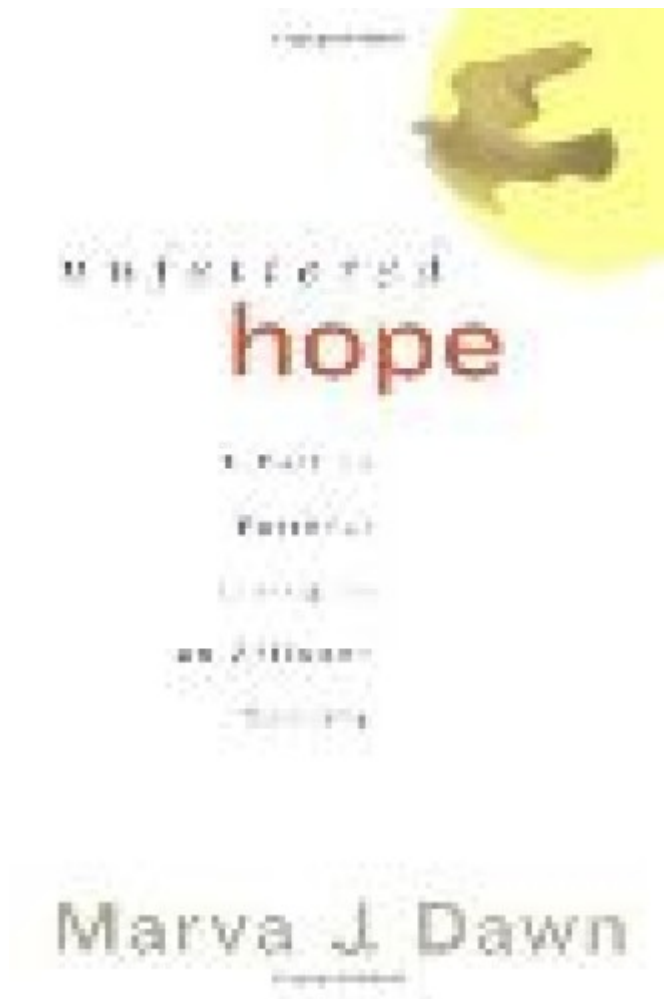


Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society

reviewed by [Arthur Paul Boers](#) in the [January 27, 2004](#) issue

In Review



Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society

Marva J. Dawn

Westminster John Knox

It can be hard to keep up with Marva J. Dawn, since she usually produces a book a year. But this one should definitely be on your reading list. Perhaps because Dawn has a new publisher, this book is crisper and more concise than her previous works. And she tackles concerns not much addressed elsewhere, reflecting in fresh ways on the challenges of living in our technological society.

Dawn challenges us to scrutinize the meaning of September 11. That notorious date can become an excuse to avoid hard self-examination or, worse, to justify violent retribution. She compels us to examine what that terrible event teaches about the actual cost and meaning of our way of life.

Dawn sees September 11 as an opportunity to examine misplaced priorities—the pursuit of profits, possessions or power. She argues that people are overwhelmed with the despair that comes from serving Mammon. She laments the inhuman conditions under which most of the world's people live, while we North Americans use commodities to deal with our feelings of meaninglessness. Dawn addresses this situation by thoroughly examining the role of technology in bringing it about.

Without condemning technology she notes its tendency to overstep appropriate limits and seduce us into believing that anything wrong in our lives can be fixed by a few improved gadgets. Technology's momentum perpetuates and aggravates gross economic injustices and fosters inequality.

Dawn gives an excellent summary of social philosopher Albert Borgmann's work on technology, which is finally getting some deserved attention, and draws on his ideas about the technological paradigm and the importance of focal practices and focal things.

Dawn challenges Christians to reflect on the proliferation and accumulation of "stuff." In her critique of consumerism gone awry she discusses issues like computers and children, the information glut, distance education, e-mail, and our adulation of speed.

Calling herself a hopeful realist, Dawn finds hope in the Christian eschatological metanarrative and makes numerous suggestions about how Christians and churches can live differently. Such alternative living demands deeply rooted ways of being.

While I agree with many of her assertions, it can be tempting to quibble with her along the way. Too often she uses her husband and herself as examples (e.g., giving so much to charity that they have been audited by the IRS). Since she travels extensively and visits with Christians throughout North America, one wishes that she also had shared stories of faithfulness from other good models.

Dawn points to a Christianity that makes a daily difference and is not dominated and determined by our milieu. So, in her words, “we sing our songs, we pray our prayers, we proclaim in worship the truth—until we know that truth so well that we say to the surrounding culture, ‘We don’t believe your lies anymore,’ and that opens up a trembling freedom to change it.”