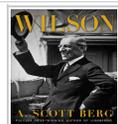




Presbyterian Outlook

Like 6,514



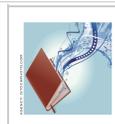
Book review – Wilson

Michael Parker



Board of Pensions responds to recent housing allowance ruling

Leslie Scanlon, Outlook national reporter



Bookmark – Feasting on the Word Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1

Roy W. Howard, Outlook book editor



November 25, 2013: Digital issue for subscribers

The Presbyterian Outlook

The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice

Written by Brian C. Wyatt
Sunday, 05 October 2008 00:00

by Mark Labberton. InterVarsity Press, 2007. Hb., 200pp. \$18.

“What’s at stake in worship? Everything.” begins Mark Labberton in a timely and much appreciated attempt to recall for privileged North American Christians the intimate connection between worship and issues of justice. Labberton writes as one who has intentionally and repeatedly placed himself in situations of solidarity with the impoverished and abused two-thirds world. These personal vignettes, offered along the way, add a unique face to the concerns he raises.

As Labberton sees it, the Church in North America is asleep (and here he takes care to differentiate mainline churches from those that contextually still operate on the margins of mainstream society). When we narrowly confine worship to mean the sacred hour on Sunday morning and neglect “the global realities of life on planet Earth that silently scream for attention” (p. 17), we fail to worship truly. True worship, he suggests, is about “dwelling where God’s heart is and showing it in lives that embody [God’s] loving righteousness and merciful justice” (p. 40). The remainder of the book serves as a call to move privileged Christians from viewing worship as a product for consumption to seeing it as an offering that extends beyond the walls of a building.

Labberton explores a number of factors that often inhibit a church’s pursuit of justice in worship, many of which will likely resonate with readers. He calls into question expectations that worship should be comfortable, popular, and always familiar, suggesting instead that these can become idols that distract from true worship. Utilizing the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3), he illustrates how true worship seeks to tell the truth both to God and about God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced real and immediate danger at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, but rather than succumb to imperial pressures to conform, they understood that a far great danger lay in false worship. As a result of their faithfulness, not only were they able to resist being conformed to the Babylonian culture, they also changed the culture around them. This, suggests Labberton, is the fruit of true worship.

Labberton believes one of the most dangerous impediments to true worship is the demise of Sabbath practice — one of the many dangers inherent in conforming to the dominant American culture. Doing justice, he suggests, begins with rest, with the acknowledgement that our efforts in pursuing justice are not our own business, but a participation in the business of God. And while he rightly advocates that Sabbath rest enables us to see and respond to God and to the world around us differently, Sabbath is ultimately about more than rest. Sabbath practices encompass not only a rest from the production/ consumption cycle, but also seek a restructuring of economic systems to insure just distribution that meets the basic needs of all people. The Law of Jubilee in Leviticus 25 and the social justice codes of Exodus 23, for example, are implicitly Sabbath practices that demonstrate the intimate relationship between justice and Sabbath keeping.

Encouraging churches to restore the connection between worship and justice, Labberton explores various liturgical elements, suggesting ways in which they might prompt worshipers toward greater social action outside congregational walls. The overview is perhaps necessarily cursory, however, as Labberton seeks to be widely relevant to various liturgical traditions.

As Labberton concludes the call for worship to concern itself with justice, he raises the need for a paradigm shift in our self-understanding. The Hebrew Bible centers around two central events: Exodus and Exile. He suggests that, given our national history, we are more comfortable dwelling within the Exodus – that is, looking for God to free us from injustice. What we need in the church is an understanding of dwelling in Exile as well.

Because of its own unjust practices, Israel found itself in exile in a foreign land surrounded by economic and cultural practices contrary to Israel’s faith. God’s expectation of Israel was that it learn to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” in this foreign culture. That is a paradigm to which the contemporary church would do well to awaken.

This book serves as a summons to a holy imagination. Although Labberton does not provide a formula for just how a church might “do justice,” he takes the common element of worship and encourages churches, worship leaders, and worshipers to understand how that might be woven into the broader fabric of life in Christ. In doing so, we might find we are not only awakened to God, but to the world around us as well.

Brian C. Wyatt is pastor of Timber Ridge Church, Greeneville, Tenn.

Tweet Like Share 0

Add comment

Name (required)
E-mail (required, but will not display)
City (required)
State (required)



Notify me of follow-up comments



Refresh

Send



JComments

Copyright © 2013 The Presbyterian Outlook. All Rights Reserved.
Joomla! is Free Software released under the GNU/GPL License.