



A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology

Kelly M. Kapic

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Whenever we read, think, hear or say anything about God, we are doing theology. Yet theology isn't just a matter of what we think. It affects who we are.

In the tradition of Helmut Thielicke's *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, Kelly Kopic offers a concise introduction to the study of theology for newcomers to the field. He highlights the value and importance of theological study and explains its unique nature as a serious discipline.

Not only concerned with content and method, Kopic explores the skills, attitudes and spiritual practices needed by those who take up the discipline. This brief, clear and lively primer draws out the relevance of theology for Christian life, worship, mission, witness and more.

"Theology is about life," writes Kopic. "It is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid."

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Nathan Parker says

Excellent concise book on the importance of studying Theology. It gave me a better appreciation for studying Theology, and it will be a book I recommend all of my students read. While it is not an ideal primary textbook for Systematic Theology (other books are meant to cover that area), it is the ideal supplement book to any Theology class to ensure students know why they are going through the process of learning Theology, and how they can apply what they learn in their devotional time and discipleship process.

Katie says

This book is a good overview of what a well balanced theologian might look like. It addresses many concerns people have about theology and provides good insight on avoiding these pitfalls. Overall it was enjoyable and quick to read.

Jordan says

Kapic's short introduction to theology is an ideal book for both the classroom and church. His writing is clear, careful, insightful, and he is a wise guide for students beginning and continuing their study of theology. Aimed at American evangelical college and seminary students, the book strongly integrates theology and spirituality by convincingly demonstrating that worship is at the heart of good theology. Theologians must learn how to become wise and how to approach and do theology in a way that avoids idolatry, admits our sin and finitude, and develops key characteristics of the life and mind via the work of the Holy Spirit. I would definitely recommend that professors and church leaders give this book a serious look (and read). I believe it can help provide structure and direction for students to approach and do theology well in relation to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Coupled with the personal guidance of the teacher, this will be a significant resource for developing faithful theologians.

This book is an "updated attempt" at Thielicke's A Little Exercise for Young Theologians (1962), but I'm not sure that this means it replaces the older text. Both could be read together with great benefit. The book comprises ten short chapters:

Part One – Why Study Theology?

1. Entering the Conversation
2. To Know and Enjoy God: Becoming Wise
3. Theology as Pilgrimage

Part Two – Characteristics of Faith Theology and Theologians

4. The Inseparability of Life and Theology
5. Faithful Reason
6. Prayer and Study
7. Humility and Repentance

8. Suffering, Justice and Knowing God
9. Tradition and Community
10. Love of Scripture

Kapic models the kind of theology he recommends to students by consistently integrating Scripture, the theological tradition, and working towards what he calls an “anthroposensitive theology.” By this he means “a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns” (p. 47). This kind of theology can be seen, for example, when Kapic writes that “God judges our theology faithful or false by our attitudes and responses to those in need. Theology that lacks compassion and action is no theology at all” (pp. 83–84). Furthermore, he calls students to do theology within the context of the great tradition as well as our local communities. Listening to the past requires patience, humility, trust, critical interaction, and the recognition that the Spirit worked in the lives of previous saints as well. Doing theology locally is to hear and recognize the Spirit’s work in the church now and to realize that theology grows best in community. In short, “we do ourselves and God no favors by neglecting the faithful, whether they are living or dead” (p. 104).

In the end, Kapic describes Christian theology as “an active response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, whereby the believer, in the power of the Holy Spirit, subordinate to the testimonies of the prophets and apostles as recorded in the Scriptures and in communion with the saints, wrestles with and rests in the mysteries of God, his work and his world.” (p. 121). I hope this book will find a wide readership as an excellent starting-place for serious study of theology.

For those interested, you can watch a video interview with Kapic here - <http://www.ivpress.com/videos/3975.php>

Thanks to IVP Academic for the review copy.

Rebecca Ray says

Helpful book explaining how our theology effects us. I gleaned a lot from this one, and haven't went back through my notes yet, but I think a big upshot for me is the reminder that everyone has a theology and our intellectual assents cannot be divorced from our beliefs.

David Goetz says

A very good book for new seminary students and even for advanced high school students or college students or adults interested in theology. Kapic writes clearly and forcefully. He also manages to pack quite a bit of content into 107 pages.

He argues for theology as a practice of all Christians, and he remains firm throughout that theology cannot be detached from concrete living: "theological detachment ... produces a divide between spirituality and theology, between life and thought, between faith and agency. [It] creates a deep misunderstanding that negatively affects not only our lives but also our theology, our churches, and even the world in which we witness and serve" (9).

The book includes two parts: 1) Why Study Theology? 2) Characteristics of Faithful Theology and Theologians.

In Part One, he calls for an understanding of theology as pilgrimage but affirms nonetheless that, though we do not yet know fully (1 Cor. 13), we can indeed know God truly in this world through Christ and in the Spirit. Knowledge of God--the point of theology--always properly issues in worship, and theology itself is done, as Barth says, only within the act of prayer. "Theological reflection," Kapic says, "is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words, and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone" (18).

Part Two contains seven chapters: The Inseparability of Life and Theology; Faithful Reason; Prayer and Study; Humility and Repentance; Suffering, Justice, and Knowing God; Tradition and Community; and Love of Scripture. I don't think he leaves out any characteristic essential to good theological performance. Each of the seven chapters is quite good, with "Suffering, Justice, and Knowing God" standing out as unfortunately unique in books of this sort. "For those who know God," he says, "love is the manner and context of all knowing. Speaking of God as if one were merely conveying cognitive data betrays and falsifies the speech" (91).

I give Kapic's book 5 stars because it admirably does what it sets out to do. I'm strongly considering it as a required book for our church's Care Group leaders.

Connor Longaphie says

A great handling of why and how not just pastors or seminary students but all Christians and even all humans are theologians and why we need to carefully consider if we are going about our theology the right way. Theology done right is an act of faith that brings us closer to the Lord. However, if we are not careful about how we go about this practice it can end up pushing us away from Him. Yet we also need to make sure that we are actually engaging in theology. Just as bad as those who do theology in a way that pushes them away from God those who refuse to engage in academic searching of the things of God, are neglecting their relationship with Him. We ought to do theology and we ought to do it correctly. This should be a mandatory reading for everybody that opens a Bible even once in their life. I'm tempted to buy boxes of this book and hand copies out to everyone I know. Definitely worth the \$5 CAD I spent on it.

Dave McNeely says

A useful introduction for beginning students of theology, but adds little to what has already been written. Most importantly, it's accessible and brief. The best contribution of the book is its chapter on "Suffering, Justice, and Knowing God," a cluster of topics often found missing from introductory books on the work of theology.

Joshua Spencer says

Length: shortish

Quality: Pretty good

It's full of wise advice for the humble, prayerful, and joyful study of theology. It encourages us to see the scriptures as an intellectually challenging encounter with God. It is unfortunately peppered with the wonky tendency to elevate pious sounding extra-biblical ideas and traditions far past their place, but it also has quotable little gems like "Reading Scripture is like collecting pollen. Meditating on it is like making honey. (Bruce Waltke)."

Eric Chappell says

Great little book. Kopic is a great writer: thoughtful, clear, well-read. His fabulous quotes are punchy and taken from a variety of traditions: Cappodocian fathers, Medieval church, Reformers, Puritans, Barth, contemporary theologians. A wonderful afternoon read. Every seminary student should read, and any Christians interested in theology (which should be all Christians).

Theologies that cannot be sung (or prayed for that matter) are certainly wrong at a deep level, and such theologies leave me, in both senses, cold: cold-hearted and uninterested. -J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*

People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. -G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Pilgrim theology: see Acts 9:2; 19:19, 23; 24:14, 22--followers of Jesus, followers of The Way.

Pilgrim theology: you are not God, and have not arrived at theological perfection. Your knowledge is not perfect (Ps 131)

Johannes Cocceius called it "the theology of the way" and Johannes Wollebius described as a 'wayfarers.'

Pilgrim theology: Exod 33:17-23 and the theological enterprise. We are not arrived. Stay humble.

William Ames--theology is "the teaching of living to God" see Marrow.

Christians learn doctrine in order to participate more deeply, passionately, and truthfully in the drama of redemption. Intellectual apprehension alone, without the appropriation of heart and hand, leads only to hypocrisy. -Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*

Anthroposensitive theology: a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns.

Faithful Reason: the experience of cognitive rest is godly sense of satisfaction with what we know and the limits of our knowing. See Frame, *Doc of Knowledge of God* (152ff).

See Helmut Thielicke's book A Little Exercise for Young Theologians

Illegitimate identification with Another: reading of Luther's faith is not the same as having Luther's faith.

Coram deo & theology: prayer as a way of being. Dialogue with God over books. Anselm wrote the Proslogian which were basically prayers consisting of theological reflection.

Augustine wrote Retractions at the end of his life--HUMILITY.

Repent--not just of sinful actions, but of faulty theology. Stop worshipping idols.

God shows Greatness in Compassionate Presence.

Theology that lacks compassion is not theology (James 1:27)

Jesus' concern for outcasts raised questions about his theology.

Isaiah 1:18 is not about philosophical debate with atheists, but lived theology.

Jaroslav Pelikan: Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.

Donald Bloesch: begin all books on theology with the index of Scripture. That can usually give you a good sense of where the author's errors will lie (summary).

Bruce Waltke: Reading Scripture is like collecting pollen. Meditating on it is like making honey.

Scott Carter says

Wonderful book. I thought Kopic did a great job of doing away with many negative connotations of studying theology and offers it in a more refined way. He clearly loves theology that is a lived theology and has an infectious attitude. This will hopefully keep many (myself included) from having or falling back on a stale, dry spiritual undertaking of theology.

Adam Webb says

A great little book on theology. Not overwhelming and not over simplistic. Kopic focuses on both faith and reason as it relates to theology. This book is primarily theological, but has many practical points for application.

J.J. says

Excellent! Pulling in great quotes and concepts from Frame, Bavinck, and others, but putting the cookies down on the shelf. A quick little read—can be done in one sitting. Edifying and practical, it keeps the goal of worship at the core of all theological study.

Michael says

Start here

If you are thinking about getting into theology study, start with this book. To use an analogy of flying aircraft, this book gives a great overview of why study flying, asking why you want to fly, how will you use this knowledge, will you put it into practice and actually do something (fly), how will you act while on the ground and in the air, and will your education and actions lead you to solve the human problem?

Abin says

A must read for any theologian (not just new ones). The author proposes the concept of anthroposensitive theology where theological reflections are interwoven with anthropological considerations, this really hits the nail on the head for modern theology. A brilliant little book which is definitely worth a second read.

John Coatney says

I think perhaps I expected too much from this one. It reads like an introduction for an entry-level undergraduate theology class written from a Reformed perspective, which is exactly what it is. The overview is nice, and the emphasis on a holistic approach to the study of theology is absolutely necessary. It is understandably Western and Reformed, which limits its usefulness for my purposes to some degree. I do recommend it to those for whom it was written - newbies to theological study in the Reformed tradition.
