**Practical Theology and Qualitative Research (second edition)**

**John Swinton and Harriet Mowat SCM Press, 2016, 301pp, pbk £25**

The second edition of this immensely valuable, well-organised and practical text for those engaging in theologically orientated ethnography is welcome. It comes from the pen of two skilled and experienced researchers who share their experience and wisdom in the area of empirical research. The publication of a second edition reflects in part the growth of the number of projects engaged in empirical research. This is a complex area and one, which needs careful mapping, guidance and support. The student and teacher will find all of these qualities present in this text.

The book is divided into two parts with nine chapters and a concluding chapter. In this second edition, all bibliographies have been updated and a new chapter added. Part One (Theoretical Foundations) deals with the nature of Practical Theology, Qualitative Research and Qualitative Research Methods. Part Two includes an examination of the researching personal experience of depression; an exploration of the nature of the ‘Emergent Church' ; a discussion of Chaplaincy, religious communities and suicide, researching marginalised people and the spiritual lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

This book models excellence in interdisciplinary conversation especially in the way in which the methodologies of social sciences can assist and deepen the tasks of theological reflection. The text is grounded in an understanding of the development of practical theology is a discipline and the way in which theology might work across its disciplines (historical, systematic and biblical theology) to develop informed practice. The reader is constantly enlightened with case studies offering a very wide range of grounded experience.

In a world and perhaps even a church that seems to hold some measure of ambivalence about the usefulness of academic theology it is time for practical theology to assert its primary role in enlarging our intellectual horizons so that we can understand how to make sense of experience in community. Practical theologians have a key role to play in grounding our sensibilities and discussions about belief, meaning and religiosity in contemporary society.

This book will assist us in this task and should become part of any required reading for Ministry development.

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