

The Oikonomia Network, in partnership with ICETE, has commissioned writers from four global regions to share the developments, challenges and opportunities involved in overcoming the sacred/secular divide in theological education in their contexts. These articles are for your personal use as you prepare to attend ICETE C-18, so our time in Panama City will be as fruitful as possible; please do not publish or redistribute them. The Oikonomia Network is a community of evangelical theological educators and schools dedicated to preparing church leaders to bear God's image, bear witness and bear fruit in every area of life, and to help others do so, with particular emphasis on needed growth in whole-life discipleship, fruitful work and economic wisdom; for more information see [oikonomianetwork.org](http://oikonomianetwork.org).

## ICETE 2018: The Secular/Sacred Divide and Theological Education

### THE WEST

W. Jay Moon

Professor of Evangelism and Church Planting, Asbury Theological Seminary

An African proverb states, “*Suom dan lang chala, fi lang yuka*” – if a rabbit changes the direction he runs, you must change the direction you shoot. It is easy to make changes when hunting rabbits, but it is not so easy to change the directions of institutions.

Theological institutions in the western world are facing rapid cultural and economic pressures. Many are reluctant to change, even though the success of the “hunt” depends on change. While topics like work, business, economics and entrepreneurship have not been part of theological training in the past, the new environment that western schools find themselves in has created a demand to introduce these topics – even though the response has been slow.

#### **Curricular Focus Areas**

Four curricular areas where theological schools have made the most progress bridging the secular-sacred divide include:

1. Theology of vocation (calling): Courses help students recognize and value non-clergy as well as clergy positions as holy callings given by God to carry out the *Missio Dei*. As the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) states: “We have a dream that every Christian would go out into their bit of God’s world confident that God can work through them...[where] 98% of Christians spend 95% of their waking lives ‘on the frontline’ – in shops and schools and shelters, in homes and offices and gyms.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Biblical studies on scripture passages addressing work, poverty and wealth: Biblical perspectives are offered on the meaning of work and wealth, and the responsibility to address poverty. For example, Sioux Falls Seminary’s course “Faith, Business, and Money” is team-taught by eleven faculty who discuss a variety of biblical perspectives on these issues.
3. Christian ethics: Amidst workplace pressures, envy, competition, corruption and so on, courses outline ethical perspectives to offer Christian guidance. The Mockler Center for Faith and Ethics in the Workplace at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, for example, hosts an annual faith and work seminar. Several missionaries in Eastern Europe have highlighted this as a major area of need.
4. Social good through business: Social entrepreneurship is gaining more attention in U.S. business schools, and this is now making its way to theological

institutions.<sup>2</sup> Businesses can create value for communities to address social ills. For example, Richard Higginson, Director of Faith in Business at Ridley Hall in Cambridge, researches and discusses alternative business models such as social enterprise, micro-finance, fair trade, cooperatives and eco-friendly companies. Asbury Theological Seminary goes a step further and hosts an annual business “pitch” competition for students to pitch a social entrepreneurship business plan that both results in profit and addresses a social concern to reveal the kingdom of God. Several student-run social entrepreneurship enterprises have been incubated by this competition and are presently operating. In the U.K, fresh expressions of the church are engaging unchurched and de-churched people in the marketplace. Entrepreneurial church plants are a subset of this movement, whereby church planters start businesses (e.g., coffee shop, café, pizza shop, gym, hotel) in order to create a venue for a church plant.

## **Regional Diversity**

### *United Kingdom*

Beginning in 1982, John Stott and others noticed how difficult it was for Christians to engage their faith in the marketplace, thereby limiting the church’s mission. The LICC formed to “recover Jesus’ central emphasis on growing whole-life disciples as the primary means for mission.”<sup>3</sup> Other parachurch organizations also arose to tackle this challenge in the U.K., such as A Call to Business and Business Connect. In 1989, theological institution Ridley Hall in Cambridge was started to recognize and respond to the same need.

### *United States*

David Miller’s historical survey *God at Work* describes how the “faith and work movement” grew almost entirely outside formal theological institutions for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This changed near the end of the century with the founding of initiatives like Gordon-Conwell’s Mockler Center in 1994 and the participation of theological scholars in the work of the Theology of Work Project. Beginning in 2010, a grant initiative of the Kern Family Foundation gathered more U.S. evangelical seminaries to discuss how theological education could bridge the secular-sacred divide. This initiative eventually became the Oikonomia Network, which now has 22 partner schools. The network’s programs affect classes with attendance of over 4,000 students and extracurricular activities with attendance of over 16,000 students annually. Faculty from the schools gather regularly for collaboration, development and networking.

### *Australia*

Lindsay McMillan, an Australian academic and thought leader, notes that Australian theological institutions have initially engaged the theology of vocation and calling, but several are now eager to engage this discussion more fully, largely due to cultural and economic pressures. He describes the topic of entrepreneurship as being in “neon lights” in Australian culture, and this emphasis is influencing theological institutions and parachurch ministries.

### *Eastern Europe*

Since many pastors are bi-vocational (e.g., an estimated 80% in the Czech Republic), there is great interest in entrepreneurship in general. This is a huge opportunity for seminaries. Some seminaries already teach ethics in the marketplace (e.g., in Ukraine).

## Obstacles to Growth

Some obstacles seminaries face in this area include:

1. Politics: People often have strong political attachments to economic ideologies. In highly polarized cultural environments, this can lead to assumptions and biases that prevent people from engaging with others meaningfully on topics related to work and the public square. This is evident in the present U.S. environment, but other countries are facing similar ideological challenges.
2. Resistance to change: Lindsay McMillan notes: "Colleges have a hard time to move fast enough to be relevant. We need to have entrepreneurial leadership and agility." In several Eastern European countries (e.g., Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania), the young generation has a great interest in entrepreneurship but this is not discussed often in church or seminaries. The same could be said of Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy.
3. Busy work schedules: Students and faculty are increasingly pressed with tight schedules and budgets. In urban settings, the daily commute further limits available time for co-curricular activities.
4. Ivory Tower-ism: Michael Moynagh, in the U.K., notes that discussions of the secular-sacred divide need to engage people at a practical level that is assessable to non-clergy. Academic institutions typically speak mostly to those in the academic world.

## Changing Our Direction

The changing cultural climate for Christianity in the west requires theological institutions to change accordingly. While many parachurch ministries have awakened to the need for whole-life discipleship in areas affected by work and economics, theological schools are increasingly making changes as well. The present interest and trajectory gives us reason to hope in the Lord that the best is yet to come.

## Resources

Mark Green, *Transforming Work* (DVD series), London Institute for Contemporary Christianity: <https://www.licc.org.uk/product/transforming-work/>

Richard Higginson, *Faith, Hope and the Global Economy*, InterVarsity Press, 2012.

David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice*, SCM Press, 2012.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.licc.org.uk/about/#our-vision>

<sup>2</sup> See for example Danielson, ed. *Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World*. R. Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing. 2015; W. Jay Moon, ed. *Case Studies in Social Entrepreneurship*. Nicholasville, KY: DOPS. 2017 (available on I-books).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.licc.org.uk/about/#our-vision>