
Book Reviews

**Diverse Worship:
African-American, Caribbean & Hispanic Perspectives**

Reviewed by Marguerite Kraft

Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U. Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2000, 259 pp.

Pedrito Maynard-Reid's book is based on solid research and wide exposure in three contemporary cultures: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic. He is Jamaican by birth, lived in Puerto Rico, traveled and studied throughout Hispanic America, and teaches on worship at a university in the United States. Trained in music, he has served in leadership in worship settings in each of these three societies.

The author's discussion of the various aspects of the diverse forms of worship provides models for the reader's investigation of worship in any area of the world. He promotes the concept of wholistic worship that is comfortable to many different societies in the world. Since much of traditional western worship has been highly focused on the rational, this book is thought-provoking. Wholistic worship cannot be limited to the intellectual sphere. The author emphasizes the need for worship to include the emotions and the physical as well as the rational because the whole person is made up of the body, mind, and spirit. His research and the material presented certainly enrich one's concept of

worship and cause a better understanding of the diversity found in worship.

The early chapters trace the relationship of culture and worship from biblical times through the ages to our present worship patterns. Maynard-Reid's definition of culture is clear. He shows how it is learned and includes everything that is passed on, experienced and practiced. Worship as he uses the term refers to "the self-expression of a particular church community in a public celebrating of its faith." The author shows that diversity of worship forms is clearly illustrated in the Bible. Scripture prescribes no monolithic form or language of worship. Worship must be grounded in peoples' lives and cultural experiences and since culture is dynamic, worship cannot be static. Believing that worship patterns are as culturally conditioned as any other aspect of human experience, the author presents the need for affirming the cultural nature and celebrating worship wholistically so that God is truly glorified and the worshippers are richly blessed.

Maynard-Reid defines the ageless, universal core factors in worship as 1) the gathering of the people of God to experience the divine presence in encounter with their neighbors, 2) a celebration of festivals and sacraments, 3) the presentation of the Word in Scripture readings, study and sermon, and 4) prayer. Though these are constants in worship, for worship to be authentic it must be accommodated to particular eras and particular cultures. The author notes the importance of worship forms affirming and celebrating Christian values and traditions peculiar to the specific culture. It must be "related and relevant to the total lived life of a particular community."

A section of several chapters is given to each of the three societies: African-American, Caribbean, and Hispanic. In each area the author first presents a brief history after which he focuses on the music, the spoken Word and the response. African-American worship illustrates well the wholistic view of life with everything done in worship manifesting connectedness and inter-relatedness. They come to church to worship with their whole persons—to learn, to feel God's Spirit, to participate in communal sharing and to involve themselves physically in the service.

The author presents their music as emphasizing the immediate and their preaching as an event in which the congregation and preacher are caught up in a highly emotional yet cognitive drama directed by the Spirit. In Caribbean music the local rhythms are used in worship using drums, rattles, tambourines, organ and the human body itself as a percussive instrument. The pastor is perceived as the one who speaks for God and speaks to God on behalf of the worshipping community. Manifestations of possession of the Holy Spirit and the dance are often a part of worship. For Hispanics, worship is perceived as fiesta—highly emotive, celebrative, and marked by joyful spontaneity. Worship is seen not as an individualistic matter between a person and God but as a communal affair involving the divine and the community. Worship music, accompanied by the Spanish guitar, is highly participatory and expresses people's happiness, concerns and trials. Worship reflects the family focus with opportunities for physical contact and testimonies as vital.

This book with its clear explanation of how worship styles "fit" a particular society is a must for church leaders, especially those involved in church planting. Foreign missionaries or the outsiders starting a new work must immerse themselves in the local culture and community so that the patterns of worship do reflect the history, values and expressions of the local people. The music, the instruments used, the way in which the Word is presented, the response and the "feel" of the local body of Christ must come from within the local setting. As to the boundaries of what forms can be used in worship, the author suggests that we not concentrate on the boundaries, but on the center, Jesus Christ. I see this as an excellent guide in choosing forms of worship. I personally strongly agree that worship forms must come out of the cultural group in order to be the most meaningful and expressive of their interaction with God. This also means that local believers must be involved in decisions on the suitability of the form.

The author does illustrate the difficulty that ethnic groups such as the Hispanic have had in allowing worship to actually reflect their own history and culture. This is due to the influence

of the dominant societies that first brought Christianity to them. Though clearly presenting the goal of wholistic worship flowing out of the culture and history of the people, the author does not deal specifically with how to attain that goal in church planting.

This book provides a useful guide for multiethnic worship communication. Today we have the opportunity of being enriched by experiencing different styles of worship and in this way learning to respect those of different ethnic backgrounds. It also gives believers the opportunity to experience the greatness of God and His acceptance of variations of corporate ways to respond to a relationship to Him. Maynard-Reid has given us a useful tool to help us evaluate our own worship styles and to guide us in understanding diverse worship styles.

Reviewer

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