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Manis and Martins' "Eavesdropping on the most segregated hour: A city's clergy reflect on racial reconciliation" (book review)

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Book Review



Manis, Andrew M. and Sandy Dwayne Martin. (Eds). (2021). *Eavesdropping on the most segregated hour: A city's clergy reflect on racial reconciliation*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press. 304 pp. \$24.00. ISBN 9780881467918

Fifteen diverse clergypersons, ministering in Macon, Georgia, contributed sermons to this work about racial reconciliation. They come from Baptist, Presbyterian, Assembly of God, Catholic, Methodist, Unitarian, Jewish, African Methodist Episcopal, Muslim, and Non-denominational affiliations. Each sermon is unique. One asks the question of where we are in terms of the problem of race, and what we are doing for it, while another focuses on racism as the sin that it is, needing a spiritual cure. We are reminded in Christ there is a balm that heals division. All parts are needed to serve the body, so repentance for wrongs is necessary. We should forgive one another, recognizing each of us has been created in God's image.

In the first part of the book, the editors, two historians who have served as professors and ordained Baptist ministers, reflect historically and theologically on why preachers in America have rarely spoken out on concerns related to race. Manis believes American individualism, consumerism, patriotism, nostalgia, and exceptionalism all play a role. Martin Luther King Jr. called the church hour the most segregated one left in America since African American and White congregations still tend to worship separately. Martin defines racism as an act of controlling other races while unrealized racial prejudice can feed into white privilege, which is what gives White people advantages simply based on their skin color. While Black clergy have tended to emphasize liberation from oppression and the need for reconciliation, Martin emphasizes that race must be brought into all pulpits in order for justice and righteousness to prevail.

After the sermons are presented, the editors comment on them and bring their own perspectives into view. Manis speaks about how most people can point to individual acts of racism without acknowledging unconscious or systemic racism that exists. Martin states it is not enough to personally address racism, but that societal justice must be involved. Even King made it clear his personal relationship with God is what propelled his social activism. Martin also explains Black nationalism, pluralism, and integration, approaches that have been taken to achieve racial justice. Both Manis and Martin support reparations for the Black community.

Finally, this compilation concludes with two churches who meet together to liturgically express reconciliation with the other, modeling what it looks like for a White and African American church to worship jointly after 189 years of being neighbors with a shared but complicated history. The call is for others to embody Jesus' ethic of grace through racial reconciliation.

This collection of essays would be a good addition for any academic, seminary, or church library. It accomplishes its purpose of bringing together willing interracial and interreligious clergy to send messages of racial reconciliation to their congregations in one geographical location. It is a unique work that combines historical knowledge with practical application for churches. It includes endnotes, a bibliography, and a section on the contributors.

Reviewer

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