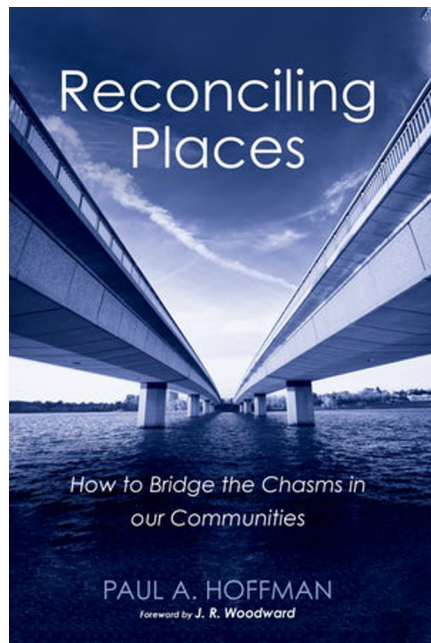


## REVIEW: *Reconciling Places: How to Bridge the Chasms in Our Communities* by Paul A. Hoffman

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REVIEWED BY  
ALLEN YEH

Hoffman, Paul A. *Reconciling Places: How to Bridge the Chasms in Our Communities*. Eugene: Cascade, 2020. 170 pp, ISBN: 978-1-5326-5122-9. \$20 paperback.



I have to offer a full disclaimer: I am friends with Paul Hoffman. He and I both went to Gordon-Conwell Seminary and we have known each other a long time. That being said, when I offered to review his book, I was determined to be absolutely fair, inasmuch as possible. This review is my attempt to do so, even while recognizing my friendship with him will inevitably color my perception a bit. But that's as it should be: we cannot help but be particularly situated whenever we approach anything, and that is part of the philosophy of Paul's book.

First, I discovered a lot more about Paul while reading this book, increasing my respect for him even more. I have only known him since grad school, but I learned that so much of his earlier life

led him naturally in this direction, and I've only seen the tip of the iceberg. His heart for reconciliation is *authentic*. In this cynical age, it is too easy to dismiss all white males as being complicit in systemic racism, end of story. But what I have learned (through Paul and others) is that everyone has their own journey, and discounting someone outright based on their race and gender is not fair, without knowing their story. Often, the messenger *is* part of the message. We are living epistles. And Paul's experiences (the hardships and the lessons) greatly inform his perspectives.

Secondly, Paul's theological and missiological foundations are *solid*. I am a professor of missions, so my antennae were up in both directions: is he biblical, and is he colonial? Sadly, Western theologians are often both: they do a good job deriving their

theology from Scripture, then ruin it by mixing it with their own biases (e.g. individualism, capitalism, Enlightenment thinking, etc.), leading to paternalism and “white Savior” theology. I am happy to say that—even while I was not going to give Paul a “free pass” in this department without proving himself first—his theology of reconciliation more than passed muster. He drew from diverse theological perspectives: from theologians of different races, sexes, and nations, all while remaining firmly rooted in the text with solid exegesis, and dialoguing with modern culture and situations.

Thirdly, Paul is profoundly *practical*. Even if Western theology is not hegemonic, it often remains in the realm of simply propositional truth or Platonic dualism. I love that Paul incorporated reflection and application questions at the end of each chapter. These come from his pastor’s heart, and even though he has a PhD from a major British research university, his ministry is still in the local church and the community it serves. This book can serve either the local church or the classroom extremely well.

Finally, this book is *timely*. The United States has not felt more divided, at least as long as I have been alive. We are coming off a contentious (to say the least) Presidential election. Paul’s use of the metaphor of the bridge is apt: not only does it symbolize reconciliation (which I would agree with him is perhaps *the* central theme of Scripture), but it becomes the architectural structure of his book. Though the Pope may be called the *Pontifex Maximus* (the greatest bridge-builder), we are all called to be bridge-builders: the priesthood of all believers. This book helps us to self-actualize that in extremely meaningful and practical ways.

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