

Adam Hearlson. *The Holy No: Worship as a Subversive Act*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018. 184 pages. \$24.

“Eschatological imagination occurs in flashes” that cultivate the “artful practice of disruptive perception,” “here and there, in history and in contemporary contexts, in biblical stories, in liturgies, in visual art, and in narratives of people” (7, 167), write Andrea Bieler and Luise Shottroff in *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread and Resurrection* (Fortress Press, 2007). Adam Hearlson’s *The Holy No: Worship as a Subversive Act* collects or curates such flashes or “holy fires” within Christian worship, inviting readers to the “slow, quiet, and hidden” ways that liturgical power in and through liturgy is itself an act of worship. Hearlson focuses on a range of liturgical practices as sparks to cultivate the search for subversion in other liturgical forms. Worship critiques present world power as worshippers challenge the reproductions of power that liturgies and liturgical hierarchies promote.

Engaging biblical texts, artists, theologians, and philosophers, Hearlson traces particular subversive genres into liturgical contexts across different time periods in order to frame salient examples of resistance to “the normal” within Christian worship: the powers of indirect speech in farewell sermons and glossolalia (chapter 2), the holy absurdity of disruptive characters in festivals (chapter 3), practices of radical hospitality during communion (chapter 4), music that bends, resists, and transforms white Western time and space (chapter 5), and the apocalyptic dreams of liturgical artists (chapter 6). Grasping the liturgical significance of such practices requires an understanding of the church itself as a relational, mobile, and provisional response to a God who promises to subvert the powers of this world, Hearlson argues.

The book explicitly challenges “the privileged,” which Hearlson identifies as “my people,” engages “the boundary-dwellers” who identify with both the powerful and the weak, and affirms the theological integrity of “the needy.” At the end of his book, however, Hearlson turns directly to “the subversive worship leader,” whose task is “to expose the world as deeply complex and diverse, while still trying to make unified sense of such complexity” (151). Indeed this book encouraged me, a worship leader and teacher of liturgy, to reconsider the categories and critical lenses through which I guide congregations and students through Christian worship.

To curate differently requires accountability regarding the names and categories we use. In a chapter exploring examples of subversive hospitality, Hearlson grapples with the misleading term “the homeless” to name people who gather for worship in the public space of Boston Common. He argues that subverting hierarchies in worship compels a new “social grammar,” such that “production of a new vocabulary is an opportunity to expose the limitations and assumptions of the social grammar of the world” (99). Such an argument raises questions about the categories with which Hearlson navigates subversion as a relationship between “the powerful” and “the weak.” The latter obscures the cultures and powers of communities and persons whose subversions are celebrated in the text. It hides the complex markers of identity that shape the possibilities for subversion. While the stories of subversion raise some analysis of identity markers, the book could have benefited from further analysis of the reluctance, refusal, or obliviousness of those in positions of liturgical power to name or recognize these practices as worship, as well as the perspectives of those who participate in acts of liturgical subversion.

While the variety of narratives engaged in each chapter and throughout the book perform an example of the “eclectic” curation of worship practices that the book recommends, this rapid tour of very different kinds of subversion is dizzying at times. Hearlson may have intended such experiences of disorientation to subvert his readers’ desires for a liturgical manual. At the same

time, a focus on subversion of power as worship begs further study of the complex power relations embedded within the communities and contexts from which Hearlson draws examples of subversion. Bearing witness to the work of people who say “no” to current arrangements of liturgical power must also mean a “yes and” by those in positions of ecclesial power to study the obvious and subtle ways that racism, ableism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism, nationalism, ecclesial chauvinism, and other blasphemies shroud the logics of oppression in Christian worship. In the book’s concluding words, “there is much work to be done” (168).

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