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## Review of Maria Harris & Gabriel Moran's Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice

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**Maria Harris & Gabriel Moran**  
***Reshaping Religious Education:***  
***Conversations on Contemporary***  
***Practice***

Westminster/John Knox 1998 pb 202pp  
 \$18.95 US ISBN 0-664-25738-6

Christian educators around the world, especially those who work in congregational settings, will recognise the names of Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran. This couple is a team both in and out of the classroom, and *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* is their comment on the changes they have observed in religious education throughout four decades of their own work in the field in the North American context. They describe several features of current religious education, and explore directions for future religious education needs.

The book is structured around four themes: foundations, development, spirituality and 'the wider world'. Perhaps because it deals with familiar questions, the foundations section makes an accessible start to the book. In this section, Harris and Moran discuss the what and why of religious education, approaching these two foundational questions throughout the first three chapters. In Chapter 1, Moran addresses the question of what shape curriculum should take within religious communities now that state schools have recognised that they cannot accomplish all the tasks once carried out by families, churches, workplaces and schools. Moran next explores the twin aims of increasing people's understanding of religion and inducting them into specific religious

practices, aims which he believes come together in the learner. The induction into religious practices Moran calls 'teaching the way', and in Chapter 3 Harris expands her own conception of catechesis as one means of teaching the way. In the course of doing so, she drops at least one gem for her readers, a metaphor for the teacher as the midwife who knows how to recognise and nurture new life in her students (p. 48).

Despite some thought-provoking ideas in the book's second major section, 'Development', this portion sits somewhat incongruently amidst the whole of the book. Both authors follow up several connections between various (mostly economic) senses of *development* and education in Chapter 4. Then Harris begins a treatment of development of gender roles and their implications for education, a chapter to which Moran contributes later. Moran begins (and Harris ends) Chapter 6 with a plea to consider death and mourning as a part of lifespan development, a request that contemporary developmental psychology textbooks are already meeting.

The challenging contents of the third section may compensate for any failure of the second section to fit smoothly into the book. They trace the roots of spirituality to the broadened definition characteristic of our own time. But they offer a caution about individualistic contemporary approaches to and understandings of spirituality: spirituality is not a 20th-century discovery. They invite their readers to understand that 'to be is to be with' . . . that spirituality is not only individual but is also communal (p. 109). Chapter 7 closes with a schema in which Harris sets out three kinds of disciplines: individual disciplines, group disciplines and integrating disciplines – such as art, play, and storytelling – that bring individual and group together. Some readers may find Harris and Moran's inclusion of a chapter on justice (Ch. 8) in the section on spirituality too much of a stretch. However, they present their argument in quite an invitational tone, and they live up to the title's advertising – that the book is conversational – more in this chapter than in most. Both these characteristics leave the reader less with a sense of having been rebuked about doing justice than with a sense of having been enticed to be part of

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something wonderful. Chapter 9, entitled 'Proclaiming Jubilee' invites the reader to recognize that one's spirituality has everything to do with the doing of justice.

*Reshaping Religious Education* ends with several surmises about the future. The final section of the book – 'The Wider World' – begins by asking what Christians can learn about education from Jews (Ch. 10). Moran's Chapter 11 contains some useful clarifications for anyone attempting to understand the various overlaps among the meanings of such phrases as *religious education*, *Christian education* and *catechesis*, especially as these are used in American settings. Friedrich Schweitzer closes Chapter 10 by setting Moran's concerns in a contemporary German context. The section and book end with a truly conversational chapter in which both Harris and Moran comment about several changes they see in the future of religious education. They focus on matters in the wider world such as technology, politics and economics, but also on churches themselves and on people's understandings of religion and its place in human affairs.

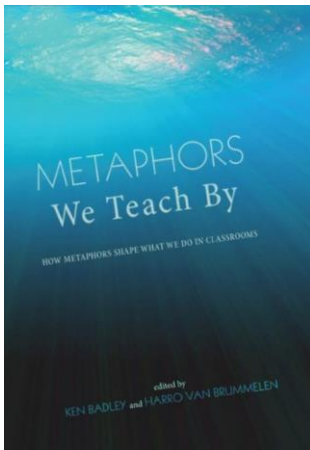
*Reshaping Religious Education* contains both sobering and inspiring ideas for anyone interested in religious education, or more specifically, Christian education. But it seems disjointed at points, as if too many topics are being attached to a single skeleton. The chapters and the book as a whole are for the most part not real conversations, they are more a mix of some conversation and some alternating authorship of chapters. And some readers may find *Reshaping Religious Education* drier in its execution than in its conception. Nevertheless, libraries ought to include it in their collections, and many readers will benefit from the sweeping perspectives these two veteran religious educators are able to offer.

*Sherilyn Braun and Ken Badley*

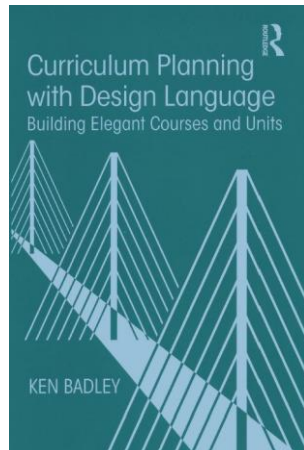
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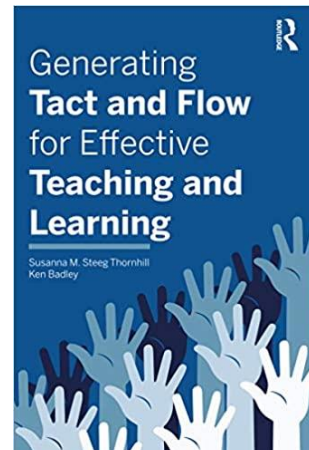
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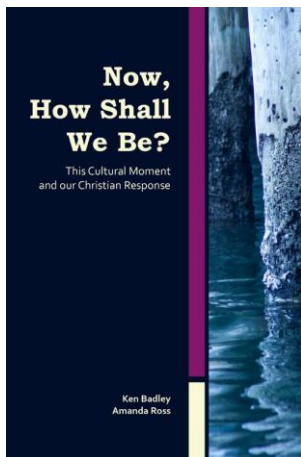
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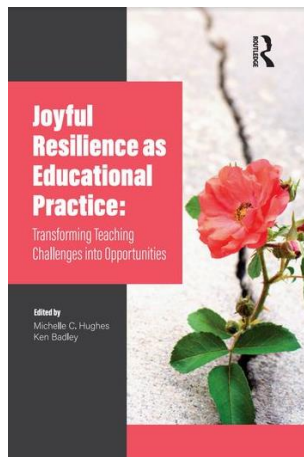
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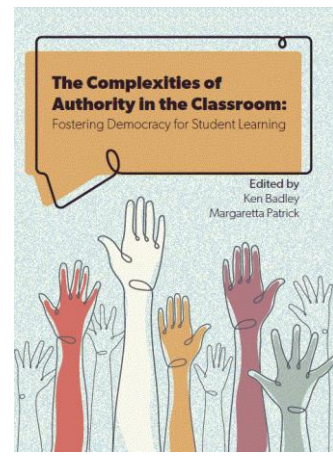
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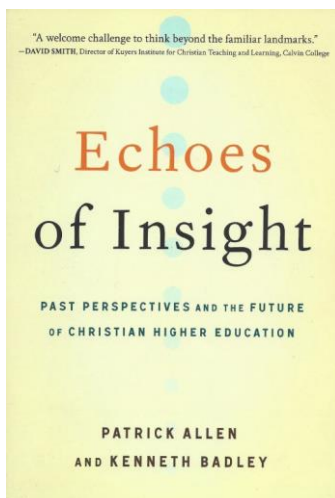


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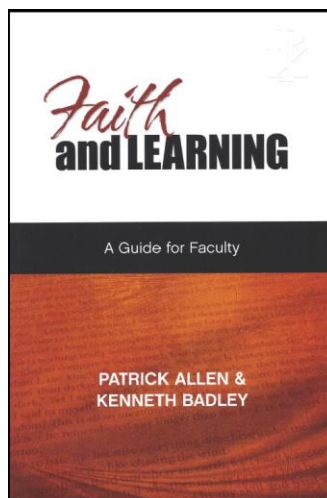


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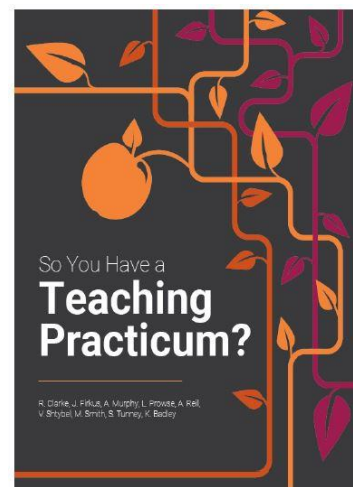


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