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Book Review: The New Worship: Strait Talk on Music and the Church By Barry Leach

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Book Review

**The New Worship:
Strait Talk on Music and the Church.**

Reviewed by Clark Fox

Liesch, Barry. *The New Worship: Strait Talk on Music and the Church*. Michigan: Baker Books, 2001. 269 pp. \$16.99.

The New Worship, by Barry Liesch, deals with the importance of worship in the church, and the current problems the church is faced with as it is adapting to the changing culture and its new taste in music. The goal of the book is to seek balance in the use of hymns and choruses so that the church will remain relevant to the culture while remaining instructive. Barry is well equipped for this task. He is a professor of music at Biola University, who has also served several churches as music/worship director.

This book mainly deals with the new trend towards choruses in the church. While the author is in no way against this new movement, he does point out some possible downfalls and suggests appropriate solutions. Liesch suggests that, while the choruses have many great qualities, if they aren't chosen with care or blended with hymns, then we could lose the valuable teaching ability we once had in worship. Not only that, but many choruses are dangerous in that they promote "instant gratification, intellectual impatience, a historical immediacy, and incessant novelty" (21).

Liesch points out that there is not one right style of worship, and therefore we should not argue one style is more spiritual than another. He does, however, plea with chorus leaders to integrate more hymns into their sets. The reason being that most choruses repeat simple ideas, never developing fuller thoughts as the hymns do. According to Liesch, if we were to do away with hymns completely, then the church would lose an invaluable

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able teaching tool. On the other hand, the music used in most hymns is out of date and irrelevant to today's generation, and thus must be restyled in music they can appreciate.

Liesch goes on to establish the purpose of worship by examining Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-21. According to Colossians 3:16 there are "...two audiences in our worship, (1) God and (2) our fellow worshipers" (38). This leads Liesch to the conclusion that the privatized experience of many Gen-Xers is wrong. Ephesians further proves his point by its emphasis on speaking, singing, psalming, giving thanks, and submitting to one another. Furthermore, Liesch draws six principles for worship from these two passages: (1) sing to the Lord, (2) sing to one another, (3) teach and admonish one another with song, (4) value variety, (5) recognize that grace motivates praise, and (6) see worship as one way to be filled with the Holy Spirit (51).

Once Liesch has done this, he defends Free-Flowing Praise and spends a lot of time showing how affective it can be when properly balanced with hymns. Several chapters are written to show how to practically set up one's own Free-Flowing Praise Service. He even goes over what type of songs to play when and why.

After all of this, Liesch defends the term "performance" in reference to worship. According to him: "to perform is to do something complicated or difficult with skill in public with a view toward serving and ministering" (126). Kierkegaard saw three levels to worship, (1) the people should be the performers of worship, (2) the pastor and worship leaders the prompters of worship and (3) God is the audience (123).

Later, Liesch encourages older believers, through the example of Peter and Cornelius, to put their preferences aside and meet the needs of the younger generation. The book concludes with some practical advice on how to deal with volunteer and staff relations and how to attract worship leaders.

The overall purpose of the book is to advocate worship in the church that is both relevant to the culture and accomplishes its teaching function. The author does a good job supporting this premise and then shows how such a worship service could be practically used in a ministry. Liesch uses several different means to prove his point, he first addresses the current popularity of choruses and the need for integration of musically transformed hymns for teaching purposes. He then turns to Scripture to support the importance of the corporate teaching aspect in

worship. Once this has been established Liesch endorses the Free-Flowing Praise Service and outlines how it should be setup to maximize its effectiveness. This is followed by a section dealing with pressing issues and finally by a section on ministering with others.

Liesch's first argument points out the current trend toward choruses and away from hymns, establishing the cultural relevance of choruses. This premise is not well supported, using only a few quotes of support from Gen-Xers, most likely because it is an excepted fact. After establishing the cultural relevance of choruses, Liesch then criticizes their lack of depth and tradition. This is well supported in that Liesch shows how hymns play an important part in keeping us connected with our roots in the Protestant Reformation, and how many have great stories behind them, like *It Is Well With My Soul* (25-26). He later goes on to give examples of choruses' lack of depth (45), and how in depth hymns are (24-25). The conclusion of this section is that we need to integrate hymns, musically altered when necessary, into our chorus worship.

Liesch next turns to Scripture to support this integration. Through the use of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-21 Liesch shows the two audiences in worship (1) God and (2) our fellow worshipers (38). He then focuses on worship's purpose of teaching and admonishing one another to support the integration of hymns and new more in depth choruses. This section is very well developed and convincing.

Once Liesch has established the importance of a relevant and teaching worship, he then gives three ways to approach its layout. The first is called *The Wimber Five-Phrase Model* that was developed by John Wimber and Eddie Espinosa. This approach is merely a suggestion based on the experience of its formulators, who find support for it in Psalm 95 (55). Liesch does a great job introducing the model as a good approach to a worship service, while not claiming any biblical mandate or superiority for it.

After presenting the Wimber model, Liesch presents another model, *Journey Into The Holy of Holies*, and shows how it too can accomplish the goals of his premises. Liesch finally uses *Hustad's Isaiah 6 Order of Worship* in the same way.

The rest of the book fleshes out how to practically integrate such a worship service in one's church, a proper view toward "performance", and volunteer and staff relations. Liesch does an especially good job in the "performance" section on defining and

defending the appropriate use of “performance” in worship.

As far as any biases of the author in the writing of this book, it should be noted that he is a music professor at Biola and that he has served as a worship leader for several churches. Working at a college certainly gives him a greater awareness of the current and upcoming trends in worship. Most of his experience is also more relevant to Southern Californians, who are certainly very different from anywhere else in the world. However, his overall premises are still good ones that do apply to most people and churches.

The strengths of this book are definitely the use of Scripture in support of the author’s premises. The authority for what worship is to accomplish comes from God and not the author. Another strength is seen in how Liesch does not claim any one worship style to be more spiritual, but instead calls for relevant and teachable worship. Finally, the practicality of the book is a huge strength. Liesch spends a lot of time laying out how his theory can be practically applied. He also gives many useful steps a pastor can take to get his congregation more involved in worship.

The one thing I did not agree with was a quote by Bruce Leafbald that stated, “If God comes first in our lives and first in our churches, then worship must come ahead of everything else we do” (157). While I agree that worship (glorifying God by enjoying him forever) is the end means of everything we do, our first job in the church must then be to prepare our congregation so they can worship God in a worthy manner. Therefore, the primary focus needs to be on instilling a God-sized view of God in our flock through preaching and practical living.

All in all this book is very well written. It uses Scripture to support its premises very convincingly, while not claiming any one style as more spiritual than another. The practical application of the book is excellent and helpful. I would definitely recommend the book to pastors and worship directors.

Reviewer

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