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EDITORIAL

POST COVID 19 CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Hayoung Lim

It is April 10, 2020, Good Friday in the peak week of the COVID-19 pandemic. Writing this editorial for the 2020 publication of *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Christian Higher Education* as being affected by the greatest pandemic of the last 100 years will be one of the most memorable moments in my professional life. Dr. Wilson, president of Oral Roberts University, wrote to the faculty that “We are part of a higher education sector that was already being disrupted significantly. Now, we are enduring perhaps the greatest disruption this disrupted sector has ever experienced.” With our brightly lit classrooms, grandiose halls, spring flowers, and previously booming campuses lying vacant, higher education is forced to react to new demands and to struggle with sudden changes as if our body is fighting against the corona virus itself.

One of the major demands in the recent higher education systems is online teaching and learning. This particular demand not only includes providing all educational instruction online, but also constantly monitoring and evaluating the students’ progress in reaching learning outcomes while removing the entire curriculum from the sanctity of a lecture hall to a collection of individual students sitting behind a webcam. The necessity of increased online and virtual learning can no longer be denied. As a result of the COVID-19 school closures and the rapid transition to online teaching and learning, more and more students, faculty, and staff may well stay away from the physical presence-oriented educational settings once the pandemic has passed. Presidents, provosts, and academic deans are being forced to reconsider which parts of their institutions’ delivery system will be offered in

person and which parts will be offered online. It is an inevitable move in any higher education sector; the majority of higher education systems will eventually make choices whether to embrace the uncertain, yet the current, distance learning and/or hybrid models of virtual education. Online education may become a strategic priority at every institution.

While most universities and colleges are finding new and creative ways to teach their students using virtual tools and strengthening an online academic forum with the purpose of providing high-quality education, are we ready to look beyond this pandemic and rebuild the post COVID-19 Christian higher education system? Can we develop online programs to substitute for face-to-face contact that nurtures and strengthens the spiritual growth and Christian faith of college and university students? However, before assessing the readiness of virtual Christian higher education, we should ask more fundamental questions such as “What is Christian education providing to higher education?” or “What pedagogical changes do we see on the horizon in Christian education for the new generation?” Once we can give some solid answers to these questions, we might step in the right direction to create and produce the virtual tools to facilitate Christian higher education in the future.

Students may choose to come to a Christian university or college to strengthen their faith through not only well-received education but also through daily life involved in spiritual aspects on campus (e.g., chapel services, prayer groups, theological discussions). People having experienced a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit often seek ways to make meaningful changes in the world. Therefore, a priority of Christian higher education is to provide opportunities for each student to experience or strengthen a personal relationship with Christ for him- or herself. Professors, staff, and fellow students in the same spiritual commitment can nurture the individual student and help support each other. Cultivating the spiritual environment with a clear sense of academic direction and purpose in daily life has been the core of Christian education and should be the main feature of virtual education for Christian college students in post COVID-19.

COVID-19 has ironically united the nations as one; wars and fights between nations, ethnicities, and religions have stopped. We are

simply the citizens of the united world, facing a great pandemic that has woven our lives together. True “globalization” has come, even if it looks different than our expectations. Some cohorts of students, including international students, may well opt to study closer to home. According to a recent news report in *The PIE News* (News and Business analysis for *Professionals in International Education*) (Dennis, 2020), more Asian students are planning to look to study in Asia. Globalization in higher education may shift from international students from various countries going to Europe or the United States and instead remaining in their various countries and enrolling as international students online. Therefore, creating and producing those programs/curricula under a solid mission and vision embracing the majority of global groups of students might be the key for successful globalization of the university.

Almost every human being in this world wants to get back to “normal” life and do what they used to do before COVID-19 happened. With God’s grace, we will eventually get there, but we must prepare the returning journey carefully because it will not be exactly the same as before—the criteria for “normal” has already shifted. Therefore, we should not focus on merely restoring what we have lost during the pandemic; we should move forward with the eminent knowledge and the intensive experience that we have obtained to reach the essential purpose and vision of every institution. For us, we should keep seeking Jesus Christ, our savior.

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