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Reviewing *Learning to Be Learners: A Mathegenical Approach to Theological Education*

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Learning to Be Learners: A Mathegenical Approach to Theological Education. By Les Ball. Sydney College of Divinity, 2022. 236 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-9257-3031-9 (PAPERBACK) \$45

Professor Les Ball's book titled *Learning to Be Learners* epitomizes his goal to make students become learners through his particular methodology, which he calls "mathegenical." He derives this nomenclature from *Koine* Greek terms *mathetes* (learner or disciple) and *ginomai* (to produce or generate) (p. 156). The process includes the idea that a "learner" is one who learns how to learn, a life-long learner. The focus of "mathegesis" must include concepts like motivation, facilitation, consolidation, and creation (p.157), highlighting "new and lasting ways of learning, which the learner will embrace as an 'independently motivated inquiry and production'" of learning (p. 157). Ball decries the more common and traditional educational methodology, primarily an effort to present foundational information, similar to reading a book in a lecture format, which is a fragmented approach at best. His goal is to identify the weaknesses of this traditional delivery of education and training—its lack of creativity and little use of modern methods—and to promote the integration of ministry training and academic knowledge, especially using the latest electronic means.

The initial portion of Ball's book involves a rather complete summary of the history of theological education beginning with the first colleges and schools worldwide. This history reveals the development of the basic dominant hermeneutical principles that became standard from the Middle Ages to modern times. However, Ball's critique of modern theological education lacks an appreciation of the philosophical methodology that has long been a standard approach for theological training. It must be included not only in the curriculum but also in the technique for developing a theology for use not only by learners but also by parishioners. Ball does not wish to eliminate all traditional subjects used in theological curriculum, but it should certainly not be the only content for ministerial training.

One feature of Ball's book that is extremely helpful to students and teachers is the "Critical Reflection," which appears near the end of each chapter. For example, in chapter seven, "Focus on Learning—A Mathegenical Approach," the Critical Reflection is "What mathegenical approaches do/could you employ in teaching your program?" (p. 157). Ball tries to match teaching "methods to stages and kinds of learning" (p. 208). His goal is to embrace "as many of the constructive components of various approaches as it can encompass . . . to produce a learner with a passion to learn, the skills to expand that learning, and the habits of learning as a productive ongoing way of life" (p. 209).

With our experience of instructional and educative creativity over 30 years of professional college-level teaching, we realize that multiple life and character factors bring a student to the point Ball seeks to develop. Motivation is likely the strongest factor in this individual pursuit, though Ball spends less time on this aspect of development. The educational technique certainly contributes a vital element, but the student's mental, personal, and strength of character are influenced in many ways. If the strongest blame for the lack of development of the student is the instructional technique, the teacher will always be at "fault" if the student does not become a lifelong learner.

REFERENCES

Ball, L. (2002). *Learning to be learners: A mathegenical approach to theological education*. Sydney College of Divinity.

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