

Book Review

Commitment and Connection: Service-Learning and Christian Higher Education
Gail Gunst Heffner and Claudia DeVries Beversluis, Editors
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Reviewed by Jeffrey P. Bouman, Ph.D.
Director of the Service-Learning Center, Calvin College

A 1998 conference hosted by Calvin College explored the question of how faculty and students at colleges and universities with core faith commitments could uniquely participate in the growing service-learning movement. Calvin was a natural place for this conversation to begin, as in the early 1990s it had successfully transformed its three decades of strong community service into a faculty-driven emphasis on integrating the service impulse into the curriculum in departments across the college. Calvin's serious commitment to its balanced identity as both a Christian, and a liberal arts college forced it to go beyond viewing service in exclusively religious or simply pedagogical terms. As this vision grew, Calvin's Service-Learning Center found itself at the receiving end of inquiries from colleges, many of them faith-based, for information on how to successfully implement a service-learning program.

To take up the challenge presented by these myriad requests, Heffner and Beversluis, along with other faculty and staff at Calvin, hosted a conference asking specifically where the three central elements of service, learning, and faith intersect. The result of that conference is this book: fifteen essays written by Calvin faculty, staff and alumni/ae. The essays address four general areas: Building Community, Developing Students, Developing Faculty, and Building Institutional Support.

Gail Gunst Heffner lays out an important backdrop for the chapters that follow by articulating the relationship between higher education, service-learning, and the development of positive social capital. She argues that faith-based colleges and universities have a largely unrecognized but unique missional opportunity to address issues of human need through creative, academically-based service-learning experiences for students. Based on the quality and creativity of academically-based service-learning opportunities presented in the book's chapters, Calvin's faculty agree.

Examples from Calvin's faculty make up the remainder of the book, which concludes with a brief history of how Calvin's program shifted successfully in the early 1990s from a Student Affairs-based office providing volunteer opportunities to students, to an integral college program that works side by side with faculty from every department to develop creative and meaningful service-learning opportunities for students that dovetail with course goals. Chapter contributors come from departments as diverse as nursing, history, philosophy (Kantian ethics), theater, sociology, teacher education, English and marketing. Especially interesting are two chapters, one written by a recent graduate now working in an after-school program in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and the other by the faculty

director of Calvin's off-campus semester in Honduras, each of which touches on the difficult issue of how much a college should focus its attention on the development of students' hearts, when the *raison d'être* of a college is often understood to be the development of students' minds.

A particularly radical suggestion is found in philosopher John Hare's report of his experiment with service-learning in an intermediate level class teaching ethics from a Kantian perspective. Hare warns against overselling service-learning as a means to virtue, rather than as "an occasion for the acquisition of virtue." The difference, according to Hare, lies in whether or not the intervention of the divine is acknowledged, as Hare claims Kant would have required. Despite his Kantian belief that it is God who ultimately makes people moral, Hare devised an occasion for the acquisition of virtue by way of students' interaction with pregnant or young mothers, and dialogue with a local Christian support group for homosexuals. Using abortion and homosexuality as examples of large moral questions of our time, Hare required his students to engage with these issues on a personal level with real people. Directly defying John Dewey's humanistic notion of experience being a moral teacher, Hare claims that it is not experience, but God that provides what is necessary for the development of virtue. In the end, Hare argues, the service-learning component that he required of his students "will be remembered and will be helpful to my students' ethical lives, if they choose to use it, long after they have left college. There is not much of my teaching that I can be so sure about, but I have to retain the recognition that the choice is theirs, together with God's, in some combination that I do not claim to understand."

Problems with the book include its all-Calvin author team and the social, theological and cultural knowledge sometimes required to fully engage with much of the material. Having said that, I find the material to be relevant to any student of the service-learning movement willing to consider a full-orbed perspective on issues such as justice, service, and engaged scholarship.

Heffner and Beversluis's book allows a set of deeply Christian voices into a serious discussion of service-learning, a movement that supercedes institutional worldview commitments. Like it or not, today's world of higher education includes broad support for engaged scholarship from all varieties of philosophical and religious perspectives. This book takes a particular religious tradition, the historic Reformed Christian faith, and applies it thoughtfully and fully to the discussion. Anyone concerned about the place where head, hands and heart intersect in American colleges and universities will benefit by reading this book.