

Review: Reparations

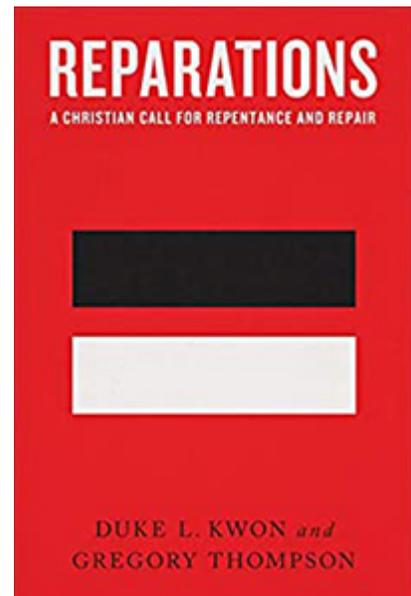
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Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair

By Duke Kwon and Gregory Thompson (Brazos Press)

Reparations. The title is sufficient to turn off many readers. The startling design of the dust jacket is enough to worry many more. For those who get past both, the content is as unsettling as the title and cover suggest. And the authors are fully aware how many readers will react to their work.

In *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*, Duke Kwon and Gregory Thompson respond to a masterful letter written by Jourdan Anderson in 1865 to his “Old Master.” The former slave owner wanted Anderson to return, promising he would treat him well. Anderson wrote back that the proof of the promise would be in the payment for past service. “If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future,” Anderson wrote.



Kwon and Gregory issue a direct and stiff call to the Christian church in the United States—in all its manifestations—to engage in reparations individually, collectively and specifically to African Americans, noting reparations also are due Native Americans, Asian Americans and others. The authors make a powerful case for the church to take up the work of

reparations, pointing to the stories of Zacchaeus and the good Samaritan as examples to the church.

Kwon and Gregory's convictions are as follows: (1) racism is best understood as a cultural force; (2) racism serves the interests of white supremacy; (3) white supremacy is guilty of theft, robbing nonwhite people of truth, power and wealth; (4) the Christian church in America is implicated in white supremacy's theft; (5) enacting the Christian church's "historic ethic of culpability and restitution" is necessary, (6) as is the church's teaching on restoration; and (7) the Christian church must enact restitution for all three thefts—truth, power and wealth. Each conviction is developed in a separate chapter. One of the hardest hitting chapters takes the church—including Southern Baptists—to task for its complicity in white supremacy.

Their case is clear and easy to follow, though it's strongest appeal is to those persuaded by logical arguments. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those the authors wish to convince are not likely to be won over by this book alone. As noted at the beginning of this review, sentiment against the idea of reparations is so strong that a case for it requires an approach that will connect emotionally perhaps more than intellectually. To that point, *Reparations* is intended to be an introduction to the subject.

Reparations should be read as part of a reading plan that includes memoirs, novels and historical accounts of slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow, lynching, segregation, disparities in housing and health care, and other facets of American life and history affected by racism.

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