

Book Analysis - Faithful Antiracism

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UR714: Leadership Development in the Urban Church

April 29, 2022

*Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* is a book cowritten by Christina Barland Edmondson and Chad Brennan. Published in 2022, part of its goals are to take into account all of the new events and responses to those events that have come out of the last couple of years. The authors' main purpose is to "help readers to apply the teachings of the Bible and take practical steps for measurable change."<sup>1</sup> Because the main focus of the book is action, they come into it with the assumption that their reader has already done a good deal of research into racism, and therefore they only "touch on essential concepts."<sup>2</sup> That said, their touches are very clear and well laid out, and remarkably thorough given the statement that they would not go into too much detail. *Faithful Antiracism* is organized in chapter that describe what faithful antiracists are or what faithful antiracists do, for example "Faithful antiracists have wisdom," and "faithful antiracists understand racial trauma."<sup>3</sup> At the end of each chapter, there are discussion questions and a recommended prayer to pray. Each chapter has a few elements that show up most of the time. There is data and explanation for the data, there is a theological or Biblical part, and there are concrete suggestions for action, although the first seven chapters skew more towards information while chapters eight through 11 skew more towards the practical and concrete action side of things. The foreword states that the book "is for any person or group that wants to understand an implement a biblical approach to undoing systems of white supremacy in their personal lives and this world."<sup>4</sup> The discussion questions make it easily accessible for a group book study.

A strength of the book is that they frequently include common questions that could be asked either in true ignorance or in an attempt to refute the data the authors present or their

1 Emerson, x

2 Edmondson & Brennan, 7

3 Edmondson & Brennan, 7

4 Edmondson & Brennan, 11, 107

conclusions from this data. With each question, they also include an answer to the question. They also include suggestions for extra resources throughout, such as recommending the Bible Project's video on justice within their chapter "Faithful Antiracists Apply the Bible." Another strength is that they are very clear about where they source their data for their graphs, and whenever they are discussing events or someone else's work, everything is well cited and clear. When discussing things that might be controversial, such as "belief in white superiority in our society today," their descriptions of different types of white superiority are very clear and well stated.<sup>5</sup> A last strength is that the book strikes a good balance between its elements. There is never so much data that the reader feels overwhelmed. There is never so much diving into Biblical ideas that the reader feels like the practical is neglected. There is never so much practical suggestions that the reader feels like they cannot do what needs to be done. It is a hard balance to strike, but the authors did a good job.

One critique, and this is truly minuscule, is that sometimes the yellow fonts used for emphasis actually made it hard to read the words. I think it would have been especially hard on people with bad eyesight. They use three different shades of yellow, and while the darkest one is fine, the middle one is difficult, and the lightest one sometimes almost looks like it is fading into the page. This may also just be a printing issue with my particular copy. Another small critique comes in "faithful antiracists follow the example of the early Christians." I would have liked to have actually seen the full Scripture there so that I could better follow the way they were interpreting and applying the Scripture. That said, I understand that doing so would have made the chapter, and therefore the book, much longer, and I appreciate the fact that they did their best

<sup>5</sup> Edmondson & Brennan, 83

to keep the book as succinct as possible so that it was always moving forward and never got bogged down.

All in all this book is quite useful. Not only is it a great book to read through in its entirety, its layout is such that once it has been read, it can almost be used like an encyclopedia to look up certain issues or events. This makes it easier to use across a period of time, versus reading it, remarking on what a great book it is, wanting to put everything into practice, and then never picking it up again or if you do, never finding what it was that you wanted to remember. The appendix of key terms and the appendix of interviews also aid in making this a good resource for continued use rather than single use. Not only is it a good resource to put into play in the readers' lives, its questions that are refuted as discussed earlier, makes it a great resource when preparing to talk with someone who does not necessarily believe that we need antiracism. I know that I definitely found parts of it challenging and convicting. I also appreciate the look at previous attempts at racial justice, or ways in which people are currently trying to promote equality, such as the "80/20 standard" discussed in "faithful antiracists do not rely on magic."<sup>6</sup> It is easy for people to try their best to see justice done, but forget to keep abreast of what is helpful and what is not, what is relevant and what is not, what actually works, and what does not. Looking at these practices honestly, but without condemnation, helps those who might currently be using these practices to update their understanding.

A good takeaway is from the "draft a nicer black person" section of the chapter "faithful antiracists understand racial trauma."<sup>7</sup> It is incredibly important that church leadership take stock and ensure that they are not retraumatizing members of their congregation, especially people of

<sup>6</sup> Edmondson & Brennan, 131

<sup>7</sup> Edmondson & Brennan, 138

color, through their good intentions. This is especially important in congregations that want to be multiethnic and multicultural, and triply so when the leaders of those congregations are primarily, mostly, or entirely made up of White Christians. A second good takeaway is the importance of always being humble and teachable. Edmondson and Brennan discuss how sometimes people's desire to be "knowledgeable and motivated in regard to racial justice efforts...can become a major barrier to them becoming a faithful antiracist."<sup>8</sup> As leaders, not only do we need to always remember that we are always reliant on God, we have to be humble and teachable by other people. Believing we know too much or have done too much to be taught causes us to miss out on many things that may bless not only us but those around us and those we wish to advocate for. A last good takeaway comes from the fact that the authors do a great job in "faithful antiracists follow the example of the early Christians" in doing sound Biblical exegesis and application for today from Acts. Understanding how the Bible applies to today's issues, but not twisting Scripture and taking it out of context so that it applies to a pet issue that you have, is critical in good church leadership. The authors walk their readers through passages, explain what was happening within the passage, apply it to a common scenario via a story, and discuss what Christians should be doing within these scenarios. It is also a great example of a good way to run a Bible study.

A good significance for ministry comes in "Faithful Antiracists Stand for Justice." Within the chapter, Edmondson and Brennan present a list of four ways that people take a partial stand for racial justice and an explanation of what those entail: "secret stand, theoretical stand, selective stand, limited stand." I think that it is important to have the verbiage to be able to talk to those people within ministry context who are employing one of these so that we can move

towards a more complete picture of what actually standing for justice looks like. Another good significance comes in the chapter on racial trauma. There are a couple of good exercises that Edmondson put in that would be useful to go through, both as individuals and collectively, especially in evaluating the last couple of years. A last good takeaway is basically the entire chapter “faithful antiracists effectively measure progress.”<sup>9</sup> I have had a few conversations with people who have found it difficult to measure whether progress that they feel is happening is true progress or not. The RJUC assessment tools discussed seem like they could be useful in helping people to actually measure progress versus surface level pandering.

<sup>9</sup> Edmondson & Brennan, 180