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# Formation and reflection: the promise of practical theology

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an intense examination of her life, her inheritance and what that needs to mean for her at this time. True to her feminist viewpoint, she ponders how life was for her and how biblical texts can interact in her living, augmenting meaning and understanding. Her sociological background gives a different stance to critical examination of current scholarship, biblical and feminist. But her disclosure of the effects her new beliefs had on her lifestyle, her family and community of friends, add a human dimension to the academic insights.

Miriam never entered the promised land. Shirley writes, "This ordeal was a journey and it, too, was my home: the struggle against the tiger does not end; the cycle of Gethsemane, Calvary and Resurrection will be repeated—again and again" (217). Her book provides insight into the struggle of a woman attempting to integrate old and new ideas, a raised consciousness with romantic fantasies of a "promised land". Women will find affirmation and men another perspective, hopefully leading all to move to more empathetic inter-relationships. For those involved with the Canadian church in the first half of the twentieth century, there will be remembering, especially of the enthusiasm of the "missionary movement". Whatever reactions to our recollections and her revelations, Shirley challenges us to turn and face our own tigers and relive authentically our life's experiences. As we do, we will be strengthened by the knowledge that others, both present and past, are with us in the struggle and our companions in the wilderness.

Enid R. Powell  
Cambridge, Ontario

## **Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology**

Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds.

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987

164 pp.

What is practical theology? "What is the relation between 'theology' as an academic discipline and living, worshiping, serving communities of faith?" What is the relationship between what goes on in the theological school known as the seminary and what goes on in the parish?

These are the questions—timely questions indeed—to which this scholarly collection of essays is seeking some creative direction and constructive response. Within this volume, eight theologians—Don S. Browning, Rebecca S. Chopp, Edward Farley, Thomas H. Groome, Lewis S. Mudge, James N. Poling, David Tracy, James D. Whitehead and Charles E. Winquist—search for ways in which the academic theological world and the practising parish simultaneously can be a critique of each other, a challenge for each other, a partner in ministry with each other, and a creative stimulant with one another for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the foreword, the editors note that

... this book has emerged from a series of seminars sponsored by the Issues Research program of the Association of Theological Schools....The ATS grant made possible invitations—over a period of two years—to an array of distinguished scholars and practitioners from outside Chicago as well as from within. A faithful core of local participants ensured continuity in the dialogue. These local colleagues also formed a progressively more sophisticated and aggressive audience to meet each new famous but unwary visiting speaker! The essays in this book represent a selection of the papers given on these occasions.

It is the claim of this text that theology simply is “the work of the people of God”. Yet what that really means is open to much question, constant debate and effort at clarification. And well it should be! For it is through these processes that “practical theology” (by which the editors mean that “which makes the process of formation of Christian community and personhood in the world thematic for critical reflection. Reflection can be about the formation of the community of faith, and it can also be, in another form, an element within this process of formation”) takes on its rightful role. “If the people are to be the theologians, as they must be, theology as a fully responsible enterprise must teach them what it is to do theology in the community of faith. They must be taught, so that they can then surpass their teachers.”

In many respects this book consists of eight viable ways in which this task can be approached within the modern pluralistic world. To summarize each essay here would, of course, be inappropriate; such an exercise also has the tendency of doing a disservice to each author as well as to the reader, who might wish to read the actual words of each author. Yet it should be noted that these essays are related to literature already in print by the contributors. Hence, those familiar with Thomas H. Groome's *Christian Religious Education* or with *Method in Ministry* by James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead will treasure the way in which these authors reflect on the nature and the use of their own materials in theological reflection.

There are a variety of ways in which this text can be fruitfully employed in its designed task and purpose. The reader may in fact use each essay and its suggested approach to the questions at hand in order to come to terms with the issues of “formation” and “reflection” as well as the correlation of these in the search for a significantly constructive response to the question: What is practical theology? Or one may in fact compare one essay with another. In any event, each essay is as much of a search for methodology as it is for substance.

I believe that this is a potential text for courses in systematic theology, pastoral/practical theology and in theological reflection. I also believe that it is a book which seminars of clergy and laity, parish pastors, ministers in

specialized settings and seminary professors would do well in using for ongoing dialogues as to the relationship between academic studies in theology and living one's faith in the congregation/parish/world.

In the editors' epilogue, the poignant question is asked: "Living a faith tradition in the modern world—is that still possible?" Of course, this question embraces a larger set of questions: "How is authentic Christian formation possible? How can we conceive a lived context of faith in which some form of critical correlation between tradition and situation can even begin to take place? How can the community of faith be both responsible to the tradition and responsibly present in a pluralistic world?"

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**Healing Wounded Emotions: Overcoming Life's Hurts**  
Martin H. Padovani  
Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987  
U.S. \$6.95

In the foreword to the book, John Powell reflects on the observation of Victor Frankl that for the last fifty years psychology has had a narrow preoccupation with the human mind and body to the neglect of the human spirit. Powell suggests that "we have been selectively silent about the persistent questions of the human spirit: questions about where we have come from, what are we doing, and where we are going."

This book is written with the assumption that theology and psychology must address the human condition holistically. It is written out of a belief that psychology provides clues in understanding and coping with life experiences. It views religious faith as a source of meaning and purpose bringing hope to the human spirit. Religious faith when integrated with psychology should potentially bring healing into the lives of people. Padovani argues for an integration of these two streams. He notes however, that "the task of harmonizing the spiritual and the psychological is frequently difficult" (2). Problems occur when one discipline assumes its own approach to be a panacea for all life's problems or where a discipline lacks knowledge of the other discipline. Using the imagery of blindness he says, "psychological blindness results in ignorance about the person; spiritual blindness fosters a profound ignorance in religious areas" (2).

This short treatise is comprised of sixteen chapters which identify problem areas, human experiences, behaviours or needs. His approach is to describe the human experience in terms of problems. He then proceeds to describe how these problems emerge in everyday life followed by illustrations as to how one can respond redemptively to the problem. A case in