

Cole Arthur Riley. *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*. New York: Convergent, 2024. 304 pages.

Cole Arthur Riley's book *Black Liturgies* is a brilliant, moving, and necessary series of poems, letters, prayers, confessions, and more that came from a place of rage. She began her *Black Liturgies* project in 2020 as a response to the "terror of whiteness armed against Black bodies" (p. xv). Please take a moment with me to remember that during this time there were modern-day lynchings and public executions of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd (to name just a few) coupled with a global pandemic and a "white president who stoked racial divisions at the site of religious fault lines" (p. xv). There was much to rage about for those living in black bodies, and this book is a way to not only speak to the reality of black pain, grief, and hope but to center "Black emotion, Black literature, and the black body unapologetically" (xvi). Her written words and prayers are not only divine encounters and practices in both individual and communal solidarity and liberation but also a clearing space and escape from the terror and "trauma of white Christian nationalism, religious homophobia, and transphobia, biblical ableism, and ecclesial misogyny" (p. xvii).

The book is structured in two parts, both of which stem from not only a Christian spiritual formation perspective but also from black, queer, and mythical spiritualities. Part one entitled "The Story" takes a more existential focus, engaging in questions about and contemplation of human experiences such as wonder, rage, body, belonging, and fear. Riley has core elements within each section to help guide the reader in the form of the words of the ancestors, letters, poetry, breath work, confessions and forgiveness, benediction, and questions for further contemplation. Part two, entitled "By Time," focuses on our more temporal relationship with the divine through times of day, seasons, and occasions such as dusk, Kwanzaa, Juneteenth, and homegoing. This part's layout is shaped in the black tradition of call and response. With this kind of structure, you can tailor your experience to align more with your feelings, experiences, or the season you find yourself in. There is no order in which you need to go through the book, but I believe the author would rather you experience it as you and your body might need to. I feel it important to mention that while this book is entitled *Black Liturgies* and comes from a particular lived reality, I believe its particularity speaks to the universal in an important and necessary way. This means that this book is not just for black people but for everyone that seeks to be in solidarity with black bodies and to speak honest truths about our lived realities together. For those in non-black and non-marginalized bodies, I ask you the question posed by the author: "Are you capable of decentering yourself long enough to hear the voice of another?" (p. xvii).

I believe this book is a strong resource for religious professionals in any field, but especially for those in fields involving formation and care as it speaks to lived realities through different modalities. It offers a truth and authenticity that many are hungry for in a world of fake news and misinformation. It unapologetically centers black and marginalized experiences, emotions, and truths. I have personally used this approach in my classes, faculty retreat, workshops, and facilitations, presentations, and in my own personal life. I have invited people into this work, and they have danced with the words and we have breathed deeply together. It

has been both beautiful and freeing. The only weakness I might find in this book is that there is not more of it. A year-long Black Liturgy devotion would be healing and glorious. I hope you choose to accept Riley's invitation into Black Liturgies and allow yourself to feel whatever it is you are feeling, and I too pray, as does the author, that this book "leaves you feeling more free" (p. xvii).

Lakisha R. Lockhart
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