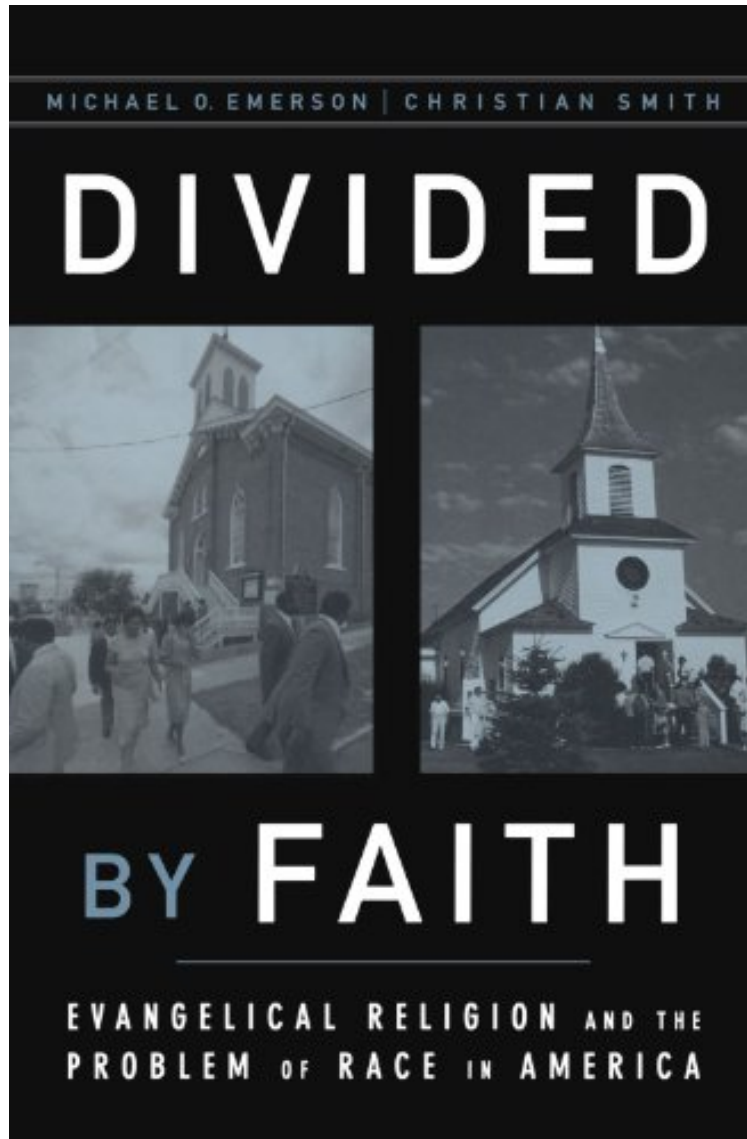


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Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America

Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith
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Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith : Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Paving the Path to Hell By M Zin An outstanding read. Smith and co. start with an exposition of the racialization of society. They then dissect how the seemingly good intentions of Evangelicals vis. race is not only self-limiting, but ultimately helps perpetuate the division of society along racial lines. Evangelicals strict focus on individual salvation at the expense of systemic reform relegates them, by definition, to a force opposed to meaningful change and true Christian reconciliation. This is not done in a polemical way, but rather demonstrated by survey data and interviews with people on both sides of the question. The title of this book could have been "The Paving of the Path to Hell".

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Highly Recommended By B The author does an exceptional job navigating an extremely convoluted subject. Much has been written on the issues of God, Faith and Race in America, but this is a pivotal work. The book reads like a long academic paper, which is refreshing, the authors assertions are driven by historical facts and reliable research all presented through a Biblical World View. Highly recommended.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America By Gabbarta Emerson, author of more the nine books and journals, teaches courses in race and ethnic relations, religion, urban sociology, poverty and justice, and research methods in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and his colleague Smith who served as the Stuart Chapin Distinguished Professor of Sociology in the university and author of several books. Collaborate to write this book, which was named the 2001 Distinguished Book of the Year by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. The authors conducted a national telephone survey of more than 2500 Americans, interviewed almost 200 evangelicals, and collected data from variety of different sources to base on their argument. Their main these is that America is a "racialized society" and religion, more specifically evangelical religion, without intention, makes the problem worse by focusing on strengthening the relationship that already exist in the same group. They state: Religion, as structured in America, is unable to make great impact on the racialized society. In fact, far from knocking down racial barriers, religion generally serves to maintain these historical divides, and helps to develop new ones..... The structure of religion in America is conducive to freeing groups from the direct control of the other groups but not addressing the fundamental division that exist in our current racialized society. (p. 18). At the individual level, the authors believe that the white evangelicals do not see that we have a racialized society; rather, they see racial problem only in individual cases and bad interpersonal relationships. By this the white evangelicals are minimizing the race problem, and thus they offer poor solutions that are profoundly individualistic and interpersonal and do not exceed their individualistic view. These solutions do not touch "the system," because they do not include any financial or cultural sacrifices. "They maintain what is for them the noncostly status quo." At the organizational level, the authors believe that "the religious market" in America leads congregations to become focused on marketing themselves to "homogenous" congregations in order to survive as organizations in a competitive market, which generate internal growth and external division, leading to racially separate congregations. They argue that "internally homogeneous congregations more often provide what draws people to religious groups for a lower cost than do internally diverse congregations." In other word, the religious market principle leads the congregation to do what makes its "consumer" happy in order to stay, which consequently will cost the congregation to lose its power as a prophetic voice. Thus instead of providing "the moral force" to change what violate the moral standard of what evangelical believe in, the congregation, unintentionally, perpetuate the status quo. I would have liked the authors to tackle the psychological issue of the race problem in America. They spoke about confessing and healing from the white evangelical side, but what about blacks? Do not they also need healing? I believe that the black people's self-image, not to minimize the racialized culture of America, needed to be addressed. The impact of hundreds of years of slavery and segregation cannot be wiped out in five decades. It is going to be a journey in the desert until the whole old generation dies and a new generation that "have a dream" rise up. In my point of view, the race problem is two-way road. When both blacks and whites do their part, they will eventually end up sitting in one church, but this time in the same pews.

Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America

Through a nationwide telephone survey of 2,000 people and an additional 200 face-to-face interviews, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith probed the grassroots of white evangelical America. They found that despite recent efforts by the movement's leaders to address the problem of racial discrimination, evangelicals themselves seem to be preserving America's racial chasm. In fact, most white evangelicals see no systematic discrimination against blacks. But the authors contend that it is not active racism that prevents evangelicals from recognizing ongoing problems in American society. Instead, it is the evangelical movement's emphasis on individualism, free will, and personal relationships that makes invisible the pervasive injustice that perpetuates racial inequality. Most racial problems, the subjects told the authors, can be solved by the repentance and conversion of the sinful individuals at fault. Combining a substantial body of evidence with sophisticated analysis and interpretation, the authors throw sharp light on the oldest American dilemma. In the end, they conclude that despite the best intentions of evangelical leaders and some positive trends, real racial reconciliation remains far over the horizon.

.com Divided by Faith by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith has an ingenious, troubling argument.

"[E]vangelicals desire to end racial division and inequality, and attempt to think and act accordingly. But, in the process, they likely do more to perpetuate the racial divide than they do to tear it down." Emerson and Smith, who conducted 2,000 telephone surveys and 200 face-to-face interviews in preparing this book, argue that evangelicals have a theological world view that makes it difficult for them to perceive systematic injustices in society. In particular, evangelical emphasis of individualism and free will seem to predispose them to believe that most racial problems can be solved if individuals will only repent of their sins. Therefore, many well-meaning strategies for healing racial divisions (such as cross-cultural friendships) carry within them the seeds of their own defeat. *Divided by Faith* also includes a brilliant, concise history of evangelical thought about race from colonial times to the civil rights movement. Clearly written and impeccably researched, this book ranks among the most compassionate and critical studies of contemporary evangelicalism. --Michael Joseph Gross *From Publishers Weekly* Evangelicals, argue sociologists Emerson and Smith, have gotten serious about racial reconciliation. This, they suggest, is a break from tradition. In the 19th century, many white evangelicals supported slavery but then upheld Jim Crow laws through the postwar years. Over the last half century, however, evangelicals have increasingly found racism unpalatable, a transformation culminating, symbolically at least, in the Southern Baptist Convention's 1995 proclamation that it repented for its role in slavery. Today, the Promise Keepers call for reconciliation, while evangelical theologians and publications explore what reconciliation means. But white evangelicals, though well-meaning, often unwittingly contribute to racism, say the authors. Smith and Emerson explain this seeming contradiction by drawing on Smith's earlier work, in which he argued that evangelicals have a piecemeal approach to social justice: they are inclined to fix immediate problems, such as feeding homeless people at a soup kitchen, rather than address systemic crises such as the unequal distribution of wealth. Smith and Emerson recycle the same argument, tweaked ever so slightly, here. The tools evangelicals use to combat racism--socializing more with members of another race, or integrating churches and racially segregated neighborhoods--are well-intentioned but ultimately not adequate to the task of eradicating deeply entrenched racist patterns. This is a valuable critique of evangelical approaches to social change, although those familiar with Smith's previous work will learn little. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. *From Library Journal* This study will be of interest to those who would like to understand the evangelical Christian mind with regard to race in America. In particular, Emerson (sociology, Rice Univ.) and Smith (sociology, Univ. of North Carolina) explain how white evangelicals respond to the race problem and how their cultural perspective and racially isolated lifestyle results in a greater disparity between the races. They show that white evangelicals tend to minimize the structural inequalities in healthcare, police treatment, educational opportunities, housing, job opportunities, and financial resources and instead perceive racism as primarily a problem of individual relationships. At the same time, white evangelicals are becoming more isolated from other parts of our society because they are so involved in their own subculture and do not understand why they should address the broader social problems. While the authors would like white evangelicals to support structural and institutional solutions to racism, they realize that cultural perspectives change slowly. For academic sociological and religious collections. DGeorge Westerlund, Palmyra, VA Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.