

UR714 Leadership Development in the Urban Church

Dr. Nathaniel Perez & Dr. Charles Galbreath - Spring 2023

Reading While Black Book Analysis

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The subtitle of this book encompasses it all, an African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope. Dr. McCaulley engages the scripture with the black experience in a way that brings forth affirmation and hope. "I read biblical commentaries that displayed little concern for how biblical texts speak to the experiences of Black believers." (page 12) "I felt a strong call to dig deep into the roots of the Black Christian tradition to help me navigate the complexities of Black existence in the United States." (Page 13) Dr. McCaulley paints the picture of the culture and highlights the disparity between the gospel that is preached, and the way African Americans are treated by the Caucasian Christians. He also highlights the lack of representation of the culture. "Couldn't shake the feeling that voices were missing." (Page 14) Dr. McCaulley's aim is to dissect, key elements of the early Black theological enterprise especially as it relates to the practice of Bible reading. (Page 16) He claims that the black biblical interpretation can be unapologetically canonical and theological; socially located, in that it clearly arises out of the particular context of Black Americans; willing to listen to the ways in which the Scriptures themselves respond to and redirect Black issues and concerns; willing to exercise patience with the text trusting that a careful and sympathetic reading of the text brings a blessing; and willing to listen to and enter into dialogue with Black and white critiques of the Bible in the hopes of achieving a better reading of the text." (Page 21) Each chapter highlights an important factor in the black experience and compare what the bible has to say about it. He tries to answer questions regarding the New Testament theology on policing and the political protest with the witness of the church, pursuit of justice, black identity, black anger, slavery, and how do we exercise hope. Dr. McCaulley makes a case for police reform using the scriptures and created a parallel learning from Roman soldiers to modern day policing. He highlights the actual definition of policing in Paul's time and argues that Romans 13:1-7 asserts God's sovereignty over state, emphasizes our

limited human discernment, and the power structures. God will remove evil rulers by using human beings to prevent further wicked governing from the likes of the Hebrew Midwives, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He highlights that Paul focuses on those who control the sword and not the individual and further argues that it's about being a good steward of what you have authority over, not act like God the creator himself and to not instill fear in those they govern. Dr. McCaulley ties in John the Baptist from the gospel of Luke and defines extortion as not only of money but using one's power to prey on the weak. By doing this, the author gives the reader agency to speak up against evil doing without fear and to trust, that God will remove those who need not be in power. These same texts of scriptures also highlight how important political advocacy. Dr. McCaulley highlights that we are called to be peace makers. Paul calls us to pray in 1Timothy2:1-4, Jesus criticizes Herod's character, and then Jesus calls us to be peacemakers in Matthew 5:9. The author wants the readers to also know that having Luke canon to the bible is a testimony to God's value of all ethnic groups, since Luke is a Gentile. "Luke's Gospel argues that God always intended to create an international, multiethnic community for his own glory." (Page 75) Throughout the gospel of Luke, the stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth, addressing Theophilus, Mary's testimony, Jesus's identity as Son of God and His kingship's link to justice, the distortion of scripture from Satan, and how God values the undervalued is the pursuit of justice and it is all biblical. Dr. McCaulley helps to change the whitewashed perspective of the bible by highlighting the presence of Africans. "The center of early Christianity was in the Middle East and North Africa. The energy of the biblical story after the fall finds its footing in the promises made to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. In the stories of Ephraim and Manasseh, we see that this promise was first fulfilled by bringing two African boys into the people of God. We saw the inclusion of Africans again reiterated when a multiethnic

group of people left Egypt. We see the vision become flesh throughout the conversion of Africans: Simon and his family as well as the Ethiopian eunuch. Finally, when we meet our savior, we do not come to him as faceless horde but as transformed believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation.” (Page 117) Dr. McCaulley reconciles black anger by finding hope and forgiveness in and through the cross, suggesting the central biblical themes of Jesus’s resurrection, ascension, and final judgment as God entering into our pain and therefore ending the cycle of vengeance and death. The authors attempt in interpreting what does the bible really say about slavery, and how do we reconcile its weaponization during a very wicked time in history. There isn’t scripture that is explicit in condemning the slavery that took place in early American history. However, Dr. McCaulley highlights the character of God by how He has saved figures in the bible and even the laws regarding slavery that did not implicitly allow the mistreatment of human beings. The author concludes with an exercise of hope that we would have patience with the biblical text rooted in the confidence that God has willed our good and not our harm. (Page 165)

Dr. McCaulley’s target audience is for those who want to know how we can reconcile the very gospel that was used to oppress a whole race. The attempt to interpret the bible and highlight the possible blind spots from either, culture and community, or the intentional hindrance from the oppressors. The three strengths Dr. McCaulley has in his book are the way he exegetes the scriptures, the personal and relevant testimonies he weaved throughout the book, and confronting topics that conflict with the black experience and Christianity. His goal was to help bridge the need to go to one source for theological analysis and another for social practice. (Page 14) It’s so hard to find a critique as it is so eloquently written. I would have liked more from the author, in regards to the slave bible and which scriptures were used for oppression.

Only for those who may not know all of the African American experience in the United States history. The author does a great job explaining his personal experience, maybe add more scripture to the opposing side. He does mention that was one of his critiques and even added a bonus chapter to the biblical interpretation.

My main takeaway from this book is really examining what is the heart of the Father and get into alignment. “They claimed that God is fundamentally a liberator. The character of Jesus, who though innocent suffered unjustly at the hands of an empire, resonated on a deep level with the plight of the enslaved Black person.” (Page 17) It is so hard to reconcile the brutality of the black experience in America and the overall racism throughout the world, even worse by the hands of “Christians” and I believe Dr. McCaulley is off to a great start helping us interpret the bible text. I’m reminded of Paul letting us know what happens now in the last days, the days since Jesus’s ascension. “You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! They are the kind who work their way into people’s homes and win the confidence of vulnerable women who are burdened with the guilt of sin and controlled by various desires. (Such women are forever following new teachings, but they are never able to understand the truth.) These teachers oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. They have depraved minds and a counterfeit faith. But they won’t get away with this for long. Someday everyone will recognize what fools

they are, just as with Jannes and Jambres.” 2 Timothy 3:1-9, NLT The last takeaway is the importance of reading scripture and understanding context. “Where does the Bible address the hopes of Black folks, and why is this question not pressing in a community that has historically been alienated from Black Christians.” (Page 12)

In my own ministry context to apply these takeaways is to speak out and correct misinterpreted scripture. Dig deeper in the word for these problem areas that have been misconstrued and misrepresented. There is real hurt at the hands of “Christians”, and I want to help reconcile what has been perceived and what is God really telling us. I do need to lower my expectations of others when they choose to be racist and abuse their power. I have the agency to vote and advocate for those marginalized and disenfranchised at the same time must trust God’s divine timing and that this is His battle. Taking the time to reflect on how I can partner with God in what He is doing in the context and arena I’m in. Whether it’s soul care, racial reconciliation, speaking up and correcting those who are taking advantage of others. We are called to be good stewards of what we have been given, that goes for me as well in my area of influence.