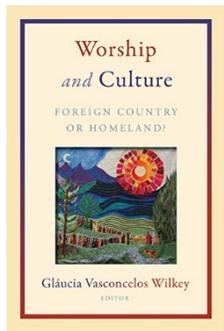


## [Review] *Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland?*, by Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey



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*Worship and Culture* revisits the seven-year (1993–1999) landmark study project of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) that resulted in three historical statements and a series of three published volumes on worship and culture. Those like me who are inspired by and embrace the *Nairobi Statement of Worship and Culture* should not let this book pass unnoticed, because it discusses the development of the epic LWF project which gave birth to this statement. The editor of this volume, Rev. Dr. Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, is a native of Brazil and a respected Presbyterian scholar in liturgy and worship who has taught and ministered in Brazil, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest US. In her preface, she explains that the creation of this book was driven by “the desire to revisit the history and the life” of the LWF project, aiming to enrich the worship-and-culture conversation by offering models, critiques and expanded discussions (xii).

Nineteen theologians and scholars from various Christian traditions contribute thirty essays and documents, which are chronologically structured into three main parts, following the titles of the LWF publication series: “Part I: Worship and Culture in Dialogue,” linked to *Cartigny Statement on Worship and Culture: Biblical and Historical Foundations* (1993); “Part II: Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity,” linked to *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture* (1996); and “Part III: Baptism, Rites of Passage, and Culture,” linked to the *Chicago Statement on Worship and Culture* (1998). All of this is framed by two introductory essays on the historical and theological contexts of the study and four concluding essays on “Reflections on the Roman Catholic-Reformed Church Dialogue.”

Before moving into the dialogue, Lutheran scholars Norman Hjelm and Lathrop give a brilliant introduction of the study. Hjelm presents the historical context of the story of the LWF project, highlighting the fourfold dynamic of worship and culture, “transcultural, contextual, cross-cultural, and countercultural,” in the Nairobi Statement (7). These four markers become the guiding structure of the discussion. Lathrop then establishes the foundation of the theological



context by bringing out the paradoxical identities of Christians as citizens and strangers on earth, as described in the second- or third-century writing *Epistle to Diognetus*, that “every foreign country is a homeland to them, and every homeland is a foreign country” (11). This not only explains the *necessary tension* of being at home in culture (and liturgy) and at a distance to critique culture and liturgy, but it also creates a momentum and framework for the upcoming discussion. I found this special kind of “discomfort” really intriguing as it drives people into deeper reflection and conversation.

First, as an instructor of intercultural studies and a worship minister, I valued this book’s theological, methodological and historical approaches to liturgical theology, provided in a sensible and culturally sensitive way. For instance, when discussing the methods of liturgical inculturation, Chupungco emphasizes the necessity of identifying the *cultural components* that are present in Christian worship, explaining how and when they got there, before applying any method (262–275). He also discusses how multiple methods could and should work together for fuller effect. In addition, there is a wide range of impressive perspectives and contexts through which themes on culture and worship are discussed, such as *by whom* and *for whom* liturgical theology should be perceived, which leads the discussion into a more contextual and incarnational approach.

Second, the essays cover a broad range of Christian traditions beyond Lutheran communities. The book helps to build bridges among varied Christian traditions, especially those with a higher-liturgical approach to worship. But still, there is a lack of the non-English-speaking and Asian voices which are important to help non-Western readers, like me, to relate and bring the discussion into our own contexts, and to display how diverse and how far the study of culture and worship could go in global contexts. Fortunately, many scholars here have been heavily involved in the context of ecumenical theology worldwide for decades. So this book is still valuable as an “ecumenical and interdisciplinary study of the relationship between Christian worship and cultures” (xi).

Third, this volume includes texts from the main statements of the original project, along with updated essays from some original contributors. I like this past–present–future approach, which invites readers to look back at a thirty-year history and carries the conversation into the twenty-first century. For example, Chupungco discusses the forty-year progression of inculturation methodology in his old-and-new pairing essays in Part II (262–286), while Mark P. Bangert gives another set on “Dynamics of World Musics: A Methodology for Evaluation” (107–123) and its twenty-year development in Part I (124–136). Through this impressive organization of the essays, readers who are new to the work of the LWF study will appreciate the introduction, while those already familiar with the conversation will find new understanding and insight. Reading this book is like playing Chinese Xiang Qi Chess: the fun and complexity of both the horizontal (cultural and ecumenical breadth) and the vertical (historical layering). This makes it a noteworthy volume that sheds new light on a landmark study of worship and culture. It is also a weighty resource in liturgical theology, worship studies, missiology (in terms of inculturation), and ethnodoxology.

Though I did not come across the term ethnodoxology in this book, its authors share many of the same concerns and mission—that is, in how the true worship of God takes appropriate

expression in different cultures and local church contexts. The major difference would only be that this volume generally places a stronger emphasis on worship *in liturgical settings*, with fewer discussions of the *arts-in-mission* context. Though local languages, patterns of gathering, and cultural matters are highly respected as modes of contextual worship, many contributors, such as Lathrop, prioritize the “more-than-local” patterns expressed in ecumenical reformed liturgy over those that embrace unique cultural expressions. As an ethnodoxologist, I found the principles and methods applied to culture and worship, especially in the introduction and Part I, to be crucial contributions to the construction of theological and methodological foundations in this new field. For instance, Mark Bangert proposes a focus on the musical event as *behavior* in evaluating musical expression in worship worldwide (122), bringing an additional dimension to the analysis of the shape of music in worship.

Another area worth praising, and maybe critiquing, is the tonal unity, which is a frequent challenge for such a big volume with multiple authors. I found little distraction in comprehension, except the first two essays under “Two Reflections of the Roman Catholic-Reformed Church Dialogue,” which seemed less connected with the central theme of the book. There are also occasional repeated explanations of the same documents and definitions, but that allows these essays to be read individually—that is, you can open any chapter in this book and it will be a freestanding, understandable reference to reach readers beyond academia, like worship ministers, missionaries, and Sunday school students.

Finally, I would like to highlight two pivotal quotes that show the importance and large audience of this book. One is from Lathrop, a scholar who captivated me as I read this book: “*Christianity is a translation religion. The belief in the incarnation requires this. And translation is not only a matter of language . . . but also a matter of gesture and symbols and festivals and ritual practices, that is, of culture and context*” (289; emphasis mine). Here Lathrop argues that liturgy is an expressive form to connect faith and culture and is thus an important place for this incarnational translation. Therefore, it is not merely an area of study but the backbone of Christianity itself. Stauffer also points out: “Dealing with the relationships between worship and culture is at once to deal with *the heart of Christianity*. It affects people’s primary Christian experience, their spirituality, and it can therefore be very controversial. It is a subject on which everyone has an opinion and many emotions.”<sup>1</sup> And most importantly, the study of it “shapes a Christian experience and defines a spirituality” (163). This helps us understand that the study of worship and culture concerns everyone and therefore is everyone’s business. *Worship and Culture* is a book no Christian should miss.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Anita Stauffer, “Worship: Ecumenical Core and Cultural Context,” in Stauffer, ed., *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity* (Geneva: LWF, Department for Theological Studies, 1996), p. 7.