



Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World

Fernandez, Eleazar S., ed.
Cascade Books, 2014

Book Review

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Eleazar S. Fernandez's edited volume, *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World*, brings together important voices in the study of religion and theology to explore issues surrounding racial-ethnic minority scholars. Fernandez writes that "'marked' identities" present challenges in all aspects of a scholarly career, from the classroom and research and publication to administration and institutional policy-making (2) and that even as racial-ethnic minority scholars make great strides, the "racist system is cunning enough to do countermoves" (3). Willie James Jennings summarizes the crucial issue: "These teachers are measured against simulacrum, images of white male teachers, images of what women teachers ought to be, images of what minority teachers ought to be, and assumptions about which ideas and concepts should matter to women and minorities and which ideas and concepts are the proper domains of white men" (119), as David Maldonado, Jr. shows us the constraints and possibilities faced by racial-ethnic minorities across the institutional spectrum, including those in leadership positions. The purpose of this volume is not to complain, however, but to be constructive: it asks how institutions can re-form themselves, set "benchmarks" (4) to support racial-ethnic diversity, and, thereby, flourish.

Two strategies characterize the volume. First, it deploys metaphors to help the reader to understand, even to experience, the positionality of the racial-ethnic scholar. For example, Jennings presents modern theological education as "the master's house built exclusively for his sons" (109), while Loida I. Martell-Otero and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier use spatial metaphors to talk about "teacher space" and where our teaching takes place, respectively. With these metaphors, the volume asks what it means to work and to learn as "foreign bodies" in such places: what does it mean to be both at war and yet in love with our disciplines? The volume

does not forget students; Peter Cha uses the metaphor of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Beloved Community" to think through the experience of racial-ethnic students in theological education. The volume asks us to think metaphorically in our assessment as well; it uses, for example, the vocational cycle as a way of thinking through justice work.

A second strategy that characterizes the volume is the inclusion of the voices of allies. Paul O. Myhre and Nancy Ramsay offer valuable strategies and insights as two Euro-American colleagues who have accepted, as Ramsay puts it, "the pervasive influence of white supremacy and the recognition of the self-interested imperative for allies to leverage our privilege on behalf of institutional formation" (251). Using the metaphor of vision, Myhre asks us to expand our vision to see racism not as a singularity for racial-ethnic scholars but in its contexts, and to use the power of discernment to decide how to address the problem justly.

This very important volume includes contributions from many stellar teachers. Though it focuses on theological education primarily, it is valuable for religious studies. Its range – from the location of the scholar, to students, to administration, to issues of assessment – is wide, but deftly handled. It is both theoretical and practical, making it a work one can mine for different kinds of insights. The volume asks for alliances that generate small but significant steps. As Fernandez puts it: "Small beginnings should not intimidate us. We must remember that we are not called to everything, but we are called to do something" (20).

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