

BOOK REVIEWS

Robinson, Elaine A. *Race and Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012. 104 pp. \$10.99.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, PhD, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Christian Ministry at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, IN.

Abingdon's *Horizons in Theology* series aims to produce short, theologically robust contributions to key subjects in light of theology. Entries in the series range from a theological consideration of preaching to globalization, music, and violence. Elaine Robinson, Academic Dean at Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University, has contributed to the series with a volume entitled *Race and Theology*. A perusal of Robinson's work suggests that she is primed to contribute the volume, as she is engaged in asking critical questions about important subjects and the way they pertain to the state of the local church. Race is a pressing issue, more so today than when the book was published, and Robinson's volume is a helpful introduction to the intersection of these two subjects.

Race and Theology has four chapters, each with a distinct purpose. Robinson first orientates the reader, giving definitions and descriptions of the book's topics. Next, she names the concern of racism, that people are considered less than human (or less human than others), in the practice and perpetuation of unhealthy and unequal relationships or affairs. Third, Robinson illustrates this practice with a cursory survey of the history of the United States of America. Finally, Robinson sounds a hopeful note, suggest-

ing changes and a kind of reformation of theological consideration of race that includes being conscious of the issue, performing theology in the prophetic tradition in light of this consciousness, and making practical changes in our practical theology, including worship and music.

Let's examine these four chapters in slightly more detail. Robinson begins by naming racism as a valuation of the other person in light of superficialities, such as skin color, eye shape, clothing, or hair texture (16). The practice is not limited to individual expressions of value, but it also includes systemic injustices that are perpetuated because of explicit racisms and racist privileges of the past (21). The effects of such racism can be found in economics, religion, and politics, or, as the foreword says so remarkably, racism is seen when certain races are "poorer and hungrier" than others (4). The foundations of these practices emerge from an impoverished or misguided theological anthropology. Robinson utilizes the black theology of James Cone to affirm that a theological anthropology proffered by the powerful will not resonate with those without power, so long as injustices persist (30). Instead, Robinson suggests, in light of Latino/a theology, that theological anthropologies must be developed in concrete existence, where God is encountered. While other cultures might not require that race become part of the language of theological anthropology, the concrete life and history of the United States of America requires its presence. Race is an integral part to being human in the American context, if God is to be found and understood in our concrete existences. With this in mind, Robinson accesses womanist, liberation, *mujerista*, and Native American theologies of being a person (30–42). Robinson does not find therein a center, but a valuation of the human person through engaging the history and lived experience of various people. The failure of white theology, in Robinson's view, is that persons have not been considered racially; indeed, the white race may be seen as the representative race or as not a race (22). As a result, churches have not always been places of affirming the value of the human person in light of race, but have perpetuated injustices, not always raising questions and criticisms from the other's point of view and the other's experience. In chapter four, Robinson offers suggestions to combat the current state of affairs. One suggestion is that we must become aware and appreciative of various cultures. We must become black, red, and yellow with God. This is not to propose race as an "ontological condition," but as an appreciation of the goodness and grace of God in various locales, among various peoples (87). The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of this varied appreciation. It alone is the impetus, and theology alone is the foundation for this fresh consideration.

Readers seeking a quick introduction to relevant vantage points and helpful discussions will appreciate Robinson's concision in *Race and Theology*. Practitioners and theological educators of evangelism will find key issues presented in accessible ways, with passion but appropriate gentleness

and humility. Theological anthropology will become a key consideration when thinking missionally or evangelizing. Readership will be limited, however, mainly to US contexts. The book's illustrations focus on such histories as the Civil War and Jim Crow laws. Racism is presented and considered as "America's Original Sin." Thus, readers from other Western nations will need to contextualize the book's illustrations, while appropriating its ideas and concerns. Further, readers will want to challenge, at points, Robinson's anthropology for its orthodoxy. Of course, such challenging is not of Robinson's anthropology, but of the anthropologies Robinson accesses. For example, Robinson notes the Native American theological anthropology that blurs the lines between human and non-human so that "people" might be considered as a category beyond human beings (39). Readers may also question the methodology of Robinson's sources for theological anthropology, for instance, whether starting with dehumanization, even before Scripture and tradition, is appropriate (42). Such concerns, when framed as questions, will push conversation and deepen mutual understanding, even if there is not consensus. One gets the idea that Robinson would consider such conscientization a helpful development and a theological corrective to racism and its effects.

Race and Theology will be best utilized in US courses on evangelism and cross-cultural ministry, and in church groups with appropriate guides for understanding and implementing theologically rooted, redemptive practices for our day.

McIntosh, Gary L. *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016. 187 pp. \$15.99.

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In the present-day church, it is often difficult to determine its unified mission, priority, role, focus, and context. It is equally difficult to articulate the relationship between the gathering of the faithful community of believers and its proclamation of the gospel to those outside of that gathering (i.e., the relationship between church attendance and evangelism). Gary McIntosh (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) has written *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today* as an attempt to discover and outline the true relationship between faith, evangelism, and the modern church.

McIntosh notes that the church has lost its connection between missional thinking and evangelism. He hopes to offer a corrective in this book by engaging in the biblical and practical questions pertinent to evangelism