



Transforming Ourselves, Transforming the World: Justice in Jesuit Higher Education

Combs, Mary Beth; and Schmidt, Patricia Ruggiano, eds.
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Book Review

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teaching for transformation

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In 2000, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, delivered a landmark address entitled “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education.” In it, he raises the question, what is the “whole person” that Jesuit institutions seek to educate? His answer: “Tomorrow’s ‘whole person’ cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world... [Students] should learn to perceive, think, judge, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed” (11). Spurred on by the sentiments expressed by Fr. Kolvenbach and others, faculty and administrators at Jesuit universities across the nation have developed a remarkable array of responses to the call for justice in education. The task of Mary Beth Combs and Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt’s edited volume was to gather many of those who have been responsible for the progress in justice education made in Jesuit institutions in the last decade and a half, highlight their work, and give them a platform from which to share what they have learned in the process about effectively educating for justice. They have succeeded admirably.

The first two sections feature ways in which faculty evoke in their students the kind of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized from which the work of justice springs. Readers of this journal will find particularly evocative and potentially useful Carol Kelly and Christopher Pramuk’s use of the arts, particularly music, to open students’ minds to appreciating how the world looks from the perspective of the poor and neglected among us. Many of the essays focus on various kinds of “academic immersion.” These range from something as simple as incorporating a strategic service learning component into a class, to summer courses abroad where advanced students work to help a population in need, to a full

semester living and learning among some of the world's poorest inhabitants. Another theme addressed in several essays is curricular change at the department or college level. This is perhaps a more daunting task, as it requires the cooperation of faculty and administrators. But there is also an opportunity here for departments of religion, in our often secularizing institutions, to perhaps discover a new means of making the content of our discipline more relevant to the practical concerns of our students and the world outside our classroom. The third section contains a number of reflections on establishing more justice-centered institutional *modi operandi*. These will interest faculty concerned with shaping campus culture outside their own classroom.

On occasion, the authors press their conclusions about what "works" beyond the warrant of their limited experiences. Nevertheless, this book remains an excellent source of inspiration and ideas for bringing students into contact with "the gritty reality of this world" (11), so that they not only learn the content of their discipline, but also begin to discover possibilities for its meaningful application in the service of justice. I highly recommend it as a starting place for thinking about how to make any course or program in religion a more transformative, justice-centered endeavor.

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