



Book Review

Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church: Experiential Learning and Contextual Practices in North Africa and the Middle East. Joseph Nehemiah, Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021.

In *Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church*, Joseph Nehemiah seeks to develop a contextually appropriate theory and practice of adult education for developing church leaders in the Middle East and North Africa, with particular consideration for recent converts from Islam. Nehemiah proves a thoughtful observer of pedagogical culture as he refuses to give into an all too easy West vs. East pedagogical binary. Though he recognises the need for careful contextualisation and cultural competency, he is also interested in gleaning those elements of Western pedagogy that he feels would most fit within the context of what he sweepingly calls ‘the Arab world’.

The volume is divided into four general. After an introduction, Nehemiah begins with a section on ‘Biblical Foundations’. There is no critical awareness brought to the text of scripture and a strong evangelical approach to the Bible and to Jesus signal a reading that some may find not to their theological taste. In short, this section on biblical foundations reads more like a devotional than an academic study.

In section II, Nehemiah offers summaries of the adult education theories of Bloom, Knowles and Kolb. In all three he gleans elements that he believes to be fruitful for the Middle Eastern and North African context. At the end of each chapter, he offers a summary of what teachers and learners in the Arab world think about aspects of these principles. But there is no citation or discussion of interviews, surveys, focus groups or other methodologies for gathering this data.

The most important sections of the book are III and IV. In the former, Nehemiah lifts up what he sees as the key feature of Arab cultural leadership necessary for bringing experiential learning theory appropriately into that context: *shura*. Nehemiah describes *shura* as a kind of leadership that is both strong and distanced while also being consultative and communal. By appealing to and nurturing *shura*, adult converts to Christianity may be trained to be leaders in a way that is experiential—thus disrupting the normative pedagogy of the culture—but also contextually appropriate.

The final section of the book demonstrates how experiential learning theory can be applied to and implemented in the Arab culture. He begins by placing his favoured theorists—Knowles, Kolb and Bloom—into conversation with Arab culture. He is interested in how aspects of these theories resonate with *shura* leadership. For example, Kolb’s emphasis on reflecting upon experiences, Nehemiah argues, fits well with *shura*’s emphasis on benefiting a leader’s followers.

Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church’s premise is much needed: Western pedagogical modes may be helpful in non-Western contexts, but they must be thoroughly contextualized to operate well. That is to say, one cannot simply implement ELT or any other learning theory wholesale without first considering whether and how it might fit within unique contexts. For this reason, I recommend it to all theological educators, regardless of context, as an example of thorough and thoughtful analysis of and reflection on contextualization.

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