

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 18 | Number 18

Article 9

2019

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Recommended Citation

Morris, Morgan K. (2019) "Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in the Fragmented Age," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. Vol. 18: No. 18, Article 9.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol18/iss18/9

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Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age

Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Alleman, and Todd C. Ream
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press

Reviewed by Morgan K. Morris

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Unity is becoming increasingly difficult to find within current culture. Politics, faith, and more seem only to divide people. Colleges and universities are not exempt from this division and in the wake of divisiveness, Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream assert these institutions have lost their soul. In their book, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age*, the term “soul” refers to “a university’s core identity, story, and mission” (p. 13). Although the soul has been lost, the authors also contend the soul of the university can be revived and returned to health. They believe this restoration “must connect to the transcendent story of the universe and its Author—the triune God” (p. 13).

To defend the idea of the university’s lost soul and illustrate the past, present, and future impact of this lost identity, *Restoring the Soul* begins with an introduction, then is divided into three parts, followed by a conclusion. The Introduction is characterized by the question “Can the Soul of the University Be Saved?” In this introduction, the authors describe the term “soul” with other words like “identity” and “purpose.” Moreover, they assert their thesis and introduce the following parts of the text.

Part One is designated “Building the University.” In this

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section, the authors explore the history of the university, and thus the original soul of higher education. The authors include information from as early as the twelfth century to provide historical context for colleges and universities. In this part, the authors remind readers of the connection between the university's soul and Christian faith in saying, "theology can and must be understood as essential to the soul of the university" (p. 37). However, throughout history, theology decreases in importance to most higher education institutions and is replaced by idea such as "moral philosophy" (p. 54) and "political purpose" (p. 65).

As the world entered into the post-Christian era, the vision of higher education continued to change and broaden, causing fragmentation. Thus, Part Two of this work is entitled "The Fragmentation of the Multiversity." This section identifies several elements of higher education that have lost their soul, therefore causing division in higher education. These areas include the role of the professor and the curricular/cocurricular divide, among others. When discussing the role of the professor, the authors highlight Derek Bok's identification of "'publish or perish' culture" among faculty members (p. 124). The authors share several concerns about this culture, specifically the attention it takes away from teaching. Moreover, the shift in attention away from curricular educators, leaves cocurricular educators "with not only subdivided disciplines but also now with subdivided students" (p. 153).

In hopes of leaving readers with some encouragement, Part Three is called "Restoring the Soul of the University." In the final part of this work, the authors examine how aspects of the university can be "reimagined" in hopes of restoring its soul. These components include academic vocation and the cocurricular, among others. In discussing academic vocation, the authors describe the need to "connect our understanding of virtues and practices to the triune God and God's story" by upholding virtues such as faith, hope, and love in higher education work (p. 253). Moreover, when the cocurricular is reimagined, educators are not concerned solely with a "narrow range of capacities" but a "wider range of different student identities" to help students understand "what it means to be a good student" and "explore what it means to be a good neighbor, friend, man or woman, community member, citizen, and so on" (p. 273). When work done within colleges and universities is reimagined, readers begin to see pieces of the original soul of higher education from Part One.

To end, the authors pose the question "Can a University with a Singular Soul Exist?" as their Conclusion. Their answer acknowledges the limitations and fallenness of this world stating "A university with soul will never be fully embodied on this earth" (p. 323). However, the authors challenge readers to live "among a redeemed community with a mission to fully image God in communal academic life" (p. 324).

Over the course of the book, the authors essentially create a timeline of the loss the university's soul, identify the influence this lack of unity currently has on institutions, and provide insights into how higher education professionals can work to rectify this crisis. This text employs hundreds of references from scholarly resources as well as the author's personal higher education experiences to create a robust history and vision of the soul of the university. Everything within the text points back to the main assertion that the soul of the university has been lost, but can be found again. Because of this framework and thorough research, readers would find it difficult to disagree with the authors' thesis.

With such a strong, but viable, thesis, reading this book with a Christian worldview causes alarm. And it should! When reading this text, Christians are forced to confront the reality that an integral piece of culture—the higher education system—is flawed, fallen, and in need of repair. The higher education system has lost sight of its beginnings, its purpose, and our God. This text reminds readers of these important origins, unified purpose, and eternal God.

This text is honest, robust, and dense. The authors intended to give a full picture of higher education and its soul, and they have done so well. Including everything from athletics, administrative positions, academic leadership, the role of theology, and more, this text leaves few to no stones unturned when it comes to exploring the purpose, or soul, of higher education. *Restoring the Soul* is a great resource for higher education professionals and student affairs practitioners who wish to better understand the former, current, and future state of the field.

Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream identify their audiences as "Christians in the multiversity" and "those seeking to nurture or build coherent Christian universities" (p. 12). There is no doubt, this text has already and will continue to benefit both of these groups. This work provides context often forgotten by professionals about the original purpose of higher education. Moreover, it examines the ways in which that first purpose has not been fulfilled. Finally, it provides a glimmer of hope for professionals—hope to keep working, serving, and remembering who God is

as well as the purpose He has called Christians to in higher education. This text emulates a common higher education practice—challenge and support—it supports the meaningful work of higher education professionals and challenges the soul behind it, for the glory of God.

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