

# IMPLEMENTING GLOBAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A response to Richard Slimbach's paper: Globalization, the Kingdom of God and Christian Higher Education  
By Donald E. Douglas

Richard Slimbach has articulated the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the challenge of the phenomenon of globalization succinctly and with considerable insight in his statement. He rightly places the matter of globalization within the eschatological realities of the Kingdom of God and calls us to consider globalization in light of kingdom ideals.

In our present reality, however, Slimbach recognizes that we only dimly apprehend the kingdom ideal on our campuses particularly in terms of our commitment to diversity, pedagogical practice, justice, social behaviors, attitudes toward change and a variety of other indicators. His check list of 25 signs of a true global institution of higher learning are particularly instructive.

While we may quibble with details of Slimbach's prospectus, most of us are at least intuitively convinced that he has correctly defined reality for us in Christian higher education. No Christian college President or Board of Directors is likely to seriously disagree with these ideals. The issue for most of us lies in implementation. How can we get from here to there in terms of the indicators listed? While affirming the layout of Slimbach's challenge, I would like to try to indicate what it will take for our institutions to more fully approximate the ideals set forth for us so clearly in his statement.

## **Intentionality**

Beginning with the board and permeating the entire administrative structure of the academy there must be a clear determination to become all that the institution should be in terms of the global ideals presented here. This may require a total conversion in some cases and a radical reordering of priorities in others. Informing and educating boards, administrators, staffs and faculties to the absolute necessity of this transformation are critical. This process should result, as Slimbach suggests, in rewriting mission statements and strategic objectives to include institutional commitment to global Christian education. In short, we must *believe* in what the paper outlines and be willing to welcome change in our structures and procedures to deal with its implications.

## **Implementation**

Part of the commitment to globalization must be to recruit and hire gifted, talented and qualified representatives of the kingdom who are ethnically diverse for faculty and key staff positions in our institutions. There is probably nothing that more concretely demonstrates our commitment to the demands of globalization than this. The visible presence of such people among us makes the institution "friendly" to ethnically diverse students. Equally important is the fact that our assumptions will be challenged in new ways and "business as usual" will not continue since alternative viewpoints and challenges to the way we do things will emerge. This entails some risk, to be sure. There is the ever-present "constituency" to worry about. The nature of institutional decision-making may have to be revised. Our campuses may be less comfortable for the dominant majority for a while as we learn new ways of accomplishing our tasks.

## **Curricula**

The ways and means we utilize to deliver higher education will likely need to undergo serious review as well. This will clearly involve the entire faculty and educational support team. Commitment to diversity necessarily implies a wide range of teaching and learning styles. Willingness to employ different approaches to educational delivery must be an ingredient in each new faculty appointment we make. Re-educating existing faculty to alternative methods of teaching and learning must accompany this commitment. Team-teaching assignments between professors of differing ethnicities will afford crucial experience that can lead to sharpening our ability to engage in true global Christian education.

## **Exposure**

Engagement in a variety of expanding globalization experiences as administrators, faculty and students should begin at home and extend to overseas opportunities. Each institution should commit a portion of its annual budget to support such endeavors. Faculty and staff development is crucial to the accomplishment of genuine global Christian education. Local commitments to explore difference as it exists around us will provide the necessary experiential base to extend our understanding to international contexts. Field-based learning can engage all members of the academy's staff.

## **Task-Forcing**

Most of our campuses are surrounded by populations that are underrepresented on our campuses. These populations may be defined by ethnicity, language, gender, socio-economic status, employment, religion or a host of other determinants. We should be preemptive in identifying these collectivities and strategizing how we can serve them. This may mean that we will have to define our role differently as we incorporate these diverse populations into our sphere of ministry and service. It may mean providing remedial programs that are not necessarily income-generating but that testify to our kingdom-centeredness by providing an educational cup of cold water in the name of our Lord to those that are thirsty around us.

## **Risk**

Educational institutions are notoriously conservative by nature. We find comfort and security in the familiar as we carry on the "tradition" of our institutions. Harkening back to the founding fathers, we intone adherence to procedures that, in some cases, the fathers themselves would have long ago abandoned! As kingdom representatives we are called to be risk-takers. Experimentation in the name of learning how to advance the kingdom is a good investment. A small percentage of our budgets should be devoted to experimenting with a wide range of educational initiatives. Not every attempt will succeed but the process of encouraging an experimental frame of mind will pay healthy dividends among our people as they catch the adventure of moving beyond their depth discovering in the process that there are new ways of accomplishing our tasks. Students themselves must be enlisted in this effort. This can be infectious as the entire campus community engages in practicing the "community of scholars" concept.

## **Reflection**

There will be a need for a continual flow of information, research, writing, seminars and interaction as member schools contribute to our ongoing understanding of international globalization. Resources must be made available for this production as we learn how to advance the kingdom of God through our educational mandate in an age of globalization. We should become more collegial in our efforts. Schools in the same locality can pool faculty/staff resources to address these issues together. Specializations necessary to the task of preparing adequately educated students can be shared providing a richer resource for global learning than may exist at any one institution. Duplication and competition may not be commensurate with good stewardship of resources in the kingdom of God. Sharing successes and failures in our endeavor can enable us to learn how to realize the purpose of God for Christian higher education in the new century.

## **Exchange**

With the advent of the interrelated world that we experience every day it behooves us to create opportunities to learn from counterparts in other corners of the global village. Priority should be given to enlisting and engaging appropriate representatives from other societies, cultures and economies to enrich our understanding of our shrinking world by serving stints among us. Rather than simply providing office space and support for their stay, we must involve them in our operations and decision-making processes so that they may provide a much-needed critique to our bounded systems. By the same token, key personnel from our institutions should take opportunity to do likewise in institutions abroad. Commitment to globalization implies that we have much to learn from one another. Learning how to get the most from these intense interactions is a responsibility of our educational leadership.

## **Mentoring**

In order to achieve success in diversifying and internationalizing our campuses, we must allot resources to accomplish adequate mentoring of diverse new faculty and staff. This will require some financial investment but will also require staff and faculty time. Encouragement of this mentoring function will be evident in our willingness to provide specialized equipping and support for those who will perform this vital function. Our goal should be to see that the new hires have maximum chance to succeed in the new environment. The purpose is not to insure that the new hire adopts the prevailing culture-bound, institutional way of doing things but rather to provide support, encouragement and a sounding board for ideas and experiences that the new staffer has to offer the institution.

## **Inclusiveness**

Our theological predispositions must be challenged and expanded. The experience that our institutions have with the Christian faith sometimes differs radically with that of those who do not share our culture. Too often they are made to feel alien and defensive among us – particularly in terms of some of our theological understandings. That which should be a basis for unity some-

times becomes a source of disappointment, confusion and frustration. In the west we tend to define, categorize, explain and exclude. Other societies seek to harmonize, blend, relate and include. It will be important for our institutions to expand the bands of the rainbow that are acceptable theologically as a manifestation of the kingdom of God. To this end, our theological faculties must be central to the process of internationalization and globalization. Failing this, it will not matter how effective we are in other dimensions of our mission. A commitment to viewing the faith from the standpoint of others, and what they have learned about the walk of faith is critical. There is so much we as western Christians can learn from those who have experienced deep poverty, suffering, persecution, pressure and minority status in different societies. Alternative ways of experiencing and practicing genuine Christian faith can be instructive and spiritually revitalizing.

### **The Co-Curriculum**

Perhaps one of the most fruitful means for addressing the issues implicit in global Christian education with our students is through the campus life activities that are a part of each institution. It is here where issues of justice, acceptance and equity are most likely to be encountered by students. Residence and student affairs staffs must be in possession of truly global world and life views and skills of facilitating substantial learning in the daily encounter with diversity that takes place on the campus. The management of off-campus service learning experiences and mission trips should be closely integrated with the curriculum in order to achieve maximum global effect in the lives of students. The entire campus must be alert to “teaching/learning moments” that occur in the life of each institution. These may be local events or issues that provide a unique opportunity to address issues of global significance. The campus should stand ready to make necessary adjustments to its schedule to capitalize on these moments through teach-ins or special emphasis treatments. These relevant, high profile issues can play a vital role in raising the consciousness of our students to vital matters in global Christian education.

These suggestions are merely introductory and exploratory. It remains for each institution to determine how it will cope with the challenge of global Christian education. But cope we must.

Christian education is always futuristic in its orientation since we move toward a destiny ordained by God. The age of globalization provides new perspectives on our pilgrimage toward the City of God and our calling to equip tomorrow’s Christian leadership with the capacity to engage the world responsibly and effectively for our Lord.