

were needed to instill African Americans with Christianity. As the abolitionists' influence inside Northern wings of the major evangelical denominations grew, proslavery Southerners no longer remained satisfied with the efforts of moderates to silence internal debates. The collapse of the conversionist consensus helped provoke sectional divisions in the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominations. Wright bemoans that those sectional schisms of the largest evangelical denominations destroyed "the best hope of avoiding war, and the nation hurled headlong into an increasingly rancorous sectional crisis" (19). This conclusion seems at variance with the modern historical opinion that nothing less than such a bloody conflict was likely to rid the nation of slavery. It also contradicts Wright's own conclusion that church unity based upon adherence to the conversionist ideology had stood in the way of emancipation. The breaking of those religious bonds instead seems to have been a necessary step in provoking the violent confrontation to end the immorality of human bondage.

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***African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance and Transformation.* By Lisa M. Bowens. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2020. xix + 309 pp. \$40.00 hardcover.**

Lisa M. Bowens's monumental monograph unearths hidden or even neglected African American voices from the 1700s to the mid-twentieth century who found Paul and his letters empowering and liberating, an ally in their protest against slavery, racism, and other oppressive structures. In the midst of the sea of books and articles on African American biblical interpretation of Paul, Bowens's work stands out for two reasons. First, Bowens expands the African American dialectical experience of reading Pauline letters by tracing African American interpreters who embraced Paul and his letters as companions in their struggle for liberation and justice (296). For racially minoritized persons, critiquing Paul and his letters has been the primary epistemological lens for obvious reasons. Bowens acknowledges this critique by starting her book with Howard Thurman's grandmother, Nancy Ambrose, and her disdain for Paul (1). And yet, Bowens courageously and cautiously invites her readers to realize that there are countless other African American voices who actually embraced Paul and his letters (broadly construed) as useful tools for protest and liberation. In their sermons, autobiographies, speeches, and other media, Bowens argues that many black voices were engaged in *counterreception*, or "They did not allow the way Paul was presented to them by whites to be the way they received the apostle, so they engaged in their own counterreception [*sic*]" (305). As Frederick Douglass puts it, "you press it to your bosom all the more closely; you read it all the time more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty—and not on the side of slavery" (297). Second, Bowens extends the "canon" of must-read African American biblical interpreters by including Jupiter Hammon, Lemuel Haynes, Zilpha Elaw, and Maria Stewart, to name a few. Bowens actually undersells her work by calling it as an "introductory volume to the field of African American Pauline Hermeneutics" (13). This monograph is

shifting the canonical grounds of African American biblical interpretation and on how to preach and teach Paul and his letters within and beyond the African American communities.

The bulk of the monograph (chapters 1 to 3, pp. 15–264) historically, theologically, and socio-ethically traces various black interpreters' embrace of and struggle with Paul's letters. This tracing, though, is far from any simplistic exercise of listing of names and documents. Bowens introduces the black voices in ways that are affectively vivid and critically informative. For example, Bowens quotes Zilpha Elaw's documents/experiences that help you (the reader of Bowens and Elaw) to feel Elaw's struggle, rooting for her as she prophetically speaks/writes: "just as the apostle is an earthen vessel, so too is she [Elaw] (2 Cor. 4:7), and as an effectual door was opened for Paul, God likewise opened the door for her to preach when she traveled (1 Cor. 16:9)" (90). Bowens also includes harrowing, gut-wrenching narratives of black women, such as Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897), as they steadfastly hold on to their faith (and Paul's letters) in the midst of their struggle to survive: "My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him" (178). Even if the white slave owners used Paul (and other parts of the Bible) to compel blacks to be submissive, Bowens highlights how Jacobs finds certain parts of the Pauline letters liberating, or at least useful, for her cause. For example, Jacobs interprets Acts 17:26 as depicting racial and gender equality because we are all "one blood and one humanity" (186), thereby censuring the white masters' (sexual) abuse and slavery in general.

On a technical note, Bowens clearly explains that the African American interpreters that she marshals have a broad understanding of what counts as "Pauline letters:" Paul of Acts, the thirteen letters, and Hebrews (28). One also has to realize that Bowens's work is not just centered on the perspectives of race and ethnicity. Bowens highlights many poor black women's voices in her compilation, thus engaging gender and sexuality and class issues. Of course, since the book is about "resistance and transformation," one could push the bounds and ask if there were any queer black voices during the time period she has chosen. One could also inquire about whether there were any connections with ecology at all (Rom. 8:18–25). To be fair, such inquiries go beyond the scope of an already lengthy book. Perhaps these are projects Bowens or someone else could pursue later on. Moreover, chapter 4, "Pauline Language in Enslaved Conversion Experiences and Call Narratives," feels out of place in this book solely because the three previous chapters were written in the same format (name—biography—critical analysis). Meanwhile, chapter 4's format is thematic: conversion. Nevertheless, this minute difference does not in any degree veer away from Bowens' intent of highlighting and uplifting various black voices and their take on Paul and his letters from the 1700s to the mid-twentieth century.

Bowens's monograph bridges the unfortunate and arbitrary divide between those who (rightly so) critique Paul's letters and those who use his texts to live faithful and just (black) lives. Once again, Bowens emphasizes that the members of the African American community are not monolithic in their approach(es) to Paul and his letters (5). For many seminary and religious studies classrooms these days, this monograph enriches the discussion, especially for those who are interrogating Paul's questionable words and yet still hold on to the spiritual practice of reading Paul's letters as life-giving, empowering, and liberating. Bowens's work is not a simplistic "rescue mission" of Paul from the fangs of critical lenses. Rather, Bowens invites us to witness various African American testimonies from the past who, in the midst of desperation and agony,

found Paul and his letters as a viable tool for black resilience and empowerment. They were not unaware of how Paul's letters have questionable statements. As a matter of fact, they critically dealt with them in their own ways. In the midst of all of the imperfections, the black voices throughout the centuries worked with Paul and his letters as one of the many indispensable sources for resistance and transformation.

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A Marginal Majority: Women, Gender, and a Reimagining of Southern Baptists. Edited by Elizabeth H. Flowers and Karen K. Seat. America's Baptists. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2020. xl + 254 pp. \$60.00 hardcover; e-book available.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) remains America's largest Protestant denomination, and the stories that its own historians have tended to tell about it have often conformed to a master narrative about the organization's rise to prominence and, later, its successful ejection of nonconservative leaders and influences from its boards and agencies. This account, while useful for fundraising and promotion, misses a number of facets of the denomination's history. The most important of these facets is the story of Southern Baptist women.

In this edited collection of uniformly well-written and thought-provoking essays, editors Elizabeth Flowers and Karen Seat present the results of a mission to "reimagine" the Southern Baptist past by focusing on the experiences of the denomination's women. The project hearkens back to the work of Ann Braude and Catherine Brekus, seeking to uncover the stories of women where they have previously been neglected and ignored, but also seeking through the application of this new perspective to revitalize denominational history and demonstrate its usefulness and importance to the historian of American religion at large.

Delane Tew's chapter, the first in the volume, may offer the most directly revisionist claim of any in the book. Tew notes that the Seventy-Five Million Campaign of 1919 to 1925, the Southern Baptist Convention's first major coordinated fundraising drive, was directly dependent upon the work of women in its committee structure and for its fundraising methods. Even though the leaders of the campaign themselves admitted as much in print during the waning months of the campaign, studies of the campaign have neglected women's roles. Other essays in the volume provide other direct forms of scholarly intervention; Carol Crawford Holcomb's essay, for instance, seeks to correct the commonplace that Progressive Era Southern Baptists were uniformly rural traditionalists when it came to social issues, citing publications and activities of the denomination's Woman's Missionary Union (WMU). When the denomination's leading women are taken into account, Southern Baptists suddenly emerge as a group many of whose members were fully engaged with the Social Gospel, believing and teaching that their faith required close attention to social problems.

Flowers and Seat acknowledge in their introduction that "not every 'reimagining' will prove uplifting" (xvii). This mixed assessment is particularly appropriate as the authors