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

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

Mary Beth Combs and Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt (Eds.)
New York: Fordham University Press, 2013
372 Pages. \$65.00 (hardcover)
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Reviewed by Stephen Hess, S. J., Loyola Marymount University

Mary Beth Combs and Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt deserve commendation for their vision in editing *Transforming Ourselves, Transforming the World: Justice in Jesuit Higher Education*—focusing on the transformative social justice mission of Jesuit higher education. Combs and Schmidt strategically organize the book into thematic sections: formation and learning, research and teaching, and our way of proceeding. Each section contains informative and challenging chapters—many drawn from presentations given at the 2009 Justice in Jesuit Higher Education Conference held at Fairfield University—describing social justice initiatives aimed at transforming the lives of students and faculty in Jesuit colleges and universities and impelling them to transform an unjust world. Each section begins with an introductory piece written by international scholars and leaders in Jesuit higher education.

The first three sections of the book highlight an array of social justice issues such as: diversity, environmental awareness, healthcare, and poverty. While all the authors present noteworthy initiatives and programs, a few deserve to be highlighted. Carol Kelly’s contribution describes a Seattle University program aimed at educating students about poverty. The program, which draws on the rich heritage of the arts in Jesuit education, illustrates a creative way to raise students’ awareness about the issue. David Koelsch’s chapter, “Doing Well By Doing Good: The Application of Ignatian Principles to Legal Education,” along with the chapter titled “Personal Transformation and Curricula Change” by Suzanne Hetzel Campbell, Philip Greiner, Sheila Grossman, Alison Kris, Laurence Miners, and Joyce Shea, show how professional schools can be leaders in placing social justice in their curricula, thereby providing a distinctive education for students.

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The introductory pieces of each section are insightful and provocative. Authors David J. O'Brien, Lisa Sowle Cahill, and Stephen A. Privett, SJ each provide concise yet comprehensive descriptions of the programs discussed in their respective sections, indicating both strengths and areas in need of further development. Their insights and criticisms are grounded in sound intellectual thought and mission-centered values. In addition, these authors provoke the reader to consider why social justice is central to Jesuit higher education and how this part of the Jesuit mission must be continually discerned and developed.

It must be stressed that *Transforming Ourselves, Transforming the World: Justice in Jesuit Higher Education* is one of a few books that approaches social justice in such an informative, honest, and mission-centered fashion. The editors' fine job of compiling the contents provoke the reader to examine the issues and ideas that need further exploration. For instance, the timely topic of social class as a justice issue requires much more attention within Jesuit higher education—a fact stressed by Jeffry von Arx in his opening address to the 2009 Justice in Jesuit Higher Education Conference, the text of which is reprinted in this volume. Although some authors touch on social class, often addressing class within the context of race, ethnicity, and other issues of identity, it is clear that Jesuit higher education needs to build additional programs and commentaries solely addressing social class.

Furthermore, the volume gives little attention to the faith dimension of social justice education in Jesuit higher education. In the Jesuit context, social justice is placed in the context of faith as expressed in the phrase “the service of faith and the promotion of justice” (32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Decree 4). The inclusion of a faith that does justice is paramount to the distinctiveness of social justice initiatives at Jesuit colleges and universities. Similarly, the authors could highlight Catholic Social Teaching, as the rich social teachings of the Church provide an intellectual and moral foundation for justice initiatives at any Catholic institution of higher education.

The final section of the book, “Our Way of Proceeding,” is especially provocative and integral to any exploration of social justice education in Jesuit higher education. The authors in this section present complex realities and challenges still needing to be addressed regarding the Jesuit approach to social justice. They challenge all involved with Jesuit higher education to critically reflect on its role in contemporary society, analyzing current social justice programs and assessing how justice is lived out within institutions.

For instance, in the chapter “Nonviolently Transforming the Road to Jericho,” Anna Brown courageously challenges readers to move beyond the typical practice of using community service programs to realize social justice education, instead approaching justice from the standpoint of living justly and working to change unjust social structures. This shift requires those working in Jesuit higher education to examine other ways of operationalizing the phrase “educating men and women for others.”

Finally, David McMEnamin’s concluding chapter, “Further and Deeper,” provides a perfect springboard for approaching the future of social justice education. McMEnamin shows a deep understanding of Jesuit higher education and what it means to truly live the magis while challenging readers to critically examine current efforts at social justice education with an eye to what might be done differently in the future. The chapter’s title summarizes his insights.

Overall, readers will find *Transforming Ourselves, Transforming Our World: Justice in Jesuit Higher Education* to be both informative and challenging—a “must read” for anyone involved with Jesuit higher education and a useful tool for exploring ways to educate “further and deeper” within Jesuit colleges and universities.

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