

UR714 Leadership Development in the Urban Church
Dr. Nathaniel Perez & Dr. Charles Galbreath - Spring 2022
Subversive Witness Book Analysis
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Subversive Witness by Dominique Gilliard is a passionate and inspiring book to disrupt the system of racism and patriarchy deeply embedded in our US history and still prevalent to this day. He is charging us as Christians to further the kingdom and love our neighbors by stepping out of our comfort zone and speaking out against white supremacy, racism, patriarchy, and all areas of iniquity. He also charges us to understand privilege and its power as well as change our framework of individualism to this kingdom-minded movement at all costs. Dominique asserts that “having privilege is not a sin, though sin has perverted our systems and structures in ways that engender sinful disparities.” (pg. 13) Dominique highlights leaders both biblical and not, who sacrificed as far as their life for the sake of helping the oppressed and using privilege to further the kingdom and love their vulnerable neighbors by confronting the powers that be. He quotes Dr. Bryan Stevenson, “we cannot create justice without getting close to places where injustices prevail.” (pg. 177)

The target audience for Subversive Witness is all Christians regardless of their race, gender, status, etc., to leverage privilege to help others. The style of his writing is appropriate as Dominique uses excellent scripture references as well as key leaders of our time who fight against the oppression of all persons. The strengths I found in this book are acknowledging women’s oppression, the use of biblical stories and leaders, and the spiritual formation given to leaders to follow. For us to acknowledge women and the double attack of racism and misogyny and the choice of which identity women need to advocate for is a powerful statement and allows us women to be seen. The use of biblical stories and leaders in the bible to fight nonviolent justice from a place of privilege is eye-opening and spirit-led. It is exhausting and traumatizing to read and experience the ugly side of oppression. I appreciate Dominique’s insight and

suggestion to take care of ourselves as leaders through spiritual formation, so we don't become exhausted and burnt out causing us to default to our shadow side.

My only critique is I wish Dominique shed light on the arguments the oppressors used. As we engage in conversation and speak the truth, it's important to share what scriptures and biblical stories were used to support white supremacy, racism, and misogyny. Having polarizing views helps with growth and development. I know there was a slave bible that took out pieces of scripture of liberation. Dominique does acknowledge a statistic of 12% of evangelicals look at scriptures when it looks to how to deal with immigrants. (pg. 172) I'm curious about what the statistics are and which scriptures are used to support slavery, segregation, mass incarceration, and misogyny. He may have found it irrelevant as there are overwhelming amounts of scripture for loving our neighbors and being a voice for the voiceless. *Subversive Witness* is an overall useful book for all its intended audiences. It is helpful to framework our agency as the oppressed and those in place of privilege to confront the powers of oppression and pursue kingdom advancement by loving all neighbors.

One of the concepts I took away from the book is, we work so hard to get out of the hood, but removing ourselves from the urban areas and a church that does not acknowledge systemic racism and patriarchy doesn't mean it doesn't exist. I appreciate the concept of staying in the proximity of those in need to continue to love our vulnerable neighbors. This brings me to the next takeaway from First Nations leader from Canada, Georges Erasmus, who said, "where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created." This concept of remembering sins past so we don't repeat history while holding on to God's promises, sovereignty, and our identity in Christ is an important concept to balance. (Pg. 5-6) The last

takeaway is the absolute importance of lamentation and the space for restoration (pg. 63). We need to empty out what's in our souls to give more space for God to operate in and through us. We need to slow down and process all that it is, and really allow God to restore our souls as we grieve such traumas.

During the Sankofa Journey, while driving through Alabama and parts of Mississippi, there were desolate areas and so many empty business buildings. I was thinking to myself if the community would only tear down the burned-down homes and spend money towards rebuilding, it would promote bringing in business and economy to the area. It made me think of areas where I spend my money to help the community and boost the economy. I do continue to spend my time in proximity to urban areas, however, I do want to implement action toward spending money in areas of need versus making those who are already wealthy even richer. For example, shopping at farmer's markets and small businesses versus bigger corporations that use their conglomerates to keep the oppressed down. Another application is continuing to read and watch the documentaries of our nation's history and complicit racism and misogyny. There are patterns of behavior from generation to generation just labeled differently. It's important to always be informed and pass it down to my children so they are fully aware and remind them of the agency they have to make changes. Finally, I love spiritual formation and the practice of becoming more Christ-like. "We have the spiritual practices needed- remembrance, confession, lament, and repentance- to ensure that the sins of our ancestors are never repeated. We also have the biblical mandate to serve as co-laborers with Christ and ambassadors of reconciliation." (pg. 171) The aspect of slowing down, grieving, and making space for God to heal and restore, helps to avoid burnout and minister from a place of wholeness.

Gilliard, Dominique DuBois. Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021.