

***Sabbath as resistance - Saying No to the CULTURE OF NOW* by Walter Brueggemann**

I liked this book and its accompanying Study Guide a lot. My only qualification is that I found myself wondering if the biblical exegesis was supported by other academics in the field, as it seemed at times to fit rather too neatly in support of the author's main thesis. Whatever the conclusion to that question may be this is certainly not a book to be ignored, written as it is by a foremost Old Testament scholar and theologian of our day.

The fundamental aim of the book is to show that the sabbath is no less relevant now than it was in biblical times. At the same time, the sabbath needs to be understood in much wider terms than a weekly day of rest.

Brueggemann goes to great lengths to show that the initial four commandments intentionally contrast the God of Israel with Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt who demand an unbroken schedule of work from the Hebrew slaves. Unlike all other gods, the God of Israel, who rested on the seventh day of creation, is not a workaholic himself and ensures that the well-being of creation does not depend on the endless toil of its human inhabitants. The constant pressure of production and desire for more and more material things makes for anxiety and destroys neighbourliness, eventually turning people against one another.

Sabbath is about breaking the chain of uninterrupted production and accompanying anxiety, and resisting the false belief that everything is dependent on us.

It provides time, space, energy, and imagination for coming to the ultimate recognition that more commodities finally do not satisfy. Sabbath is an antidote to anxiety that both derives from our craving and in turn feeds those cravings for more. Sabbath is an arena in which to recognize that we live by gift and not by possession, that we are satisfied by relationships of attentive fidelity and not by amassing commodities.

The Fourth Commandment (Sabbath), the author argues, undergirds all the others. It determines our relationship with God (Commandments 1-3) and enables us to live responsibly in community (Commandments 5-10).

This is a book which challenges us to look at the way we live and work, not least the clergy, and to reassess our priorities. It is about resisting the pressures of consumerism which, especially through advertising, assail us all and resisting, too, a culture which tells us our value is earned by conforming to the false ethic of endless work.

Barry Preece