



Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next-Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education

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Book Review

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Preparing citizens through education is not a novel idea. Its origins lie in Greco-Roman approaches to the task, and in American history the goal of educating the citizenry can be traced back to Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey, who was perhaps the most articulate about the implications of pragmatism for education, saw academic preparation for life in a democracy and the moral education of children as part of the same endeavor.

The contributors to this volume acknowledge Dewey's role in this enterprise, but do not explicitly explain why these essays represent the "next generation" of educators inspired by his vision. The best explanation, perhaps, is that they emphasize academic advocacy, as opposed to broader social wellbeing; engagement *with* society over preparation *for* engagement with society; and social location over citizenship as a point of departure for academic work.

With that set of assumptions in mind, it is easier to discern the larger purpose of the sixteen essays in this volume which include an introduction and afterward, along with chapters devoted to three subject areas: (1) "The Collaborative Engagement Paradigm"; (2) the work of "New Public Scholars"; and (3) thoughts on "The Future of Engagement."

The vast majority of the contributors to this volume are specialists in education and programs in community engagement, and there are individual writers from the disciplines of art and political science. For that reason, some seminarians and seminary faculty will find more immediate points of contact with their work than others. Both groups will also find themselves

asking – if education driven by engagement is appealing or necessary – whether the more natural point of contact for seminaries is the community, the church, or both.

A critical evaluation of the essays will also raise other questions to which there are no simple answers:

- What is the place of “social relevancy and public legitimacy” in shaping the curriculum of higher education (1)?
- Can engagement as a model for learning set aside more abstract, disciplinary concerns (17)?
- What role has commodification played in shaping higher education and is learning through engagement immune to commodification (24)?
- To what degree do faculty members remain accountable to the disciplines that they represent when using engagement as a model for teaching and, if so, how is that accountability achieved?

The answers to those questions will all look potentially different in theological schools and seminaries where faculty regularly grapple with the relationship between the work that they do and the needs of the church. Indeed, that realization may point to the most important question that the subject matter, but not the book itself, raises for theological educators: What does it mean for seminaries to engage the church “as reciprocal partners and coeducators” (5)? Answering that question is one that everyone who cares about theological education would do well to answer.

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