

Joseph E. Bush, Jr. *Practical Theology in Church and Society*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016. 184 pages. \$25.

Over the past decade, we have been fortunate to see an uptick in the number of texts introducing and/or further theorizing the field of practical theology. Joseph Bush Jr.'s text seeks to do both, and as such is an orientation and guide for those who face the "challenge of beginning ministry in a new place with new people," (ix) whether that may be seminarians in a field placement, those beginning their first call or other ministry situation, or those who are entering a new position of ministry after extended time in another. The text emerges from Bush's own ministry experiences and as director of field education at Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C. This note about place extends beyond a perfunctory recognition: the book features an approachable, conversational style that one might imagine grows out of, and is intended for, Bush's classroom.

The book unfolds in two major divisions: "Part One: Reflection on Practice" and "Part Two: Methodological Movements." Novice readers are invited to enter into Part One, which guides thinking about ministry as a practice of action and reflection (Ch. 1), understanding congregational cultures (Ch. 2), pastoral authority and leadership in liminality (Ch. 3), reframing as an act of the reflective practitioner (Ch. 4), and similarly, introducing frames for understanding congregations as organizational cultures (Ch. 5). Each chapter contains case examples from Bush's ministry experience and exercises that place the discussion into the reader's context.

In Part Two, Bush traces out his theological, methodological, and theoretical commitments as a practical theologian. While Part One focused on the relationship reflection and practice in ministry contexts, Part Two focuses on "the relationship between the community of faith, on the one hand, and the wider surrounding community of the larger social world, on the other" (93). In this, Bush makes a fundamental assertion that reflection-practice rhythms never stand apart from the wider social location of communities of faith. Practical theology happens in a larger social orbit, which Bush seeks to outline as a descriptive practice (Ch. 6) and a constructive one that leads to social engagement (Ch. 7). Outlining his own theological commitments to liberation theology, Bush explores four different ways of negotiating action-reflection in context (Ch. 8). Bush then maps different practical theological methods from mostly male, European American practical theologians, charting commonalities and differences among Don Browning, Ed Farley, Robert Schreiter, Thomas Groome, Richard Osmer, and Bishop Laurie Green (Ch. 9). Following this, Bush explores the role of hermeneutics within practical theology, particularly naming both a hermeneutic of suspicion and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic of restoration as necessary perspectives for practical theological reflection (Ch. 10). The book concludes by thinking about how formation for ministry might best occur through the practices of reflexivity described throughout the book, along with the goal of solidarity with others (Ch. 11).

In these two major divisions of Parts One and Two, the book speaks to two different audiences. Part One provides a helpful orientation to those just entering the work of practical theological reflection. This may be most helpful in field education settings in theological schools at the M.Div. and other master's degree levels. Bush employs the ideas of two now-classic texts: Ammerman's edited *Studying Congregations* (1998) and Carroll's *As One with Authority* (1991), in addition to integrating new voices and perspective. The case studies from Bush's experience and reflection questions provide useful components for the aforementioned level of study. Part

Two, however, shifts to a different audience. This might best be read in a D. Min course in practical theology, deepening theoretical frameworks for practical theological reflection. Or perhaps Part Two is somewhat directed toward an intradisciplinary discussion among field educators (Ch. 11 especially rings true in this regard). These shifts in audience are both a strength and a weakness of the book as a whole. One substantive difficulty with the book falls in the organization of Part One. In Chapter One, Bush indicates the direction the following chapters will take: “the profession of ministry itself as a community of practice...the church as community...[and] the wider community of which the church is a part...The chapters that follow address each of these arenas in turn” (15). This is not, in fact, how Bush moves subsequently in Part One, thus providing a confusing orientation to the otherwise helpful material that comes next.

Bush’s text provides not only an updated primer in practical theology for individuals leading in congregational settings, but broadens the perspective for readers to see congregations as integrated, liberation-seeking components of society, worthy of similar practical theological reflection.

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