

**P. Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church*.** Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017. Pp. iv, 188. Pb. \$21.99. ISBN 978-0-8010-9819-2.

Pete Ward is an ambitious writer and theological educator – as demonstrated in this guide to the literature which seeks to explore the practical nature of theological knowledge – a well-organised volume that will find its way onto core student reading lists. It succeeds in enabling the reader to understand the field of practical theology, and especially the nature of empirical research and theological reflection.

Ten chapters seek to deal with some of the orientating ideas, methods and writers in the field for an audience of students, teachers of practical theology and other interested general readers. There is an energy to democratise theology, to re-imagine the ‘clerical paradigm’ and recover practical theology as transformational for both Church and academy. The dynamic between theory and practice, doctrine and experience, is opened up in a discussion about deepening encounter, learning and the nurture of judgment.

The reader is offered a framework within which we attend to and honour the lived experience of religion as people attempt to put theology to work. There is an attractive tolerance of ambiguity and complexity as the theologian strives always to be in the middle of things. Learning needs to equip us to be confident in the fundamental categories of belief if theology is to survive in the competitive marketplace of ways in which meaning is constructed.

One of the particular qualities of this text is its commitment to the practice of faith. Theological reasoning is understood as taking place within the context of spiritual life and prayer. The boundaries are constantly pushed in order to move the reader out of complacency. Theology is described as ‘a liturgy for the work of the people – praising, arguing and turning to God for many purposes’ (p. 44). Do not, argues Ward, reduce the complexity of the gospel, or indeed underestimate its capacity for transformation.

Chapter 4, on what Ward describes as ‘lived theology’, is especially stimulating. Practices are the bearers of a theology that is acknowledged

to be performed, complex, contradictory and not always good (p. 66). Ward describes strategic pastoral theology as countercultural attention to people and their concrete situations in which action takes place (p. 80). The context within which we listen, attend to the human and seek change is a critical part of our desire to transform society.

Chapter 6 is an adept summary of theological reflection, offering a critique of some key models and writers. I will put Ward's quite brilliant 'Theological Reflections: Some Guidelines' (pp. 114–18) to use in my own context. This chapter would have been strengthened with a couple of case studies of worked examples.

Ward offers a discussion of the relationship between practical theology and other theological disciplines (chapter 7) and an approach to the discipline as a 'conversation' about culture (chapter 8). Ward ends this introduction by moving his reader back into action: chapter 9 offers a framework within which the reader might begin to engage in small-scale empirical research. The book is completed with guidance on how to write an academic paper in theology (pp. 174–7), a comprehensive bibliography and an index.

This book will establish itself as a trusted guide in the field. There is a unique quality to it. Ward authentically asks his readers to attend to theology in the everyday. He challenges those of us in the field to renew commitment to the substance and content of theology for mission alongside the discipline's commitment to models and process. Above all, Ward urges his readers to put theology to work.

We wait to see what might come next for Ward. His voice needs to be heard and responded to in the life and discourse of the ecclesial community, where theology continues to be marginal. Ward persuades us that we need to dig deeper both into the Christian tradition, and into the human experience that is so pregnant with theological treasure.

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