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## Fisher-Stewart's "Preaching black lives (matter)" (book review)

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# Book Review

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Fisher-Stewart, G. (Ed.). (2020). *Preaching black lives (matter)*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated. 304 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 9781640652569

The Black Lives Matter movement has forced the American church to reckon with issues of racism, racial identity, and white supremacy. In *Preaching Black Lives (Matter)*, readers are offered a sense of the conversation taking place among Episcopalians who are concerned with issues of racial justice and the mission of the church. This series of sermons, essays, and reflections is edited by Gayle Fisher-Stewart, an Episcopal priest, educator, activist, and former officer in the Washington, D. C. Metropolitan Police Department. In addition to editing the volume, Fisher-Stewart also contributes substantive Introductions to the book as a whole and each of its three sections, “Preaching Black Lives Matter,” “Advocating for Black Lives,” and “Teaching for Black Lives.”

As the section titles indicate, the book is concerned with how the issue of race is addressed in the church’s preaching, its activism, and its theological education and formation. The sermons offer a prophetic challenge to the church. Among many other things, they read the African American experience in light of the Gospels and the Bible’s prophetic literature, explore the anti-imperial message of the book of Daniel, and use Luke’s story of the rich man and Lazarus to examine white privilege. In the section on activism, contributors include laity and seekers as well as clergy. This mix of voices creates a dialogue that expresses both criticism and hope for the church. Young activists (some religious, others not) express their frustrations with the church’s complacency on issues of justice, and clergy explain why they see social justice work as an important part of their ministry. The final section on theological education or formation offers a revealing look at how the educational and institutional structures of the Episcopal church have enabled whiteness, and it offers a hopeful vision for transformative educational methods. In this way, it addresses similar issues as Willie James Jennings’ *After Whiteness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), another recent title that explores the deformative effect of whiteness in Western theological institutions.

As with most edited volumes, the quality of the contributions is a little uneven. However, the range of perspectives and concerns expressed by the book’s diverse group of authors is invaluable for understanding the issues surrounding the church and race, and contributions from prominent Episcopal voices like Gene Robinson

and Kelly Brown Douglas add theological weight to the proceedings. Discussion questions at the end of each section lend the book to use in a Christian education or classroom setting. The book's emphases on social issues in preaching and Christian education make it relevant for Christian college and seminary libraries. Though the book is driven by the question "What does it mean to be Black in the Episcopal Church?" (x), its lessons and insights are translatable to other Christian and religious traditions as well.

**Reviewer**

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