

Kapic, Kelly M., *A Little Book for New Theologians - Why and How to Study Theology* (Lisle: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012).

Kelly Kapic's 'A Little Book for New Theologians' is an excellent textbook for all kinds of individuals, especially anyone starting to study Christian theology. Book's author, Kapic, has been a professor of theology at Covenant College; he has the qualifications to compose such a literature. He highlights the private and public lifestyles of religious persons. Kapic analyses ancient scriptures, traditions and legends to emphasise the nature of spirituality. He asserts that gaining God's knowledge can alter our understanding of all things.

The book itself is not really lengthy but a wide range of sources are examined by Kapic. For example the fathers of the Church: Origen of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzus, Saint Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury. Moreover, he also utilises modern day sources such as: Miroslav Volf and C.S Lewis. After that he references the prayer book of Episcopal Church.

The primary topic of this book is worship. Mainly because worship is very important for someone who aims to be a church leader. The textbook's sections regarding knowledge of scripture and prayer are focused on how to be a valuable member of a church and ultimately how to lead it. It seems like Kapic is intending to target a niche audience. This is a questionable decision as a book aimed at beginners should be accessible for everyone hence it would have been better if Kapic tried to aim at a broader audience.

Kapic advocates that theology can not be separated from life. If separated, the truthfulness and beauty of these two are lost.

He provides a lot of arguments in favor of studying theology, trying to encourage new students to stick to this religious subject. Apart from this, he emphasises the qualities of faithful theology for example the understanding of Bible, giving importance to worship, and to repent for sins. Further to this, he highlights the importance of understanding one's limitations as a human.

Kapic concludes that we, as humans, can not make perfect theological judgements due to our sinful instincts, personal preferences and assumptions.

This is an excellent explanation for students who begin to study theology. It's a great idea from Kapic to focus on a human's limitations and to show the impact of these limitations to newbie students.

Kapic shows a concise and clear definition of Christian theology in his book. For a beginner theology student, this definition is a great starting point.

The book, as said before, is not as lengthy as expected but this seems like an intended decision by Kapic. Since the book is aimed at supporting the undergraduate students who attend

introductory theology classes, the short size makes sure a beginner can understand the book with ease. Otherwise, If the book was very lengthy, it would have been really hard for a newcomer to finish all of it and to comprehend its contents properly.

Throughout the book, Kaptic keeps reminding the reader about the importance of humility and how it relates to understanding theology.

Despite being short in size, this book contains a lot of detail and valuable facts. Despite being only around 120 pages long, this concise resource contains more depth and detail than many 500 page books of similar subjects. As talked before, a wide range of ancient and contemporary sources are discussed in such a short amount of pages.

The textbook's title clearly emphasises that it's meant to be read by 'new' theology students. This is indeed the reason why the language used by Kaptic is clear, in order to make the book as accessible as possible.

However, this book should also be read by experts of theology, not just beginners as suggested by the title. Due to the book's depth, structure and accessible language, it is recommended for everyone to read this book. Especially theologians, whether they are very experienced academics with multiple doctorate degrees or are newly enrolled students.

Even if one is not a Christian, they will still be able to comprehend Kaptic's arguments and learn a lot from reading this resource. Hence everyone, regardless of their religion, skill level or background, is recommended to read this book.

And this is not just because the book is accessible or the book contains depth... It is because this book is also very engaging.

In this small sized resource, Kaptic feeds the reader with a flood of really valuable information on theology. This ranges from theological communication; understanding the nature of God, enjoying the worship of God, relation of life and theology, pilgrimage, humility, use of theological reasoning, importance of suffering for God, God's justice and ultimately the value of the Bible.

The entire volume is made up of ten chapters which are not really long. All chapters are really interesting and hook the reader so much that it becomes hard to stop reading after finishing a chapter. Normally, when reading a book, one might want to take breaks after a chapter finishes and leave the rest for another day. But for this textbook, this is not the case. The chapters are so engaging that it becomes hard to stop reading after a chapter finishes.

This is the sort of book that one wishes was longer than its original size. Honestly, when one starts reading Kaptic's masterpiece, it is almost impossible for them to quit reading it.

Kapic cleverly manages to make the book this interesting by melding his opinions and observations with the ones of Church's well known fathers. These include: Luther, Baxter, Zwingli, Calvin, Barth, Hodge, Augustine, Brunner and also Bavinck. Although many times Kapic misses the chance to quote Brunner.

The title of this resource is a bit misleading. 'A Little Book for New Theologians' as a title will really deter a lot of people from reading this tome. Many individuals who should read this book will be misguided by the title into believing that this book is only for beginner undergraduate theology students.

In the book's initial chapter, Kapic clearly highlights that every Christian can benefit from this book. Despite being aware of the book's quality to be beneficial to a very broad audience, he should not have used the term 'for New Theologians' in the title.

It would have been better if the title was 'A Little Book for Everyone, Especially New Theologians - Why and How to Study Theology'. Or at least it could have been 'A Little Book for Christians, Especially New Theologians - Why and How to Study Theology'

Despite this book's appeal for a very broad audience, it's clear that Kapic is trying to target a niche only: New theologians. Seems like Kapic originally intended to write this resource only for new religious studies students but due to his excellent writing style, concise explanations and magnificent choice of topics: The textbook can be understood by almost anyone. It is very likely that Kapic did not intend it to be like this, hence the title shows the book is 'for New Theologians'.

Another key point to take into account is what Kapic actually says. Kapic's memorable points can be summarized as following: One can not be considered religious just because they talk about God; we worship God because we enjoy him; one should use both reason and faith; to be adept at faithful theology one needs to learn how to pray; reason is not to be abandoned by faithful theologians as reason needs to be used as a slave of faith instead of its lord.

All of the points summarised in the previous paragraph are very valuable treasures of information. For new theologians or students, these points introduce them to the nature of faithful theology and its importance. For experts of theology, these remind them about the importance of prayer and how religion, life and theology are bonded with each other. For a layperson, these points are also understandable and highlight the importance of praying, using reason and enjoying God.

Now it all starts to make sense how this book is recommended for everyone, not just new theologians or pastors. The way Kapic wrote it, there are layers of meanings to be taken from many of his points.

His arguments about worshipping God and how to enjoy it can apply to the life of an average Christian or even a Jew or a Muslim. Anyone with an abrahamic religious background can relate to what Kaptic highlighted and take a lot of lessons from it.

Kaptic managed to write a really great resource for all kinds of people but unfortunately this marvellous book is not perfect. There are minor flaws. Previously, the title was highlighted and it was explained why he should have not used the phrase "for New Theologians" in the book's name. Sadly it is not the only issue with this book.

Let's be honest: Christianity inherits a lot of elements from Judaism and Islam inherits many of its elements from Christianity and Judaism. The very close bond of similarities between these 3 major abrahamic religions can not be denied. If that is the case then why does Kaptic seem to ignore this bond?

There are times when one wishes Kaptic had referenced Ghazali alongside Augustine or Maimonides alongside Zwingli. Just like in Christianity, worship of God is also central in Islam and Judaism. Kaptic has unfortunately missed several opportunities to strengthen his points by backing up his claims from sources of other Abrahamic religions. He seems to only view God, worship and theological reasoning from the Western and Christian perspective. It could have been much better if alternative views (from non Christian and non Western sources) were at least discussed.

But despite the lack of spotlight given to non-Christian sources, the book is still accessible and useful for people of every faith. Worship of God or a pantheon is central to many religions, not just Christianity. Most of Kaptic's arguments can be made for almost any other religion, especially abrahamic religions like Islam and Judaism.

For example, enjoying the worship itself is also very important for a Muslim since they are expected to pray five times daily. Similarly the Jews have to perform Shema prayer multiple times a day.

However it would have been better if Kaptic had highlighted these religions himself and explained how it's also beneficial for them to enjoy God's worship.

Unfortunately this does not just end here, there is also another minor flaw that needs spotlight: The questionable assumption that theology is mainly for faithful Christians. Why does one need to be a pious Christian to be a good theologian? Why can't a Muslim, Hindu or an atheist study Christian theology?

John Hinnels in the opening essay of the book he edited, 'The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion', claims that being religious is not a requirement to understand and study religion. He is able to perfectly prove his argument due to his materialist, atheist background.

In Hinnels' book the opening essay ('Why Study Religions?') makes it clear that one really does not need to be religious or pious in order to study religions.¹ Hinnels is a renowned academic who authored or edited over 200 works.

Hinnels is right. Indeed anyone, if they are passionate, can understand and master religious studies - especially theology.

Would have been better if Kaptic also considered that and highlighted that one doesn't just need to be pious to become a good theologian.

Ultimately, 'A Little Book for New Theologians' is an excellent textbook for all kinds of individuals, especially anyone starting to study Christian theology. The book is really engaging and everyone is recommended to read it. Due to Kaptic's accessible language, interesting choice of topics and diverse use of Christian sources: almost anyone will enjoy reading this book and learn a lot from it. Maybe Kaptic's original intention was to only target a small audience, new theologians, but the book seems to have a really wide appeal due to its quality. Alas, there are a few flaws... it's not a perfect book. The flaws are that the title could be better as many who are supposed to read this will be misguided by the title to not read it. And Kaptic misses the chance to highlight religions other than Christianity or to present non-Western perspectives. Finally, Kaptic fails to emphasize that non-Christians and atheists can also study theology and maybe even master it.

Bibliography

Hinnels, John, 'Why Study Religions?', *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)

¹John Hinnels, 'Why Study Religions?', *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.