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Practice and Profile: Christian Spiritual Formation for Vocation

Johan Hegeman, Margaret Edgell, & Henk Jochemsen

Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Reviewed by Kelly D. Sargent

The integration of faith and learning has been at the forefront of conversations, research, and practice of Christian education for many years. However, much of the research and writing around this topic does not address exactly how this integration takes place, specifically within the context of professional programs. The authors of *Practice and Profile: Christian Spiritual Formation for Vocation* adequately address this particular topic with thoughtful research and a thorough scope of both theory and application.

Hegeman, Edgell, and Jochemsen bring an interesting cross-section of perspectives to this research, blending their experiences in Christian higher education in the Netherlands and United States. They were drawn together through the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education to partner on this work. Hegeman currently serves as Senior Professor of Ethics and Social Sciences in the Academy of Theology at Christelijke Hogeschool Ede. Edgell is an Associate Professor of Business at Calvin College, and Jochemsen serves as Chair of Reformational Philosophy at Wageningen University.

Practice and Profile addresses the timely issue of intentionally developing college students for vocation with a moral foundation. The foundational claim of this book is that students make choices about who they want to be as people in a profession before choosing a professional profile. It is paramount, therefore, that a strong moral profile, specifically in a Christian mindset, must be infused in the curriculum, and that mentoring should be the role of the educator.

Training students for four or more years as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and the like, should equip them to perform their respective functions with competence. However, working with students to help them understand that there is a moral consideration to the way they live out their practice will enable them to not only perform their respective functions with competence, but also with transparency, honesty, and a strong ethical foundation.

The authors propose that helping students develop a moral profile is not only possible but vital, and it is the responsibility of those who work in higher education to develop and mentor students along this journey. According to the authors, moral formation is accomplished in four ways, which they have termed PISA: (a) Being Practice Minded, (b) Being Integral, (c) Being Spiritual, (d) Being Answerable.

P: Being Practice Minded

The authors begin their argument with the concept of marrying competence-based learning (CBL) with *Bildung* (a German tradition of self-cultivation) as an approach to the practice of developing a moral profile. Apart from the typical experiences that internships and extracurricular activities provide a student, CBL is an integral component of education, though they claim it is insufficient as a stand-alone technique of developing a competent and ethical professional. Here,

they introduce the idea of *Bildung*, which they argue will enhance CBL to create an intentional moral and personal formation within the practice of profession. It is the responsibility of the educator, supervisor, and student to embark on the journey of intentional practice together in order to truly achieve moral formation.

I: Being Integral

In the following chapter, the authors elaborate on the second condition of PISA. Being integral involves deep reflection as a key aspect of education. Many institutions of higher education, especially those with a religious focus, place value on holistic education of students. The development of the whole student – body, mind, and spirit – is an admittedly high standard to achieve. This concept, however, is not new to the Christian community. The call to higher standards, to integrate belief and action in everyday life, is so much a part of the Christian life. Relating that wholeness to professional practice, however, may not come naturally to some. The authors state, “Our central claim is that the student cannot become integral without knowing thoroughly what the intrinsic normativity of practice means for him or her” (p. 100). Mentoring and deep reflection is key in developing this understanding. Here, the authors provide a useful example of reflection tools for the practice of professional education that can guide the reader through various reflective techniques and dialogues to encourage integration.

S: Being Spiritual

The book progresses to a third aspect of the moral development process which the authors identify as being spiritual. Hegeman, Edgell, and Jochemsen assert,

Opening the window of spirituality in PISA allows us to see how faith, worldview, and deep feelings influence the moral formation of students in Christian higher education. Not only must their instructors gain insight into experiences and questions of meaning and purpose that motivate students to be moral, above all, students need this knowledge in order to make fitting career choices. (p. 153)

The authors support their claims with practical applications for spirituality-infused curriculum and mentorship, drawing on the tested theories of faith formation from prominent scholars to support their work. I would argue that this aspect of moral development is relevant and important both inside and outside of specifically-Christian higher education settings. Identifying a specific spiritual profile to hold fast to ultimately influences students’ professional practice. Encouraging students to think critically about spiritual implications and guiding a process of deep reflection regarding practice and belief will ultimately empower students for a life-long journey of moral consideration and development.

A: Being Answerable

Finally, the authors tie together their model of developing a strong moral profile with the claim that being answerable is the culmination of student formation. Faith integration in professional practice has the power to inform and influence, if a person has mastered the concept of being answerable. They sum up this idea by saying,

The student who is answerable in PISA chooses willingly to be a responsible, accountable professional. The student's willingness implies that he or she chose a moral profile after reflecting deeply on being answerable. Clearly, this process requires guidance, which derives from an ethics of accountability. (p. 213)

Students will be faced with many situations in their professional lives that force them to be accountable to their beliefs or to turn from them in a moment. With guidance and mentoring in practice, integration, and spiritual formation, students will gain the tools and wisdom necessary to be answerable to their moral profile as responsible professionals.

Through various examples and reflection, the authors give a comprehensive approach for educational theory, vocational practice, and intentional spiritual formation. They successfully explore the formation of a strong moral profile in this well-developed book. The call for those who work in higher education to intentionally mentor and encourage college students to identify and shape a moral profile for their future vocation is an important one. This book reminds us that education is far more than developing competencies in students, but rather creating in others a desire to live and improve upon this world in a thoughtful, Christ-like manner.

Contributor

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