

## BOOK REVIEW

**Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education**, Quentin Schultze, Grand Rapids, MI: Edenridge Press, 2022, 151 pp., \$15.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781937532000

Quentin Schultze, emeritus professor of communication at Calvin University, offers wisdom from his 33 years of experience in Christian higher education in his latest book, *Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education*. A recipient of the Presidential Award for Exemplary Teaching at Calvin University, Schultze's passion for instructional excellence is evident throughout this text. Comprised of 30 three-page chapters, each with a story from Schultze's teaching career that highlights a specific educational practice and a question that inspires reflection, this book encourages readers to pursue what he calls "servant teaching." The author defines this concept as "serving our students by teaching them with faith, skill, and virtue" (p. 22).

Notably, Schultze's approach to promoting servant teaching does not take the form of an abridged textbook of Christian pedagogical principles. Rather, Schultze uses inspiring illustrations of his own pedagogical approach to encourage readers to think creatively about how those practices may be adapted for their unique personal, institutional, and disciplinary contexts. For instance, Schultze suggests referring to students as colleagues (or the professional term most appropriate to the course subject) to show respect to everyone in the learning environment. In order to support students in information-rich classes, Schultze advocates providing students with outlines to guide their study. Noting that this latter approach takes more effort on the part of the teacher, he explains: "I want students to do well, so I share the burden with them" (p. 71). Similarly, Schultze highlights the importance of selecting engaging course materials and crafting syllabi with the goal of fostering a community of learners bringing their best selves to the classroom.

Emphasizing gratitude and humility as the two most important virtues of servant teaching, Schultze contends that this approach to education counteracts the cynicism often found in academia and instead promotes delight in learning. To cultivate these virtues, he recommends practices like creating a gratitude board with mementos and injecting humor into the classroom as a way of connecting with learners. Schultze views servant teaching as a calling in which educators are nurturers who inspire students "to cultivate God's world in the service of others to God's glory" (p. 34). Thus, successful servant teachers will in turn develop servant students and servant alumni. In doing so, Schultze hopes educators will model and expect from their students both "heartfelt compassion" and "skilled excellence" (p. 34) as they fulfill God's calling on their lives.

Although servant teaching certainly benefits students, Schultze is also concerned with how these practices reorient educators toward a more sustainable and Spirit-filled way of engaging in their work. Core to Schultze's implicit argument for servant teaching throughout the book is the need for educators to develop their own faith in order for them to effectively serve and educate their students. Schultze aptly quotes Søren Kierkegaard to prove his point: "Christ has not appointed assistant professors—but followers" (p. 24). Schultze defines the work of a servant teacher as worship and emphasizes the importance of Sabbath rest to remember that God is actually the one accomplishing good works through educators. Furthermore, he reminds readers that servant teachers must use their limited time wisely,

with an awareness that aimless busyness is often the product of self-righteousness. Schultze suggests prayer with and for students as an antidote to this tendency, writing: “I prayerfully aim as a servant teacher to engage my mind humbly through my open heart rather than through my self-controlling ego” (p. 55).

Aware of the context in which servant teaching takes place, Schultze asserts that it is a tool for successfully confronting the challenges facing Christian institutions of higher education. Schultze recognizes that the future of Christian higher education is at risk due to “declining enrollments and financial exigencies”; however, he believes that faculty can “renew Christian higher education” (p. 22) by teaching through faith, by skill, and with virtue. Noting that graduates of Christian colleges and universities are often unconvinced of the worth of their education, Schultze asserts that educators can prove the value of Christian higher education through effective teaching. In fact, Schultze expects that servant teaching will lead students to become alumni who are supportive of Christian education and will promote their alma mater to prospective students.

In order to become effective servant teachers, Schultze makes the case that faculty in Christian higher education must engage in “ongoing pedagogical renewal” (p. 23) to adapt to the changing culture of the student body. It is not enough, Schultze argues, to merely update teaching practices in the classroom. Instead, educators must also apply this attitude of renewal to the manner in which they speak about Christian higher education to the broader Christian community. Schultze emphasizes that prospective students and families are not interested in a college or university where the educational outcomes appear to be irrelevant. Rather, faculty must be able to “help students formulate and use a coherent Christian worldview” (p. 63).

Relatedly, Schultze shares his conviction that the way in which faculty at Christian institutions of higher education respond to students who are doubting their faith will be important for the future of these colleges and universities. He writes: “If we can model authentic, humble faith, we will teach through powerful attraction; we will persuade by demonstrating authentic faith in action, doubts and all” (p. 51). Schultze suggests that servant teachers share portions of their own faith journeys with their students as a way of welcoming conversation about the topic. In a transcript of how he introduces his faith journey, Schultze cites Hebrews 11:8, “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (*New International Version*, 2011), to explain that it is acceptable to feel lost in doubts and to invite students to journey with him as they seek to follow Jesus.

Although I agree with Schultze about the importance of servant teaching and the potential it has to influence students positively, I question how effective this approach is for safeguarding the future of Christian higher education. Schultze seems to expect that alumni of Christian institutions of higher education who had positive experiences and are still faithful will consequently promote Christian colleges and universities to their children and communities. I recognize that many of these institutions rely on word of mouth and legacy students to support enrollment. Yet, given the array of issues facing the higher education sector, including the enrollment declines that are projected to continue in the next decade, I doubt that improving pedagogy alone will protect the future of Christian colleges and universities.

The case remains, however, that servant teaching as described by Schultze is certainly a worthwhile pursuit. Regardless of its ability to be the savior of Christian higher education, this pedagogical approach aligns well with Jesus’ exhortation to love one another (John 13:34–35). I agree with Schultze’s assertions that servant teaching is a calling and that in the spirit of Sabbath rest, it is important for educators to remember that success comes from God. With these foundational beliefs in mind, I believe that God will take

care of those who work in Christian higher education as they seek to honor God's call to serve students. Servant teaching as a practical approach to education may not in and of itself save these institutions; however, the orientation toward the true Savior that it promotes just might. As Schultze suggests, servant teachers must have a sense that God is accompanying them as they “enjoy [their] calling and celebrate the Holy Spirit's fruit along the way” (p. 26).

Educators of all experience levels will benefit from reading *Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education*. I am inspired by Perry Glanzer's suggestion in the foreword to think of this book as a “teaching devotional” (p. 20). With its format of 30 brief, clearly written chapters, even the busiest faculty member could read a chapter each day for a month. Paired with a chapter from Proverbs (and perhaps starting with the introduction of Schultze's book in months with 31 days), readers could conceivably prepare for each day with a reminder of the wisdom that comes only from God and a suggestion for how to integrate it into the classroom through servant teaching. Better yet, a chapter from this text would serve as an excellent opener for a faculty meeting or other gathering of like-minded teachers. Of course, the book would also be helpful for new professors to read and discuss as part of new-faculty orientation. No matter the context in which Schultze's book is read, Christian educators will surely be encouraged by this work.

## References

- New International Version*. (2011). BibleGateway.com. <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>
- Schultze, Q. (2022). *Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education*. Edenridge Press.

Katrina Gallardo Palma 

*Azusa Pacific University*

 [kgallardopalma22@apu.edu](mailto:kgallardopalma22@apu.edu)

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0005-8508-8287>

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