

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (ed.). *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2012. 626 pages. \$199.95.

What is practical theology? How can we study that? Why should we practice that? This edited volume deals with these questions in a comprehensive way. In the Introduction, editor Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore summarizes the historical development of the concept of practical theology and explains its complexity today by referring to four different understandings of practical theology: 1) a discipline among scholars, 2) an activity of faith among believers, 3) a method for studying theology in practice, and 4) a curricular area of subdisciplines in the seminary. (5) Miller-McLemore stresses that these four perspectives are “not mutually exclusive” but “connected and interdependent” with one another (5) and uses the fourfold approach as the basic framework of the book.

The book comprises four parts with fifty-six essays written by scholars in various fields of theological studies. Their contributions to the book with divergent definitions of practical theology and its various practices in relation to their specialties help readers understand practical theology not as one of the traditional curricular areas of theological education but as “a general way of doing theology concerned with the embodiment of religious belief in the day-to-day-lives of individuals and communities.” (14)

Part One, “Way of Life: Shaping Faith among Believers in Home and Society,” relates to how everyday life experience can be interpreted theologically to have relevant meaning. Seven essays critically explore such topics as suffering, healing, playing, eating, loving, consuming, and blessing from ministerial perspectives.

Part Two, “Method: Studying Theology in Practice in Library and Field,” illustrates a variety of research theories and methods that can be used as effective tools to do practical theology. The seventeen essays explain case study method, psychological theory, hermeneutical theory, quantitative method, congregational studies, ritual theory, social policy, the use of scripture, poetics, emancipatory theory and method, feminist theory, womanist theory, narrative approaches, ethnography, participatory action research, theories of practice, and action theories.

Part Three, “Curriculum: Educating for Ministry and Faith in Classroom, Congregation, and Community,” concentrates on the pedagogy of practical theology in a broad range. It deals with how to teach Christian theology as a way of doing practical theology in relation to thirteen selected fields such as pastoral care, homiletics, religious education, worship, religious leadership, evangelism, spirituality, contextual education, ethics, systematic theology, historical theology, and biblical theology. The last chapter of Part Three, “Integration in Theological Education,” emphasizes the significance of connecting “the disparate parts of ministerial education into a whole.” (386)

Part Four, “Discipline: Defining History and Context in Guild and Global Setting,” has three sections. Six essays in the first section focus on such crucial topics being discussed in the North American context as racism, sexism and sexuality, globalization and colonial and postcolonialism, economics and classism, disability, and religious pluralism and Christian centrism. The authors who teach in the area of practical theology approach these topics critically and analytically and provide theological and practical wisdom to deal with them. The second section concerns the development and practice of practical theology in geographically different regions of the globe. Nine international scholars who teach and research practical theology in Continental Europe, Britain, French Canada, the United States, South Africa, West Africa, Brazil,

South Korea, Australia and Oceania describe how practical theology has been taught and learned in their regions. The last section closes the book with four essays summarizing the histories of practical theological endeavors in four different Christian traditions—mainline Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism.

This edited collection is a showcase presenting how contemporary scholarship of practical theology has been developed into a wide concept of practical theology. The content and structure of the book, on the one hand, remind readers of the significance of the integration of theory and practice in theological education and challenge contemporary theological schools and educators to reassess their theological education from a practical theological perspective. On the other hand, the basic assumption of the book that practical theology is “a general way of doing theology” tends to narrow down the width and depth of theological education to the relationship between theology and practice by ignoring the richness and complexity of theological education in the past and the present. For those who are interested in teaching Christian theology from a practical theological perspective, this book will be a useful reference, though its relatively high price and encyclopedic length may hinder them from using the book as a class textbook.

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