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Gender and Diversity
Issues in Religious-Based
Institutions and Organizations

Gender and Diversity Issues in Religious-Based Institutions and Organizations

Glimps, Blanche Jackson; and Ford, Theron, eds.
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Book Review

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Blanche Jackson Glimps and Theron Ford



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Gender and Diversity Issues in Religious-Based Institutions and Organizations offers a chilling reminder that much remains to be done to educate people on race, gender, and diversity. Blanche Jackson Glimps and Theron Ford craft a goldmine filled with breathtaking essays insisting that schools, institutions, and organizations cannot afford a wait-and-see attitude hoping that these issues will somehow work themselves out. They argue that education to inspire intentional acts to diversify is quintessential. This is accomplished in thirteen chapters written with a national and international scope by concerned experts who agree that although progress is being made in the areas of gender, race, and diversity, many people still feel alienated. For this, the authors marshal copiously documented arguments that expose relational problems in many religious schools, institutions, and organizations around the world. A dense annotation of each chapter is implemented with meticulous summaries and abstracts to offer a clear layout of the entire book. Readers are graciously guided to address a timely need while also given actionable solutions to these nagging issues and further recommendations on helpful publications to consult. In the end, what Glimps and Ford offer is a timely well-written encyclopedic work not just for socially and religiously engaged teachers and leaders but for any caring person willing to make a difference in human relationships for many years to come.

As an African scholar teaching in the United States, I am particularly struck by Sheri Young's "Psychological Essentialism" (80-123). Aspects of her argument permeate the entire book in many ways. She explores how religious institutions handle diversity matters and wonders if "there is a benefit to being 'essentialized' versus 'essentializing' others?" (84). In other words, do religious and social institutions have a good grasp on how to diversify their spaces? Case studies suggest that this is hardly the case. To essentialize self or someone else, she avers, has

little if no benefit at all. To deal with psychological essentialism, religious and social institutions must own up to their stated mission goals because most of them “have an institutional mission statement that includes a goal to develop individuals who stand with, and serve, their fellow human beings” and “hold a view of education that includes promoting education that does justice, as faith does justice.” Exercising this noble mission by avoiding the biases that transform religiosity into wars about hierarchy and superiority, while upholding messages of faith, hope, and equality, religious institutions are better prepared to create positive changes to develop positive campus climates than religious institutions that are held in place by waging outdated superiority wars. (114)

In many ways, the contributors to this volume testify to the fact that ours is anything but a postracial or gender sensitive world, even in religious circles. Racial and gender objectification is a daily experience for many people around the globe. A resilient hope runs through the book that well-meaning religious educators and leaders inspired by their mission statements will strive to reclaim their confessed commitments and goals to do the right thing by exercising genuine gender diversity, justice, and equality. This book is long overdue and should be read, studied, and its content applied in every institution, school, and social organization worthy of its socioreligious commitment to the betterment of human interrelationships for a foreseeable and lasting future.

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