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DUST AND BREATH: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care about Both By Kend Hotz and Matthew Mathews

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DUST AND BREATH: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care about Both. By Kendra G. Hotz and Matthew T. Mathews. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 118 pages. Paper. \$14.00.

“What have treadmills to do with hymnals? What have pulpits to do with blood pressure cuffs? The answer is simple: faith and health, salvation and healing belong together.” *Dust and Breath* states the case for why the church should care about both faith and health. Utilizing case studies from the Church Health Center in Memphis, Tennessee, this book illustrates how the battle for healthy lifestyles in the inner city may be understood

in light of the finitude of our bodies in this fallen world. The call to action is motivated by an understanding of the full scope of our world's redemption in view of the present reign of God.

The first instinct of the confessionally minded Lutheran is to view the idea of a church-run health club with skepticism. Yet *Dust and Breath* approaches the church's focus on health from the theological perspective of the reign of God coming to us now in Christ. Referencing the resurrection of the body as taught in 1 Corinthians 15, the authors explore how both our bodies and souls are subject to redemption. Hotz and Mathews understand our existence as characterized by both the dust which God created us, and the breath of life by which we have the image of God.

Is this book's focus on health and wellness one more example of contemporary theology shamelessly conforming to the values of our culture? Has Hollywood's obsession with the perfect body infiltrated our ecclesiology? In this case the answer is no. The motivation for this book is not health and fitness for the purpose of vanity or an implicit belief that it is only for this world that we have hope.

Through individual case studies from inner city Memphis, the book illustrates instances of illness that can be connected pastorally with sin and redemption through faith in Christ. The case studies rely on an extensive theology of the consequences of sin in our fallen world in order to illustrate how people become separated from the wholeness and peace that we have in the image of God. For example, the sin of excessive self-reliance is illustrated in the case study of a pastor who woke up in a hospital bed after an

emergency triple bypass surgery. Through pastoral care, this pastor began to see that he rationalized away responsibility to care for his health through his belief that he was in all circumstances indispensable to the church.

Dust and Breath does not address the potential theological confusion of relating healthy life choices with Christ's work of redemption in the world. For example, how does the picture of redemption framed by Hotz and Matthews relate to those with physical disfigurements or chronic illnesses who have scarce hope for healing until Christ returns?

If you are looking to broaden your theological perspective on the relationship between redemption and wellness of body, mind, and spirit this 118-page book is a relevant read. The use of case studies provides excellent insight into the theological questions associated with pastoral care of the sick. The description of established inner-city health programs may provide helpful ideas to those churches seeking to transform their communities by promoting healthy lifestyle choices motivated by the love of Christ. This book raises some important questions about the relationship between healthy lifestyles and a living faith. What response should the church have to unhealthy lifestyles in our culture, especially in the inner city?

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