

Joseph E. Bush, Jr., *Practical Theology in Church and Society* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 184 pp.

This book examines two complex dialectics using several distinct methods and frameworks that deepen our understanding of (a) the relationship between church and society and (b) the interaction of action and reflection in the practice of ministry that gives rise to the body of thought called 'practical theology.' The intended audience for *Practical Theology in Church and Society* is both seminary students and practicing ministers, particularly when they face the challenge of entering a new ministry. Its aim is to articulate a method that attends "to our practice as individuals in ministry, to our corporate practice as congregations in ministry, and to our practice as Christians within the larger society" (p. x). Joseph Bush brings a rich and diverse personal and professional history to this task.

There are two parts to the book. The first outlines methods for reflection on practice, and the second examines methodologies for connecting thought and experience, ideas and realities, particularly as they relate to book reviews the interactions of church and society. In both sections, Bush utilizes established frameworks for reflecting on relationships in and between church and society. The author does not shy away from complexity, particularly the overlapping interactions between church and society, action and reflection. The book is clearly written, but it is not easy reading. There are ample illustrations of the methods discussed. However, Bush does not do the work for you. There are seemingly endless questions to consider, especially in the second part on methodologies. Along the way, the reader is invited to practice using the material being presented. If you like schemas or grids, you will love this book. If, however, you are not a fan of paradox or are reluctant to recognize it as an inescapable dimension of life, you may struggle to grasp the book's value.

There are nuggets of wisdom sprinkled throughout the book that should not be missed. Here is one: "Pastors are both central and marginal with regard to their authority in congregations" (p. 51). Overlooking this insight on the practice of ministry in a congregation is often a source of pain. In a pastoral way, Bush invites readers who are practicing ministry to attend realistically to their own functioning in confusing situations. Noticing contradictions, according to Bush, leads to a deeper critical consciousness. So, for example, he makes this intriguing observation: "Social conditions tend to overlap, and social forces tend to collude" (p. 109). Regarding the relationship between the individual and culture, there is a mutuality of influence or reflexivity. "Each is formed by the other" (p. 158). I found his emphasis on reciprocity or reflexivity between the individual and larger social forces both compelling and daunting.

I first read this book before the presidential election of 2016. Rereading the final chapters on practical theology in relation to liberation theology after

the election challenged me to consider ‘the hermeneutics of restoration’ as one way forward. Building on the work of Ruthellen Josselson, our task is “to give credence to the understanding of the marginalized themselves as they are able to find expression. One wants to avoid their further disenfranchisement by overlaying on top of theirs another layer of meaning inferred by the interpreter according to the interpreter’s preconceived theory. Although the interpretation always is the construct of the interpreter, the aim here is for the interpreter to understand as closely as possible the meaning that might be held by the speaker” (p. 155). Empathy is the way to restoration among individuals and between individuals and larger social realities. And the road to empathy begins with careful listening. That connection between action and reflection, like this book, is both simple and difficult.

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