

Ken J. Walden. *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 132 pages. \$18.

This book is a useful resource for clergy and lay leaders of the church who are interested in “cross-cultural pastoral ministry” (xiii). The author, an African American Methodist pastor who has been appointed to serve racially different churches, reflects on his own experience of cross-racial and multicultural ministry and offers the reader valuable advice and practical ideas for the cross-cultural ministry. As Vergel L. Lattimore III describes in the Forward, this book is indeed “a practical training manual for cross-racial ministry readiness, planning, exploration, delivery, and evaluation” (ix).

In the Introduction, the author states, regarding his methodology, that “[f]ollowing the tradition of practical theology, this book identifies a specific problem, explores major contributing factors of the problem, and then offers some solutions to the problem” (xii). The six chapters identify and explore the problem of church diversity from multifaceted angles and provide pragmatic suggestions and helpful resources to solve the problem, based on the author’s hands-on experience of cross-racial and multicultural ministry.

Chapter One analyzes the contemporary ministerial context in relation to the history of racial diversity in the United States and challenges clergy and church leaders to have a “big picture of church diversity” (11). Chapter Two provides pastors and congregations with practical guidelines for preparation for the multicultural ministry. Based on his experience of cross-cultural pastoral ministry, the author offers a list of questions for them to consider, as well as two reading lists for them to use as resources. Chapter Three emphasizes the significance of “the welcome introduction between the clergy person and the church community for cross-racial pastoral ministry” (42) and offers useful tips with a reading list for preparation for the event. Chapter Four focuses on how the church can work in partnership with diverse ethnic groups within and beyond the church and provides ideas for intra-church, inter-church, and global-church collaborations along with reading lists. Chapter Five explores some challenges to cross-racial and multicultural ministry in relation to pastoral images and perception, the crisis of congregational identity and territorial conflict, and pastoral leadership. The last chapter includes practical strategies and useful resources to deal with the challenges explored in the previous chapter.

Although the author does not pin down his own definition of practical theology, the book implies that, for him, practical theology means “a pragmatic approach”(xii) to issues emerging from the church ministry in order to help clergy and lay leaders improve their skills and strategies for church leadership. While this concept of practical theology, as an area of applied theology, is pertinent to many theologians and practitioners, it is significant to pay attention to the fact that contemporary discourse on practical theology in academia is much more complex. One of the major concerns of practical theology is how to provide profound theological and biblical reflection on the issue, through which the problem can be critically evaluated and be solved. The author, however, uses a two-step procedure—critical analysis of the problem through interdisciplinary studies and solution of the problem based on his personal experience of cross-cultural pastoral ministry. In this process, theological and biblical reflection or “the normative task,” to use Richard Osmer’s term,¹ was not sufficiently executed. In other words,

¹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 129-173.

while the author analyzes the issue of church diversity through historical and cultural studies, he does not engage in theological reflection at a deeper level. His personal experience of cross-cultural ministry, which is a tremendously useful resource to help other pastors and congregations, also needs to be interpreted from a certain theological and biblical perspective. One of the possible areas to include the normative task more seriously in the book may be the section of “Biblical Context/Understanding” in Chapter Two. It can be extended into a deeper theological conversation in order to provide a theological and biblical foundation for dealing with the issue of church diversity.

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