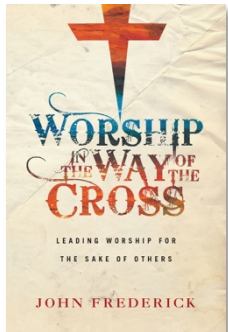


[Review] *Worship in the Way of the Cross: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others*, by John Frederick



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Frederick, John. *Worship in the Way of Others: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2017. 208pp. ISBN 978-0-8308-4488-3.

In *Worship in the Way of the Cross: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others*, John Frederick laments that many modern worship leaders use worship as an opportunity to promote individualism. As Frederick observes, worship leaders are guilty of inflating their egos or of calling worshipers to very little action apart from personal piety. This book, then, is Frederick's opportunity to offer a new vision for worship leading, one that prioritizes Christ's self-giving love.

The book is composed of six parts. In part 1, "The Story that Shapes Cruciform Worship," Frederick claims that stories have the potential to form or deform. With the influence of postmodernism and relativity, he argues, contemporary worship is prioritizing the wrong stories of individuality. (Here we can hear echoes of Robert Webber's jeremiad of postmodern spirituality in *Who Gets to Narrate the World?*) Instead, Frederick sets forth a vision for worship that is rooted in *cruciformity*, a term borrowed from New Testament scholar Michael Gorman. For Frederick, experiencing the proleptic kingdom of God does not occur through passively accepting false narratives but by worshiping "in the way of the cross." He writes, "When the reconciled become reconcilers, our communion with God and one another empowers us to refuse and contradict the world as it is and to see it transformed through the cruciform love of God—the one who created it and the one who is redeeming it" (29). Therefore, cruciform worship has the ability to reject false narratives and change individual stories when located underneath the story of Christ's self-giving love. "The way to redemption is always through the communal worship and embodiment of the crucified God," Frederick claims, "through whom we receive the power to exit the narrative of this world and to rewrite life" (29).

Part 2, "Cruciformity: Worship in the Way of the Cross," expands on Frederick's vision for cruciform worship. He submits that receiving the love of God transforms humans into the image of Christ—a "family resemblance" that is known through worship and completed in community. In part 3, "Cruciform Counterculture," Frederick argues against a church that conforms to culture. Instead, he promotes cultivating a history of arts so that a congregation can stand against what he calls a "karaoke chapel" culture and bring people of all ages and preferences together. One can



find similarities to Webber's vision for ancient–future worship; but although both models have similar end goals (transforming cultural stories through God's grand story), they hold different presumptions. For Frederick, worship is primarily meant to bring all people together as one in Christ, whereas for Webber, worship is primarily meant to celebrate God's saving acts in Christ. There is much potential overlap between these philosophies, to be sure, but Frederick expands on a distinct sliver of this Christocentric liturgical theology.

In part 4, “Interpersonal Cruciformity,” Frederick contrasts two false narratives that are prevalent when worship leaders relate to congregants and staff. The first, a narrative of passive–aggression, mistakes an others-centered way of ministry for passivity and avoidance. The second, a narrative of power, locates leadership through threats. Frederick rightly identifies how dominant models of leadership can be overemphasized: servant leadership can result in “leading as doormats,” while corporate influences from secular organizational leadership can result in “leading as lords.” Frederick balances these extremes by showing how the cross provides a model of love that redefines relationships to others.

Part 5, “Cruciform Liturgy,” explores how the structure of worship inspires cruciformation. Here, Frederick sets forth a vision of “liturgical ideation,” but, unfortunately, does not offer much guidance for its implementation. Although his ideas are worthy, this section lacks practical suggestions for planning and leading cruciform worship. He gives brief arguments for *how* prayers, preaching, singing, and communion become cruciformational, but these remain abstract implications, not concrete applications. Though this section has the most potential for entering the territory of practical theology, Frederick is content to remain in the realm of the speculative. This is a shortcoming of the book, which does not seem to fully follow through on its promise to help worship leaders “lead for the sake of others.” His final section, “Cruciform Mission,” is a short but poignant challenge for the church to become “reconciling reconcilers” who transform the world. He ends the book with a beautiful call for the church to not only *embrace* but also to *embody* worship as mission.

Frederick's background as a New Testament scholar, together with his experience as a musician and worship leader, offers a distinctive perspective on worship. Following the lead of many evangelical scholars, Frederick attempts to reclaim a cross-centered story in the church's worship. In doing so, worshipers become imitators of the self-giving love demonstrated on the cross. By applying Gorman's model of cruciformity to worship, Frederick makes a fresh contribution to a contemporary theology of worship. His book contains interesting, lively writing that combines popular culture, profound theological reflection, and candid personal testimonies. However, it blurs the lines between practical theology and philosophical theology (a notoriously difficult balance to achieve in worship studies), while certainly preferring the latter. The chapters are brief and easily digestible but perhaps too short. They often feel like too-brief vignettes with little connection to one another, and it seems that some chapters could be subsumed into a larger section.

For Frederick, the *telos* of worship is for a Christian community to live in a way that models the self-giving love displayed on the cross. He casts a rich ecclesiological vision that moves beyond

Lord's Day worship. Assuming a broader view of worship is respectable, as many contemporary evangelical worship leaders are prone to minimize worship as merely the musical portion of a service. But it is also possible to expand worship to the point of abstraction, a temptation Frederick might slip into. His vision of "worship in the way of the cross" could become conflated with "a lifestyle in the way of the cross" or "church in the way of the cross." Because his argument lacks specific insights for implementation, much of this phrase remains nebulous. Perhaps this ambiguity exists so that his principles can be applied in a variety of contexts. Nevertheless, since Frederick does not offer many suggestions for countering resistance when implementing change toward a cruciform worshipping community, his book is less useful for ministry leaders.

In summary, Frederick offers strong, important points and a cohesive argument for cruciform worship but does not necessarily accomplish what he promises for worship leaders. This is not so much a "worship" book as it is a set of theological musings on worship-related topics. It is written at a level more appropriate for the scholarly community; thus, it may be difficult for laypersons, worship leaders, pastors, or volunteers to fully appreciate the complex nuances of this book—though Frederick's brief anecdotal asides do assist readability. *Worship in the Way of the Cross* frames worship within the task of speculative theology—a worthy endeavor with compelling results—but it has less to say about making this vision a reality in worshipping communities.