
Pro Rege

Volume 26 | Number 3

Article 3

March 1998

Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defence (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Hielema, Syd (1998) "Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defence (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 26: No. 3, 22 - 23.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol26/iss3/3

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A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

a key determinant of public policy and are not always thought of in negative terms. Where Hiemstra contributes constructively to research in this area is in suggesting that worldviews are not just another explanatory variable which we can add to the list. His case study shows how worldviews structure the way people approach political problems and are intricately related to other variables.

Ideas, values, and presuppositions play only a part among a large number of interrelated policy determinants. Hiemstra does briefly acknowledge that there are other influences on human action, "such as political power, technological development or societal differentiation" (131). But, these variables, while intertwined with worldview influences, receive much less attention from him. It is not that he thinks these other variables are unimportant; rather he seems to argue that they are fundamentally related to worldviews as they affect the development of public policy. The difficulty for the reader may be in seeing exactly, (or even partially) how they are related. One gets the impression that Hiemstra sees worldviews as an overarching factor of great significance. He clearly demonstrates their great significance in the case study by showing how worldviews shape human action. However, some ambiguity over the relationship to other interrelated variables remains.

Hiemstra's desire to assert worldviews as important in political and policy analysis stems from his belief that modern social science has been based on assumptions that seem to rule out the significance of worldviews as explanatory variables or lead us to incorrectly understand how they work. In particular, Hiemstra suggests that many (most?) social scientists believe secularization and modernization "travel together," consider themselves religiously neutral, and are committed to developing "reliable objective knowledge" that is universally valid (150-51). If

these charges are true, the argument that worldviews are not recognized as prominent explanatory variables is more plausible. However, these charges may no longer be valid for many (most?) social scientists today. Postmodern thought, which has made extensive inroads into political and policy analysis, rejects any value/fact dichotomy, the universal validity of ideas and "reliable objective knowledge." To the extent that postmodern values and assumptions characterize political analysis today, Hiemstra may appear to be setting up a dated, "straw man" in arguing that modern social science denies or diminishes the significance of worldviews. On the other hand, to the extent that "objective" social science is still attempted in practice, Hiemstra's critique is valid.

However, rather than viewing Hiemstra's research in contradistinction to other current political analysis, I would be inclined to see it as a confirmation of the widespread thinking in social science today that ideas, as they are manifested in religion, ethnicity, nationalism, and worldviews, are of fundamental importance in politics and in determining institutional and policy development today, as well as in the past. Although Hiemstra does not make reference to it, there is extensive research today on these matters. Perhaps it is beyond the scope of the book, but his analysis could be strengthened by reference to this literature and by carefully identifying the ways in which he believes the concept of worldview extends beyond a narrow deterministic approach religion or ethnicity, for instance.

In sum, for those curious about the nature of worldviews and public policy development, for those who need to be encouraged about political change, and for those who are interested in how to accommodate diversity and maintain just relations in an ideologically and religiously differentiated society, this book is well worth reading.

Frame, John M, *Contemporary Worship Music, A Biblical Defence*. (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1997). 212 pp. \$10.99 paperback. Reviewed by Syd Hielema, Instructor of Theology.

The worship wars that have exercised many North American churches during the past fifteen years or so appear to be diminishing, and this welcome movement towards calm is furthered by publications such as John Frame's *Contemporary Worship Music, A Biblical Defence (ABD)*. Frame's contribution provides, for the most part, a balanced and fair apologetic for the inclusion of contemporary music styles in worship. His credentials for writing this defence are sound: professor of apologetics and systematics at Westminster (West)

Theological Seminary, classically trained musician and worship leader. His defence of contemporary music places him among those who, as he notes in the book's dedication, "swim against the current of Reformed opinion for the sake of the Reformed gospel."

The primary strength of ABD lies in its solid rooting in a biblical common sense that rises above the dogmatic stridency so easily engendered by polarized debate. This sensible approach is evident in a number of areas. Frame recognizes the importance of tradition in

worship, but he notes, "we revere Luther and Calvin because they had the courage to rethink the current traditions about salvation and worship. They were respectful of tradition, but they were not bound to it" (4). Frame develops this theme more specifically in his observation that

in every genre we must use discernment. I do believe that there is a higher percentage of good hymns in the traditional literature, almost by definition. What we call "traditional hymns" are hymns that have been tested by time. CWM must also be tested in order to become part of that tradition. (35)

When tradition is so construed—as a dynamic process—permission is given to proceed by trial and error, to "sin boldly," as Luther declared. Such permission spawns a creative freedom which allows God's people to develop fresh ways of worship, knowing that time will separate the wheat from the chaff. In my experience, when those who lead worship receive this permission the wheat/ chaff separation occurs quite quickly and relatively painlessly. Withholding such permission results in a lack of growth and/or polarization.

Recognizing that much of what passes for discussion concerning worship generates visceral heat rather than Scripturally informed light, Frame wisely begins with a theology of worship that places the issue squarely where it belongs: within the framework of our theological understanding. His theological overview (ch. 2) serves as a useful guide for congregational or small group discussion. Frame moves from discussion of the transcendence and immanence of God to the issues of music, worship, and the character of the church, providing solid biblical support as he proceeds. Though it covers most important bases, the framework which he sketches includes only one peripheral reference to the Holy Spirit. This omission is surprising particularly because one of the benefits of CWM is its recovery of pneumatology, reminding us that Calvin and many other Reformers have emphasized the central character of the Spirit's work in Christian life and worship. Though Frame does briefly acknowledge this emphasis later in the book (c.f. 85, 91), I would recommend that any group planning to use this chapter for discussion supplement it with a more overtly Trinitarian description of God's transcendence and immanence.

One of ABD's major strengths is also its major weakness: Frame seeks to provide a comprehensive defence which counters virtually every criticism levelled against CWM. This lengthy list includes charges that contemporary songs are emotional, anti-intellectual, consumeristic, seeker-driven, subjectivistic, repetitive, entertainment-oriented, culture-compromised, anti-traditional, and many more. He effectively

demonstrates how many such critiques are guilty of simplistic caricature that culminates in close-minded polarization rather than biblically informed discernment. However, in his drive to be thorough, Frame becomes both repetitive and defensive, giving certain criticisms more time than they warrant. As a result, the agenda of the heart of the book (ch. 4-11) is determined primarily by the critics to whom he responds.

In these chapters Frame's method is to (a) summarize a critique, (b) respond to it, and (c) propose a more appropriate formulation of the issue. The weakness inherent in this method is that too often part c, Frame's proposal, is not sufficiently developed. I would have much preferred that he began with carefully worked-out proposals followed by applications of the same to the criticisms of CWM. For example, in ch. 9, "Does CWM dumb down worship?," Frame begins by discussing the place of the intellect in worship and concludes with (too short) a description of worship as personal encounter. If he had begun with a biblical description of the powerful personal and communal encounter character of worship, such description would have provided a clearer framework for determining the role of the intellect in worship and addressing those who charge that CWM is anti-intellectual. Frame's apologetic approach is not able to clarify sufficiently the relation between encounter and education in worship.

Similarly, in response to the charge that CWM is superficially sanctified pop music, Frame disagrees but isn't sure what to say. "I don't know how to argue the point except to urge readers to listen for themselves. One cannot understand CWM without recognizing the deeply Christian spirit that has transformed the pop genre into something far better" (57). However, in a later chapter (118-121) he provides a delightful description of the music and poetry of "Shine, Jesus, Shine" which illustrates the ways in which this well-known hymn "shines" as an example of deeply sanctified music. I am sure that more examples of such careful melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic analysis of CWM would reveal that the best of this genre intertwines music and poetry to express profound biblical insights with depth and freshness.

Are you (or your Aunt Karen) convinced that contemporary worship music bears the devil's fingerprints? Is your church in the throes of worship wars? If so, Frame's offering is a worthwhile and quick read (or "gift" for Aunt K.). You may not agree with him, but his arguments cannot be dismissed in an offhand manner. I would have preferred a more systematic, descriptive volume, but perhaps he is correct in assessing that pointers to a peace treaty are required before the post-war reconstruction can begin in earnest.