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Christian Schools International, 1943-1965: 22 Landmark Years (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by Russell Maatman

Christian Schools International, 1943-1965 22 Landmark Years, by John A. Vander Ark. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983, 189 pp. Reviewed by Georgè A. Faber, Professor of Education.

On September 1, 1920, The National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) was formed in Chicago. A committee of principals had been appointed by the Chicago Christian Schools "to investigate certain problems regarding the education and financial welfare of teachers, teaching materials, and supervision of schools" (p. 16). The committee realized that these problems were not unique to their schools; therefore they invited other Christian schools to send delegates to an organizational meeting. This meeting gave birth to the NUCS (now Christian Schools International: CSI). Vander Ark states that "early in the history of the NUCS, its leaders determined that the organization's function would be service rather than supervision or control" (p. 16). That function continues today.

The author covers the history of CSI from 1943 to 1965. He calls these landmark years, for during these years the organization encountered new challenges brought about by growth and an improved economy. During this time member schools of CSI increased from 94 to 277, and pupils in these schools increased from 15,604 to 59,535. Also the close of World War II saw economic prosperity that permitted parents to implement their dreams for improved educational programs and facilities.

The book covers a variety of topics relating to CSI. The organizational development, the publication of the *Christian Home and School*, the relationships with churches and college departments of education are explained. However, the two most interesting topics deal with governmental relationships and curriculum development. These areas continue to be the focus of attention for CSI and Christian schools.

The Christian education movement continues to seek

justice from governments, particularly in the area of funding. Vander Ark points out developments in the United States and Canada. Much progress has occurred, but the task is not finished.

From its beginning CSI has been concerned with curricular materials. Most commercial textbooks promote a perspective that is secular. Christian parents believe that Christian education is most effective if the perspective of the teacher and the textbooks is the same. At one time CSI sought to work out arrangements with commercial publishers for the publication of Christian editions of their textbook series. This arrangement did not interest the publishers, primarily because the number of books that could be sold was small. Since that time CSI has published curriculum guides and textbooks in many academic areas (Bible, literature, history, science).

The book concludes with three appendices: Appendix A is the "Doctrinal Statement of the National Association of Christian Schools." Appendix B lists the "Openings and Closures of Christian Schools." Appendix C lists "Significant U.S. Supreme Court Decisions (1943 to 1965) Relating to Christian Schools."

The book is interestingly written. It is a volume that should be read by everyone who supports Christian education. It should be required reading for all teacher education students. Eventually this book should be joined by two others: one that covers the history of CSI from 1920 to 1942 and another from 1966 to the present.

Finally, a theme implied in the book is that Christian education is a communal enterprise. Key leaders emerge and provide direction, but Christian education prospers when all God's people promote it.