

A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live? by Robert W. Jenson and Adam Eitel. Oxford University Press, 2016. 141 pp. Hb., \$30.95 CDN. ISBN: 978-0-19-021459-3.

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Robert W. Jenson has taught Christian theology at Luther College, Gettysburg Seminary, St. Olaf College, Oxford University, and Princeton University; he was most recently Senior Scholar for Research at the Center of Theological Inquiry of Princeton University. Jenson's writings span disciplines and discourses that modernity attempts to separate: biblical studies, ethics, philosophy, theology, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue. Notably, he is also the author of a two-volume *Systematic Theology* (Oxford University Press 1997, 1999). Adam Eitel is Assistant Professor of Ethics at Yale Divinity School. They come together in this text, *A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live?*, to offer a concise and accessible overview of Christian theology. The text has its origin in an undergraduate course taught by Jenson at Princeton University in the spring of 2008. Based on a series of twenty-three course lectures, the text retains the aura of Jenson's classroom. It is not simply a summary of his renowned *Systematic Theology*, but an instance of his teaching instead. It is an outline, or itinerary, for doing theology.

Much like Jenson's *Systematic Theology*, *A Theology in Outline* treats the standard sequence of doctrines in Christian theology: God, the Trinity, creation, humanity, sin, salvation, and the church. However, it reflects Jenson's relatively recent interest in the theological interpretation of scripture, and in this text he frames the whole of Christian theology as a response to the question posed to the prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, can these bones live?" For Jenson, this question is an inquiry into whether Christian theology itself is a pile of dead bones. As such, can the story that God lives with his people be told today with any coherence? The chapters of this book attempt to answer this question. They therefore comprise a single string of conversations that have the purpose of introducing people – to give a taste of it, as he puts it—to theology. Jenson uses the valley of bones as a metaphor in two senses: to ask whether these bones can live is to ask first whether the story that God can live with his people can continue. Second, if it is still continuing, is the Christian faith a pile of dead and dried up bones? Is Christian theology itself dead? From first to last, Jenson seeks to address this question. In what follows, I will elucidate more particularly the entailments of the text.

Indeed, in Chapter One, “What is Theology?,” Jenson insists that the character of theology is specific of the church of Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead. Chapters Two and Three elaborate on the content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The second chapter, “Israel,” focuses on the memory of Israel of its own story, noting how it had its origin with the God-who-*speaks* (i.e., to Abraham and Moses). Jenson contends that Israel’s relationship with God culminates with his question to Ezekiel, “can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3). Chapter Three, “Jesus and Resurrection,” depicts Jesus’s resurrection as an answer to this question in the affirmative. The fourth chapter, “The Triune God,” specifies the primary *dramatis personae* of Jesus’s resurrection. Chapter Five, “Creation,” builds on the fourth chapter, and notes that God calls the world into being in the same way he calls Israel and the church into being. Again, God *speaks* it into existence.

Chapter Six, “The Image of God,” elucidates the nature of human beings, who are divine image bearers, whom God calls to participate in the Triune discourse. Jenson asserts that the biblical notion of the image of God differs from standard portrayals of the image of God in that to be made in the image of God is to be a creature with whom God can strike up a conversation. Again, Jenson stresses that God *speaks*. Chapter Seven, “Sin and Salvation,” explicates the moral content of divine speech. Jenson avers that humans are created for living faithfully and lovingly in community with God and one another. The eighth chapter, “Church,” turns the discussion to the community gathered around the news of Christ’s resurrection. Jenson highlights therein the fact that the New Testament contends that the church is Christ’s own body. The final chapter, “Can These Bones Live?,” revisits such doubts as whether the church can survive the critique of the modern manifestation of nihilism.

All in all, one will find a well-thought-out presentation of the kernel of Christianity within these pages. My only caution would be to note the slight preference for Calvinistic theology that Jenson’s presentation belies. With that reservation aside, I recommend it to novices and well-established Christians alike.