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Review

Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

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The title of Anthony B. Bradley's book, *Liberating Black Theology*, is doubly misleading. On the one hand, it does not deal with "Liberating Black Theology," in the sense of introducing Black Theology as a liberating force in society. On the other hand, while Bradley pretends to present a theology that liberates Black Theology, he is only able to demonstrate that, from a certain point of view (which, in his case, is conservative evangelical), Black Theology is superfluous, and, in his own words, dead.

It's a pity that Bradley has undergone a load of work reading, studying, and trying to understand James H. Cone, Dwight N. Hopkins and quite a number of other black and womanist theologians, only to present a distorted and falsified version of Black Liberation Theology and criticize it from a fundamentalist point of view. Bradley never reaches the depth of black theological spirituality, because he is not able to leave even for an instant his own hermeneutical presuppositions, rooted in – what he calls – “historic orthodox Christian theology”, which seems to him eternal and self-sufficient. The very critique of this self-stated “orthodoxy” made by Black Theology is downplayed by Bradley in an auto-referential way, because this critique leaves those historical and now obsolete foundations.

Bradley presents these theological foundations in the first chapter, testified by present-day evangelical theologians. The second and third chapters expose Black Theology, as developed by Cone, Hopkins, and some other theologians. Bradley tries to present this theology in an unbiased way, but fails to do so. His presentation of Black Theology is unfair and prejudiced. This is most obvious in the fourth chapter, where he pretends (but fails) to demonstrate that Black Theology has substituted the infallibility of Scripture for the inevitability of Marxist analysis. In chapter five, Bradley exposes his own understanding of a legitimate black interpretation of the Bible, with a quite honest intent of a contribution to debate. Finally, in the last chapter, Bradley denies his own question: “Is There a Future for Black Liberation Theology?”

One of the main topics of Bradley's book, the concentration of Black Theology (and other liberation theologies) on victimology, i.e. characterizing the victims only out of their perspective as victims, and not from their own potentialities for liberation, should be open for debate within

the liberationist theological communities. The way it is presented by Bradley, however, rules out any chance of debate. This, also, is a pity.

That his own book is guided not so much by theological but by political interests (a suspicion he tries to arouse against Black Theology) is demonstrated not only by Bradley's obsessive concern with (and against) Marxism, but also by the (ironically placed) citations of Barack Obama and his former Pastor Jeremiah Wright at the beginning of every chapter. This book is no theological work – it is a political pamphlet.