

BOOK REVIEWS

Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, eds. *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2023.

“Liturgy is power-laden, and this is manifested in distinct ways in Free Church traditions that invite ecumenical dialogue” (1). Thus begins *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*, a robust and skillfully curated volume which invites careful consideration of the ways power is embedded in liturgical rituals and experiences of worship. This opening statement captures a somewhat contested reality: that Free Church communities—which prioritize decentralized power and individual agency—are not absolved from the responsibility of examining the power that inevitably shapes worship gatherings.

In the context of broader ecumenical assemblies, such as the North American Academy of Liturgy from which this volume partially emerges, Free Church approaches to worship leadership are unique in their approach to liturgical authority. The reflections of this volume are most striking when taken in this broader view: whereas many denominations—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and many more—receive rigorous liturgical guidance from a centralized source, Free Church congregations (including Mennonites) have significant freedom when it comes to worship. By resisting top-down power structures and prioritizing committee work and census decision making, it may seem that interrogations of power imbalances are somewhat unnecessary. In this frame, one of the most significant contributions of this collection is the tools it provides to examine power in what appear to be less hierarchical structures. Whether interrogating the evolution of leadership structures over time, differences between spiritual and liturgical authority, the often-concealed processes of decision making, or the more visible dynamics of gender, class, race, and culture, this collection lifts the veil that has often hidden power dynamics in Free Church contexts.

The book is organized in three sections, with contributions written by scholars from Canada to Australia to Korea and exploring traditions from Southern Baptist to Pentecostal to Disciples of Christ. Part

one, "Contesting Power in Society," considers Free Church separation from state in the context of socially engaged worship practices. Part two, "Negotiating Power in Ecclesial Institutions," examines the role of institutional policies and guidelines for worship communities that have autonomy in decision making. Part three, "Claiming Power through Practices," explores how both established and informal rituals can become sites to challenge established authorities, particularly for marginalized people.

Two of the essays in this book are particularly relevant to readers of this journal as they address Mennonite worship. The essay by Isaac Villegas, "The Power to Re-Member Community: Vigils in the Borderlands," offers a powerful description of a weekly ritual of remembrance of individuals who died in the desert on the border of Mexico, the result of US immigration policies and border enforcement. Through the individual naming of each person who has died, and the spoken response of "¡Presente!" by those who are gathered, the assembly ties their identity to the identity of those who the government has violently erased. Villegas recounts his own participation in the Healing Our Borders Vigil in 2018, and draws upon conversations with Jack and Linda Knox, two Mennonite retirees who coordinate the service. While connections to power in this essay are less overt, Villegas effectively offers a reinterpretation of the ritual as an extension of Mennonite rituals of remembrance found in the *Martyr's Mirror*, "an intersection where one route of the Mennonite tradition crosses into a communal ritual of faith, a spirituality that conjures a communion of the living and the dead, a belonging that transgresses national borders" (71).

In her essay "Domination, Resistance, Solidarity: An Analysis of Power in the Making of a Mennonite Worship Book," Sarah Kathleen Johnson considers liturgical authority and power distribution in the *Voices Together* hymnal committee process through her experience as the worship resources editor for the collection. Johnson draws upon Amy Allen's (1999) theory of power, which articulates three forms of power: *power-over* is a form of domination by one actor over another; *power-to* is a form of resistance as a form of empowerment; and *power-with* is a way of acting collectively towards solidarity (78-79). Acknowledging the ways that hymnals hold a high degree of *power-over* Mennonite identity, Johnson uses this frame to interrogate how actors in the hymnal creation process were granted mul-

multiple forms of power, both in the foreground and background. As an example, she identifies that the open application process for committee positions initially appears to create equal access to positions of power, yet it inherently privileges those who see a hymnal as relevant, which ends up being white “ethnic Mennonites” with classical music training. Ultimately, Johnson suggests that “without clear-eyed attention to the multidimensional nature of power, Free Church worship risks reproducing relationships of domination present in our broader social context that are in violation of our ecclesiological commitments and eschatological vision” (93).

In her foreward, Lisa M. Weaver observes that the *free* in Free Church is not just an adjective describing a historical reality, it also expresses the way that communities can live and participate in worship. As the editors observe, the nature of power is that it ebbs and flows depending on who has it and how it operates. In our changing political, social, and religious climate, Free Church worship—and the power embedded in it—will continue to evolve. Weaver suggests that Free Church worshippers can “revisit, reconsider, and reimagine liturgical power and authority in ways that enable all who participate in worship to do so fully and *freely*” (xiv). With thought-provoking ideas for practitioners and scholars at a range of stages, this edited collection acts as an invitation to continue the work that the contributors have begun, consistently re-evaluating power as liturgical structures develop.

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Sabrina Reed. *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Landscapes of Resilience in the Works of Miriam Toews*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2022.

Sabrina Reed’s clearly written, accessible study of Miriam Toews’s novels is the first such book and rather overdue, considering how important Toews has become on the Canadian literary scene since *A Complicated Kindness* nearly twenty years ago. This is, in many respects, a good first book in the field