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Robert Banks. *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xii + 268. \$20.00 (Paper).

[1] Robert Banks, the executive and academic director of the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute in Sydney, Australia, and senior international fellow at the DePree Leadership Center of Fuller Theological Seminary, has written an excellent book. It presents his vision of how theological education should be done in seminaries, Bible institutes, mission schools, lay theological centers, and church-based training programs (4). The book investigates what ministry and character formation in biblical times might contribute to our understanding of theological education, and it offers numerous practical suggestions for classroom teaching and course design (73).

[2] The book has four parts. Part I provides "a concise but comprehensive account of the key positions advanced in the debate over [how to do theological education that has occurred over] the last fifteen years" (12). Part II examines selected biblical texts to study how "ministry formation took place in prophetic circles, among Jesus' group of disciples, and within Paul's band of companions" (12). Part III, the core of the book, presents the missional approach to theological education with its emphasis on practical applications (144). Part IV "lays out a range of practical ways in which we can move our present patterns of theological education in a more holistic and practical direction" (13).

[3] In Part I, Banks exhaustively surveys the major models that both leading scholars, and the lesser known, have contributed to the debate on how to do theological education. As a heuristic device, Banks attempts to employ David Kelsey's "Athens" and "Berlin" approaches to theological education as a way of tersely summarizing this complicated debate. This heuristic device succeeds only in part. Readers would do better to refer to a one-page summary that appears later in the book where Banks has laid out the various extant models of theological education (143). From among those models, Banks retrieves and revises some under-appreciated ideas and insights that he will incorporate into his missional model. Banks considers how these ideas and insights might inform his classroom teaching and course

design. For both students and their teachers, Banks aims to promote sharper skills for reflecting critically "on the church's practice in view of the dangerous memory of Jesus" (36).

[4] Banks also adopts Charles Wood's concepts of vision and discernment where "vision seeks to encompass the totality of Christian witness, [and] discernment its particularity" (48). This grounding in vision and discernment informs Banks' own missional practices of teaching. Specifically, he aims to assist students in the process of coming to understand God truly through study of the Bible, to which Banks assigns a normative role (54). He also incorporates "more practical testing out of the results of critical inquiry into the class experience itself" (54).

[5] In Part II, Banks expresses surprise that "in the debate so far there has been little reflection on what the Bible might contribute to our understanding of theological education" (73). Presenting his argument cautiously, Banks first rebuts numerous anticipated objections to his missional model's biblical foundation. Then, he examines selected biblical texts that address ministry and character formation. Worthy of special note, Banks adopts Mark 8-10 as his canon within the canon; he identifies Jesus as Teacher and then rightly develops that image in a manner consistent with the above notions of vision and discernment. Similarly, Banks explores Paul's self-identification as teacher and his relationships with his colleagues in ministry. These examples of ministry and character formation in biblical times are the bedrock for Banks' missional model.

[6] The core of the book, Part III, develops Banks' distinctive understanding of his missional model. Banks defines mission as "not just 'mission-oriented,' but an education undertaken with a view to what God is doing in the world" (142). For Banks, "the 'missional' model of theological education places the main emphasis on theological mission, on hands-on *partnership* [author's emphasis] in ministry based on interpreting the tradition and reflecting on practice with a strong spiritual and communal dimension" (144). Banks argues convincingly that the missional model not only furnishes a more immediate connection between action and reflection, but also yields a richer relationship between theory and practice than does any other model of theological education (159, 163). Banks also calls for reconceiving classroom teaching as a missional practice (169). That is, "our effectiveness as teachers flows from who we are [as believers] and how we relate [to others and to God] as much as what we do" (170). Banks offers numerous realistic suggestions that he submits as examples of missional teaching practices.

[7] Part IV addresses practical ways for initiating a missional reform of theological education. Banks explores how a missional culture of teaching and administration could help educators respond better to the changing needs of theological students, especially those students who might be lay, commuters, part-time, weak academically, or embarking on a second-career (190-192). The missional model, Banks argues, lends itself better than any other model to the personal formation that he understands as "the leavening effect of the personal example of teachers and other key figures as they interact with students" (199). Banks is calling for care for the whole person, spiritually, intellectually, and morally. The book concludes with brief practical suggestions for reshaping the theological curriculum along missional lines.

[8] In a way, the complexity of this book's first part mirrors the complicated nature of the actual debate over how to do theological education, but as mentioned above, the one-page summary can help to clarify matters (143). The extra study of Part I will yield ample rewards. The remainder of the book is more accessible and makes the case for the missional model in a convincing manner. *Reenvisioning Theological Education* is an excellent book that merits serious study by pastors, professors, church-based educators, and theology students who are, or will soon be, involved in preparing future leaders, both lay and ordained, for pastoral leadership.

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