

Matthew Floding and Dawn Davis, eds. *Experience: Spiritual Formation in Theological Field Education*. An Alban Book. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2025. 246 pages.

This is the fifth book in a series on elements of theological field education. Faculty from members of the Association of Theological Schools know well that we are to support the spiritual formation of our students, but those of us who are trained in the more classical disciplines (Bible, history, systematic theology, and so on) rarely feel competent doing so. This book brings to life a variety of pedagogies that support the development of and reflection upon spiritual practices, not only for our students but indeed for ourselves as well.

Editors Floding and Davis note early in the book that “spiritual formation (in theological field education) develops ministry leaders by fostering an intimate and growing relationship with God through a constellation of practices and disciplines (including reflecting on the practice of ministry) that deepen personal integration and a love of all of creation” (6). Davis then offers a brief yet thorough introduction to spiritual formation in theological education, drawing on both ancient and contemporary wisdom. This chapter alone would be very useful for a seminary (or other theological) faculty to read together.

Following this context setting, the editors offer two distinct sets of curated essays. The first part shares twenty-three short explorations of different spiritual practices presented by teachers who regularly employ them in their teaching. Here, readers can sample a variety of practices with insight into how they might be engaged in theological learning, being particularly attentive to the voices of students in these settings. I was delighted by the breadth of practices shared, which included embodied practices of breath, various kinds of art, digital engagement, bread-making, walking, as well as more ancient practices such as the Ignatian Examen, *lectio divina*, the sabbath, and more.

The second part of the book begins with an introduction by Floding, who notes that “we invited twenty people to testify. The instructions were simple: In the form of testimony, share a life-giving, ministry-sustaining spiritual practice that is essential for you. Be vulnerable. Disclose why this practice, as you’ve adapted and adopted it, is so important for you. Connect it to your story” (147).

This part of the book draws on the wisdom of pastors, nonprofit executives, camp and conference directors, professors, campus ministry leaders, clinical pastoral education educators, and chaplains, in addition to theological field educators. That diversity is important because pastoral leaders need to be able to speak beyond their immediate church settings and collaborate with leaders in broader civic spaces. But it is also important because each of these authors acknowledges the profound challenges they are facing amidst the tumult of a pandemic, climate change, polarization, and so on.

In addition to compelling stories, the book offers robust bibliographic resources as well as questions for reflection. This book would be a great resource as a required text in almost any practice of ministry course, but it is particularly well suited for courses that involve active ministry practice in specific contexts.

I also want to urge theological educators more generally to read this book as the challenges these teachers share are ones that we face across the spectrum of theological disciplines. We have so much to learn from our experienced field educators!

If I have any quibbles at all, they have to do with no one book being able to be all things to all people. I think this book could be well paired with a more philosophical exploration of what is meant by “experience,” given that we are entering a world where what it means to be human in relationship and in communication is being profoundly contested by forms of digital technology, not least by what is termed “artificial intelligence.” Further, as the world grows ever more diverse and complex, there is much to be learned from other faith traditions who also face these challenges. While the book engaged a little with Judaism, other faith traditions were noticeably absent.

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