

UNDERSTANDING RACISM, ONE BOOK AT A TIME

THIS HERE FLESH BY COLE ARTHUR RILEY

Report by Cathy Scott

I hope many have had the opportunity to read This Here Flesh by Cole Arthur Riley. I have been talking with Cole the past two years as we planned her presentation at Spirit and Place and her workshop and plenary at Convention this month. She liberally quoted from her book at Convention to emphasize points in her talk about rest and liberation.

I feel Cole writes in the same fashion as our Gospel writers wrote – by telling stories. The stories of her Gramma, her father, and her ancestors, illustrate both her theology of the Sacred and the weaknesses and strengths of the human spirit. Cole's perspective on life, relationships, and religion are formed from her experiences as a Black woman. Additionally, she expounds on suffering and redemption in relationship to her autoimmune disorder, chronic pain and vision problems. Cole writes about an embodied theology, an embodied spirituality. Her acceptance of her body comes with considerable struggle and she revisits that acceptance regularly.

Cole writes honestly of her depression, anxiety, and introversion that confound her attempts to blend into the white world throughout her childhood, youth, and young adult life. She discusses the difficulties experienced by her family members as they confronted prejudice, poverty, and the colonization mentality of whites. She addresses systemic racism and its impact on minorities and those without power. Cole does not mince words.

She expresses powerful opinions about religion, solitude, white supremacy, suffering, contemplation, white worship, Black worship, childhood abuse, and mental and physical malaise.

I will pull some of her comments out for discussion and also ask others what struck them about her book. For myself, I love her emphasis on an embodied spirituality. I have always believed it important to become our prayer, rather than just say our prayers. I am looking forward to our discussion and sharing.

Deacon Cathy