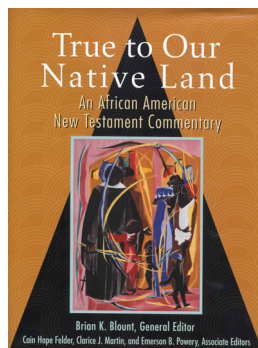


○ **REVIEW OF BRIAN K. BLOUNT, CAIN HOPE FELDER, CLARICE JANNETTE MARTIN AND EMERSON B. POWERY (EDS), *TRUE TO OUR NATIVE LAND: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY* (MINNEAPOLIS: FORTRESS PRESS, 2007)**

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This collection of essays and commentary on each book of the New Testament provides a much-needed treatment of New Testament interpretation from an African-American perspective. The introductory articles help situate the biblical documents within African-American context. Mitzi Smith's chapter on 'Slavery in the Early Church' provides a good overview of the institution of slavery in the First Century C.E. Mediterranean world as well as a powerful critique of uncritical appropriation of slavery images.

Similarly, Rodney Sadler's 'The Place and Role of Africa and African Imagery in the Bible' raises the important matter of why the name 'Africa' does not appear in the biblical text. In response, Sadler offers a good overview of the various places mentioned in the Bible that should be associated with Africa. The major flaw of Sadler's chapter is his dismissal of the Ethiopian eunuch as a Gentile; he states without qualification that 'he is not unlike the other Jews mentioned in Acts who became followers of Jesus.(27)' On the contrary, his status as *eunuchos* does render him quite unlike the other Jews who follow Jesus in Acts. A more careful examination of the matter would bolster the theme of marginalization and boundary crossing in African-American context.

Abraham Smith's 'Paul and African American Biblical Interpretation' addresses the reception of the Pauline corpus by African Americans. His critique of Paul's 'limited or ambiguous' passion with regard to 'other kinds of inclusion' misses the point of the biblical documents. The point of Paul's passion regarding the full inclusion of the Gentiles reflects the major struggle within the early Christian communities. Furthermore, most of the Pauline texts that are cited as endorsing

slavery are deuterio-Pauline and open to debate concerning their author. The author also does not address the possibility of Paul as a pastoral theologian who was writing about matters concerning local congregations alone. While I realize that the use of slavery as an image for the early church is problematic for post-modern interpreters, we must always keep in mind that these authors lived in a culture vastly different from our own. Perhaps Smith could have included a section on the role of slavery and the early church's response to it in his opening chapter.

Vincent Wimbush rails against traditional biblical commentaries for their focus on the ancient world and suggests an alternative orientation for interpreting biblical documents. Rather than beginning with the ancient world, Wimbush seems to argue that the reader's context be the starting place for interpretation. Likewise offering an alternative hermeneutical approach, Raquel St. Clair presents an excellent chapter covering the unique issues faced by African-American women. In what she termed 'A Hermeneutics of Wholeness,' St. Clair suggests promoting wholeness for all people while maintaining a commitment to 'grounding' interpretation in the 'concrete reality of African American women's lives (59).'

The final two introductory chapters by Cleophus LaRue and James Noel provide the unique view of preaching and art within the African-American perspective. LaRue discusses God, Scripture, preacher, and the 'Black Lived Experience' as the four essentials of a black sermon. This interaction of the divine, text, and lived experience in the preacher form the essential components of a sermon in the African-American tradition.

Since the book is a one-volume commentary on the entire New Testament, its treatment of the individual books is necessarily limited. This unfortunate necessity is overcome by the dense attention given to the major pericopes of each book. While refusing to get bogged down in academic details that often obscure our attention to the meaning of the text, this commentary focuses in on the central message of each passage in a highly readable manner. There are content boxes throughout the text that offer additional details from historical and cultural information to additional insights for other African-American scholars. Content boxes that emphasize practical ecclesial issues are found as well. The commentary on each book ends with suggestions for further reading from the African-American perspective.

True to Our Native Land is perhaps one the best one-volume commentaries this author has looked at. Though it does not meet the basic requirements of the critical commentaries scholars are accustomed to, it fulfills its own purpose to answer the question, '[w]hat if the reading of and thinking about the Bible ... were read through African American experience?' The use of this commentary should not replace critical examination of the biblical texts with traditional commentaries and other resources. But this commentary should be used along with those resources in order to help Anglo scholars, among whom I am counted, to understand how African-Americans read and think about the biblical text. This would be an excellent resource for clergy to use during sermon preparation and for seminary professors to use as a textbook in an introductory course on the New Testament. Despite the shortcomings involved in the publication of a one volume commentary, *True to Our Native Land* is an exceptional source that should not be missed.