

S. nonetheless faults Ward for failing to answer the remaining stubborn question of why God did not in the first place create a better world with less independent beings, such as heaven (218–19). S. suggests his own answer: we may claim that God has already created that better world, and that therefore God cannot be faulted for failing to create a better world than this one. Surely, S. continues, it is better to create *both* that better world *and* this one with all its unique value that comes from its independence, rather than *only* that better world (256–59). Of course, if one thinks that heaven is not another world but the fulfillment of this one, then S.’s suggestion will not persuade. But then it is a sign of S.’s impressive creativity and clarity that he can persuasively advance new theories in this thought-provoking and insightful book.

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DOMINIC DOYLE

WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY. By James H. Evans Jr. Edited and introduced by Stephen G. Ray Jr. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. Pp. xxii + 233. \$27.

Evans’s book deserves to be widely read. Like Margaret Walker Alexander’s poem, *E.* expresses the depth and breadth of the African diasporic experience in America, and the overflowing creativity and painful struggle of diverse African people for life and freedom in the midst of bondage and ongoing oppression.

E.’s African American systematic theology endures for its critique of Eurocentric white theologies, its method of interrelating the contexts and content of theology, and for articulating a liberation theology that integrates biblical scholarship, slave narratives and experience, and diverse historical and contemporary theological perspectives. Indebted yet not beholden to James Cone’s black liberation theology, *E.* develops a broader systematic theology that interrelates themes of revelation, creation, redemption, Christology, liberation, and community in critical dialogue with a wide variety of perspectives, including Marxist, Pan-African, and Womanist perspectives.

The relationship between faith and freedom is *E.*’s opening question, one that is crucial for the whole of Christianity. The enslavement of Africans, the extermination of Jews, and the oppression of women and Native Americans blinded theologians of so-called European societies to the import of this question because they assumed that “they alone were the recipients of God’s revelation” (17). *E.* incisively critiques an American cultural conflict that is about not only the failure of white Americans to contend with the legacy of slavery but also the ways American culture has devalued community, idolized the individual, and given priority to the

protection of property and individual rights over against the life and liberty of aboriginal and African communities. Black religion was created in the midst of profound conflict between “the inherited cosmology, value systems, and philosophical constructs that African slaves brought with them to the New World” and the dominant European paradigm of the colonies (5–6). E. underscores the irony that the colonists presumably came to the New World to escape tyranny only to become tyrants themselves. E.’s systematic theology sensitively contends with this enduring cultural conflict.

For E., revelation, liberation, and Christology are fundamentally interconnected. There is no revelatory significance of the biblical account of Jesus if he did not speak directly to the experience of the oppressed and excluded. The theological and moral implication is that any attempt to formulate a theology of revelation apart from a social and structural analysis of injustice in society “does violence to both the significance of that revelation and to the integrity of the liberation struggles carried on by the victims of society” (15).

E.’s penetrating critical reflection on the “ungiven” God begins by exposing the simplistic assumption that African Americans are inherently a religious people. Unlike the “disenchantment” with the “holy” that gave rise to the European American “Death of God” movement, African Americans have long dealt with a more complex question of the existence of God in the midst of their experience of the brutality of colonial conquest. Although African cosmologies were extensively lost in the midst of being stripped from cultures of origin, E. draws upon Albert Raboteau’s insight that the “African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American spirituals, ring shouts, and folk beliefs. That this was so is evidence of slaves’ ability not only to adapt to new contexts but to do so creatively” (66). This creativity includes how slaves reinterpreted the racist biblical theologies taught by slave owners and drew upon their reinterpretation in order to survive, protest, and struggle for new life. Second, drawing upon Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1991), the “ungiveness” or otherness of God in African American Christianity is not based upon a theological metaphysics but rather “indissolubly connected with the fate and struggle of those for whom there is no place in this world.’ Their otherness represents his otherness” (67).

The book includes critical responses from womanist theologian Linda Thomas, the former pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright Jr., and Evangelical theologian Bruce Fields, as well as E.’s afterword. The inclusion of an African American pragmatist like Victor Anderson would have strengthened the book’s dialogical dimension even more. Against Anderson’s claim of “ontological blackness,” that African American liberation theology is beholden to a reaction against whiteness, E. claims that God’s favor for

African Americans rests not on “romantic assumptions about their moral or spiritual excellence” but rather on “God’s freedom and love” (127). Nevertheless, like Margaret Walker Alexander’s poem of the same title, *We Have Been Believers* ought to be required reading for divinity, theology, religious studies, ethics, and American studies students.

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ALEX MIKULICH

WAR AND THE AMERICAN DIFFERENCE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY. By Stanley Hauerwas. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. Pp. xvii + 188. \$19.99.

Perhaps the oldest and most fundamental problem of Christian politics is how to deal with the “present-not yet” character of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Christians are a “new creation,” called to a new existence. But all too obviously the world around them has not seen radical change. As Hauerwas says in introducing this collection, “The question is how Christians can and should live in a world of war as a people who believe that war has been abolished” (xi).

The essays that follow, however, do not all offer the same answer; they seem to envision plural aims: to command the attention of scholars like Andrew Bacevich, the realist Boston University historian (who wrote a cover endorsement and was invited by H. as president of the Society of Christian Ethics to deliver a plenary address at the 2012 convention); to join the campaign of H.’s Catholic friend Enda McDonagh, who actually wanted to “Abolish War”; and to embellish H.’s own vision of the church, captured in aphorisms such as “the church does not have a social ethic; it is a social ethic” (*The Peaceable Kingdom* [1983] 99; *War and the American Difference* 68), and now the church is an “alternative politics” (xii), and “is the alternative to war” (34). Yet Bacevich thinks the United States should cease military engagement in no-win wars because it is a senseless use of resources (*The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* [2008]); McDonagh, however, thinks that if theologians and church leaders join forces, they can persuade governments to renounce war as a political tool because God created all people to desire peace; and H.’s very different ecclesiology (up to now) is conveyed in his concluding proposal: “Let Christians of the World Agree That They Will Not Kill Each Other” (181). Do the different essays come together in a coherent stance? No. But maybe coherence is not what H. is interested in. Maybe he wants to provoke reconsideration of the status quo across as broad a swath of the American public as possible.

H. has made his name by taking a strong stance in favor of a faithful church modeled on Christ’s cross that renounces cooperation with corrupt