

*Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church.* Edited by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis. Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology 6. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. xv + 238. \$35.96.

“Ordinary theology” describes the faith discourses and representations of individuals who have received little or no scholarly theological education. Astley and Francis bring together well-researched chapters on what ordinary Christians believe and why it is important to take their faith expressions seriously in academic theological studies and church life. First, there is a pragmatic justification: the majority of Christians express nonscholarly understandings about their faith. Second, ordinary theology articulates a faith and a spirituality that people find to be salvific. Attending to such beliefs and processes of believing can enrich Christian theology and practice.

The volume also offers examples of how such theologizing can be studied. Two complementary approaches are highlighted: an empirical, descriptive approach (involving theological listening) and a more evaluative and reflective approach (involving theological critique, broadly defined). The diversity in exploring the terrain of ordinary theology and in applying these approaches can be regarded as the volume’s major strength. Areas of exploration and application include Christian learning, biblical studies, and prayer and worship, as well as denominational and ecumenical studies. Also significant is the attention given to specific Christian doctrines and activities, such as the doctrine of revelation and the concept of the church. “In many of these areas, the very existence of an ordinary theology challenges certain assumptions of academic and ecclesiastical theology” (7).

However, one can also run into methodological and analytical problems. For instance, ordinary theology cannot just be described; it must be subject to the same careful analysis and critique as is academic theology. The question an academic theologian faces is whether tools used in academic theological analysis will be helpful in articulating an ordinary theology. Reading the chapters, one senses how the different contributors wrestle with this question. While the question is not directly addressed, the sense of “wrestling” serves to enhance the volume’s overall contribution to contemporary theological studies, namely, that engaging in a critical analysis of ordinary theology can enable a conversation between academic and ordinary theology, allowing each to enrich the other. Scholars and students in a variety of theological studies should find this volume very helpful.

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*Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization.* By Robert P. Imbelli. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical, 2014. Pp. xx + 122. \$17.99.

Karl Rahner once startled his more rationalistic colleagues when he stated that Christology cannot be done unless the theologian had previously thrown his or her