

Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel. By Gary Dorrien. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018. xv + 610 pages. \$45.00.

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Americans often identify the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King Jr. *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* is the second installment of Gary Dorrien's argument that "King did not come from nowhere" (3). Dorrien contends that King came from a movement we can call the black social gospel tradition. On his encyclopedic account, this tradition parallels and may even surpass the white social gospel movement often identified with Walter Rauschenbusch.

The first installment, *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*, traces the emergence of the black social gospel to an intellectually diverse school of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century thinkers such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Booker T. Washington, Henry McNeal Turner, Nannie Burroughs, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., and Reverdy Ransom. Dorrien discerns four distinct strands in the black social gospel tradition and claims that the black social gospel that ultimately informed King's worldview emphasized two of those strands. In recounting these developments, *Breaking White Supremacy* offers in-depth biographies of six major figures: Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University from 1926 to 1960; Benjamin Mays and Howard Thurman, accomplished theologians who taught at Howard and elsewhere; Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who served for decades in Congress; Martin Luther King Jr., the icon of the movement; and Pauli Murray, an activist turned theologian and episcopal priest. A host of other figures also receive extensive attention.

Breaking White Supremacy is both broad in scope and meticulously detailed. It appears to be the product of many years of research into the lives of the figures studied, including close readings of their works. Dorrien's goal—to describe the tradition that shaped King's thought and career—is borne out by the book's structure of seven long chapters. The first chapter situates the work among other histories of African American thought. King is the focus of two chapters (5 and 6), whereas the other thinkers are covered in one chapter or less: Johnson is the focus of chapter 2; Powell Jr. dominates chapter 4; Mays and Thurman share chapter 3; and Murray, the only woman, is one of several theologians discussed in chapter 7. Into the main biographies, Dorrien weaves mini-biographies of numerous additional figures, along with descriptions of their accomplishments. It is not uncommon for a summary of a book or speech to extend for several pages. For example, Dorrien spends three pages summarizing King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, which itself is around twenty pages long. The resulting

volume reads rather clumsily as a narrative, yet its clear prose, incredible detail, and exhaustive index render it invaluable.

Dorrien himself notes a significant limitation of this work: it deals with intellectual history, philosophy, theology, politics, and social ethics, but not social history. A social history of the era, exploring the contributions of organizations such as the NAACP and other grassroots initiatives, is outside his wheelhouse but sorely needed (xi). Perhaps this explains why, even though Dorrien aims to delineate an intellectual tradition and titles the chapters thematically, he still organizes the material overwhelmingly by individual thinker rather than by time period, theme, or defining event (for example, encounters with Gandhi). What this means for the reader is that the era's history is recounted over and over, with the figures showing up repeatedly in each other's stories. A towering strength of the work is Dorrien's thorough knowledge of the people and events he describes. Yet at times his very ease with the material, combined with the sheer mass of data, can leave the reader feeling lost in a sea of names, dates, and events.

On a possibly related note, the book's title, though compelling, is overstated. As Dorrien admits in the first paragraph, the civil rights movement "failed to break white supremacy" (1). Neither does he attempt to spin it by arguing that the project is ongoing. Indeed, whether substantive social progress has been made against white supremacy is a question that Dorrien avoids, perhaps because he is not doing "social history."

In dialogue with other histories of US social thought, *Breaking White Supremacy* argues persuasively that Martin Luther King Jr. arose from a robust intellectual tradition that was already sophisticated and venerable when it formed him. The book should be in every library and will be hailed by scholars of the civil rights movement and US history generally. *Breaking White Supremacy* will prove handy for instructors and researchers dipping in for overviews of the figures and writings covered. The entire book would be too much to ask of most undergraduates but might be assigned in graduate seminars. Excerpts could be used at any level.

KAREN TEEL

University of San Diego

Stumbling in Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church. By Brian P. Flanagan. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018. viii + 185 pages. \$24.95 (paper).

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This text has arrived at a very appropriate moment given the crisis in the US Catholic Church. How are we to understand the church in this moment, in the face of the betrayal of sexual and financial scandals? Who is the church?