

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

Porter, Stanley E., and Steven M. Studebaker, eds. *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views*. Spectrum Multiview Books. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018. 237 pp. \$30.00. ISBN 978-0-8308-5208-6.

Evangelical theologians have historically excelled at defending what they believe: the authority of Scripture, the atoning work of Christ, the necessity of personal faith. What they have been considerably less successful at is explaining how they do theology: the procedural steps, the rules of evidence, and the criteria by which theological conclusions are reached and evaluated. The volume under review represents a sustained, collaborative, and largely successful attempt to address this deficit directly.

Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker (both of McMaster Divinity College), *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views* is the latest entry in InterVarsity Press's Spectrum Multiview series. It brings together five credentialed evangelical theologians, Sung Wook Chung, John R. Franke, Telford C. Work, Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, and Paul Louis Metzger, each of whom presents a distinct methodological approach, applies it to Christology as a shared case study, and responds to the other four essays. The book manages to be both accessible for beginners and challenging for experts, though its ambitions are not fully realized. The driving problem animating the entire volume is stated in the editors' introduction (pp. 1–30). Porter and Studebaker argue that most approaches to theology explain well what it is and why it matters, but do not clearly show how to actually do it. The introduction surveys the propositional method associated with Charles Hodge (carried forward by Wayne Grudem and Millard Erickson), liberal theology, neo-orthodoxy, postliberal and postconservative theology, Kevin Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach, and the radical orthodoxy of Milbank, Pickstock, and James K. A. Smith (pp. 4–30). For each movement, its proponents define what theology is before explaining how to do it. The book's solution is to ask five theologians to explain and then demonstrate their methods through the doctrine of Christ.

Chapter 1 (pp. 31–51): Sung Wook Chung defends Bible Doctrines/Conservative Theology, a propositional approach rooted in sola Scriptura and operating by the systematic, topical codification of biblical data. His Christological application traces a clear path from exegesis to doctrinal synthesis, integrating biblical, historical, and contemporary theological resources. Chapter 2 (pp. 52–72): John R. Franke presents Missional Theology, a postconservative approach that locates theology within the *missio Dei*, treats it as a contextually situated second-order discipline, and develops a Christology oriented around the life and ministry of Jesus rather than primarily around metaphysical categories. Chapter 3 (pp. 73–92): Telford C. Work develops an Interdisciplinary Theology through the generative metaphor of “framers and painters”: theology frames knowledge from other disciplines, providing the

christological and eschatological coordinates within which all human inquiry finds its ultimate significance. Chapter 4 (pp. 93–115): Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo advocates Contextual Theology and argues that human context is not merely a recipient of theology but an indispensable source alongside Scripture and tradition. His demonstration engages Nigerian Christianity as a concrete case. Chapter 5 (pp. 116–142): Paul Louis Metzger rounds out Part One with Trinitarian Dogmatic Theology, a confessional, neo-orthodox approach in which pneumatology mediates between the historical Christ and the contemporary life of the church.

Part Two (pp. 143–198) offers each contributor the opportunity to respond to the other four essays. The editors close with a synthetic reflection (pp. 199–215) that identifies five key observations about what the volume has revealed concerning evangelical theological method. The volume's central argument is clear, well-documented, and persuasively illustrated, yet the solution only partly works. Franke's missional Christology is rich with ideas but remains at the level of vision without practical steps. Metzger's essay is sophisticated, but a student seeking procedural guidance would struggle to extract a clear sequence of tasks. Chung's essay, by contrast, is the most methodologically explicit, and it is no coincidence that the clearest contribution also uses the most traditional method. A project meant to fix a problem sometimes ends up revealing it.

The responses in Part Two are often more insightful than the original essays. Ezigbo warns that other methods risk producing armchair theologies developed in isolation from everyday Christians, supporting this with a compelling Nigerian case study. Work's "framers and painters" metaphor is creative but implies theology merely frames other disciplines rather than engaging them in genuine dialogue, a weakness Ezigbo highlights (p. 180). Metzger draws on Peter Harrison's work to explain why theological methods have become disconnected. Together, these responses transform the book into a lively conversation, which is precisely what the Spectrum format achieves.

The volume makes three significant contributions. First, it is the first Spectrum book to apply the multi-view format to theological method rather than a doctrinal locus. Second, the shared Christological case study lets readers compare not only what each method claims but what it actually produces. Third, Ezigbo's contribution raises vital questions about global Christianity and the gap between academic theology and everyday Christian life.

The book's biggest strength is its format. Instead of one author summarizing different methods, it brings in genuine practitioners of each approach, making the discussion more credible. The contributors are genuinely committed to their methods, and their disagreements are serious. The editors' introduction is especially strong, clearly mapping the history of modern theological methods and equipping readers with tools to engage the essays. The conclusion (pp. 199–215) is also commendable for its honesty: rather than claiming victory, the editors point out areas where each method could improve, such as adding more contextual awareness, grounding missional theology more deeply in Scripture, or keeping dogmatic theology connected to current concerns.

The book has clear weaknesses. All five contributors are men, while feminist, womanist, and mujerista perspectives, though mentioned by the editors (p. 29), are absent. None of the essays mounts a sustained defense of the

assumptions underlying their respective methods; each simply takes those assumptions for granted. The five-view format, while pedagogically useful, can give the impression that the methods are more distinct than they really are. As Metzger observes (p. 193), all five approaches involve elements of context, mission, interdisciplinarity, and confession. A clearer account of what truly distinguishes each approach would have strengthened the book.

Overall, *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views* is a valuable and thought-provoking book. It shared focus on Christology, and the quality of its contributors makes it worthy of careful study. It is especially useful for graduate theology courses, as its design encourages deep, critical discussion. Readers looking for a step-by-step manual on how to do theology will not find a formula here, but will instead gain a clearer sense of why such a formula is hard to produce, and why that difficulty is itself an invitation to keep thinking carefully about method. For these reasons, the book is highly recommended.

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