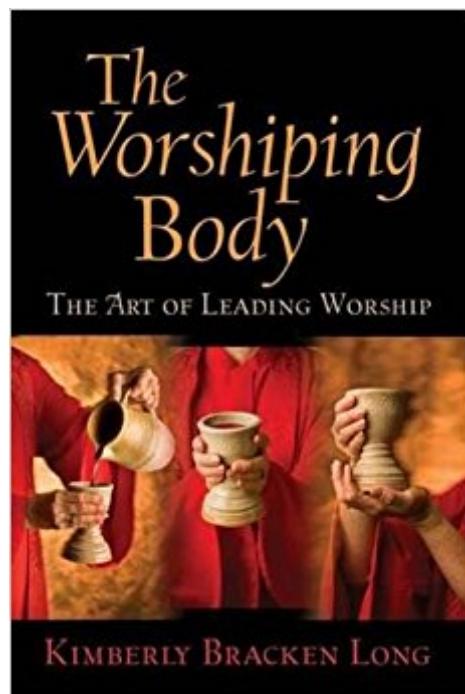


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# The Worshiping Body: The Art Of Leading Worship



## **Synopsis**

Kimberly Bracken Long, by focusing on what presiders do with their bodies, eyes, ears, lips, hands, feet, and heart, describes an attitude and style of worship leadership that is both firmly rooted and blessedly free. A wonderful offering for all worship presiders, seminarians, commissioned lay pastors, new pastors, and experienced pastors, *The Worshiping Body* is essential reading for anyone interested in how their presence and movement during worship make a difference.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Kimberly Bracken Long is Associate Professor of Worship and Coordinator of Worship Resources for Congregations at Columbia Theological Seminary. She is the author of *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship*, published by Westminster John Knox Press.

This book was a great supplemental reading to the class manual which I used in my Lay Servant Class.

This used book came to me practically brand new.

I had hopes for this volume to give more guidance about movement and body posture in worship leadership. It does, accurately, describe the importance of the body, but is short on guidance or examples.

The church as the "body of Christ" is an important image. It reminds us of not only how connected we are to Christ, but the degree to which he should define us as a community of faith. Kimberly Bracken Long, Assistant Professor of Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary, has taken the image of the body and used it to inform a wonderfully written look at worship leadership. Near the close of the book, Long notes the lament of many pastors, that they simply can't worship and lead at the same time. This book is an answer to their dilemma, for how can we lead the body in worship, if we are not at the same time worshiping ourselves? The book is organized around parts of the body - Eyes and ears, mouth, hands, feet, and heart. Under each of these images, Long explores aspects of worship, and the leadership that is given to that worship. Thus, under eyes and ears, she focuses on attentiveness to God and to the community. Under the mouth, she looks at voice and speech - including preaching and prayer, but other aspects of speech as well. Under hands she looks at gesture and touch, and then under the feet she looks at the issue of sacred space - focusing on pulpit, font, and table. Finally, she comes to the heart - "the spirituality of the presider." In lifting up the image of the body and the importance of embodied worship, Long reminds us that those who preside emerge out of the body - and thus are part of the body. And, with this is the reminder that when the church gathers for worship, it "gathers to do something" (p. 4). Worship, at least in most of our communities of faith, requires that someone speak and someone lead. The one who presides, comes forth from the body, not as one who has authority over the body, but as one who has authority for the body, so that the body can fully worship the living God. The presider is the servant of the assembly, which is the primary actor in the worship setting. Thus, the presider serves as prompter, conductor, midwife. They help the body do its work. Interestingly, Long suggests that the presider/pastor is not the shepherd, but is the one who points beyond oneself to the true shepherd - God. The question that is raised here is one of expectation - and that expectation colors what the presider/pastor/preacher does in worship. She suggests that when we come to worship, we come to enact the kingdom of God. If this is true, then when we come to worship, we should expect to encounter God there, and we should come expecting something to happen. But, that's not what happens. Rather than coming in anticipation that God is to be encountered, we fill our time with chatter and business. We end up focusing on entertainment, because that's the only way we can get them in. But, if worship is embodied. If we truly understand what it means for us to gather as the body of Christ, then, what we do in worship becomes the pattern for our lives in the world. If we're to truly worship God, then we must bring our entire being into worship, so that we can be formed as disciples of Jesus. With that said, then we can explore how the different aspects of the body can

inform the way we worship and how worship is lead. Reading the book, I was especially struck by what Long said about attentiveness. The worship leader is to be attentive to the Kingdom - what is God up to? But, the presider must also be attentive to what is going on in worship, and not just when he or she is on stage. If the preacher is rustling with hymnals, notes, or writing prayers at the last minute, then cues are given to the congregation - only that which the presider is leading has importance. As for the mouth, she suggests that we develop a theology of speech. After all, in Scripture, the voice is important. God speaks and things happen. Jesus is the Word of God. She writes: "To be Christian, in fact, is to hear the word and then to testify" (p. 53). Thus, we as presiders must give attention to what happens in our preaching, in declarations of forgiveness (for those communities that share a prayer of confession), in the reading of scripture, and even in the benediction. In our speech, we must beware of sloppiness. Eyes, ears, mouth - all are important images, but what about those hands? We forget about gestures and body language. How often do we give attention to how we use our body? And what do those gestures say to the community? There is, Long suggests, an art of gesturing - and thus we must practice and be aware of our bodies. As for touch, this has important meaning - especially such uses of touch as laying on of hands in prayer or anointing with oil. From the hands we move to the feet - to the importance of sacred space. The focus here is not so much on what the space looks like, but how it is understood and used. When we come to worship, is this space - no matter how it was used earlier - considered sacred - a place of encountering God? How we lay out our worship space speaks of our theologies and practices. In this chapter she speaks to how we use pulpit, font (baptismal), and Table, suggesting ways in which all can be reclaimed and used to lead worship effectively. This chapter is not just about furniture. It's also about movement, movement of presiders and movement of the people, including movement from the building into the world. This is because what we do in worship should set patterns for what we do in the world. The book concludes with a look at the heart of the body - the spirituality of the presider. In this concluding chapter Long suggests five practices that can help the presider lead the body in worship. She begins with leading from the heart, that is knowing the words and the patterns of worship by heart. Then, she writes that our leadership should be rooted in prayer, that we should let go of control to God, and trust the service to God in prayer. We should also love the body, and lead with authenticity. Finally, we should lead with passion. That last statement needs some explanation - for she writes this doesn't mean "bringing an overwrought sense of melodrama to presiding." Instead, what it means is that what we say and what we do in worship should be "imbued with the deep conviction that every bit of it matters (p. 114). The important message of this book is that worship isn't about style or format. Life and passion don't

derive from a certain kind of music. Instead, it comes from expectation - both on the part of the presider and the people gathered - that God is at work and the kingdom is coming and even is already here in our midst. The presider plays an important role in this, but the presider isn't the star or the center piece. Worship is something the body does, and the presider is part of the body, which is why if the presider isn't worshiping with the body, then something is amiss. Long's book is informed by her experience as a pastor and as a worshiper. It's informed by her Presbyterian background and theology. John Calvin, while not a dominant voice, is an important one in this conversation. Style is not an issue here - indeed, there is little discussion of music. The question is - what do we as presiders expect to happen when we come into the sanctuary? As we ask this question, I believe Kimberly Bracken Long has much to say to us. This should be essential reading for every pastor and presider in worship.

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