

L. Callid Keefe-Perry. *Tending Call: A Liberation Theology of Vocation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2026. 440 pages.

The pioneering womanist theologian and ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon often reminded her students that the deeper meaning of liberation theology lies in the liberation of theology itself. In her view, liberation theology, properly understood, requires, above all, freeing theology from the limitations and distortions imposed by social systems of oppression that have historically shaped theological discourse. This insight provides a guiding lens for engaging with *Tending Call: A Liberation Theology of Vocation* by L. Callid Keefe-Perry. In this work, Keefe-Perry invites readers to reconsider the meaning of vocation through the perspective of liberation theology, presenting calling not as a static, fixed endpoint but as a dynamic, evolving journey of discernment that unfolds within particular social, cultural, and communal contexts. Through its process-oriented approach—which fosters critical reflection on personal identity, social location, and structures of power—the book enacts the very work Cannon described: the ongoing liberation of theological reflection on vocation itself.

To free vocation from narrow and oppressive assumptions and open it to broader, more liberative theological visions and imaginations, Keefe-Perry draws on sources such as Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy and Rubem Alves’s constructive theopoetics, which together provide both critical and imaginative resources for rethinking vocation. The result is a comprehensive and pedagogically rich textbook for contextual and field education. In *Tending Call*, Keefe-Perry seeks to create safe and brave spaces “where every student’s experiences and insights are valued and integrated into the learning process” so that “the classroom becomes a space where everyone is practicing, everyone is listening, and no one is pretending to be finished” (p. xxix). In this way, the book stands out not merely as a theoretical study of vocation but as a resource that equips educators and students to engage vocation as a practice of spiritual formation, communal discernment, theological reflection, and faithful participation in God’s liberating work. Accordingly, *Tending Call* has the potential to become a foundational textbook for contextual education, offering theological educators a thoughtful and practical framework for accompanying students in the ongoing work of vocational discernment.

Keefe-Perry asks readers to understand vocation as a living, evolving reality to be continuously tended “in a world that does not always make it easy to be faithful” (p. 21), and the book is carefully structured to make this point clear. Through the three-part image of *Seeds*, *Growth*, and *Abundance*, vocation is presented as an organic, cyclical process rather than a linear trajectory. In *Seeds*, Keefe-Perry invites readers to attend to the “seeds” already present in their lives and examines vocation, discernment, and spiritual formation alongside theological reflection from the perspective of “the ongoing

interplay between God's call and our response to it" (p. 49). This part emphasizes noticing, nurturing, and engaging these emerging callings as the foundation of a living, evolving vocational journey. In *Growth*, attention shifts to the often unseen dimensions of vocational development, exploring "the ways that systems shape us, how identity and belonging are negotiated, and how joy and lament intermingle in the vocational journey" (p. 105). This part underscores the importance of systems thinking and the ongoing discernment of vocation within communal relationships. It encourages creating spaces for joyful celebration as well as honest lamentation while promoting the integration of fragmented life experiences into a cohesive communal and vocational identity. Finally, in *Abundance*, Keefe-Perry explores the flourishing of vocation as it reaches outward, showing how living faithfully in response to call entails accompaniment, storytelling, and ministry. This part highlights the connection between personal discernment and communal engagement, illustrating how cultivated vocation bears fruit in service, justice, and participation in God's life-giving work in the world. By attending to vocation as an iterative, cyclical process, the book models the ongoing practice of liberation—expanding theological imagination, nurturing faithful engagement, amplifying voices that have been silenced or misrepresented, and opening space for communal flourishing.

What impressed this reviewer the most is that Keefe-Perry introduces relatively unfamiliar concepts—such as moral orienting systems, fractals, and context collapse—to illuminate the evolving, dynamic, and relational nature of vocation. His use of these concepts is more than a theoretical flourish; it reflects a deep commitment to portraying vocation as a living, interactive reality. By integrating these ideas, Keefe-Perry situates vocational discernment within complex, interconnected social, cultural, and institutional contexts, demonstrating how personal calling both shapes and is shaped by relationships, communities, and broader structures of power. This approach challenges static notions of vocation as a fixed path or singular destination, inviting readers to attend to the iterative, relational, and sometimes unpredictable ways that God's call unfolds in real life.

Overall, *Tending Call* succeeds as both a rigorous theological study and a pedagogically rich, practically oriented resource. For scholars, educators, and students in pastoral care, spiritual formation, and ministry preparation, this book offers a thoughtful, transformative framework for engaging vocation as both spiritual formation and theological reflection.

Sung Hee Chang
Union Presbyterian Seminary
Charlotte, North Carolina