BOOKS I HAVE READ: IS CHRISTIANITY THE WHITE MAN'S RELIGION?

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Imagine a little dark-skinned baby born to an unmarried peasant girl named Mary. Impregnated under odd circumstances, Mary had already resisted any potential temptation to terminate her pregnancy. Then, shortly after the babyâ€™s birth, his poor, dark-skinned mom and stepdad were warned to flee as refugees to Egypt because of Herodâ€™s threat of infanticide.
Category: Observations

Spoiler alert: the answer is no!

> ***Among many young people of color, there is a growing wariness about organized religion and Christianity in particular.***Â *If Christianity is for everyone, why does the Bible seem to endorse slavery? Why do most popular images of Jesus feature a man with white skin and blue eyes? Is evangelical Christianity "good news" or a tool of white supremacy?*
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> *From the book description on Amazon*

Is Christianity the White Man's Religion: How the Bible is Good News for People of Color tackles these and other questions head-on. This is an important and useful book for understanding some of the underlying issues surrounding different communities and how the church could and should respond to them. Its focus is on the United States, but there is still much here that would benefit readers in other countries.

As far as I can tell, the book is not available in paperback yet and the hardback is out of stock on Amazon. The hardback is a medium sized book of 168 pages, including extensive notes and references.The style is popular, any regular reader would be able to tackle it without problem. The Kindle version will currently set you back Â£5.40. I obtained my copy direct from the publishers on a recent free offer.

The author, Antipas L. Harris is an African American theologian and activist. The issues he talks about in this book are not theoretical, they emerge out of his own experience and from the experience of his friends and colleagues. There are times that it is hard to believe that some of these things have happened.

The book consists of four broad sections.

The Church and Threatening Contemporary Ideas. In this section, Harris outlines some of the challenges facing the church in the United States. These included a rejection of Christianity by many in the millennial generation and the attraction of alternative spiritualities to people of colour, who find the church to be inhospitable.

Have We Been Taught to Misread the Bible? Here, Harris moves away from a focus on the current

situation in the United States and starts to examine broader issues. To this Brit, it was at this point that the book really took off. Issues such as the Bible being used to justify slavery and apartheid are dealt with as is the question of why so many images of Biblical characters portray them as apparently having Scandinavian origins. The Bible is presented as being a much richer and ethnically diverse book than it is sometimes portrayed.

A Faith That Cares About People From Different Cultures. This takes the discussion from the previous section a step further. It clearly demonstrates that if we are to take the Bible seriously, then we must care about people from other cultures and that this care must extend beyond seeing them as targets for evangelism.

Where Do We Go From Here? The Streets Are Waiting. The final section is practical in orientation and builds on the earlier arguments in the book. It includes a short section on the author's reasons from leaving academia to take up a role as a social-activist.

This is a good and helpful book. There are works that go into some of the issues more deeply, but the strength of this one is its breadth, rather than its depth. A lot of ground is covered in a short space and that is very helpful for anyone trying to get to grips with what is a complex subject.

Who should read it? I'd strongly suggest that anyone leading a church in the USA should have it on their "to read" list and, until something similar is published with a British focus, I think a lot of people on this side of the pond could benefit from it, too. I'd also suggest that it would form excellent background reading for anyone preparing for cross-cultural or diaspora mission in any context.

As usual, a series of quotes which struck me.

> *They are interested in spirituality, social justice, personal significance, and how to live a good life. Studies show that millennials are reading more than any other adult generation. But they are not reading the Bible! The church and the Bible are no longer where they look for answers.*

> *Also, the gift of listening is crucial when discipling others. Listening will help the church develop better strategies to re-envision the faith altogether. Top-down approaches will strangle the future of faith. Listening draws in perspectives that are often overlooked and aids*

in the development of more compassionate ministries.

Afrocentric religious movements such as Black Muslims, black nationalists, Rastafarians, and Black Hebrew Israelites stand on urban street corners and unabashedly proclaim that Christianity is the white manâ€™s religion! And, yes, young people are listening to them and joining their movements by the thousands.

Theologically speaking, it seems of little importance to know the color of the historical Jesus. Jesus loves the world and offered himself as Savior for everyone. Yet the question of historical identity is on many peopleâ€™s minds. Deeper than the physical features, they are concerned that perhaps Jesus canâ€™t really understand life in the ghettos and barrios. Everyone wants a Savior with whom they can relate. The musician needs to know that Jesus loves their music. The pilot needs to know that Jesus is in the airplane as it flies across the skies. The business executive needs to know that Jesus is in the boardroom to help close a deal. This is why the spirit of Christ is central to theological discourse. Jesus is present with us daily by the Holy Spirit.

To have a serious conversation about biblical interpretation, one must confront the problem of colonial readings of Scripture that have permeated Western Christian history since the sixteenth century.

We must not continue to trick ourselves into thinking that peopleâ€™s experiences are not important when interpreting Scripture. Of course, we must be faithful to the text, but human experience is as a significant part of interpreting the Word of God in Scripture. Yet, almost without fail, Western European models of biblical interpretation assume the dominant voice heard in American liberal and conservative, Catholic and Evangelical churches.

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infanticide.

In the West, spirituality is generally thought of as a private and internal affair. Many have been indoctrinated to believe the Christian faith is only for the salvation of our souls and, as a result, we only engage Jesus in light of what he did on the cross for our benefit. Most churches talk about Christâ€™s death and resurrection with his ministry relegated to the background. There is much more to Jesusâ€™ life and ministry. Without a doubt, Christâ€™s death and resurrection are the central tenets of Christianity; however, if his death and resurrection are separated from his teaching and historical context, their meaning becomes distorted. Jesusâ€™ ministry cannot be overlooked if we are to engage the fullness of his revelation in the Scriptures. His ministry provides deep insight into the way in which God has chosen to redeem and restore humanity.

However, many conservative evangelicals tend to lose sight of the seriousness of a society plagued by the sin of social injustice. Sadly, they say they preach against sin but do very little to challenge sinful systems that colonized forms of Christianity set in motionâ€"systems that have perpetuated social injustice.

The church, as God intends, consists of people of all nations, cultures, and languages. It is notâ€"nor does it belong toâ€"any one nation, culture, and language. In the church, we have the opportunity to experience that completeness of color, a united front with anyone and everyone facing the throne of God. How can we face the throne of God when we have not learned that God is a God of diversity?

Given the upsurge of suspicion about faith, the Christian mission must not focus on growing churches. It must turn its gaze toward showing the world how Jesus came to love them, affirm their humanity, and offer them hope in despair.

Imagine that instead of instructing Peter to â€œfeed my sheep,â€ Jesus had said, â€œBe sure you announce your doctrine and political affiliation.â€ The idea may seem laughable, but mainstream and evangelical churches in America may be doing just thatâ€"twisting the

> *gospel into a confessional religion and a political platform.*

> *In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, â€œOn this rock I will build my church.â€ The church is Godâ€™s idea, so any extensions must remain participants in Christâ€™s mission for the church. Too often people with great zeal for God build PCOs (para-church organisations) because they have a passion for a particular ministry and are frustrated that their local church is not attending to the need as effectively as they think they should. However, every believer is called to be part of the body of Christ. To ensure that new believers are properly involved in a local body of believers, parachurch ministries need a seamless connection with the local church. Otherwise, their efforts are relegated to humanitarian efforts, or worse, they share Godâ€™s love in the world but perpetuate the epidemic of unchurched people.*