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Reviewing *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition*

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REVIEWS

Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition. By David Dockery and Christopher Morgan, eds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 576 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-4335-5653-1 (HARDCOVER) \$50

C*hristian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* reminds evangelicals in higher education of their past and potential future. To loosely apply an old adage to its description, “It is preaching to the choir” and prospective choir members. This work is a collection of 27 essays authored by current thought leaders in the field of Christian higher education. The editors and contributors serve in a variety of positions in several prominent Christian universities—having committed their vocational calling to promote God’s academy and having dedicated themselves to living for Christ and discipling others in their Christian walk and vocational callings. The purpose of this collection of essays is to inform and strengthen those serving in the Christian higher education community and to better prepare future leaders for service to the Church and society. To this end, David Dockery, Christopher Morgan, and the 25 other contributors have done their work well. *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* is a serious text for those seriously considering Christian service in the Church or the Christian academy.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part establishes definitions and lays the Scriptural and historical foundation for mission and calling for Christian higher education. The second examines the integration of faith in the teaching and learning process, both historically and in current specific content areas. The third explores the current state and potential future of Christian higher education’s influence on the Christian scholarship, the Church, and the world, and it explores how Christian educators can make a lasting difference through

Christian higher education.

Dockery sets the tone and direction of the text in Chapter 1. He points out that for Christian intellectualism to impact today's society through academia, Christian universities must remain true to their foundational faith and mission. He reminds the reader that simply hiring younger faculty in the pursuit of "relevance" will not make Christian universities more effective in accomplishing their mission. It is imperative to prepare younger faculty in many ways, including a Scriptural foundation and knowledge of the general mission of Christian higher education, the history of the Christian academy, established and new discussions of faith and philosophy, the integration of faith and learning, the nature of the learner, the nature of the teacher, Scripturally-based subject area concepts and teaching strategies, leadership skills, demographic issues, and many more. Understanding these facets is necessary for leading faculty members in Christian universities to shape an effective professorate who will serve the academy and the Church and also make a difference in society. *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* addresses each of these critical components with an unapologetic depth and breadth of scholarship.

Taylor Worley goes on to make a point in his essay that justifies the depth and breadth of the text, which contains nearly 550 pages. Worley reminds us that society has changed dramatically in recent years. Truths that were long held as common knowledge and widely accepted within Christendom have become quaint relics of the past, or worse, they have simply been forgotten. For over two millennia, those preparing the next generation for Christian service had a firm foundation of doctrinal truth to build upon, but that is much less so today. In many ways, future faculty for Christian universities are entering the field without the full armor of God. Many claim a faith and profession about which they may know very little.

Nathan Finn reminds us in his essay of the great Christian traditions so well summarized by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. This collection of essays provides a primer of what has been considered for centuries as background knowledge for the profession; it could almost be called "*Mere Christianity* for Christian Higher Education."

The second part of the book examines the meaning and practice of integrating faith with the teaching and learning process. Morgan and others provide a well-developed framework for the concepts of integrating faith in learning and teaching. They do not do this by crafting a new theoretical framework, but by reminding the reader of the depth of thought that has already gone into these topics. These authors first open the Scriptures to see what God has told us about the nature of teaching and learning; then, they summarize centuries of thought on the topic.

The reader will hear Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas as these pillars of the Christian academy used Scripture to craft conceptual frameworks for the nature of the learner, the teacher, and truth. The reader is taken through medieval scholasticism and the foundation of early American universities, where religious and academic pursuits were blended to create the Christian higher education model. Moreover, the reader is a party to further refinements in the Christian higher education model with reflections on Finney at Oberlin College and Blanchard at Wheaton College. The authors then examine the philosophical and societal challenges to Christian intellectualism. The pragmatism and secularism common to educational systems of the early and mid-20th century took their toll by starving and corrupting Christian academic thought; however, the essays remind the reader that the 20th century closed with hope for Christian higher education. The reader is reminded that Nolls and Marsden call for a return to the founding mission for Christian universities and the Scriptural, historical view of the nature of teaching and learning. The authors of this section close the historical review by bringing the reader to the present day, highlighting the work and thought of Duane Litfin and others who see faith and learning as influencing each other and placing a focus on where the two intersect.

Once the foundational Scriptural and historical definitions are set, the remainder of the second part of the text explores the philosophical questions and practical application of the integration of faith in learning and teaching in several disciplines of study. These essays show the relationship between Scripture and discipline-specific concepts. The essays raise the question of the nature of mathematics, science, philosophy,

and more. They ask, is mathematics part of the nature of God or part of His created order? How do God's creations interact with His natural laws? Returning to Tertullian, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" The authors pose the question of Christian metaphysical, axiological, and epistemological beliefs. Once a firm footing is established philosophically, the essays discuss and suggest practical teaching strategies that are in line with a robust practice of integrating faith in teaching and learning.

Building upon the foundation for faith, teaching, and learning established in the second part of the text, the third part of the text explores the implications of faith, teaching, and learning for the Christian university, the Church, and the world. S. Steve Kang opens this third part by pointing out a major concern within the Christian academy. Generally speaking, Kang believes that Christian higher education is failing to raise up Christian disciples. Teaching how to think from a Christian perspective but failing to teach the practical outworking of the Christian life is rendering the Christian campus impotent. He recommends that Christian academia revive teaching the Christian life by reviving the Catechesis, in order to intentionally, formally, and proactively teach, mentor, and disciple those who are new to the Christian learning community.

Kang's contribution is very well developed and justified; however, this brings us to our only negative criticism of the text. The structure of this third part of the text would have been better served with Kang's thoughts coming toward the end of the section rather than the beginning. Kang's essay is a very good response, but a response to some of the authors that follow after him. He is addressing a problem that, as structured, has not yet been fully developed. The essays that follow Kang's build the problem and make a solid case for the Catechesis. Other than this one issue, *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* is an outstanding work that will strengthen the Christian academy, serve to better prepare Christian leaders for the Church and the world, and most importantly, help produce disciples who not only think Christianly, but also live Christianly.

To complete this work, Worley, building on Bonhoeffer, reminds us that God is the author and director of both our individual vocational

calling as well as the general mission for Christian higher education. As such, Christian educators can be effective in their individual vocational calling in Christian higher education only when they are intentional about serving God's broader mission for Christian higher education. *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* shows future Christian higher education faculty how to accomplish this intent, and reminds the seasoned faculty member of the dynamic faith tradition and rich history of the Christian academy. Again, this is a serious text for those who are serious about Christian service and ready to take a missional stand in and for Christian higher education.

REFERENCES

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