

Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, eds. *Worship & Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023. 210 pages. \$29.

In the Afterword to *Worship & Power*, John Witvliet rightly notes that this collection of essays about Free Church traditions "is an invitation to explore the interface of liturgy and church polity." (204) It is a needed exploration since—as others among the nine contributors point out—much of liturgical scholarship until quite recently has concentrated on traditions that were governed by relatively stable liturgies as seen in Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. This book means to correct that lack, asserting that Free Churches, residing in a different liturgical world, deserve scholarly attention.

The editors have assembled essays with the assumption that "liturgy is what religious communities do when they gather" (3), that all "liturgy is power-laden" and is "manifested in distinct ways in Free Church traditions." (1) The editors additionally characterize the Free Church as expressing three key qualities: being free of civic interference, valuing local autonomy, and holding to "voluntarism" (8). Running through all the essays are the central tenets that Free Church worship prides itself on: spontaneity, egalitarian leadership, and strict adherence to the Bible.

A portrait of a "tradition" emerges of multiple "traditions" including the liturgical experiences in the Mennonite, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Womanist, Pentecostal, and Korean Free churches on a range of topics. Here I can touch on only a few of the essays to convey the rich diversity of foci.

Sarah Kathleen Johnson distinguishes types of power exerted in the construction of a new Mennonite hymnal—"Power-to, Power-over, and Power-with"—emblematic of the difficulty of involving all voices despite Free Church insistence on egalitarianism. Jonathan Ottaway points to the roots of Pentecostal "praise and worship" based in Amos 9:11-12 ("the tabernacle of David") and Psalm 22:3 (offering a sacrifice of praise to which God must respond) that made worship "fundamentally musical in nature." (115–119) Emily Snider Andrews emphasizes the "biblically based" worship of the Southern Baptist Convention. Essays by Chelsea Brooke Yarborough and another by Dorothy Mendez, Tanya Riches, and Andrew Davies claim that authority for women to preach and teach in some Free Churches comes through a feeling of God's call welcomed by others' responses—considered to be ordinations as valid as through "ecclesial structures." Such contrasts with non-Free Church practices delineate theirs from the liturgical traditions they eschew. Most pointedly, Free Churches share a history of worshipping in ways distinct from the traditions they have left behind, namely the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Their one shared characteristic is local autonomy, with decisions determined to varying degrees apart from a regional or worldwide body.

Because these essays raise so many crucial matters, the reader is drawn to crave more detailed engagement with many of the Free Church's central values. A second volume to more incisively define Free Church values and practices could bring needed clarity. For example, what does "egalitarian leadership" mean among the churches that prohibit women from presiding and preaching? Given that all churches are voluntary organizations, what does "voluntarism" in the Free Church mean? That Free Churches refuse "civic intervention" begs discussion of how and where the U.S. government intervenes in the church life of any denomination. The meaning of spontaneity for Free Churches could helpfully outline in what ways it manifests itself.

In every tradition, preachers often deeply feed, teach, and nourish those who listen to their sermons, making it a significant conversation to have on how—and how differently—a

roundtable pulpit or testimony feeds the people's faith. Does such a conception of preaching change the very purpose of gathering? If worship is organized around personal testimony, how is it "universal"?

Furthermore, while every church tradition, liturgy, and polity grows out of assumptions about biblical interpretation, an underlying suggestion in this volume is that Free Churches see biblical witness as more central than it is in non-Free traditions. Martin Luther, who was not a Free Church pastor, taunted the Vatican with his reliance on God's word alone (*sola scriptura*), insisting that the Bible is the plumb line for everything. Basing worship on the Bible is a matter of how biblical interpretation informs the liturgy, especially given the variety and paucity of texts describing the early church's worship.

All of these questions are honest requests toward greater understanding for the sake of ecumenism. The wealth of insights presented in this book regarding what Free Churches stand for demonstrates how enriching it is for all of our Christian traditions to share our histories and the experiences that have fed our liturgical aims. Each tradition's liturgical gifts enhance others even through differences. We are in this together, and that seems to be the underlying purpose of this book: to begin pulling aside the curtain to share and celebrate who we are as people of faith.

Rev. Melinda Quivik, PhD
Backstory Preaching
The Liturgical Conference