

## Theological Reflection

Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. 2nd edition. London: SCM Press, 2019. xi + 268 pp. \$40.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9780334056119.

The book under review here, *Theological Reflection: Methods* by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, is published in its second edition. According to the authors' preface to the second edition, the distinctive elements of the first edition have been retained in the second. In addition to updating the "further reading" lists throughout the book to account for more recent and global publications, the only other notable changes are to a couple of the chapter titles. In short, the second edition appears to be an updated version of the first edition without significant change in substance or overall structure.

Offered in both print and e-book formats, *Theological Reflection: Methods* provides a wide-reaching collection of different methods of theological reflection. The book consists of an introduction, seven main chapters, a bibliography, and an index of names and subjects. Notably absent from the book is a comprehensive or synthetic conclusion. The introductory chapter explores the meaning of theological reflection and its relationship to the larger theological curriculum, especially practical theology. This chapter also introduces the three major tasks of theological reflection to which the authors return throughout the book: the induction and nurture of members, building and sustaining the community of faith, and communicating the faith to a wider community (12).

Each of the seven body chapters shares a common structure, which includes six elements: the method in outline, an introduction to the method, examples of the method from history, examples of the method from the more recent past, an evaluation of the method, and an annotated list of additional resources. This predictable structure is one of the major strengths of the book. The method in outline and introduction sections present key terms, figures, and concepts in one or two pages, while the rest of each chapter introduces representatives of the method and short extracts from their written sources. While perhaps not intended by the authors, this allows readers different levels of engagement with each chapter. By reading the method in outline and introduction, readers can gather a basic impression of the method and its representative thinkers. The remaining material in the chapter allows readers to go deeper. Because the authors have already identified the major proponents of each method, their chapters serve as a pathway to further research and analysis, either individually or in a structured classroom setting. On the whole, the common structure of the chapters is reminiscent of expanded versions of the "library guides" at many institutions: they offer clear, incisive summaries of each method while easily facilitating further research or application.

The first chapter introduces the method of theological reflection that sees "the self and the reflexive life as the primary space in which theological awareness is generated and nurtured" (22). This method stresses the dialogical approach to theological reflection, seen in Psalm 139, spiritual autobiography, letter writing, journaling, verbatims, and blogging. The second chapter explores theological reflection through constructive narrative theology. Growing out of the storied nature of Scripture, this method emphasizes the role of narrative and storytelling. Examples of this include the parables of Jesus, *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas*, *the Book of Margery Kempe*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and more contemporary examples like Stephen Crites, Paul Ricoeur, Rebecca Chopp, and Shelly Rambo. The third chapter also relates narrative to theological reflection. In this chapter, however, the emphasis is on what the authors call "canonical narrative theology,"

which challenges Christians to pattern their own lives according to the drama of God's salvation (87). The authors offer the New Testament narratives about the Lord's Supper, St. Francis, Ignatius of Loyola, the Anabaptists, Karl Barth, proponents of biblical narrative (Hans Frei and George Lindbeck), Stanley Hauerwas, and John Swinton.

In the fourth chapter, the authors shift the focus from theological reflection as a private activity to one that is more corporate, rooted in and creating identities, metaphors, and practices for the faith community. Examples of this method from history include the Rule of St. Benedict, the Vita Apostolica among the Beguines communities, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*; more recent proponents of this method are James Hopewell, Don Browning, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, the principles of Theological Action Research, and new monasticism. The fifth chapter discusses the correlative method of theological reflection, which creates a dialogue between the sources of Christian tradition and non-theological (or non-Christian) sources (151). This method endeavors to make the claims of Christian theology comprehensive to those outside of the faith by connecting theological understandings in so-called secular sources (the dialogical strand) or by showing how theological understandings are relevant or address human questions (the apologetic strand). Paul's sermon in Acts 17 in Athens, Justin Martyr's *Apology to the Gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and Schleiermacher's *On Religion* offer historical examples of this method. The authors Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, Seward Hiltner, David Tracy, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elaine Graham as diverse representatives of the correlative method in more recent times.

Chapter six introduces the praxis method of theological reflection, which characterizes theology as "*performative knowledge ... a way of knowing that is inseparable from doing*" (185). While some might think this method originates with the political philosophy of Marx, the authors point to Jesus's parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46), Pope Gregory I's *Book of Pastoral Rule*, the Society of Friends, and Søren Kierkegaard as precursors to later praxis-oriented theologians. The authors offer Paulo Freire, who influenced theologies of liberation significantly, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan-Luis Segundo and his pastoral cycle, a variety of thinkers who emphasize Christian practices (Don Browning, Donald Schön, Dorothy Bass, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore), and the interfaith work of Ray Gaston as more recent examples. The final chapter concerns the method of contextual theological reflection, which speaks theology "in the vernacular" (217). This method calls attention to the importance of place and culture in shaping theological reflection. Classic examples of this method include the experience of Pentecost in Acts 2, Origen's attempt to blend middle Platonic thought and Christian theology, Erasmus's humanism, and the efforts of certain Catholic missionaries (Bartolomé de Las Casas and Matteo Ricci). The Second Vatican Council represents a collective effort moving in the direction of contextual theological reflection in more recent times. Figures like Vincent Donovan, James Cone, and Marcella Althaus-Reid offer clear examples of this method as well.

As the authors note in the preface, they hope to "show the structure and internal logic of different ways of doing theology in ways that honour a diversity of traditions and approaches, and above all issuing an invitation to [the reader] to join in" (xi). On the whole, the authors achieve their overall goal for the volume. The collection of methods clearly illustrates the diverse traditions and methods for doing theological reflection. They write clearly and fairly. The authors do not betray preference for one method or another, even when the work of one of the co-authors is referenced. The invitation to join in one of the methods is more difficult to achieve. Because the chapters themselves are mostly descriptive and analytical, it is not always exactly clear *how* the reader might join in one method or another. This may be another aspect of the book that suggests its suitability for a classroom setting, rather than for independent use.

In addition to the goal stated in the preface, the authors identify five aims for writing the book in the introduction: (1) to introduce a variety of models of theological reflection and to identify their strengths and weaknesses; (2) to identify the process of “theological reflection” as the common methodology among all theological thinking; (3) to indicate historical and contemporary examples with extracts from primary sources of each method of theological reflection; (4) to reflect the diversity of church and global traditions of theological reflection; (5) to assist readers in applying methods of theological reflection that are appropriate to their own context and practice (13–14). Once again, the authors are largely successful in achieving these aims. The book is strongest in the first four of these aims. The fifth aim, to assist readers in applying methods of theological reflection, is more uneven. Some of the methods presented in the book offer lend themselves more to a “how to” approach, while others remain more descriptive or theoretical in nature.

I would recommend libraries purchase this volume, especially those tied to a school of theology or an active undergraduate theology program. As the review above indicates, *Theological Reflection: Methods* will be best used in conjunction with a professor-led class, like an introduction to theology. Still, the book will benefit individuals who read it independently, whether for their research purposes or to better understand their own methods of theological reflection or those of others.

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