

# Intense book challenges status quo on churches' approach to racism

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*"Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Sees Racism" by Drew G.I. Hart. (Herald Press, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 2016). 205 pp., \$16.99.*

White Christians, and particularly white, male Christians, who like to be challenged about how they live the Gospel will find that challenge in "Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Sees Racism."

If terms like "white supremacy" and "racialized society" make one uncomfortable, one will find plenty of discomfort. If statements like "Churches have often been the least helpful place to discuss racism and our white-dominated society" and "Most white people need to get past their faulty and insufficient understanding of black history and grasp even a fraction of the assault on black humanity that persists even to this day" make one want to talk about it and examine it, then maybe Hart's intention of changing the way the church views racism is being realized.

Noting he is determined to start a conversation about racism in the church, Hart, a doctoral candidate in theology and ethics at Lutheran Theological Seminary, adds: "Having two-way conversations on racism is challenging when white people respond to discomfort with either defensive emotionalism or white fragility, which is the instability to deal with stressful racialized situations."

Hart wants the book to replace foundations on sinking sand - the racialized perspectives of the dominant culture - with the firm footing one finds in the way of Jesus. There is little doubt that, chapter by chapter, "Trouble I've Seen" can be a catalyst for the conversations that will make that happen.

While Hart writes about "the church," it is not about one specific Christian denomination. Nonetheless, his mix of personal experiences and opinions with references to history, sociology and Scripture provide the reader with ample material on which to build an examination of conscience. (Those seeking a book regarding racism and the Catholic Church would do well to start with "Racial Justice and the Catholic Church" by Father Bryan N. Massingale, Orbis Books, 2010)

In the final chapter, Hart offers "disciplines that help us take the first steps out of the cycles of oppression and toward the shalom of Christ." Sounding much like Pope Francis, the author states, "We are not seeking to merely be the church for the poor and oppressed; as we work toward a more Jesus-shaped way of Christian community,

we hope to be the church of the poor and oppressed.”

“Trouble I’ve Seen” is not an easy read; it’s intense. It’s disturbing, piercing. Given the topic, it should disturb and pierce, and it should be part of discussions on racism sponsored by parishes and dioceses. Readers may disagree with what Hart writes, but his words may provide enlightenment for Christians willing to address racism.

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