

Book Review
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The Future of Christian Higher Education

Edited by David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee.
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David Dockery (president of Union University) and David Gushee (director of the Center for

Christian Leadership and associate professor of Christian studies at Union University) have assembled a challenging and wide-ranging set of articles that will be of value to every member of the CBFA. As we move into the 21st century, those of us concerned about Christian higher education are faced with issues ranging from institutional structure and vision to interpersonal relationships and value to individual discipline and devotion. This book addresses these issues in clear, compelling, and (I found) personally challenging ways.

The articles actually are drawn from addresses given at chapel addresses, lectures, and convocation and commencement exercises held at Union University. Additional material was drawn from addresses given at David Dockery's inauguration as president of Union University. Some material was drawn from the Conference on the Future of Christian Higher Education, jointly sponsored by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and Union University. The time span of the material was from 1996 to 1998.

CBFA members will recognize many of the authors of the material: Robert Andringa

(president of the CCCU), Stan Gaede (provost of Westmont College), Timothy George (dean of the Beeson Divinity School of Stamford University), Arthur Holmes (professor emeritus at Wheaton College), and Karen Longman (at the time of her address, vice president for professional development and research at the CCCU).

Counting the book's "Forward" by Robert Andringa, David Dockery's "Introduction," and Davis Gushee's "Afterword," there are 21 different "pieces" (called chapters) in this unique collection. Among the topics covered are:

- the great commandment as a paradigm for Christian higher education
- preserving distinctively Christian higher education
- sustaining Christian intellectual commitments
- the postmodern challenge
- integrating faith and learning
- the spiritual life of the Christian scholar

Readers of this collection will find themselves drawn to some of these pieces more than others. Let me share some ideas from some of the pieces

that I found especially challenging.

In “The Future of Christian Higher Education: An Introduction,” co-editor David Dockery challenges us to remember the lesson of Swiss watchmakers. In 1968 the Swiss made more than two-thirds of all watches sold in the world. Then they lost the market by refusing to embrace quartz technology—in 1980 Swiss watches only commanded 10 percent of the market. Dockery’s challenge is clearly stated: “A successful, profitable, and secure past was destroyed by an unwillingness ... to be future directed in outlook” (p. 5). Dockery goes on to describe the tensions we face in meeting the challenge of creating the future of Christian higher education: “We must revise what it means to be a part of a learning community that is dedicated to academic excellence, faithful to Christian convictions, devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the veracity of Holy Scriptures, where students will be educated and equipped for responsible service and leadership” (p. 5).

In “Envisioning the Future of the Christian University,” Karen Longman suggests in the form of questions “five dreams” for Christian higher education:

(1) What if Christian colleges became known as places committed to helping every student succeed? (2) What if Christian colleges were known as places that intentionally focused on helping students figure out how they are gifted, on what their strengths are, on what they could contribute to the world? (3) What if Christian colleges were known as places that opened up the world for incoming students? (4) What if Christian colleges collaborated to offer higher education from a biblical perspective for believers around the world? (5) What if Christian colleges, collectively, became known as the focal point for the best of thoughtful Christian scholarship?

In “The Role of Professional Education in Christian Higher Education,” David Dockery challenges Christians to be “intentional about integrating faith and learning in every discipline—not as a cliché, or public relations watchword, but as a foundational reality” (p. 77). Dockery articulates three goals for Christian higher education in this integrated pursuit: “To enable men and women to be prepared for their chosen vocation in such a way that they can be salt and light in the marketplace; to help

students become servant leaders and agents of change in our world; and to help [them] ... be prepared for work and to see it from God’s perspective in a way that will bring glory to Him ...” (p. 78).

Claude O. Pressnell’s piece, “The Spiritual Life of the Christian Scholar: Practicing the Presence of Christ,” had the most profound effect on me personally of all the articles in the book. His challenge was stated early in the piece: “Christian scholarship is more than merely an intellectual assent to a biblical understanding of a particular academic discipline; it is the expression of a life that is being fully redeemed by the activity of the living Christ” (p. 121). Later he states that “scholarship without devotion reduces itself to an attempt to jockey for position in the academic community rather than offering it as a form of worship to Christ” (p. 122). Pressnell’s call to Christlikeness modeled before our students was both challenging and convicting: “Students want to hear us pray, to know we have fasted in order to find resolve in a particular intellectual crisis, or that in a time of solitude and meditation we have a peace about God’s will concerning a particular decision” (p. 133).

David Gushee drives home a similar challenge in “Attract Them by Your Way of Life: The Professor’s Task in the Christian University.” Gushee identifies five virtues (defined as normative habits of heart, mind, and life) which might most clearly incarnate an authentically Christian way of life: (1) spiritual virtue: authentic piety (genuine devotion to God in a living relationship with Jesus Christ, regular prayer, study of Scripture, and a life wholly lived under God’s grace); (2) relational virtue: covenant fidelity (taking seriously the moral obligations created by our relational commitments to our spouses, children, colleagues, and students); (3) intellectual virtue: critical curiosity (the ability and desire to interact with ideas and to sift them for their truthfulness and value); (4) social virtue: transformative engagement (a sensitivity to the brokenness, suffering, and injustice to be found in our world and a vision for our redemptive role); and (5) personal virtue: purposeful self-discipline (a steady and committed pursuit of God’s kingdom rule in all areas of our personal lives).

I would urge all CBFA members to acquire a copy of this important work. Union University

and its president and other people involved with this project are to be commended. You will, as I did, find yourself encouraged and exhorted as you continue this journey in Christian higher education.

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