

Review: Reading While Black

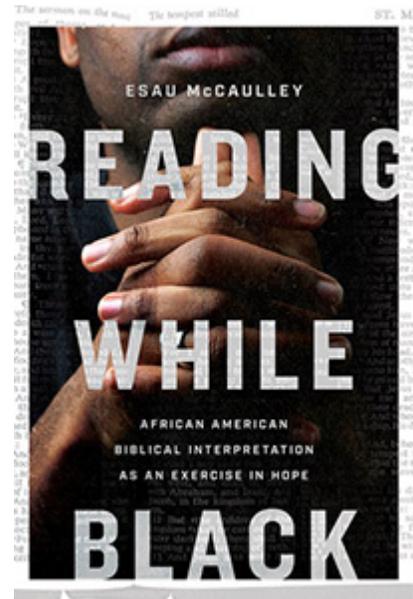
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Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope

By Esau McCaulley (InterVarsity Academic)

Reading While Black is a book for today. Not only does Esau McCaulley take on current pressing topics, but he is just beginning an illustrious career readers will want to follow.

White evangelicals and progressives long have debated methods of biblical interpretation and how much culture plays into accurate readings of gender and sexuality in the Bible.



Black readers often are left alienated by these debates, not because they don't share evangelical or progressive views, but because they navigate additional layers long ignored by these debates.

Black readers of the Bible find themselves responding to "Black

secularists” and other non-Christians in the Black community who criticize Christianity as a slaveholder—or white—religion.

From this angle, when Black evangelicals agree with their white counterparts, they are accused of colluding with the oppressors. When they agree with Black progressives on matters of justice, they are accused by white evangelicals of unorthodoxy.

McCaulley offers a Black reading of Scripture that unashamedly holds to that difficult position amid all the layers. In academic terms, it is the “Black ecclesial interpretive model.” In lay terms, McCaulley describes a means of understanding the Bible rooted in the Black church and its oral tradition.

McCaulley prescribes “a hermeneutic of trust in which we are patient with the text (of the Bible) in the belief that when interpreted properly it will bring a blessing and not a curse. This means that we do the hard work of reading the text closely, attending to historical context, grammar, and structure.”

Acknowledging that the Black ecclesial interpretive model is not new with him, McCaulley goes back to the earliest teachings of Black pastors and theologians in the United States. He demonstrates their belief that Scripture offered both eternal and temporal salvation—freedom from sin and freedom from physical enslavement—not only spiritual freedom beyond earthly life.

He addresses the role of policing, the political witness of the church, justice, race in the Bible, what to do with anger, and slavery and freedom. Based on his treatment of just this set of topics, McCaulley has much more to teach us.

McCaulley studied under the direction of N.T. Wright while a doctoral student at the University of St. Andrews. Those who have read Wright’s books will recognize the tutor in the student.

Reading While Black is written to Black readers. White readers are guests who will come away blessed with an expanded view of Scripture and God's people.

Eric Black, executive director, publisher and editor

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