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Christian Higher Education in the Global Context: Implications for Curriculum, Pedagogy and Administration

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N. Lantinga, (Ed.); Christian Higher Education in the Global Context: Implications for Curriculum, Pedagogy and Administration.

(Sioux Century, IA: Dordt Press, 2008)

Reviewed by Kevin Kehl, Ed.D.

The emphasis on preparing today's college graduates for the global workplace has found its way into the mission statements, curriculum, and co-curriculum of many institutions in secular as well as Christian higher education. The International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE) pursued the seemingly daunting task of addressing the role of Christian higher education in the age of globalization in its most recent international conference. Since its inception in 1975, IAPCHE has been dedicated to discussing questions that encourage a desire of lifelong learning. The text reviewed in this article is consistent with the organization's original mission to "confront difficult issues and promote biblically grounded, critical analysis of distortions of the truth in the contemporary world" (Hulst, 2006, p.24).

While the individuals at the first international conference of Christian higher education were primarily drawn together to serve the needs of practitioners and institutions within the Reformed Christian tradition, today the organization's aim is to "serve Jesus as Lord by fostering worldwide, the development of integral Christian higher education through networking and related academic activity" (Hulst, 2006, p. 28).

Presentations given at the seventh International Conference of IAPCHE held in Nicaragua in 2006 have been published by Dordt Press, and are designed to draw Christian higher education practitioners into conversation with the global context within which we find ourselves in the 21st century. The aim of these conversations is to help make the work of preparing students for Christian service in their respective vocations relevant. This is best illustrated through the format of keynote presentations followed by critical, yet thoughtful responses from other experts in the same academic discipline or related content area.

The opening keynote speaker and author of the first chapter contextualizes her own thoughts while she frames the presentations to follow when she says, "Latin American Educators have reiterated that education is an act of love and that it is formed in dialogue between teachers and students with their environment" (Murillo, 2006, p. 13). Presentations and the responses to follow are organized around three questions:

- How does Christian higher education bridge gaps between competing cultures/worldviews?
- What can Christian higher education do to promote educational well-being?
- How does Christian higher education connect kingdom citizenship to specific regional issues and crises? (Murillo, 2006).

These questions help to define and limit the text while openly admitting that it cannot be a comprehensive discussion regarding Christian higher education in a global context.

While there are significant theoretical and practical contributions made in response to each of these questions, their treatment is by no means even or complete. On the other hand, readers may be challenged in their thinking, as presenters and responders engage in difficult discussions that require openness and honesty. One example of this can be seen in Jose Ramon Alcantara-Mejia's (2006) discussion of transculturation the humanities in response to the question of strategies that Christian higher education can use to bridge gaps between competing worldviews. He states, "From a Christian perspective, a globalized Christian higher education cannot follow the economic-imperial model that only legitimizes the Western model. On the contrary, a Christian perspective values and legitimizes other cultural points of view" (Alcantara-Mejia, 2006, p. 109). While these comments deserve additional thought and reflection on what it means to legitimize a particular economic model or cultural point of view, they do serve as a reminder that our policies and practices are often ethnocentric in their orientation.

The implication for professionals in Christian higher education student development is that they must grapple with issues to maximize resources for multicultural and international student services. Facilitating the expression of many other cultures through campus conversations and programming may help to facilitate opportunities for students to be transformed into the likeness of Christ found in other cultures. Practitioners serving Christian higher education in the area of student development might also note that the format of the presentations found in this text serve as a model for dialogue. This is best illustrated in Elisabeth Hulscher's (2006) response to R. Ruard Ganzevoort's presentation on "Teaching Religion in a Pluralistic World." While Ganzevoort (2006) aims at trying to help Christian educators to avoid the extremes of ethnocentrism and religious relativism while living simultaneously among many cultures, Hulscher states that most cultural differences lie deep within individuals at the level of value orientations. Her comments are profound when she states that understanding one's own value orientations as well as the differences of others, is essential if we are to thoughtfully act in response to God's working through us to serve our fellow humans and the world (Hulscher, 2006, p.131). Again, administrators including supervisors and managers might consider the possible positive consequences of leading faculty and staff through readings and other activities that would lead to a greater awareness of value differences among students represented in the institution.

In addition to the important contribution this book makes to the global phenomena of Christian higher education, it also provides some excellent practical suggestions and action steps for promoting Christian higher education in a variety of cultural settings including (but not limited to) specific examples within Africa, Asian, Central America, and North American (learning and serving abroad). These actions could lead to the development of a relevant curriculum, professionally prepared educators and improved management of resources.

Upon a thorough investigation of IAPCHE's history, the authors, and contents found in this book, readers will discover or be reminded that Christian higher education is a worldwide movement. I recommend that administrators, faculty, and especially student development professionals read this book as they take to heart the current impact of diverse cultures on Christian higher education. We would all be well advised to note that what happens in Africa and Asia as well as the Americas will have a growing effect on the development of Christian higher education throughout the world.

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