

Robert Chao Romero and Jeff M. Liou. *Christianity and Critical Race Theory: A Faithful and Constructive Conversation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 196 pages. \$21.46.

Critical Race Theory has become a flashpoint of social and political tension not only in our divided country but also among evangelical Christians. Romero and Liou argue CRT is often mischaracterized and misunderstood. If employed with discernment, it can be a valuable tool for Christians desiring to promote God's vision for humanity. Through their experiences as Asian-Latino (Romero) and Asian (Liou) Americans and through lenses of ethics, Scripture, and theology, the authors offer their voices of reason to the conversation. Romero and Liou critique evangelical Christianity's tendency toward color-blind and individualistic theology, while also calling into account destructive and divisive aspects of CRT from a biblical frame of reference. They suggest a useful overlap between CRT and Christian theology that opens possibilities for realizing the hope of beloved community.

In the introduction, the authors lay the groundwork for the discussion by explaining their social locations and defining Critical Race Theory. They suggest CRT can be held in productive tension with Christian theology and discuss the consequences of a selective, individual-focused theological framework that excuses ecclesial inaction. They delimit the scope of subsequent chapters, explaining their examination of CRT will take place through the doctrinal narratives of creation, sin, redemption, and consummation (eschatology).

Chapter 1 exposes racist educational trends of viewing "communities of color as sites of cultural poverty and disadvantage" (29) and the attempt to "solve" the problem by homogenizing all cultures into the dominant white, middle-class culture. Demonstrating how CRT and Scripture both resist the "cultural deficit" picture, they point out how CRT educational scholars focus on various communities' unique "cultural wealth" and how that aligns with the eschatological picture of God bringing "the glory and honor of the nations" into the temple—not as heavenly homogenization but as a treasure of diverse creation. The authors provide a historical backdrop for the construction and maintenance of racial categories, how racism became "ordinary," and how systemic racism has functioned in society, and then juxtapose that picture with the vision of community in Revelation.

Chapter 2 compares the "ordinariness" of racism with the pervasive nature of sin and suggests that just as individual sins do not constitute the fullness of the "sin" problem, individual attitudes do not constitute the broad problem of racism. The authors delve into explanations of sin and atonement. While they break down some of the problems with aligning the "legal theory" of CRT with the "theological concept" of sin, they show compatibility between the two views and explain why it is important to see the problem as systemic in order to move toward a solution.

Chapter 3 shares narratives to show how racial issues function in the church and religious educational institutions. They explain the "voice of color thesis" which states that people of color who live racialized experiences are best situated to understand and create solutions for the problems. The CRT voice of color thesis aligns with the biblical model of the body of Christ, where each distinctive part is necessary to the whole. The authors believe institutional colorblindness can be resisted through the voice of color thesis and counterstories, along with examples of the early church recognizing and responding to racially-charged situations without being colorblind to the people in them.

Chapter 4 explains Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of a beloved community and contends that the church should live into this vision now, not only in some future realm.

However, CRT's vision is limited and is susceptible to an endless roundabout of "rhetorical violence" (153). The chapter concludes with the ultimate counterstory in Revelation, distinguishing the "gloomy" eschaton of CRT with the eschaton of Scripture.

The book concludes with an appeal to church leaders and educators, and a word of encouragement to those bearing the wounds of racialized experiences. A limited glossary contains helpful terms at the end.

Since the topic is examined through the particularities of the authors' theological convictions, readers with different doctrinal beliefs may need to focus on the principles and concerns the authors raise and determine how to apply them within their own doctrinal context. In addition, while the book covers a range of ideas, the glossary did not contain some terms frequently used (and misunderstood), such as "whiteness" and "white privilege." Since the book prepares Christians to engage in productive conversation, an expanded glossary containing more explicit definitions of key terms that confuse people would have been helpful.

This book is an excellent primer for evangelical Christian leaders and others who are seeking a deeper understanding of racial issues and Critical Race Theory, as well as guidance on how to respond faithfully to God and to others in critical conversations and decisions.

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