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The Hubris and Folly of Defining a Discipline:

Reflections on the Evolution of *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*

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The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology is by far the most expansive and expensive book I have ever overseen or plan to oversee again.¹ A few years ago, knee-deep in endless days of editing, I could not quite anticipate the day when colleagues, students, and even clergy might read and review it and I would have to respond. Now that such a time has arrived, I realize that fifty-six authors should be standing with me, deserving appreciation and responding to queries and critique. The sizeable number of people able to do so well is part and parcel of the book’s overarching argument: a major change has occurred in the last half century marking an incredibly heightened interest in theology in the midst of practice, most visible in the intellectual and faith-inspired sprawl and refinement of the discipline.

The volumes in the *Companion to Religion* series conceptualize disciplinary areas of study. I do not think I grasped the full weight of this responsibility when I agreed—that is, the *hubris and the fallacy of conceiving a discipline*. The *Companions* are neither

¹ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (London: Wiley/Blackwell, 2012).

encyclopedias nor readers.² Aimed at an academic audience, they identify key themes, figures, and developments in recognized intellectual areas. Practical theology's identification as such an area is significant itself. The *Companion to Practical Theology* marks immense progress in the field in the last fifty years, making this an "auspicious time for reassessment" as I argue in my opening chapter.³ Indeed, that was one of the most gratifying experiences—witnessing the expanding corpus of literature and scholars well positioned to contribute. Among one of my biggest surprises was the richness of the chapter bibliographies compiled by each author, with approximately 25 citations maximum per chapter representing a substantive track record of key research in a wide range of areas. At the same time, I recognize the book's necessary impermanence and limitations. It is *just* a holding place for the next iteration.

Conceptualization

What might be helpful for readers to know about the book's conceptualization? I deliberated for over a year on the invitation from Wiley-Blackwell editor, Rebecca Harkin, before agreeing to take on the project, equivocating not just about my time restrictions but also about an adequate framework and key contributors. In the end, I

² Hence, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* is distinct from a book with which some people have naturally confused it that appeared over a decade ago, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), edited by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison. The *Reader* is a under half the size of the *Companion* and includes 22 authors, 8 from the United States, 14 from the United Kingdom. Among the other key differences, the *Reader* focuses solely on the discipline's development (history, methods, and issues), contains reprints of historically significant essays from scholars such as Seward Hiltner and Don Browning, and, for the most part, does not distinguish pastoral and practical theology from each other.

³ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Contributions of Practical Theology" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (London: Wiley/Blackwell, 2012), p. 2.

chose against the suggested format from editors at the press of approximately 30 to 35 chapters of 8000 words, which in retrospect might have simplified my task merely by reducing the number of authors. I did not think there was need for another book collection where renowned scholars write lengthy essays on their favorite subject for a limited audience.⁴

My decision for more authors and shorter, possibly more helpful, chapters (4500 words to be precise, a limit that raised some complaint from authors) coincided with harder deliberations about the overarching framework. I perused other volumes, considered conventional headings (e.g., history, classic figures, issues), when it dawned on me: A four-part definition of practical theology that I developed for an encyclopedia entry might provide a ready and useful rubric.⁵ This framework actually evolved out of two major projects that began in 2003 and 2004 and provided the good fortune of a virtual consulting committee of colleagues and supporting institutions: A Lilly consultation on Practical Theology and Christian Ministry of about twenty scholars and

⁴ This is not to suggest that such volumes have not been useful or significant in the discipline's development. Two classic volumes appeared in the United States in 1980s: Don S. Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983) and James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985). Two other decisive international volumes came out in the late 1990s: Denise Ackermann, and Riet Bons-Storm, eds., *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) and Friedrich Schweitzer, and Johannes A. van der Ven, eds., *Practical Theology: International Perspectives* (Frankfurt/M.: P. Lang, 1999).

⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Practical Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, eds. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2010), pp. 1739-1743.

ministers from a variety of disciplines and traditions⁶ and a Lilly-funded planning grant at Vanderbilt University to create a new Ph.D. curriculum in theology and practice.⁷

Both projects changed my thinking in two fundamental ways.⁸ Although the term *practical theology* refers to the valuable process of developing disciplinary expertise (sufficient to be recognized by the Companion series), the ultimate aim or *telos* of practical theology lies beyond this identity in the pursuit of embodied faith. Second and related, I gained a clearer picture of the multivalent nature of practical theology. Of central importance, the sheer difficulty of defining it does not mean it is an invalid or ill-conceived enterprise. Rather it underscores its complex and extended responsibilities. Too often people mistake practical theology's confusion over definition as a sign of its lack of viability rather than a source of its opulence.⁹

The volume displays this expanse. It moves from practical theology's concrete actualization as an *activity of faith* among believers in Part I to its specialized use as a *discipline* among scholars in Part IV. Two other common uses of the term *practical theology* comprise Part II and III respectively: Practical theology is a *method* for studying theology in practice and it is a *curricular area* of subdisciplines oriented toward

⁶ A key result of this consultation was the publication of Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁷ This program is now in its seventh year and has graduated its first entering class of doctoral students from 2006. See <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool/religion/t&p/>

⁸ I expand on some of what follows in my chapter in the *Companion*, "The Contributions of Practical Theology" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (London: Wiley/Blackwell, 2012), pp. 1-20 and introductory materials in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012).

⁹ See my 2009 presidential address for the International Academy of Practical Theology, now published with six responses, "Five Misunderstandings About Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16 (1) (2012): 5-26.

education and formation for ministry. These four understandings are interdependent and reflect the range and complexity of practical theology and its diverse spatial locations, demonstrating what Pamela McCarroll describes as a “dialogic pluralist” approach as opposed to simple “unitary” or “pluralistic” approaches to the discipline.¹⁰ In the table of contents, the titles of each major section include a brief definition of practical theology as the main heading (way of life, method, curriculum, discipline), a subtitle that amplifies this (shaping faith among believers, studying theology in practice, educating for ministry, and defining disciplinary content and method), and a final clause that identifies the primary setting in which each definition commonly operates (home and society; library and field; classroom, congregation, and community; and guild and global context).

Organization

The activity of practical theology as a discipline, pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to sustain these first three enterprises, comes at the end of the book. Three decades ago, as the discipline struggled to establish itself, Part IV likely would have been the whole book. Instead, the *Companion* concludes where some scholars and students may prefer to start, with developments in the *discipline*. By beginning instead with constitutive *activities* of daily life, the book intentionally subverts the usual order of affairs. It starts with the particular because that is a basic premise of practical theological methodology, that is, to ground theological reflection locally in the concrete context of ordinary life. The decision is not just methodological, however. It is also a reminder of

¹⁰ See Pamela McCarroll’s article in this issue. She is borrowing a framework developed by Jaco S. Dreyer in his essay, “Practical Theology and Intradisciplinary Diversity: A Response to Miller-McLemore’s [IAPT Plenary Address] Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16 (1) (2012): 34-54.

practical theology's more comprehensive aim. It either has relevance for everyday life—the wider *telos* of a more faithful Christian practice—or it has little meaning at all. Not surprisingly, these chapters were among the most difficult to execute. Authors had little precedent or academic pattern to follow and, in the effort to catch faith under theological construction, they had the challenge of showing the fluidity between a phenomenology of daily life and resources in the Christian tradition that elucidate it.¹¹

Others might wonder why Part III on the ministerial arts does not figure more prominently. Many countries and scholars still equate practical theology with its historical designation as the fourth area of the curriculum alongside bible, history, and systematics (sometimes disparagingly labeled “area four”). In fact, despite its tertiary placement in the volume, Tom Reynolds cannot help but conclude that the “semantic weight of the volume still gravitates” toward this section. However, this reading of practical theology as only about ministerial practice within the church has obstructed comprehension of other critical foci in the discipline. Part II on method comes before curriculum (Part III), therefore, because it represents a broader reach and definition of practical theology. To understand theology in practice and to make religious experience and ministry a text for study is actually one of practical theology's most significant twentieth-century scholarly contributions. Although none of these methods is unique to practical theology, practical theologians have had significant investment in their fuller development and implementation as a means to connect theory and practice.

¹¹ Conversation with colleague and friend Dorothy Bass who has devoted her vocation to an examination of the practices of faith for the sake of Christian formation, was pivotal in this overall reorganization of the volume. Her contributions on Christian practices are manifold but see, for example, *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Of particular note, the methods in Part II are both methods of research *and* methods of pastoral practice. That is, they provide a way to understand the experience of faith *and* to affect its transformation. In fact, although these methods have certainly been refined in the academy, they often originate in the clinic (e.g., case studies), congregation (e.g., congregational studies), field (e.g., ethnography), and political realm (e.g., social policy analysis). Finally, Part III on practical theology as curriculum does not sequester practical theology to a fourth (and lesser) corner of the school. Rather, by including chapters on biblical, ethical, historical, and constructive theology as well as a chapter on integration, the third section intentionally works against the centrifugal force that allows all disciplines in theological education to forget their interrelationships with other areas and with the wider purpose of educating for ministry. In other words, Part III invites all theological disciplines to consider their connections to practical theology as ministerial practice.

Another argument lies behind the mere inclusion of Part III. Few, if any, books on practical theology in the last few decades pay any attention to the distinct ministerial arts and the connection of subdisciplines to the wider-ranging enterprise of practical theology or theology for the sake of ministry. Part III includes and revalues what has been inadvertently overlooked in the 1980s rush to counter the problem of the “clerical paradigm,” so powerful encapsulated by Edward Farley. Although he captured the historical problem of a theological education oriented more and more to teaching skills rather than the richer *habitus* of theological reorientation toward God, he underestimated the challenge and value of learning ministerial practice and the necessity of skills within the richer evolution of pastoral wisdom. Even the historical naming of the problem within

the discipline as the “clerical paradigm” backfired on the effort to reprise practice as a source of knowledge. As I demonstrate in an essay on the overuse of this term to describe everything wrong with theological education, I argue that the “academic paradigm” or the prizing of theory alone has been every bit as virulent and resistant to change—what Reynolds calls the “*episteme regime* of the [modern] university” that made practice “secondary.”¹² This has made it difficult to see the fertile interplay necessary between at least three sources of knowledge, traditionally classified by Aristotle as *theoria*, *techne*, and *phronesis*, all of which are necessary for the practice of faith and religious leadership. Part III then recognizes the unique *intelligence within ministerial practice* itself.

The emergence of fresh metaphors in both Reynolds’s and Lorraine Ste-Marie’s portrait of the book is especially interesting. I envisioned the book’s four parts as a kind of inverse or upside down pyramid: It starts with the broadest level of practical theological interpretation of everyday life (Part I), opening up the responsibility for theology as both Reynolds and McCarroll note to “all people of faith” as a task “not solely...of the trained specialist,” before progressively narrowing the book’s focus from a general group of people interested in the study of theology in practice (Part II) and practices of ministry (Part III) to a smaller group of scholars responsible for the minutia of disciplinary method and content (Part IV). Consequently, I am pleased by Reynolds’s alternative image of a circle rather than a triangle that returns or reconnects the discipline (Part IV) to the everyday practices on which it should be grounded (Part I). Hence the book “concludes in a way that feeds back into its beginning.” This “hermeneutic circle”

¹² See Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The ‘Clerical Paradigm’: A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, 2 (2007): 19-38, also reprinted in *Christian Theology in Practice*, pp. 160-184.

has, of course, played a major role in twentieth-century revisions of the discipline.¹³

By contrast, Ste-Marie uses aesthetic rather than geometric images, describing the book's differentiated but interdependent parts in beautiful terms that harken to the discipline's identity as pertaining to the "arts" of ministry. Rather than the usual "cacophony" of definitions and job descriptions with which many of us live, the book orchestrates "a symphony" in which each movement echoes themes of the others while making its own intrinsic contribution to the whole.

Benefits, Deficits, and Lingerings Questions

One benefit of this fourfold definition is its descriptive rather than prescriptive intent. Differentiating the various contexts and uses of the term helps straighten out the confusion (what Ste-Marie nicely calls a "multi-phrenic" feeling) when people use the same word for equally valuable but different purposes. Its use as a framework also takes us beyond simplified portraits of practical theology in the general public as "ministry and church studies" (the identity the popular magazine journal, *The Christian Century*, presumes every time it lists books by area in its special book issue). The fourfold definition also amplifies conventional academic definitions of practical theology as

¹³ I discuss this in my research on pedagogy and practical theology in *Christian Theology in Practice*, pp. 199-201. This development, of course, partially rested on a redefinition of the hermeneutical circle in Latin American liberation theology. See, for example, Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976). For examples from the 1980s revival of practical theology, see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) and Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: a Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: the Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) and, reappearing more recently, Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

merely the “study of the relationship between beliefs and practices”¹⁴ or a hermeneutical process of description, interpretation, construction, and response.¹⁵ These are valid and helpful snapshots. But the *Companion* demonstrates a richer plethora of attributes and responsibilities that extend beyond these understandings and deserve the attention of scholars in a finely tuned academic discipline.

Each of these attributes has its underside. Given the book’s organization, it is hard to avoid the question of what is left out. There are topics overlooked, senior and up-and-coming scholars not included, and religions besides Christianity bracketed. Although analogous interest in practical theology exists in other religions, the primary location of the discussion has been Christianity. Interreligious interchange is a serious growing edge, as Kathleen Greider’s chapter in the volume and wider research illustrates.¹⁶

The *Companion* aims for comprehensive but not exhaustive coverage. Chapters in Part I are illustrative. The hope is that the chosen sites will give readers a generative taste of what an activity-oriented view of practical theology looks like. Neither does Part II aim at inclusive coverage. Nor are its methods of the same order and magnitude. Their arrangement follows a rough chronology of their appearance and use in practical theology and contests a simpler 1980s division between hermeneutical, empirical, and aesthetic

¹⁴ For example, Stephen Pattison favors this phrase and uses it frequently. See his collection of previous writings, *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007).

¹⁵ This is *the* dominant 1980s portrait offered by key texts, such as those cited above in footnote 13.

¹⁶ See, for example, her other work such as "Offenheit und Religionsvielfalt: Grundlagen für die Pastoraltheologie und für *Spiritual Care*." [Openness to Religious Pluralism: Foundations for Pastoral Theology and Spiritual Care.] In *Nachdenkliche Seelsorge—Seelsorgliches Nachdenken: Festschrift für Christoph Morgenthaler zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Isabelle Noth und Ralph Kunz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 106-122 and "Pastoral Theological Reflections on Caregiving and Religious Pluralism." *Pistis e Praxis: Theologia e Pastoral* vol. 3, no. 2, (July-Dec. 2011): 449-465.

methods. There is room for additional subjects in each part, not just those suggested by Ste-Marie and Reynolds of ecology and geography (e.g., “home/displacement and sojourning/migration” as understood through postcolonial and place studies), but also those suggested by others, such as the inclusion in Part III of philosophy of religion and religion in the arts or the Caribbean and Central America in Part IV.¹⁷ From the perspective of the Toronto context, there is certainly room for growth across English- and French-speaking lines in Canada and beyond.

In McCarroll’s recognition of the “privilege and power” that allowed her the time, space, and resources to read all 595 pages, she suggests a wider concern about the book’s limitations that I share. The middle section of Part IV only includes “hot spots” or places where practical theological scholarship has flourished worldwide. The arrangement of chapters here and in the section on religious traditions retains rather than disguises the discipline’s Western and Christian biases that puts certain global contexts and traditions on top and others “down under,” a colonialist ordering that demands critique and alternative constructions.

This ordering reflects the more troubling economic foundation of Western academic elitism. Practical theology, as religious and theological studies more generally, thrives where there is money. So, not coincidentally, the global hot spots are also spots where wealth has accumulated or economic exploitation has occurred. Institutions of higher education require higher finance and depend on massive governmental and private business-spawned endowment funding. Faculty members publish to earn tenure; presses

¹⁷ America Academy of Religion panelist Emilie Townes made these suggestions in her remarks at a session on the book at the national meeting in November 13, 2011 in San Francisco (unpublished paper).

print books to earn a profit; so scholarship is indelibly shaped by the market's bottom line. Like most academic presses, Wiley-Blackwell's market is largely comprised of the fortunate few in the northern hemisphere capable of purchasing books. Even global inclusion of authors highlights economic privilege and discrimination.

It is some solace (although also surprising and disturbing) to discover that most other volumes in the series, such as the *Companions* to political theology, modern theology, postmodern theology, and Christian ethics, do not have sections on worldwide developments at all. Indeed, they pay scant attention to what is happening in the southern and eastern hemispheres and have few authors outside the United States.¹⁸ Most mundane material realities of intellectual life and religious and social identity are bracketed out. At least the *Companion to Practical Theology* begins the process of “diversif[ying] and challeng[ing] the US-dominated conversation,” as McCarroll remarks. It is precisely practical theology's interest in location and place that makes international participation requisite and leads many practical theologians to find the disparities among the world's population disturbing. By the very nature of the discipline, practical theologians are interested in the material “conditions for the production of practical theological scholarship: who gets to do it and how,” including the “very changed economic and labor situation of the academy.”¹⁹

Ironically, the negative reaction to the book's hardcover price of nearly 200

¹⁸ For two suggestive and prototypical examples, see *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁹ Tom Beaudoin's remarks on the *Companion to Practical Theology* at the America Academy of Religion panel in San Francisco, November 13, 2011 (unpublished paper). See also his *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2003).

United States dollars is itself a reminder of how accustomed we Westerners have become to the privilege of affording books, a privilege the world's majority lacks, often living without access to either the creation or possession of written knowledge. At the same time, the written word, whether dispersed through books and libraries or more recently through the worldwide web, has served historically as a powerful political leverage for the marginalized and oppressed. Wiley-Blackwell's general approach with all the books in the *Companion* series is to publish a hardcover edition first with library purchase in mind and then a lower-priced paperback edition for wider circulation within two years. The *Companion to Practical Theology* is also now among the volumes accessible on-line through library subscription. These facts, of course, do not allay the economic concerns but they do explain some of the practical realities behind the market decisions.²⁰

A deeper irony is how questions about *comprehensive coverage* run headlong into questions arising in all three essays in this symposium about the *necessity of defining practical theology more concisely* "as a bounded discipline in the traditional way" in McCarroll's words. When practical theology tries to cover so much territory, it risks becoming "everything," says Reynolds, and so is nothing in the end. It is "too broad to acquire strategic curricular gains," he says, leaving Ste-Marie to wonder about "what might be the limits to the place of practical theology in the academy." Reynolds in turn asks, "[W]hat specific curricular focus defines practical theology?"

These questions lead back to the discipline's paradoxical position as both an intellectual and a practical transforming enterprise—a tension apparent in the relationship

²⁰ For information on accessing Blackwell Reference Online see <http://www.blackwellreference.com/>

between Part I, the discipline's wider *telos* of meaning for life as a whole, and its narrow definition as a discipline in Part IV. There is, in other words, an inevitable ambiguity in aim and audience with which practical theology simply has to live, at least for now. That is, in its very definition as a discipline committed to a wider *telos* of "human flourishing" and "transformation" as McCarroll underscores, its primary scholars are caught in a catch-22 of both wanting to sustain intellectual infrastructures and recognizing their relativity, futility, and obscurity. Faculty members must have the means to evaluate student expertise just as faculty themselves must demonstrate intellectual acumen recognizable by university standards of promotion and tenure. Yet from a God's eye view, so to speak, these benchmarks hold lesser import than remedying poverty, feeding children, stopping ecological dissemination, and other pressing local and global needs. As I have argued elsewhere, if pressed to choose, some practical theologians would prioritize making a creative and real difference in the world over securing an academic career.²¹ And those like myself who stand at a distance from practical ministries must justify our work by hoping that our endeavors still serve this wider purpose, even if only indirectly.

Both McCarroll and Ste-Marie remind us that we still need "pithy, straightforward" definitions to indicate clearly the discipline's subject matter and alleviate the "sense of fragmented multiplicity" so common to those of us with plural job titles and academic commitments within each of David Tracy's three publics of academy, society, and church.²² There are a few such viable, even if inadvertent, catch phrases or

²¹ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Also a Pastoral Theologian: In Pursuit of Dynamic Theology (Or: Meditations from a Recalcitrant Heart)," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 6 (2010): 813-828.

²² Tracy himself saw practical theology's main audience as the wider public of society, not the church, which he defined as the terrain of a systematic theology dedicated to what

shorthand references in the symposium essays themselves. Ste-Marie, for example, describes practical theology as concerned about the “‘practicing theology’ in the doing of our lives.”²³ Practical theology is essentially the study of the practicing of theology and Christian faith, what she later depicts as “the critical and constructive analysis of praxis.” Although in one respect all areas of theological study are fundamentally practical, as Reynolds observes (and Browning before him excelled in demonstrating²⁴), this does not mean that all scholars or believers care expressly about this dimension to the same extent that practical theologians do or share the responsibility of refining its parameters. As another example of a concise definition, Reynolds suggests that practical theology is that discipline with expertise in the “performative” function of theological reflection, partially answering his own question about its central curricular focus.

Perhaps the more important lesson to be drawn from this discussion is that definitional issues remain alive and well. Maybe they always will. This is not necessarily a bad problem. However, it can get old. The “quizzical and unconvinced expressions” as McCarroll says, of those who persist in asking, “What is practical theology *anyway*?” are tiresome. The question reminds me of questions asked in 1980s about feminism that constantly put the burden of explanation back on women, just as I imagine similar requests to explain racism were foisted on people of color. Sometimes it is hard not to hear such queries as a *willed ignorance* based on the privilege of a dominant group who feigns incomprehension of the oppressions they perpetuate and upon which they depend

Reynolds describes as “articulating, arranging coherently, and defending the claims laid down by faith.” See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 56-57.

²³ This image is drawn from Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

²⁴ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*.

for their own position. I do not think it beneficial to dwell on this here but a list of the condescending remarks reported to me by colleagues from peers in other disciplines is astonishing (e.g., one of my own colleagues expressed “surprise” that there were actually 56 scholars equipped to write for the volume). So it is easy to get angry and worn down. But it is essential to persist for the sake of the enrichment of Christian faith as a world-transforming force in today’s world. In this enterprise, we will be better off if we retain the approach that McCarroll observes in the *Companion* itself of fostering conversation that is “inviting and hospitable,” an approach exemplified in the Toronto symposium.

For, despite the price, I hope the book’s audience extends well beyond the in-house scholars in the so-called practical area of the curriculum. The book will be of genuine benefit if it not only strengthens the discipline but also reaches religious leaders, faculty, and students across the disciplines, giving people fresh tools to understand the distinct kind of knowledge that evolves out of religious practice and helping them better grasp how theology and faith operate as living realities.