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Marva J. Dawn. *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. 485. No Price Listed.

[1] What is worship? What is it good for? Is it a royal waste of time in a busy world? What is postmodernism and how has it affected the church? How has it affected worship? What changes should the community of faith make in light of changing culture? Should we use giant video screens, powerpoint presentations, and praise music? Should we stick to the old hymns and pipe organs? How do we even begin to answer such questions? By what authority?

[2] These are only a few of the kinds of questions Marva J. Dawn addresses in her *A Royal "Waste" of Time*, a sequel to *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*. In the process of addressing such issues, we get a work full of passionate insights, reflective sermons, critical analyses, personal anecdotes, children's messages, hymns, and guidelines for decision-making in the church. The book is full. But at its core, Dawn is trying to revive worship.

[3] Worship takes us to the heart of the matter. Dawn uses baptismal imagery to describe worship as an immersion in splendor. This is where the book is the strongest. Worship is "like a plunge into a sapphire mountain lake on a hot day." Yet given the current preoccupation with "contemporary vs. traditional" services, who would know? The author reveals how nonchalant our times have become about "the Lord of the cosmos." Worship needs to recover the grandeur of God, it should be "a cascade into the ever-flowing surprises of encounters with the immensity of God's magnificence and sublimity and radiance" (7). Her descriptions of God's splendor themselves evoke awe. Such immersion in God, ultimately, shapes our communities of faith and our worship practices. Consumer culture, obsession with numbers and growth, or technology for technology's sake should not be our guiding forces.

[4] The book is particularly concerned to explore the relationship between worship and postmodern culture. To highlight key issues and characteristics in a postmodern world she draws heavily upon Douglas Coupland's *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, revealing a lost, disillusioned, disgusted, private, and searching generation. A major factor in this

situation is authority - specifically authority's collapse in this generation. The sheer multiplicity of voices has made any authority simply one among many voices. "That's your opinion." "What's your point of view?" "That's just your perception." As sure foundations shift beneath our feet, the result is an overwhelming identity crisis for postmodern society. Dawn bemoans such hyper-relativism and believes the church has a way through the madness. The church has a "Godly authority in an age of opinion" (201).

[5] On this point - and it is a point fundamental to the book - there is a difficult issue that I am not sure is resolved very cleanly. One of the conditions of postmodernism that Dawn observes is the loss of an overarching meta-narrative that offers meaning to existence. Again, the loss is due to the loss of the authority of any one narrative. In fact, she notes that to the postmodern pluralist, the meta-narrative of Christianity is often violent and oppressive (46). To this situation, Dawn offers the good news of Revelation: "God does offer a genuine meta-narrative which is universally available and applicable and which is not violent or oppressive." She is clear that *we* cannot say this standing outside the biblical narrative, somehow, with some kind of pure objectivity. But she insists that *God* does (47).

[6] This is difficult because the argument still dances around the problem of authority. The logic is this: the biblical narrative tells us about God, giving us a sure footing on postmodern soil, and we can trust the narrative because it comes from God. I doubt the postmodern seeker, agnostic, or atheist would find this a persuasive argument. Rather than simply asserting one biblical meta-narrative that will relieve our plight, perhaps it would have been helpful to explore whether the collapse of monolithic authority itself could lead to redemptive, albeit more complex, possibilities.

[7] On a less significant front, the book would have benefited from another round of editing. Unnecessarily lengthy quotes, redundancies, multiple promises to define or elaborate terms in future chapters, and arguments with critics of *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, only get in the way of otherwise important insights and discussions.

[8] In all, Dawn is at her best when she is addressing the community of faith itself. From faith to faith she comforts those broken by their own church work, she challenges easy or idolatrous assumptions, she stimulates reflection on the nature of worship, and she guides the community of faith to address many of the profound questions of our times. This book reminds us that in an age of conspicuous consumption and commitment to technological efficiency, worship may be a "waste" by cultural standards, but it is indeed royal.

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