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Book Review: A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir by Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge

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Cornett: Book Review: *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch* and that is honoring to all parties and moves us to a more secure place in our own faith and evangelistic calling. These steps include acknowledging experience, bracketing convictions, encountering the strange situation with openness, evaluating the strange culture, fusion of horizons, and developing new practices. Adeney's examples from her own time in Indonesia prove quite helpful in explaining this spiral. The book concludes with a look at "giftive mission" and seven practices (and people) that "further the gospel through the witness of grace and love toward others" (175).

Interactive questions and group dialogue sprinkled throughout the book, along with an appendix to help congregations take an historical look at evangelism in their own church, make this resource applicable for small group study and broader church Sunday school classes.

Graceful Evangelism is an excellent overview of a holistic view of evangelism—sharing God's love in word and deed—from an ecumenical landscape. The book covers much territory—historically, socially, denominationally—and the 240 pages leave the reader wanting more. This concise synopsis is perhaps its greatest asset and its biggest downfall. Many chapters are chock full of models and metaphors, which could easily be expanded. As a guide to the Western missionary movement and its view of evangelism, it has to be read as such, for Adeney only rarely touches upon evangelism in a more global context.

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Today's relativistic world demands the kind of insight Adeney demonstrates. It demands that we listen and learn from those around us that we not only proclaim Jesus as Lord, but live as though we believe Jesus is Savior. Being a Christian today demands that we see the kingdom as now and yet to come—that we look on those we meet as both spiritual and physical beings. To my unease, there are movements where social justice is the rage but proclamation is abandoned. I find great joy in that Adeney seeks to help us step into the social while not denying the verbal. May we be humble and receptive as we live out the "E" word in our wonderfully changing world.

Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, 194 pp., \$16.99.

Reviewed by Daryl C. Cornett, Ph.D., Pastor, First Baptist Church, Hazard, Kentucky.

Collin Hansen is currently the editorial director of the Gospel Coalition, a fellowship of evangelical churches committed to reforming ministry practices to conform fully to Scripture. He previously served as an associate editor for

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Christianity Today and is the author of *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (2008). John Woodbridge is Professor of Church History and Christian Thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he has taught since 1970. He has authored and co-authored numerous books and has received four Gold Medallion Awards for his writings related to Christian history and biography. In *A God-Sized Vision: Stories that Stretch and Stir*, the authors present the reader with a series of revival stories encapsulated in their desire to see evangelicals sincerely long for spiritual awakening and pray earnestly and expectantly for God to do a mighty work again.

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Drawing from the life and passion of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the long-time pastor in London, England, the authors introduce the work's purpose as both to inform and inspire. Lloyd-Jones always coupled his study of revivals with his desire for revival. The authors candidly write that Lloyd-Jones' personal example and his call for the church to pray earnestly for revival changed his life. Now, in this work, the authors desire to pass along some of the Lloyd-Jones spirit in regard to revival. They explain, "We've never even heard many of the revival stories that buoyed the faith of Lloyd-Jones. They've been lost" (14). Therefore, Hansen and Woodbridge take their readers into selected times and places when God stirred His people to spiritual renewal in an attempt to engage their minds and warm their hearts. They write, "This book is for Christians who want to bring their lives in line with their deepest beliefs. This book won't make church committee meetings shorter, can't guarantee greater happiness, and doesn't offer any ready-made revival formula. But by taking you back to days when God tore open the heavens and gave this world a glimpse of blissful eternity, it might stir you to offer prayers that move God" (15).

Before presenting the various historical accounts of revival, the authors devote the first chapter to "Biblical Foundations and Theology of Revival." By glancing at the biblical content, they hope to help the reader understand "the precedents, patterns, and principles of revival" (20). They observe that the Old Testament supplies a pattern of forgetfulness and infidelity followed by judgment and difficulty, then repentance and reform. The New Testament pictures an early church that is empowered overall yet punctuated by moments of intensity as believers experienced the power of God's outpouring of His Spirit emboldening them as witnesses for Christ. The remainder of the chapter touches on the difficulty of arriving at a precise theological definition of revival. They contrast the theology and methods of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney as example of this difficulty—two revival preachers and authors who come from opposite ends of the theological spectrum. Hansen and Woodbridge offer a definition that is prayer

Cornett: Book Review: *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and centered and more general while clearly leaning toward a more Edwardsian understanding: “Revival is neither a well-organized evangelistic campaign nor a finely crafted apologetic treatise, though the church may profitably employ such methods. Revival transcends all ordinary ways we comprehend and communicate the grace of Jesus Christ. For reasons known only to him, God occasionally condescends to answer his people’s faithful prayers with a special sense of his power and presence” (35).*

The bulk of the book is given to recounting revival movements from the early eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. The authors claim, “We have done our best to sift through the dross and present you with the most compelling, most reliable stories” (17). However, in such a brief survey, the greatest weakness is sure to be omissions. For example, the frontier revivalism of the latter half of the eighteenth century and first few decades of the nineteenth century gets little attention. Timothy Dwight and the revivalism at Yale under his leadership merits a whole chapter. However, Charles Finney, considered by most the father of modern revivalism and whose influence is recognized in the first chapter, is barely mentioned in one paragraph with others, such as William Miller and Joseph Smith. Furthermore, Finney’s works on revival and ministry remain untouched although the reliable, historical record on him and left by him is abundant.

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Similarly, the authors mention that the “1800s would belong to the upstart Methodists and Baptists who burned themselves out planting frontier churches” (61). Although what the authors mean by “burned themselves out” remains unclear, what is clear is that the revivalism associated with the Methodists and Baptists somehow did not merit inclusion. The Second Great Awakening is represented by Dwight and the revivals at Yale. This is curious since Methodist and Baptists far exceeded Congregational numbers by mid-nineteenth century, and the book gives no explanation of why the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The authors make no mention of Methodist circuit riders Peter Cartwright or Francis Asbury or Baptist pioneers of the South, Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall, whose ministries largely consisted of revival and church planting. These omissions certainly reflect the biases of the authors, and the criticism here certainly reflects the biases of this reviewer.

A few additional paragraphs in the introduction could have benefited the readers by allowing them into the selection process of the authors. In addition to the omissions just cited, the reader might get a rationale for why the authors highlight Bill Bright but ignore the revivalism associated with the life and ministry of D. L. Moody. Not that Timothy Dwight or Bill Bright or any of the others the authors chose are not worthy of inclusion, but why exclude Moody and others

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associated with revival? A concise rationale for the stories *not told* would have been helpful.

Conversely, Hansen and Woodbridge remind us of one of the most overlooked revival movements in North American history—The Layman’s Prayer Revival. This reviewer agrees with the authors who state: “Nestled between the Second Great Awakening and the Civil War, the so-called Prayer Meeting or Businessmen’s Revival of 1857–58 has often been overshadowed. But closer examination reveals a revival worth remembering and repeating” (78). Ministerial students, pastors, and lay people need to hear about this incredible prayer movement that resulted in genuine revival and awakening.

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Hansen and Woodbridge conclude this survey by highlighting what they see as common denominators of revival among the various expressions described in the book. The marks of revival, according to the authors, are persistent prayer, repentance, proclamation of the gospel, acknowledgment of God’s authority, and bold service. Therefore, the authors conclude with a general description of what revival looks like, so believers can learn both what to desire, what to do, and what to expect.

A God-Sized Vision accomplishes its purpose, revealed in the subtitle, to stretch and stir. The reader is taken to see in word picture the people who displayed unusual passion in prayer, spiritual discernment, courage, and persistence in the face of terrible adversity, and boldly proclaimed the gospel to see the fruit of their labor when revival and awakening came. Hansen and Woodbridge deliver a satisfactorily scholarly approach to a subject not easily accessible to historian or theologian alike. Even if we struggle to agree on what revival *is* theologically, however, we all need to remember what revival looks like when it has happened and that we desperately need it again. This work helps us to remember certain times of spiritual refreshing and calls the redeemed to cry out with renewed resolve

Cornett: Book Review: A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and humility like the Psalmist, “Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” (Ps. 85:6)

Wraight, David. *The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will Change Our World*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007, 212 pp., \$12.99.

Reviewed by R. Scott Pace, Ph.D., Huitt Professor of Religious Education, Chair of Applied Ministry Department, Oklahoma Baptist University

As International President and CEO of Youth for Christ International, David Wraight is exceptionally qualified to write a book focused on maximizing the potential of the next generation. His first-hand ministry experience includes considerable time as a pastor, youth counselor, and organizational leader. These credentials, along with his passion to invest in young people, serve as the foundation in constructing a strategy to empower “the generation who will change the world” (101). In his work, Wraight, a native of Australia and an international leader, provides some much-needed balance to Western ideas of how to engage the youth culture with informed insights and a global perspective.

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The title, *The Next Wave*, capitalizes on a surfing metaphor that perfectly translates into Wraight’s stated purpose. Careful study of the wave trends with an acute gaze toward the horizon helps surfers position themselves to combine their observations with their abilities into a successful ride. Wraight draws a parallel for believers desiring to advance the cause of Christ with a particular focus on the next generation. He summarizes his initial goal and the first five chapters of the book by contending, “It is about reading the signs, trends, and cultural, social, and spiritual shifts that are converging around the world and in the church” (xv). However, his stated thesis does not end with an evaluation of these factors. The practical challenge portion of his book, chapters six through ten, involves “preparing, empowering, and releasing a generation of young people into mission and ministry throughout the world, as well as the associated challenge before us to serve, nurture, encourage, and resource these young people” (xv).

In the first two chapters, Wraight outlines the enormous potential of this generation by describing their instrumental role in the tragic genocide in Rwanda and its subsequent restoration. The author also uses biblical examples such as David, Esther, and Mary along with historical examples such as James Hudson Taylor and pioneer missionary movements to demonstrate God’s desire to use young people.