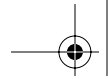


Foreword

It is remarkable that, to my knowledge, there has never been a book that attempts what Thabiti Anyabwile's *The Decline of African American Theology* attempts. For historical purposes, the book makes an unusually valuable contribution with its full account of the course of African American Christian thought. Theologically, it makes another signal contribution with its critique of the general development of that thought. For both historical and theological reasons, this is a very important volume.

As a survey of historical theology, it offers an expert, well-contextualized, and very nicely organized survey of a truly important topic. Its treatment of six areas of doctrine is as clear as the doctrines are important. For some of the individuals treated here, more extensive material is available elsewhere, but I do not think that anyone has *put together* such a serious reading of so many sources, and done it so well. For a few of the figures (especially Jupiter Hammon and, surprisingly, the notable nineteenth-century Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne), what Rev. Anyabwile provides is some of the best exposition of these figures available. To be sure, there might be some omissions that could be filled in if this were to be a life's work of 1,000 pages (for example, there is nothing on the pioneering Reformed Baptist, David George). A full roster of other worthies—Daniel Coker, Richard Allen, David Walker, Henry Highland Garnett, Henry McNeal Turner, and Martin Luther King Jr.—are mentioned only in passing. But for a book of reasonable size, the coverage is very broad. Especially the treatments of Jupiter Hammon, Lemuel Haynes, Bishop Payne, William Seymour, Marcus Garvey, Howard Thurman, James Cone, and T. D. Jakes are outstanding. To see such figures considered together makes for a superb contribution to the historical understanding of African American theology throughout the whole of American history.





How Rev. Anyabwile himself interprets the theological history he narrates so well will not please all readers, since he makes that interpretation from his position as a firm Reformed theologian of the old Puritan school. Yet since the book clearly differentiates between historical exposition and theological critique, the perspective of the author does not prevent readers of any sort from benefiting from the whole. Indeed, Rev. Anyabwile's interpretation of this history makes an important theological contribution of its own and should be the right kind of challenge for all readers. The firmly Reformed will much appreciate it; those that lean in that direction (like myself), or that lean against it, will be encouraged to think more carefully about normative theological judgments; while those who strongly oppose such a Reformed view (like strong Arminians, strong modernists, strong liberationists, strong health-and-wealthists) might be quite irritated. This result is not a problem. In fact, because the book is written from a well-defined angle, it actually gives readers purchase for understanding the historical survey and reacting to Rev. Anyabwile's judgments.

Along the way, one of the most interesting of many provocative matters is to see how the paranormal and the theological coincided in African American history. In a word, it is remarkable that dreams, visions, and disembodied voices often communicated to more-or-less illiterate audiences (often kept illiterate by the malice of masters) a picture of the Christian faith that was very close to what Bible-believing readers and careful theologians also held. Of many such insights on individual thinkers and topics, this book is full. Because I have already learned so much from its pages, I am delighted to recommend it wholeheartedly to others.

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