

BOOK REVIEW OF *PREPARING FOR MINISTRY*

A Book Review

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Hillman, George M. *Preparing for Ministry: a Practical Guide to Theological Field Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008.

Preparing for Ministry: A Practical Guide to Theological Field Education is a book "birthed" out of meetings that were conducted by twenty-two members of the Evangelical Association of Theological Field Educators.¹ In response to a growing need, the contributors in this volume have attempted to "fill in the gaps" that are present in many field education guides. Though the reviewer is not familiar with many of the contributors, it appears that their selection to be a part of this work was based upon their proficiency in their respective areas of field education.

The book is divided into five parts.² Part one addresses the purposes of field education. In this part, there are four sections. The first section addresses the task of vocational discernment. Essentially, vocational discernment is described as the activity where by the student discerns himself and his calling in the context of ministry within a particular community. By focusing on the need for vocational discernment, the student is forced to refine their understanding of their call and seek counsel from others who can help them through the process. The process of vocational discernment naturally flows into the need to recognize ministry skills and to have them evaluated by a broad and varied audience. This is the particular focus of the second section. Among the many the things that are presented in this chapter, the focus on developing particular skills for particular callings is predominant. The proposal in this section is that skills are best developed in the context of ministry under the mentorship of a minister that possesses both desirable skills and experience in the area of ministry that the student is interested in pursuing.

¹ Pg. 9

² Though there are five parts in this book, this review will only cover the first four parts since it is written from the perspective of a student who is engaged in field education.

In third section, the focus of the work turns to theological reflection. More will be said regarding this section in the evaluation element of this review, but for now, it is important to note that this section seeks to integrate the theological education of the student with the practical exercise of ministry for the purpose of perspective and reflection. In the fourth and final section of part one, the student is exposed to the reality of culture and its bearing on field education. Essentially, the point of this section is to encourage the student to be aware of and observe the culture that they are engaging during their field education. Furthermore, the section encourages the student to at least put himself in a situation where cross-cultural ministry is taking place.

Part two makes up a smaller portion of this book, yet it addresses two of the key elements of any field education program. There are two sections in this part of the book. The first deals with the expectations and orientation of the student who is engaged in field education. The second deals with the characteristics and the responsibility of a mentor in the field education process.

Part three considers the "tools of field education" that are to be employed by the student and their mentor. The first section in this part is related to the commitment of the student and mentor to one another and the goals that dictate the direction of that particular relationship. In correspondence to the goals of this uniquely defined relationship, the next section addresses the need for and the nature of the supervisory meeting between student and mentor. After defining the nature of the supervisory relationship, the next section goes on to describe the benefit and encourage the use of case studies to expose the student to different decision-making situations that they may not be able to experience over the course of their field education. Under the mentorship of their ministry supervisor, the student is encouraged to analyze and address the

issues presented in the case studies with the intent of allowing their supervisor evaluate their decision-making skills.

After considering the benefits of the supervisory relationship and the use of case studies, the next section reveals how the student can benefit from field education within the context of biblical community. Community affords the student another opportunity both for cross-cultural ministry engagement and "real life" skill evaluation. Furthermore, community provides a unique opportunity to receive support from others outside of the student's supervisory relationship. In conclusion to this part of the book, the matters of "assessment and evaluation" are presented in terms of their benefit and role in the field education process.

In part four, this book addresses special considerations in field education. In the first section of this part, the cross-cultural element of field education is considered in the context of working with an international student. The unique nature of this particular context demands both the field educator and the international student to work through the matters of culture in a way that is more thorough than indigenous students. In the next part, the topic of women students and field education is considered. Much like the international student, great care is needed in discerning the appropriate process for engaging in field education in light of gender roles. Related though different in many senses, the next part considers the needs that must be addressed when a married student with a family engages in field education. This part observes how marriage and family will impact the field education and addresses how these circumstance can be used for the benefit of the student. The last two parts of this section, consider the use of distance education in the work of field education and the especially difficult situations that are sometimes encountered in field education.

Much could be said about this book, yet the scope of this review does not permit a full evaluation. There was very little that could be mentioned as negative, which means that this book deserves a wide readership and is to be commended for use in field education programs. Having considered the commendable nature of this work, there were some elements that were truly exceptional and noteworthy. In particular, Timothy Witmer's chapter on ministry skills, Don Payne's chapter on theological reflection and Paul Pettit's chapter on Biblical community.

In Witmer's chapter, he says, "ministerial formation must be holistic."³ In many ways, this comment is worth the price of the book, because it gets right to heart of the matter. Field education is greatly needed to facilitate the holistic formation of the ministry student. Theology, ministry philosophies and methods that are not worked out in the context of ministry can be deadly. Witmer is right on with his evaluation of the need for ministry skills development and his suggestions regarding the way forward.

In Payne's chapter, he says, "Theological education intends to prepare people for faithful and sustainable ministry."⁴ Unfortunately, this perspective regarding theology is often completely absent in the minds of ministry students. More often than not classes in systematic theology and exegesis are seen as a barrier to ministry, yet, when viewed in light of the whole, such classes are equipping the students with tools that will sustain their ministry. This chapter was wonderful and integrated well through out the rest of the book. It was by far the reviewer's favorite chapter.

In Pettit's chapter, he concludes his part by encouraging students to be engaged in "a lifetime of vocational Christian service" that takes place in the context of "authentic biblical

³ Pg. 36

⁴ Pg. 56

community."⁵ If one considers the two previous chapters that were evaluated, it is easy to see how the need for theological informed holistic ministry development will only flourish within the context that is promoted by Pettit. The Christian life is not intended to be lived in isolation from the world, but rather, to be lived out in the context of biblical community wherein true "sharpening" of ministry skills can take place.

These chapters taken with the rest of the book have resulted in a wonderful resources for both students and educators and have provoked this reviewer to further consider how these concepts should be and can be employed on a smaller scale in the context of the local church. The book is well worth the read.

⁵ Pg. 183