

Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity

Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshva Raja, eds. *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010. 759 pp. \$80.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781870345804.

Proposed and written by an international group of scholars under the leadership of the Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), this volume aims to introduce the reader to the history, current state, and future possibilities for global theological education. Completed in just over a year, the purpose of the volume is to inform theological educators, theological institutions and associations, church leaders, and scholars interested in global developments about the state of theological education in different parts of the world and resources available for building partnerships, engaging in research, and assessing programs. Billing itself as “the first attempt to map and analyze developments in theological education on a global scale” (xxv), the volume includes essays from ninety-eight leaders in theological education worldwide, along with three forewords written by Ofelia Ortega, Desmond Tutu, and Robert Schreier.

One stated goal of the project was to include the faith groups that participated in the WCC’s Edinburgh 2010 mission conference and to represent all regions of the world while incorporating a balance of perspectives regarding gender, faith tradition, and cultural context. Approximately twenty percent of the authors are female. Geographic representation based on authors’ listed professional affiliations reveals a body tilted toward representing European perspectives, with more than one-third of the contributors writing from a European locale (although it is granted that some of these contributors hail from another continent). Another one-fifth write from North America, with one-sixth writing from Asia or Africa. Australia, the Middle East, and Latin and South America have less than five contributors apiece. This leaning continues into the included essays, with fully six essays describing theological education in Western Europe and another four focusing on theological education in Eastern and Central Europe while one apiece suffices for North America and the Middle East. Mainline Protestant and, to a lesser extent, Roman Catholic and evangelical perspectives are well represented in the volume, with smaller numbers of contributors representing Orthodox and pentecostal approaches. These divisions are largely in keeping with the membership of the World Council of Churches as a whole.

The work is divided into three primary sections. Part I discusses issues and themes of theological education globally, focusing on the past one hundred years (1910-2010) and divided into eighteen topic areas, including postcolonial education, the mission of the church, issues of gender and race, ecumenism, accreditation, spiritual formation, interfaith dialogue, curriculum development, libraries, and international partnerships. Part II provides a series of regional surveys by geographical region (Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Australia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North America, Eastern and Central Europe, and Western Europe). Part III focuses on how theological education occurs in a number of denominations and confessional approaches, including Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist, evangelical, and pentecostal schools and churches. An appendix lists selected websites for additional resources.

Several topics that receive much current discussion in theological education are not represented in this volume, which the editors attribute to the tight timeline under which this volume was constructed. Such topics include environmental education, human sexuality and sexual orientation in theological education, the impact of information technology, and an essay regarding theological education of pentecostals in North America.

The volume is particularly helpful for learning about initiatives and organizations addressing regional and global theological education. Differing approaches to accreditation, international partnership, and models of education are discussed in essays throughout the volume. Case studies are also provided in many essays, with some essays primarily describing the experiences of one organization or initiative. The histories of theological education in regions and denominations serve as helpful orientations to particular locales and current concerns.

Essays differ in length and quality, as well as in the number of additional resources provided. The depth of coverage on a particular topic also varies; while topics such as accreditation and quality assurance and public ministry are covered by three essays apiece to account for different geographically based approaches, topics such as HIV/AIDS education, disabilities and theological education, and education by extension are limited to one essay each. Furthermore, while the editors succeeded in including a variety of perspectives, these are not evenly represented throughout the text and topics discussed. Given the concern of some authors in the volume regarding the perceived normativity of Western theological education in terms of subject areas covered, approaches, and language abilities needed as compared to other regional approaches, the heavy inclusion of European and North American authors is problematic for the volume's stated aims.

A few minor quibbles relate to the organization of the volume. Introductory overviews of the topics and perspectives covered in each section would be welcome additions; in the current model, a reader must jump from one topic to another without any orientation other than a bolded number and topic title. Furthermore, an editorial decision to allow authors to use their own bibliography, footnoting, and grammatical styles causes disjointed reading in places. A more thorough editing process to correct for misspellings and omitted words, as well as stylistic similarity, would make using the book as a whole easier. When considering just one or two chapters at a time, however, these inconsistencies are easier to overlook.

Despite these caveats, this book provides a helpful starting point overall for individuals interested in learning more about the state of theological education worldwide in a single volume. I recommend its purchase by seminaries and graduate schools of theology. It brings together voices from multiple continents and denominational approaches into a single place, which gives the volume reference utility. It also succeeds in its aims to provide resources for connection and additional research. I do not see turning to this volume for a quick question, but referring a patron to it as a starting point for learning more about the status of global theological education. The references from many authors, as well as the appendix of websites, will lead to additional resources as needed.

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