Preface

There are numerous religious institutions and organizations in our world community. To what extent are these places welcoming to the range of diversity that is found in the human condition? Gul, Gul, Kaya, and Alican (2010) describe changes in the world of higher education including increased cross border education, diversified body of students and faculty, and multiculturalization. Responding effectively to these trends is important for higher education institutions, both secular and religious, in shaping the 21st century. Interestingly, Katti (2010) feels that diversity is the most important question of the 21st century.

Organizations are also influenced by the population trend towards more diverse members. Lauring and Selmer (2013) assert that human capital is a critical component of organizations’ knowledge base. In fact, according to these authors, “if diverse members interact and thereby integrate previously disconnected information they provide access to greater knowledge resources” (p. 124) within the organization. Lauring and Selmer studied the relationship between openness to diversity and group knowledge processing. Results indicated, “a group’s openness to diversity has a positive effect on group knowledge” (p. 131). Lauring and Selmer (2010) also researched diversity issues in institutions. They feel that universities have experienced demographic diversification both in terms of surface level diversity (e.g., gender) and in terms of more deep level diversity (e.g., cultural background). The authors studied an academic science department using a questionnaire to examine the relationship between gender diversity and departmental success. Findings indicated that the “value in diversity paradigm was a useful theory to explain performance in a culturally diverse academic context” (p. 168).

THE CHALLENGE

Diversity, according to Herring (2009) “enriches the workplace by broadening employee perspectives, strengthening their teams, and offering greater resources for problem resolution” (p. 208). In other words, there is value in diversity. Ideally, in
a perfect world, religion would serve to enable believers to live harmoniously with all persons without regard to their diverse racial/ethnic, cultural, gender or religious differences. Nationally and internationally, religion seems to serve to accentuate and problematize human diversity, often resulting in psychological and physical harm to some groups.

Herring (2009), used data from the 1996-1997 National Organization Survey to test the value in diversity perspective. Value in diversity is based on the “creation of an inclusive culture that values and uses the talents of would be members” (p. 209). Results of his study support the belief that diversity is important and leads to “increased sales revenue, more customers, greater market share, and greater relative profit” (p. 219). Diversity allows organizations to “think outside the box by bringing previously excluded groups inside the box” (p. 220). The compelling implication of these findings is religious-based institutions and organizations need to seriously examine the benefits that comes when their workforce reflects diversity.

Historically, African Americans have fought to become an integral part of religious institutions and organizations. Schueneman (2012) described how Beckwith in the 1930s integrated the National College for Christian Workers. While Beckwith was able to attend the college, she was not permitted to live on campus. In 1952, Johnson became “the first African American student admitted to Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, Tennessee” (p. 874). In 1949, according to Schueneman, four individuals became the first African Americans assigned by the Methodist Church as missionaries to India. Each of these individuals secure in his or her faith, challenged the barriers to diversity found in these religious institutions and organizations. These early Christian workers saw a need to serve as a described leavening force not only on religious-based institutions and organizations but also on USA society. That need continues as gender and diversity barriers still need to be challenged particularly within the context of religious-based institutions and organizations.

Kim, Anderson, Hall, and Willingham (2010) conducted a phenomenological exploration, through interviews, of discrimination experiences among Asian American faculty at various Christian universities. Three themes were identified and “included lack of diversity, naiveté and denial among the Christian community, and a missionary mentality” (p. 459). The authors feel that the study highlights the importance of studying the context of the discrimination experience and provided a way to make sense of those who were discriminating against the individuals involved in the study.
SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

The influence religion exerts on individuals and groups within varied social contexts as witnessed in varied nations or social settings is the focus of examination in this edited book. How does gender and diversity issues interact within religious-based organizations and institutions? The question raises as many new questions as they address. Will patterns of inequality and discrimination diminish or persist over time in religious-based institutions and organizations? Muzio and Tomlinson (2012) believe that greater emphasis should be placed on the importance of intersectionality and the ways in which gender relates to other sources of inequality…the possible tension between these identity characteristics and their consequences for the gender order” (p. 463).

Both editors have spent a considerable amount of their professional life as faculty members in Christian higher education institutions. The answer to the question and the interplay between gender and diversity in religious based organizations and institutions serves as the theme of this edited book. Moreover, persons within religious institutions, religious leaders, scholars in the fields of critical studies and multicultural education should find useful information within the text. Zalzbrunn (2012) believes that “gender and religion do not always have the same impact on the interactive process that can be analyzed through the concept of intersectionality” (p. 685). Factors such as political climate, time period, and the situation itself are also important influences.

Byant (2006), quoting Hurtado, describes the importance of institutional and organizational climate, particularly for “populations that have faced discrimination, namely women, individuals with disabilities, people of color and the LGBTQ community” (p. 613). This book includes chapters that address different aspects of personal and professional life experiences that are impacted by religious forces. Shared life-experiences that are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities and religion are a powerful means by which contributors give meaning to the theme of the book. The editors believe that an exploration of these issues will prevent “business as usual” from continuing and will result in a different paradigm of experiences in religious-based institutions and organizations.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into thirteen chapters. A brief description of each of the chapters follows:
Chapter 1

Spiritual Health Identity: Placing Black Women’s Lives in the Center of Analysis

The author examines Black women’s spiritual healthy identity via their lived experiences and in the process aids the audience to understand how those lived experiences are central to how Black women see the world and make sense of it. Additionally, the author attends to the issue of traditional practices of the mainstream society that minimize Black women’s ways of knowing. A womanist epistemological framework is used for the examination because it is apropos and enables Black women to define themselves, free of the judgments imposed by the dominant white culture. Central to the formation of a spiritual health identity—which is essential to one’s existence, is the Black Church, religion, and spirituality. It is with the formation of a spiritual health identity that Black women not only define themselves, but also elevates the ways, places and spaces that help them make meaning. This is a timely chapter as Black women continue to confront media messages that belittle their physical and intellectual identities and it should do much to support Black women in their path to spiritual health identify.

Chapter 2


An historic study of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) as transposed to Kenya during the Colonial period is provided in this chapter. The author not only gives a detailed overview of the essential purpose the YWCA in Kenya served, there is also an examination of the racism and sexism embedded within the organization. Equally informative is the expose of tensions among settlers from diverse European origins, who were sharing space within a colony dominated by white supremacy. The audience is called to question how a “Christian” organization could promote the racist policies of the British Colonial Office and to witness the impact that brand of Christianity had on the Kenyan culture. Given the YWCA’s questionable beginning in Kenya, the author shares with the audience the deliberate transition the organization made in overcoming its discriminatory past. The YWCA became a force in support of the educational and spiritual development of Kenyan women, advocating for their participation in leadership roles within the organization and, eventually a voice for the transition of the nation to independences.
Chapter 3

Body Image and Wellbeing in Religious Male and Female Youth in Israel: An Educational Challenge

The audience is taken inside Israel to examine how religiously observant teens’ body image correlates with their wellbeing. Body image is shaped by gender, culture and age and in this instance, also by membership as a Modern Orthodox Israeli. What are the expectations Modern Orthodox Israelis have with regard to physical presentation of male and females? How are those expectations helpful or harmful to achieving emotional wellbeing for youth at various development stages? The author makes comparisons between different culture, by ethnicity and race, and within the same racial groupings in order to provide an overarching perspective of issues of body image and wellbeing. Data contained in the chapter may be especially timely in light of current focus media influence on women’s body images, particularly in the Western world.

Chapter 4

Psychological Essentialism, Diversity, and the Religious Experience

Utilizing a case study method, the author explores psychological essentialism—the process of giving meaning to sameness. Additionally, the author cites supporting data that are highly effective in explaining the tensions that develop within contested spaces such as religious higher education institutions and other settings, when diversity and equity are examined and the ensuing struggle to “understand” emerges. The case study is in actuality an amalgamation of the experiences faculty of color typically encounter when immersed on campuses as they struggle with issues of diversity and inclusion. In the process there is a search for understanding the campus incidents that are seemingly without consciousness and those that are malicious by intent. In conclusion, the chapter shares solutions to overcome barriers that inhibit frank common dialogue, which is vital if we are to create a campus climate that nurturing and inclusive to all who share the space.
Chapter 5

Laborare est Orare: Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance at a Rural, Private, Catholic College

The difficulties of being a gay person within the domain of a Catholic college, is frequently a challenge. When the college is situated in a rural locale the need for emotional support and acceptance becomes critical. This chapter presents the efforts undertaken in one rural Catholic college to develop a Gay-Straight Alliance. The author articulates multiple challenges; fear of loss of donor support, entrenched religious and political conservatism, and the disapproval of Catholic Church. Yet, a small, dedicated group undertook the task largely in response to meet the needs of LGBTQ students who often chose to remain invisible while in plain sight. This chapter serves as one blueprint for overcoming religiously based, entrenched doctrines that create hostile spaces within some religious higher education institutions and showcases the determination of those who stood in solidarity with LGBTQ students in order to create a more socially justice campus.

Chapter 6

The Promise for African American Male Students in Teacher Education at Marygrove College

The authors examine the Marygrove College’s Griot Program as an initiative established to address the underrepresentation of African American males in teaching. The philosophy and heritage from which the Griot Program was developed, along with key events and decisions throughout its life span are discussed. Other state and national male initiatives for increasing the number of male teachers are described and recommendations for the Griot Program are presented.

Chapter 7

A Comparison of “Inclusiveness” in Two Liberal Arts Catholic Universities: What Nurtures an Inclusive Campus Climate?

The authors endeavor to create an image of two different Catholic universities in order to discuss and build the case for inclusiveness. In their comparison of the two predominately white religious institutions, issues of race and gender intersect in
each setting, often with markedly different results. It is through the examination of those differences that the authors are able to identify specific actions that contribute to or impede the creation of a campus climate that is inclusive. There are specific recommendations that institutions should take in order to create enduring inclusiveness for African American females especially, as well as for other individuals who are not part of the white male dominant power structure found in many Christian religious higher education sites.

Chapter 8

Race Relations in the Churches of Christ: Strategies towards Reconciliation

The reality of segregated American churches provides the context for race relations in the Churches of Christ. This chapter seeks to present a historical context of race relations within the Churches of Christ, and to provide strategies toward reconciliation. The author describes this group as a racially divided congregation that describes itself as “one body.” The chapter recommends truth telling sessions defined as a discussion of the racial history of this church. The goals of these sessions are to actualize the “one body: descriptor and achieve tangible efforts towards reconciliation

Chapter 9

Women, Faith and Social Cohesion: Lessons for Leadership and for Effective Bridging

The data contained in this chapter are the result of research that examined the relationship between different faith communities in Britain. Of central importance was the insights gained about social cohesion activity and leadership role of women. The authors observed that women who engaged in interfaith activity frequently held roles that lack the authority of power. Impressively, the women formed small intercultural, interfaith projects as a means to improve social cohesion within their local communities, and through their own efforts were able to exert considerable influence within their own communities despite the lack of authority of power. Examining these finding suggest the need for discussion of the different conceptualizations of social cohesion and leadership within faith communities.
Chapter 10

The Role of Women in the Development of New Religious Movements in Latin America: The Case of Pentecostalism

Latin America, an area known for its predominately Roman Catholic faith, is examined by the authors who provide an intriguing overview of the spread of Pentecostalism, a Protestant Evangelical movement and share the role females are playing in this religious shift. Conversion among females in particularly is fostering this historic shift. The authors articulate motivating factors that support females’ decisions to abandon Catholicism. Historically, in many Latin American nations institutional action and religious action were nearly indistinguishable, and as such the Catholic Church was able to continue to exert great influence over both social and political decisions within those nations. Pentecostalism by contrast is leading to the secularization of the societies in which it has gained a foothold. With that has come a new and vibrate roles for females within the movement—roles traditionally not open to them within the Catholic male hierarchy. The authors suggest the increased and more visible female involvement may be one reason that female converts are less likely than males to abandon their new faith.

Chapter 11

Navigating the Terrain of Diversity: Lessons and Insights for Religious Institutions and Faculty from Diverse Backgrounds

Echoing a theme found in other chapters, specifically the role religious higher education institutions by reason of their proclaimed commitment to social justice and equity; can and should play in seeking, hiring, nurturing and retaining diverse faculty. Such actions are not only beneficial to the institution because it brings in different cultural frames of reference that enable members of the dominant culture to have an expanded worldview. Equally important, students within the institutions will have the experience of being taught and mentored by faculty who “do not look like them” which fosters the students’ transformation academically, socially and spiritually. There are several strategies presented for consideration that institutions may undertake in order to achieve and maintain a diverse, well-integrated faculty and also ensure that the work environment is one that is welcoming to all its members.
Chapter 12

Sense of Belonging in Religious-Based Colleges and Universities: Predictors and Patterns among Students of Color and White Students

Sense of belonging refers to the variety of affective, psychological, social, academic, and subjective dimensions by which an individual perceives and develops connections with other members of the larger campus community. This chapter examines how the level and predictors of sense of belonging among students of color at Christian colleges and universities differ from those for their White counterparts. The sample for this study was limited to those students who enrolled at institutions that participated in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities’ (CCCU) Comprehensive Assessment Project (CAP) during 2004 and 2008. This study revealed significant differences in the level of sense of belonging between students of color and White students at Christian colleges and universities. The researchers found that White students at these institutions tend to have higher levels of sense of belonging than their students of color peers.

Chapter 13

Changing the Traditional Education of Igbo Females: The Role of Religion in Colonial Education

Contrary to the perception of some within the “developed” world, there was an educational system among the varied ethnic groups across the continent of Africa that predated the arrival of the colonial powers. In this chapter the author presents insights into the traditional education Igbo females received, noting why the knowledge passed down for generations was important to the Igbo culture. The invasion of British colonizers brought with it an education system imbued with Christian doctrines. There is an overview of the characteristics common to education imposed on colonized people the world over, as well as the lasting impact colonial education has had on Igbo females.

Blanche Jackson Glimps
Tennessee State University, USA

Theron Ford
John Carroll University, USA
REFERENCES


