Journal of Catholic Education

Volume 2 | Issue 4 Article 8

6-1-1999

Responses

John C. Holmes

MOVING BEYOND INDIFFERENCE: A RESPONSE TO LOURDES SHEEHAN

JOHN C. HOLMES
Association of Christian Schools International

Evangelical postsecondary institutions which are members of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)—Bible colleges, Christian liberal arts colleges and universities—comprise 124,000 students, or 17% of ACSI's student enrollment in North America (Association of Christian Schools International, 1997). Recent discussions with leaders of these and other evangelical institutions have led us to conclude that most evangelical colleges have placed limited value on the current K-12 Christian school movement.

This indifference may have to do with the history of evangelical colleges. Most were founded before the phenomenal growth of the Christian day school movement which began its surge in the 1960s. Fifty-three percent (53.2%) of ACSI member colleges in 1996 were founded before World War II and 77% were in existence by 1965. This was in contrast to ACSI member schools in North America from preschool through twelfth grade. Only 1.3% of the P-12 members existed before 1941 and 90% had not been founded in 1965. Evangelical colleges had already established patterns of providing teachers for American public schools. They may also have been unwilling to be viewed as supporting "white flight" to "segregation academies" which, admittedly, was a part of this movement's impetus in certain regions of the country (Carper & Layman, 1997).

Christian college officials appear to have limited knowledge of Christian school associations in North America, such as ACSI, which is headquartered in Colorado; Christian Schools International (CSI) in Michigan; the American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) in Missouri; the Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship (ORUEF) in Oklahoma, and so on. For the most part, these officials have not attempted to understand the dynamics of each association's constituency. Just a cursory glance at the maps in *Private Schools in the United States* (McLaughlin & Broughman, 1997) would show that conservative Christian schools as a whole (p. 30) have a different geographic constituency from ACSI's, even though ACSI (p.

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126) comprises half of the conservative Christian schools in the country (p. 28). ACSI is predominantly a western association, while the highest concentration of conservative Christian schools is in the South. In spite of its similar name, Christian Schools International, which is Calvinist, does not consider itself "conservative Christian" and is not listed under that category in the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) reports. CSI's main area of concentration is the Midwest.

Most evangelical colleges do not design their teacher education programs with private or Christian school teaching in mind. In spite of this, 51 of 91 member colleges of the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities (56%) are now members of ACSI. Christian liberal arts colleges join ACSI especially for student recruitment purposes. Roughly one in five of their entering freshmen is the product of K-12 Christian schools.

Only five of those 51 Christian colleges have sought approval of their teacher education program through the ACSI Approved Teacher Education Program. Most preservice teachers trained in these colleges are on their way to teach in public schools. This is not surprising since almost 9 out of 10 (88.3%) of full-time equivalent teachers in the U.S. teach in the public sector. Then there is the economic reality that private school teachers, on average, earn less than two-thirds of the average base salary of public school teachers (McLaughlin & Broughman, 1997).

One Christian college official in the Midwest said that local public school systems had recruited all of the college's education majors long before Christian school administrators thought to contact the college. None of their education majors would have any trouble being placed in public school teaching positions. Public school recruiters appreciated the "values and mores" of the Christian college's graduates. Yes, the college leader knew that an ACSI teachers' convention was in the area, but why spend the money to participate?

Because of situations such as these, there are not enough teachers trained in evangelical colleges to meet the teacher placement demands of evangelical elementary and secondary schools. Today, approximately half the teachers hired by Christian day schools received their undergraduate degrees from state universities. According to the NCES, 64.2% of ACSI teachers are state certified, while 34.0% are certified by a private organization (McLaughlin, & Broughman, 1997). One of the fastest growing areas of service by ACSI to its member schools is teacher and administrator certification specifically for Christian educators. Many who seek ACSI certification already have state credentials, but they have little or no formal Bible training. Nor do they understand the philosophy of Christian school education. The late Roy Lowrie, Jr., Ed.D., longtime headmaster at Delaware County Christian School and mentor to many Christian school administrators, used to say that it took three to four years for state college trained teachers to begin to under-

stand the mission of the Christian school.

For too long K-12 religious schools and their postsecondary counterparts have been at odds with or indifferent to each other's concerns. Recently ACSI has chosen to find a way to improve the dialogue. ACSI's executive staff and regional directors are attempting to come alongside and nudge evangelical colleges into learning more about the K-12 religious school movement in North America. Slowly, religious college leaders are beginning to recognize the movement's diversity and interact with its varied constituencies. This interaction is proving to be beneficial for evangelical K-12 schools and the colleges.

An additional trend is emerging as a result of the progressive recognition of the Christian day school movement. Bible colleges, many of which did not consider Christian school teaching a ministry, are now re-evaluating this limited viewpoint. Some now offer an education major with the goal of Christian school teacher certification. Of the 17 ACSI Approved Teacher Education Programs (ACSI, 1997), eight hold accreditation with the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges (Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, 1994), with three additional Bible colleges currently seeking ACSI approval.

Evangelical Christian colleges and those representing other religious traditions have a unique opportunity to advance the private religious school movement in America. Religious school associations need help to move beyond one-time seminars at conferences or even the limited interaction model for post-undergraduate teacher training professional development.

Christian colleges could design planned mentoring efforts in which the individual needs of educators could be addressed. Such mentoring could help to smooth the learner's interpersonal edges by encouraging the reading of literature with a distinctive philosophical worldview—in our case that of evangelical Christianity—and by requiring personal accountability for the task. A mentor-learner relationship would allow the learner to have a reality-check from a person who previously had similar life experiences. Thus, the learner will advance as a more effective teacher and leader in private religious school education with less personal pain.

To encourage mentoring, the colleges could include such a component as a part of their graduate level courses and their distance-learning interaction requirements with adjunct faculty, sympathetic school administrators, or master teachers. The goal of preservice and in-service education should not be to make the private school teacher comparable to the public school teacher. Instead, the private school teacher should be uniquely qualified to teach children from the viewpoint of the particular private school movement's distinctiveness and heritage. Concerted efforts to address this goal will cause overall improvement in teacher qualifications and teacher satisfaction (Henke et al., 1996).

It is encouraging to note that some colleges have begun to accept this

challenge, and groups such as the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities have expressed an interest in being involved. Also, Christian school movement leaders, such as ACSI, CSI, AACS, ORUEF, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Seventh-Day Adventists are meeting periodically to see what they can learn from each other and what changes they can implement to benefit the teachers and students within their respective Christian schools. Christian college leadership, one hopes, will hear of their suggestions and grapple with how the colleges can more effectively work with the Christian day school movement.

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John Holmes is director of government affairs, Association of Christian Schools International.