produced offspring who 'went native' and became typically Afrikaner. One of Andrew's sons, John Neithling Murray, was deported to India as a prisoner of war during the South African War of 1899–1902, while one of his nephews, Willie Louw, was executed by the British. William Hoppe Murray nearly scuppered the negotiations to form the CCAP in 1924 by insisting that white and black delegates ate separately, and the Scottish missionaries reluctantly ceded the point. Andrew Murray himself took the Boer side in the South African War. Yet he remained a pan-Evangelical and multi-racialist, combining conservative Evangelicalism and political liberalism in a synthesis rarely matched in later South African history. By the 1930s hard-line Afrikaner theologians were dismissing the Murray tradition as a form of 'Methodism', manifesting experiential piety but lacking in Calvinist theological backbone. Murray was no Methodist, but the accusation contained a grain of truth: as a student Murray had imbibed from Utrecht's version of the 'Holy Club', known as *Sechor Dabar* ('Remember the Word'), a zeal for Evangelical unity in mission that ultimately ran against the grain of Afrikaner national identity.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH BRIAN STANLEY

*Hell without fires. Slavery, Christianity and the antebellum spiritual narrative.* By Yoland Pierce. Pp. xii + 153. Gainsville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2021 (first publ. 2005). $24.95 (paper). 978 0 8130 6859 6

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The conversion of enslaved African Americans to Christianity has been well documented in studies of religion in the antebellum South. Yolanda Pierce's study provides greater nuance to this process by analysing five conversion narratives in detail, those of George White, John Jea, Solomon Bayley, Zilpha Elaw and David Smith. All five individuals converted to Christianity and were subsequently 'called' to preach, encountering risks and dangers in their journey. Pierce recounts the key details of each narrative, noting White's difficulty in gaining a licence to preach from the Methodist Church; the intersection between literacy and faith in Jea's conversion, and also his difficulty in failing to convert his wife; Bayley's work as a missionary to Africa, and his role as both a husband and father; Elaw's challenges in navigating issues surrounding religion, race and gender; and Smith's multiple conversion experiences to first the Catholic, and then the Methodist, Churches, and his attempts to engage with the African American community and the remaining elements of African religious cosmology. Yet, in addition to recounting the key details of each narrative, Pierce also highlights recurring themes generated by the accounts, such as the ability of Christianity to help individuals survive enslavement, the creation of a syncretic form of African American Christianity and the potential rift between those who converted to Christianity and those who primarily maintained African religious traditions. A consistent theme running through the narratives is the use of Christianity to help African Americans cope with the 'hell without fires' nature of enslavement, and simultaneously refute proslavery arguments that tried to both justify the institution of slavery and stress its benevolence to African Americans. Additionally, Pierce notes how each of the narrators contributed to

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the development of a distinct African American religious identity, which was neither a rejection of African traditions, nor an embracing of white American cultural norms. The final recurring theme is the issue that, following their conversion, these individuals often found themselves at odds with either family members or other slaves who had not accepted Christianity. Pierce highlights the frustration and, at times, incomprehension, of the narrators, highlighting the potential rift that Christianity could generate within the slave community. While these themes will already be familiar to scholars of African American religious history, Pierce's study is a useful addition to the literature, particularly in her efforts to incorporate a wide variety of religious positions and issues, highlighting the experiences of both enslaved and free, how gender impacted on the religious leadership, and in exploring the relationship of African Americans to different denominations, in particular to Catholicism.

FELSTED SCHOOL THOMAS STRANGE

*African American readings of Paul. Reception, resistance and transformation.* By Lisa M. Bowens (foreword Emerson B. Powery). Pp. xx + 335. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020. $40. 978 0 8028 7676 8

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Very recent research into the letters of Paul has seen a powerful complaint to the effect that the moral problem with the letters is not interpretive malpractice by later readers, but bad faith on the part of Paul himself (see, in particular, Cavan Concannon, *Profaning Paul*). This complaint sprang to mind as I read in Lisa Bowen's new book a quotation from one of Frederick Douglass's speeches against the Fugitive Slave Act:

> They have declared that the Bible sanctions slavery. What do we do in such a case? What do you do when you are told by the slaveholders of America that the Bible sanctions slavery? Do you go and throw your Bible into the fire? Do you sing out, 'No union with the Bible!' Do you declare that a thing is bad because it has been misused, abused, and made bad use of? Do you throw it away on that account? No! You press it to your bosom all the more closely; you read it all the more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty – and not on the side of slavery.

Nowadays, more or less all parties agree that, whatever the Bible may or may not say, we must not countenance the enslavement of other human beings. But it remains a live debate whether, or to what extent, we should concede that the Bible (or any given part of it) is in fact 'on the side of slavery'. In this remarkable book, Bowens effectively argues, in the tradition of Douglass, that we should not. So great is the hermeneutical power of the reader, Bowens reasons, that even the canonical Paul – whose fateful line 'Slaves, obey your masters' (Colossians iii.22; Ephesians vi.5) has done such catastrophic harm down the centuries – need not, and ought not, be ceded to the side of slavery.

The proof of Bowens's claim is her rich reception history of the letters of Paul in African American interpretation from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Drawing on her own herculean feat of archival research, Bowens shows us a kaleidoscope of readings of Paul by black Americans from across these

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