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Worship

UNDERSTANDING,
PRACTICE,
ECUMENICAL IMPLICATIONS

Today

Edited by
Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller

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Introduction

THOMAS F. BEST AND DAGMAR HELLER

Worship today: a new situation in, and among, the churches

This book is a survey of the understanding and practice of worship today in a wide variety of Christian churches, communities and contexts. Our aims in gathering this material are several: (1) to provide information on the understanding and practice of worship in a wide range of churches and Christian contexts; (2) thereby to promote understanding among Christians of their own, and each others’, worship lives; (3) to take account of the impact – and implications – of the liturgical renewal and ecumenical movements for worship today; (4) through this to encourage informed reflection and dialogue among Christians about the meaning and practice of worship, both within particular churches and ecumenically; and (5) thus to promote the deepening and renewal of worship within and among the churches.

We believe that the time is ripe for such a survey, and this for several reasons. Christians are recognizing anew that worship lies at the heart of their faith, and that it is foundational and central to the lives and witness of the churches, as well as to the ecumenical movement. The efforts of churches to find new vitality and depth in their own worship through the reappropriation of their own traditions; the rediscovery of common patterns, intentions and values in worship through the movements for liturgical renewal; the growing awareness, through the ecumenical movement, of the worship of other churches and Christian communities; and the growing experience of Christians and churches praying and praising God *together* rather than separately – all these factors have created a new situation within and among the churches. This offers churches the chance to deepen and intensify their own worship life. Equally it calls them to discern the meaning and possibilities of worship with Christians in traditions other than their own. Already the new situation has stimulated much creative work on worship within and among the churches.¹

But understanding, reflection and discussion on worship are also needed today because, for all their ecumenical progress, the churches remain divided in significant ways. And these divisions are nowhere so clearly visible and painfully felt as in worship – most evidently, though not only, when the churches are unable to gather at the one Table of their