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## Book Review: Those Who Can, Teach: Teaching as a Christian Vocation

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**Stanley E. Porter (ed.)**

***Those Who Can, Teach: Teaching as a Christian Vocation***

*Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013 pb 226pp \$25.00*

*ISBN: 978-1-62032-936-8*

Porter's title, *Those Who Can, Teach*, leads one to believe that the book contains essays on the merits or caliber of the professoriate and the academy.

On the contrary, the essays are centered on a theme that Porter misses in his introduction: transitioning from a doctoral program to being an educator in a theology department or seminary. McMaster Divinity College offers teaching colloquies to doctoral and master's students in an attempt to prepare them for careers as theological educators, and this collection of essays represents some of the topics presented at those colloquies. Several of the contributors refer to their own early mistakes in the classroom and then offer the reader advice in the area of teaching. As is typical of many books written for those in higher education offering such guidance in the art of teaching, the content does not originate from authors with earned degrees in the content area of education. That said, the book contains ample evidence that those at McMaster have analyzed the planning and teaching process to arrive at a solid collection of readings worthy of assignment in a graduate program.

In the first chapter the editor refers to the necessity of establishing a philosophy of education while remaining mindful of the institutional philosophy and goals. Traditional educational philosophies appear in digest form along with a section on the role of the teacher. A section on adult learners, better left to Knowles, who addresses this subject quite well in the following chapter, touches on the intriguing concept of relearning but overlooks the expectations and life experiences these students bring to the classroom. Knowles's chapter could easily appear as an entire textbook on teaching adult learners (not to be confused with Malcolm Knowles's theories on andragogy), as the content focuses on the needs of the adult learner in relationship to planning aligned with objectives and instruction .

Following this chapter, Boda offers a glimpse of student-centered teaching and the possibilities for excellent classroom experiences. On examining the appendix, one finds evidence of traditional instruction in higher education with a syllabus that reinforces professor-centered education with the traditional research paper and peer review along with statements about “tardies” and those such as “I do not give extensions on assignments except in the most dire of circumstances” (p . 81) . I maintain that grace mandates flexibility for adults who learn at different rates and often juggle much more than our traditional view of undergraduate students.

Chapter 5 moves the book into the area of preparation for teaching. Unlike education professors who stress planning backward from the de- sired outcome, Breech suggests beginning with research on the topic and posits that great classes are about content. The chapter supports our earlier statement about professor-centered education, as the focus here supports traditional lecture-style delivery and puts the emphasis on content rather than student learning. The strength Breech brings to the conversation lies in the assertion that the classroom must convey a sense of comfort and hospitality. Breech closes with a short section on assessing the learning (formative) as opposed to simply grading or evaluating a student product, as discussed by Boda (summative). Some of the subsequent chapters stretch beyond the traditional graduate pedagogical strategies with suggestions for using songs and games to learn Greek and Hebrew. Of particular interest and value, Evans offers students a grade guarantee. If students do the assignments and pass the final exam, the guarantee provides for a minimum grade of “C” in the course. Evans has discovered what it takes in the structure of a course to provide such an offer.

The final chapters by Porter, Studebaker, Heath, and Zylla address topics those in Christian higher education refer to as the integration of faith and learning. Porter offers hints on bringing theological reflection into the classroom. Studebaker includes a section on teaching in a confessional context. Heath captures the essence of servant teaching with the notion of the “upside-down professor.” This approach to the issues of power and privilege in the classroom may surprise readers who are used to those terms in relation to racial diversity. Finally, Zylla suggests James 3:17 as a

template for spiritual integration. A sense of humor and maintaining lightheartedness finish this chapter. While the final chapters provide a philosophical reflection on theological education as opposed to specifics on pedagogical strategies like the earlier chapters attempt, they round out the collection and offer insight to McMaster as an institution.

As teachers of adults, we appreciate the papers compiled by Porter and written by the McMaster Divinity College faculty. We share in the goals to teach well, expand hearts and minds, and enrich the lives of our students. Interestingly, even with the diversity of subjects taught by the authors, there appears to be some commonality of teaching methods, one being flexibility in responding to changing societal needs. Each teacher comes with his or her own approach, or, as Porter states, a philosophy, and no one model will work for everyone. When Porter writes, “This ability to teach oneself and think for oneself is what distinguishes education from merely training” (p. 36), it also applies to professors and the continuing Growth in the area of teaching for learning. *Those Who Can, Teach* offers specific guidance for doctoral students and new professors who will teach either in a Christian institution or in the content area of theology. Porter states that “there is a wealth of important experience that those who have gone before us have gained and from which we can all benefit” (p. 8). Just don’t forget to think for yourself.

*Amy Lynn Dee and Anne G. Foster*