

The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World

by *Brian Bantum*

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. 182 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-1-5064-0888-0.

IN THIS POIGNANT, accessible, and eloquent book—part memoir and part social/theological treatise—Brian Bantum urges readers to consider “the death of race” in a twofold sense. First, the very notion of race has brought death to God’s good and diverse creation. God created us as differently bodied, incarnate people, so that our true freedom is in mutuality and love of difference. But we have made difference a problem. We have cultivated the lie that we can live independently of one another, with the result that one racial difference (whiteness) flourishes at the expense of all others. Bantum puts it this way: “Race is a form of death because it renders certain bodies to nothing but bone. It eats away at the uniqueness and beauty of every individual and incorporates them into an ecosystem where such uniqueness is only possible for white bodies. . . . Race is a system that classifies bodies in order to justify their economic and sexual exploitation, that renders dark bodies criminal, hypersexual, utterly invisible, and yet fearfully present”(p. 116).

Race has reaped death throughout God’s good but fallen creation. It is a “pseudo god” (p. 151) used to recreate the world in its own image. Thus, there is a second sense in which Bantum speaks of the death of race: if we are to live, race must die. He means that we must reject the lie that we can live freely when we are separated from one another. This also requires receiving one another’s differences as gifts from God. Out of the resurrection of Jesus’s body, newly embodied life can be formed. The resurrected body of Christ breathes new life into our tombs and enables a new way of being in our different bodies. The new life created by the life, death, and resurrection of God in Christ empowers a new Christianity in a racial world.

In Bantum’s view, the white church in America has not always been very Christian. As

he notes, “Too often, Christian identity in America is more about bodies governed by a racial ideal in the guise of a so-called Christianity” (p. 10). Race, says Bantum, has eclipsed the Christian story in America. Indeed, he maintains that “[r]ace is not a description but a way of being—its henchman is whiteness and its chariot is the church” (p. 151). Yet God’s incarnation in Christ holds promise that can transform the systems that have warped us, so that we can begin anew by “recognizing the fullness of our bodied lives and how we cannot neatly separate the various particularities of our bodies from one another” (p. 167).

I highly recommend this engaging, thought-provoking book. Bantum offers poignant insights into his own life as a mixed race man (born of a black father and white mother) married to a Korean-American woman. He weaves this story into reflections on the creation story, on Mary the mother of Jesus as the image of embodied and redeemed humanity, and on the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus. The volume is accessible for lay audiences. Indeed, I look forward to using it in an adult education series in my congregation.

ROGER J. GENCH
THE NEW YORK AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism

by *Drew G. I. Hart*

Harrisonburg, PA: Herald, 2016. 187 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-1-5138-0000-4.

IN *TROUBLE I’VE SEEN*, Drew Hart calls Christians of all ethnicities and races to recognize and reject white supremacy, as he argues for a radically Christocentric perspective to replace white-dominant enculturation and epistemologies. Hart critiques individualized notions of racism in order to lift up a power-aware and systemic view of racism. He turns an equally critical eye on the life of Jesus, rejecting the whitewashed and domesticated Jesus of