

After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging. By Willie James Jennings. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. x + 165 pages. \$19.99 (paper).

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Willie James Jennings' newest book is part of Eerdmans's series *Theological Education Between the Times*. The collection (there are more to follow) brings forward appraisals and proposals from a diverse group of educators whose interest is in amending current theological training. Like his predecessors in the series, Chloe T. Sun and Amos Yong, Jennings has been both a faculty member and an academic dean. And like them, Jennings has grasped how theological education in the United States is facing a moment of judgment.

Given that Jennings' indictment of theological education as a place of institutionalized power is like Nathan confronting David with the words "thou are the man," it is curious that he avoids mentioning Duke Divinity School by name (as well as Yale where he now teaches), although anyone who knows Jennings would recognize that most of what he says about theological education has its origins in Durham and the twenty-five years he spent there beginning with his doctoral studies. His long time of standing in the same spot has allowed him to see how things change—and how they don't—while at the same time his standing in academic rank has moved from student, to instructor, to professor, to dean. Perhaps Jennings is more of a gentleman than I think he ought to be.

In my better assessment, the reason for Jennings' omission is because what he saw there, he also sees as true for theological education across the board. From what he learned as a consultant for the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, and as an adviser for The Association of Theological Schools, Jennings wants the goal of theological education to be *the cultivation of belonging*. Theological education should facilitate opportunities for being near others, for touching others, for listening to others. He believes that the best theological education that ever was came when Jesus had crowds around him: he had crowds of people who had something, or nothing, in common; he had crowds of people who laughed, and pondered, and hurt together. The opposite of belonging, the dead end of theological miseducation, is the creation and propagation of what Jennings calls "white self-sufficient masculinity."

White self-sufficient masculinity, as an aim of theological education, is not about individuals per se, but about consolidating human experience. It is about forming persons who are self-possessed, in control, and proficient in respect to certain assumptions about Christian formation. Jennings locates its origin in the Christian missionary experience of translating and teaching

the words of God into the languages of the people they encountered in their travels. These two acts, translating and teaching, became both the conduit for the spread of Christianity (and he affirms that God's message of love ought to be spoken) but also, and this is his real worry, the means that allowed hegemony and homogeneity to overtake freedom, life, and cultural agency. When the theological education that began in the hands of a few men in China and the Congo became the provenance of powerful institutions like Duke, Yale, Wheaton, and Fuller, the consequences of white self-sufficient masculinity emerged even more.

Jennings tells this story through a hand that writes for ear and eye: he has poetry and prose, memoir and discourse, reflection and assertion. The chapters naturally build upon one another as Jennings explores how theological education can be become better at the task of forming folks for service. Some of the stories and poems about his students will make you sad; the ones that show the pale underbellies of his colleagues might make you squirm. But this book is not just recounting all that is wrong. It is a work about constructing hope. He is telling us that we are in both a cultural shift and an eschatological moment. It is a moment where reorientation offers the possibility of releasing us from the reckoning ahead. *After Whiteness* is useful for anyone teaching in a seminary or college theology department. Those in the parish or the parsonage will find it an instructive text on how churches can commit themselves to a better, more faithful, discipleship.

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The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty. By Junius Johnson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020. xiv + 210 pages. \$32.00 (paper).
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Junius Johnson's *The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty* contributes to theological studies with a philosophical argument for the objective experience of beauty. Johnson distinguishes his work from other twentieth-century efforts, and in particular the benchmark volumes of Hans Urs von Balthasar, in method and substance. Rather than theological aesthetics, which Johnson defines as reflections on art, Johnson declares that his ambition is to engage beauty directly to explore its nature and relation to theological realities revealed by God in Christ. For readers of von Balthasar, this distinction may not appear as clear-cut as Johnson suggests in light of von Balthasar's own references to beauty's appearance within the object-subject