Proleptic Pedagogy: Theological Education Anticipating the Future

Matthaei, Sondra Higgins; and Howell, Nancy R., eds.
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Book Review

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Proleptic Pedagogy: Theological Education Anticipating the Future is the capstone project of a three-year study undertaken by faculty members at Saint Paul School of Theology. In the volume's first essay, co-editor Nancy R. Howell explains that this study was designed to investigate three "distinct pedagogical challenges" that the Saint Paul faculty has come to recognize within the rapidly changing landscape of its own institution: (1) teaching in ways that adequately address the needs of both digital natives and digital immigrants, as well as distance learners; (2) creating instructional approaches that are flexible enough to accommodate students with diverse learning styles and backgrounds; and (3) attending in new ways to the changing racial and ethnic demographics among theological students. While these particular emphases are clearly shaped by Saint Paul's particular context, the authors of the essays argue convincingly that they also represent broader emerging themes within theological education.

Proleptic Pedagogy includes eight chapters. The first of these, "Proleptic Pedagogy, Transition, and Teaching Toward the Future" by Nancy R. Howell, serves as the introduction to the volume and describes the origins of this project and the major pedagogical challenges it aims to address. Though brief, the introduction provides a helpful guide to the central themes that the other contributors address in varying degrees of depth. The remaining chapters focus primarily on one of the three main challenges named in the introduction: Chapters 4, 6, and 8 emphasize the challenge of racial and ethnic diversity; Chapter 2 addresses the challenge of educating students with diverse learning styles and needs; and Chapter 5 engages the challenge of discerning the proper place of technology within theological education. Chapters 3 and 7 simultaneously address diversity in race and ethnicity and learning styles, and how

these two dimensions may influence one another in the classroom.

Although the essays vary in their particular emphases, they all employ the same organizational structure and include the following sections: (1) Telling a Classroom Story; (2) Identifying the Pedagogical Challenges; (3) Engaging Pedagogical Literature; (4) Considering a Theology of Pedagogy; and (5) Constructing a Pedagogical Proposal. This structure exemplifies a practical theological approach: it begins in the lived experience of teachers in the classroom, engages pedagogical and theological resources, and finally returns to concrete implications for practice. The essays prove particularly helpful in summarizing a wide variety of pedagogical literature (which many theological educators may not have time to explore on their own) and providing examples of theological reflection on teaching.

The unique strength of this volume lies in its modeling of constructive theological and pedagogical dialogue between faculty members from one institution, without necessarily suggesting that they are in full agreement. As Howell notes in the introduction, "The essays demonstrate that the faculty interprets the Saint Paul mission, theological education, theology, and pedagogy in diverse ways. Not to be interpreted as inconsistency, our diverse pedagogical approaches are our strength" (7). Taken together, the essays identify challenges to which faculty in many different contexts can relate, while grounding reflection on those challenges in the authors' lived experience of teaching in a theological school. Additionally, the volume's index makes it easy to identify which essays address particular topics and themes. The lack of a concluding chapter, however, makes for a rather abrupt ending to an otherwise well-integrated and compelling volume. It would have been helpful to include a brief chapter at the end of the book to reiterate the essays' primary emphases and to propose avenues for future conversation. Nonetheless, *Proleptic Pedagogy* represents an important contribution to the broader conversation about the relationship between pedagogical practice and the future of theological education.

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