

Book Review by Helen Froud

Bennett, Zoe, Graham, Elaine, Pattison, Stephen and Walton, Heather. *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018

This is a collaborative volume on the underpinning philosophy, approach and experiences of four key British practical theologians. It is neither a textbook nor a thesis, rather it is an illustrative vision of how these practical theologians have approached their work.

The 'invitation' uses four key themes (p.7-11) to engage with the theological issues it illustrates:

- a) Rooted
- b) Changed
- c) Lost
- d) Claimed

These four themes underscore the approach to the book, helping would-be practical theologians to understand firstly their own context and tradition; and secondly, how journeys in Practical Theology are transformative both to the theologian and to the issue that is tackled. The theme of 'lost' reminds a researcher that learning can be a profoundly dis-orientating experience as new landscapes are encountered and navigated. Finally, the theme of 'claimed' reminds the reader of God's call to the seeker of knowledge, of the vocational discovery of new ways of thinking, and the joy which comes from sharing this knowledge with others.

The authors, each leading practical theologians at British universities, have collaborated with an international network of colleagues to produce this work. The book is aimed at those attempting research in Practical Theology, and includes worked examples of contemporary issues from current researchers in the field illustrating the challenges they are facing and the approaches they have taken.

This is a practical book about Practical Theology, and therefore addresses many of the kind of issues that Salvationists engaging in reflection on their work might encounter. The successive chapters ask researchers to see the process of practical theological research in the light of their own tradition and context, and also to

understand the limitations of research. The style is accessible and personal in tone, inviting readers on a collaborative journey into their own process of theological enquiry.

Chapter by chapter, this book outlines the importance of understanding the practice of our faith before we attempt to analyse it. It also reminds the researcher that each piece of work comes from a spiritual 'home' which is understood differently after our research is completed. It also explores the tensions and hidden agendas implicit in the kind of research methods which each researcher employs. This work also reminds researchers that they are not alone and encourages participation in communities of practice. Finally, it considers questions of research ethics and challenges researchers to question their own motivations for undertaking research, as well as considering more conventional questions about ethics.

Any Salvationist wanting to understand a Practical Theology process of enquiry will find this work a useful insight into contemporary British academic practice. It is also a useful point of departure for further reflection on practical theological methods, with a helpful bibliography at the conclusion to each chapter.