

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom. *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 170 pages. \$18.

Many books are available to learn about Contemporary Worship. This book, however, is unique in the sense that it guides readers to discern whether their experiences of Contemporary Worship were Spirit-led or not. The five chapters of the book provide rich resources for understanding the history and practices of Contemporary Worship in North America. In the pages of the chapters, twenty-seven excerpts of articles about worship written by well-known liturgical scholars and theologians were sporadically inserted to enrich the substance of the book.

Chapter One begins with the reminder that not all spiritual worship is led by the Spirit of God but is often confused by “the spirit of personal ambition,” “the spirit of aesthetic pleasure,” or “the spirit of envy” (1). The authors, therefore, warn that worshippers need to gain the ability to discern spirits so that they may identify them from the Spirit of God (1). The following four chapters provide guidance for discerning the spirits.

Chapter Two provides a historical guidance for discerning the spirits. The authors explain the history of Contemporary Worship in a broad sense, by tracing various worship styles designed and practiced for the purpose of evangelism in church history. The chapter reviews the contemporary history of Protestant worship in the United States from the 1940s-1950s’ evangelistic movements led by Billy Graham and others until now led by the evangelical mega churches such as Willow Creek and Calvary Chapel. The Roman Catholic Church’s inculturation movement spurred by its Second Vatican Council in the 1960s is also evaluated as one of the great impacts on Contemporary Worship. The authors understand Martin Luther’s reformation movement and the Pietist movements in the sixteenth century and the Wesley brothers’ evangelical movement in the eighteenth century as historical origins of Contemporary Worship in terms of their evangelistic zeal and fervor conveyed through their worship, especially through their heart-felt music.

Chapter Three provides a biblical and theological guidance for discerning the spirits. The authors focus on the issue of the translation of the Christian gospel into contemporary idioms of secular culture. On the one hand, they admit that cultural adaptation is inevitable for Christian worship. On the other hand, they remind us that it risks losing the essence of the Christian gospel in the process of translation and propose three criteria—Scripture, the theology of incarnation, and the tradition of Christian worship—for evaluating the cultural adaptation in worship.

Chapter Four takes into consideration the multicultural reality and presents the doctrine of the Trinity as the theological guidance for discerning the spirits. The authors emphasize the significance of “unity within diversity” in planning the worship services, based on the theological premise that “[j]ust as no divine person can be God without the other two, so no Christian can be the church without the rest of the body” (105).

Chapter Five defines worship as “engagement” (134) or “a holy dialogue” among the triune God, the company of believers, and the communion of the saints (135). Based on this theological concept of worship, the authors distinguish worship from evangelism. They stress that one of the major functions of worship is the “covenantal renewal” between believers and God, rather than evangelism for the unchurched and nonbelievers (150).

No longer is contemporary Worship practiced within evangelical churches in the United States. Rather, it is so appealing to many mainline churches that they have been offering or are considering offering the Contemporary Worship service complementary to their traditional service on Sunday mornings. This reality challenges worship leaders to critically reflect on

Contemporary Worship in relation to its theology and practice. For those, this book will be a comprehensive resource, for each chapter deals with crucial topics emerging from Contemporary Worship in depth and width with sufficient information and theological knowledge.

This book is written in neither a dry nor a formal style but is conversational, inviting readers to think together. The page format that inserts a number of excerpts from different essays in almost every page makes it possible for the book to include different voices about Christian worship in the conversation and makes the book a most useful resource. Some readers, however, may be interrupted by that format in their following of the flow of the authors' logic. As in other books, the authors use their particular theological perspective as the measuring stick to evaluate the theology and practice of Contemporary Worship. Perhaps some readers may disagree on the authors' theological point of view based on their Reformed covenant theology. Nevertheless, their critical approach will challenge readers to reconsider their understanding and practice of Contemporary Worship.

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