



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Aleshire, Daniel O. *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education. Theological Education Between the Times.* Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. vii + 149. £15.99 (paperback).

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The future of theological education is a hot topic around the world. The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education's (ICETE) C-25 event will focus on what's "Next for Theological Education." The 2023 inaugural General Assembly of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), the publisher of this journal, was dedicated to "African Theological Education: Retrospect and Prospect." Plenary addresses from anglophone and francophone perspectives can be found in *African Christian Theology* 1(1): 28-65.¹ That Daniel Aleshire's *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* was provided to participants at ACTEA's inaugural General Assembly suggests that it might make a contribution to the discussion about the future of theological education in Africa.

Aleshire, who served as executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, an accrediting body for graduate theological schools in Canada and the United States, from 1998 to 2017, writes about American theological education. His book "constitutes what I want to say about American theological education at the conclusion of the four decades I have been involved in it" (7). It says nothing about theological education in Africa or anywhere else outside of the United States. The "particular expression of theological education" about which Aleshire writes — "postbaccalaureate education for religious leaders . . . that offers a theological curriculum including a range of theological disciplines, is oriented to educational goals of knowledge and competence, and is characterized by educational practices of degree-granting schools and accountable to standards of quality in higher education" (16) — may not be the dominant form of theological education in Africa. ICETE and ACTEA are

¹ The assembly also included an address from a lusophone perspective. It was not published, but can be viewed here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BV7cBMxqMkI>

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equally concerned about the intersection of formal and informal theological formation, micro-credentials, and contextual curriculum — topics Aleshire's book does not address.

Yet, *Beyond Profession* does provide a framework for thinking about theological education that is relevant for Africa. Aleshire proposes the following goal for theological education: “the development of a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understandings and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership” (82). The goal is tripartite: intellectual formation (knowledge of the Scripture and tradition), professional formation (the capacity to exercise religious leadership), and spiritual formation (spiritual and moral maturity and relational integrity).

From its earliest days, American theological education has been strong on intellectual formation. In the twentieth century, as the disciplines of practical theology developed and theological education became “a form of professional education” (36), theological schools began to attend to the development of pastoral skills. But Protestant theological education in America has yet to sufficiently address spiritual formation. Catholic theological education has done so and thus, for Aleshire, offers something of a model for Protestants. Aleshire argues that the next future for theological education in America is formational theological education that shapes the heads (intellect), hands (skills), and hearts (character) of its students.

This is a useful framework for thinking about theological education in any context. In my experience of theological education in Africa, formal theological programs tend to focus on intellectual formation. They could benefit from the inclusion of more robust programs of field education for professional development. Informal theological programs tend to focus on professional formation or skill development. They could benefit from increased teaching in Scripture and the Christian theological tradition. All programs are challenged to include spiritual formation.

Aleshire describes Titus 1:7–9 and 1 Timothy 3:2–7 as texts that “remain instructive about characteristics fundamentally important for persons who lead communities of faith” (76). These qualities are “not bound by time or culture” (77). They are as relevant and applicable in Africa as they are in the United States. Aleshire proposes “to retrieve [these] qualities . . . and then find ways to modify the goals and practices of theological education to focus on these characteristics” (139). It is an important proposal and worthy of attention in both African and international conversations about the future of theological education.

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Aleshire's proposed educational practices, which he acknowledges may be "more theories of practice than strategies of practice" (110), also warrant consideration. He notes that "theological schools are derivative institutions; they do not exist for their own purposes . . . they do not have a mission apart from the religious communities they serve" (71). "A theological school's ultimate client is the communities of faith in which [its] graduates serve" (130). The next future for theological education begins with "a renewed sense of the vocation of the theological school" (112), and theological education more broadly. All conversations about theological education do well to remember that theological education is not an end in itself. Theological education must always be in service to the church and its mission. Faithful service in the church requires formational theological education. This too must be part of conversations about theological education in Africa's next future.