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# Fortress Introduction to Black Church History

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**Fortress Introduction to Black Church History**

Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002

184 pages, \$18.34 Softcover

Since the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s we have witnessed the appearance of a few notable Afro-American histories. The seminal tome *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin comes to mind. Nonetheless, we do well to appreciate the emergence of yet another in a field that cries for such input. The book by the two Pinn's *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* provides a fine addition to the genre at an affordable price. At the same time its concise character involved some clear choices of focus.

The heart of the book involves studies of those particular faith traditions that incorporated blacks (slave and free) drawn to the Christian message. We are treated to descriptive analyses of both the commitment to and disappointment with the Methodist tradition in America which grew out of the Great Awakening, notably the creation of both the African Methodist Episcopal Church under the leadership of the Rev. Richard Allen and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The following two chapters encompass the significant role of black Christian Americans within the revivalist traditions of American Baptists and Pentecostals. In these latter two chapters it becomes abundantly clear just how significant, even crucial, proved the role of African Americans in the success and expansion of these two traditions.

I celebrate especially how the authors highlight the role of women as significant leaders in these black denominations. We read of Jarena Lee AME preacher (exhorter); of the Rev. Julia Foote (ordained in 1894 in the AME Zion Church); of Helena Brown Cobb's missionary organizing in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; and of the Baptist Nannie Helen Borroughs work in church women's groups among others. As one sees the strength and growth of these denominations one notes also the profound tragedy of these churches growing and being defined within the scandal of American white Christian apartheid.

Perhaps the most outstanding genius of this book is its wrapping these denominational histories within the larger two-ended framework of the origins of Afro-American Christianity and its profound social

gospel manifestation in the struggle for black liberation from slave revolts through the civil rights movement to black liberation theology. As readers we encounter the effort of white Christians committed to a slave culture training their black "chattel" in a docile obedient Christianity over against the religious fires of revival stirring blacks to appropriate the more fundamental revolutionary character of the gospel to turn the religion of the slavers upon its head. In the last chapter we reconnect with the combination of Afro-American visions of full humanity for all as well as the growing consciousness of an earlier tradition of black pride and the "blackness of God."

*Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* emerges as a fine addition to a growing genre, but it is more. It provides, in addition, a source of inspiration of the radical and inclusive character of the Christian gospel over against that racism that some have called appropriately America's "original sin."

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### **The Strange New World of the Gospel: Re-Evangelizing in the Post-Modern World**

Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, Editors  
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002  
176 pages, \$23.00 Softcover

"Postmodernism" is one of the latest buzzwords being bandied about in the church today. Unfortunately, no one really knows what the word means. Often, "postmodern" people have been identified with pluralistic or relativistic theological and spiritual stances ("I find my own truth"), and a consequent distrust of institutional religion ("spiritual" but not "religious"). Many people in our communities are baptized and perhaps attended Sunday School, but no longer believe or live their faith through a Christian community. The purpose of this volume is "re-evangelizing" those who were are part of our congregations but, for many various reasons, have fallen away.