

**Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr., eds., *Black Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 350 pp.**

Dale Andrews, who is the Distinguished Professor of Homiletics, Social Justice, and Practical Theology at Vanderbilt University, and Robert London Smith, the Honorary Researcher in Practical Theology at King's College, University of Aberdeen, have embodied, in this groundbreaking volume, what seems at first impossible—the challenging union of theory, method, and practice in the discipline of practical theology. In other words, this is a virtual feast, both for those who have a wealth of experiences on the way and for those just starting the journey.

The purpose of the book is to show through ideas and concrete examples how practical theologians make a vital connection between black theology and black churches. Finally, we have wise writers who give us success stories for bridging these two important parts of the African American religious narrative. Black church history begins in 1619 when the first group of enslaved Africans was brought to North American shores and began to merge their traditional African spirituality with their slave masters' form of Christianity. From its origins, black religion was a movement of interpretation: taking the best from the old religion from the continent and mapping it with the survival and liberation dimensions of the slave system's Christianity. Indeed, this was practical theology at its root. Likewise, the rise of black liberation theology in 1966 wedded the contemporary experiences of African American churches and the social justice struggles in black communities with a new examination of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. When pastors sought to answer the question of how to attend to their congregation's suffering of profound instances of injustice in the 1960s, we encounter practical theology in one of its most exciting moments. Already, we detect how both black theology and black churches combined theology, church, and the use of different disciplines by beginning with various experiences and vibrant realities.

Consequently, Andrews and Smith offer four aims in their edited collection of essays. In order to examine black practical theology (that is to say, to understand black consciousness from the perspective of theology), the two editors aim to clarify black practical theology's (1) rationale, (2) definition of terms, (3) theological focus, and (4) methodology. And they succeed magnificently in realizing their stated goals for the book.

In an incredible way, the editors have summoned together black theologians, practical theologians, and practitioners. These are the three types of thought leaders who are the authors of the essays. Then, they asked these writers to engage black theology, vocational theological scholarship, religious practices, and the human sciences. Graduate schools of higher education call this doing interdisciplinary work. On the ground, black congregations call this as using everything that you have to get what you need. Next,

Andrews and Smith divide the book into six sections focusing on six key topics in black communities and black congregations. On each topic, a theologian, a professor of practical theology, and a black church pastor have a conversation. In other words, teams comprised of these three experts look at (1) black youth, intergenerational relations, and ageism; (2) education class, and poverty; (3) gender, sexual orientation, and race; (4) globalism, immigration, and diasporan communities; (5) health care, HIV/AIDS, and poverty; and (6) mass incarceration, capital punishment, and the justice system. In a word, we enter a “trialogue” about life-and-death issues facing churches and communities across the three continents of southern Africa, England, and the United States.

And finally, each of the twenty essays expand, challenge, and surprise our thinking, feeling, and doing related to how religious leaders (and all concerned people) might walk together into a new reality of life and community. In particular, each of the six sections includes theological reflection on everyday topics, interpretations of biblical passages, using wisdom from outside of theology, and practical steps to advance the ties between black theology and practical theology.

Dwight N. Hopkins,  
University of Chicago Divinity School  
Chicago, IL