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Fordham University, New York

ELIZABETH M. PYNE

RACISM AND THE IMAGE OF GOD. By Karen Teel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. vii + 216. \$90.

Teel examines traditional Christian anthropological thinking that has played an extensive role in perpetuating the denigration of black bodies, which counters the belief that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. An American, Roman Catholic, feminist, systematic theologian, T. illustrates how the works of five womanist theologians speak to the needed transformation of traditional Christian anthropological thinking. These theologians include Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Kelly Brown Douglas, M. Shawn Copeland, and Emilie M. Townes. Each elucidates how racism damages the spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of black women's bodies. Drawing on the works of these thinkers as "a way to honor black women's struggle to survive and to join them in it" (76), T. argues that bodies play a key role in the Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God.

In this volume of nine chapters, T. uses the first person plural personal pronoun "we" to show that she as a white female has benefited from a Eurocentric hegemonic normative worldview of Christianity that has oppressed, marginalized, and abused people of African descent (15).

In chapter 1 T. introduces the book's purpose, main argument, and plan of development. In subsequent chapters she amplifies various aspects of the book's purpose. She points out that racism is a white problem, and includes a lengthy discussion on the aftermath of the African slave trade. She highlights the mental gymnastics that European Americans have engaged in for centuries to denigrate black bodies. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, when African slaves were declared free from bondage, through media stereotypes, black people continued to be viewed as not fully human persons.

In tracing the historical development of Christian anthropological thinking concerning the human body, T. observes that Christian faith often has not functioned to prevent the continual objectification of black bodies. To help rectify the situation, she appeals to womanist theologies to articulate the norms necessary to critique white European and North American Christian anthropological thinking about black bodies (50).

T. describes Cannon's struggles with self-image as an African-American woman and links them to the plight of many African-American women and women in general, who creatively struggle for survival in a hostile society.

Although social and ecclesial attitudes toward black bodies cause many African-American women to wrestle with negative feelings about themselves (74), Cannon recommends “combat breathing” that serves to protect the lifeline, evokes the spirit, and resists hostility (74). T. maintains that all women need to embrace themselves as created in the image and likeness of God.

For T., Deloris Williams’s contemporary notions of surrogacy and survival are extrapolated from the biblical story of Hagar and Sarah. Although Williams admits that black women have suffered through silent “coerced surrogacy,” she does not believe that their experiences should be readily equated with Jesus’ redemptive suffering and death. Rather, black women’s experiences of survival involve more than achievement against the odds. Williams’s critical analysis of surrogacy and survivalist theology must include the incarnation. T. submits that, when viewed from the perspective of the incarnation, black women’s bodies represent concrete manifestations of the spirit of God.

T. also examines Kelly Brown Douglas’s notion of the “color of Christianity” under the guise of “Platonized Christianity,” which coheres with soul-body and mind-body dualism discourses. Contending that these dualisms have coalesced into a theologically supported denigration of black bodies (105), Douglas holds that the promotion of harmonious human relationships is vital for the credibility of Christian belief, which includes understanding the black Christ. T. asserts that the black Christ allows all to see that black bodies are made in the image and likeness of God.

When T. illuminates the similarities that Shawn Copeland sees between the suffering body of Jesus and the suffering of black women’s bodies, she points out that Copeland hopes that the parallel inspires Christians to resist racism by concrete relationships in actions of solidarity (126). Acknowledging that solidarity is a process, T. maintains that the idea that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God takes time to internalize.

T. agrees with Emilie Townes, who argues that dominant oppressive racist attitudes toward African Americans have disproportionately and unnecessarily promoted the ailing of black bodies (147). Christian anthropology and antiracist work expand the vision of the image of God for black bodies. T. contends that we must commit to dismantling the evil that dehumanizes black bodies.

In her final chapter, T. reviews the book’s main argument and contends that we need to reverence each human body, as each one is created in the image and likeness of God.

I enthusiastically recommend this captivating book as a “must read” for those interested in Christian theological anthropology. It is appropriate for graduate and upper-level college students as well as for scholars.