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Who Loved the Neighbor? A Review of Faithful Antiracism

Abby De Groot

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Abstract

"The authors' purpose is... to equip Christians in all spheres of life to understand and, more essentially, *disrupt* racial injustice."

Posting about the book *Faithful Antiracism* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/who-loved-the-neighbor-a-review-of-faithful-antiracism/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

Who Loved the Neighbor? A Review of *Faithful Antiracism*

Abby De Groot

November 3, 2022

Title: *Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change*

Author: Christina Edmundson and Chad Brennan

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We have all had moments that take us by surprise. A conversation with a friend suddenly makes me realize that my childhood was a lot simpler than her traumatic abuse. An angry outburst in the shopping mall makes me shake my head in confusion as to the surrounding events and persons involved. A news report of another traffic stop that led to a shooting and death that makes it impossible to ignore the reality of injustice and pain. As a teacher, a parent, and a Christian, I have found myself learning and listening with fresh ears as I continue to process what it means to love.

In my job as a teacher in the Education Department at Dordt, part of the listening and learning that I am called to is specifically tied to racial justice. Every fall, I teach a module in my Applied Educational Psychology class on culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogy that is designed to provide future teachers and me an opportunity to consider a perspective that we may not have considered before. We talk about the complicated history of race and education in the U.S., including the still-present inequalities and poor outcomes that exist for many students—specifically many students of color.

I believe that this module is incredibly important for the future teachers in my classroom, most of whom are white and will go on to serve increasing numbers of racially diverse students in their own classrooms. I hope to equip these future teachers with a beginning set of the tools they need to see students as unique image-bearers of God, to understand how they and the classroom are impacted by racial and cultural dynamics, and to respond by creating opportunities for each child to flourish. This is a tall order, and I often feel intimidated by it, especially in a political environment where phrases like “critical race theory” can ignite fierce debate.

Faithful Anti-Racism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change by Christina Barland Edmondson and Chad Brennan is a book that not only better equipped me for that task, but also reinforced and

reignited my commitment to doing it, convicting me at times along the way. The book is not a book only for the Education field—the authors’ purpose is larger, meant to equip Christians in all spheres of life to understand and, more essentially, *disrupt* racial injustice.

What is unique for a book in this category of social commentary is its rootedness in scripture. Edmondson and Brennan do not add a thin veneer of faith to their research and ideas on antiracism; instead, the very premise of the book flows from their understanding of biblical justice and love for neighbor. Their recommended action steps similarly find their roots in examples and commands from the Bible. Because I have read a variety of other books on racial justice assigned by my secular graduate school, leaving me to wrestle alone with how the content fit into the truth of scripture, I found the authors’ transparent inclusion of their own understanding of *faithful antiracism* both refreshing and stimulating.

The term *faithful antiracism* is foundational to the book’s message. *Faithful*, in the authors’ minds, holds two meanings: both someone who is loyal and true and someone who is full of faith, relying on God’s power and leading. In order to explain what they mean by *antiracist*, the authors first define *racism* as “race-based discrimination and social hierarchies where individuals receive advantages or disadvantages because of perceived racial differences” (p. 3). *Antiracist*, then, describes a person working against “the forces that sustain racism” (p. 3).

After clarifying terms, the book is organized into two sections: the first six chapters lay the foundation of dispositions and understandings that a faithful antiracist has, while the final five chapters address the actions that faithful antiracists take as the natural outflow of those dispositions and understandings. The authors’ depth of explanation to help the reader understand how loving our neighbors includes knowing their stories, recognizing the devastating effects of racial trauma, and working to disrupt those effects.

One part of that work of disruption includes recognizing the ways that racial injustice has persisted throughout our history. The authors outline ways that economic, political, educational, and criminal justice systems have created and perpetuate racial disparities more than the choices, characteristics, morals, or values of individual people. This explanation of systemic racism is at odds with the way that some other Christians understand and explain the racial disparities in America, but Edmondson and Brennan use data, scripture, and storytelling to effectively support their ideas. This was, in my estimation, one of the main strengths of the book: the authors’ conclusions are drawn from their biblical understanding of justice while also relying on data, research, and history to make their case.

Their call for faithful antiracism may be uncomfortable for some readers, but it is also a worthy cause for Christians to discuss together and take up in their individual pockets of influence (in fact, the authors include discussion questions and prayers meant to be used in a small group setting). As an educator, I have learned, lived, and taught about injustice connected to schooling. My heart has broken over stories of underfunded classrooms where large numbers of teachers cycle in and out of kids’ lives, leaving them ill-equipped to learn deeply. My

students have been surprised to learn about the ways that education has been weaponized to strip culture from Native Americans in Indian boarding schools or separate kids with different skin colors through segregation. Their responses are varied, but always include a version of “what can we do?”. In *Faithful Antiracism*, the authors not only offer immediate action steps, but also shift readers’ gaze toward proactive, long-term shifts, helping us imagine better ways to love our neighbors through pursuing justice.