

# **Book Review: Shaw, Perry. *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning.***

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In *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, Perry Shaw, Professor of Christian Education at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon, addresses problems familiar to theological educators around the world. These challenges include providing alternatives to the classic tripartite curriculum (i.e., biblical, dogmatic, and practical theology), overcoming an almost exclusive reliance on lecturing by professors, and integrating theory and praxis in the educational experience.

This book is a theoretical reflection on the process of curriculum revision undertaken by ABTS to address these common educational challenges. The still-ongoing process, which involves stakeholders including faculty, administrators, and students, is designed to enhance teaching and learning processes at the school. The book serves as a guide and reference for those dealing with similar challenges.

What makes *Transforming Theological Education* an invaluable resource for theological schools, however, is not only the answers or suggestions provided, but also the methodologies presented. The author constructs a path toward integrative learning that is solid in structure and makes the journey possible for the reader.

Formally, the book is divided into two sections. In the first section, Shaw addresses curriculum and institutional development, proposing fundamental

questions for strategic planning before exploring deeper issues, such as the effects of the null curriculum, assessment, and the promising possibilities of multidimensional and deep learning. In the second section, the author addresses more concrete topics, from designing courses that address different learning styles and cultural contexts to addressing daily challenges within the classroom, such as lesson planning, the formulation of appealing questions, and even classroom management. Overall, the author's holistic proposals reflect a deep understanding of educational theories and the theological curriculum, employ a wide variety of learning strategies, and address with intentionality the affective and behavioral dimensions of learning.

The strongest characteristic of the book is Shaw's ability to intertwine three elements: educational theory, contextual relevance, and impactful application. First, while avoiding extensive theoretical discussion, Shaw still grounds his work solidly in advanced adult education theory. Thus, even a reader who is not familiar with the theory can engage the conceptual elements invoked. Second, the theory is embedded within the practical context of curriculum development, specifically the work undertaken by the author and his colleagues at ABTS. By testing his proposals against actual challenges, Shaw manages to escape the realm of abstraction and resonate with his practitioner readers who likely face similar dilemmas. Third, Shaw applies his own suggestions throughout the book: the reader is treated as a learner and is invited into an active educational experience, guided by questions and exercises that go beyond mere retention and comprehension activities. Plenty of sample documents and examples are provided, and all the main points defended by the author are reflected in the activities he proposes.

One example of this intertwining is found in the final part of Chapter 7. Shaw first addresses theoretical concepts and their implications for curricular elements outside the classroom, such as field education and mentoring. He then calls upon the reader to reflect on the potential consequences of applying these concepts to their own contexts. Exercises include invitations to integrate the theoretical concepts into the reader's prior experiences, as well as into case studies presenting new situations. At the end, the author offers sample syllabi for actual credit courses that incorporate or are based exclusively on activities outside the classroom – these syllabi also clearly display elements discussed in other chapters. Such an attention to detail and internal coherence enhance the credibility of this work.

Since integration and intentionality are key concepts for Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education* would benefit from greater attention to at least two areas dealing with the integration of education and theology.

First, considering contextual theological methods is crucial for going beyond fragmentation in the theological curriculum, which is one of Shaw's central concerns. In the Preface, he acknowledges that Western systematic theological methods have roots in Greek philosophy, but fails to explore the link between this traditional theological approach and the traditional teaching methods that he considers ineffective. Yet, there is a strong link between the way teachers think theologically and the instructional approaches they choose. The inclusion of contextual theological methods into the discussion could have shaped a framework for a *theological*, rather than exclusively *educational*, integration among disciplines in the theological curriculum, affecting not only classroom situations, but also the assimilation and reconstruction of theological knowledge.

Second, the author adopts a church-centered language and approach, evident especially in the examples and samples provided. Although this may be suited to ABTS' context, stakeholders, and values, considering the broader category of the Kingdom of God would have allowed for wider applications to Christian ministry, and to public faith and service.

Despite these issues, *Transforming Theological Education* is still an encouraging book for theological educators around the world, and an excellent resource for reflection and practice as they develop leaders for the church and the kingdom.



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