



*Love at the Heart of Things:  
A Biography of Douglas V. Steere*  
by E. Glenn Hinson.

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The Upper Room Books, 1998, xvi + 392 pp.

Contemporary Christian college students need spiritual heroes. The postmodern information age has left North American students with few public figures whose lives, upon close scrutiny, demand genuine respect, let alone evoking a desire for emulation.

Tragically, in recent years the leadership of both mainline and evangelical Protestant churches in America has suffered from too many highly-publicized scandals of affluence to inspire admiration from many of the bright young adults who should become future Christian leaders. Part of the calling of campus ministers—especially *Baptist* collegiate ministers—is to bridge this gap between the high calling of the Christian faith and the clay feet of its visible practitioners.

Douglas Steere, whose life from 1901 to 1995 virtually spanned the twentieth century, was a spiritual leader, whose committed example offers encouragement both to Christian students and genuine spiritual seekers. Whether he was teaching philosophy at Haverford College or globe-trotting as a Quaker peacemaker, organizing war-relief for Finland or guiding people at Pendle Hill into the ways of prayer, Steere's outward activity was a consistent (though not perfect) reflection of his inner spiritual journey. Two of his best-known books, *On Beginning from Within* and *On Listening to One Another*, capture the spiritual sensitivity and vitality which animated his life and work. His witness powerfully embodied the dynamic unity of "the journey inward and journey outward," which long-time veterans of Baptist campus ministry will remember was symbolized in the logo of National Student Ministries.

Glenn Hinson's biography of Douglas Steere provides a resource to help with this challenging task. Hinson, who was commissioned by Steere himself to write this work and was assisted by private materials provided by the Steere family, has done a characteristically thorough job in analyzing the diverse information available. The book ably chronicles Steere's pilgrimage from a variety of perspectives, complemented by a diverse selection of photographs. Due to the extensive range of Steere's travels, Hinson's work risks the danger of degenerating into a travel diary of the multitude of people and places which comprised Steere's amazing ministry. Yet Hinson's focus on how one accounts for the "love at the heart of things" which "suffused [Steere's] life and irradiated all who came near" (p. xiv) draws readers through the mass of detail.

In the spring of 1975 I had the opportunity to meet Douglas Steere in a class on desert spirituality taught by a gradually-becoming-known spiritual writer named Henri Nouwen. To speak to our class, the 74-year-old Steere had traveled by train from Philadelphia to New Haven, partly out of ecological concern (before it was fashionable). When Nouwen went to meet the guest speaker at the train station, he was nowhere to be seen. Then, from the very back of the train, Nouwen perceived this bent figure toiling up the walkway, bearing all of this luggage. An elderly man was helping a poorly dressed woman, whom he had just met on the train and to whom all this baggage belonged. That was the saint Douglas Steere—a spiritual hero, whom this book provides a way for campus ministers and their students to come to know . . . and be blessed!

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