

Lisa Allen. *A Womanist Theology of Worship: Liturgy, Justice, and Communal Righteousness*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021. 231 pages. \$19.59.

Lisa Allen's *A Womanist Theology of Worship* challenges Black churches in America to reclaim justice-making as central to their liturgical practice. With a detailed historical narration of Black worship, Allen carefully discloses how liberation and justice lie at the heart of a Black Christian faith. Allen writes to address a lack of justice-making in many contemporary Black churches. She argues for and provides a paradigm that "seeks to dismantle problematic liturgies based in white supremacist theologies that have permeated Black worship in America from its inception through the twenty-first century" (xii).

The first eight chapters model a womanist hermeneutic for liturgical historical analysis. In chapter 1, Allen identifies three vital aspects of a Black liturgical imagination: a personal view of God, a communal call of justice, and a communal identity (8). In the second and third chapters, she shows how African cosmologies and white supremacy, explicit in slavery, shape the liturgical needs and expressions of "*Africans in America*" (22). While African cosmology provided a framework to understand God(s) as both immanent and transcendent, the inhumanity of slavery challenged Africans to hold their relational and communal needs as means of survival and care. While liturgical elements such as prayer, preaching, and singing were the same as whites, the impetus behind Black worship and its aesthetic particulars affirmed justice for and liberation of Black people as essential.

In section 2, covering chapters 4 through 8, Allen examines contemporary Black liturgical theology, identifies problematic divergences, and shows how those divergences undermine the sustainability of the Black church and, subsequently, Black communities writ large. Here, Allen's womanist hermeneutic of suspicion is in full tilt. Her well-researched analysis engages a wide range of scholars across the humanities and social sciences. In chapter 4, Allen codifies various African retentions and new-world developments in Black worship to identify the foundations of a black liturgical theology. At the heart of her analysis is an embrace of four convictions guiding Black worship: survival, resistance, deliverance and liberation, and affirmation and joy. These convictions inform a Black performative aesthetic that affirms the unrestricted use of the Black body. In chapters 5 and 6, Allen shows how the development of organized Black churches and denominations elaborated aspects of historical Black worship while also succumbing to anti-black Eurocentric theologies and liturgies. Here, Allen elucidates anti-black elements of theological anthropology. Among her observations is the double self-negation that affirms black color as dark and sinful and Black bodies as purposed for slavery or more consistently less than whites. Even as Blacks and whites worshiped together in both Great Awakenings, asymmetries of power between Black and white worshipers grew as white supremacy, and anti-blackness persisted. The evangelical and Pentecostal movements of the early and mid-20th solidified asymmetries as white evangelicals asserted their political agenda and Pentecostals disengaged from worldly pursuits and concerns. Even as Black performative aesthetics grew on radio and television during this period, they did little to further justice and liberation for Black people. In chapter 7, Allen shows how Black churches maintained a connection to the concerns of Black people, which culminated in the civil rights movement. In chapter 8, she considers the biblical mandate for justice as a foundational through-line for liturgy and justice in the Black church. Her turn to the bible foregrounds a pivot to womanism as a praxis of justice-making.

In section 3, chapters nine and ten, Allen offers a womanist instructive intervention calling for Black churches to reclaim interest in and concern for justice that embraces the diversity within black communities and takes the ongoing threat of anti-blackness seriously. Her guiding womanist ethic requires a “centering of African and African-descended cosmological and theological worldviews and spirituality, an affirmation of embodiment in worship without qualification, employing womanist hermeneutics in all worship elements, as well as a womanist hermeneutic/spirituality of communal empowerment and agency” (175). The task of the Black church is to work, the very meaning of the word liturgy, on behalf of the welfare and well-being of all Black people readily denied justice in an anti-black world. In conclusion, *A Womanist Theology of Worship* provides a most comprehensive narration of justice as the Black church’s liturgical guidepost. This text is appropriate for any class focusing on Black worship, the Black church, Black preaching, and contemporary issues in theological anthropology.

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