

BOOK REVIEWS

Barbara J. Blodgett and Matthew Floding, eds., *Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 176 pp.

“Reflect theologically on an experience you have had in your internship.” For theological field educators, few instructions are more fundamental and few more fraught, than this one. One insight I’ve gained as a theological field educator is that the seminary classroom as a pedagogical space resists, in its dominant norms and practices, the kind of wisdom generated in skillful reflection on ministry experience—precisely the knowledge most appropriate to field-based learning. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that theological school curricula still devalue wisdom as a way of knowing. A dominant assumption embodied in theological school curricula seems to be this: If students have the wherewithal to navigate successfully the rigors of theological study in the seminary classroom, then it should be self-evident how lessons learned in those spaces can be operationalized to make meaning out of experience in the field. But that, as Barbara Blodgett and Matthew Floding rightly note in their introduction to *Brimming with God*, is “far easier said than done” (p. 3).

For these reasons, Blodgett and Floding’s edited volume is a welcome resource both for theological field educators and seminary students. The underlying pedagogy of this volume is mentoring, a strategy that theological field educators know well. Each chapter pairs two field educators who first discuss their approach

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to theological reflection on experience. Then each contributor applies his or her model of theological reflection to a case study. In this way, the volume invites readers to “learn the ropes” of theological reflection on ministry practice from seasoned practitioners of this ministry art. In the two-step movement from describing models to applying them, the volume wisely pairs talking about theological reflection with showing readers what it looks like. Ultimately, the value of this approach is that it says enough but shows more.

Most of the contributors offer models of theological reflection that riff on a familiar pattern beginning with careful description, moving towards theological meaning-making, and then concluding with implications for continuing ministry practice. Several others explore models of theological reflection that are less familiar. One of the striking features of this volume is the dominance of the former approach, with its inspiration take from familiar sources (like Killen and de Beer, Mudge, Poling, Whitehead and Whitehead, etc.), over a collection of alternatives. In a North American cultural setting in which traditional modes of theological meaning-making increasingly fail to land, one wonders whether the “What? So What? Now What?” approach (as one contributor calls it) needs to be critically reimagined, or at least re-oriented. Moreover, there is little explicit reflection about why certain contributors were paired with one another, what the reader is supposed to glean from each pair’s engagement with one case study, and what the primary lessons are that each interpretive frame teaches about theological reflection in relationship to the relevant case study.

I will certainly use essays from this volume to show students in my field education courses what skillful theological reflection on ministry practice looks like. That is the primary goal of this volume, and to that extent it more than succeeds. The volume also raises a number of questions for me about the place of the tried-and-true pedagogy of theological reflection on case studies in a historical moment that is so dramatically challenging what counts as a case study of ministry.

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