

***Born This Way? Homosexuality, Science, and the Scriptures.* By J. Alan Branch. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2016. 224 pp. \$14.25, Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1941337509.**

Over the past couple of decades, no facet of American society has experienced more upheaval than issues related to human sexuality. What was inconceivable less than a generation ago is now nearly complete in its social acceptance—the redefinition of marriage, gender and sexuality. For Christians, this is quintessentially calling good evil and evil good.

The drive to detach gender, sexuality and marriage from biblical and traditional categories of moral evaluation has been central to this transformation. For homosexual activists, asserting that one is “born gay” has been vital to their argument and has helped to galvanize broader public acceptance for the homosexual lifestyle and same-sex marriage. But are people “born gay?”

For most Christians, that question is a troubling. Confusion abounds, and the mounting cultural-pressure to accept the gay lifestyle makes the topic daunting. That is precisely why I am so thankful for Alan Branch’s new book, *Born this Way?* Branch serves as professor of Christian Ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and as a research fellow in Christian Ethics for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

In *Born this Way?* Branch engages the most recent scientific research, deconstructs the overreaches of the born-this-way movement, engages these matters from a robustly biblical worldview, and applies all of it in a pastorally-sensitive way.

First, Branch charts the history of the homosexual movement. These chapters provide rich background about how the homosexual rights movement, and the general drive for sexual liberation, took shape. For those unfamiliar with the homosexual movement, the first three chapters are worth the price of the book.

Branch introduces infamous figures like Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, and the specious aspects of their research. Additionally, Branch helpfully engages brain plasticity, and how new neuron paths form in the brain—in part due to human stimuli, like pornography. Additionally, he documents the successful political effort within the American Psychiatric Association to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

In dealing specifically with the possibility of a “gay gene,” Branch argues:

What if some future study proves incontrovertibly that a specific gene or cluster of genes acts in such a way that every person with these markers is born with a homosexual orientation? Does this mean that we must then surrender Scripture teaching concerning the sinful nature of homosexual acts? No, we should not. One of the major flaws in born-this-way arguments is that advocates seem to want to affirm the basic idea of Genesis 1:26-28 (humans are made in the image of God), while rejecting the equally important fact of Genesis 3 (all humans have been negatively affected by a historic, space-time Fall). As a result, every human being is born with a natural tendency to rebel against God and sin. It is not inconsistent with Christian anthropology to suggest the effects of sin reach even to the level of how our genetic code influences the way we respond to certain stimuli and our desires be distorted (107).

In *Born this Way?* Branch is an honest broker, and throughout the book, he is appropriately nuanced. He engages the topic biblically, scientifically, sociologically, and pastorally. Branch points out the spuriousness of born-this-way argumentation, but also deals honestly with the far-from-uniform results of reparative therapy and other ex-gay initiatives. Branch writes:

We must face the current data with honesty, but also with discernment. Movement on a continuum of orientation change is possible for some, but is not as easy or as frequent as many of us as evangelicals would wish....In this light, pastors and therapists should be cautious in assertions made to people struggling with same-sex attraction (132).

Branch also engages the nomenclature itself, counseling,

Christians do not hyphenate their identity: their identity is found in Christ alone....Our primary identity is not found in our sexuality; our primary identity is found in our redemption and

relationship with Jesus Christ. When a person insists on calling himself a gay-Christian, he has made an idol of his sexual desires (148-149).

In summary, the presupposition of homosexual activists is that if a genetic causation for homosexuality is found, then the case is closed against biblical standards of sexuality, as well as the possibility of change. Many Christians buy this argument and categorically refute any scientific linkage to causation—or even correlation. On the other hand, they live in fear that if a linkage is found, then we will have no basis to label unbiblical sexual activity as sin. Genetic causation—or even correlation—appears to be the coup de grace.

Branch proves that the evidence for genetic causation of homosexuality is far from settled. And, in either case, Christians should not fear where scientific research might lead us. God's Word, biblical theology, and the gospel of Jesus Christ give us sufficient ground to stand on—to articulate the Christian worldview, to offer hope to those mired in sexual sin, and to offer a clear and certain word to God's goodness in marriage and human sexuality.

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**1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family. By David L. Allen. (Preaching the Word commentary series), edited by R. Kent Hughes. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. 334 pp. Hardback, \$32.99. ISBN-13: 978-1433502859.**

The Preaching the Word series is a commentary specifically designed for expository preachers. This volume is written by one of the strongest advocates and practitioners of expository preaching, Dr. David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching. The series presupposes the inerrancy of Scripture, and that preaching is best done with paragraph by paragraph exposition of Scripture. Allen describes this work as a "sermontary," in

that it has some sermonic elements like exposition, application, and illustration, but also affords greater in-depth exposition more typical of a commentary.

*1-3 John* is a commentary that focuses on the meaning and proper interpretation of the text. It does not, however, lose the forest for the trees by pursuing arcane issues which make no real difference for the expositor, as do some overly technical commentaries. Although space in this review does not permit going into detail about interpretations of individual texts, the commentary consistently amplifies the grammatical clues and word meanings that illumine and clarify the proper interpretation of the text. Allen also provides rich illustrative material and application which are helpful in sermon preparation.

Some of the richest in-depth exposition may be easily overlooked because it is hidden in endnotes at the end of the book. There are over 450 endnotes, most of them with meaty content, single spaced in 45 endnote pages. Some of these single-spaced notes are the equivalent of two or more pages of regular text. These endnotes go into greater detail pursuing various theological, grammatical, and hermeneutical issues, and also provide an outstanding bibliographical resource. Since these careful expositional notes are not placed as footnotes on the same page as the material being referenced, they are easily missed by the casual reader. It is rather inconvenient and cumbersome for the scholarly reader to literally flip back and forth 450 times as one is attempting to read the book. However, for the more devotional reader, the placement of this more scholarly content in the endnotes allows the text to be uncluttered by these more technical issues. Happily, the book does have excellent indexes of Scripture references, topics, and sermon illustrations.

This commentary is a remarkably helpful resource for expositional preachers or Bible study teachers. In fact, it would also be excellent as a Bible study for a small group, affording much meatier content than many Bible study materials. For this reason, the book is highly recommended.

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***One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope For American Politics.* By Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. 160 pp. Hardcover, \$14.99. ISBN: 978-1-4336-9069-3.**

The Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision mandating the acceptance of same-sex marriage in all fifty states is seen by many as the end of the so-called "culture war," with the end being a victory for the secular children of the sexual revolution. Many younger evangelicals are now wondering how they should interact in a political process which seems openly hostile to their convictions. In *One Nation Under God: Christian Hope For American Politics*, Bruce Ashford of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Chris Pappalardo of The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham area offer a helpful paradigm of engagement. Their overall presentation rightly calls for a helpful blend of doctrinal and ethical conviction, cultural awareness, and civility in engagement.

The authors strongly emphasize the compelling truth of the Biblical narrative as the starting point for Christian political engagement. Focusing on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they emphasize that our worldview is fundamentally at odds with the regnant secularism of American public discourse and say, "The gospel story is deeply at odds with modern political narratives because each looks to a different place for history's true meaning. Christians look to the event of the resurrection while modern thinkers look to scientific and democratic strategies and methods" (32). The authors leverage the resurrection of Christ into a helpful critique of John Rawls's "veil of ignorance," insisting the Lordship of Christ "precludes us from abandoning our religious commitments just because we are acting publicly" (49). Indeed, Ashford and Pappalardo recognize that secularists would like to exterminate Christianity, but if that is not possible, then to shut Christians in a ghetto of "private faith" with no public dimension. This "ghettoization" of the church seems to be reflected in the *Obergefell* decision where Justice Kennedy discusses freedom of worship while remaining ominously silent about the free exercise of religion.

Ashford and Pappalardo urge Christians to engage non-Christians at both a personal and private level, developing a keen sense

of awareness regarding the culture's beliefs. In particular, the authors suggest Augustine's *The City of God* as a helpful example of successfully engaging a culture unhappy with Christians. They point out that Augustine was intimately aware of the pagan narrative regarding the Roman Empire, and it was his familiarity with their arguments which enabled him to develop a robust answer to diatribes against Christianity.

*One Nation Under God* also urges Christians to maintain a firm and courteous civility in public dialogue. The authors seem somewhat displeased with a great deal of the "culture war" language and the militant stance of the previous generation of culture warrior fundamentalists. They state, "If we aim to win a culture war, we will likely only be disappointed and disillusioned" (23). The authors ask for Christians to engage in public politeness. Expressing frustration with the charged climate of contemporary politics, they say, "But we find this incivility distasteful and insist that it is possible . . . for our public lives to be marked by both conviction and civility" (58). In the latter half of the book, Ashford and Pappalardo argue for positions on the sanctity of life, sexuality, marriage, racial reconciliation, immigration, and war and peace which are quite consistent with stances held by previous generations of culture warriors, but do so with a strong eye towards civility and graciousness in presentation.

The authors urge Christians to focus on the fulfillment of God's kingdom which will be consummated at Christ's return, and rightly so. Our ultimate hope is certainly not in politics, but in the imminent return of Jesus Christ. But in the authors' discussions of eschatology, it would have been helpful to see them interact with the concept of the Antichrist. For many Evangelicals, and Southern Baptists in particular, it is the eschatological concept of the Antichrist—the Beast of Revelation 13 and the Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2—which forms the way they view much involvement with politics. The Bible's vision of a coming tyrannical ruler bent on the destruction of God's people infuses many Southern Baptists with a fundamental distrust of big government. It would be fascinating to see how Ashford and Pappalardo think through this Biblical theme as part of their larger analysis.

I confess that I am not afraid of using "culture war" language regarding events over the last fifty years in American public discourse and politics. It is from this perspective that I find this book most interesting. Specifically, Ashford and Pappalardo often cite Richard

Mouw, former president of Fuller Seminary, as a source for their analysis and a model for engagement and I find most all of their references to Mouw helpful. But what is missing is reference to people of an earlier generation that Southern Baptists found informative for cultural engagement—Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy, James Dobson, and Adrian Rogers. I am not trying to give a blanket endorsement for every stance advocated by these men. But in response to the sexual revolution and legalized abortion, they crafted a strategy in the late 1970s in attempt reign in a tyrannical Supreme Court: Elect a conservative President who will appoint conservative Supreme Court justices. If Robert Bork had been approved by the Senate in 1987, *Roe* would most certainly have been overturned. As it is, we instead have Justice Kennedy, the swing vote in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and the author of *Obergefell*. We must certainly acknowledge that the culture warrior fundamentalists of that era were aware of what was at stake. Perhaps *One Nation Under God* could have included a brief section analyzing what the previous generation got right as well as areas where they could have improved.

Ashford and Pappalardo provide a helpful book for political engagement in a progressively post-Christian America. *One Nation Under God* is a good first-read for younger Evangelicals and Baptists with an interest in political engagement.

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***Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Edited by John Mark Terry. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015, 583 pp. \$54.99, paperback, ISBN: 978-1-4336-8151-4.**

Seventeen years after the first edition appeared in 1998, John Mark Terry has completed a thorough revision of *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*. Designed as a textbook on missions primarily for graduate schools and

seminaries, *Missiology* thoroughly and expertly covers the major doctrines and practices of this academic discipline. John Mark Terry is well qualified to edit this work, as he ministered as a missionary in the Philippines, achieving emeritus status with the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. Terry also served as the Professor of Missions at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and currently is the Professor of Missions at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Cordova, Tennessee.

Fifty percent of the content of *Missiology* embraces new material. Some of the article titles from the older edition are repeated but different authors were solicited to rewrite the chapters. Some of the chapters are repeated *verbatim* from the first edition. A number of the new chapters cover completely different topics. Both editions feature forty-two chapters but the second edition organizes them in a more readable way. The new edition divides the book into five sections. These include (1) Introduction to missions (2) The Biblical basis of missions (3) The theology of missions (4) The history of missions and (5) Applied Missiology. The first four sections together comprise only fifteen chapters. The last section is by far the largest, numbering twenty-seven chapters, a full sixty-five percent of the book. In my opinion, the last section on Applied Missiology could have been further subdivided under headings, such as culture, contextualization, world religions and strategies, to name just a few. Nonetheless, the new divisions represent an improvement over the first edition, which included no separations between chapters at all.

*Missiology* boasts thirty-nine different contributors, mostly from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Such homogeneity represents both a strength and weakness. The denominational background of the contributors insures the doctrinal integrity and uniformity of the book. Furthermore, a multiplicity of authors allows for a more detailed examination of specialized subjects. For instance, there are chapters on women in mission and the missionary family. On the other hand, a multitude of authors often leads to some repetition and *Missiology* is no exception. Several topics are treated more than once in different chapters. Also, a book with forty-two chapters by almost as many authors on almost every conceivable missions subject lacks a clear focus. This disadvantage is more than offset, however, by the thoroughness of the text as it reaches back into the many tributaries of missions thought.



*Missiology* unveils entirely new chapters on the subjects of Business as Mission and Urban Missions, important new emphases in missions strategy. IMB President David Platt has recently announced renewed initiatives on both fronts. In the future, the IMB will focus on strategic world-class cities, sending teams of missionaries to reach them. In addition, Platt desires to deploy hundreds of thousands of Southern Baptist businesspeople, teachers, aid workers, and retirees to exponentially multiply the IMB's force of overseas missionaries.

When the first edition of *Missiology* was being edited in 1997, the extent of the Christian movement in China was just becoming known to the outside world. Now there are major lessons to be learned from the phenomenon. The chapter on missions in China captures this well and draws lessons that can be applied to other parts of the globe.

Thom Rainer's well-written first edition chapter on "Strategies for Church Growth" should have been retained in the second edition but instead was omitted. I feel the church growth paradigm still has merit and should be studied by the current generation. In addition, Bob Reccord's important chapter describing the SBC Cooperative Program (CP) did not pass muster for the second edition. This is unfortunate in these days of declining or plateauing CP giving. Although the second edition of *Missiology* attempts to appeal to a broader audience than Southern Baptists, dropping the CP element weakens its value to SBC seminaries.

Particular attention should be given to the last two chapters in the second edition of *Missiology*. Keith Eitel pens an excellent article about "World Christianity." Here he explains how former mission fields have become new mission forces in their own right. Churches from countries such as China, South Korea, Brazil and South Africa are sending their own missionaries, founding their own seminaries and composing indigenous theologies. Eitel explores the extensive future implications.

Perhaps the major difference between the first and second editions of *Missiology* lies in the opposing thrusts of the respective final chapters. In the first edition, the late Avery T. Willis, Jr., (and my former direct supervisor) wrote a chapter entitled, "The Unfinished Task." At the time, Willis was the Sr. Vice President of the Office of Overseas Operations for the IMB. In this capacity he controlled the strategy and supervised 5,000 missionaries. Willis' chapter reflects the IMB's emphasis on penetrating the final frontier of missions that was just

beginning to hit stride in 1998. Since then, most IMB missionaries have been redeployed through retirement, attrition, or redeployment toward the least reached parts of the world. Willis (and his successors) prioritized SBC missions resources toward reaching the remaining people groups of the world, arguing the task of world evangelization could be finished. Most mission agencies adopted the IMB's philosophy and leadership on this issue.

Jeffrey Brawner's final chapter in the second edition of *Missiology*, however, stands in remarkable contrast to Willis' article in the first edition. Brawner, a young missiologist who served as one of my missionaries in Brazil when I supervised IMB work there, entitled his article, "Finishing the Task: A Balanced Approach." Here Brawner argues for a dual mandate for reaping and discipling the harvest countries where the lost are responding while simultaneously evangelizing unreached peoples in the world's last frontier. Since most mission groups, including the IMB, are pursuing more of a "one track" strategy tilted in favor of unreached peoples, Brawner's chapter ends the book on a refreshing note.

*Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* constitutes an excellent introductory missions text for seminaries and graduate schools. I have chosen it as the principle required book for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's (MBTS) on-line introduction to missions course. I highly recommend *Missiology* for use by students, scholars and vocational ministers.

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***The Unfinished Church: God's Broken and Redeemed Work-In-Progress.* By Rob Bentz. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014. 172 pp. \$14.99, Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4335-41066-6.**

Rob Bentz in his book *The Unfinished Church* issues a call to those who are within the church and disenchanted with it, to not abandon the church, but to remain in it to be a catalyst for its completion. Bentz takes

his idea of the unfinished church from a half constructed church building in Bermuda where he briefly lived. This unfinished building, with its beauty and pathos, caught and held his attention, becoming for him a metaphor for the state of the North American evangelical suburban church. Bentz does not single out the church he is discussing as the North American suburban evangelical church, which is a weakness of the book if you are not within the demographic audience, but there are enough contextual clues to let the reader know that he is not discussing the church in general, but instead a very specific manifestation of the church. With that said, his recommendations for how the church should be constructed are still applicable across cultures.

The book is structured around three main sections with an introduction. The introduction gives the author's backstory and reveals the image of the unfinished church to the reader. An image that will carry forward throughout the book in the clarion call to finish the building. After the introduction, the book moves through three major sections; from the foundation of the church, to the construction of the church, and ending with the completion of the church.

Before a church can begin construction it must have a proper foundation, and this foundation is discussed in the first major section. Bentz lays out his argument for the foundation of the church in two chapters entitled "God's Called Out Community" and "God's Redeemed Community". The core thought of these two chapters is that God has not called out and redeemed His people for them to become a holier-than-thou, self-serving club, but instead for the church to expend itself in the service of others. Redemption cost God something on the cross and therefore believers' service to Him and the world should be a sacrifice. Bentz connects the New Testament church with Israel in a way that is both helpful and less than satisfying. He is helpful in that he acknowledges the connection between the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament. He is less than helpful though, in explaining the nuances of this connection. This can be forgiven, however, in that his book does not purport to be an in-depth systematic treatment of the relation between Israel and the church, but instead a call to action to God's people to be faithful to God's call.

The heart of the book is in the section in which Bentz deals with the church's construction: Both its material and its builders. The first chapter of this section seeks to show how a church that is built around

one's own desires and preferences is not a true reflection of the church. The church should reflect the community in which it is located, with all its diversity. There is no room in the church for an exclusiveness built around ethnic or cultural barriers. The book is to be rightly commended for this emphasis, but with that said, Bentz does not address the very real difficulty of creating a multi-cultural church. It is impossible to represent equally the various musical, preaching, architectural, and design styles of every culture in a church. While no person should be excluded based on culture or race every church will have a distinct culture that is more reflective of one of the cultures in the community. It would help for Bentz to acknowledge this in the chapter, but instead he leaves the reader hoping for a church that is like a tie-dyed shirt of cultures. If all the cultures are blended into a new multicultural culture, then none of the cultures are truly represented. Nonetheless, Bentz does offer a helpful call for the unity of the church to be built upon our unity in Christ and not a unity built upon other things.

In the remaining four chapters in the section on construction, the book aims to highlight how those within the church should live so as to complete the church. First, we are to love each other. This is a love that finds its source in God's love for us and overflows into our love for each other. It is also not just a sentimental feeling for others, but is manifested in the actions we take to sacrificially serve those both inside and outside the church. Without this love, there is no hope of the church being finished. Second, we are to encourage each other. Playing off of the characters in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the reader is encouraged to find his own Evangelist, Interpreter, Christian, and Faithful characters. We all need to have people in our life who encourage us, but we also need to be doing the same in the life of others. On this long journey to finish the church, we need to support each other. The third thing we are to do is to serve each other. Again, like with love, we serve others because Christ was a servant to us. While the church can meet your needs, you also need to be meeting the needs of the church, and we do this through serving others for their sake and for their benefit. Bentz encourages every Christian to engage the spiritual gifts God has given him and to strengthen the church through service. Finally, we are to dwell in unity. This can a difficult thing given the people we encounter in church and the various issues, such as worship styles that arise, but nevertheless, we are called to unity as followers of Christ. This is a unity that we are given

by the Spirit, but which we must work and struggle to maintain. We must learn to forgive and to be forgiven. We must commit ourselves to each other through both the good and bad times, and in so doing, the church can move forward in its project and not be left unfinished.

The final section of the book is entitled “The Completion” with the one chapter in it entitled “Jesus Finishes His Building Project.” This chapter is given over to a discussion of the work of sanctification in the believer and how one day God will complete the work that he has begun, both in individuals and in His church. While the church is unfinished today, its completion is guaranteed in the resurrection and return of Christ. Jesus will complete the work He has begun. With this assurance each follower of Christ is to move forward in his own sanctification and work towards the completion of the unfinished church. All-in-all, Bentz has offered the church a good reminder of the need to be working to transformed into the image of Christ. In so doing, Bentz will hopefully recall some people from the mistaken belief that you can love Jesus, but hate his church. Instead, he challenges each of us to roll up our sleeves and help the church look more like Jesus.

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***Heaven. (Theology in Community Series). Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 287 pp. \$18.99 paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1433527814.***

The subject of heaven can quickly become a mess. Just attend your average funeral to see for yourself where heaven becomes the place where the departed become angels or spend their days enjoying pristine golf courses or look wistfully down at us. Heaven hardly fares much better in many pulpits either. It's either presented as the great escape for the Christian to get out of this hopeless world, or it's ignored by preachers who want their congregants invested in the solutions to the problems of the world. Admit it, you either love the hymn “I'll Fly Away”

or it makes you cringe. It is this plague of misinformation and biblical imbalances that the present volume seeks to remedy by setting forth a robust, biblical, and multidisciplinary treatise on the doctrine of heaven and its relevance to the daily life of every believer.

*Heaven* is the sixth volume of the Theology in Community series edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson. (Other volumes include: *The Kingdom of God*, *The Deity of Christ*, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, and *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*). These volumes investigate their titular doctrine utilizing several highly respected and evangelical scholars who present the doctrine from several angles, including biblical theology, systematic theology, history, culture, and pastoral theology. The objective of this communal approach is to “provide for pastors, leaders, and laypeople an up-to-date resource for exploring both theology and practice with accessible depth” (back cover). Thus, just to name a couple examples, in the present volume the reader gets a chapter from Andreas Köstenberger, a pre-eminent scholar on Johannine literature, addressing heaven in John’s Gospel and Revelation and an excellent treatment of suffering and heaven from Ajith Fernando, who knows firsthand the relevance of this subject as the leader of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka. The chapters, though scholarly, always keep the pastor’s questions and concerns in mind. For example, the first chapter, while providing a fittingly broad and historical introduction to the study of heaven, includes a very helpful section in which the most frequently asked questions about heaven are given succinct biblical answers (pp. 29-40). Indeed, the pastor should familiarize himself with this brief section of FAQs as he will likely encounter these questions often in his ministry.

The book is well organized. After an introduction, there are five biblical theology chapters. There is a chapter given to heaven in the Old Testament, the synoptic gospels, Paul’s letters, the general epistles, and John’s gospel and revelation. After these are five chapters that take up the subject more systematically from the perspectives of biblical themes, history, suffering, angelic beings, and the Christian’s hope. The book also has three indexes: author, subject, and Scripture, which allow it to remain useful as a helpful reference.

Within these chapters, all of the expected topics get addressed, including the meaning of heaven as both a place and as a reference to God’s abode, the subject of the intermediate state, rewards, the new heavens and the new earth, and the resurrection. Each chapter is

grounded in redemptive history and is centered in the gospel. Indeed, Raymond Ortlund Jr. articulates this shared viewpoint aptly: "The whole Bible is the story of heaven above coming down to earth, deity coming down to humanity, grace coming down to the underserving, to lift them up" (43).

It is a testimony to the editors that this volume shows so much continuity and agreement amongst the various contributors. Each author stresses the hope of heaven being much less about a place that we depart too, but a reality that is invading the earth. This, of course, does not happen all at once. Pennington, for example, shows that "Jesus' mission is to announce, and through his death and resurrection, effect the coming reign of God" (82), i.e. heaven on earth. Wellum, who addresses Paul's theology, shows how, in the light of Christ, the hope of heaven carries with it the tension of being both already and not yet. We are already citizens of heaven and receive many of the heavenly blessings, however the full reality is still future, awaiting Christ's return (93-94). As such, the biblical vision of heaven is indissolubly connected to the doctrine of the resurrection and of new creation. Köstenberger lays this whole thought out in succinct fashion: "Christian's hope for heaven is rather for resurrection and eternal life in God's new creation, where heaven and earth are joined and God dwells fully in the midst of his creation and his people. This implies both continuity and discontinuity with our present experience of what it means to be human and to live in the world" (145).

The recognition of the continuity/discontinuity in the Bible's hope of heaven, as being both already present in Christ to believers but also awaiting its full consummation in the future, greatly expands the relevance of the doctrine of heaven to the believer's daily life. Jon Laansma brings this out in his discussion on the epistle of James, a book not often thought of as being about heaven. However, Laansma shows that heaven greatly informs the teaching of this little letter. He states, "in brief, James contains the idea of heaven as both present and future . . . with its attention given primarily to the 'wisdom that [already] comes down from above' (3:15), to heaven's imminent justice, and to how these enable believers to navigate the economic and social realities of their present world" (118). In short, James is teaching believers how to live under the rule of heaven in the present as they wait patiently for God to bring heaven to earth in its fullness (120).

The doctrine of heaven is also critical for making sense of suffering and persecution in the believer's life as Ajith Fernando demonstrates in his chapter. Fernando shows that the New Testament is replete with promises and encouragements to those suffering for Christ of the reward of heaven. He notes that "the Bible considers persecution to be a basic aspect of discipleship" (223). He is careful to clarify that the reward of heaven is not spoken of in the Bible as the result of suffering, but that our sufferings, "are necessary experiences that those destined for glory experience" (225). In other words, heaven is not given to the sufferer because they have suffered, rather heaven is the reward that makes present suffering worthwhile. For a life of facing persecution, the reward of heaven is a great source of strength and encouragement. Fernando considers the possibility that much of the modern church's weakness is due to such an avoidance of this in its preaching.

In light of this neglect of such a major portion of God's revelation, we should not be surprised that many Christians make choices that tend to avoid the way of the cross . . . We should not be surprised at the lack of a sharp moral edge among Christians, or by the church's inability to motivate people to costly commitment and service. In place of a message of radical obedience motivated by the hope of glorious future reward in heaven, we seem to have chosen to entertain our flock with pleasing programs that meet their perceived wants in the present. (231-232)

The biblical doctrine of heaven, then, rather than being a cause for Christian disengagement is one of the best motivations the church has to encourage self-sacrifice and radical obedience.

I only have two criticisms of this book. First of all, I wish the editors had given more than one chapter to the Old Testament and had given the Book of Revelation a chapter to itself. The current arrangement causes both of these sections of Scripture to get less treatment than they deserve. For example, except for the Book of Job, the wisdom literature gets no attention. I would have liked to have seen Proverbs addressed, especially with the claim that Bruce Waltke makes that the expectations contained in many Proverbs points the faithful to a hope beyond the present life. Likewise, Ecclesiastes with its refrain "under the sun" and the futility of a life that does not look to heaven would have enriched the book's thesis even further.



My other criticism is the book lacks a chapter on heaven and cosmology, both ancient and modern. The work never addresses the issue of the biblical conception of the cosmos as a three-tiered universe, where heaven is not just metaphorically, but literally, above the earth. This is an important topic in the realm of apologetics and arises in the tension that many Christians feel between science and faith. Granted, Pennington attempts to address this topic in his discussion of the effect our modern worldview has on our ability to think biblically about heaven. He discusses the ancient architecture in an oblique fashion when he insists that this language is primarily ethical rather than scientific (81). However, his handling of the subject really leaves the question begged, “how do we know they weren't teaching both?” We need a better justification for why the interpreter is supposed to accept the ethical meaning of the biblical cosmology, but is free to disregard the scientific meaning. Simply saying that the former gets more emphasis than the latter is insufficient.

In conclusion, this is a great book to have for any pastor or lay person needing a better grasp on the biblical doctrine of heaven. This book makes a strong case that we need to spend more time thinking about heaven. After reading this book, I couldn't agree more.

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***Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization.* By Bill Henard. Nashville: B&H Books, 2015. xiv + 242 pp. \$14.99, Paperback. ISBN-13 978-1433683978.**

Churches in North America are dying at an exponential rate. In my own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, approximately 70-75 percent of churches are plateaued or declining. An additional 10-15 percent are at serious risk of dying and will likely do so in the next five to seven years.<sup>1</sup> Every year, nearly one thousand SBC churches close their doors permanently. For Christians, these are not just statistics. These are

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<sup>1</sup> North American Mission Board, “Replant,” <http://www.namb.net/replant/>.

congregations no longer able to display the transforming power of the gospel or reach their communities with the good news.

In an effort to reverse these catastrophic numbers, Bill Henard has written a very helpful resource, *Can These Bones Live?: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*, to assist pastors in revitalizing dying churches. Henard serves as a consultant for churches in need of revitalization and teaches courses on this same topic at Southern Seminary. He has compiled statistical research with his many years of experience in assisting struggling churches to produce an accessible and useful volume.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters, in addition to an introduction, a conclusion, and seven appendices. In the introduction, Henard offers a needed caveat to all preparing to revitalize. There is no formula, method, or program that will guarantee success. Only God can initiate revitalization. There are particular steps a pastor should take, but ultimately change results from the work of the Spirit.

In the first chapter, Henard explains the desperate need for revitalization in America. He cites several statistics that show churches' startling rate of death and decline. He follows these statistics with the basic presuppositions that undergird church revitalization. These assumptions need to be held in order for a pastor to lead a congregation toward health and growth.

The second chapter alone is worth the price of the book because it equips the pastor to accurately assess the spiritual condition and cultural climate of a potential congregation. It is vital to ask the right questions about a church before accepting a call to be their pastor. The unfortunate truth is that some churches, though faced with likelihood of death, are unwilling to change. An accurate assessment is able to save the revitalizer time, discouragement, and frustration.

The next eleven chapters address various obstacles that prevent church growth and practical suggestions on how to overcome them. The barriers are myriad. Some involve the differing personalities of churches, others the physical limitations of church property, and still others congregations' decision-making process. For each hurdle, Henard prescribes a feasible solution.

The final chapter, entitled "The Change Matrix," provides a strategy for implementing a systemic change within the church without destroying it in the process. Henard presents a four-step strategic plan

that enables a congregation to develop and carry out God's unique vision for their church.

*Can These Bones Live?* has many strengths. Henard understands that church revitalization is not an entrepreneurial enterprise, but ultimately a spiritual endeavor. "A fatal flaw that pastors make" explains Henard, "is to major on the physical and only give the occasional glance at the spiritual" (43). While most of this book focuses on resolving the physical problems of a church, a necessary and proper qualification is given to acknowledge the spiritual aspect involved.

Additionally, Henard is no novice when it comes to revitalizing churches. His many years of experience are evident throughout the book, which is full of little gems of wisdom and practical advice that will greatly benefit the revitalizer.

Over the last few decades, evangelicals have emphasized the necessity of planting new churches. This is an important undertaking that must continue. However, evangelicals must also address the decline of established churches. Henard brings to light this legitimate concern, while providing a practical resource for reversing this trend.

While there is much to commend in this book, a couple of criticisms are in order. As stated above, Henard correctly recognizes that church revitalization is primarily a call to spiritual transformation. However, the content of the book does not match this. The title, which is taken from Ezekiel's vision in the valley of the dry bones, does not seem to accurately reflect the book's content. If revitalization is solely dependent on the preaching of the Word and the necessity of prayer then why is no practical wisdom given for how to preach or cultivate prayer?

Furthermore, the titles of the chapters do not consistently coordinate with their content. For example, chapter one is entitled "Why Church Revitalization?" but only the first section discusses the reason churches need to be revitalized. After this very brief section, the rest of the chapter explains the character and the qualifications required for those revitalizing.

In conclusion, *Can These Dry Bones Live?* will serve those, who are called to revitalize dying churches by assisting them with much practical wisdom and insight.

This book will prove beneficial for those with minimal experience in church revitalization. It could even assist the veteran pastor who

knows his church needs help but is unsure of how to implement the necessary changes.

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***A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator (Explorations in Biblical Theology)*. By Charles L. Quarles. Edited by Robert A. Peterson. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013. xviii + 220 pages. Softcover, \$17.99. ISBN-13: 978-1596381674.**

With the Bible as his compass and Matthew 13:52 as his hermeneutical guide, Quarles, in his succinct yet satisfying, five-part work, *A Theology of Matthew*, embarks with his readers on an exploration of Matthew's integrative approach to Christology. For Quarles, Matthew's approach is integrative in that numerous other themes "are so tightly integrated with Matthew's Christology that separating them is practically impossible" (16). In this work, Quarles explores the exegetical and theological significance of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as *Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator*.

In his introduction, Quarles exhibits a pastor's heart in lamenting the "doctrinal anemia of the contemporary church." Quarles presents sobering data evincing the sad state of affairs within the church as many "disciples" do not understand the core tenets of the Christian faith (1-2). Admirably, Quarles hopes that this monograph will help the church recover a biblical (rather than cultural) Christology (2).

At the beginning of Part 1 (Foundations for a Theology of Matthew), Quarles explains his purpose for writing: "the book intends to summarize and describe the theology of an individual by a particular name who served as the author of this gospel" (5). Essentially, Part 1 serves a prolegomena to Matthean studies. Introductory matters such as authorship, dating, provenance, audience, structure, and purpose are succinctly surveyed, and Quarles proffers a fair and balanced approach while elucidating his own position on these topics. As a Markan prioritist,

Quarles rejects both Bacon's (five-part) and Kingsbury's (two-part) structural schemas, opting rather to see Matthew's structure as a "chronological and geographical progression of Mark's gospel" (14). Quarles also presents a well-argued case for a Christocentric, rather than an ecclesiocentric reading (so Gundry) of Matthew's gospel. Germane to Quarles's thesis is Matthew 13:52 and Quarles's concept of Matthew as "kingdom scribe":

When Matthew wrote his gospel, he sought to fulfill the role of scribe of the kingdom. He pointed to old treasures in the Hebrew Scriptures, new treasures in the life and teaching of Jesus, and the amazing correspondence between the two. . . . Jesus is the new Moses who corresponds in many ways to the Moses of the Old Testament; he is the new David who corresponds in many ways to the David of the Old Testament; and so forth (30).

In Part 2 (The New Moses: Jesus as Savior), Quarles explores how Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses through his infancy, teaching ministry, fasting, miracles, and transfiguration. Quarles explains that Matthew did not fabricate these connections, and "one must not drive a wedge between Matthew's theological purpose and his historical reliability" (44). A synopsis reveals that these Mosaic connections make up the warp and woof of the canonical Gospels (44–45).

Part 3 (The New David: Jesus Our King) highlights Jesus's parallels with David through his genealogy, title, birth, fulfillment of prophecy, and actions. This is the shortest of Quarles's five parts, and perhaps, the most underdeveloped. There also seems to be redundancy between this section and Part 5 (see e.g., 89–91 and 134–38; 96, 102–04 and 150; 93–95 and 172).

Methodologically, in Part 4 (The New Abraham: Jesus Our Founder) Quarles seems inconsistent in not listing the specific parallels between the patriarch and Jesus (as in Parts 2–3), opting rather to discuss their relationship with the nation of Israel. For Quarles, Matthew portrays Jesus as the "new Abraham" who "serves as the founder of a new Israel" (107).

Lastly, Part 5 (The New Creator: Jesus, Our God) marks the largest section of Quarles's book and synthesizes much of the content in Parts 2–4. Part 5 explores the titles of deity ascribed to Jesus by Matthew

“Son of Man,” “Wisdom,” “Lord,” “Son of God,” and “Immanuel”) and Quarles rightly notes that these titles reveal Jesus’s divinity and oneness with YHWH (133).

The chief strength of this work is Quarles’s ability to compress vast amounts of data into manageable and easily understandable chunks. Quarles’s magisterial survey of the debates surrounding Matthew’s gospel in Part 1 is worth the price of this book alone. Furthermore, Quarles’s synthetic approach in surveying the exegetical and theological significance of Matthew’s portrait of Jesus helps to bridge the superfluous gap between the academy and the church. Another valuable insight is Quarles’s concept of reading the gospels *vertically* (reading the gospel from start to finish in a single sitting) as well as *horizontally* (as a synopsis/harmony). Such a holistic reading of Matthew elucidates the writer’s “movement, flow, and major emphases,” and helps uncover “new and important details of Matthew’s theology” (23–25).

In sum, *A Theology of Matthew*, is an exciting exploration of what may be the most important document in church history. Quarles’s erudition and pastoral heart shine brightly through in rediscovering much of Matthew’s integrative Christology that has, apparently (given Quarles’s statistics on pages 1–2), been hidden in plain sight. While not without its faults (no book is), *A Theology of Matthew* is a first-rate page turner that deserves a spot on the shelf of any Christian seeking to better understand Matthew, his Christology, and his immaculate display of storeroom treasures—*both old and new* (30).

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