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Book Reviews

Eleanor Daniel

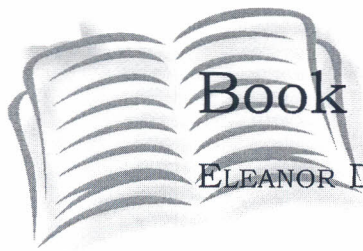
Mark Love

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Book Reviews

ELEANOR DANIEL AND MARK LOVE, EDITORS

Missing More Than Music: When Disputable Matters Eclipse Worship and Unity

(Bloomington, IN: Self-published through Author House, 2008, 171 pages, \$13.99 paperback)

by Danny Corbitt, reviewed by Teresa D. Welch

In his first book, *Missing More than Music*, Danny Corbitt challenges commonly held positions within the Churches of Christ on the subject that has become, as he states “a litmus test for church staff candidates or missionary support . . . a sticking point for prospective Sunday school teachers . . . [and] a significant test for Christian fellowship” (8). For the past one hundred years, the majority of Churches of Christ have held to a belief that prohibits the use of solos, choruses and instruments to praise God in corporate worship settings. Prompted by questions raised by the students in the Church of Christ campus ministry he served for fourteen years and his own personal journey, Corbitt returned to the scriptures and historical information often used to support the *a cappella* tradition. The conclusions he draws from his study differ from the traditional position of the Churches of Christ, which in turn lead him to support the use of instruments in praise in addition to the tradition of *a cappella* worship. Though Corbitt’s book provides the rationale for his position, its primary intent is “to contribute to our understanding of these issues that divide us” (7), for in the midst of his personal journey and study, he came to believe that the issue of the use of instrumental music should be seen as secondary to the more important issues of worship and unity.

Before launching into a presentation of his research of biblical interpretation, word studies and a look at church history in defending his argument, Corbitt articulates how the practice of the non-instrumental, non-solo churches has been perceived as inconsistent by those both inside and outside this tradition. He suggests that the reason for the dispute over specific biblical passages and the interpretation of specific words in those texts is not because of improper interpretation, but rather the presuppositions one brings to the text. Corbitt states, “Perhaps we are wearing *a cappella*-colored glasses” that “have kept us [Churches of Christ] from seeing” (12). Therefore, he encourages readers to attempt to remove their glasses in reevaluation of the arguments used for the past century in support of non-instrumental worship.

Corbitt engages the arguments of the Churches of Christ by addressing the research and conclusions of scholars, most specifically the work of renowned patristic scholar, Dr. Everett Ferguson. Though he explicitly expresses his admiration of Dr. Ferguson and appreciation for his work, Corbitt attempts to look at some of the same sources and research through a different lens. This results in Corbitt providing a different set of conclusions than those he was taught and had practiced as a member of the Church of Christ for many years. He concludes that since the New Testament does not clearly prohibit the use of instruments in favor of *a cappella* singing during corporate worship, the church should support both instrumental and non-instrumental worship. Additionally, he challenges the belief that worship can occur only in a corporate setting such as the weekly assembly. Rather, he encourages his readers to worship God with their entire lives. Corbitt also weaves into his book constant reminders of the apostle Paul’s command regarding the acceptance of one another in regard to “disputable matters” (Rom 14.1). He calls on the movement that once called itself the unity movement to stop dividing the church and breaking fellowship with others over issues of music and to restore relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

The strength of *Missing More Than Music* lies in Corbitt's clear articulation of the issues. Though some may think his work is redundant or oversimplified, his intent is to provide a resource for four groups of people: (1) members of non-instrumental churches who have struggled with understanding the rules surrounding worship, (2) Church of Christ members who continue to support *a cappella* only worship and are skeptical about those who would disagree, (3) individuals who would like to dialogue with those in the *a cappella* churches, and (4) Christians who desire unity within the church. Therefore, Corbitt deliberately explains quotes, attempts to help his readers understand how to read lexicon entries and goes to great lengths to simplify complicated biblical interpretation issues. He is intentionally writing for readers to understand the positions of both sides of these issues. Additionally, at the conclusion of each section, Corbitt poses questions to help readers apply the material to their current understanding or set of presuppositions.

At times, Corbitt seems to make the same mistakes he claims Ferguson and others make when approaching the study of specific words or passages, because he now comes to the material wearing his own set of glasses. In his explanation of the connotations of the Greek word *psallō*, Corbitt looks for arguments that this word implied, for the New Testament audience, the use of instruments to accompany songs of praise. For example Corbitt argues that Luke chose to use the Greek word *humneō* in his description of Paul and Silas singing hymns in prison (Acts 16.25) since instrumental accompaniment could not have been used in this circumstance. However, since Luke does not use *psallō* elsewhere in his writings, the assertion that Luke's choice of words infers the difference between *psallō* and *humneō* as instrumental accompaniment is unfounded.

Corbitt acknowledges the difficulty he had in seeking a publisher for his work, and though he states he has had this book reviewed and affirmed by scholars, this work is self-published and has not been formally reviewed and edited by those who might discover additional inconsistent arguments.

Additionally, Corbitt makes a few assumptions about the practice of the Churches of Christ that may not be true for all churches within that movement and uses strong, sometimes even abrasive language, when addressing those who would disagree with his position. His choice of the word "exclusion" to define the beliefs of the non-solo, non-instrumental churches may not be helpful in his attempt to reconcile himself to his former tradition. On page 29, he likens those who support "exclusion" to the Pharisees whom Jesus rebukes in Mark 7.5–8 who have "let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." Though he desires compassion in favor of unity, his argumentative writing style may not always sound compassionate toward his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Regardless of one's position on the issues of instruments in worship, this book could serve as a helpful resource and encouragement to reexamine the issues that have fractured the Restoration Movement. For those, including myself, who participate in instrumental congregations, Corbitt's work can promote understanding in an effort to dialogue with our brothers and sisters who worship differently. It could also serve to encourage all of us to reexamine other "disputable matters" that have divided our fellowship from other believers in Christ. Corbitt rightly concludes, "I am ready for a lost world to come to Jesus because of a church that is united. I want to see them drawn in amazement at what God alone can do. I want to be in that number" (162).

TERESA D. WELCH IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT EMMANUEL SCHOOL OF RELIGION IN JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE.

