

Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language

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Christian Faith in Plain Language

While textbooks supply description and analysis of all the classic questions of doctrine, they often miss the *contemporary questions* our students want to ask in class. Students may wonder if the Holy Spirit is still an active force in our churches today. They may wonder whether Jesus thought about getting married. They may want to describe a current natural catastrophe and ask about God's sovereignty. Sometimes these questions are asked in class. Often they are not. And when they are asked, how often have we wondered ourselves as faculty how to frame the best answer?

This book was born out of our desire to answer those questions. As theologians, we pooled those questions we heard again and again in class, we sorted them, and we decided to answer them to the best of our ability. We did not think about this effort as a replacement for a well-written survey of Christian theology. We see it as a supplement. This is a book that can parallel any good theological text, and in it students (and faculty) can peruse the tough questions and see how we have tried to answer them. In classroom settings, this book can also be an effective discussion starter. Once the basic lecture material has been covered and students have read these contemporary questions, a stimulating classroom discussion might orbit around these lead thoughts: *Did any of these questions resonate with you? Did you find any of their answers satisfying? Unsatisfying?* The hope is that these provocative questions will "ring true" with beginning students. And when they do, their appetite and love for theology will begin to blossom. We want these questions to inspire reflection, debate and disagreement; but above all, *engagement*.

Each of us has many years of experience teaching a variety of theological topics in the local church. And (not surprisingly) these same questions appear there. Adults (and adolescents) often have questions about their faith and yet, unlike students, they have no curriculum or classes, and no venue where such discussions are a matter of course. And in most cases they have no access to theology professors who can help them wrestle with many of the most challenging questions. Thus, this book could easily serve the church as well. Imagine an adult education curriculum that moves through the book each Sunday covering one chapter at a time!

So, our wider aim is to help believers—whether they be laity or students—to grow and flourish in their faith. And when an intellectual obstacle impedes that growth, we want to let them know that good and thoughtful answers are at hand that can help.

— Adapted from the introduction by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber

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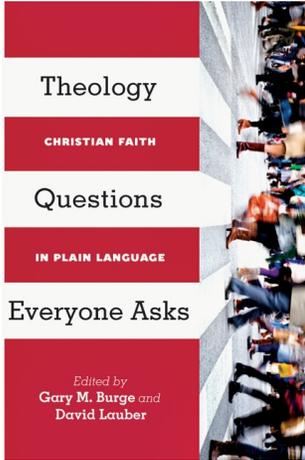
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Everyone Has Questions About God and What Matters Most in Life.

When we ask those questions, we are asking about theology.

- Isn't talk about God really a guessing game?
- What good is the Old Testament?
- How can we have free will if God controls everything?
- The virgin birth. Really?
- What does an earthquake say about God?
- Is the Holy Spirit still at work in churches today?
- What did Jesus think about getting married?
- Does being a Christian mean having particular political views?

While books about doctrine supply description and analysis of the classic questions of the faith, they often miss the contemporary questions on the minds of readers. This book fills that gap. Organized around the key topics of Jesus, the Bible, church, the Holy Spirit, evil, salvation and hope, the sometimes provocative questions on these topics aim to ring true with the lived experience of real people.

Chapters and contributors include:

Chapter 1: "What Is Christianity?" by Timothy Larsen

Chapter 2: "What Is the Bible?" by Kevin J. Vanhoozer

Chapter 3: "Who Is God?" by George Kalantzis

Chapter 4: "How Does God Relate to the World?" by Gregory W. Lee

Chapter 5: "What Is the Meaning of Evil and Suffering?" by Jennifer Powell McNutt

Chapter 6: "Who Is Jesus?" by Gary M. Burge

Chapter 7: "What Is Salvation?" by Keith L. Johnson

Chapter 8: "Who Is the Holy Spirit?" by Jeffrey W. Barbeau

Chapter 9: "Who Are Human Beings?" by David Lauber

Chapter 10: "Who Is the Church?" by Daniel J. Treier

Chapter 11: "How Should I Live?" by Vincent Bacote

Chapter 12: "What Is Christian Hope?" by Beth Felker Jones

Theology Questions Everyone Asks aims to inspire reflection, debate, disagreement and, above all, engagement in what the Christian faith is all about.

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