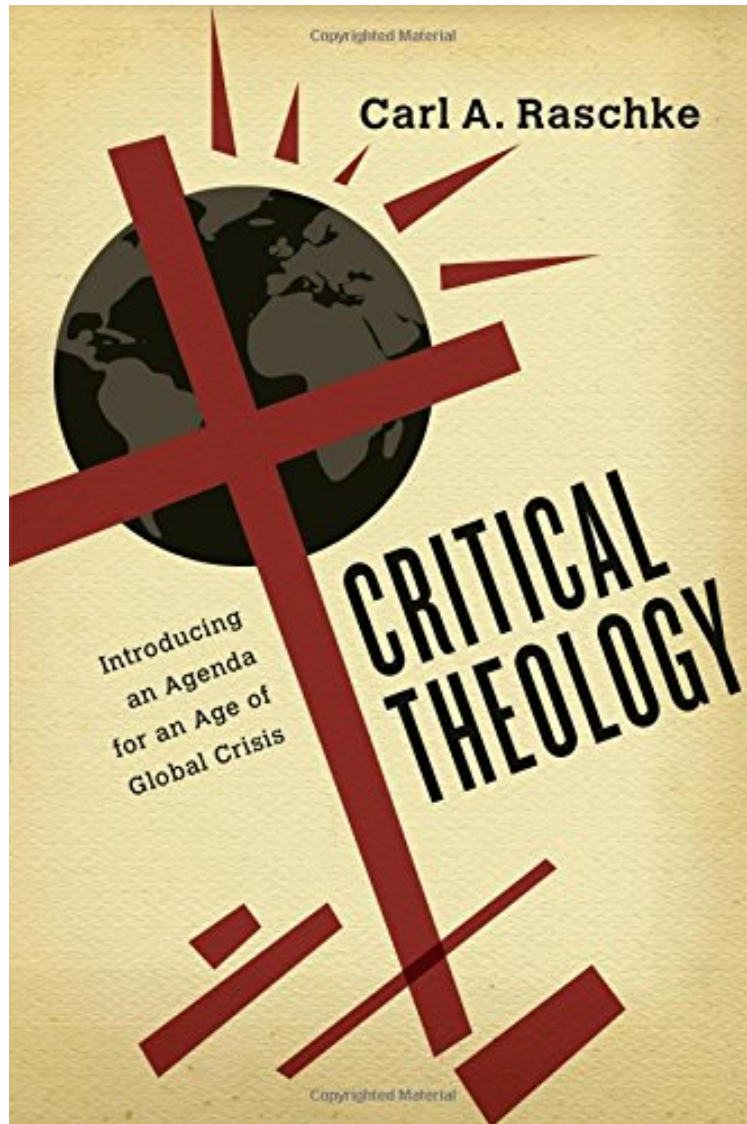


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# Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis

*Carl A. Raschke*

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**Carl A. Raschke : Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Could Have Been Clearer, But Deep and RichBy James B. PateCarl

A. Raschke teaches religious studies at the University of Denver. In *Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis*, Raschke explores how Christian theology can contribute to political liberation. Raschke refers to a global crisis, which includes disarray on the global scale and the aftermath of the economic collapse in 2008. Another problem that Raschke discusses is how the communications media enslave people by emphasizing commodification. Karl Marx's thought plays a role in Raschke's analysis, as Raschke notes Marx's insight that the superstructure (i.e., society, media, etc.) often supports and reinforces the class system. Raschke presents a history of Christian theology's political programs, primarily in the twentieth century. Bultmann, Heidigger, Otto, and Barth were significant figures in this. Neo-Kantianism also had significant influence in the story that Raschke tells. (Kant, of course, was a philosopher, but there was a transcendental and religious dimension to his thought, which would influence later neo-Kantianism.) Raschke also discusses the Frankfurt School, which offered analysis that was supportive of liberation, albeit from a largely secularist standpoint. (Yet, Raschke says in an endnote that some have argued that the Frankfurt School was actually open to religion playing a role in liberation.) Raschke profiles thinkers whom he believes can inform the agenda that he believes is important. Raschke discusses how Badiou and Zizek interpret Paul in a manner that is consistent with political liberation. Law refers not just to the Torah in their thought, but to structures of society that enslave. Grace ran contrary to such law in Badiou's thought, and Zizek regarded love as a cure for treating people as commodities. Zizek interpreted faith as optimism regarding the future. Badiou and Zizek were still secularists, but they believed that aspects of the Christian religion could be helpful in their analysis and articulation of the importance of political liberation. What elements of Christianity does Raschke highlight as significant in terms of the agenda that he introduces? He appears to agree with Zizek's emphasis on love. He highlights the incarnation, in which God in Jesus was present with humanity. That may relate to God's concern for humanity, which a political theology presumes, but it also seems to relate to how Raschke believes Christians should interact with other cultures and religions in a post-modern age. At the same time, Raschke maintains that Christians should regard ethics as transcendent: human value and dignity are not relative but are absolute principles from God. The book is highly abstract and complex, and one may wonder if a lot of academic and philosophical language is being unnecessarily used to express the simple proposition that love is the answer. It is tempting to think so, and yet Raschke does wade in waters that are deep and complex. These waters concern trends from the past and the present, in thought and in life, and how the agenda that Raschke introduces engages current trends. In terms of the political program that Raschke promotes, Raschke seems to emphasize the power of ideas, used by God, to effect change. He is critical of violent revolution. He talks about the New Left, and he may be supportive of political activism, motivated, for Christians, by theological concerns. His hope may be that more people will see the Christian religion as something other than an object of study, a set of creeds, or feel-good platitudes, and to embrace it as something that can make a positive difference in the world for all people, especially the disenfranchised. This book has its positives. It is informative in its exploration of theological and philosophical political thought, and some of that thought interacted with other fields, such as psychology. This book is deep and rich. The treatment of Paul by Badiou and Zizek was definitely creative. Raschke's discussion of how thinkers in the New Left opposed totalitarian Communism was also interesting, since many right-wingers tend to lump the two together as allies. In terms of negatives, this book could have been clearer in terms of its prose, hopefully without sacrificing its depth. The prose in the endnotes was very lucid, and perhaps Raschke would have done well to have used that kind of prose throughout the book. Moreover, while Raschke is interacting with and contributing to an academic discussion, Raschke should have explained how these academic thoughts could make a difference on the ground. I received a complimentary review copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

What is the future of theology in the midst of rapid geopolitical and economic change? Carl A. Raschke contends that two options from the last century—crisis theology and critical theory—do not provide the resources needed to address the current global crisis. Both of these perspectives remained distant from the messiness and unpredictability of life. Crisis theology spoke of the wholly other God, while critical theory spoke of universal reason. These ideas aren't tenable after postmodernism and the return of religion, which both call for a dialogical approach to God and the world. Raschke's new critical theology takes as its starting point the biblical claim that the Word became flesh—a flesh that includes the cultural, political and religious phenomena that shape contemporary existence. Drawing on recent reformulations of critical theory by Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou and post-secularists such as Jürgen Habermas, Raschke introduces an agenda for theological thinking accessible to readers unfamiliar with this literature. In addition, the book explores the relationship between a new critical theology and current forms of political theology. Written with the passion of a manifesto, *Critical Theology* presents the critical and theological resources for thinking responsibly about the present global situation.

"Carl Raschke has been one of the most brilliant trailblazers for theological thinking over the last quarter century. Here he provides a fresh appropriation of critical theory in and for theology, buttressed by critical engagements with Žižek and Badiou. Anyone interested in the vitality of contemporary theory should read this book!" (Clayton Crockett,

University of Central Arkansas)"All good theology responds critically to the situation from which it emerges. Raschke's proposal for a new critical theology is no exception. For Raschke, our current, postsecular condition is one in which religion functions as a public force in a pluralized world a world that is riddled with sometimes violent contradictions. Responding to this condition requires not only taking religion seriously as a motivating factor in global conflicts, but also deploying it critically and politically toward universal, emancipatory ends. Raschke draws on recent work in Continental philosophy and critical theory particularly the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek to provide an outline for such a theology. The result is both thought provoking and timely, and it should be required reading for those working in the fields of political theology, critical theory, and philosophy. Raschke's proposal, in short, sets an agenda that can't be ignored. Raschke's style also makes the book very accessible to a broader audience. He provides an admirably clear overview of twentieth-century critical theory and crisis theology as they relate to current issues regarding secularization, making this an ideal book to use in the classroom." (Hollis Phelps, University of Mount Olive, author of *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*)"In our globalizing world fraught with cultural, ideological and religious tension, the task facing Christian theology is both immense and urgent. Impressive in its scope and unflinching in its diagnosis of the current state of affairs, Carl Raschke's *Critical Theology* proposes a compelling theological agenda for an age of global crisis and asks with renewed vigor the old question, 'What has Athens (and Frankfurt, and Paris, and Ljubljana) to do with Jerusalem?' Raschke's deft critiques and provocative, constructive proposals blaze a promising path forward for radical theological analysis and engagement in our times." (Brent A. R. Hege, Butler University)"In *Critical Theology*, Carl A. Raschke provides a new and exquisitely detailed examination of critical 'global' thinking and its transdisciplinary connections to the legacy of postmodern theology and the future of an 'assembled' religious theory." (Victor E. Taylor, author of *Religion After Postmodernism*)"Often truth is the first casualty in a time of crisis. For Raschke, however, crisis is what most calls for truth. Unflinching in his commitment to argumentative clarity and undaunted by the enormity of the task of appropriating critical theory for political theology, Raschke offers a manifesto that is intellectually rigorous yet stylistically inviting. Anyone working in political theology will have to engage this book or risk ignoring the global crisis that calls for such theology in the first place." (J. Aaron Simmons, Furman University)About the AuthorCarl A. Raschke (PhD, Harvard University) is professor of religious studies at the University of Denver, specializing in continental philosophy, the philosophy of religion and the theory of religion. He is an internationally known writer and academic who has authored numerous books and hundreds of articles on topics ranging from postmodernism to popular religion and culture to technology and society. Raschke is the author or coauthor of books such as *The Revolution in Religious Theory: Toward a Semiotics of the Event*, *GloboChrist*, *The Next Reformation*, *Faith and Reason: Three Views, Painted Black*, *The Interruption of Eternity*, *The Digital Revolution and the Coming of the Postmodern University*, *Fire and Roses: Postmodernity and the Thought of the Body* and *The Engendering God*. He is co-founder and senior editor of *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* and he is a regular blogger and current affairs editor with *Political Theology Today*. A well-known expert on religion and higher education, Raschke has been interviewed at least nine hundred times over two decades. During the late 1980s and early 1990s he advised the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, DC, on matters involving core curriculum, serving for several years as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Core Curriculum. He has also served on the board of directors and various national committees of the American Academy of Religion. Raschke is a permanent adjunct faculty member at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology as well as the Global Center for Advanced Studies, and has been a visiting scholar and lecturer at the University of Vienna. He is co-proprietor of Wingsoar, a lecturing, writing and seminar company, and he is co-founder of the Global Art Ideas Nexus. He and his wife Sunny live in Denver, Colorado.