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Book Analysis

*The Color of Compromise:
The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*
By Jemar Tisby

In the text, *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby focuses primarily on the role that the American church has played in history regarding the failure to advocate against racism. Although Tisby does acknowledge that there have been positive actions by the church, although his emphasis is on bringing the negligence done by the church in regards to advocating against racism historically to the forefront and addressing how the church has remained silent on issues of racism.

In addressing both religion and racism, the author clearly acknowledges the counterarguments with what he is addressing. His rationale for writing a text that he admits will be rejected by many. He is confident that the same counterarguments that will be presented as a result of his book, "are the same arguments that perpetuated racial inequality in decades past"¹. The author desires to bring to light and acknowledge that despite expressing a love for God and service to others, the church has failed and continues to fail in the fight against racism. His goals are acknowledgment, accountability, and action by the church.

He bluntly likens the reading of his text to, "having a sobering conversation with your doctor and hearing that the only way to cure a dangerous disease is by undergoing an uncomfortable surgery and ongoing rehabilitation. Although the truth cuts like a scalpel and may

¹ Jemar Tisby. *The Color of Compromise : The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, 2019, 21.

leave a scar, it offers healing and health. The progress is worth the pain”². *The Color of Compromise* is the first step to healing.

Tisby begins to develop his very compelling argument by providing some historical background and context. He refers back to the time of Christopher Columbus and his experience in North America. He addresses the way in which Christian Europeans used Scripture to cause racial divisions. This in essence, is the genesis of the fusion of racism and religion. He goes on to provide background information on the African Slave Trade and the Middle Passage. The author states, “The development of the idea of race required the intentional actions of people in the social, political, and religious spheres to decide that skin color determined who would be enslaved and who would be free. Over time Europeans, including Christians, wrote the laws and formed the habits that concentrated power in the hands of those they considered “white” while withholding equality from those they considered “black”³.

Tisby then provides the reader with a timeline of events from before and after the Revolutionary War, the Antebellum Era, the Civil War, the Jim Crow South, Civil Rights Movement in addition to other periods in American History. In doing this, Tisby traces how the genesis of the White church in America and its failure to advocate against racism and hopes the reader will trace this history, that he presents, and make the connections for themselves.

In the chapter “Defending Slavery at the Onset of the Civil War”, Tisby begins to introduce the idea that the Civil War was also in the Church and the Bible as well. He explains that both the South and North had very opposing interpretations of the Bible and that was key in the rationalization for slavery. Christians in the South used to argue that the biblical story of Ham in Genesis 9:24-25 (where Noah awakes from his drunkenness and curses Ham’s

² Tisby. *The Color of Compromise, : The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*, 22.

³ *Ibid*, 27.

descendants to be slaves), justifies slavery. On the other hand, Christians in the North argued that the teachings of Jesus taught the immorality of slavery.

The author presents many strengths in his writing of the text *The Color of Compromise*. There are three notable strengths worth mentioning, although there are additional strengths. The first strength is the author's use of language and vocabulary throughout the text. It was clear and easy to comprehend. A second strength is a way in which Tisby begins by presenting his rationale for the text, addressing that it may not be an easy read for some individuals and boldly acknowledges a list of counterarguments that can be made to his arguments.

A third strength is the short and succinct historical timeline of the church from the Colonial Era to the current *Black Lives Matter* Era. The way in which this timeline was presented was incredibly impressive. The way in which Tisby highlighted how the Bible was used to rationalize slavery and its progression over the centuries served as convincing support for his primary arguments in the complicity of the Church pertaining to racism and the call to action to, "practice courageous Christianity"⁴.

One weakness worth highlighting in the text is his idea that New seminaries that have incorporated antiracist ideas from their inception may be required....we need more of them"⁵. He acknowledges that many seminaries have made "admirable efforts" to reflect more diversity in their curriculum and the thought of creating new seminaries which will "incorporate antiracist ideas" seems unnecessary and extreme.

The Color of Compromise is a text that every follower of Jesus and everyone who is a part of a church should read. This is a text that will cause a great deal of reflection and will hopefully propel the church to take accountability for its "complicity in racism".

⁴ Ibid, 215.

⁵ Ibid, 204.

Bibliography

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