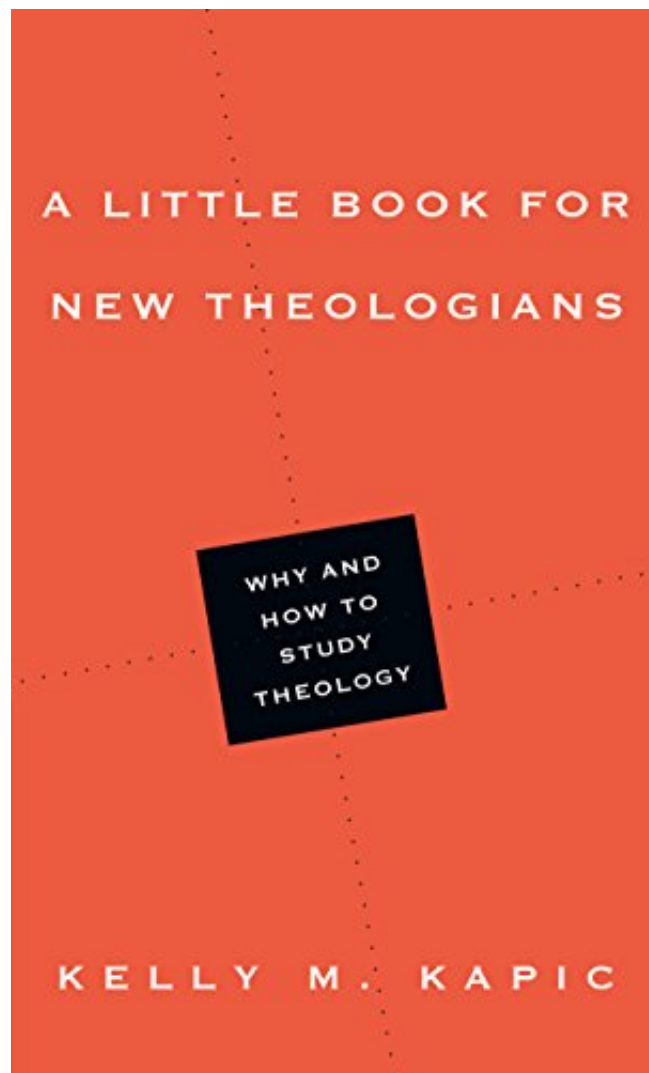


A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology

by

Bruce Feiler



EBOOK DOWNLOAD

Synopsis

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."

Sort review

From Publishers Weekly **Starred Review**. The question of what makes a life worth living has rarely been posed with as much poignancy and ambition as it is in Satrapi's dazzling new effort. Satrapi's talent for distilling complex personal histories into richly evocative vignettes made *Persepolis* a bestseller. Here she presents us with the story of her great-uncle Nasser Ali Khan, one of Iran's most revered musicians, who takes to bed after realizing that he'll never be able to find an instrument to replace his beloved, broken tar. Eight days later, he's dead. These final eight days, which we're taken through one by one, make up the bulk of this slim volume. While waiting for death, Nasser Ali is visited by family, memories and hallucinations. Because everything is being filtered through Satrapi's formidable imagination, we are also treated to classical Persian poetry, bits of history, folk stories, as well as an occasional flash forward into lives Nasser Ali will never have a chance to see. Each episode is illustrated with Satrapi's characteristic, almost childlike drawings, which take on the stark expressiveness of block prints. Clear and emotive, they bring surprising force and humor to this stunning tribute to a life whose worth can be measured in the questions it leaves. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *The New Yorker* The writer and illustrator who chronicled her childhood in the best-selling graphic memoir "Persepolis" now turns to the life of her great-uncle Nasser Ali Khan. A revered musician, he takes to his bed and refuses sustenance after his frustrated wife breaks his tar - an Iranian lute - over her knee. It takes him eight days to die, and in that time Satrapi reveals the futures of his children and unearths his past. She shows her great-uncle not merely as a wayward romantic but as a conflicted man whose story embodies several aspects of Iranian cultural identity during the late nineteen-fifties. Satrapi's deceptively simple, remarkably powerful drawings match the precise but flexible prose she employs in adapting to her multiple roles as educator, folklorist, and grand-niece. Copyright © 2006 Click here to subscribe to *The New Yorker* From Booklist Iranian born writer-artist Satrapi has been steadily building a reputation with children's books and simple but

distinctive New Yorker cartoons. Her acclaimed autobiographical graphic novels, *Persepolis* (2003) and *Persepolis 2* (2004), on her childhood exile from and eventual return to Iran, have been translated into 12 languages. The poignant last days of her granduncle, Nassar Ali Khan, a famous musician in 1950s Iran, provides the foundation of her latest illustrated tale. After his wife spitefully fractures his favorite tar (an instrument akin to the Indian sitar), Nassar goes on a wayward mission to find a suitable replacement. When the search fails, he renounces the world, vowing to end his life in bed. Scenes from his final week alternate with episodes from his courtship and musical training, along with glimpses into the destinies of his offspring after his death. Fans of fine artwork may regard Satrapi's boxy black-and-white drawings as primitive and unschooled, but her characters' faces and sad fates will haunt readers long after the last pages are turned. Carl Hays

Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Review Praise for *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* "A mighty achievement [and] an inspiring coming-of-age story." —USA Today "Delectable . . . Dances with drama and insouciant wit." —New York Times Book Review "It is virtually impossible to read *Persepolis* without falling in love." —Baltimore Sun "One of the freshest and most original memoirs of our day. [Satrapi's] is a voice calling out to the rest of us, reminding us to embrace this child's fervent desire that human dignity reign supreme." —Los Angeles Times "Cause for celebration . . . Superb." —Philadelphia Inquirer "Delightful . . . It is our good fortune that Satrapi has never stopped visiting Iran in her mind." —Newsweek

Praise for *Embroideries* "Stories of sex, love and marriage, ranging from the disheartening to hysterically funny . . . *Embroideries* generates a flavorful mix of perspectives with engaging, fully fleshed-out characters." —The Miami Herald "Tantalizing . . . Bold, bewitchingly humorous and politically astute." —Elle "As funny, opinionated, controversial, and surprising as any good comic or conversation should be." —Time.com "Subversive . . . Satrapi's book is a mocking rebuke to the cult of chastity, and a statement about the way human passions find their way around the most determined repression." —Salon

About the Author Marjane Satrapi was born in 1969 in Rasht, Iran. She now lives in Paris, where she is a regular contributor to magazines and newspapers throughout the world, including *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*. She is also the author of several children's books, *Embroideries*, and the internationally best-selling and award-winning comic book autobiography in two parts, *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*. *Persepolis* is currently being made into an animated feature film, cowritten and codirected by Satrapi, which will be distributed by Sony Picture Classics in 2007. [Read more](#)

[Download to continue reading...](#)

Look inside the book

A Little Book for New Theologians Why and How to Study Theology Kelly M. Kapic InterVarsity Press P.O. Box 1400 Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426 World Wide Web: E-mail: email@ivpress.com © 2012 by Kelly M. Kapic All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press. InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at . Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. Cover design: Cindy Kiple To Danny Kapic More than a brother . . . Contents Acknowledgments 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 Faithful 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 Notes Name and Subject Index Scripture Index About the Author Acknowledgments I have seen God use good theology to liberate lives. But I have also seen people misuse theology, resulting in abuse, hard hearts and pain. One thing that I have become concerned about in theological studies is the temptation to make overly strong divisions: between academics and the church, between theology and life, between truth and love. In the past the task of theological reflection was often intertwined with the experience and character of the theologian, so that the result was an organic connection between themes like prayer, humility, suffering and community and the act of “doing” theology. My worry is that in our day, for many of us, we have unintentionally cultivated what might be called theological detachment: such a view produces a divide between spirituality and theology, between life and thought, between faith and agency. Theological detachment 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. So here is my small offering; I hope students might read this book near the beginning of their theological studies, whether such education takes place formally within a classroom or informally as one sits reading and reflecting. My prayer is that this book might, in some small way, help new theologians avoid the strong dichotomies of theological detachment. The heart of this little book was first written seven or so years ago, although it has undergone various revisions since its inception. My great hope and prayer is that it might serve as a kind of updated attempt at what Helmut Thielicke brilliantly

accomplished in his classic, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, written in 1959 and translated into English in 1962. As I mentioned, the book in your hands has gone through many revisions, mostly because I have been using versions of it in my Doctrine 1 course at Covenant College. Countless students have given feedback and inspiration through the years, and I am sure the final version is much stronger as a result of their assistance. There are some folks in particular who read various versions of this and offered noteworthy help, feedback and encouragement: Sinclair Ferguson, Wesley Vander Lugt, Justin Borger, Brian Hecker, John Holberg, Cameron Moran, John Yates, Bill Davis, John Wingard, Jay Green, Jeff Morton, Paul Morton and Gary Deddo. Members of my department (Scott, Jeff, Dan, Herb, Ray and Ken) all provided various sorts of assistance along the way, for which I am deeply thankful. Tabitha, my wife, remains the best theologian I know. I can't thank you enough for your faith, hope and love: this is the soil out of which Jonathan, Margot and I grow and live. Thank you for bearing witness to God's glory in weakness, for your wisdom in times of uncertainty and for your courage amid the chaos. Finally, I dedicate this book to Danny Kapic, my brother in flesh and in spirit. I cannot thank God enough for you. You have become a rock for me, quick to offer a listening ear, words of grace, prayers of mercy and innumerable forms of love. From our days of unbelief to the wonder of God's mercy to our families, I stand amazed at how Christ has worked. Thank you for becoming a great model to me of integrity, faith, sacrifice and promise. And thanks for always helping me to laugh—that is a wonderful gift.

Part One Why Study Theology?

1 Entering the Conversation

We are all called theologians, just as [we are] all [called] Christians. Martin Luther, "Sermon on Psalm 5, Jan. 17, 1535" Tell me about God. For some people the question of whether or not God exists is a painful and haunting uncertainty not easily dismissed. But for most people the question is not whether God exists, but what is God like. Not whether there is a deity, but how many, and which one(s). How do we know God? Can God be trusted? Does God care? And is God good? Whenever we speak about God we are engaged in theology. The term "theology" means a word (*logos*) about God (*theos*), so when anyone speaks about God, whether that person dropped out of high school or completed a PhD in philosophy, he or she is engaged in theology. Theology is not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray. If I speak truth here, it is not so much knowledge that lifts me up, but rather the ardor of a burning soul that urges me to try this.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), "Book Three of the Trinity" Theological questions surround our lives, whether we know it or not. A wife and husband facing infertility inevitably struggle through deep theological questions, whether or not they want to voice them. College students working through issues of identity, culture, politics and ethics struggle—in one way or another—with theological convictions and how to live them. Our concepts about the divine inform our lives more deeply than most people can trace. Whether we view God as distant or near, as gracious or capricious, as concerned or apathetic, the conclusions we reach—whether the result of careful reflection or negligent assumptions—guide our lives. Christians must care deeply about theology. If the true God is renewing our lives and calling us to worship

him “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23), then such worship includes our thoughts, words, affections and actions. Do we want to worship Yahweh or waste time and effort on a deity we have constructed in our own image? Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), a nineteenth-century atheist philosopher, argued that talk about God is no more than amplified talk about ourselves: “God” is merely the projection of human thoughts and desires.[1] Surprising as it may seem, Christians share a fundamental concern with Feuerbach, for we recognize the temptation to create our own gods—gods that belong to us—rather than to respond faithfully to the One who is. Whether our theology is good or flawed, those we love most will be first to feel the effects. Carolyn Custis James, *When Life and Beliefs Collide* The Scriptures testify to the God who made the heavens and the earth, who created men and women to enjoy his creation and their communion with him. But sin has entered the world, creating chaos instead of order, death instead of life, and substituting idolatry for the worship of the true God. The Bible often describes our temptation to create and follow false gods. For example, after delivering Israel from Egypt, God warns them against forgetting their Redeemer and turning to false gods: “Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them” (Deut 11:16). The Song of Moses warns that, despite this display of God’s favor and power, the Israelites would eventually look to “strange gods . . . to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut 32:16-18). The Song warns coming generations against provoking God with their idols—with “what is no god” (Deut 32:21). Praise is, among other things, a form of thinking, and aims to “think God” as adequately as possible. David Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise* Theological reflection is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone. Every age has its own idols, its own distortions that twist and pervert how we view God, ourselves and the world. Whether it is the distant and uninterested deity of modernity or the fragmented and territorial gods of postmodernity, all times and cultures carry the danger of warping our worship. We aim not to escape our cultures, however, but to recognize that God calls us to respond faithfully to him in our place and time, whatever our particular social and philosophical climate. We, not just our ancestors, are invited to know and love God—and thus to worship him. While most of us are no longer drawn to the Baals and Ashtaroths of the past, we still look to idols—that which is not God—for our security, happiness and comfort. Is it not true that when many of us feel anxious or depressed, we seek relief by purchasing things: we head to the contemporary temples of self-indulgence in the malls across the country or on the Internet, where the shopping experience is meant to calm our souls? Similarly, the emphasis in American culture on comfort, which exalts the consumer over the community, skews how we view ourselves, others and creation. We lose sight of our relational nature, embracing instead the myth of individuality and autonomy. One of the greatest theological challenges of our time is to move our worship beyond self-absorption. Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Anselm (c. 1033-1109), *Proslogion* This takes us back to Feuerbach’s critique

of religion: that we religious folks are, in the end and at the start, concerned only with ourselves. Sociologist Alan Wolfe has criticized contemporary evangelical churches for mirroring the self-centered aspects of American culture. "Television, publishing, political campaigning, education, self-help advice—all increasingly tell Americans what they already want to hear. Religion, it would seem, should now be added to that list."^[2] One great danger of idols is that we try to fill our souls with what cannot satisfy, and then in our loneliness, questions and despair we wonder where God is. We were created for fellowship with God, and apart from that communion we are lost. Theology is about life, and it is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid.² To Know and Enjoy God Becoming Wise Theology is more of a virtue than an art, more wisdom than factual knowledge. It consists more in virtue and efficacy than in contemplation and knowledge. Alexander of Halles, quoted in *Theological Commonplaces* We enjoy God to the degree that we worship him faithfully. Faithful worship—including praise, prayer, obedience and faith—matters because idolatry, in whatever form, satisfies neither God nor us. Worship does not require that we perfectly understand everything about God but that we respond genuinely to the true God who makes himself known to us. The words of Saint Augustine (354-430) are as true now as they were in the fourth century when he first prayed them: You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is [restless] until it rests in you.^[1] God freely created that which was not God, and among his reasons for creating was a desire to see his creation freely reflect his glory and bask in his love. Under the warmth of his creative work and care, humanity was invited to walk with God, to know him and to love him. This is worship. But from early on there has been a power that seeks to distort our view of God, to call his provision and kindness into question. With human sin we come face to face with the realities of evil, suffering and death: this is the broader context of our brokenness. Sin creates a rupture in relationships between God and humanity, between people, between humanity and creation. Sin has clouded our view of and interaction with God, ourselves and the world. In this situation worship is impaired, confused and often lost. The gospel proclaims reconciliation in these relationships—first to God and then to his creation. Christians are called to enter into the chorus of praise that is true worship, responding in the Spirit to the revelation of the saving God in Jesus Christ. Theology is all about knowing how to sing the song of redemption: to know when to shout, when to mourn, when to be silent and when to hope. But in order to enjoy the song and sing it well, we must learn the words and the music. 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* Ignatius of Antioch (d. 117), who died by the mauling of beasts in a Roman arena not many years after the death of the apostles, wrote seven challenging letters to churches being pressed to alter or abandon their worship of Jesus Christ. He said, "Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever you do, may prosper both in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit."^[2] Rather than compromise his worship of God, Ignatius was willing to face death—and

his knowledge of God sustained him. Writing more than a century later, Lactantius (250-324) similarly concluded that “the knowledge of God comes first, His worship is the result of knowledge.”[3] When one begins to know God in his beauty and truth, worship springs into being. Having said that, even as we worship, our knowledge not only grows but also is often revised and reshaped. Worship and knowledge are interrelated. There is reciprocity between the two; they are not simply one-way streets. But how do we understand what or whom we are worshipping? He who understands Him best loves and praises him best. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), *The Life of Teresa of Jesus* “Knowledge” in theology is not merely cognitive but also personal with elements of connection and commitment. It would be a dangerous misunderstanding to assert that we can only worship God once we have understood all the important doctrines. The relationship between worship and knowing is not that one-dimensional. Augustine of Hippo, already mentioned, argued that rationality might be considered glorious, but there was something greater than reason: he called this “the truth” (i.e., Christ himself). Only in relation to this truth can we experience real enjoyment (see Jn 14:7; 17:3; 20:31; Mt 11:27; 1 Jn 5:20). “Our freedom is found in submission to this truth. And it is our God Himself who frees us from death, namely, our sinful condition. . . . But the soul is not free in the enjoyment of anything unless it is secure in that enjoyment.”[4] Knowledge and enjoyment of God are inseparable. The sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) similarly connected knowledge to worship. He argues for a strong relationship between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves, both of which are vital for faithful worship. Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with these words: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.”[5] In other words, there is a strong relationship between knowing God and knowing ourselves: while Calvin will argue we should start with the former (knowing God), he does not think the task is complete without moving to the latter (knowing ourselves).[6] We can never rightly understand ourselves, our meaning or true human satisfaction apart from knowing God. True worship—and true wisdom—comes not through an exercise in autonomous introspection but by presenting ourselves humbly to the living God. The knowledge of God and knowledge of self grow within this fellowship: we can never properly understand ourselves if we attempt to do this apart from knowing God. Growing in our knowledge of God changes our view of everything else. It is not that we lose sight of all except God, but rather that we view everything in light of God and through the story of his creation and redemption.[7] True worship of God frees and enables us to love his creation rightly and to grieve when we see it abused. Further, our worship has its impulse from a future hope as well as the records of God’s past actions: the risen Christ will return, bringing the fullness of his kingdom and eternal, unhindered communion with God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10 This knowledge is all-encompassing. True worship is not restricted to congregational gatherings, but it inhabits the whole of our existence. This is partly why

worship is tied to wisdom. The “fear of the Lord,” spoken of throughout Scripture, is not normally meant to convey the idea of being frightened. Rather, it carries the idea of awe and wonder, of joy and hope. The fear of the Lord is “the beginning of wisdom,” not because a person immediately understands archaic Latin phrases and complex mathematics, but because the worshiper no longer sees only a fragmented world, but stands before the One who holds all things together (see Prov 1:7; 2:1-6; 9:10; Ps 19:9; 111:10). Fearing the Lord means that we are not left to our own resources to control and survive the elements of creation, but that we can trust the Creator who sustains that creation, controls the future and has our best interests at heart (e.g., Prov 23:17-18). This wisdom allows believers to sing the full song of redemption rather than merely disconnected stanzas. What distinguishes the wise from the foolish in Scripture is how they respond to God’s Word and work. Where foolish persons demand that God must work within the parameters of their limited understanding, wise persons expand and readjust their views to fit God’s words, work and creation. The foolish person lives as though individuals can decide whether or not God exists, and if he does exist, what God’s activities can be like (Ps 14:1-7; 92:5-6; 53:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:18-31). The wise person recognizes the limits of human reason and perception and therefore delights in the fact that the eternal One has unveiled himself and has invited us to know and abide with him. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. (Ps 139:17-18) The songs of the psalmists capture in poetic form the connection between fearing and delighting in God. What an overwhelming thought to recognize that the eternal God who created all things is the same God who “takes pleasure in his people” (Ps 149:4). God “takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps 147:11). Our “heart is glad in him” who is our help and shield, for not only is Yahweh holy and powerful, but also his love rests upon his people (Ps 33:20-22). Since God delights in his people and has the power to protect them, it should be no surprise that the Scriptures call us to delight in God and promise that we can rest in God as our sanctuary. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. . . . “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps 46:1-3, 10-11) The proper end of the drama of doctrine is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* By coming to the living God with our life, questions, fears and hopes, we grow in our knowledge of God. This knowledge is not merely intellectual; it is also passionate, touching both our understanding and affections. Our approach to God challenges us to “think God’s thoughts after him.” Although our understanding is never final, and although we can expect that we will misunderstand or misapply aspects of what we learn, he still invites us to begin.[8] And thus, with eyes lifted toward him we live, speak and praise. This is the beginning of the fear of the Lord; this is the beginning of wisdom; this is the beginning of worship. 3 Theology as Pilgrimage 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*

We are not God. This may seem ridiculously obvious, but much of our practice ignores this simple truth. Not only can we not control the events around us, but our understanding is inescapably incomplete. Human reflections about God are always limited by at least two key realities: our finitude and our sin. Although few Christians explicitly deny these realities, sometimes we act as though our theological reflections are free from these factors.

A Little Book for New Theologians

Why and How to Study Theology

Kelly M. Kopic

A Little Book for New Theologians

Why and How to Study Theology

Kelly M. Kopic

InterVarsity Press

P.O. Box 1400

Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426

World Wide Web: <http://www.ivpress.com>

E-mail: email@ivpress.com

© 2012 by Kelly M. Kopic

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at www.ivcf.org.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Cover design: Cindy Kiple

InterVarsity Press

P.O. Box 1400

Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426

World Wide Web: <http://www.ivpress.com>

E-mail: email@ivpress.com

© 2012 by Kelly M. Kopic

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at www.ivcf.org.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Cover design: Cindy Kiple

ISBN 978-0-8308-6670-0 (digital)

ISBN 978-0-8308-3975-9 (print)

To Danny Kopic

More than a brother . . .

To Danny Kopic

More than a brother . . .

Contents

Acknowledgments

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 Faithful 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 God9: Tradition and Community10: Love of ScriptureNotesName and Subject IndexScripture IndexAbout the AuthorContentsAcknowledgmentsPart One: Why Study Theology?1: Entering the Conversation2: To Know and Enjoy GodBecoming Wise3: Theology as PilgrimagePart Two: Characteristics of Faithful Theology and Theologians4: The Inseparability of Life and Theology5: Faithful Reason6: Prayer and Study7: Humility and Repentance8: Suffering, Justice and Knowing God9: Tradition and Community10: Love of ScriptureNotesName and Subject IndexScripture IndexAbout the AuthorAcknowledgments

I have seen God use good theology to liberate lives. But I have also seen people misuse theology, resulting in abuse, hard hearts and pain. One thing that I have become concerned about in theological studies is the temptation to make overly strong divisions: between academics and the church, between theology and life, between truth and love. In the past the task of theological reflection was often intertwined with the experience and character of the theologian, so that the result was an organic connection between themes like prayer, humility, suffering and community and the act of “doing” theology. My worry is that in our day, for many of us, we have unintentionally cultivated what might be called theological detachment: such a view produces a divide between spirituality and theology, between life and thought, between faith and agency. Theological detachment 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. So here is my small offering; I hope students might read this book near the beginning of their theological studies, whether such education takes place formally within a classroom or informally as one sits reading and reflecting. My prayer is that this book might, in some small way, help new theologians avoid the strong dichotomies of theological detachment.

The heart of this little book was first written seven or so years ago, although it has undergone various revisions since its inception. My great hope and prayer is that it might serve as a kind of updated attempt at what Helmut Thielicke brilliantly accomplished in his classic, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, written in 1959 and translated into English in 1962. As I mentioned, the book in your hands has gone through many revisions, mostly because I have been using versions of it in my Doctrine 1 course at Covenant College. Countless students have given feedback and inspiration through the years, and I am sure the final version is much stronger as a result of their assistance. There are some folks in particular who read various versions of this and offered noteworthy help, feedback and encouragement: Sinclair Ferguson, Wesley Vander Lugt, Justin Berger, Brian Hecker, John Holberg, Cameron Moran, John Yates, Bill Davis, John Wingard, Jay Green, Jeff Morton, Paul Morton and Gary Deddo. Members of my department (Scott, Jeff, Dan, Herb, Ray and Ken) all provided various sorts of assistance along the way, for which I am deeply thankful. Tabitha, my wife, remains the best theologian I know. I can’t thank you enough for your faith, hope and love: this is the soil out of which Jonathan, Margot and I grow and live. Thank you for bearing witness to God’s glory in weakness, for your wisdom in times of uncertainty and for your courage amid the chaos. Finally, I dedicate this book to Danny Kapic, my brother in flesh and in spirit. I cannot thank God enough for you. You have become a rock for me, quick to offer a listening ear, words

of grace, prayers of mercy and innumerable forms of love. From our days of unbelief to the wonder of God's mercy to our families, I stand amazed at how Christ has worked. Thank you for becoming a great model to me of integrity, faith, sacrifice and promise. And thanks for always helping me to laugh—that is a wonderful gift.

Acknowledgments

I have seen God use good theology to liberate lives. But I have also seen people misuse theology, resulting in abuse, hard hearts and pain. One thing that I have become concerned about in theological studies is the temptation to make overly strong divisions: between academics and the church, between theology and life, between truth and love. In the past the task of theological reflection was often intertwined with the experience and character of the theologian, so that the result was an organic connection between themes like prayer, humility, suffering and community and the act of “doing” theology. My worry is that in our day, for many of us, we have unintentionally cultivated what might be called theological detachment: such a view produces a divide between spirituality and theology, between life and thought, between faith and agency. Theological detachment 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. So here is my small offering; I hope students might read this book near the beginning of their theological studies, whether such education takes place formally within a classroom or informally as one sits reading and reflecting. My prayer is that this book might, in some small way, help new theologians avoid the strong dichotomies of theological detachment.

The heart of this little book was first written seven or so years ago, although it has undergone various revisions since its inception. My great hope and prayer is that it might serve as a kind of updated attempt at what Helmut Thielicke brilliantly accomplished in his classic, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, written in 1959 and translated into English in 1962. As I mentioned, the book in your hands has gone through many revisions, mostly because I have been using versions of it in my Doctrine 1 course at Covenant College. Countless students have given feedback and inspiration through the years, and I am sure the final version is much stronger as a result of their assistance. There are some folks in particular who read various versions of this and offered noteworthy help, feedback and encouragement: Sinclair Ferguson, Wesley Vander Lugt, Justin Borger, Brian Hecker, John Holberg, Cameron Moran, John Yates, Bill Davis, John Wingard, Jay Green, Jeff Morton, Paul Morton and Gary Deddo. Members of my department (Scott, Jeff, Dan, Herb, Ray and Ken) all provided various sorts of assistance along the way, for which I am deeply thankful. Tabitha, my wife, remains the best theologian I know. I can't thank you enough for your faith, hope and love: this is the soil out of which Jonathan, Margot and I grow and live. Thank you for bearing witness to God's glory in weakness, for your wisdom in times of uncertainty and for your courage amid the chaos.

Finally, I dedicate this book to Danny Kapic, my brother in flesh and in spirit. I cannot thank God enough for you. You have become a rock for me, quick to offer a listening ear, words of grace, prayers of mercy and innumerable forms of love. From our days of unbelief to the wonder of God's mercy to our families, I stand amazed at how Christ has worked. Thank you for becoming a great model to me of integrity, faith, sacrifice and promise. And thanks for always

helping me to laugh—that is a wonderful gift.

Part One Why Study Theology?

Part One Why Study Theology?

1 Entering the Conversation

We are all called theologians, just as [we are] all [called] Christians. Martin Luther, “Sermon on Psalm 5, Jan. 17, 1535” Tell me about God. For some people the question of whether or not God exists is a painful and haunting uncertainty not easily dismissed. But for most people the question is not whether God exists, but what is God like. Not whether there is a deity, but how many, and which one(s). How do we know God? Can God be trusted? Does God care? And is God good? Whenever we speak about God we are engaged in theology. The term “theology” means a word (logos) about God (theos), so when anyone speaks about God, whether that person dropped out of high school or completed a PhD in philosophy, he or she is engaged in theology. Theology is not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray. If I speak truth here, it is not so much knowledge that lifts me up, but rather the ardor of a burning soul that urges me to try this.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), “Book Three of the Trinity” Theological questions surround our lives, whether we know it or not. A wife and husband facing infertility inevitably struggle through deep theological questions, whether or not they want to voice them. College students working through issues of identity, culture, politics and ethics struggle—in one way or another—with theological convictions and how to live them. Our concepts about the divine inform our lives more deeply than most people can trace. Whether we view God as distant or near, as gracious or capricious, as concerned or apathetic, the conclusions we reach—whether the result of careful reflection or negligent assumptions—guide our lives. Christians must care deeply about theology. If the true God is renewing our lives and calling us to worship him “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23), then such worship includes our thoughts, words, affections and actions. Do we want to worship Yahweh or waste time and effort on a deity we have constructed in our own image? Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), a nineteenth-century atheist philosopher, argued that talk about God is no more than amplified talk about ourselves: “God” is merely the projection of human thoughts and desires.[1] Surprising as it may seem, Christians share a fundamental concern with Feuerbach, for we recognize the temptation to create our own gods—gods that belong to us—rather than to respond faithfully to the One who is. Whether our theology is good or flawed, those we love most will be first to feel the effects.

Carolyn Custis James, *When Life and Beliefs Collide* The Scriptures testify to the God who made the heavens and the earth, who created men and women to enjoy his creation and their communion with him. But sin has entered the world, creating chaos instead of order, death instead of life, and substituting idolatry for the worship of the true God. The Bible often describes our temptation to create and follow false gods. For example, after delivering Israel from Egypt, God warns them against forgetting their Redeemer and turning to false gods: “Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them” (Deut 11:16). The Song of Moses warns that, despite this display of God’s favor and power, the Israelites would eventually look to “strange gods . . . to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. You were unmindful of the Rock

that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut 32:16-18). The Song warns coming generations against provoking God with their idols—with “what is no god” (Deut 32:21). Praise is, among other things, a form of thinking, and aims to “think God” as adequately as possible. David Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise* Theological reflection is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone. Every age has its own idols, its own distortions that twist and pervert how we view God, ourselves and the world. Whether it is the distant and uninterested deity of modernity or the fragmented and territorial gods of postmodernity, all times and cultures carry the danger of warping our worship. We aim not to escape our cultures, however, but to recognize that God calls us to respond faithfully to him in our place and time, whatever our particular social and philosophical climate. We, not just our ancestors, are invited to know and love God—and thus to worship him. While most of us are no longer drawn to the Baals and Ashtaroths of the past, we still look to idols—that which is not God—for our security, happiness and comfort. Is it not true that when many of us feel anxious or depressed, we seek relief by purchasing things: we head to the contemporary temples of self-indulgence in the malls across the country or on the Internet, where the shopping experience is meant to calm our souls? Similarly, the emphasis in American culture on comfort, which exalts the consumer over the community, skews how we view ourselves, others and creation. We lose sight of our relational nature, embracing instead the myth of individuality and autonomy. One of the greatest theological challenges of our time is to move our worship beyond self-absorption. Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Anselm (c. 1033-1109), *Proslogion* This takes us back to Feuerbach’s critique of religion: that we religious folks are, in the end and at the start, concerned only with ourselves. Sociologist Alan Wolfe has criticized contemporary evangelical churches for mirroring the self-centered aspects of American culture. “Television, publishing, political campaigning, education, self-help advice—all increasingly tell Americans what they already want to hear. Religion, it would seem, should now be added to that list.” [2] One great danger of idols is that we try to fill our souls with what cannot satisfy, and then in our loneliness, questions and despair we wonder where God is. We were created for fellowship with God, and apart from that communion we are lost. Theology is about life, and it is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid. 1 Entering the Conversation 1 Entering the Conversation We are all called theologians, just as [we are] all [called] Christians. Martin Luther, “Sermon on Psalm 5, Jan. 17, 1535” Tell me about God. For some people the question of whether or not God exists is a painful and haunting uncertainty not easily dismissed. But for most people the question is not whether God exists, but what is God like. Not whether there is a deity, but how many, and which one(s). How do we know God? Can God be trusted? Does God care? And is God good? Whenever we speak about God we are engaged in theology. The term “theology” means a word (logos) about God (theos), so when anyone speaks about God, whether that person dropped out of high school or completed a PhD in philosophy, he or she is engaged in theology. Theology is not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and

conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray. If I speak truth here, it is not so much knowledge that lifts me up, but rather the ardor of a burning soul that urges me to try this. Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), "Book Three of the Trinity" If I speak truth here, it is not so much knowledge that lifts me up, but rather the ardor of a burning soul that urges me to try this. Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), "Book Three of the Trinity" Theological questions surround our lives, whether we know it or not. A wife and husband facing infertility inevitably struggle through deep theological questions, whether or not they want to voice them. College students working through issues of identity, culture, politics and ethics struggle—in one way or another—with theological convictions and how to live them. Our concepts about the divine inform our lives more deeply than most people can trace. Whether we view God as distant or near, as gracious or capricious, as concerned or apathetic, the conclusions we reach—whether the result of careful reflection or negligent assumptions—guide our lives. Christians must care deeply about theology. If the true God is renewing our lives and calling us to worship him "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23), then such worship includes our thoughts, words, affections and actions. Do we want to worship Yahweh or waste time and effort on a deity we have constructed in our own image? Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), a nineteenth-century atheist philosopher, argued that talk about God is no more than amplified talk about ourselves: "God" is merely the projection of human thoughts and desires.[1] Surprising as it may seem, Christians share a fundamental concern with Feuerbach, for we recognize the temptation to create our own gods—gods that belong to us—rather than to respond faithfully to the One who is. Whether our theology is good or flawed, those we love most will be first to feel the effects. Carolyn Custis James, *When Life and Beliefs Collide* Whether our theology is good or flawed, those we love most will be first to feel the effects. Carolyn Custis James, *When Life and Beliefs Collide* The Scriptures testify to the God who made the heavens and the earth, who created men and women to enjoy his creation and their communion with him. But sin has entered the world, creating chaos instead of order, death instead of life, and substituting idolatry for the worship of the true God. The Bible often describes our temptation to create and follow false gods. For example, after delivering Israel from Egypt, God warns them against forgetting their Redeemer and turning to false gods: "Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them" (Deut 11:16). The Song of Moses warns that, despite this display of God's favor and power, the Israelites would eventually look to "strange gods . . . to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut 32:16-18). The Song warns coming generations against provoking God with their idols—with "what is no god" (Deut 32:21). Praise is, among other things, a form of thinking, and aims to "think God" as adequately as possible. David Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise* Praise is, among other things, a form of thinking, and aims to "think God" as adequately as possible. David Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise* Theological reflection is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone. Every age has its own

idols, its own distortions that twist and pervert how we view God, ourselves and the world. Whether it is the distant and uninterested deity of modernity or the fragmented and territorial gods of postmodernity, all times and cultures carry the danger of warping our worship. We aim not to escape our cultures, however, but to recognize that God calls us to respond faithfully to him in our place and time, whatever our particular social and philosophical climate. We, not just our ancestors, are invited to know and love God—and thus to worship him. While most of us are no longer drawn to the Baals and Ashtaroths of the past, we still look to idols—that which is not God—for our security, happiness and comfort. Is it not true that when many of us feel anxious or depressed, we seek relief by purchasing things: we head to the contemporary temples of self-indulgence in the malls across the country or on the Internet, where the shopping experience is meant to calm our souls? Similarly, the emphasis in American culture on comfort, which exalts the consumer over the community, skews how we view ourselves, others and creation. We lose sight of our relational nature, embracing instead the myth of individuality and autonomy. One of the greatest theological challenges of our time is to move our worship beyond self-absorption.

Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Anselm (c. 1033-1109), *Proslogion*

Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Anselm (c. 1033-1109), *Proslogion*

This takes us back to Feuerbach's critique of religion: that we religious folks are, in the end and at the start, concerned only with ourselves. Sociologist Alan Wolfe has criticized contemporary evangelical churches for mirroring the self-centered aspects of American culture. "Television, publishing, political campaigning, education, self-help advice—all increasingly tell Americans what they already want to hear. Religion, it would seem, should now be added to that list."^[2] One great danger of idols is that we try to fill our souls with what cannot satisfy, and then in our loneliness, questions and despair we wonder where God is. We were created for fellowship with God, and apart from that communion we are lost. Theology is about life, and it is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid.

²To Know and Enjoy God

Becoming Wise

Theology is more of a virtue than an art, more wisdom than factual knowledge. It consists more in virtue and efficacy than in contemplation and knowledge. Alexander of Halles, quoted in *Theological Commonplaces*

We enjoy God to the degree that we worship him faithfully. Faithful worship—including praise, prayer, obedience and faith—matters because idolatry, in whatever form, satisfies neither God nor us. Worship does not require that we perfectly understand everything about God but that we respond genuinely to the true God who makes himself known to us. The words of Saint Augustine (354-430) are as true now as they were in the fourth century when he first prayed them: You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is [restless] until it rests in you.^[1]

God freely created that which was not God, and among his reasons for creating was a desire to see his creation freely reflect his glory and bask in his love. Under the warmth of his creative work and care, humanity was invited to walk with God, to know him and to love him. This is worship. But from early on there has been a power that seeks to distort our view of God, to call his provision

and kindness into question. With human sin we come face to face with the realities of evil, suffering and death: this is the broader context of our brokenness. Sin creates a rupture in relationships between God and humanity, between people, between humanity and creation. Sin has clouded our view of and interaction with God, ourselves and the world. In this situation worship is impaired, confused and often lost. The gospel proclaims reconciliation in these relationships—first to God and then to his creation. Christians are called to enter into the chorus of praise that is true worship, responding in the Spirit to the revelation of the saving God in Jesus Christ. Theology is all about knowing how to sing the song of redemption: to know when to shout, when to mourn, when to be silent and when to hope. But in order to enjoy the song and sing it well, we must learn the words and the music. 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* Ignatius of Antioch (d. 117), who died by the mauling of beasts in a Roman arena not many years after the death of the apostles, wrote seven challenging letters to churches being pressed to alter or abandon their worship of Jesus Christ. He said, “Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever you do, may prosper both in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit.”^[2] Rather than compromise his worship of God, Ignatius was willing to face death—and his knowledge of God sustained him. Writing more than a century later, Lactantius (250-324) similarly concluded that “the knowledge of God comes first, His worship is the result of knowledge.”^[3] When one begins to know God in his beauty and truth, worship springs into being. Having said that, even as we worship, our knowledge not only grows but also is often revised and reshaped. Worship and knowledge are interrelated. There is reciprocity between the two; they are not simply one-way streets. But how do we understand what or whom we are worshiping? He who understands Him best loves and praises him best.

Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), *The Life of Teresa of Jesus* “Knowledge” in theology is not merely cognitive but also personal with elements of connection and commitment. It would be a dangerous misunderstanding to assert that we can only worship God once we have understood all the important doctrines. The relationship between worship and knowing is not that one-dimensional. Augustine of Hippo, already mentioned, argued that rationality might be considered glorious, but there was something greater than reason: he called this “the truth” (i.e., Christ himself). Only in relation to this truth can we experience real enjoyment (see Jn 14:7; 17:3; 20:31; Mt 11:27; 1 Jn 5:20). “Our freedom is found in submission to this truth. And it is our God Himself who frees us from death, namely, our sinful condition. . . . But the soul is not free in the enjoyment of anything unless it is secure in that enjoyment.”^[4] Knowledge and enjoyment of God are inseparable.

The sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) similarly connected knowledge to worship. He argues for a strong relationship between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves, both of which are vital for faithful worship. Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with these words: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.”[5]In other words, there is a strong relationship between knowing God and knowing ourselves: while Calvin will argue we should start with the former (knowing God), he does not think the task is complete without moving to the latter (knowing ourselves).[6] We can never rightly understand ourselves, our meaning or true human satisfaction apart from knowing God. True worship—and true wisdom—comes not through an exercise in autonomous introspection but by presenting ourselves humbly to the living God. The knowledge of God and knowledge of self grow within this fellowship: we can never properly understand ourselves if we attempt to do this apart from knowing God. Growing in our knowledge of God changes our view of everything else. It is not that we lose sight of all except God, but rather that we view everything in light of God and through the story of his creation and redemption.[7] True worship of God frees and enables us to love his creation rightly and to grieve when we see it abused. Further, our worship has its impulse from a future hope as well as the records of God’s past actions: the risen Christ will return, bringing the fullness of his kingdom and eternal, unhindered communion with God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10 This knowledge is all-encompassing. True worship is not restricted to congregational gatherings, but it inhabits the whole of our existence. This is partly why worship is tied to wisdom. The “fear of the Lord,” spoken of throughout Scripture, is not normally meant to convey the idea of being frightened. Rather, it carries the idea of awe and wonder, of joy and hope. The fear of the Lord is “the beginning of wisdom,” not because a person immediately understands archaic Latin phrases and complex mathematics, but because the worshiper no longer sees only a fragmented world, but stands before the One who holds all things together (see Prov 1:7; 2:1-6; 9:10; Ps 19:9; 111:10). Fearing the Lord means that we are not left to our own resources to control and survive the elements of creation, but that we can trust the Creator who sustains that creation, controls the future and has our best interests at heart (e.g., Prov 23:17-18). This wisdom allows believers to sing the full song of redemption rather than merely disconnected stanzas. What distinguishes the wise from the foolish in Scripture is how they respond to God’s Word and work. Where foolish persons demand that God must work within the parameters of their limited understanding, wise persons expand and readjust their views to fit God’s words, work and creation. The foolish person lives as though individuals can decide whether or not God exists, and if he does exist, what God’s activities can be like (Ps 14:1-7; 92:5-6; 53:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:18-31). The wise person recognizes the limits of human reason and perception and therefore delights in the fact that the eternal One has unveiled himself and has invited us to know and abide with him. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. (Ps 139:17-18) The songs of the psalmists capture in poetic form the connection between fearing and delighting in God. What an overwhelming thought to recognize that the eternal God who created all things is the same God who “takes pleasure in his people” (Ps 149:4). God “takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his

steadfast love” (Ps 147:11). Our “heart is glad in him” who is our help and shield, for not only is Yahweh holy and powerful, but also his love rests upon his people (Ps 33:20-22). Since God delights in his people and has the power to protect them, it should be no surprise that the Scriptures call us to delight in God and promise that we can rest in God as our sanctuary. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. . . . “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps 46:1-3, 10-11) The proper end of the drama of doctrine is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* By coming to the living God with our life, questions, fears and hopes, we grow in our knowledge of God. This knowledge is not merely intellectual; it is also passionate, touching both our understanding and affections. Our approach to God challenges us to “think God’s thoughts after him.” Although our understanding is never final, and although we can expect that we will misunderstand or misapply aspects of what we learn, he still invites us to begin.[8] And thus, with eyes lifted toward him we live, speak and praise. This is the beginning of the fear of the Lord; this is the beginning of wisdom; this is the beginning of worship.

2 To Know and Enjoy God

2 To Know and Enjoy God

Becoming Wise

Theology is more of a virtue than an art, more wisdom than factual knowledge. It consists more in virtue and efficacy than in contemplation and knowledge. Alexander of Halles, quoted in *Theological Commonplaces* We enjoy God to the degree that we worship him faithfully. Faithful worship—including praise, prayer, obedience and faith—matters because idolatry, in whatever form, satisfies neither God nor us. Worship does not require that we perfectly understand everything about God but that we respond genuinely to the true God who makes himself known to us. The words of Saint Augustine (354-430) are as true now as they were in the fourth century when he first prayed them: You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is [restless] until it rests in you.[1] You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is [restless] until it rests in you.[1] God freely created that which was not God, and among his reasons for creating was a desire to see his creation freely reflect his glory and bask in his love. Under the warmth of his creative work and care, humanity was invited to walk with God, to know him and to love him. This is worship. But from early on there has been a power that seeks to distort our view of God, to call his provision and kindness into question. With human sin we come face to face with the realities of evil, suffering and death: this is the broader context of our brokenness. Sin creates a rupture in relationships between God and humanity, between people, between humanity and creation. Sin has clouded our view of and interaction with God, ourselves and the world. In this situation worship is impaired, confused and often lost. The gospel proclaims reconciliation in these relationships—first to God and then to his creation. Christians are called to enter into the chorus of praise that is true worship, responding in the Spirit to the revelation of the saving God in Jesus

Christ. Theology is all about knowing how to sing the song of redemption: to know when to shout, when to mourn, when to be silent and when to hope. But in order to enjoy the song and sing it well, we must learn the words and the music. 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*

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*

Ignatius of Antioch (d. 117), who died by the mauling of beasts in a Roman arena not many years after the death of the apostles, wrote seven challenging letters to churches being pressed to alter or abandon their worship of Jesus Christ. He said, "Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever you do, may prosper both in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit."^[2] Rather than compromise his worship of God, Ignatius was willing to face death—and his knowledge of God sustained him. Writing more than a century later, Lactantius (250-324) similarly concluded that "the knowledge of God comes first, His worship is the result of knowledge."^[3] When one begins to know God in his beauty and truth, worship springs into being. Having said that, even as we worship, our knowledge not only grows but also is often revised and reshaped. Worship and knowledge are interrelated. There is reciprocity between the two; they are not simply one-way streets. But how do we understand what or whom we are worshipping? He who understands Him best loves and praises him best. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*

He who understands Him best loves and praises him best. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*

"Knowledge" in theology is not merely cognitive but also personal with elements of connection and commitment. It would be a dangerous misunderstanding to assert that we can only worship God once we have understood all the important doctrines. The relationship between worship and knowing is not that one-dimensional. Augustine of Hippo, already mentioned, argued that rationality might be considered glorious, but there was something greater than reason: he called this "the truth" (i.e., Christ himself). Only in relation to this truth can we experience real enjoyment (see Jn 14:7; 17:3; 20:31; Mt 11:27; 1 Jn 5:20). "Our freedom is found in submission to this truth. And it is our God Himself who frees us from death, namely, our sinful condition. . . . But the soul is not free in the enjoyment of anything unless it is secure in that enjoyment."^[4] Knowledge and enjoyment of God are inseparable. The sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) similarly connected knowledge to worship. He argues for a strong relationship between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves, both of which are vital for faithful worship. Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with these words: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern."^[5] In other words, there is a strong relationship between knowing God and knowing ourselves: while Calvin will argue we should start with the former (knowing God), he does not

think the task is complete without moving to the latter (knowing ourselves).[6] We can never rightly understand ourselves, our meaning or true human satisfaction apart from knowing God. True worship—and true wisdom—comes not through an exercise in autonomous introspection but by presenting ourselves humbly to the living God. The knowledge of God and knowledge of self grow within this fellowship: we can never properly understand ourselves if we attempt to do this apart from knowing God. Growing in our knowledge of God changes our view of everything else. It is not that we lose sight of all except God, but rather that we view everything in light of God and through the story of his creation and redemption.[7] True worship of God frees and enables us to love his creation rightly and to grieve when we see it abused. Further, our worship has its impulse from a future hope as well as the records of God's past actions: the risen Christ will return, bringing the fullness of his kingdom and eternal, unhindered communion with God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10 This knowledge is all-encompassing. True worship is not restricted to congregational gatherings, but it inhabits the whole of our existence. This is partly why worship is tied to wisdom. The "fear of the Lord," spoken of throughout Scripture, is not normally meant to convey the idea of being frightened. Rather, it carries the idea of awe and wonder, of joy and hope. The fear of the Lord is "the beginning of wisdom," not because a person immediately understands archaic Latin phrases and complex mathematics, but because the worshiper no longer sees only a fragmented world, but stands before the One who holds all things together (see Prov 1:7; 2:1-6; 9:10; Ps 19:9; 111:10). Fearing the Lord means that we are not left to our own resources to control and survive the elements of creation, but that we can trust the Creator who sustains that creation, controls the future and has our best interests at heart (e.g., Prov 23:17-18). This wisdom allows believers to sing the full song of redemption rather than merely disconnected stanzas. What distinguishes the wise from the foolish in Scripture is how they respond to God's Word and work. Where foolish persons demand that God must work within the parameters of their limited understanding, wise persons expand and readjust their views to fit God's words, work and creation. The foolish person lives as though individuals can decide whether or not God exists, and if he does exist, what God's activities can be like (Ps 14:1-7; 92:5-6; 53:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:18-31). The wise person recognizes the limits of human reason and perception and therefore delights in the fact that the eternal One has unveiled himself and has invited us to know and abide with him. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. (Ps 139:17-18) How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. (Ps 139:17-18) The songs of the psalmists capture in poetic form the connection between fearing and delighting in God. What an overwhelming thought to recognize that the eternal God who created all things is the same God who "takes pleasure in his people" (Ps 149:4). God "takes pleasure" in those who fear him, in those who hope in his

steadfast love” (Ps 147:11). Our “heart is glad in him” who is our help and shield, for not only is Yahweh holy and powerful, but also his love rests upon his people (Ps 33:20-22). Since God delights in his people and has the power to protect them, it should be no surprise that the Scriptures call us to delight in God and promise that we can rest in God as our sanctuary. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. . . . “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps 46:1-3, 10-11) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. . . . “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps 46:1-3, 10-11) The proper end of the drama of doctrine is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* The proper end of the drama of doctrine is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* By coming to the living God with our life, questions, fears and hopes, we grow in our knowledge of God. This knowledge is not merely intellectual; it is also passionate, touching both our understanding and affections. Our approach to God challenges us to “think God’s thoughts after him.” Although our understanding is never final, and although we can expect that we will misunderstand or misapply aspects of what we learn, he still invites us to begin.[8] And thus, with eyes lifted toward him we live, speak and praise. This is the beginning of the fear of the Lord; this is the beginning of wisdom; this is the beginning of worship. 3 Theology as Pilgrimage 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* We are not God. This may seem ridiculously obvious, but much of our practice ignores this simple truth. Not only can we not control the events around us, but our understanding is inescapably incomplete. Human reflections about God are always limited by at least two key realities: our finitude and our sin. Although few Christians explicitly deny these realities, sometimes we act as though our theological reflections are free from these factors. 3 Theology as Pilgrimage 3 Theology as Pilgrimage 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* We are not God. This may seem ridiculously obvious, but much of our practice ignores this simple truth. Not only can we not control the events around us, but our understanding is inescapably incomplete. Human reflections about God are always limited by at least two key realities: our finitude and our sin. Although few Christians explicitly deny these realities, sometimes we act as though our theological reflections are free from these factors.

[Download to continue reading...](#)

A Little Book for New Philosophers: Why and How to Study Philosophy (Little Books)

What people say about this book

Joseph C. Gunter, "Kapic is the author or editor of numerous books such as *God So Loved He Gave*. Kelly Kapic is professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. He earned a PhD in systematic and historical theology at King's College, University of London and an M.Div. at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Kapic is the author or editor of numerous books such as *God So Loved He Gave*, *Communion with God*, and *Mapping Modern Theology*. Additionally, he has published articles in various journals, such as the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, *Westminster Theological Journal*, *Conversations in Religion and Theology*, and *Evangelical Quarterly*. The goal of this book is to show that theology is not a lifeless science that is separated from everyday life. The author shows this by saying, "Theology is not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray." (81) Whenever we read, think, hear or say anything about God, we are doing theology. Yet theology is not 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*, the author 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. The author reminds us of this by saying, "Good theology is public theology." (815) Not only concerned with content and method, Kapic explores the skills, attitudes and spiritual practices needed by those who take up the discipline. This concise, clear and lively primer draws out the relevance of theology for Christian life, worship, mission, witness and more. "Theological reflection is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone." (109) The author achieves this goal by first answering the question, "why study Theology", and then by giving us characteristics of faithful theology and theologians. He first displays to us that we do need to study theology by saying, "One great danger of idols is that we try to fill our souls with what cannot satisfy, and then in our loneliness, questions and despair we wonder where God is. We were created for fellowship with God, and apart from that communion we are lost. Theology is about life, and it is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid." (126) Theology is not an isolated activity that happens in an ivory tower. It is something that changes the way we live and affects those around us. The author displays this when he quotes Carolyn Curtis James, "Whether our theology is good or flawed, those we love most will be first to feel the effects." (97) He also states, "Theology grows best in community." (856) More is at stake than just our relationship with God or our thoughts, our theology can change the lives of those around us, in fact, since our theology is not dead it should change the lives and for some the eternity of those around us. In the next section he points to the characteristics of faithful theology and theologians. In this section we learn that not only why we should study theology, but also what it looks like in the everyday life of a theologian. The author starts by first reminding us that, "true theology is inevitably lived theology." (323) However, the main goal of this section is

to debunk several misconceptions about theology. First the author takes on the misconception that theology becomes defective because of faulty thinking. "Not so, argues Hodge. Our theology can become corrupted because we neglect to attend to our lives, for true theology must always be true spirituality. He concludes, "Holiness is essential to correct knowledge of divine things, and the great security from error." (360) Another misconception that the author takes on is the misconception that not all people have a theology because some do not believe in a God. The author responds to this by saying, "There are no true unbelievers; we all place our trust in something. Therefore, whatever its content, our faith inescapably informs what we determine to be reasonable. Reason is not mocked by faithful theologians; it is put to proper use as the servant of faith rather than its master." (505) Next the author answers the question, which is more important, prayer or theology? He answers by appealing that they are not opposites. He says, "Our study informs our prayers, and our prayers enliven our study. We cannot choose between prayer and study; faithful theology requires prayerful study." (613) Similarly, he does the same for the question of tradition and scripture. He in the same way answers both by saying, "We do ourselves and God no favors by neglecting the faithful, whether they are living or dead. Those in the pew should not lord their instincts over their pastors and theologians, but neither should such leaders neglect the wisdom in the pew." (972) However, just to clarify that scripture takes precedence he goes onto say, "With all of the importance of tradition, it cannot stand above Scripture, nor can the experience of the church." (975) The author also takes on the challenge of whether the Christian should pick between having strong emotions or solid theology. To answer this the author reminds us that, "The theologian who has no joy in his work is not a theologian at all. Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this science." (1150) A strength of this book is that its claims and arguments are very well supported. Throughout the book the author quotes several different theologians from different time periods as well as from different theological backgrounds. Another strength of this book is not only does he point us to other strong theologians that back up his claims, but the author also uses several biblical references from both the new and old testaments to back his claims. Another strength of this book is the way that he delivers weighty theological truths in a concise and easily understandable language. One does not need a Masters degree nor have extensive background in Greek and Hebrew to understand the main point of this book. The author does come from a reformed theological background, but does so in a way that would not scare off anyone that opposes reformed theology. The claims he makes about scripture and theology are done so in a way that does not use any terminology that others might find offensive or distracting. Probably the biggest strength of this book is the manner that the author handles such theological claims with such great humility. Knowing that knowledge has a temptation to "puff up" the author approaches everything with humility even pointing out his goal by saying: This book was not written from the perspective of a person who has arrived and finished the race. My prayers are weak, my pride a constant threat, my concern for the poor and those who suffer is often meager, and my struggle with faith is anything but over. I have known and

continue to wrestle with suffering, doubt, weariness, hardness of heart and the constant presence of my own finitude. But I have also known joy, hope and the deepest comfort in my pilgrimage. What I describe above should be considered marks of a good theologian and theology, not because I have personally attained them but because I think they point in the right direction. I write merely as one sojourner to another. (1141) In summary this is a great book for anyone starting out in the work of theology. It will help anyone not only know the why of studying theology, but also help them think through some of the pitfalls and misconceptions about who a theologian is and what he looks like. This book is a concise and easily readable book regardless of background. A weakness of this book is that it does not point you out beyond this book. This book is great to get one started in the work of theology, but it would have been great if it could point the reader in the right direction for their next step as they continue to study theology. However, one could argue that in the notes section of the book, someone looking for the next step could start there. Although some of those references get heavy very quickly especially for a new theologian. Overall this is a great book and would recommend it to anyone that is searching or has misconceptions on what theology really is about. The author achieves a great accomplishment by writing a concise book on theology that calls all to the task by reminding us that, "Theology is about life, and it is not a conversation our souls can afford to avoid." (126)"

Happy, "Lest those who wander get lost. I've been at this for 50 years, and still relished and needed every paragraph of this book for beginners. Kapic gives essential insights and guideposts without which any student of theology can wander or even get lost."

Michael Foret, "A little book that delivers a lot. Because I consider myself a new theologian and did not grow up reading the Bible, much less pursuing theology, the title of this book appealed to me enough to buy it. And I am very glad that I did. Kelly Kapic has written a wonderful book that takes on a very deep subject which he knows a lot about. Lots of people do that, but not many are able to write about their deep subject in ways that are accessible to the rest of us who don't know as much about their subject as they do. That's an achievement for a scholar in any field. The fact that his field is theology makes this accomplishment so much more important for theology beginners like me. I grew up in the Catholic tradition, which very much leaves theology to the theologians, most of whom seemed to be priests with lots of degrees. Even after my conversion to the Baptist reformed faith, and despite having a couple of degrees myself, I at first resisted the idea that I would ever be, much less want to be in any way a theologian. But the more I read and studied the Bible and read the writings of holy men and women from across the ages and faith traditions, without realizing it I became a theology student. And not reluctantly, either, like one of those required courses you have to take to get your degree. I was actually enjoying it. Eventually I realized that if we are indeed a priesthood of all believers, then we are by definition theologians. Kelly Kapic lays out why and how this is so in a most readable fashion. Like most of the best writers in this area, his book is filled not only with passages from Scripture

—both testaments, and he explains why that is important at one point—but also writers from Augustine on to the present day. Kopic has concentrated his own research on the early Puritan John Owen, so it is not surprising that he quotes him several times along with Luther and others from the Reformed tradition as well. I think, however, that any Christian of any of the three major traditions could benefit from reading this book, whether to gain new perspectives or to be reminded and refreshed in old ones. The book is divided into two parts. Part I, *Why Study Theology*, has three chapters. Part II, *Characteristics of Faithful Theology and Theologians*, has seven. This book really spoke to me in several places based on my own pilgrimage, which is one of his themes, but I think anyone who is serious about faith would find the same thing, even though every person's own particular pilgrimage is so different. This book not only spurs you to study, but to prayer as well. I own a Kindle 1100, the basic model. Not from any plan, I basically read the first half of the book on the Kindle, and the second half on my desktop using Windows 8. This Kindle edition worked well on both platforms. I really appreciated that it had good notes, but also a name and subject index, as well as a scripture index. It concluded with a short note on the author that contained a link to a short video of Professor Kopic talking about theology that I really enjoyed. I highly recommend this book. I can't help but reflect sadly that, like many a good sermon, it's the people who really need this book that will not read it."

Janixa, "Read it for a Practical Theology Class. I very much enjoyed this book. I am encouraged by the author's simple yet profound way of laying out sound theology. I also appreciate the mention of triune God."

T Holton, "Taster for those exploring theology. This small book is in two parts - reasons for studying theology and some characteristics of faithful theology. As such it would be an excellent taster for somebody considering whether to study Christian theology. The book is written from the perspective of a confessional Christian seeking to explore and express theology as part of their Christian discipleship. In the first part of the book the author describes theology as the way to know and enjoy God, the way to wisdom, and a pilgrimage. The writer clearly loves the Lord and sees theology as an intrinsic part of the Christian life for all Christians, but especially as a calling for some to take further. The second part of the book covers theology in relation to reason, personal prayer and study, humility and repentance, suffering, justice and knowing God, tradition and community and the love of scripture. It is a quick-moving booklet but contains good advice and stimulating thoughts on what it means to be a theologian. He includes many reflections and quotations from a variety of theologians."

Mr A J Davies-Whitfield, "A helpful and practical read but still warming to the soul.. I'm a first year theology student and so I was recommended to read this book. This book is a great compass for any evangelical theology student on mapping out a safe path. It shows you the dangers and pitfalls, it helps you keep the main purpose in view. He is succinct and knowledgeable about

Theological studies. I found him helpful from the understanding of maintaining a healthy spiritual life of communion to God with the difficult task of studying the scriptures both devotionally and academically. He is honest and unbiased with his views. He gives practical advice as well as important things for your consideration. If you want to keep your eyes on Jesus, your love for the bible as the word of God and still remain faithful to studying theology, I would recommend you read this book because it has a lot to say on the matter for such a small book. God bless.”

AptThoughts, “Short but thought-provoking. I found this to be a very enjoyable and helpful read and would certainly recommend it to others. I didn't find it difficult, but it definitely presents some challenges to the reader concerning the attitude with which we must come to God's word if we are to properly benefit from it, as well as about the impact of God's word on our life and worship.”

Dietmar Gross, “Klein aber (sehr(!)) fein! / Most excellent!. Dieses kleine Büchlein ist einfach wunderbar! Es enthält einen sehr wichtigen Mix aus theologischen Grundlagen und ist exzellent ausbalanciert. eines Erachtens nicht nur für "new theologians". Kopic hat mit diesem Buch einen kostbaren Grundstein für die angemessene und Gott-treue Herangehensweise an das Bibel- und Theologie-Studium zu Papier gebracht. Wer die Autortät der Schrift ablehnt - i.d.R. also wer nicht an Jesus Christus glaubt - wird an diesem Buch Anstoß nehmen.----Kopic's book may be 'small' in page number, but the contents are packed with Biblical-theological truth and experience as a believer in Christ and as a scholar. If You are a student of God's Word (evangelical-orthodox tradition) - with my warmest recommendation I would like to encourage You to get this book. Even at a post-graduate level or in pastoral practice - this will serve You well as a personal reminder of what it means to be a steward of God's Word. Most excellent, Biblically decent and beautiful!”

Tanner, “Recommended for every Christian!. If you are a believer who wants to live a God honoring life, this book has your name on it! Kopic goes over many theological importances and breaks them down in an applicable way. He also uses many different theologian's opinions giving the readers a wide scope of theology's significance in our Christian lives. Highly recommended!”

The book by Bruce Feiler has a rating of 5 out of 4.6. 294 people have provided feedback.

Title Page Copyright Dedication Contents Acknowledgments Part One: Why Study Theology?
Part Two: Characteristics of Faithful Theology and Theologians Notes Name and Subject Index
Scripture Index About the Author Endorsements

Book Information

Language: English

Paperback: 736 pages

Item Weight: 12 ounces

Dimensions: 6.75 x 0.75 x 9.5 inches

Reading age: 8 - 12 years

Hardcover: 96 pages

File size: 543 KB

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced typesetting: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Sticky notes: On Kindle Scribe

Print length: 120 pages

Simultaneous device usage: Unlimited

Unbound: 1712 pages

Lexile measure: 820L

Grade level: 3 - 7

[DMCA](#)