

**Encyclopedia of Christian Education**, edited by George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport. London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, Volume 1, A-F (i-xxxv + 1-528 pp.), Volume 2, G-R (529-1087 pp.) and Volume 3, S-Z (1089-1630 pp.), £240.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8108-8492-2.

The *Encyclopedia of Christian Education*, spanning three volumes, contains more than 1,200 entries (in alphabetical order) by 400 contributors from 75 countries. The editorial advisory board consists of more than 30 scholars and five consulting editors. There is representation from a range of Christian denominations. It is, as a consequence, a large and significant reference work, designed and priced primarily for purchase by institutional libraries rather than individual readers. The editors, advisory board members, consultants and 'Foreword Contributors' (including Stanley Hauerwas, Richard J. Mouw, J. I. Packer, Ronald J. Sider and Will Willimon) have impressive credentials. They are overwhelmingly males drawn from higher education institutions in the United States of America, although Jeff Astley of Durham University (UK) is listed amongst the Editorial Advisory Board members.

The scope of the work is determined by an acceptance that 'to become a Christian is to be educated' and 'Christians are people to whom nothing human is foreign', as Stanley Hauerwas states in his Foreword (p. xv). Accordingly, in their Preface, Kurian and Lamport state that the *Encyclopedia* includes 'an ambitious and panoptic survey of the history, traditions, methodologies, institutions, curricula, and rubrics of Christian education for the last 2,000 years' (p. xxiii). At the same time, they recognise two primary kinds of Christian education: that which occurs in formal day schools and that which occurs in informal faith community settings. The *Encyclopedia* covers both of these and much more.

According to the editors, the goal of Christian education, as opposed to secular education, 'lies in the sanctification of knowledge and using knowledge itself as a tool of salvation' (p. xxiii). It is concerned for the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and character; 'the yoking of the human mind to the mind of God'; and, as part of the church's

engagement with the world, nurturing ‘faith in the context of shared values, beliefs and attitudes’ (p. xxiii). Christian education is not deemed to be different in pedagogy or methodology, ‘but deeper in function [being] concerned with the ultimate purpose of human life [and] driven by the urge to find meaning in existence’ (p. xxxiv). Overall, it seeks to bring about *metanoia*, that is, Christo-centric transformation or transmutation, based on unique content (revealed scripture) and a distinctive dynamic (the power of the Holy Spirit). Its aim is the accomplishment of human intimacy with the divine, which is at the heart of Christianity, and which is only made possible by transforming hope, principled freedom, countercultural faith, restorative grace, and fortifying love (p. xxxv).

In J. I. Packer’s Prologue, the *curriculum* of Christian education is described as ‘authoritative intellectual and moral material drawn from God’s own self-revelation in the history recorded, the thinking embedded, and the ethic delineated in the canonical Holy Scriptures, a reality that reaches its climax in the space-time, word-and-deed, provincial-Jewish, historical–redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, whom Christians adore as the Son of God incarnate and risen, the perfection of humanness, the ultimate authority on all aspects of the relational knowledge, sovereign love, and saving action of God, himself the personal transformer of all who truly trust him’ (p. xiii). This lengthy quotation is representative of the evangelical rhetorical flourishes within the text, which will not appeal to all potential readers. Some may also find uncomfortable the assertion that the Western school system has been taken over by ‘humanistic scientism’, and that ‘independent Christian educational institutions’ have developed, firstly, ‘to make Christian values and behavioural standards culturally normative’ in the communities within which Christianity has been planted, and secondly, to produce ‘material critiquing non-, sub-, and anti-Christian views and reaffirming their own stance in face of them’ (p. xiv). It is clear that the intended readership is firmly located within the Christian community, including ‘the more than 21,000 Christian educational institutions in English-speaking countries’, and ‘local churches, denominational leadership, and para-church organizations’ (p. xxv). Readers from different cultural contexts and faith traditions, as well as those with different conceptions of Christian education, may

struggle with the dissonance between their own assumptions and experiences and those of many of the contributors to the *Encyclopedia*.

According to Kurian and Lamport, this is ‘the first encyclopedia in publishing history dedicated to the history of Christian education in all countries of the world and through the past 20 centuries’ (p. xxiii). Its purpose is fourfold: ‘(1) to fill a gap in the reference shelf on education, (2) to explore the legacy and heritage of Christian education in the history of Christianity, (3) to restore a study of Christian education to the curricula of teachers’ colleges, and (4) to foster further research on Christian education at all levels by providing a flagship resource’ (p. xxiii). The question of whether it is ‘presumptive for a global volume on Christian education to emanate from the United States’ is raised, but it leads to the largely unsupported and unclear conclusion that such a volume can ‘contribute a worldwide sensitivity to the concerns and practices of Christian education without borders’ (p. xxv). The North American-centricism of many of the *Encyclopedia* entries is stark with much that is unduly jurisdiction-bounded.

For Kurian and Lamport (see pp. xxx-xxxiv), the ‘encroaching challenges’ facing Christian education globally include: (1) disorientating amnesia (i.e. ‘discontinuity between the historical faith and the current lived experience of Christianity’); (2) suppressed thinking (i.e. ‘devaluing, even belittling, the role of reason and critical reflection’); (3) redoubtable postmodernism (including cultural fatigue and the consequences of plurality); (4) divisive interpretation (i.e. the challenge to authority posed by the ‘uncontrollable diversity of [theological and interpretive] outcomes’); and (5) muddled approaches (i.e. a failure to grasp the central concepts of Christian education: ‘*faith* that requires obedience in submission to God and in mission to the world, *hope* that sees a transcendent story of this life and the next, and *love* that binds us into a nurturing community and extends to despairing humanity’). They argue that each of these ‘encroaching challenges’ should be met by the following ‘engaging opportunities’: (1) meaningful commemorations (i.e. remembering the Church’s heritage and truth); (2) probing reflection (i.e. ‘reflecting on and articulating beliefs about God and the world that Christians share’); (3) irresistible citizenship (i.e. emphasizing ‘the

true-north guidance of the Holy Spirit to negotiate our place in the world’); (4) generous humility (i.e. promoting a theological and biblical focus for all education, with grace and humility ‘as the church makes its way to faithful means of encountering both the Word and the world’); and (5) faithful gestures (i.e. ‘the training in those gestures through which we learn the story of God and God’s will for our lives’). In the end, the compilation of the *Encyclopedia* is part of their search for the ‘wisdom to apply human development research, theological scholarship, and educational theory and practice for the creative and faithful application of biblical truth ... in the deeply meaningful, life-affirming, radicalizing Christian way’ (p. xxxv).

The entries that follow, in the main text of the *Encyclopedia*, are far more standard in terms of theological and theoretical framing than the prologue, forewords and introduction. Many are excellent summations of fields of enquiry, biographical vignettes, historical narratives, philosophical discussions, and so forth. Inevitably, the quality is variable, and one could argue about many decisions regarding selection and emphasis both within and between the entries. Nevertheless, for theologians and educationists concerned about the field of Christian education this will be a significant scholarly resource.

Dr R. J. K. Freathy  
University of Exeter  
Email: [r.j.k.freathy@ex.ac.uk](mailto:r.j.k.freathy@ex.ac.uk)