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Review – *Black Practical Theology*, edited by Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr.

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***Black Practical Theology*, edited by Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr. x, 350 pp. Baylor University Press, Waco TX, 2015. \$49.95 (paperback). ISBN-13:9781602584358**

Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith, edited collection of essays in *Black Practical Theology* represents a significant contribution to the discourse on Practical Theology. The discipline of practical theology primarily addresses critical thinking about what we do and how we live out faith. As stated in an earlier book, *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions* (Paulist Press, 2014), includes the study of practices, contexts, cultures and communities in dialogue with faith traditions and informed by human knowledge.

Dale P. Andrews has been a prominent black voice in this discourse with his previous book, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). In that book, Andrews helped to define practical theology in a way that the black minister or scholar could better understand and appreciate. He saw that there was a chasm between the academy of black theology and black churches. This widening chasm critiqued the role and purpose of black theologians in the life of the black community. His hope in his earlier book was to "bridge the theological axioms of black theology and the faith claims operating in African American folk religion. He was able in the earlier book to make palpable the idea of black theology's contribution to black life. The missing piece in the earlier book, was the voice of black pastoral leaders. This omission has been rectified in this new collection of essays. The purpose of this new contribution to the discourse on practical theology is to "bring into dialogue with church and parachurch leaders in the black communities select scholars who are working within the constructive, biblical and ethics disciplines of black theology and those scholars who work within practical theology and its customary subdisciplines. The hope for Andrews and Smith, is to create a "dialogue" between these various communities. These three dialogue partners are 1) scholars from among the traditional subdisciplines of practical theology (homiletics, Christian education, pastoral care and counseling); 2) dialogue partners from either constructive, biblical or ethics theological disciplines and 3) finally the third partner chosen was a prominent black church pastor or parachurch leader who exhibited

significant ministerial presence in the black community. The areas that they address include Black Youth, Education/Class and Poverty; Gender, Sexual Orientation and Race; Globalism, Immigration and Diasporan communities; Health Care and HIV/AIDS; Mass Incarceration and the Justice System. Contributors include well known and recognized scholars and ministers such as Diana Hayes, Phillis Sheppard and Jeremiah Wright as well as new voices in the field and landscape such as Raphael Warnock, Madipoane Masenya and Edward Antonio. The final section is written by Andrews and Smith who offer a synthesis of the text and share their own conclusions to this discourse.

Did they succeed in providing something new as well as contributing a voice(s) that has been missing from the discourse? The answer is a guarded yes. In the academy, the voices of black scholars continue to be muted or nonexistent in certain disciplines. Practical theology is one discipline that has until recently omitted the diversity of voices within the community. The editors are to be congratulated for the inclusion of essays from scholars in the Caribbean and South Africa, as well as attentiveness to an ecumenical vision (Catholic and Protestant authors). While this book is an excellent resource for students studying theology, one glaring omission in this collection of essays is the field of spiritual formation (a subdiscipline of practical theology) and liturgical studies. Hopefully revised editions of this text will include these disciplines as well as those black voices who are emerging in the "Black and Urban Education Matters" movements. As a final note, recommended companion to this book for black Catholic readers is *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices* (Paulist Press, 2014) which includes an essay by M. Shawn Copeland, "Weaving Memory, Structuring Ritual, Evoking Mythos: Commemoration of the Ancestors."

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Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God.
Kelly Brown Douglas. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books,
2015. 234pp. \$24.00. Paper. ISBN: 9781626981096.

Trayvon Martin and Sybrina Fulton are the immediate inspirations for *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* by Kelly Brown Douglas. For Douglas, the mother of an African American young man, Trayvon's death and the acquittal of his killer compelled her to investigate the prevailing "Stand Your Ground" culture that condones the treatment of black bodies as little more than disposable commodities. A womanist theologian and pastor, Douglas connects the anxieties of Black mothers who are particularly afflicted by "Stand Your Ground" politics with Fulton's faithful advocacy for the full humanity of her deceased son and the enduring meaning of Trayvon's life in light of her God who is immanently just.

Douglas' intent in this work is to engage readers, as she was engaged, in philosophical, political, spiritual and maternal soul-searching on "Stand Your Ground" law and its implications for black bodies and those who trust in the justice of God. The result is a work that testifies to the power of the human story to shape across generations a people's values, principles and beliefs. In *Stand Your Ground*, the reader participates in a historical and theological exploration of the major strands of two grand narratives that undergird U.S. culture and contemporary way of life. Part One of the text chronicles the development of "American Exceptionalism", an ideology that privileges Anglo-Saxon heritage; Part Two gives an account of Black Faith, rooted in African religious traditions and shaped by the life experiences of African Americans. In competing voices, the stories speak to the nation's ongoing struggle for racial justice, evidenced most powerfully by the more recent shootings of other unarmed Black youth - Jordan Davis, Jonathan Ferrell, Renisha McBride, and Michael Brown, perhaps the most widely recognized - and the Mother Emmanuel Nine, whose execution occurred during the reviewer's reading of this text.

Douglas situates Trayvon's 21st century confrontation with "Stand Your Ground" rationale in first century German history, English common law and the philosophy of the nation's founding fathers. With thorough research, she reconstructs the case for the Anglo-Saxon myth of "American Exceptionalism", pulling back the curtain to expose cultivated ideologies that systematically promote the "hypervaluation of whiteness

and the denigration of blackness (xiv).” Through the ages, America’s exceptional identity, represented in Anglo-Saxon culture and language, government institutions and politics, its unique calling among nations and singular relationship with God, is rooted in the cherished purity of its Anglo-Saxon citizens. Douglas suggests that science, religion, and the law were systematically manipulated to legitimize the superiority of the white American race and accord it with extraordinary property rights that led to the extermination of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans in the United States.

She contends that in the context of white culture ingrained in Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, blackness is an offense to white America, blackness is a sin against God. Historically and even until today, the black body is considered “guilty chattel”, a threat to “cherished white property” by virtue of its perceived hypersexuality and violent disposition. Douglas explains the problematic in terms of traditional natural law and theo-ideology that describe blackness as dangerous, criminal and surely always guilty of something. In sad summary, this is the myth and these are the grounds on which chattel slavery, the black codes, Jim Crow, lynchings, the war on drugs, the industrial prison complex and “Stand Your Ground” laws have prevailed and continue to perpetrate racialized violence against black bodies in defense of white freedoms. In her insights up to this point, Douglas provides informed affirmation, appropriate vocabulary and historic perspective to corroborate the suspicions of African Americans that the United States is protected space, a home for white supremacy.

Despite the grief and sorrow so often triggered by “Stand Your Ground” culture, Sybrina Fulton and Kelly Brown Douglas uphold another great American narrative. In Part Two, the author juxtaposes the God portrayed in the myth of American exceptionalism with the God of black faith. Although both divine personalities can be located in Sacred Scripture, in the respective prayers and religion of God’s people, Douglas lifts up the story and song of God’s beloved black faithful, counter-narratives to the deification of white oppression that condemns black bodies as “guilty chattel”. Drawing on traditional African understandings of the Supreme Being, the author reflects on the God-given freedom and power of black believers to theologically resist the absurdity of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, even as they were (and remain) caught in its racist web. Here it seemed that the author missed an opportunity to more fully flesh out the African heritage of Black

Americans given the extensive research done on the construction of Anglo-Saxon identity.

However, her location of Trayvon on the cross, crucified like Jesus Christ by the same sin of a "Stand Your Ground" culture and raised to new life by the justice of God, is a poignant image that resounds with the familiar prophetic voices of faith whose truth telling in this kairos time calls humanity to renew this culture following the example of Trayvon's mother, whose hope lies in a God who is mysterious, free, just and right on time.

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