

2012

de Muynck, Hegeman, and Vos's "Bridging the Gap: Connecting Christian Faith and Professional Practice in a Pluralistic Society;" Dinakaral's "Christian Higher Education and Globalization in Asia/Oceania: Realities and Challenges" - Book Review

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Recommended Citation

Badley, Ken, "de Muynck, Hegeman, and Vos's "Bridging the Gap: Connecting Christian Faith and Professional Practice in a Pluralistic Society;" Dinakaral's "Christian Higher Education and Globalization in Asia/Oceania: Realities and Challenges" - Book Review" (2012). *Faculty Publications - School of Education*. Paper 43.
http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/43

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Bram de Muynck, Johan Hegeman, and Pieter Vos
***Bridging the Gap: Connecting Christian Faith and Professional
Practice in a Pluralistic Society***
Sioux Center, IA: IAPCHE / Dordt College, 2011 pb 405pp \$25
ISBN: 978-0-932914-88-0

J. Dinakaralal (ed.)
***Christian Higher Education and Globalization in Asia/Oceania:
Realities and Challenges***
Sioux Center, IA: IAPCHE / Dordt College, 2010 pb 259pp \$20
ISBN: 978-0-932914-85-9

These two volumes are both welcome additions to the series of regional conference proceedings published over the last decade by the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (see <http://www.iapche.org>). Having attended the *Bridging the Gap* conference in the Netherlands (in the spring of 2009), I can attest to both the quality of thought and the passion to bring about deeply Christian forms of higher education among those who affiliate with IAPCHE.

The volume edited by Dinakaral gathers plenary sessions and other papers presented at a conference of the same name held in Taipei, Taiwan, in May 2008. Two features of the book warrant noting. First, the book divides into three sections, treating higher education, elementary and secondary education, and the “academic mission to marginalized peoples” separately. These divisions reflect the three tracks on offer at the 2008 conference. Second, each section includes two or three papers with responses from other scholars. Readers who missed the conference will sense some of the conference’s energy in the to’ing and fro’ing represented in these chapters. Some of that energy derives, no doubt, from the fact that conference participants went to Taipei from several continents (16 countries on one account, p. 50). But keen differences of perspective emerge that have as much to do with theology and politics as with nationality and location.

A theme running throughout *Christian Higher Education and Globalization in Asia/Oceania* is that globalization—under its many names, such as *pluralism* and *diversity*—presents new challenges to Christian education. That will not surprise many readers of this journal. What might surprise is the variety of perspectives, all going by the name *Reformed*, present at the conference and apparent in the book. Educators in Reformed circles in North America, western Europe, and the United Kingdom who desire greater insight into Reformed thought in other parts of the world should read this volume. The third section (on marginalized peoples) is especially revealing of the diversity of thought that goes by the name Reformed. Participants in the marginalized-peoples track at the IAPCHE conference in Taipei engaged with questions about materialism, poverty, gender discrimination, and children in poverty. Late in the book, in fact, David Lim uses the familiar word *transformational* in ways that might have some readers checking the front cover of their book to see if they accidentally picked up something by Illich or Friere.

Not all can learn first-hand about education—Christian or otherwise—in Asia and Oceania. This book offers a breadth of perspectives on what is happening and on what should be happening in those parts of God’s world. The book is packed without appearing overloaded. I recommend it without reservation.

Almost a year after the Taipei conference, IAPCHE hosted a working conference in Biezenmortel, the Netherlands, asking how to connect Christian faith with professional practice. *Bridging the Gap* includes

many plenary sessions and papers from that conference. At 400 pages, it could intimidate, but the editors have taken pains to organize it in a way that most readers will find inviting.

De Muynck, Hegeman, and Vos begin by explaining briefly the three questions that drove the conference:

- How can spiritual and moral formation lead to bridging the gap?
- How are worldviews essential for understanding the gap and bridging it in a pluralistic society?
- How do practices provide normative guidance for bridging the gap?

Readers will benefit by giving the few minutes needed to read the six pages of introduction because the editors offer there both a structure for the whole book and an interesting overview—nearly a free-standing essay in its own right—of how they see these questions connecting to each other and to practice.

The first section contains five plenary addresses, two of which have attached responses. Participants in the conference may have been heartened, as was I, by a dialogical tone that extended even to the plenary sessions. Obviously, such dialogue cannot always be caught in print, but the inclusion here of two responses helps the reader get a sense of the collaborative and still-in-progress character both of IAPCHE's overall project and of this 2009 conference. For my money, this book would be worth its price for these first ninety pages alone; that twenty-six more chapters follow this introduction feels like a bonus.

The editors have organized the remainder of *Bridging the Gap* into two clusters of chapters. The first includes four chapters under the heading of "Worldview and Practices," and two chapters entitled "Spiritual and Moral Formation" and "Youth and Identity." These eight papers range from the sociological to the theological to the ecclesiastical. The second cluster has four sections, the first of which offers three chapters on practices in church ministry. The second, "Practices of Health Care and Social Care," contains five chapters which tend to focus on strategies to bridge the gap, that is, to attend to the ethical, faith, and worldview dimensions within medical and social work education. The second cluster ties two chapters together under the heading "Practice of Journalism and Business." Again, the presenters/authors want to locate these areas of

education in a larger framework, in this case one that asks about globalization and ethics.

The last section of the book contains eight chapters related to education. This section runs from teacher training, to the role of stories, to the meaning of *vocation* and *inspiration* for educators. One of the papers in this section led to my asking at my own place of work if we could afford to bring a speaker from England to the USA to speak, such was the quality and passion in evidence in Biezenmortel. I cannot answer whether a book can catch that kind of energy for readers who were not in attendance. However, as I do for the Dinakaral volume of papers assembled from the Taipei conference, I recommend this volume without reservation. Its thirty-one chapters are a feast, and readers of all theological stripes inside and outside the Reformed higher education movement will take courage from *Bridging the Gap*.

Ken Badley