topic, with a decent bibliography to start their research journey.

As a longtime participant in the ethnodoxology movement, this book did not surprise me with new information. But that is not its purpose. Ron Man does not mean to teach us something different but to plant us in the firm truth of scripture and the rich history of the church. Being still young, the ethnodoxology movement needs a solid theological grounding, and this book contributes to that end.