

BOOK REVIEWS

Clifton, Mark. *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*. Nashville: B&H, 2016. 153 pp. \$12.61.

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Most books that focus on church revitalization are written to churches that are plateaued or beginning to decline. However, many churches in the United States are in such disrepair that they are about to close; they are defined as *dying churches*. A book attempting to speak more specifically to the dying church in the field of church revitalization is *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* by Mark Clifton.

Clifton begins *Reclaiming Glory* by analyzing the proper attitudes of church replanting. Even though the author assumes that church replanting and church revitalization are synonymous, the two are different, which will be discussed below. Clifton's first section of the book argues that the

congregation is best renewed when they repent and remember (14-15). The author also explains the proper motivation to replant a church is to worship God (18-20). After the book examines the correct attitude and motivations, the second chapter defines a dying church as a congregation with poor leadership, poor focus, and lack of evangelism (22-30). Next, the author proposes questions churches should ask before they begin the church replanting process (30-34).

Chapters three and four examine two different lists of characteristics. The first list is in chapter three, which describes four different church replanting pathways: 1) give the building to a church plant, 2) share the building with a church plant, 3) merge with a church plant, or 4) replant the church from within (37-51). Chapter four provides another list, which discusses six components needed to replant a church effectively. This list includes: 1) pray without ceasing, 2) love the church's remaining members, 3) exegete the community, 4) simplify the strategy, 5) focus on reaching young men, and 6) make disciples who make disciples (54-76).

After discussing these pathways and components, Clifton goes on to define success in a church replant and the qualifications of an effective church replanter. The book claims success in a church replant is not defined by the number of people who attend, but by the transformation of the community in which the church is located (112-113). Regarding the qualifications of a strong church replanter, the author identifies three attributes: a pastoral leadership heart, emotional toughness, and an ability to adapt. The book then concludes with the point that "only the divine power of God, the glorious message of the gospel, and the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women will replant a dying church" (141).

Clifton's work provides multiple elements to consider. The first aspect to analyze is the reliance on the God-factor that is often ignored in other church revitalization or church replanting books. While the author does not ignore the human factor in church revitalization, the beginning and end of his argument consist in relying solely on God. This reliance on God is an important reminder for pastors going into a church needing revitalization since pastors can easily get overwhelmed with the many tasks related to revitalization. This book helps the pastor remain steadfast in his faith that God is the one building up His church.

Another worthy contribution provided in the book, *Reclaiming Glory*, is the chapter describing the characteristics of an effective church replanter. A reader can appreciate the clarity provided in this list but will recognize that this list should not be exclusive just to church replanters but should be characteristic of all pastors. While the Bible does provide a list of qualifications for pastors and deacons, Clifton provides a more contemporary application of the passages in 1 Timothy and Titus. Also, while the Bible provides clear guidelines for pastors, the lists provided in Clifton's book allow any pastor to know how they can be most effective in a 21st-century congregation in the United States.

Perhaps the biggest weakness of this book concerns the matter of focus. The subtitle of the book explicitly states that the topic is about church revitalization. However, the constant theme throughout the entire book is that the topic is about church replanting. Church revitalization and church replanting are similar but different enough to warrant different terms. Revitalization can be defined as a church using its existing organizational structures and traditions while making changes to be healthier with the same group of people. Replanting can be defined as using new organizational structures and traditions to start an entirely new vision with the same group of people. Therefore, the author could do a better job clarifying the focus, whether the book is about church replanting or church revitalization. Even though the two terms are similar, they are different enough to confuse the reader when the terms are used interchangeably. In the judgment of this reviewer, the author should have focused his work on church replanting rather than blending church replanting and church revitalization.

Another weakness of this book is the lack of depth in the content provided. Most of the book consists of examples or stories of churches that have implemented a process of revitalization in their church. While this can be helpful for the reader to understand the concepts better, most of those provided are self-explanatory. The content also raises some questions that are left unanswered.

Nevertheless, this book may be a good resource for local associations of churches to provide to pastors who are new to the field of church replanting and revitalization. It provides a general introduction for pastors

entering churches that are dying and need to find health again, and it includes examples and stories of the basic principles provided. More advanced readers may find the book lacks depth for pastors attempting to replant their congregations. Wider reading may be necessary to build on this introductory work.

Barna, George. *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993. 111 pp. \$4.99.

Reviewed by Harvey Mitchell Jr. Harvey is currently serving in a rural town of 7,800 people where he is the lead pastor in a church revitalization. He has seen growth in his church from 12 people to over 150 in five years. Harvey graduated with a BA in Pastoral Ministries from Central Bible College, Springfield, MO, and MDiv from Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, CA. He is currently in the first year of a DMin program at Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA.

George Barna founded the Barna Group in 1984, which researched various issues in culture and in the church. Due to his research, Barna has become a well-known cultural and religious researcher, writing over 50 books. His work is often cited in other publications and scholarly writings.

This book was written to those interested in how to turn around established churches that were on a slow spiral towards the end of their life cycle as a church. Barna believes that there is a way back to growth and vitality, and he uses his many years of research to help churches find a way back to life again.

This book opens with the author giving two perspectives of churches. The first perspective is of a dying church that needs to be turned around, and the second perspective is of a healthy church being able to understand how it needs to change over time to stay healthy and growing. We can simply look at the religious landscape in almost any city and see some churches that are growing while other churches are declining. The main difference is that the declining churches are trying to hold on to a style and memory of a past that is no longer here (12). Meanwhile, the growing churches are taking time and spending resources to help the church become the church