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Gerben Heitink. Practical Theology: History, Theory,
Action Domains. Translated by Reinder Bruinsma.
Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids:

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Gerben Heitink. *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*. Translated by Reinder Bruinsma. Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xix + 358. \$45.00 (Paper).

[1] Heitink, Professor of Practical Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam, has written an excellent book, which is a detailed case for and presentation of practical theology. He has not, however, been well served by his translator. Having done translations myself, I grant the difficulty of finding English equivalents for the nuances, but a translator should be able to render a text readable. I mention this only because the plodding style of the translator made this book difficult for me to read, and it might do the same for others. This would be a shame, for the book is well worth reading.

[2] The work comes in three parts, with a clarifying "floor plan" (12), one of many helpful diagrams scattered throughout. Part I deals with the development of practical theology; it is historical and interpretive. Part II, the core section, unfolds the definition of practical theology as a theological theory of action. Part III analyses the three domains in which practical theology acts: humanity, Church, and society. The development is consistent as systematic theory, though sometimes the density of the detail makes the thread difficult to hold. Density, however, is essential to the theory for, to be genuinely *practical*, practical theology must give a thorough account of all the contexts, individual, ecclesial, and social in which it is done.

[3] Practical theology, the currently preferred term for what used to be "pastoral subjects" in the Protestant and "pastoral theology" in the Catholic traditions, is "the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society" (6). *Praxis* is action, and Heitink correctly differentiates two praxes. There is Praxis 1, which is the mediation of the Christian faith, and there is Praxis 2, which is the context in which Praxis 1 is played out, real life, real people in dynamic interaction, real actors responsible for their own lives, the lives of others, and the life of society as a whole. Though the two praxes are differentiated, they are not separable; they are correlated and dialogical. The two demand that practical theology be hermeneutical, empirical, and strategic.

[4] The two praxes, and the demands they make on one another, lead to the consideration of a broad, ecumenical, European pantheon, largely Dutch and German. Kant, Schleiermacher, Nitzsch, Marheineke, Marx, Comte, Durkheim, Weber, Barth, Berkhof, Schillebeeckx, papal encyclicals, Habermas, Ricoeur, are all lightly mined for a theory of practical theology as a theory of action. A twenty-two page bibliography provides eloquent testimony to the thoroughness of the search, Heitink's detailed theory eloquent proof of the thoroughness of the integration. Habermas' central idea of *communicative action* is central also to practical theology.

[5] Communicative action divides communication into three areas: facts, norms, and feelings. Corresponding to these three areas, there are three validity claims to be established: that the facts are true (theoretical discourse), that the norms are fair (practical discourse), that the feelings are genuine (esthetic-expressive discourse). A family, for instance, is watching television. The mother says to her son: "I am thirsty, please get me a coke from the fridge." The mother is convinced of the fact that there is a coke in the fridge, she accepts the norm that parents can ask their children to do some tasks as fair, and she believes her feeling of thirst is genuine. If the son also accepts the fact, the norm, and the feeling, he will get the coke; if he does not, he may enter into negotiations about one or all of them. Such democratic

negotiation is the root of social order. If the mother decides not to negotiate but to impose her authority, she has embarked on strategic action which may provoke from the son a strategic reaction. Authoritarian strategic action and reaction may lie at the root of the crisis the Churches face in Europe and the United States. This crisis is ultimately the provocation for practical theology.

[6] The book closes with a differentiation and consideration of three domains in which practical theology functions: humanity, church, and society. Heitink, therefore, makes strategic choices of an anthropology, ecclesiology, and what he calls diaconology. His anthropology is Augustinian: the human is made to encounter God, to respond to his love, and is responsible. Being related to God and to fellow humans, the human being is endowed with a high degree of responsibility. Heitink's ecclesiology is a normative ecclesiology of *koinonia*: the Church exhibits solidarity, celebrates memory, and is engaged in the world. *Koinonia* requires critical participation by all Church members who are taken seriously as critical subjects. Consideration of the relationship between society and Church leads to *diaconology*, "coined as a parallel for anthropology and ecclesiology" (293). *Koinonia* leads to *diakonia*-service. Diaconology refers to the work of serving at table (John 12:2), to the service of fellow humans (Luke 22:26-27), with the use of the charismata, not only of the clergy but of all the baptized, for the well-being of all, including non-believers. Diaconal service in the public domain is differentiated in four areas: labor, equality for all, irrespective of race, religion, gender, or sexual inclination, politics and social policy, and moral responsibility as a contribution to public morality.

[7] *Practical Theology* is an excellent, if somewhat dense, book. It should be read by all teachers and students of theology, pastors, and every Christian seeking to permeate the world, wherever she or he encounters it, with the spirit of the gospel. It is not an easy read in the present translation, but the reward exceeds the effort. The cover-blurb's claim that it "is the best one-volume work available on the subject" is difficult to gainsay.

Michael G. Lawler  
Creighton University

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