

***Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education.* By David S. Dockery. 2008; B&H Publishing Group; ISBN 978-0-8054-4788-0; \$19.99 list.**

In this book comprised of nine essays, Dockery casts a vision for the Christian university, characterized by biblical community, orthodox faith, academic and intellectual rigor, integration of faith and knowledge, and impact on the surrounding culture. The style is engaging and accessible, and Dockery raises a number of interesting issues and convincingly supplies several ideas which would sharpen the focus and boost the effectiveness of Christian universities. In the preface to the second edition, Dockery said his intended audience was anyone involved or thinking of being involved with a Christian university, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Dockery proposed to define the identity and role of Christian universities within the contexts of God's ministry and academia. His intention was for the Christian university to integrate Christian spiritual truth into the study of all other disciplines: He wrote, "I believe that the integration of faith and learning is the essence of authentic Christian higher education and should be wholeheartedly implemented across the campus and across the curriculum..." [4]. Furthermore, in his opinion, one of the biggest problems is the fragmentation of knowledge which "has resulted in a false dichotomy between the life of the mind and the life of faith" [11-12].

The goals of such integration of faith and learning are multiple. First, to "...provide education that is faithful to our heritage as Christ-centered institutions while seeking to be ever more connected to the reformulations of the world in which we now find ourselves" [2]. Second, "...to offer education that is academically rigorous and unapologetically Christian as we seek to become resources for serious Christian thinking and scholarship in all disciplines..." [3]. Third, such an "... education will mean much more than passing on content to our students, it will also mean shaping character, and it will move toward the development and construction of a convictional worldview by which we can see, learn, and interpret the world from the vantage point of God's revelation to us" [12]. As part of shaping character and living out faith, such institutions would be characterized by people serving one another, valuing one another, and doing life together in an encouraging and affirming community, while each striving to excel both in modeling the character of Christ and in learning. The ultimate result would be graduates who are prepared for both employment and the gospel mission in the context of daily life.

In chapter one – after reviewing history, from the founding of the earliest American colleges for the purpose of learning within the context of Christian faith, to the present day when lack of faith is not only accepted but sometimes practically enforced – Dockery argued that if renewal of our minds is real, then it should result in greater insight and perspective plus a willingness to engage lovingly with our culture. If this is so, then Christians should not separate the truths of their faith from the study of other disciplines, but rather should bring the advantages of their Christian insight and perspective into that study, because all truth is from God and integrated in nature. He noted that this was the historical view of Christian education in the early church and at the time of the Reformation.

In chapter two, Dockery explained that the primary purpose of the Christian university is to educate students, including educating them in how to think as Christians. Toward this end, Dockery favors a broad liberal arts education, which will equip students to think critically and creatively, so as to prepare them for the challenges of life and further learning. Dockery again called for integration of faith into learning, as a corrective for the secular-liberal errors of denying faith and promoting only an atheistic reasoning: “We must bring students to a mature reflection of what the Christian faith means for every field of study. In doing so we can develop a grace-filled convictional community of learning” [21]. Empowering students with a Christian perspective and the ability to think will lead to the development of individual character and a loving community, two more goals of the Christian university, which itself should be characterized by biblical community and the values of believers. To accomplish all of this, Dockery advocated intentional administration, personal mentoring and spiritual leadership by professors, an openness for serious intellectual engagement while embracing the historical aspects of the Christian faith, and an effort to influence the culture through the excellence of Christian arts, scholarship, and leadership.

In chapter three – after explaining that everyone has a perspective on life – Dockery explained that the Christian perspective must influence all areas of life and thought. This perspective begins with an understanding of the Triune God and the need to worship him, extends to the glory associated with people being created in God’s image and the corruption with which we are all born as a result of the first sin, and is not complete without the death and resurrection of Christ – the unique one who was both God and man – which brought deliverance to those who believe, both from eternal alienation from God and from the power of sin in this life. Such an understanding helps empower and motivate believers to a more godly and faithful life and to clearer thinking about world issues.

In chapter four, Dockery used Clement of Alexandria as a model for the Christian educator, “...because of his wide range of learning, his love of philosophy and literature, his concern for the cultivation of an intellectually serious Christianity, his interaction with the issues and trends in the changing world of his day, and perhaps most importantly because he was a layperson...” [54]. With Clement in mind, Dockery drew insight from the historical Christian intellectual tradition about the centrality of orthodox spiritual truths for the Christian perspective [reiterating some of the core truths from the previous chapter, while discussing some others] combined with the need for cultural engagement and critical thinking. Dockery discussed some implications for the Christian university: the intention to “...sanctify the secular [arts] as we carry forth the Christian intellectual tradition in our institutions” [63]; to learn from the past through history and the classics; to let faith shape our intellectual inquiry so that we apply quantitative and scientific tools for the good of society; to maintain academically rigorous standards in the classroom and in research; and to value and integrate all fields of learning. Dockery closed the chapter with some comments about implications for life, including applying God’s Word, loving people, seeking reconciliation and peace, and developing the mind and character.

In chapter five, Dockery elaborated on integrating the Christian perspective with learning in all subjects, as the distinctive task of Christian education. He declared that Christian studies are foundational “for serious intellectual wrestling with literary, philosophical, scientific, technological, and worldview issues” [73]. Though the Christian faith faces criticism for its

exclusivity, in fact [besides being true] this is favorable for leading to a unified understanding of knowledge. On that foundation, Dockery would overlay a broad liberal arts education to teach students to think critically and creatively [as described earlier], and then students would be prepared – intellectually and morally – to receive useful professional training to further prepare them for a vocation. Dockery used Paul’s discussion in Athens [Acts 17] as a model for integrating faith and learning, which would require the Christian university to understand the contemporary culture well enough to engage it with credibility through all academic disciplines, and openly live by the Christian perspective in all areas of life. Dockery said, “Many people today are rejecting the Christian faith not because they perceive it to be false but because they believe it is superficial or trivial. People are looking for an integrated worldview that brings coherence to all learning and helps make sense of life’s experiences, some of which are quite confusing” [82].

In chapters six and seven – after noting the recent academic trends in the opposite direction – Dockery elaborated on his vision for biblical community at the Christian university. Such community means giving up individualism to truly do life together, recognizing that the community is more important than the self. Said Dockery, “... an invitation to teach at a Christ-centered institution is an invitation not just to teach, not just to do research, not just to pursue truth, not just to invest in the lives of students, not just to develop relationships with colleagues who are choosing to create a sense of community – as vital as all of these things are – but to join in building a distinctive Christ-centered community” [93]. Again turning to Paul [Romans 12], Dockery provided building blocks for this community: authentic love, discernment of right and wrong, devotion and respect for one another, passion for God, faithful hope, generosity, hospitality, ambition to bless each other and live in peace, sharing good and bad times, serving each other, and humility. He envisioned a diverse body of people who could share unity in purpose, worship, essential Christian belief, service, and peaceful coexistence, while enjoying personal and academic freedom. Dockery noted that creating such a community not only would be in obedience to biblical teaching, but also highly attractive to those who do not yet know Christ.

In chapter eight, Dockery explained the need for Christian universities to embrace a theological core, for the sake of student development, community cultivation, and culture engagement. This entails affirming the creeds and confessions of the early church, but realizing there is room for interpretation. It also entails rigorous theological research and debate, while being mindful of the need to serve the church and laity, not just academia. Being theologically aware “...provides a coherent way of seeing life, of seeing the world distinct from deism, naturalism, materialism, existentialism, polytheism, mysticism, or deconstructionist postmodernism. Such a theistic perspective provides bearings and direction when confronted with secularistic and pluralistic approaches to truth and morality. Fear about the future, suffering, disease, and poverty are [*sic*] informed by Christian thinking grounded in the redemptive work of Christ and the grandeur of God” [132].

In chapter nine, Dockery considered the need to have a global perspective. He said educational institutions can help the gospel mission by “maintaining a credible Christian presence in the world” [144], by affirming the exclusive Christian gospel while also affirming religious freedom

and tolerance, engaging in the world-wide intellectual community, promoting justice, and creating an intercultural environment.

Overall, Dockery convincingly provided purpose and vision for Christian universities to integrate faith with learning, so as to equip students to effectively think, understand, and live, and thus have influence in the world. He has casted a vision that is well grounded in theology and history, well argued, and easily accessible to an average reader. There are only two shortcomings worth mentioning. First, by design, this book is limited to casting vision, not guiding implementation. Even so, it gives quite a bit of detail about how that vision could be played out, making formulation of implementation steps possible for others in their individual contexts. Second, the book is comprised of individual essays, and – even after revision for the second edition – there remains some repetitiveness, especially in later chapters. For example, much of chapter seven repeats the themes of chapter six, and strays into discussion of points made in earlier chapters, such as the integration of faith and learning, the value of a liberal arts education, and the need to engage culture instead of accommodating or hiding from it.

Overall, I recommend this book to anyone involved in higher education, especially Christian higher education. It raises issues worthy of discussion which will provoke deep thought by the reader, casts a grand and bold vision, and entertains.