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## Review — Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, & Religious Diversity in America*

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***The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, & Religious Diversity in America.* Jeannine Hill Fletcher. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017. xiii, 194pp. \$28.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-62698-237-6.**

*The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, & Religious Diversity in America* joins a growing number of theological attempts to take responsibility for Christianity's central role in the history and ongoing reality of white supremacy. Jeannine Hill Fletcher argues that Christian supremacy, the idea that Christianity is superior to other faiths, created white supremacy, the idea that "race" is real and that people racialized as "white" are superior to people racialized as "nonwhite." Hoping to persuade contemporary white Christians to oppose white supremacy, Hill Fletcher re-imagines Christian theological notions about love, suffering, and activism.

With refreshing self-awareness, Hill Fletcher describes herself as a "White theologian inhabiting a 'white habitus'" (x). She reports that she was inspired to write this book by "good White Christians" who understand the need for compassionate service to people directly harmed by white supremacy, but who do not necessarily grasp the corresponding need for justice work to diminish the effects of "generational dispossession" (ix). She does not expect this book to solve this problem, but hopes to equip Christians, especially white Christians, to understand it.

In the first half of the book (chapters 1–3), Hill Fletcher describes in detail the development of white supremacy as a process undertaken by European and European American Christians. She shows how their actions, deliberately designed for domination, were motivated and justified by Christian theological ideas. Beginning with the Doctrine of Discovery in the 1400s and the notion of Christian superiority that undergirded European colonial expansion, Hill Fletcher traces "white Christian supremacy" (29) through the enslavement of Africans, genocidal tactics deployed against Native peoples, the rise of US colleges and universities, exclusion of Asians, and exploitation of Mexicans. Showing how Europeans and their descendants intentionally created and maintained a system in which they retained power, Hill Fletcher argues convincingly that "Christian supremacy gave birth to white supremacy" (1). In the second half of the book (chapters 4–6), she creatively investigates the gospels' call to Christian love, in various challenging forms, and meditation on the crucifixion of Jesus as

theological resources that help to generate ideas for actions that redress the “epic failure to love” (156) that is white supremacy.

This informative and provocative book is essential reading for professional and aspiring theologians and indeed for anyone interested in the origins of white supremacy. As noted, Hill Fletcher frames it as a response to ordinary people of faith who fail to see the scope of the problem of white supremacy. Members of this audience will need time to work through the book, as it is packed with complex ideas, detailed historical analysis, and technical terminology. For example, having opened chapter one with an engaging account of the 1923 Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, Hill Fletcher immediately begins to discuss the US as a “religio-racial project” (3). In my upper-division undergraduate course on racial justice, students found Hill Fletcher’s argument compelling, even as they struggled with the abundance of historical and theological information and challenging concepts. Probably the most difficult was “symbolic capital,” a sociological concept on which turns the main argument of the book; this concept warrants explanation but is defined only briefly in a footnote (18). For these reasons, the book may be best assigned to undergraduates when time can be spent unpacking it.

*The Sin of White Supremacy* expands our understanding of how whiteness has operated throughout the history of what is now the US. It stands alongside other recent efforts to describe Christianity’s role in the development of the modern concept of race, such as Kelly Brown Douglas’s *What’s Faith Got to Do with It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls*, J. Kameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account*, and Katie Walker Grimes’s *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice*. Such works offer an important corrective to the practice, until recently common among historians, of treating religion as incidental to the problem of race.

We are indebted to Hill Fletcher for fleshing out an organic connection between Christian supremacy and white supremacy. Inevitably, her analysis is sobering. Yet she suggests that with sustained effort it may be possible for white Christians to repent and perhaps, over generations (xii), to recover from our “epic failure to love.”

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