

Daniel O. Aleshire. *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. vii + 149 pages. \$19.99.

In this timely volume, Daniel O. Aleshire, the former executive director of the Association of Theological Schools (1998-2017), presents a set of very helpful insights about the future of theological education, particularly for Protestant schools. As a likely sequel to his previous work, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (2008), which rather focuses on the history and current trends of theological education, this volume is more about how to revamp the current theological education in order to better train religious service providers and pastors of local congregations in such a challenging time like ours in the 21st century. He summarizes his proposal in the following comprehensive sentence, “The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and the ways of God fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership” (90). Put simply, Aleshire calls his proposal “formational theological education.”

Aleshire spends Chapters 1 and 2, which he superscribes as the Prelude, in explaining reasons for formational theological education in terms of the surrounding culture today, religion’s status in society, and continued changes in higher education. Briefly, he points out the surrounding culture’s rapid secularization and distrust in the institutionalized religion, the rise of religious nones and decline of traditional churches, and higher education’s focus on professional skills preparation of students (thus, the “death” of humanities) and far less on their moral or ethical character. Aleshire urges substantive restructuring of theological education to effectively respond to such a challenging, multilayered social ethos around religion and education. Again, his responsive proposal is formational theological education.

It is his critical diagnosis that current theological education is designed after the professional school model originated in 19th century Germany, largely thanks to Friedrich Schleiermacher (see his *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*). The theological school or seminary as a professional school, Aleshire points out, heavily emphasizes the development of professional ministry skills in students, such as biblical language capacity, church historical knowledge, pastoral care techniques, preaching performance, church planting skills, etc. Yet what is missing in that model is whole personality development in students, including their spiritual, moral, ethical, and people-relational character. It is not that Aleshire completely degrades seminary as a professional school or its evidenced merits, but that in today’s world, seminary should become something beyond that, as his book’s main title firmly indicates, *Beyond Profession*.

Aleshire devotes Chapter 3 to the detailing of what he means by formational theological education, in particular articulating his long definition of it, “The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and the ways of God fashioned . . .,” which requires “increased attention to the behavioral and affective learning that occurs in experiential context” (135). Then the final chapter (Chapter 4) is spent on practical suggestions for the improvement of theological education, in terms of renewing institutional goals and vocation, reorienting faculty’s educational approaches, rethinking of assessment of theological education, and creating educational curriculum aiming for whole personality formation.

Finishing up the book, readers may feel that the author’s “practical” suggestions for the improvement of theological education in Chapter 4 are rather superficial or repetitive of the main

ideas of Chapter 3 with a slightly practical nudge. Thus, Chapter 4 would be more helpful for readers if it became practically more specific; for instance, if it provided a sample MDiv or MA in Ministry curriculum, or new courses or programs that could help actualize the author-proposed formational theological education at a local seminary level. Also, it would be very helpful if Chapter 4 had more sections on digital education, multicultural context, sexuality and gender, and other urgent matters, as (formational) theological education today is not possible without honestly and effectively facing these matters.

Despite the few aforementioned shortcomings, this new volume is set to become another must-read for all theological school administrators and concerned faculty around the nation, beyond cultural or denominational boundaries. Readers will find many good insights in this work for the reform of today's theological education. Particularly, Chapter 3 could be a helpful student orientation reading source for all new students entering seminaries as well as existing faculty.

As Aleshire admits, his ideas are not really new. Edward Farley, already a couple of decades ago, shared similar ideas in his *Theologia* (2001). And many Catholic theological communities have already practiced certain aspects of his ideas for a long time. Thus, he believes, it is a matter of determination, not a new invention when it comes to adopting formational theological education. In other words, it is a matter of how we better apply what we already know in this new era of novel challenges and opportunities.

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