

Scott Haldeman. *Towards Liturgies that Reconcile: Race and Ritual among African-American and European American Protestants*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007. 183 pages. \$99.95.

Often attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr., Gardner Taylor's poignant and incisive words at the 1950 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, still haunt those willing to think of liturgical spaces of reconciliation: "There is more segregation at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning than any time in the week."¹ In his book, Scott Haldeman takes on the difficult and arduous task of both interpreting and reconciling liturgical practices within the context of race in America.

Haldeman's careful intentionality helps his readers navigate through 400 years of history both intertwined and segregated. He is careful to remind his readers of what he is attempting to do, providing a helpful synopsis of the previous movements and a gentle guide for the subsequent chapters.

Haldeman uses the image of a river with four contributing currents that "Flow side by side" (92). The challenge that remains in this schema is that it speaks of institutional representations in each of the currents. In our present time, denominational identities continue to disintegrate, irrespective of race. The late James Melvin Washington, historian at Union Seminary said, "The best definition of a church is the local congregation."² The intensification of "church" ought to be understood as "local congregation." Still, it is difficult to get a handle on liturgies. Although it must be argued that rituals yet abound, many rituals have not yet been formed into formal liturgies.

Whereas Haldeman may give his readers one way of viewing histories, it still remains that race and culture cannot be so easily simplified. Haldeman is careful to note the difficulty in making sweeping generalizations and warns of the danger of stereotyping. Haldeman provides us with a methodology for making the sensitive inquiries into difference.

Haldeman's insight is derived from an immersion in the Riverside Church of New York City. Riverside is committed to a church that is "Interfaith, Interracial and Intergenerational." While many of us remain hopeful about the "Riverside experiment," given its history since the writing of Haldeman's work, we must conclude that the jury is still out. Racial interpretations of the definition and composition of ecclesia still remain a challenge. Does a reconciling liturgy take the unconscious and perhaps intentional forms of Eurocentric presuppositions and thereby render any understanding of "reconciliation" as assimilation? There is danger in locating the questions of reconciliation in the construct of liturgies alone when in fact the leadership and governance issues from which these definitions arise remain unresolved, unchallenged, and otherwise unaddressed. Haldeman rightly recognizes this point in his concluding statement of the text:

Communities with black and white members must be prepared to negotiate across the chasm that white racism has torn between these peoples. To dismantle the dividing wall, members of these groups must accept a final, difficult implication. Praying together will not only entail the painful acts of confession, compromise, and conversion, it will also lead ultimately to the emergence of a shared identity, a shared culture . . . by engaging

¹ Gardner Taylor, "They Shall Ask the Way." World Baptist Alliance Minutes, 1950.

² James Melvin Washington. Radio Interview, WLIB, New York 1986.

ritually in a shared communal life, members of multicultural communities risk losing cherished parts of themselves in exchange for the promise of greater wholeness (137).

With the rise of post-modernity, there are many approaches to race that go beyond the typical African-American/European American discussion. Haldeman's intentionality may give us entre to more complexified, global understanding of race and worship. As we debate whether or not we are in a post-racial America, the fact remains that both white and Black churches must make significant adjustments to their understandings of worship in America today.³ Haldeman is right to understand his work as prolegomenon, "*Towards*"

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³ Efrem Smith, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church: Becoming the Beloved Community in a Multi-Ethnic World* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012).