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## Book Review: Bible Shaped Teaching

Christina Belcher  
*Redeemer University College*

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## The ICCTE Journal

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### Book Review: Bible Shaped Teaching

Christina Belcher, Redeemer University College

Shortt, J. (2014). *Bible-shaped teaching*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock. ISBN 978-1-62564-558-6. Softcover. 76 pages.

Lately, I have been contemplating the act of remembering. Not just as this regards to memory, but as it applies to metaphorically putting the members or attributes of our physical, mental and spiritual holistic self into the act of teaching and learning; re-assembling the “members” of being human into a coherent and flourishing wholeness. In many ways, this aligns well with the essence of John Shortt’s small but powerful text. It needs to be read more than once. It returns the mind and heart to the entire landscape of teaching.

The key thesis of the text is that the Bible plays a significant role in the shaping of teachers who desire to unite their faith and their work into “faith-full” practice. The Bible is a living ecology from which we “lean into life.”

In ten short chapters, the reader is taken on a journey through the “life-long and life-wide” view of not only the biblical narrative, but also to how life and teaching are empowered by the metaphors from which we teach. It reminds us that various modes of teaching and principles for teaching emerge in our teaching in various ways. Such ways are not content based such as in a beginning pedagogical or disciplinary strategy, but rather they are based in emanating the character and truths of Jesus within the different ways in which the Bible speaks.

This book causes me to ponder how an individual’s personal metaphor for teaching can reflect, or fail to reflect, a fully embodied metanarrative. A metanarrative, that, as a “Big Story,” makes sense of life by securing a past, present, and future direction for life that beckons a teacher to model teaching that is faith-full.

This text portrays all of life as a faith journey, where the desired outcome of that faith permeates the mind of the teacher. This thought is beautifully and simply written in the premise with the words

“please join me in thinking of the Bible as being like a new environment in which we find ourselves, a new ecology in which we live and move and have our being” (p. 8).

Some strategies are provided on how this can occur. One is a call to work “against pictures that dehumanize humanity” and to “use biblical metaphors in discussions surrounding education” (p. 34). In an age when we are seeing the evidence of Neil Postman’s (1995) prophecy in *The End of Education* of becoming a people who think with our eyes, this is timely. But for me, in my act of remembering, this passage spoke loudly to my soul:

Jesus is the great teacher ... the Torah teacher who teaches us who we are, the prophetic teacher who teaches us to think and ask questions, and the teacher of wisdom who teaches us to live wisely and justly in the world with other people. (p. 42)

It speaks to my soul not only because it truthfully says what *is*, but because it continues to say what it *is not*:

If we only teach people what to believe, we make them secure but self-satisfied, or we turn them off and alienate them. If we only teach them to ask questions, then they never know what to believe – always questions and never answers, no security. If we only teach them practical life lessons, they never get to see the big picture of God’s world and never explore beyond the limits of their present knowledge. (p. 43)

In an age of technological saturation, the question raised after reading this insightful text could be how can educators more fully open the window on God’s world while being in balance to the awareness of the world *as it is*, warts and all. Teachers are now under the spell of another kind of cultural ecology, an ecology of fragmentation. I would like to have

seen a link to our present educational world included in this text. A Biblical ecology also begs attention to a binary opposite. As referenced again by Neil Postman (1995), technological change does not add or subtract within culture as much as it is ecological — a belief system:

... important distinctions are made among different meanings of “belief,” but as some point it becomes far from asinine to speak of the god of Technology—in the sense that people believe technology works, that they rely on it, that it makes promises, that they are bereft when denied access to it, that they are delighted when that are in its presence, that for most people it works in mysterious ways, that they condemn people who speak against it, that they stand in awe of it, and that , in the born-again mode, they will alter their lifestyles, their schedules, their habits and their relationships to accommodate it. If this is not a form of religious belief, what is? (p. 19)

This small book by John Shortt, enhances my “remembering,” to consider my own educational story even more intentionally. From it I embody truth about the purpose of education. I do not need to surrender culture to technology; but to advise culture beyond technology and its Faustian bargain. The ecological battle technology poses is a battle for *attention of the mind* from two different stories that are faith based. Posing a Bible-based ecological narrative and probing questions of faith, will lead to an exploration of an ecology where faith is the core fabric of what it means to flourish.

Thank you John Shortt, for “remembering” – in all of its definitions.

And thank you even more for writing it down.