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Archibald's "Shaking the gates of hell: a search for family and truth in the wake of the civil rights revolution" (book review)

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Book Review



Archibald, J. (2021). *Shaking the gates of hell: a search for family and truth in the wake of the civil rights revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 304 pp. \$28.00. ISBN 9780525658115

Born during the Civil Rights Movement, author John Archibald, an Alabama newspaper columnist, looks at his childhood world and its intersection with the struggle for racial justice. Archibald's father and grandfather were Methodist pastors. While only a few of his grandfather's sermons from the era could be found, he examined his father's manuscripts for content on racism. He found vague references addressing the issue – often in the context of loving one's neighbor. He wished his father's messages to his flock offered stronger words condemning racial injustices. He witnessed his father take a stand for black men and women on several occasions and knew his father's sympathies lay with the movement. He wished his father voiced this more often when addressing his congregation. Archibald acknowledges the differences in the times. While his father's manuscripts lacked references to the current situation, pastors often add thoughts, particularly ones from recent news or community events, as they expound upon the text or in other times during services. When video or audio recordings of services do not exist, one cannot know for certain. John should take pride his father treated blacks respectfully and supported their cause. He acknowledges the appreciation African Americans showed for his father.

Archibald also examines homosexuality. His brother Murray came out. His parents continued to show love and acceptance for their son. Archibald criticizes the decisions of the United Methodist Church regarding its official position on the issue. While John left the Methodist Church because of it, his brother Murray remains in his ancestral faith. Many readers will disagree with the author's statement that Paul's writings about homosexuality may be disregarded because the words came from Paul instead of Jesus and because they reflected a first century situation rather than a contemporary one. Many will take issue with the author's views that Old Testament laws concerning same-sex relationships are cultural rather than God's command. Archibald emphasizes Jesus' love for all people. He does not address how God dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah nor does he address Jesus' righteous anger in Gospel passages. Many churches find it difficult to communicate God's love in a culture which misunderstands homosexuality's classification as sinful as hatred.

The book offers a well-written and interesting story, incorporating memories from the author's experiences in childhood and youth. It lacks footnotes, endnotes, and a bibliography, even though the author quotes sources which may be difficult to locate without them. It includes an index, illustration credits, and text permissions for longer passages quoted. Libraries with collections focusing on Methodism in Alabama or on the Civil Rights Movement and the church may wish to purchase a copy.

Reviewer

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