



## **Pastor Mike's Bookshelf**

### ***Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture***

By Christopher Watkin

The first bookshelf item for the new year is quite a tome (over 600 pages), and may only appeal to a few people to pick up and work your way through. But the purpose of doing these “bookshelf” reviews is not just to make recommendations for all, but also to let you know what I’ve been reading as I seek to bring the Word of God to bear on our world today in my preaching and teaching. This review will be a little longer, but that’s because of the scope of this book.

This is a book I was looking for before I knew it existed, so as soon as I read the description, I picked it up. (And the fact that the forward was by Tim Keller helped in that decision as well.) Something that is very important to me in my teaching and preaching as your pastor, and you may have noticed, is helping us as followers of Jesus to think like Christians in a world that is becoming less and less Christian. There are many assumptions and beliefs we take for granted in our modern context that do not come from Christianity, that are in fact opposed to Christianity, even though, because they are deep in our culture, they sound right. This concern is what led to the “Did God Really Say?” worship series last fall. These “cultural narratives” shape our world, and if we’re not immersed in Scripture, they will shape our thinking and living as well, and lead us away from Christ.

What Christopher Watkin has done in this book is provide a comprehensive overview of what it means to see the world through Christianity. Critical theory, in its various forms, is an approach to the world which seeks to explain everything in terms of an overarching issue. For Marx, history is the story of economic class struggle. For others today, our history can be explained as a conflict between races. There are many varieties of critical theory at work today that are shaping how we approach issues and challenges in the world. Critical theories are often reductionistic in assuming that the chosen issue accounts for everything in history and in our world today. In this book, Watkin describes the biblical lens through which Christians are to view the world. In doing so, he compares and contrasts it with other views that are influential in the world today. Unlike other critical theories, Biblical critical theory is not reductionistic, but rather comprehensive, taking in all of history and all of our world today, and all of eternity.

Watkin models his approach on “The City of God” by Augustine (354-430), one of the most important books in church history. Augustine wrote his book as Rome was falling and people were blaming Christianity for weakening the empire. So Augustine composed a thoroughgoing critique of pagan Roman culture, and then went through the entire Bible, pointing out how Christianity is not only different, but better. Watkin’s intent in this book is to provide a “City of God” for today. In doing so, he goes through the entire Bible, and all along the way compares and contrasts the Christian view with the contemporary (Western) assumptions about reality.

What can make this book difficult is that Watkin doesn't do this on a superficial level, but rather dives deep into the philosophical issues underlying the attitudes of today. I will readily admit that there were sections that I had to read multiple times before moving on. This is not because he is a poor writer (he's actually quite a very good writer!), but rather because of my unfamiliarity with some of the contemporary philosophies he was dialoguing with.

I had the privilege of hearing and (briefly) meeting the author when I attended The Gospel Coalition conference last September. I found him to be an engaging speaker on this topic as well. This is an important book and is being recognized as such. Christianity Today named it their "Book of the Year," in their annual book awards.

The copy of this book for the Church Library cart hasn't arrived yet,, but if you are interested reading it, I will gladly let you borrow my copy. Previous recommendations can be found here: [Pastor Mike's Bookshelf](#).