

Discerning the Spirits. A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today

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In the early church, worship was for Christians only. They were called apart from the world to live in evangelical attractiveness. Evangelism and worship were distinctive activities with distinct goals. Present-day Christian worship in North America has undergone great changes in recent years. The church growth movement is one of the primary motivating forces pushing churches in new directions, giving them whole new modes of expression, most obviously in worship. There is now an increasing diversity in worship style. But change always brings uncertainty – at times even division – about what constitutes "authentic worship". A number of Christians even think of themselves primarily in terms of their style of worship. They attend either "contemporary worship" or "traditional worship," and they make their choice with a good deal of passion. In some churches liturgical dancers, ages seven to fifty-seven, may interpret a song of praise. In the last thirty years, denominational hymn books and their supplements proliferated. Some churches use power-point, praise teams, and no hymnals. Some churches feature seeker services where worship is aimed at the half-committed and the uncommitted, to dazzle and convert the visitors. When contemporary ways and means are used to present the Gospel, is it still the gospel according to Jesus Christ, or have we fashioned a gospel according to contemporary culture? And how do we know? We need spiritual discernment to judge what's *fitting* for Christian worship. In *Discerning the Spirits* the authors gathered a team of church musicians, ministers, worship leaders, and educators from eight church traditions to provide the widest, most insightful discussion on present-day worship practices. Sidebar articles and quotes are meant to draw readers and study groups into dialogue on these issues. The authors offer a survey of worship practices in North America, looking especially at the Contemporary Worship scene, but not exclusively so. They also raise questions about Christ and culture with respect to worship. Their main aim is to set a context and recommend a *tone* in which healthy discussions about worship may be conducted. They offer insights to help us understand what motivates evangelical worship. They do not accept uncritically every novelty that churches try in their attempt to be modern, relevant, with-it. What they hope instead is to offer help in making discerning choices about worship in an era of remarkable change in North America and beyond. They help the readers to think through the issues. Consequently, the readers have to draw their own conclusions about worship and its purpose.

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