

Practical Theology

“On Earth as It Is in Heaven”

TERRY A. VELING



ORBIS BOOKS

Maryknoll, New York 10545

Founded in 1970, Orbis Books endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. The publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Orbis seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. The books published reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official position of the Maryknoll Society. To learn more about Maryknoll and Orbis Books, please visit our website at www.maryknoll.org.

Copyright © 2005 by Terry A. Veling

Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0308

All rights reserved.

Acknowledgment is gratefully given for permission to reprint as follows: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., for *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden* by Yossi Klein Halevi, copyright © 2001, 2002; Stanford University Press, for *Who Is Man?* by Abraham Joshua Heschel, copyright © 1965 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University; Oxford University Press, for *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* by Douglas Burton-Christie, copyright © 1993 by Douglas Burton-Christie; Random House, Inc., for *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan, copyright © 2001; Random House, Inc., for *Franz Kafka: The Complete Short Stories* by Franz Kafka, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, copyright 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1954, 1958, 1971 by Schocken Books, used by permission of Schocken Books, a division of Random House, Inc.; Penguin Group (USA) Inc., “Du bist der Arme . . . / You are the poor one,” from *Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God* by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, copyright © 1996 by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, used by permission of Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.; Leonard Cohen, for permission to quote the lyrics of his song, “If It Be Your Will.” The publisher has endeavored to secure permission for all copyrighted material. Any oversights will be corrected in a subsequent printing.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to:
Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0308

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Veling, Terry A.

Practical theology : on earth as it is in heaven / Terry A. Veling.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN-13: 978-1-57075-614-6 (pbk.)

1. Theology, Practical. I. Title.

BV3.V45 2005

261 – dc22

2005016712

C O N T E N T S

FOREWORD by Bernard J. Lee, S.M.	xi
PREFACE: “IN THE VINEYARD OF THE TEXT”	xv
To You, the Reader / xv	
<i>Lectio Divina</i> — “Sacred Reading” / xvi	
“The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought” / xviii	
Thank You / xx	

Part One **ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**

1. WHAT IS PRACTICAL THEOLOGY?	3
Practical Theology Is Not a “Thing” / 4	
Life in the World / 5	
The People of Our Time / 8	
Vocation / 9	
To Be Thoughtful and Attentive / 10	
A Work — Not Just “Doing” / 12	
Truth and Goodness / 13	
A Craft More Than a Method / 15	
On Earth / 16	
As It Is in Heaven / 18	
Appendix: What Is Distinctive about Practical Theology? Some Representative Quotes from Scholarship / 19	
2. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION — HEAVEN’S DOOR	23
Practical Theology and the Art of Interpretation / 23	
More Than Method Alone / 26	

What Endures? / 28	
"Hear, O Israel" / 31	
The Gift of Tradition / 33	
3. ON EARTH — READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES	38
An Open Book / 38	
The Signs of the Times / 39	
" <i>Tolle, lege!</i> " — "Take and Read!" / 41	
"Explain Me!" / 42	
The Event of Understanding / 44	
A Proposed World / 45	
God's Concerns / 49	
Today / 52	
4. BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH <i>The Life of Faith for the Life of the World</i>	54
Millions of Moments of Encounter / 54	
Movements of Interpretation / 56	
Learning from the Rabbis / 63	
In the Margins of the Book / 67	
Houses of Prayer and Study / 70	
Part Two	
MAY YOUR NAME BE HELD HOLY	
5. "WE WILL DO AND WE WILL HEAR"	77
The Security of Knowing / 79	
The Risk of Acting / 80	
The Test of Faith / 82	
The Answerable Life / 84	
"I Do" / 88	
Doing the Word / 91	
We Will Do <i>and We Will Hear</i> / 93	
Binding Heaven and Earth / 95	

6. “*ECCE HOMO*”
The Human Person: Holy and Like No Other 98

The “Nonperson” / 99
Humanitas / 101
 Holy and Like No Other / 103
 Personality / 105
 The *Imago Dei* / 110
 “I and Thou” / 113

7. “CAN THE WISDOM OF HEAVEN
 RETURN TO EARTH?” 115

Levinas’s Life / 115
 A Survivor’s Question / 117
 Theology’s About-Face / 118
 “Being Faced” / 126

8. “GO AND STUDY” — “GO AND DO LIKEWISE” 136

To Venture / 136
 What Is the Work of My Life? / 138
 A Theological Life / 139
 “Go and Study” — “Go and Do Likewise” / 141
 For Example / 145
 A Case in Point / 147
 Speaking Our Lives / 152

Part Three
YOUR KINGDOM COME

9. “THE FIELD IS THE WORLD”
Practical Theology and the Plurality of Cultures 157

The Apple / 157
 Culture / 158
 Contextual Theology / 161
 Theology and Culture / 164
 “The Field Is the World” / 172

10. JUSTICE AND MERCY AT THE GATES OF THE CITY	175
The Golden Gate / 175	
The Gates of the City / 176	
“Before the Law” / 178	
Justice and Mercy / 183	
The Gates of Mercy and Repentance / 187	
“The Little Act of Goodness” / 189	
11. TO DWELL POETICALLY IN THE WORLD	194
“Tell Me My Name” / 195	
The Language of Poetry / 197	
Creative Intuition / 202	
The Mystical and the Prophetic / 204	
Combining the Letters and Naming the World / 211	
12. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IS “LIKE A ROLLING STONE”	215
“A Day in the Life of an Alien” / 215	
Reading the Signs of the Times / 217	
Border Control / 219	
Open Borders / 222	
Searching the Scriptures and Traditions of Hospitality / 225	
“And You Welcomed Me” / 231	
EPILOGUE: “FURTHER ON UP THE ROAD”	236
Theological Method—A Way of Life / 236	
“Anonymous Christianity” / 241	
Called Again / 243	
NOTES	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY	261
INDEX	275