

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

Reviewed by Dr. Barry Liesch.

Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U. *Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives*. InvterVarsity Press, 2000. 257.

This book is concerned with worship and the issues of culture—particularly African-American, Caribbean, and Hispanic culture. Jamaican by birth, the author is a trained musician who has served as a pianist, organist, choir director, and minister of music in all three of the above cultures. Additionally, he has served as senior pastor at a small rural church as well as a university church. He is currently professor of biblical studies and missiology, and serves as vice president for spiritual life and mission at Walla Walla College, Washington.

Dr. Maynard-Reid believes that “worship practices are as culturally conditioned as any other aspect of the human experience” (p. 14). He maintains that “what we perceive as appropriate worship is culturally conditioned and has little to do with Biblical orthodoxy or soteriological morality” (p.14). The church’s “dilemma and opportunity” in his view is to make worship “culturally relevant yet utterly God- and Christ centered” (p. 40). Here are a few quotes from his book:

“If worship does not have its grounding in people’s live and cultural experiences, it will remain foreign, imposed and irrele-

vant" (p.19).

"...you cannot throw cold water on a man's culture and historical life without giving him chills" (p. 18).

"When people go to church they bring their culture with them, for culture is their essential selves—the sum total of their experience" (p. 19).

"...liturgy incorporating indigenous elements produces a more wholistic worship than liturgy with a cognitive focus only. Much of traditional Western worship has been one-dimensional, with emphasis on the rational...[but for Eastern, Middle Eastern, African, and Indian cultures] the human is a whole, one complete being...The rational is not dispensed with, but it is not elevated over the emotive and the rational" (p. 16-17).

Myrdal-Reid documents how non-European culture and worship was demeaned and in some cases prohibited by settlers and missionaries. He also gives his reader insights into these cultures which are highly influential upon popular music styles in North America today.

Rhythm, dance, and ecstatic experiences are central to the three cultures explored. In Caribbean Christian worship, "the supreme religious experience of almost all is possession by the Spirit (as is true in many African-American churches)". One of the purposes of dance is to facilitate possession by the Spirit. Possession by the Spirit occurs in a public context, not privately as in the experience of Western mystics. Myrdal-Reid notes, "Where for the Americans singing is an act of praise, for the Jamaicans the song and all the dancing and rhythm that accompany it are a religious experience in themselves" (p. 134).

In African-American worship, a method is used to determine if a worshiper is dancing in the spirit or the flesh: "By suddenly halting the gospel shout music, one is able to check for authenticity. If the dancing continues without the music, it is assumed that it is genuine and induced by the Holy Spirit. But if it ceases, apparently it was not so holy after all and was merely rhythmically induced" (p. 104)

Myrdal-Reid reports that Pentecostalism is "the fastest growing body in the Caribbean." It displays "most characteristics

of the wholism that African-rooted religions possess" (p. 133). While syncretism occurs in the Orisha, Revival, and Rastafarian groups in the Caribbean, "Pentecostals are thoroughly orthodox [and] reject all aspects of the African spirit world" (p.133). Maynard-Reid maintains that "the indigenous nature of Pentecostalism will continue to make it attractive to Caribbean peoples" (p. 135). "Indigenous" here means their emphasis on the Spirit, and the use of drumming, rhythmic music, rhythmic movement, bodily gestures, the use of steel bands and reggae music, and broad participation by all the people.

In summing up Caribbean worship Maynard-Reid remarks that "too often the Euro-American ethos entirely dominates the worship service...too often we are welded to the rusty old organ that has no appeal to the soul of the islander. How much more alive would the worship experience be if the steel band and reggae rhythms in themselves were not seen as sensual, sacrilegious and carnal but as elements that can awaken the spiritual chords of the soul" (p. 148).

This book is both scholarly and engaging, and I recommend it to pastors, worship leaders, and church growth readers. It will help you look with new eyes at our own, increasingly pluralistic North American culture.

Reviewer

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