

Book Review

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

Kelly M. Kopic

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In his latest book, Kelly Kopic's contagious passion for embracing the life-transforming potential for the discipline of theology captivated my attention, even in the first few pages. He inspires a renewed value and fresh perspective, arguing that the committed Christian cannot afford to discount theological study. Kopic's concern regarding the struggle with integrating theology and spirituality motivated this most inspirational and thought-provoking book. He asserts that there should be an organic connection between theology, prayer, suffering, humility, and community—all aspects of life. Drawing from the works of St. Augustine, Ignatius, and Thielicke, to mention a few, Kopic richly demonstrates throughout history, making contemporary application, that theology and spirituality should be highly integrated.

Although designed with the American Evangelical college or seminary student in mind, the impact of the author's message draws the serious Christian from any walk of life. In Part One, Kopic answers the question, "Why Study Theology?" while Part Two discusses "The Characteristics of Faithful Theology and Theologians."

Part one begins with an invitation to enter the conversation. Whenever a person speaks about God, he or she is doing theology. Theology is not simply for the academic.

When people try to make sense of confusion, loss, identity, society, and politics in light of who God is, they are engaging in theology. Theology is about the life and how we live it, which involved a conversation our souls can risk ignoring. A person's ideas about God impact lives more than one realizes.

The author draws attention to the reality that knowledge in theology is not merely cognitive, but deeply personal. A desire to know God intimately is a prerequisite to approaching theology. As a believer grows in his or her knowledge of God, his or her view of everything changes. J. I. Packer, in *God Has Spoken*, wrote: "Theologies that cannot be sung or prayed are certainly wrong at a deep level, and such theologies leave me, in both senses, cold: cold-hearted and uninterested."¹

Kopic likens the knowledge of God to a "pilgrimage" because a person's knowledge of Him is ongoing and limited. The author points out that, on occasion, theologians climb sunlit mountains while at other times they descend into shadowy valleys; sometimes they are rewarded with an endless vista while at other moments

¹ J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979) as quoted in Kopic, 23.

darkness clouds their path. At times they must stop to catch their breath or ask others for guidance. We take paths that do not lead where we anticipated, while at other times we turn a corner only to discover what we have been yearning for and striving to reach. Theologians definitely face limitations. Enthusiastically, Kopic urges believers to never give up on theology, for our confidence ultimately rests on God, not on ourselves.

In part two, the larger portion of his book, Kopic discusses seven characteristics of faithful theology: *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*.

When stressing the *Inseparability of Theology and Life*, he states that ideal theologians are characterized by rigorous study as well as through spiritual preparation. He underscores the value of daily maintaining a humble awareness and response to God's presence. Theological discussion must not be a substitute for knowing God.

Kopic discusses the characteristic, *faithful reason*, and nicely unpacks the important tension between the two. *Prayer*, the third trait, makes faithful theology possible. The author rightly insists that believers must protect themselves from depersonalizing theological studies through the discipline of prayer. "Theological reflection can and should be a rigorous, authentic and humble dialogue with God" (p. 68).

Next, the author claims that *humility and repentance* must distinguish the faithful theologian, who is a sinner and completely dependent on grace.

The chapter on *suffering, justice and knowing God* powerfully reminds the reader that faithful theology leads outward to consider God as He is revealed in His words and actions. Theology must reflect God's compassion and the value He places on the weak, helpless, and poor. Without this concern, theological talk and religious service is empty.

In the sixth trait, *tradition and community*, Kopic effectively indicates that theology grows best in the context of community. Believers must intentionally seek the counsel of the faithful in the past and present. He warns about the danger of mistreating the Word of God by isolating it from the body of Christ and stresses the value of engaging with tradition. He poignantly underscores the significance of allowing one's theology to be reviewed by those who experience God in their burning bush and tongues of fire experiences. "This doesn't mean we should revise the gospel to match the whims of culture, but rather an appeal to hear the wisdom of believers who daily wage the fight of faith" (p. 103).

Kopic wraps up his reflections on key characteristics of faithful theology by calling attention to the importance of cultivating a passion for and *love of Scripture*.

A Little Book for New Theologians is a "must read" for the new or seasoned theologian. It provides a solid anchor for the nature of theological study.