



Practical Theology and Qualitative Research

John Swinton, Harriet Mowatt

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Practical Theology used to be a subject where students were left to fend for themselves, using what they had learnt from their scholarly studies in history, biblical and systematic theology and applying it where they could. Things have moved on however and practical theology is a growing discipline in its own right, and the latest thinking in practical theology; of how to use theological learning in practical situations, is fully explored in this textbook. This text examines methodologies of the social sciences and questions how they can enable the task of theological reflection. They begin by tracing the development of practical theology as a discipline and comment on current methodological practices, and trace the movement from practical theology as applied theology, ie a discipline which simply takes data from the other theological disciplines (historical, systematic and biblical theology) towards a model which understands the practical theological task in terms of the theology of practice. The authors examine the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods and highlight the significance of both for the task of practical theology. They also take the reader through the actual process of developing and carrying out a research project using the author's own research as case study examples. Case studies include: the rise in spirituality; the decline in church attendance, evidence-based medicine compared to needs-led assessments, the growth in chaplaincy and how it is understood as separate from parish ministry.

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