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## **The Call to Teach, by David T. Hansen**

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## THE CALL TO TEACH

DAVID T. HANSEN. TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 1995.

*Reviewed by Mary LaBarre*

In *The Call to Teach*, Hansen has skillfully combined his philosophizing and the qualitative analysis of his fieldwork to produce an approach to understanding the meaning of teaching as a vocation. This approach yields both a potent image, “vocation,” and a useful text for teacher education programs.

Long rooted in Catholicism as a divine call to join a religious community, whose charism may be teaching, vocation is not a word familiar to university students today. And so they are ripe for Hansen’s more generalized understanding of the term. As he claims,

I am not aware of any previous studies that distinguish these terms in the way I have outlined here.... I have contended that the concept “vocation” describes work that has social value and that provides enduring personal meaning. (pp. 8-9)

Hansen should find a ready audience in young teachers, many of whom articulate the career desire to make a contribution and to live a deeply rooted life.

Divided into two main parts—three chapters of analysis with four chapters in between, each a case study of one urban classroom teacher—Hansen unpacks his understanding of teaching as vocation via word derivation, philosophical analysis, and references to history and context. This structure allows plenty of room for the nuances of his thinking to emerge. Four hundred hours of classroom observation have yielded sensitive narrative portrayals of each teacher, with useful observations and questions about vocation. Teachers laid claim to being ordinary; however, they are not when the lens of vocation is

the viewing instrument.

Though only one of the four teachers profiled works in a Catholic school, *The Call to Teach* is recommended reading for all who work in Catholic schools. The current issue of Catholic identity challenges us to clarify a traditional identity in a context in which both employees and clientele are diverse. The issue becomes one of reaching a deeper understanding of identity, of mission, of vocation—and Hansen’s work has something to offer here.

Of particular interest to Catholic educators will be the portrait of Mr. Peters, a Catholic high school religion teacher. Mr. Peters represents many Catholic school teachers in his desire to teach those most in need, his sensitivity to the desirability of teaching more than preaching, and his reliance on his faith to sustain him. Hansen rates him a success as a role model of teaching as vocation:

Mr. Peters’ odyssey from being a teacher who felt somewhat lost to one who felt in command of himself and his teaching responsibilities merits attention for what it reveals about the place of vocation in the conduct of teaching. (p. 45)

Benchmarks in this transformation included Mr. Peters’s discovery of what he called a “moral stance” toward his work, his articulation of his rationale for teaching religious studies, his acceptance of the teacher as role model, and his embrace of the suffering involved in growth in his vocation. Mr. Peters learned that both his understanding of teaching and his professional growth were ongoing processes.

For those who question Hansen’s use of the concept “vocation,” it should now be clear what Hansen does not mean in using the term to apply to teaching. Hansen’s focus on vocation is not an anti-union statement; teaching as vocation for him does not endorse unjust wages. Nor is it a nostalgic effort to evoke former times when only vowed religious were seen as teachers with vocations; he does not claim that it is these “super teachers” who live out their teaching vocation.

Hansen affirms the unique and powerful contribution many of today’s teachers make. His great contribution is to affirm the professional skills and status of these teachers and then to say that teaching is more. And that “more” is the felt call within the individual teacher of having a vocation. This gives these teachers who understand their work to be vocation five strengths:

1. A powerful sense of identity and integrity in the appellation “teacher.” This sustains practitioners in a culture that does not value wisdom as highly as do many older cultures.
2. A sense of agency as an independent practitioner. This empowers ongoing action and commitment in the face of discouragement from within and without the system.

3. A belief in the essential nature of this irreplaceable service to society. This ensures the value of working with all students, who must make their way bravely in a world that is new in many ways.
4. A mighty experience of community with their students, their colleagues, the neighborhood, etc. Like the butterfly's flapping wings, the influence of the teacher is incalculable.
5. A flexibility born out of their sense of rootedness in the past and motion toward the future. Teaching is not a series of tasks but a flow of work designed to educate and to draw out what is needed for each student.

It is as Hansen claims in his opening statement: "This book is about teaching as a vocation. I describe vocation as a form of public service that yields enduring personal fulfillment to those who provide it" (p. xiii).

One minor editing point is suggested. It would be helpful to readers to include the names of the teachers profiled in the chapter headings.

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## **SPIRITLINKING LEADERSHIP: WORKING THROUGH RESISTANCE TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

DONNA J. MARKHAM, O.P. PAULIST PRESS PUBLISHING, 1999.

*Reviewed by Ronald W. Rebore*

This 143-page book is easy to read and its readability is enhanced by its layout: margin notes, highlighted features, and application exercises. The book is written in such a way that the principles set forth can be applied to all types of enterprises: not-for-profit, business, and religious organizations. The content is even applicable to individuals who work with people in groups that constitute quasi-organizations. The author has managed to integrate psychology, leadership experience, and spirituality into strategies which will be helpful to leaders as they analyze the change process, including how to identify the symptoms of resistance to change. The author also explains how to deal with factions in an organization in order to promote a sense of community. Effective leadership is set forth as healthy leadership and the nuance of this approach is clearly exemplified. The term "spiritlinking," coined by the author, refers to an innovative way to approach human interaction which is the main thrust of the book. Spiritlinking views each individual as an expression of the energy, wisdom, culture, and spirit of the group to which he or she

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