

KEYS



UNISERVITATE  
Service-learning in Catholic Higher Education

UNISERVITATE COLLECTION

# Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning

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Introduction

3.1

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***Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning***

Uniservitate Collection

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## ABOUT US

### Uniservitate

*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning (SL) in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). It is an initiative of Porticus and is coordinated by the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (CLAYSS).

The programme's objective is to generate a systemic change through the institutionalisation of service-learning as a tool for higher education institutions to fulfil their mission of offering a comprehensive education to new generations and involving them in an active commitment to the problems of our time.

### Porticus

Porticus coordinates and develops the philanthropic endeavours of the Brenninkmeijer family, whose social engagement stretching back as far as 1841, when Clemens and August Brenninkmeijer founded the C&A company, starting a tradition of doing good while doing business.

Several businesses, charitable foundations and philanthropic programmes joined Porticus and expanded through numerous family initiatives.

Since its foundation in 1995, Porticus has grown to become one of the most committed institutions working to address the challenges of our time, to improve the lives of those most in need and to create a sustainable future where justice and human dignity flourish.

Porticus has two goals which guide their way it works: to listen and learn from the people they seek to serve, and to act on evidence that demonstrates what works.

### CLAYSS

The Latin American Center for Service-Learning—CLAYSS—is a leading organisation for the promotion of service-learning in Latin America, and a worldwide reference. It promotes the development of service-learning in both formal and non-formal education, and provides advice to policy makers, NGO leaders, communities, educators and students.

## The UNISERVITATE collection

The UNISERVITATE Collection is an editorial project of CLAYSS (Latin American Center for Service-Learning) in collaboration with Porticus.

It is aimed at Catholic Higher Education professors and authorities, other educational institutions, specialists in Service-Learning, ecclesiastical leaders, as well as the general public interested in education and social change.

With the contribution and collaboration of outstanding international scholars and specialists, the objective is to offer contributions from different regions and to share multicultural perspectives on topics of interest related to spirituality and the pedagogy of Service-learning in the world.

Each digital book is published in English, Spanish and French, and can be downloaded free of charge from the Uniservitate website: [www.uniservitate.org/](http://www.uniservitate.org/)



### María Beatriz Isola

*Holds a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Psychology and a Master's Degree in Social Doctrine of the Church. She has specialized in educational institutional counseling and the formation of young people, educators and administrators. In Chile she has designed and moderated courses on initiation to Solidarity Service-Learning for educators and administrators. She has collaborated in the institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education Institutions. She has served as a university professor in Catholic Social Teaching and coordinated courses of Christian Training in Higher Education and University Pastoral Teams.*

*Her experience in Ecumenism has led her to teach diploma courses and to be a member of research teams. She is the co-author of the book "Con 'El sueño de Chile' del Cardenal Raúl". Construyendo la amistad cívica (Foundation Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, Chile).*



### Laura Gherlone

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*Tapia, the area of research, spiritual reflection and epistemological exploration of service-learning. She is particularly interested in the disciplinary field of education in the light of postcolonial and decolonial debate.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### The Reason for this Book

Higher education faces a number of challenges today. Among them, the search for a profound meaning that jointly guides faculty members, students and university staff, and which contemplates interaction with the community as a constitutive component.

While this is generally true, it echoes with an even greater urgency in those institutions that have in their roots an explicit vocation and choice of social commitment, as is the case of Catholic institutions, and not only them.

From this standpoint, academic excellence emerges as a high, universal goal by including in its objectives the common good, service to others from an ecumenical and inter-religious perspective, creative learning, holistic pedagogical experiences, and sustainable development based on the revitalization of the person-environment link. In short: human flourishing according to an integral and inclusive education.

*A research topic that is increasingly attracting the attention of the academic world is the link between teaching and spirituality. The aim is to provide, both for Catholic Institutions of Higher Education and universities at large, a space for reflection in their itinerary of discernment about their identity and specific mission.*

A research topic that is increasingly attracting the attention of the academic world<sup>1</sup> is the link between teaching and spirituality, understood in its broadest sense. This will be the focus of the volume that we present to our readers today.

The aim is to provide, both for Catholic Institutions of Higher Education and universities at large, a space for reflection in their itinerary of discernment about their identity and specific mission.

This book, the third of the Uniservitate collection, explores these topics, bringing together research and experiences of international scope, from the Catholic university world as well as of other creeds and non-religious convictions, which delve into service-learning from the ethics of care and fraternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book, the reader will find an extensive bibliography, useful for further in-depth research.

## The Importance of Context

This volume was written amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, its reflections take on a relevant character in the face of the present crisis which has exposed the fragility of humanity and revealed socio-environmental instability, known and unknown.

Educating requires entering a situation: educating *for* the reality that is taking place and *in* the reality that is taking place. To rethink education implies bringing to the classroom reality itself, together with the wounds of present society. Only thus will learning recover meaning for our young people—they are the ones who highlight the urgency to educate for today: not “being strangers” in the face of a world that suffers.

What is at stake here is the social mission of our universities and educational institutions, the coherence between what is announced and how it becomes institutional style, permeating their whole being, their work and mission. As stated by the joint document of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: “This is a time to discover new forms of solidarity to rethink the world after COVID-19” (WCC-PCID, 2020, p. 10).

*Efforts to approach “the most vulnerable other” exist in our educational spaces. However, the reality which surrounds us calls us “to transcend the limits in the service one renders to those who suffer and in the solidarity with them”, and to recognize “the true meaning of service and solidarity”. Reality does not allow us to wait, to remain involved in a mere discussion; we must get the ball rolling now and respond to the current challenges, in order to inject new hope.*

Undoubtedly, efforts to approach “the most vulnerable other” exist in our educational spaces. However, the reality which surrounds us calls us “to transcend the limits in the service one renders to those who suffer and in the solidarity with them”, and to recognize “the true meaning of service and solidarity” (WCC-PCID, 2020, p. 7). Reality does not allow us to wait, to remain involved in a mere discussion; we must get the ball rolling

now and respond to the current challenges, in order to inject new hope.

When it comes to analyzing this context, also the 2030 UN Agenda questions our educational priorities, identifying specific objectives at a global level (UNDP, 2015). Faced with this clear “road map” towards a new paradigm of integral development, religious

educational institutions become valid interlocutors when they discuss the SDGs because of their involvement in humanitarian actions and social service, which lead to a revitalization of the social fabric in an ethical key. (See especially SDG n. 17). As Elena López Ruf has emphasized,

Civil society and religious organizations play a significant role in developing proposals, monitoring advances and ensuring that all the voices participate and are heard in the process. The challenge lies in generating a space of strategic and constructive collaboration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account religious identity as an evaluative element which is expressed in both group and individual attitudes and choices, which can provide innovative proposals for human and sustainable development. (López Ruf, 2019, p. 8)

Educational institutions can and must respond to today's needs and join the global call explicitly stated in the SDGs. As Pope Francis affirms,

Today, three and a half years after the adoption of the SDGs, we must become even more aware of the importance of accelerating and adapting our actions to respond adequately to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor: they are connected. (Pope Francis, 2019)<sup>2</sup>

Service-learning can be analyzed, then, as an effective response to today's humanity. Thematic development will confront us with the challenge of combining quality learning with quality service, where service becomes learning and learning turns into service, led by student protagonism and professor accompaniment, sensitive to the urgencies of our context.

This brief outline allows us to sense the topicality and opportunity that service-learning offers, seen from the articulation between spirituality and education.

## A Polyhedral View

If we are to respond to today's educational challenges, it is not enough to approach them from a single perspective. The image of the polyhedron used by Pope Francis,<sup>3</sup> so highly valued in the context of Uniservitate, expresses the diversity of thoughts and approaches towards the same topic.

2 In this quote, Pope Francis refers to the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS, 2015, p. 49).

3 Cf. Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 235-237.

In the symphony of the world of Education, educational institutions can learn from one another to consolidate pedagogical practices which open their horizons to the surrounding reality, each one from their own mission and institutional identity. Service-learning is nourished by such richness and the present volume is a sign of it.

In this regard, the book offers readers the contribution of authors from different cultural contexts, with specific academic and research careers, from which they deepen the scope of the topic. *“Spirituality and Higher Education: a Perspective from Service-Learning”*.

We present here a brief overview of its chapters.

## Structure of the Book

This book is divided into three parts. In the first, the authors address different views on the thought of the Catholic Church on Higher Education. Novelty and history, local dimension and global horizon, institution and spirituality, university social commitment and service-learning converse in view of the person’s integral formation and the genuine university social commitment.

In the second part, as we move into spirituality and education, service-learning is explored through the lens of different approaches and settings. Their common denominator will be the necessary formation of young people for a positive, socially responsible leadership. A view which emerges from the role played by trainers and the formative impact on the students’ education.

Finally, in the third and last part of the book, reflections come from different university contexts, incorporating ecumenical, interreligious and non-religious reflections. In all of them we find spirituality as an intentional movement towards care, the urgency of which is particularly manifested in the post-COVID-19 educational world.

## First Part

### **Institutional Spirituality and Service-Learning from the Mission of Catholic Higher Education**

In his contribution, Father Mauro Mantovani SDB (Italy) proposes to move from the pair spirituality-institution to an institutional spirituality capable, not only of validating ac-

*Novelty and history, local dimension and global horizon, institution and spirituality, university social commitment and service-learning converse in view of the person's integral formation and the genuine university social commitment.*

ademic excellence but also of ensuring an identity synthesis of “being” and “acting”, shared by the community. Mantovani delves into the deep reflection on the educational heritage of the Catholic Church. In his view, service-learning represents an

essential appointment with history, the path to a New Humanism. To this contribution is added a “Colloquium between University Presidents”, as a multimedia resource: Fernando Ponce SJ (President of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador) and Mauro Mantovani SDB (then, President of the Pontifical Salesian University of Rome), with the moderation of Daniela Gargantini (Catholic University of Córdoba), converse about Institutional Spirituality. The link to this video is available on page <https://youtu.be/3t-4vJU4HgA>

Carina Rossa (Argentina/Italy) lets us immerse in Pope Francis's theology, focusing on three fundamental aspects of his social ethics: mercy, the preferential option for the poor and the centrality of the spirit of discernment. It is from these three central concepts and their implication for education that the new challenges highlighted by the Pope are addressed: the pedagogy of harmony, the pedagogy of the people and the pedagogy of tenderness. From this perspective, service-learning is presented as a form of education which enables us to gain a more loving view of ourselves and of others, learning to *de-center ourselves* and to embrace the reality that surrounds us with its wounds and creative possibilities.

The chapter by Father Andrzej S. Wodka CSsR (Vatican) introduces us to the charismatic reflection on spirituality that animates (or could potentially animate) service-learning in a Catholic institution of higher education. Wodka highlights the way in which service-learning has proved to be a nutrient for the spirit of gratuitousness (which, in fact, as etymology suggests, means *thanks*), inherent in each charism, helping to understand the specificity of one's own educational and social mission. This presentation is completed with the four papers from Catholic universities, born of different charisms, and where service-learning, chosen in a more or less explicit way, is a pillar in its implementation: from the Universidad Javeriana Cali in Colombia, Claudia Mora Motta, the Ignatian charism; from Argentina, Isabel Egaña, the spirituality of Opus Dei in the Austral University; from the College of Saint Benilde in the Philippines, Michael Valenzuela FSC, the influence of the Lasallian charism; from the United States, Daniel Horan OFM, Franciscan charism in the University;<sup>4</sup>

4 The chapter proposed here is a reprint of a work related to Friar Horan's experience at Siena College in the Uni-

Following the trail of reflection on the charismatic dimension in service-learning, this first part closes with the contribution of Patrick M. Green from the American context, offering research based on four universities. The analysis of its implementation defines the distinctive features, the particular mission, identity and specificity of community engagement in each institution, and how service-learning practice is linked to faith formation and/or spiritual development.

## Second Part

### Higher Education and Youth Leadership; Reflections on Positive, Socially Responsible Leadership

*Service-learning is explored through the lens of different approaches and contexts. Its common denominator common denominator will be the necessary training for virtuous and socially responsible leadership. A view which emerges from the role played by trainers and the formative impact on the students' education.*

Within the framework of the so-called “Education of Character”, James Arthur and Tom Harrison (Great Britain) propose to read service-learning based on the practice of moral and civic virtues, where service would represent the path (the *forma mentis*) towards spiritual, personal and community growth: in short, towards the flourishing of

character and the building of the common good. The two authors base their proposal on a large collection of case studies promoted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues of the University of Birmingham and the Oxford Character Project of the University of Oxford.

Kevin Ahern (the United States) offers us a historical reconstruction of the “See-Judge-Act” model and method and its possible contribution to the development of Spirituality for Action, capable of nourishing the service-learning approach from its foundations. Far from being a reduction of solidarity, the spiritual principle of this pedagogical approach leads it to become a key element in the formation of holistic and ethical leaders: leaders that do not favor low-cost formulas, but who discern and opt for realistic solutions to injustices and power inequalities.

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ted States, a university of the Order of Friars Minor.

In this dynamic between virtuous formation and leadership, faculty play a key role with their accompaniment activity. This topic is addressed by Arantzazu Martínez-Odría, Ana Isabel Gómez Villalba and Ernesto Jesús Brotóns Tena (Spain), who focus on the role of the educator in promoting integral learning, according to a spirituality of gift. Based on the three main thematic focuses (F. Torralba's spiritual intelligence, P. Teilhard de Chardin's itinerary of personalization and M. N. Tapia's pedagogical innovation in solidarity), the authors propose a three-phase model and six processes to start up an educational path to "training in humanity".

Finally, Daniela Gargantini and Federico Girauo (Argentina) bring the students' voices closer and, specifically, study the impact of University Social Responsibility on the graduate students' lives. To this end, they offer the outcomes of qualitative research conducted at the Catholic University of Córdoba (Argentina), emphasizing integral educational quality: an attribute that is such to the extent that it brings about changes in all the stakeholders in the process and fosters the development of a personal, long-lasting spirituality associated with service-learning experiences and their transcendence.

## Third Part

### Spirituality as Intentional Movement towards Care

*Reflections come from different university contexts, incorporating ecumenical, interreligious and non-religious reflections. In all of them we find spirituality as an intentional movement towards care.*

James Kielsmeier emphasizes that, during a time of personal and social instability such as the one we are now experiencing, service-learning can become a strategy both for academic growth and spiritual development.

His reflection, backed by decades of research in the field of education and nurtured by an ecumenical Christian perspective within the institutional framework of the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC), offers an accurate diagnosis of today's educational world: a structural shift towards service-learning requires and, at the same time, can boost two major changes in thinking: a new vision of youth in society and a new concept of learning.

With Priscilla A.S. and Mercy Pushpalatha (India) the book is enriched by the Asian stance, with its millenary approach in spirituality. As the authors underscore, spirituality—understood as the ongoing development of the meaning of the own authentic self—is

outlined as a process intrinsically linked to the network of caring relationships between human beings and the world which is their home. In this light, an education that accounts for spiritual dimension needs to include in its foundations a holistic approach together with service to others, as is shown by the cases of service-learning in Asia presented in this chapter.

Xus Martin (Spain) links spiritual dimension to the values of care and fraternity, interpreting the crisis engendered by COVID-19 as a “magnifying glass effect”—a crisis that has expanded, unmasking them, innumerable social issues while, at the same time, it unleashed its global effects, as a chain reaction—. According to Martin, service-learning allows civic engagement to be seriously introduced as a third mission of the university institution whilst it incorporates the ethical dimension of the formative-experiential students’ experience, placing the concepts of care and fraternity at the very center.

The book ends with the contribution of Father José Ivo Follmann S.J. (Brazil), who places the reflection on service-learning (as a philosophy, a methodology and a set of practices) at the intersection of education, spirituality and ecology, highly topical themes. The paradigm of “integral ecology” opens to the conception of socio-environmental justice, which carries the spirituality of care, in view of sustainable development. Referring particularly to the Brazilian context, his study is based on the results of eighteen social projects developed by the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos.

**Laura Gherlone and María Beatriz Isola**

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In support of the Global Compact on Education

*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. Its objective is to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs) through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of offering an integral education and training of agents of change committed to their community.

***“We will not change the world, if we do not change education”***

*Pope Francis*

### **3** Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning

A research topic that is increasingly attracting the attention of the academic world is the link between teaching and spirituality, understood in its broadest sense. This will be the focus of the volume that we present to our readers today. The aim is to provide, both for Catholic Institutions of Higher Education and universities at large, a space for reflection in their itinerary of discernment about their identity and specific mission.

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