

**Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 247 pp.**

The authors' intention in this volume is to reclaim theological reflection as a "perennial and indispensable part of Christian doctrine" and discipline. Graham and Walton bring substantial academic credentials to this work, and Ward adds her perspective as an Anglican parish priest to the conversation. In this volume, the authors shape their arguments in response to those who view theological reflection either as an insufficiently serious undertaking or as a novel practice lacking substantial roots in Christian tradition. The authors also aim to address what they consider a lack of sufficient resources and guidance for those who hope to undertake theological reflection.

In each of the seven main chapters of the book, the authors explore a particular mode of theological reflection they have identified. For each mode of reflection, the authors provide an outline of the starting point of that perspective, historical examples, and an evaluation of that perspective. For example, in their chapter titled "Writing the Body of Christ," the authors discuss historical models for corporate theological reflection, ranging from the Rule of St. Benedict to Christian base communities, in which scripture passages are discussed and engaged in light of a community's daily events and realities. In the questions for discussion at the end of the chapter, the authors encourage readers to reflect on the different meanings of "body of Christ" in various texts discussed previously.

Additional chapters include: "Theology by Heart': The Living Human Document," "Speaking in Parables': Constructive Narrative Theology," "Telling God's Story': Canonical Narrative Theology," "Speaking of God in Public': Correlation," "Theology-in-Action': Praxis," and "Theology in the Vernacular': Local Theologies." The authors are to be commended for weaving contemporary feminist theologies, liberation theologies, and postmodern theologies throughout these chapters, rather than relegating them to the margins. One of the most powerful examples of contemporary theological reflection included in the volume is author Heather Walton's recounting of a struggle with an unwanted visitation by an "angel" in her efforts to conceive a child.

In their wide-ranging survey of the historical roots of theological reflection, the authors offer a creative exploration of the connections between story and ritual, and the role of ritual as a kind of crystallization of theological reflection. They also affirm literature as a dialectical partner, and at times a necessary corrective, to theology. In the authors' broad definition of theological reflection, they include the formation of Christian religious orders and emergent church movements, since they see these as loci for the creation of theology that is embedded in individuals' life and practice.

The authors make a convincing case that a rich historical precedent exists for theological reflection in the Christian tradition. However, their methodology is at times confusing. For instance, it is not clear what, for the authors, distinguishes "constructive narrative theology" from theological reflection that draws on "the living human document." For a volume that professes concern with the

practical roots of theology, it could be stronger on offering practical guidance for specific communities outside the academy. With a few welcome exceptions, readers who expect a series of practical guidelines for actually doing theological reflection are likely to be left wanting. Key questions are overlooked, such as: What is the locus of authority in each of these models of theological reflection? How does culture mediate Christian tradition in each model? By what criteria should contemporary Christians evaluate methods of theological reflection?

The authors are to be commended for their creative and inclusive approach to theological reflection methods, and one that will likely pique the interest of readers wanting more of a rigorously scholarly approach to theological reflection. The book may be best appreciated as a reference guide, with annotated bibliographies in each chapter providing helpful jumping-off places for the practice of reflective theology.

Rev. Susan Conrad  
UCSF Medical Center  
San Francisco, California