

Brian K. Blount. *Invasion of the Dead: Preaching Resurrection*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014. 135 pages. \$10.81.

Brian Blount's book, based on his 2011 Beecher Lectures at Yale, is a marvelous invitation to preaching apocalyptic texts that goes beyond critical-exegetical matters to deeply important cultural and theological ones. Blount's subtitle is not decoration, but programmatic: preaching resurrection. This theme becomes important as Blount unpacks the apocalyptic dimensions of Revelation, Pauline literature, and the Gospel of Mark. However, the implication of his careful work emerges clearly as his cultural-studies approach welcomes the move from ancient text to contemporary context. Blount is incredibly adept at doing so.

By the same token, *Invasion of the Dead* is much more than a sexy title. Blount describes the reading of apocalyptic texts in light of four different kinds of death and life. Life is life lived in proximity to God, for Blount a classic formulation of apocalyptic thinking. Death type A is the cessation of bodily functioning. Death type B is eschatological death—the truly permanent death in contrast to the only relative death that type A represents. The fourth type is *the living dead*. This last type becomes a major focus of the book. For Blount, it is precisely the zombie-like state of the living dead that characterizes the world in which books like Revelation, Paul's letters, and Mark's Gospel do their work. Jesus' resurrection is the key to God's invasion of the realm of the living dead—to release the virus of life by means of a resurrection inoculation.

The book, corresponding to Blount's Beecher Lectures, moves from Revelation, to Paul, and concludes with Mark in odd-numbered successive chapters. The even-numbered chapters are Blount's own sermons, which comprise much briefer chapters between the meatier lectures with which they alternate. Both lectures and sermons are substantial. However, the lecture chapters go into greater exegetical detail for someone who wants to appreciate the critical resources upon which Blount relies and the problematic exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological traditions (Barth, Bultmann, Schweitzer) with which he is contending. In some ways, the purpose of his writing is to undo in (mainline) Protestant Christianity an undue fascination with the cross and replace it with a reinvigorated resurrection proclamation—and in such a way that the resurrection interprets the cross, rather than the other way around. The concern Blount has is that our fascination with cross, satisfaction, atonement leaves the living dead *the living dead*.

I find Blount's approach startling and arresting. Operating from a cultural-studies perspective, Blount does careful exegetical work but sees the meaning-producing dimensions of that text in profound dialogue with culture. The connection to cultural phenomena like the zombie apocalypse or shows like "The Walking Dead," helps Blount to articulate that these apocalyptic texts from the New Testament meet us in an age already obsessed with death. For this, preaching resurrection represents a full frontal assault, first through the witness and life of Jesus Christ, but then also in the empowered praxis of the church and disciples today. This is why Blount's text is a must-read.

At the same time, I have some critical concerns. In some sections, his desire to interpret the cross in light of the resurrection almost becomes a diminishment if not quite the outright displacement of it by the resurrection. The point is well taken. Satisfaction and atonement theories have led to cruciform deformations of Christianity that are anything but life-giving and are in fact death dealing. Yet sometimes I get the impression that what Blount calls a theology of the cross is really atonement theology that has become culturally warped. For me, a theology of

the cross is not about atonement, but revelation. In fact, in the hands of theologians like Douglas John Hall, Jürgen Moltmann, and Deanna Thompson the cross reveals not a suffering prescription, but a powerful anti-triumphal witness at its center. Sometimes Blount seems almost to gloss over these differences. As an exegetical matter, the claims he makes about the role of the cross are much more compelling in the sections about Revelation. The irony is that Mark seems himself to narrate the cross as an apocalyptic moment, with a darkening sun from the Day of the Lord tradition. Perhaps this would help Blount emphasize his earlier point: that the cross needs to be interpreted *in light of* the resurrection. To my mind, this more modest version of his point is both more compelling and more consistent with Markan and Pauline theologies.

Yet I view these criticisms as relatively minor. Blount makes an excellent case and helps to push the church to reclaim resurrection language and resurrection praxis. I intend to use Blount's book in my own course on apocalyptic preaching. I urge others to read it closely and rethink yet again how the resurrection, an *apocalyptic* resurrection, stands at the center and not as an afterthought of Christian proclamation in a church of the living dead.

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