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Reshaping religious education: conversations on contemporary practice

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concrete situations. As a chaplain in a chronic care hospital, I found her suggestions for worship helpful. She also offers appropriate advice to community clergy who make pastoral visits and lead worship in the institution. For example, she notes that community clergy who were invited to lead worship and acted only in a cheerleading role (“Is everyone happy?”) were not asked again by the residents. Residents preferred a gentler approach that did not avoid the pain of their situations. Clayton also demonstrates in her stories a sense of humour and respect and care for the residents that ought to be imitated.

The weaknesses of the book include a failure to connect her ideas and practices to a wider theoretical base. There is no definition of pastoral care nor a description of her theological method. As I read the book, I wondered what theological method shaped her practice. Also on page 10, she claims that there is not a lot in the non-scientific literature about working with the old and chronically ill. This claim is not true. The literature is vast and growing and Clayton fails to connect with it. Researchers like Harold Koenig, David Larson, Pamela Reed, Elizabeth Taylor and others have made significant contributions in this area. On the whole, I recommend this book for pastors and lay persons seeking practical help about pastoral visitation and leading worship with the chronically ill in an institution.

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Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998

202 pages

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, each known for formative and transformative writings and publications in religious education, have been and continue to be significant and influential shapers of religious education not only in North America but world wide. Their scholarship, educational expertise, leadership and personal involvement in a variety of educational and ecclesiastical contexts have been important in helping religious education — which is defined as “that part of education concerned with religious attitudes, ideas and practices” (8) — come into its own. Maria Harris is a national consultant in religious education. Gabriel Moran, her husband, is Director of the Program of Religious Education at New York University.

Harris and Moran speak of their richness in experience: "Since we met in 1966, we have been exploring issues of religious education in local, national, and international settings. We have taught in large and small schools, parishes, and congregations, in almost every U.S. state, many Canadian provinces, and cities as diverse as Brisbane, Australia, and Seoul, South Korea" (1). Individually, and as a team, these acclaimed authors and educators in an engaging and exciting give-and-take conversation identify in this book many key issues facing religious education in the contemporary world and invite the reader into a reflective and active participation in the emergence of relevant, exciting and transformative adult education.

The book is divided into four parts: I - FOUNDATIONS — An exploration of "curriculum" and the field of religious education whose aim is two-fold: "1) to teach people to practice a religious way of life and 2) to teach people to understand religion" (30). "The two aims of religious education come together in the person of the learner" (41); II - DEVELOPMENT — Development is a central idea in the educational literature of the twentieth century. The whole notion of development made its way into our language primarily through economic factors. Within religious education, the work of James Fowler is probably the most central relative to faith development. "But if one wished to find a theory of 'religious development', the most likely place to look would be in the great spiritual traditions that describe a lifelong journey. The major theme of these journeys is not growth, but instead its near opposite: the letting go of our prized possessions by a disciplining of thought as well as emotion" (64). ("Religion as de-idolizer keeps open the journey of development" [65]); differences in gender development are explored with implications for spirituality, and death and mourning are included as intrinsic to developmental considerations; III - SPIRITUALITY — "Our concern is to keep spirituality related to our historical religious tradition, rooted in the challenges of biblical tradition and the ethical problems of today's world" (9); spirituality also includes a primary focus on justice and responsibility and traditions/practices of jubilee, incorporating ecological realities and concerns into the conversations. "Spirituality, like development, can be one of the main allies of religious education, but a misconceived spirituality can be a chief competitor" (105). "The recovery of the richest strand of Christian spirituality is aided as Christians learn from others" (115); and IV - IMPLICATIONS OF LIVING IN THE WIDER WORLD — Religious education needs to be interinstitutional, intergenerational, interreligious and international. In keeping with these emphases, the authors have included in their conversations Jewish educator Sherry Blumberg and European educator Friedrich Schweitzer.

Reflecting on important changes that Harris and Moran have seen in religious education in more recent years, they cite primarily three: a growing

centrality of justice as a constitutive dimension of the gospel; the ecological movement and a renewed interest in sabbatical and sacramental sensibilities; and a sense of identity both of adult educators and of adult education itself has developed. They both note that appropriate and particular attention is now being given to diversity and to privilege and the implications each of these realities has on the shape and reshaping of religious education. “We don’t and can’t live in isolated religious compounds and we must find ways to live together” (5).

The book is structured and written in a dialogical fashion with give-and-take conversations taking place between the two authors — and with Sherry Blumberg and Friedrich Schweitzer in the interreligious and international conversation chapters. The contents emerge and are presented as a model for team ministry and as an expression of diversity both in style and approach. Each of the chapters is written with a view to respecting and drawing on the particular educational passions, historical and current interests and strengths as well as particular experiences in either individual or in team teaching. Although this book can be read on its own, it strikes this reviewer that at least a familiarity, if not a fairly detailed knowledge of previous writings by each author, will enhance and enrich what is gained from reading this text.

Each chapter ends with a series of excellent questions under the caption “For Reflection and Response”. These questions are a helpful way to focus both an individual reader’s interest and a group with whom a chapter might be used as a study basis. The profound and provocative contents of this book and the engaging open style with which the authors interact and reflect with one another will be quite instrumental in re-shaping religious education.

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