

Assignment Title: Reading Report

Woke Church / Report by Eric Mason

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Overview

Eric Mason, the author of *Woke Church*, was raised during the post-Civil Rights, black power, and black bourgeoisie eras. His parents were reared by former slaves. Mason's father went to two world wars, which he said was better than being a black man in the Jim Crow South. He tells how his life was impacted by his parent's rural post-slavery upbringing and their experiences in the South with whites.¹ Eric Mason begins his book by stating, "the issues of racism and injustice are like that Kilauea Volcano in a lot of ways. They form a hotbed of lava that lives just beneath the surface. At any moment, they can explode violently. As happened in Charleston, South Carolina, when Dylan Roof went into a black church and gunned down ten worshippers."²

Mason further went on to define the term woke. He said woke is "being able to see all the issues and being able to connect cultural, socio-economic, philosophical, historical, and ethical dots."³ He alluded to Du Bois, who discusses being woke in terms of the double consciousness of black people. "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."⁴

Mason also provides information on America's racial history and the connection between reconciliation, justice, the gospel, and love. He seeks to diagnose the problem and provides solutions for God's people to unite. He said his desire for this book is to encourage the church to utilize the mind of Christ and to be fully awake to the issues of race and injustice in

¹ Eric Mason, *Woke Church. An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 75-76.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

this country.⁵ Ligon Duncan, the writer of one of the forewords, puts it this way. So many people speak to the issues addressed in this book but do it unbiblical, uninformed, and unwisely. So many, even well-meaning Christians, talk of it in ways that unnecessarily divide and confuse. Dr. Mason's voice is one trying to put us together.⁶ The book is arranged around four themes. *Be Aware. Be Willing to Acknowledge. Be Accountable and Be Active.*

Analysis

Eric Mason primarily targets the church. Chris Broussard writes, "the entire Bible-believing body of Christ needs to wake up to the fullness of the gospel message." Dharius Samuels notes, "Mason calls the church out of her sleep and slumber and awakens her biblical responsibility to not only address the sins in our hearts but also in our systems." Eric Mason states, "the evangelical church seems to be asleep to the hotbed of tensions that threaten to overflow into communities across America."⁷ Mason uses narratives, persuasive, expository, and descriptive writing styles. The writing is informative, easy to read, and intriguing. Mason also conveys his point through historical information, the Scripture, and stories. The content is valuable for his intended audience. It, however, has its strengths and weaknesses.

One of the strengths of this book is Mason's use of the Scripture and his declaration that you have to be intrinsically changed by God for justice to be done. One such Scripture is Proverbs 31, where he dramatizes the queen mother teaching her son who would someday be king. He highlighted verses 8 to 9. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 22.

King Lemuel's mother taught him well in this passage. I think every mother should copy this. Noteworthy, God judged Israel for not keeping the law. One aspect of it has to do with how they treat the poor. Jesus shows deep concern for those neglected. He judges us for the way we treat others.

After this discourse, Mason adds that you have to be intrinsically changed by God for justice to be done. It doesn't come by legislation because you can legislate things, and nothing changes. We can put whatever kind of Supreme Court justices we want in place. But at the end of the day, legislation doesn't change hearts. Only the gospel does.⁸ I agree.

The other is when Mason quoted Philemon saying, how could Paul say to a believer who holds slaves, I'm praying for you?" "You come up in my prayers a lot." The strength of this is when Mason said as much as I may want to give up on evangelicalism, I cannot give up on Jesus and the church. I must affectionately pray for the family of God, the body of Christ: those who love me and those who despise me. As broken as we are, separate, splintered, and filled with schisms, we are siblings. We are called Christians, followers of Christ. Our name requires us to live like Christ because we're family. He said Paul challenges both men to move toward one another, not away from one another.⁹

Another strong point he made is that we can't condemn someone on public assistance when we don't know how they got on it. He said he knows some people who are on public assistance that have degrees. They went through deep times of disability that created a dependence on public assistance—they got trapped in the system. So, the most critical question is not why they get trapped, but how we can come alongside them and love them.¹⁰ I

⁸ Ibid., 49-51.

⁹ Ibid., 61-62.

¹⁰ Ibid., 135.

can affirm this. Not only do I know people with degrees, but they were also in good jobs. I think one of the problems in our churches is that we all know why these people are there. We will make statements like they don't need it. They are just lazy or abusing the system. Often, this is so far from the truth. It is important to learn their stories, not condemn them. I pray God will help us to love, support, and finds ways to lift them from this situation.

On the other hand, one of the issues I have with this book is implied in the conversation Mason had with his eight years old son Nehemiah after watching a video about people for sale in Libya. He said a team of CNN reporters traveled to Libya and witnessed smugglers auctioning off twelve migrant men as slaves, some for no more than \$400. His son started crying and asking, who are these people? His response was, these are our people. He said his son had never met any of them, but they looked like him, and he immediately understood the connection. I must first say that I admire Nehemiah's understanding and sympathy.¹¹ But my challenge is what I garnered from Mason's statement is that Nehemiah sympathized or should sympathize with these people because they had his skin color or share similar culture, values, etc., and not necessarily because they were made in God's image. I believe when we start to see people as God's image bearers, it will make a difference in how we respond to persons who look like and are different from us. We should also teach our children this.

The other issue I have is where he referenced 2 Corinthians 5:18, stating we have been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ. We rejoice in that truth. But in the gospel, man is not just reconciled to God by faith. Man is also reconciled to man by faith. Although what he said might be true, I don't think this particular verse speaks to man reconciling to man. It

¹¹ Ibid., 22-23.

appears he is trying to make Scripture fit into his argument. I believe verse 19-20 explains it. It starts by saying that is. In other words, which means "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you*, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

Take-a-ways

There are a few thoughts about the urban poor and the church that I take away based on reading this book. One of them is that the church has, from the beginning, been known for acting on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised. Not only that but we are expected to do the same. Eric Mason cited this. He used the example in Acts 6, where the Grecian widows were neglected.¹²

Secondly, the church often plays a significant role in grooming and shaping the urban poor early lives. As Mason states, it is where you find significance and purpose—from Vacation Bible School, substance abuse prevention, singing in choirs, trips to conferences, surrogate parents, discipline, and encouragement. He said that it was the first place he was told that he could sing and hear someone say, 'God's hand is on you for a mighty work.'¹³ I and many others can attest to this story.

Thirdly, it appears as if after God allows these persons who spent most of their lives in the rough to receive a good education and sometimes a good job, He seems to have a particular interest in sending them back to their community or to other inner cities to stay and minister to those they left behind. Again, Eric Mason is a prime example. He said, "when I was in Dallas and

¹² Ibid., 125.

¹³ Ibid., 99.

had my first experience living outside the inner city, I said I'd never go into the inner city again.”
“But God had a different plan. God wanted me back on the block.”¹⁴ I have seen this happening to a few persons/authors, for example, authors such as John Perkins and Noel Castellanos.

Application

As I read and wrote these takeaways, I wondered how to apply them. I conclude that I could be more intentional about looking out for and helping the frequently neglected and mistreated people. I could also adopt some of the activities and strategies employed by Mason. In that, I could be instrumental in creating a career path development and training program for those in need of this. Secondly, I could create enrichment programs for our children and young adults, such as educational trips, Bible studies, Vacation Bible School, mentoring programs, and retreats, to ensure they have the confidence and dignity needed to survive and, most importantly, to ensure they are molded and shaped into what God desires them to be. Thirdly, I should seek God more and be open to where He wants me to serve, even in my hometown.

Bibliography

Mason, Eric. *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid., 96-97.