

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Teaching for Spiritual Formation: A Patristic Approach to Christian Education in a Convulsed Age***

Hughes, K. R. (2022). *Teaching for spiritual formation: A patristic approach to Christian education in a convulsed age*. Cascade Books. 198 pages.

Educators in every generation ask, as they should, what will it take to better teach students, so that they may excel in their future vocation? Christian educators approach this pedagogical question with an eye to both the future (will students excel after leaving my class?) and the present (how is my teaching shaping students as physical and spiritual beings?) It is this second question of formation which concerns pastor-scholar Kyle Hughes in this book.

Hughes believes that Christian educators need both ancient and contemporary voices if they are to advance in their calling of spiritually forming learners. Blending insights from the patristic fathers and modern best practices in education theory, *Teaching for spiritual formation* (2022) casts a holistic vision of Christian education. Hughes also weaves in practical examples from his own experience as a history and biblical studies administrator and teacher at the high school and college levels.

Hughes divides the book into seven chapters. The introductory chapter submits that the purpose of Christian education is not knowing a myriad of facts but becoming disciples of Christ who are equipped to meet challenges on institutional, societal, and theological levels. The patristic fathers can provide much overlooked assistance in this regard as we nurture our learners' imaginations regarding ways to remain faithful Christians in a rootless world. Chapter 2 asks the question: *Who are we as teachers?* Taking his cue from Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule*, Hughes reminds educators to balance the twin dynamics of being actively involved in our students' spiritual lives while not neglecting our own contemplative, personal call to growing in holiness. Chapter 3 asks: *Who are our students?* Insights from John Chrysostom's teaching to all the five senses reminds educators that our students are embodied learners that develop in unique ways, thus our pedagogy must diversify for the sake of communal growth. Hughes takes up the question *What are we teaching?* in Chapter 4. The curriculum itself should be a vehicle for training in

virtue, just as Basil of Caesarea believed all content areas can and should lead back to God. Instead of shrinking from non-Christian ideas, educators must passionately teach the "through-lines" that demonstrate how the Christian faith touches all spheres of life.

*How are we teaching?* is the subject of Chapter 5, moving the discussion from resource to practice. Hughes upholds St. Benedict's *Rule* as an example of how community values are shaped through regular routines, behaviors, and use of classroom space. Chapter 6 continues with *How do we plan for growth?* Hughes addresses Cyril of Jerusalem's catechetical vision to help interested students who have not yet fully embraced Christianity, pointing to how our own classroom procedures can jumpstart our learners' spiritual forward motion. Chapter 7 concludes the book with a practical exercise in how educators might begin answering the questions posed in each chapter.

*Teaching for spiritual formation* (2022) possesses many strengths, yet for the sake of space I will only mention three. First, Hughes distills the advice of the patristics for contemporary audiences concisely and meaningfully. Second, practical examples from Hughes' own teaching ministry helpfully illustrate how educators and administrators may use these patristic insights. Third and perhaps most enlightening, Hughes simplifies the Christian education process by calling readers to the vision of spiritual formation that unites us no matter our academic discipline.

One potential weakness that Hughes may expand on in a later edition concerns his brevity while discussing online education. Certainly, Hughes is aware of this glaring reality we all face as educators, and he does address online education in his section on using classroom space. However, beyond calling educators to be creative in their use of virtual space, I found myself wishing that each chapter might address this widespread and now permanent part of (especially higher) education.

Nevertheless, through this book, Hughes offers Christian educators a valuable gift. Both secondary and university-level institutions may consider using the book to conduct workshops or departmental reading groups that craft their

own “rule of life” for ensuring spiritual formation. Hughes is correct that drilling deeper into who we are and what we are about is the path to achieving the goal of our profession.

**Reviewer Information**

Cameron D. Armstrong  
Asian Theological Seminary  
[cameron@ats.ph](mailto:cameron@ats.ph)