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**Reviewing *Renewing Minds:*
*Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education***

Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society
Through Christian Higher Education
by David S. Dockery
B & H Academic, Nashville, Copyright 2008. 214 pages.
ISBN 978-080544788-0. \$19.99

by Calvin G. Roso

As Christ-followers we are not called out of this fallen world, but we are called to engage it and to sanctify the ongoing secular society in which we live. . . . there is no sphere of humanity to which Jesus Christ is irrelevant; and that certainly includes the academic world. (Dockery, 2008, p. 3)

Relevancy is the focus of Dockery's revised edition of *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (2008). While reminding the reader of the changing scope and nature of society, Dockery discusses key principles for influencing the world through Christian higher education. For educators wanting a better understanding of the Christian foundation of higher education, this text presents a clear and concise rationale for education from a Biblical perspective.

Historical Perspective

Dockery discusses the historical overview of Christian higher education in the United States, noting that prior to the 19th century every U.S. college except two was founded on Christian principles with the purpose of Christian-approach to higher education. Historically, this practice changed in the centuries to follow. Dockery notes, "The separation of faith from learning and teaching was the first step toward creating a confused and disconnected approach to higher education, even in church-related institutions" (p. 4). According to Dockery, there is a need to recover "the Christian foundation" (p. 10) in Christian universities. He advocates that teachers begin this recovery process by seeing that God is the source of all truth.

Then education will mean much more than passing on content to students. It will also mean shaping character, and it will move toward the development and construction of a convictional worldview by which we can see, learn, and interpret the world from the vantage point of God's relevance to us. (p. 12)

Dockery does a fine job of stressing that a "convictional worldview" should motivate Christian educators to become better teachers and to help restore a "lost moral accountability" (p. 14).

Integration of Faith and Reason

Several chapters of the text summarize concepts of the integration of faith and reason discussed by J.P. Moreland, Mark Noll, John Stott, and others. These chapters discuss worldview and faith and learning integration. While these chapters may not necessarily offer any unique ideas in the area of faith and learning integration, the strength of these chapters lies in Dockery's ability to offer Biblical and historical examples of Christian education. Dockery does an

exceptional job showing how faith and learning are presented in Scripture and have been grappled with throughout Church history.

Another distinctive of Dockery's nine-chapter book lies in the chapters on how Christian higher education can influence the Church and society. The chapters titled "Renewing Minds, Serving Church and Society" and "Thinking Globally about the Future" are well-written and offer a thorough discussion and vision for Christian colleges and universities.

Renewing Minds

The "Renewing Minds" chapter discusses several elements that are important to Christian higher education and begins by defining what a Christian academic community is:

Christian colleges and universities are academic institutions of higher education committed to teaching, research, and service. . . . [A crisis is] that the university tends to give itself to research more than to teaching and does so more for learning's sake than for the sake of student formation. (p. 19)

Dockery elaborates by saying that the purpose of Christian colleges and universities is preparing students "for their chosen vocation by encouraging them to think Christianly so they will be equipped to serve faithfully in the church and society" (p. 20).

In addition to discussing how a Christian university should promote liberal arts education from a Biblical perspective, Dockery says the strength of Christian higher education is a focus on character development and competence "for effective service" (p. 21). This includes a three-fold approach:

- Convictions (developing a worldview sufficient for life's questions and crises);
- Character (involving incarnating this worldview); and
- Community (living out this worldview in company with mutually committed and stimulating people). (Garber, as cited in Dockery, 2008, p. 22)

Dockery aptly advocates that the main task of Christian higher education is that of renewing minds. This task, according to Dockery, is done through developing a shared mission, core values, and a caring community. This argument is a strength of the author's ideas—too often the discussion of Biblical integration at the college and university level focuses either on academics or on community. In contrast, Dockery shows how the two areas support each other in training and renewing students for their chosen professions.

The conflict between sacred and secular is also thoroughly discussed in this chapter. Dockery defines this conflict as a struggle Christians have being citizens of two worlds—heaven and earth. According to Dockery, Christian higher education must look to the Bible to find the balance between these worlds . . . a balance between serving the Church and serving society. Ultimately, the balance is one where the Christian university serves both church and society: "We are not called to rule over the world (at least in this age) but to relate to it and influence it for good within the framework of a Christian worldview" (p. 29). Dockery says Christian colleges and universities should encourage students to glorify God in all professions by serving God and others through their chosen profession. If, indeed, their calling is from God, it should not be viewed as a second-rate vocation just because it is serving society instead of serving the church. Serving society through one's profession "can happen not by escaping culture or identifying with it but by engaging it through Christian thinking and Christlike service, with the goal of influencing it for God's glory" (p. 30). Dockery advocates that it is the job of Christian

higher education to train students—to renew students’ minds—in the areas of Christian thinking, service, and influence within their chosen profession.

Thinking Globally about the Future

Thinking globally about the future, according to Dockery, is having an awareness of current and future trends in a global society and knowing how Christian higher education can enable students to be relevant in that society. To discuss these matters, Dockery reminds the reader of William Carey, the father of modern missions. Carey was used by God during a pivotal time in history when the Church was unwilling to support Carey’s call to reach the lost in India. Carey did not give up but, instead, exhorted others to “expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.” Dockery says that Carey “believed that the church needed to take the gospel around the world. . . . [And, Carey] emphasized that God uses *means* to accomplish the spread of the gospel” (p. 139). Christian higher education, Dockery writes, is the *means* to equip people to spread the gospel through their God-given talents and professions. Here are some of the suggestions the text gives to meet the challenges of a changing world:

- Remind ourselves of the incredible changes in our global context;
- Recognize the importance of tolerance while rejecting the pressure to adopt a stance of religious pluralism, which downplays the uniqueness of the gospel message;
- Rethink the role of Christian higher education for establishing a Christian presence in significant settings around the globe for the purpose of pre-evangelism;
- Reconsider the need to expand Christian higher education’s international commitments to include intercultural opportunities as well. (p. 140)

Dockery’s discussion about Christian higher education and thinking globally reminds the Christian educator that our job is to “help the church understand the need to live always between gospel and culture” (p. 144). Through academics, community, discipleship, and service, Christian colleges and universities must train students to think and live Christianly.

Summary

A great strength of *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* is its focus on the purpose and mission of Christian colleges and universities. While the text may lack practical specifics in some areas, it does a good job aligning the principles with Biblical and historical precedence. In addition, Dockery includes a nearly 30-page “Bibliography for the Integration of Faith and Learning” that is both philosophical and content-specific. This bibliography is an excellent resource for any Christian educator looking for ways to teach from a Biblical perspective.

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