

Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization by John Reader. Ashgate, 2008. 150pp., pb. \$39.95. ISBN-13: 9780754666608.

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The author is an Anglican priest, currently Rector in a rural multi-parish benefice in North Oxfordshire. He has academic affiliations to both the William Temple Foundation and the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology. The book builds on a stream of earlier theological thinking about the realities of ordinary people's lives, as encountered through parish ministry and chaplaincy.

This book will appeal to what I suspect is a large group of people who have a sense of unease that their theological and ministerial training no longer fits the world as they encounter it. It is also an important challenge to the growing field of Practical Theology: to examine its assumptions and become more actively engaged with the impact of globalization.

The main purpose of the book is to demolish some of the core concepts of practical theology, such as pastoral care, place, family, worship and work. The vivid metaphor of “zombie categories” is used to signal terms which are in common use but which no longer equate to lived experience. In counterbalance to the work of demolition is the building up of a new priority for Practical Theology: that is, to respond to globalization with a reflexive spirituality.

The book's work of demolition can be illustrated with two examples. The boundaries between work, home and leisure are becoming increasingly blurred. People take “safe home from school” phone calls from their children whilst at work, and send e-mails to work colleagues (expecting a reply) at the weekends. The forty-hour week, forty-year career, is no longer an expectation. Work is moved around the globe to that point where it can be undertaken most cheaply. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the churches colonised people's leisure time for its own activities. How should the church respond, when that leisure time no longer has clear boundaries? A second example is that of place. Place is a key concept for Anglican ministry, given the priority in ministry and mission accorded to the parish system. Yet the reality is that parish boundaries are no longer the first criteria people use in deciding which church to attend. Occasional offices are

increasingly located in places that have an emotional attachment, rather than a physical residence. How should a church of buildings and physical boundaries relate to this?

Reader depicts globalization as having three major effects. First, a blurring of the boundaries between the local and the global. Second, the enclosure of all aspects of life by the market, with there being no possibility of standing outside global capitalism. Third, the fluidity of personal identity, with a restless reflexivity which makes personal life a constant “work in progress.”

The author evaluates possible responses to the impact of globalization. These include: a retreat into religious fundamentalism that restores certainty to the categories; a global ethic, agreed through structures of global governance; a shift to concern for wellbeing rather than economic prosperity in the work of global institutions such as the World Bank; and cultivating sites of resistance, in which small groups conduct counter-cultural lives.

He doubts the effectiveness of responses that would lead us back to certainty. So the only way forward is a distinctively spiritual reflexivity. This will enable people to stand back and appraise the effects of globalization, and then form bonds of solidarity that are rooted in more than material concerns.

The book is effective in unsettling assumptions and demolishing concepts, but I would have liked to see a more detailed working out of its proposals. How can a reflexive spirituality be cultivated? This links to the importance accorded to tradition and the normative throughout the book. How is the normative to be brought to bear on globalised contexts? Through worship, through human relations in the parish, through the family? These routes that we have taken for granted in the transmission of tradition, are the very ones which the book questions. It would be easy to lose hope, and become caught in a bleakness about globalization as an enclosure which none can escape.

The book raises interesting questions for the readers of *Implicit Religion*. How do we test the reality of the categories we habitually use? What traditional resources or normative forces underpin those categories? What aspects of globalization do we habitually collude with? Does our concept of spirituality contain space for the self-challenging reflexivity that Reader proposes?

I commend this book as a helpfully challenging read in unsettling times.