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**Ronnie Prevost. *Evangelical Protestant Gifts to Religious Education*.
Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000. Pp. viii + 204. \$30.00 (Paper).**

[1] Condensed into twenty-one chapters, Ronnie Prevost seeks to identify what he calls "Evangelical Protestant gifts to religious education." After noting the spectrum of congregations included within Evangelical Protestantism, Prevost divides the book into four sections to explore twenty provocative themes that highlight the diverse convictions its adherents maintain. Each section weaves resources from Scripture, the Evangelical Protestant tradition, contemporary sources and scholars and Prevost's experience, concluding with the identification of a specific "gift" culled from the creative tensions highlighted and explored.

[2] Recognizing the challenge of defining a group that lacks a centralized authority to "certify" its members, Prevost begins by exploring five unifying "dimensions" (historical, theological, ecclesiological, sociopolitical, and personal-ethical) that provide a useful framework for characterizing Evangelical Protestants. Prevost claims that by investigating these dimensions and their interrelations one can develop a greater understanding of the distinctive and diverse character of the evangelical movement. Repeated throughout the text, he introduces a technique of correlating local congregational particularities with their pedagogical practice to recognize the breadth of ideologies and practices within the Evangelical Protestant tradition and the unique unifying contributions or gifts they inspire.

[3] The first section, Gifts of Commonality, "reminds of the need for core languages, a core curriculum, a core authority (Scripture) and a core experience" (31) in order to develop a common purpose and "equip and compel adherents to adopt those beliefs as their own" (53). The second section, "Gifts of Diversity," offers models developed by Evangelical Protestants for integrating a variety of elements from denominational, ecumenical, spiritual, developmental, and cultural sources. "Gifts of Function," the third section, explores frameworks for ensuring that a faith tradition's espoused and operative beliefs and practices are balanced through purposeful Bible Study, "I-Thou" relationships, purposeful study of moral and ethical issues, and a shared vision for growing the kingdom of God. Finally, "Gifts of Opportunity" delineates embodied learning and faith-filled responses that occur

when opportunities for service, leadership, and cultural sensitivity permeate the "Catechism of Life."

[4] Among the twenty gifts Prevost highlights is the gift of being "both nurtured and nurturing due to the many diverse expressions of spirituality found among [evangelicals]" (97). Correspondingly, he sees the gift of consistent and continuous focus on relationships as a paradigm for how to combat contemporary feelings of isolation and loneliness. Most of the gifts he identifies are traits within Evangelical Protestantism, which he claims can provide models for religious education - no matter the faith orientation. However, the concept of "gifts to religious education" implies that these are unique offerings. Instead, they are more accurately generalizable practices that may already be known by other faith traditions.

[5] As a cradle Roman Catholic with only cursory understanding and experience of Evangelical Protestants, I appreciate Prevost's care in introducing his faith family and have gained insight into the diversity of its adherents. As a Religious Educator, I applaud his focus on relational knowing, his recognition of the importance of dissonance for testing and strengthening one's own convictions, and the necessity for cultural sensitivity within a congregation, across denominations and faith groups, and in intersecting global contexts. As an academic, I eagerly traced his well documented notes for additional references. Unfortunately, I feel like I entered midway through a conversation and never heard its ending: Prevost's book lacks an introduction and conclusion. There are no explanations of the books' theses, the rationale for its structure and assortment of themes, the significance of identifying "gifts" and the import of the twenty gifts that he identified. As a result, it lacks the integration he seems to call for and leaves the readers to connect the dots for themselves.

[6] From the sparse personal and editorial interjections within the book, the dots I connected appear to map Prevost's struggle to find his "personal identity" within his tradition and his attempt to maintain "unity within diversity". The preface mentions the "serious problems" he has faced over the last 20 years as "the larger faith family in which I grew up has been embroiled in controversy over labels as well as matters of theological and ecclesiological substance" (vii). Later, in chapter 8, he expresses how difficult it is to live one's faith amid such controversy: "As one whose teaching ministry - mostly in theological education - has been within the context of a faith community mired in political and theological controversy for the entire span of that ministry, this writer is well aware of the personal, denominational, and institutional costs and damage of such conflict as well as the way in which it detracts from the mission of the church and its efforts in religious education" (86). By identifying the spectrum of beliefs and practices within Evangelical Protestantism, and highlighting their gifts to religious education, Prevost has articulated but not identified what may be his true gift: identifying a means to transform what is likely an "Either/Or" controversy leading toward greater division into a "Both/And" unifying solution.

[7] In the tense positioning that occurs between universal norms and contextual sensitivities, Prevost offers some clues for holding the ends together with the middle. His method of exploring localized particularities to reveal commonalities and spur growth toward a vision of the kingdom of God can be successful if, as Prevost reminds, the conversation partners

are willing to enter into an "I-Thou" relationship of mutual reverence and respect. This type of dialogue also requires openness to the possibility that one's position will change as a result of such candor and spark continued vitality. Otherwise, the risk is that the living catechism, like "a body of water whose water remains undisturbed stagnates" (73), will cease to be relevant.

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