

Brian Bantum. *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010. 193 pages. \$34.62.

In the title of this work, *Redeeming Mulatto*, Bantum offers a double entendre that speaks to his overarching aims in this work. On the one hand, he attempts to redeem the idea of mulatto and describes how the very presence of mulatto people disrupts the binaries of race that lead to oppression in our country. On the other hand, Bantum describes Jesus as a redeeming mulatto, one whose very nature is a mixture of the divine and the human and one who calls the church into a kind of mulatto discipleship.

This work is an extensive and nuanced combination of theological, sociological, and historical analysis. Part one describes the ways in which Bantum believes that understandings of race have developed in America and the ways that people have become indoctrinated in these beliefs. Calling it a “racial discipleship,” he suggests that racial distinctions in America were the result of a system designed to control people and keep things “pure.” This binary understanding of race is prevalent in all facets of our society including the church. By tracing the historical presence of mulatto people, Bantum describes how their very existence proves false the “tragic illusion” of America’s conception of race.

In part two, Bantum constructs a Mulatto Christology that situates Jesus as a hybrid of humanity and divinity. For Bantum, recent theological developments have limited Jesus by attempting to make him “like us.” While clearly sympathetic to those contextualized theologies that reimagine Jesus in solidarity with members of a particular ethnic or socioeconomic group, Bantum believes that a better way to understand Christ is through his mulatto body. Jesus’ mulatto body is the actual source of salvation and solidarity. Jesus cannot be restricted by socially constructed racial categories and it is this very refusal to be defined, the paradoxical “neither/nor” space that Christ inhabits, that Bantum believes humanity is called to enter. Bantum suggests that “our imitation of Christ is located not to our likeness in essence, but our entrance into this neither/nor (107).” This mulatto distinction does not simply mean a mixture of different entities, but also a denial of binary identification.

Part three of this work invites the church into a new kind of hybridized discipleship. Genuine Christian discipleship in this theological construction calls the Church to join with Christ in a hybridity of Spirit and Flesh. Believers who are bound together through baptism become mulatto together. Bantum puts it this way, “imbuing all human personhood with the Spirit, the incarnation, bound to baptism renders all who confess mulatto” (109). Baptism brings believers into communion with God in such a way that they are transformed into something new. This new identity is the result of a union with God so strong that the believer cannot be known apart from or separated from God. Baptized believers take on a new hybridized identity akin to the hybridized identity of Jesus. In the concluding chapter Bantum writes that prayer is what guides the new hybrid believer through this world and into deeper connection with God.

While there is no mention of preaching in the text, Bantum’s theological propositions do offer fruitful ground for reflecting on the preaching task. I believe that one of the most important moves that Bantum makes in this book is his insistence on (re)connecting the body to ideas. He argues for an embodied theology and a particularly embodied Jesus. It is Jesus’ very body, the beautiful mulatto mix that is human and God in Jesus that is the solution and source of salvation. What might it mean to more fully embody the Spirit and in preaching? What might it mean for preacher to view the sermonic moment as a beautiful mulatto moment of hybridity between the Spirit and preacher? Bantum’s vision of the hybridized believer might prove an interesting model

for the preacher. Many homileticians attempt to provide a pneumatology in their homiletical theological propositions. Bantum's work may offer new language for thinking about the preaching task as a joint venture between flesh and the Spirit. This text also offers a way of thinking race that may be appropriate for the preacher in the postmodern landscape. This idea of Christian hybridity could be quite helpful in congregations that are or are becoming multiethnic, or in communities that have already begun to resist the ideas of racial binaries. Any preacher that is interested in reflecting on the racial construction of theology in her or his preaching would benefit from this intelligent work.

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