

Ross Halbach. *Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020. 262 pages. \$44.99.

*Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* explores ecclesiological and racial intersections between Bonhoeffer, Willie Jennings, Kameron Carter, and Brian Bantum. The author's main concern is theological and guided by two central questions: "How does the triune God speak into and through a Christian church embedded within the language game of whiteness, and how does God do so without giving in to the devastating speech of whiteness?" (3). Ross Halbach is clear that he does not intend to offer a solution to these questions or the problem of the church's complicity in whiteness; instead, he invites the reader into ecclesial participation through Word and sacrament. Halbach urges readers to hold firm to the notion that God speaks and works through the Church, despite complicity in racism. While whiteness provides resistances to hearing God speaking, Halbach prioritizes theological fidelity and ecclesial participation as responses to whiteness.

The first chapter discusses whiteness through Bonhoeffer's terms of penultimate and ultimate in order to move from what the author sees as a problem/solution approach to theological debates on race to a discernment/surprise frame. The discernment/surprise frame looks for where Christ is already at work so that human participation in God's work is in response to God's work. An additional benefit, for Halbach, of the ultimate penultimate frame is avoiding the racializing of God and unduly elevating human racial identity. The second chapter names whiteness as a resistance to God's speaking and promises for Creation. It includes a historical narration of whiteness and a brief survey of whiteness studies. Chapter 3 turns to Bonhoeffer and Willie Jennings to discuss ways in which God addresses humanity amid a fallen world. Halbach places into dialogue Bonhoeffer's assertion that God speaks through the church amid sin and Jennings's focus on Western theology's legacy of whiteness.

Chapter 4 takes a Christological turn through the dialogue between Bonhoeffer's prioritization of Christological humiliation and Carter's emphasis on avoiding supersessionist theology. As in other places of the book, Halbach underscores some of the limitations of Bonhoeffer's theology, especially in this chapter with regards to supersessionism. Halbach's primary concern with the works of Jennings and Carter is their lack of attention to an ecclesiology that understands God to be speaking to and through the historical church. The final chapter is more comparative than dialogical and discusses Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and Bantum's "mulattic hybridity" in relation to Christ and the church (187). Bantum sees God working disruptively with regard to race and the church; whereas Bonhoeffer presents an ecclesiology rooted in irruption. This leads Halbach to connect the concept of the mulatto church to Bonhoeffer's presentation of Word and sacrament as God's irruption leading to a responsive disruption.

*Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* has much to offer its readers. It carefully develops a dialogue between a prominent theologian of the past with contemporary theologians who write on race and racialization. Halbach offers important Christological warnings concerning theology and race which preachers should consider. He wants readers to remember that "Christ is not an idea but a living person that confronts and comforts God's people again and again, within the midst of fallen creation" (155). The strong emphasis on intersections between Christology, ecclesiology, and theology is something that homileticians might find helpful for teaching and forming a theology of preaching. While the book has its guiding questions about God speaking through the church steeped in whiteness, and a constructive argument does unfold, some of the

chapters remain isolated from one another. In other words, the chapters on Jennings, Carter, and Bantum can largely stand on their own. Thus the individual chapters are accessible to readers interested in a dialogue between Bonhoeffer and each individual theologian. Lutheran theology features prominently throughout the book, especially concerning race and Christology, but readers outside of the Lutheran tradition can still glean valuable insights.

I think the greatest limitation of the book is its restricted constructive response to whiteness. Halbach's priority seems to be theological, as he assures readers that a church steeped in whiteness can still be a place where God speaks. For Halbach, there is a sense in which Christians looking to respond to whiteness within the racialized Church should do so by trusting Christ's presence in Word and sacrament. While this is a helpful theological orientation, readers might be left looking for more regarding practices or living out a faith that intentionally seeks to dismantle whiteness. Halbach names that the book does not engage womanist scholars as an additional limitation. Despite these problems, *Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* invites readers to see whiteness and racialization as theological concerns while holding firm to God's work and presence through the church.

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