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Review – *Racism and the Image of God*, by Karen Teel

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***Racism and the Image of God.* Karen Teel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Viii, 216 pp. \$100.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780230622777.**

A theologian serves as a midwife of God's grace to the community of believers and also as a conduit for the response of the community to the grace mediated by her theological reflections. To do this, she must always embrace the prophetic role, else, her message falls short of the transformative effect it ought to have on those who hear it. This text will stand the test of time for its ability to engage and describe the effects of racism as a moral evil on human society. As one reads each page of this book, one begins to notice that the author has taken seriously the prophetic mandate. She does this skillfully by locating the discourse on racism within the boundaries of womanist theology. This approach is consistent with a biblical pattern; the prophets derive their calling to speak God's truth to society from their place at the margins. They experience with the poor and the outcasts the effects of injustice perpetuated by those at the helm of power. When they speak against oppression, it is against a moral evil they know in the real sense of the word. The same can be said of women and most especially of black women.

The text engages the lived experiences of blacks in western societies, especially societies founded and supported by black slave labor. With detailed research into the histories of such societies, the text unpacks the layers of oppressive narratives, social biases, immoral legal codes, and outright violence carried out against black persons by whites. Else one thinks that racism and violence against the bodies of blacks are simply social problems, the text shows how in western Christian intellectual tradition, a biased reading of some scriptural texts has been followed meticulously to validate oppression against blacks, and particularly black women. In a skillful manner, the text goes further to show how Hellenistic philosophical dualism has shaped the western Christian worldview in a way that violence against black bodies has become the norm in a two front approach; one religious, the other socio-cultural.

The text appropriates the narrative method familiar to womanist theology and black cultures to reflect on the experiences of black persons in western societies. The stories, experiences, and theologies of womanist theologians are given primacy as the text systematically offers

a new vision for Christian theological anthropology that is truly ecumenical. The text invites white theologians to pay attention to theologies done at the margins for there is where new insights and pneumatic breakthroughs can be found to guide the stale and repetitious theologies currently being done by those at the center. Their failure to speak to the experiences of blacks is judged to be inexcusable.

This text has successfully reclaimed the voice of oppressed people and most particularly oppressed black women by paving the way for their experiences to be part of the content of theology today. If Christian theology is to be relevant in the third millennium, it must necessarily be truly inclusive in its content, vision, and methods. An inclusive reading of the ministry of Jesus Christ must necessarily be one that presents him as speaking against all structures of oppression; racism, xenophobia, sexism, poverty, violence and all other social vices.

This text is an important text that should become part of the required texts for college courses in liberation theologies, womanist and feminist theologies, Christian theological anthropology and courses that engage black experiences in western civilization. In a prophetic manner, this text can help to focus the discourse on race relations today in the United States. It can also be used as a guide for community discussions on what is fundamentally wrong with our social structures and the paths we can follow to remedy the problems.

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