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Aleshire's "Beyond profession: The next future of theological education" (book review)

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Book Review



Aleshire, D. O. (2021). *Beyond profession: The next future of theological education*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 149 pp. \$19.99. ISBN 9780802878755

American theological education must adopt a formational model in order to remain viable and relevant argues Daniel O. Aleshire, former chief executive officer of the Association of Theological Schools. Recent public opinion polls show that church membership and religious affiliation are declining as is the public's trust in the honesty and ethical standards of religious leaders. Aleshire first provides a transdenominational and historical overview of American theological education then extrapolates the need for the adoption of a formational model of theological education going forward.

The book is organized in two parts threaded together with wise insights on the ways cultural moments, educational trends, and religious shifts have shaped theological schools. In part one, covering chapters 1 and 2, Aleshire examines four types of Christian theological schools (Mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Historically Black and Minority-Serving) during different eras (between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the Civil War and World War II, and, World War II and the beginning of the 21st century).

In part two, Aleshire defines formational education in terms of moral maturity, spiritual maturity, and relational integrity. Chapter 3 calls for schools to create opportunities for students to undergo substantial spiritual development through practicums during their course of study under the direction of skilled and practiced faculty who both teach and model these virtues. Theological schools must shape Christian leaders who are equipped to serve their spiritual communities with integrity. Chapter 4 addresses the challenge inherent in assessing students' spiritual development. To accomplish this Aleshire suggests a shift away from "measurable" outcomes to "discernable" outcomes with a focus on students' spiritual growth rather than an end-goal.

Though historically Black and minority-serving institutions are included, it is not clear how women fit into this proposed formational model or if they do at all. Despite this oversight, the book is still worth reading by anyone interested in the future of theological education in the United States and would be a valued addition to the library's collection at any institution with ties to theological education. The book is well researched, and endnotes are included.

Reviewer

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