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### **Reading While Black**

Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope by Esau McCaulley is a thought-provoking book that challenges readers to consider how Black Christians approach and interpret the Bible. McCaulley, an assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and a priest in the Anglican Church in North America, offers a unique perspective on the intersection of race, culture, and religion.

The thesis of Reading While Black is that African American biblical interpretation is an exercise in hope. Esau McCaulley argues that the Black experience in America informs Black Christian interpretation of the Bible, and that Black Christians can find hope and inspiration in the Bible's message of liberation and justice for the oppressed. McCaulley also challenges traditional interpretations of the Bible that perpetuate racism and discrimination, and encourages Black Christians to engage in theological discourse and contribute to the wider Christian community. The book's central argument is that the unique perspective of Black Christians is an important and valuable contribution to biblical interpretation and theological discourse.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, McCaulley examines the Black experience in America and how it informs Black Christian interpretation of the Bible. He argues that Black Christians, who have historically been marginalized and oppressed, can find hope and

inspiration in the Bible, which tells the story of a God who liberates the oppressed and brings justice to the marginalized.

In the second part of the book, McCaulley explores various biblical texts and shows how they speak to the Black experience. He highlights the stories of the Exodus, the book of Job, and the New Testament letter to the Hebrews as particularly relevant to Black Christians. He also challenges readers to reconsider the traditional interpretation of certain biblical passages, such as the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, which has been used to justify racism and discrimination.

The third part of the book focuses on how Black Christians can use their unique perspective to contribute to the larger Christian community. McCaulley encourages Black Christians to engage in theological discourse and to challenge traditional interpretations of the Bible that perpetuate racism and discrimination. He also calls on the wider Christian community to listen to the voices of Black Christians and to learn from their experiences.

There are several strengths in the book, the first being the strengths of *Reading While Black* is that it offers a unique perspective on biblical interpretation. Esau McCaulley draws from his own experience as a Black Christian and his knowledge of African American history and culture to offer insights into how Black Christians interpret and relate to the Bible. This perspective is valuable and important, as it offers a different lens through which to view biblical texts and theological concepts.

Next, McCaulley's writing is clear and accessible, making the book easy to read and understand. He presents his arguments in a logical and organized manner, and uses examples and anecdotes to illustrate his points. This makes the book appealing to a wide audience, including both scholars and lay readers.

The third strength of the book is that it challenges traditional interpretations of the Bible that perpetuate racism and discrimination. McCaulley offers new insights into familiar texts and argues for a more inclusive and compassionate interpretation of the Bible. This is an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about race, religion, and social justice, and has the potential to inspire meaningful change within the Christian community.

A critique of *Reading While Black*, is that the book focuses primarily on the African American experience, and may not be as relevant or accessible to readers from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. While McCaulley acknowledges this limitation in the book, some readers may feel that the book is not inclusive enough in its scope.

Another potential critique is that the book could have provided more concrete examples of how Black Christians have historically interpreted the Bible, and how these interpretations have contributed to the broader Christian tradition. While McCaulley offers insights into specific texts and themes, readers may have benefited from more detailed and contextualized examples of Black Christian interpretation.

While *Reading While Black* is primarily focused on biblical interpretation and the African American experience, there are some important takeaways from the book that can inform leadership development. One of the key lessons from the book is the importance of perspective-taking and empathy in leadership. McCaulley argues that Black Christians offer a unique perspective on biblical interpretation and theology, and that this perspective can be a valuable contribution to the broader Christian community. Leaders who are able to appreciate and incorporate diverse perspectives are better equipped to make informed decisions and build more inclusive and equitable organizations.

Another important takeaway from the book is the need for leaders to challenge traditional interpretations and practices that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. McCaulley argues that traditional interpretations of the Bible have been used to justify racism and oppression, and that it is important to critically examine these interpretations and seek out more inclusive and compassionate understandings. Leaders who are able to question the status quo and promote more inclusive and equitable practices are better positioned to build more just and effective organizations.

Finally, *Reading While Black* underscores the importance of hope and resilience in leadership. McCaulley argues that the Bible offers a message of liberation and justice for the oppressed, and that this message can provide hope and inspiration in challenging times. Leaders who are able to cultivate hope and resilience in themselves and their teams are better equipped to navigate uncertainty and adversity, and to build organizations that are able to withstand challenges and promote positive change.

There are three ways to implement the takeaways from *Reading While Black* into your life and ministry. First, to implement the lesson of perspective-taking and empathy, make an effort to seek out diverse perspectives in your personal and professional life. This can involve reading books by authors from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, seeking out the opinions of people with different life experiences, or intentionally building more diverse teams in your ministry or organization. By incorporating diverse perspectives, you can make more informed and equitable decisions, and build a more inclusive and welcoming community.

Second, to put into action the lesson of challenging traditional interpretations and practices, make a commitment to critically examine your own beliefs and assumptions, and seek out more inclusive and equitable practices. This could involve questioning traditional

interpretations of scripture, advocating for more inclusive policies and practices in your organization or community, or actively working to dismantle systemic discrimination and inequality. By taking action to challenge the status quo, you can contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Lastly, to apply the lesson of hope and resilience, focus on cultivating practices that promote well-being and positivity in your personal and professional life. This could involve practicing self-care, engaging in activities that bring you joy and fulfillment, seeking out supportive relationships, or cultivating a sense of purpose and meaning in your work. By building resilience and hope, you can better navigate challenging times and inspire others to do the same.

In conclusion, Esau McCaulley's *Reading While Black* offers a valuable and unique perspective on biblical interpretation and theology from the African American experience. McCaulley challenges traditional interpretations of scripture that have perpetuated racism and discrimination and offers new insights into familiar texts and themes. The book is well-written, clear, and accessible, making it appealing to a wide audience.

While the book may have some limitations in terms of its scope and depth, it nonetheless offers important takeaways for leadership development, including the importance of perspective-taking, the need to challenge the status quo, and the cultivation of hope and resilience. These lessons can be applied in both personal and professional contexts to promote more inclusive, equitable, and just organizations and communities.

Overall, *Reading While Black* is a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about race, religion, and social justice, and has the potential to inspire meaningful change within the Christian community and beyond.