

TEACHING AND
CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION



David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch

Teaching and Christian Imagination

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Book Review

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David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch remind their readers that they are offering “not a ‘how-to’ manual or collection of tips” but “lenses . . . opening possibilities” for effective “learning and teaching” (2). Teaching is not a transaction to dispense knowledge but a multivalent art that should not be reduced to gimmicks. As Smith and Felch conceive of it, teaching is a living process shaped by the imagination of both teacher and student – an experience directed by “visions, not just beliefs and techniques” (1). It is an organic life shaped by theological journeying, farming, and building metaphors. To bolster their argument, Smith and Felch carry their readers through a three-dimensional rubric that reimagines teaching as a biblical hermeneutic – a teaching life that undulates between “journeys and pilgrimages,” “gardens and wildernesses,” and “buildings and walls.” Reading this book as a teacher, I was drawn into the teaching world the authors invite all instructors to enter – it is a world where one hears, sees, thinks, and reimagines inexhaustible possibilities of shaping minds.

The authors draw examples from biblical characters and Christian leaders to illustrate the multifaceted and meandering journey each of their teaching metaphors conveys. First as pilgrim, the teacher is advised to rely on God, *the divine GPS*, for the journey (84) – an act that includes rest but does not preclude imagination on the part of the pilgrim. Second, insights and actionable ideas are not caught in vacuum. They are caught in surprising places like gardens, deserts, and classrooms where both teacher and students, like the first humans and liberated communities (Gen 1-3; Exod 1:1-15:27), learned to rethink, develop new perceptions, and take new steps as they journeyed with God. Third, edifices and walls speak about the role and construction of space. Though both building and walls may have a positive role as a course syllabus might (168), one is reminded that spaces delineated by the twin metaphor, buildings

and walls, are often vigorously contested in the Bible, as is evidenced in the Household Codes (Eph 5:11-6:11; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 2:13-3:33) – a reality that did much to reduce many women to a subservient status and silence in the church to this day.

As a Senegalese transnational biblical scholar shaped by African, Islamic, and Christian faith traditions, I find the journeying, farming, and building metaphors that Smith and Felch apply to teaching in not just Christian, but in every faith tradition. In spite of my reservations about limiting such powerful metaphors to only the Christian imagination, this book makes an invaluable contribution for educators. I agree with Smith and Felch, that *Teaching and Christian Imagination* is indeed an invitation to focus on what kind of person (and therefore what kind of teacher) we are gradually becoming and the place our vision of the world plays in the process . . . to wonder what teaching and learning might look like by those who know that they live in a world created by God who has filled it with beauty and story and song and who talks with us through the vale of tears and draws us toward future glory. (206)

Put differently, Christian educators, and I would add all instructors of any discipline, are invited to take seriously their function as learners and teachers whose growth is inextricably bound to the growth of those they teach. In spite of my minor objection, this book should be in the library or office of any serious teacher, educator, or leader committed to the future of humanity.

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