



Learning and Teaching Theology: Some Ways Ahead

Ball, Les; and Harrison, James, eds.
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Book Review

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transformative teaching

Reviewed by: Arch Wong, *Ambrose University*

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The genesis of this book was a Learning and Teaching conference held at the Sydney College of Divinity that focused on issues and practices in theological education from the perspective of Australia and New Zealand. The aim of the book is to “generate further impetus in charting effective ways to make progress along the important journey of delivering relevant contemporary educational experiences for the learners of theology” (7). For the most part the book succeeds in doing this. It contains seven sections. Section 1, and in particular the essay “Where are We Going,” sets the stage well for the other essays and sections of the book. This essay argues that the philosophical starting point for theological education is student-centered learning and teaching. This pedagogical philosophy then answers the questions about what shall be taught (content of theological learning and teaching), how it will be taught (methods of learning and teaching), and how the curriculum is built. Section 2 gives a biblical road map, using the apostle Paul as a model of a theological educator, that centers on learning communities and their effects on the immediate context and implications for theological education today.

Section 3 constitutes a strength of the book since it brings together the philosophical, curricular, and theological theories about learning and teaching into an integrative whole connected to formational assessment. The various essays are informed by the works of David Ford and Walter Brueggemann, integrative and transformative learning theories, and multiple intelligences, to name a few.

The book transitions in Sections 4 and 5 to a more practical focus that brings theory and practice together from the medical and health science disciplines to enhance theological

education, and the use of technology. The two essays in Section 4 look at lessons that theological education can learn from medical education; they challenge theological education to move from an emphasis on competencies to a focus on capabilities that adapt to contextual changes that in turn improve ministerial practice. The essays in Section 5 center on e-learning technologies and its impact on the learner from formational, instructional design, gamification, and embodiment perspectives.

The last two sections continue to emphasize practice and give creative examples of innovative practices from theological practitioners around teaching and learning methodologies. These include problem-based learning, transformative pedagogy in the context of cross-cultural experiences and traditional courses, and workplace formation. The last two essays feature teaching and learning from a non-Western context.

The editors laid out the direction of the book well in that it generally moves from a theological, philosophical, and pedagogical core to learning and teaching practices. However, in a book of this nature with multiple authors, there is an unevenness in the depths of the essays. That is, some essays give excellent theoretical depth and description, fresh analysis of data, creative accounts of practice that oftentimes challenges the theological status quo, or thoughtful theological and pedagogical integration, while other essays do not. Having said this, the book does present fresh thinking and offers innovative practices about the theological education enterprise and as a result urges continual and effective development.

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