BOOKS I HAVE READ: CAN WHITE PEOPLE BE SAVED?

Posted on February 12, 2021 by Eddie

Not a comfortable book for an old, white bloke,
but a very worthwhile read.
Category: Observations

I have to admit to feeling slightly perturbed having read this book. Partly, this is is because it spends a good deal of time pointing out how people like me and my predecessors have not always been the force for good in the world that we like to think we have been. However, it is also because it uses concepts and language in ways with which I am unfamiliar. This is not a criticism of the book, which I think is good, but it did take me a while to get round some of the things it was saying.

Can White People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology and Mission is a medium format paperback of around 350 pages and will set you back around Â£17. It is pitched at a fairly academic level. It emerged out of a series of lectures at the Fuller School of Intercultural Studies. Like all multi-author books, there are differences in style and quality between the various chapters. Some of the stuff is excellent, some less so.

The first issue to deal with is the deliberately provocative title. The book is not questioning whether eternal salvation is available to white people. What it addresses is what it calls whiteness, a social, political, economic and theological construct that places white people in a place of power, authority and privilege. The question is can people who trust to their whiteness be saved - initially from their whiteness?

It would be easy to dismiss this as so much "wokeness" and no doubt many people will do so. However, when you read Native Americans, Latins and Indians talking about the way in which white people, including evangelical Christians have used privilege to marginalise and destroy their (Native American etc) societies you cannot simply ignore it.

The book has five sections, each consisting of two chapters:

- Race and Place at the Dawn of Modernity
- Race and the Colonial Enterprise
- Race and Mission to Latin America
- Race in North America: Between and Beyond Black and White
- Scriptural Reconsiderations and Ethnoracial Considerations

I can't begin to capture the various arguments in this book in a short review, but I will put a few quotes below. In the meantime, who should read it? It should certainly be on the shelves of any missionary training institution and those who are interested in the issues raised in the different sections should find a way to read them. Frankly, anyone working in a multi-racial context either at

home or abroad should be aware of this book and would profit from reading parts, if not all of it.

It was not a comfortable read, but I'm very glad I read it.

> *This is not to label all evangelicals so implicated as bigots or racists, but it is to worry around about how fear of living in a radically multiethnic country is strong enough to drive members of the body of Christ to embrace profoundly un-Christian behaviours and actors. It is to worry that racism is tightening its grip on the evangelical psyche, resulting in idolatry of the first order.*
>
> *From the Introduction*

> *Deloria's analysis tends to presume that there is only one meaning of the Bible, and that is the meaning as defined by Western Christianity. However, while the biblical text may be inerrant or infallible, there is no inerrant or infallible reader of the text. Often what we presume to be true of the Bible is primality the result of the history of European interpretation as translated into European languages.*
>
> *Andrea Smith p.54*

> *The missionary enterprise has engendered many issues, modalities, and controversies since its global inception, In an effort to seek contextual relevance, missionary agents have endeavoured to develop meaningful paradigms that will reconcile both faith and practice. The Great Commission never operates in a vacuum; it must connect with various social, cultural, political and economic realities. Christian mission has been tested in different contexts and been enhanced and supported by colonial trappings and indigenous initiatives. It has also been shaped by several societal conditions and circumstances, always enduring the. test of time and producing many movements and organisations. These are some of the nonnegotiable facts about Christian mission.*
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> *Akitunde Akinade. P 98*

> *The crux of the issue in our contemporary world is how to construct missiological paradigms that contribute to human dignity and flourishing. Mission is about standing together to*

> *proclaim the good news. It is firmly based on building bridges, not walls. It is unequivocally anchored in the transformative power of the gospel. Mission promises a prophetic profile and template that can move communities beyond tragedy. "Lord I believe; help though mine unbelief". (Mk 9:24 KJV).*
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> *Akitunde Akinade p. 119*