

Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflection: Starting with Scripture* (London: SCM, 2020), 256 pages. ISBN: 9780334058564.

*Reviewed by Fran Porter*

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It is a bold thing to challenge the dominant norms within a theological field but that is just what Helen Collins does in this book about theological reflection. Responding to the difficulties experienced particularly by evangelical and charismatic ministerial students in theological college when encountering theological reflection, which often seems ‘as if it is giving students answers to a problem they do not have’ (p. 5), she proposes a model that ‘coheres with their already familiar processes of theological reflection’ (p. 5), one which foregrounds Scripture. Further, her argument is that her ‘scriptural cycle’ model is more suited than current models for everyone who engages in theological reflection as part of their ministerial formation — ministry broadly understood as ‘God’s ministry in Christ’ and therefore potentially involving everyone equipping themselves to serve God.

She constructs her argument logically. She offers a critique of theological reflection education (particularly the critical correlation method and pastoral cycle model) before making her argument for the Bible as the starting point for any theological project, defending this ‘evangelical faith conviction’ (p. 18) against possible objections from within the practical theology field. Her chapter on the place of the Holy Spirit critiques Don Browning’s *Fundamental Practical Theology* and Elaine Graham’s *Transforming Practice*, both which she argues disadvantage divine agency. She contends that experience has been understood too broadly within practical theology, and that other academic disciplines are tools rather than sources in the work of theology. She describes the proposed scriptural cycle model (as one model for applying her method), countering potential criticisms of it, and offers four case studies of the model along with a guide for facilitators using it.

Helen Collins’s proposal for there to be ‘greater engagement within the discipline [of practical theology] over the role of the Bible, the Holy Spirit and Christian experience’ (p. 225) is carefully argued and this is a beautifully written book, easy to read, critical, constructive, and

delicately nuanced. Throughout, her conviction that ‘God can be encountered as a present, active agent in the world and as something ontologically distinct from ourselves’ (p. 97) shapes how she understands the work of practical theology, and her final chapter includes five far-reaching implications of her method for Christian theological education more broadly, one of which questions theological education’s engagement with higher education systems. This particular suggestion is one of a number of instances that gave me cause for concern that the corrective wisdom of voices from outside the church, in practice, would risk being muted in her model. While the potential for misuse inherent in her method is acknowledged, for example, because of ‘the manifold oppressive ways in which this grand story [of the Bible] has been told and used’ (p. 214), it seems to me that these ways have been and still are more influential than her model allows. Nevertheless, without doubt, the book deserves its place alongside other methods of theological reflection, fostering attention to the implicit theological and epistemological assumptions of existing more familiar models and methods.

**Nigel G. Wright, *How To Be A Church Minister* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 190 pages. ISBN: 978532665875.**

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As a ‘reluctant’ church minister, with a slight aversion to any book with a title that begins, ‘How To’, I approached reading/reviewing this book with a certain degree of nervousness, apprehension, and even suspicion. But having read it through (twice), I found it to be an informative, insightful, and generally helpful book (or instruction manual), despite being under 200 pages long.

Wright, who is a (now retired) church minister, bible college lecturer and principal, approaches this subject as a practitioner and educator, and therefore brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to bear on a whole range of issues and important factors in being (and forming) a local church minister. From the outset, Wright recognises