

and insightful analysis of the continuity of God's moral requirements for his people in the HB and the NT. Finally, Derek Thomas explores the implications of covenant theology for the understanding of the sacraments and the baptism of infants.

Covenant Theology provides an excellent introduction to the biblical basis, historical trajectory, and theological and practical implications of the historical understanding of covenant theology in the Reformed Calvinist tradition. The book is well informed, fair in its treatment of the topic, written with clarity, and provides an integrated approach to the topic. It is, in my opinion, the best introduction to covenant theology for seminary students at the moment.

Andrews University

FÉLIX H. CORTEZ

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York, NY: Random House, 2020. xi + 476 pp. Hardcover. USD 32.00.

Isabel Wilkerson is an acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller and Pulitzer Prize winner. In her new book, *Caste*, she critically examines how the United States of America has been historically shaped by a rigid hierarchical system. Such a system has lingering social effects and is a hidden metric still in use to determine human worth. She compares this system of ranking humans based on inherited physical features such as skin color, hair texture, or eye shape to India's caste system. While India's caste system is based on religion, in the United States, race constitutes the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. A caste system, she writes, is

an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups based on ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant caste whose forebears designed it (17).

Although Wilkerson admits that caste is not the only explanation for everything in American social structure, she insists that the economic, political, and social landscapes of American life cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the entrenched hierarchy its caste system has created. In addressing this polemical issue, Wilkerson's goal is not to solve all the problems that an old caste system has created in America but to shine new light onto its history, its consequences, and its continuing intrusion in everyday life, with the hope that it will one day be overcome. Thus, she strongly rejects the portrayal of slavery by many as nothing more than a "sad, dark chapter" in US history. She is of the view that because many Americans of today have inherited distorted slavery-era rules of social engagement in

total disregard of the fact, in her view, that all human beings are genetically the same, it is vital to revisit the annals of history. Her rationale is that

in the same way that individuals cannot move forward, become whole and healthy unless they examine the domestic violence they witnessed as children or the alcoholism that runs in their family, the country cannot become whole until it confronts what was not a chapter in its history, but the basis of its economic and social order. For a quarter of a millennium, slavery *was* the country (43, emphasis original).

Because historical facts are stubborn, they cannot be *simply* buried or dismissed as out of step with current reality.

One of the most important merits of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* lies in its deep and methodologically researched narrative. Wilkerson interweaves well-documented historical data with the stories of living individuals. Her unprejudiced academic reading of the history of slavery in America, in my opinion, is very instructive. By comparing the caste systems of India, Nazi Germany, and America, she brings to light eight pillars that have sustained the caste system in these nations—the firm belief that: (1) racial discrimination is part of God’s divine will and the laws of nature; (2) social status is ascribed from birth and is therefore deemed immutable; (3) marriage should be restricted to people within the same caste; (4) the dominant caste (considered pure) can be polluted by contact with members of subordinate castes; (5) in all social systems, there must be a class of people whose duty it is to do menial tasks; (6) the class of people to perform the drudgeries of life must be dehumanized and stigmatized; (7) terror and cruelty are legitimate means of keeping the subordinate castes subjugated; and (8) members of the dominant caste are inherently superior, and members of the subordinate caste inherently inferior.

The factuality of these assumptions does matter as long as they contribute to the well-being of the upper class. In the total absence of feelings and morality, such a hierarchical system is primarily about the allocation of power and resources to the dominant caste. One of the hurtful truths this book reveals is how European settlers in America used the Bible to justify the enslavement of Africans and the cruelty inflicted on them in American forced labor camps. These settlers used their self-interested interpretation of the Bible to justify the creation of “a hierarchy of who could do what, who could own what, who was on top and who was on the bottom and who was in-between” (23). In doing so, some English Protestants, the upper-rung beneficiaries of this caste system, knowingly disregarded the foundational biblical truth that God is no respecter of persons because all human beings are equally created in his image. This fundamental biblical teaching is an affirmation of the unity as well as the dignity of all humanity. It is an irony that a group of people who fled persecution and starvation in Europe spearheaded the persecution and starvation of African slaves in America.

One of the best ways to describe *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* might be to view it as a modern-day prophetic voice urgently inviting the reader to a deep reflection of his or her ideas on this subject, assuming that no ethnic group is immune to prejudice. It is not an invitation to sterile reflection but an invitation to act based on the deep understanding of the problem of human prejudice. This type of reflection is necessary since

by adulthood, researchers have found, most Americans have been exposed to a culture with enough negative messages about African-Americans and other marginalized groups that as much as 80 percent of white Americans hold unconscious bias against black Americans, bias so automatic that it kicks in before a person can process it.... The messaging is so pervasive in American society that a third of black Americans hold anti-black bias against themselves (186–187).

This unfortunate reality keeps the caste system humming among people of every color, creed, and gender. It is also imperative to carry out a deep reflection on race as a mere social construct, given the socioemotional, physical, mental, and financial large-scale impact of racial discrimination.

Reading *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* was an emotional, spiritual, and eye-opening experience. Although some sections of the book are nerve-racking, this book is a must-read, not only for the community and organizational leaders but also for anyone interested in expanding their perspective on the American social, economic, and political landscape. It could also serve as an excellent textbook for educational institutions intentional about training world changers.

Andrews University

BOUBAKAR SANOU

Wright, Christopher J. H. *Here Are Your Gods*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. viii + 164 pp. Paperback. USD 17.36.

Christopher J. H. Wright, international ministries director of the Langham Partnership and author of many books, including *The Mission of God* (IVP, 2018), has written an insightful and thought-provoking work analyzing idolatry both in the Bible and in the contemporary world. A central idea of the book is expressed in the subtitle, *Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times*. In this book, Wright raises two timely questions: What kind of people should Christians be in a world riddled with all kinds of idolatry? and What does it mean to be a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century? Wright suggests that the present culture is not that different in its idolatry than the first-century world of the apostles and Jesus. He also postulates that “the biblical category of idolatry—when it is even considered at all—is often handled or dismissed with shallow understanding and simplistic responses”