

Assignment Title: Reading Report

The Color of Compromise / Report by Jemar Tisby

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The author, Jemar Tisby, begins his book by narrating the event of the four young girls killed and at least twenty others injured in a church basement at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. He subsequently quoted Charles Morgan Jr., a young white lawyer's speech reflecting on the tragedy, "Who did it? Who threw that bomb? Was it a negro or a white? The answer should be, "We all did it."¹ Tisby writes about America's complicated and imperfect history. He unpacks the tragic connection between the American church and countless historical iterations of American racism. How white supremacy wrapped itself in Christianity, compromising the gospel for money and power. The author said *The Color of Compromise* is about telling the truth so that robust, consistent, honest reconciliation might occur across racial lines. It is about revealing racism to facilitate authentic human solidarity.²

In this book, Tisby targeted prominent figures such as the late Billy Graham, George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther King Jr., and some Republicans. He also discusses the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws, the Great Awakening, and the Black Lives Movement. Altogether, the early chapters provide information on how people invented race. He later speaks about race's role. The writer gives an extensive account of slavery and racism's history and those who have been complicit in it. Tisby said, "the goal of this book is not guilt. It is not to show white believers how bad they are. It is simply a fact of American history that white leaders and laity made decisions to maintain the racist status quo."³ Lecrae writes the author's aim is for people to look around with new eyes and see how to move forward with focus and intentionality to right the wrong so that justice will "roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."⁴ Tisby also offers action steps to take to pursue justice and reconciliation in our

¹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise. The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019) 14.

² Ibid., 15.

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

churches, community, and country.⁵ He ends his writing admonishing his audience with Dr. Kings' speech to remind America of the fierce urgency of now, provide solutions to existing problems, and instruct those he deems to be complicit to be courageous and strong and take a stand.

Analysis

Jemar Tisby targets American white Christians and Christians seeking justice and mercy or hopes to see reconciliation. He uses narratives, persuasive, expository, and descriptive writing styles. The writing is somewhat formal, informative, easy to read, and intriguing. In addition, Tisby uses historical records, interviews, and stories to bring his point across. This book is helpful, has some strengths, and in some measure, the content is valuable for its intended audience. However, there are a few things I can't entirely agree with which I cannot express here because they will exceed the required pages.

One of the strengths is that this book has much well-researched, often untold historical information, despite some spine-chilling details. For instance, it has information about the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing and its aftermath/response, the African slave trade in North America, the declaration and war for independence, the nation's bloodiest wars, Christianity and KKK, the rise of Jim Crow, and lynching. One gruesome historical detail which shocked me is the story of a pregnant woman Mary Turner who was vocally protesting her husband's lynching. In response, she was hung upside down from a small oak tree with her ankles tied. Her baby was cut from her womb and then crushed by a member of the mob.⁶

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Ibid., 108.

Another strength is a statement made by the late Reverend Billy Graham that "the heart of the problem of race is in loving our neighbor."⁷ When we do this, we will have fewer or no arguments or issues concerning racism and its effects. The principle of love should prevail. It means loving our enemies while at the same time condemning or correcting the wrong through love, dignity, and kindness—not placing them in an oppressor/oppressed status.⁸

A third strength is that it highlights false narratives. For example, throughout the book, Tisby provides information about the distorted truth of the gospel message. He also writes about the Lost Cause mythology, which today still functions as an alternative history frequently leading to public disputes over monuments, flags, and the memory surrounding the Civil War, the Confederacy, and slavery.⁹

On the contrary, I'm afraid I have to disagree with Tisby's attempt to place many respected activists or preachers like the late Reverend Billy Graham in a bad light. I believe calling him a moderate racist is ridiculous. Conversely, Tisby writes he took measured steps to desegregate his crusades and encourage Christians to obey the *Brown v. Board* decision. He assiduously avoided countercultural stances that would have alienated his predominantly white audience and supporters. Also, Graham personally took down ropes segregating black and white seating in the audience. He said, "either these ropes stay down, or you can go on and have the revival without me."¹⁰ I believe the Rev. Billy Graham placed his energy into what he was passionate about or felt called to do. Not to be addressing the black race issues only.

Take-aways

⁷ Ibid., 134-135.

⁸ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology. God's Answer to our Racial Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 53.

⁹ Tisby, 94.

¹⁰ Ibid., 134.

One specific thought/concept about leadership development and the church I took based on reading this book is that to develop or become an effective leader requires perseverance. This was portrayed in William J. Seymour, who contracted chicken pox, resulting in blindness in one eye. He was segregated from the whites in school and rejected by a church in Los Angeles. However, this did not stop him from receiving what he believed were divine visions from God.¹¹ His theology was faulty. But his determination is something I think all current and prospective church leaders should emulate.

Secondly, to develop as a leader in the church, although not unique to the church, one must not only talk but also do, which is evident in the previous statement I made about the late Rev. Billy Graham. He did not just say he disagreed with racism; he showed it by taking the ropes down that segregated black and white, among other things.

Thirdly, to be an effective leader in the church, if you don't get anything else right your theology should be sound. In that way, you will not tamper with what God is communicating to you and the world. It will also determine how one thinks and what one does. Not only that, but we'll be able to discern the truth from deception.

I can implement these in my life and current ministry by being intentional about persevering even when things seem hopeless. Be intentional about ensuring that I am not only talking but also doing. And most importantly, to be even more intentional about studying God's word to ensure my theology is sound.

Bibliography

¹¹ Ibid., 113-114.

Evans, Tony. *Kingdom Race Theology: God's Answer to our Racial Crisis*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.