



Change Agent Church in Black Lives Matter Times: Urgency for Action

Valerie A. Miles-Tribble

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This vital study represents years of scholarly work by Valerie Miles-Tribble, who serves as an associate professor of ministerial leadership and practical theology at Graduate Theological Union/Berkeley School of Theology. In light of Eric Garner “being choked while saying, ‘I can’t breathe,’ and dying while detained in that chokehold on a city street by New York police,” she asks the question: “Where’s the church?” She spends the next 477 pages determining where the church is and laying out a course to where she believes the church should be (1).

For this work Miles-Tribble employs a womanist lens with interdisciplinary, contextual approaches, and theoethics praxis in her dense and well-footnoted volume. She achieves both her goals: to provide “a relevant, multilayered resource that offers academic points of discourse and stimulates further analysis” and “to encourage Christian pastors—as leaders, practitioners, and theologians—to integrate public witness into their vocational roles of justice leadership” as she situates Black Lives Matter (BLM) within a broader era (5, 7).

The volume is organized into three parts. The first part offers societal perspectives. The three chapters in this section explore the argument for congregations and clergy to be change agents, problematic issues in the practice of being a change agent, and societal complexities in the reconstruction, segregationist, and integrationist eras as well as examining the differences between the Civil Rights era and BLM. In particular, Chapter 2, “Toxic Silence,” provides an important discussion on avoidable pitfalls such as sexism, classism, ego, and hierarchy as well as supporting literature in these areas. Part Two presents theoethical perspectives and Part Three provides two chapters of contextual perspectives “to equip or prepare congregants for social reform ministry activism in the public square” (49).

Immersion in this volume is like joining a massive interdisciplinary, scholarly conversation. It provides an important roadmap to the scholarly literature and the BLM movement. Although this volume was finished before the BLM voices of 2020, it is timely for current discussions and valuable for historical perspective. Because of this volume’s price point and its complexity, this book is not the best buy for individual clergy or congregations who are seeking a how-to manual. But, this volume should be in academic libraries seeking cross-disciplinary impact in the theological disciplines, education and formation, leadership, and social sciences.