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Catholic Schools in the Public Interest

Patricia A. Bauch, O.P. (Ed.)

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Reviewed by Tom Kiely, Marquette University

One of the fundamental issues for Archbishop John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop in the United States, was the cause of Catholic education in the newly formed nation. As stated in *The John Carroll Papers*:

His vision was of a school...to 'diffuse knowledge, promote virtue and serve Religion.' Its goal was the 'moral, religious and literary improvement' of students, it would be the 'main sheet anchor of Religion in the United States.

Catholic Schools in the Public Interest: Past, Present, and Future Directions, edited by Patricia A. Bauch, O.P., of the University of Alabama, chronicles the development of Carroll's vision through a series of extensively researched essays by renowned scholars in the field of Catholic education.

Divided into three sections, *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest* traces the historical, legal, financial, and sociological history of Catholic K-12 education in the United States since the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, which established the array of Catholic parish schools that exists today. Beyond providing a purely historical account, however, *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest* unpacks the cultural situations that have shaped the American educational scene from era to era. Providing a rich analysis of the contexts in which Catholic schools have found themselves, the authors advance the central idea that the Catholic educational enterprise has served as both a partner and a corrective to American educational progress. In short, it has served Carroll's vision both intentionally or inadvertently. The audience for this very readable volume is any student of Catholic education, leaders, lead-

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ership teams, or decision-making bodies who require an essential context for understanding the ebbs and flows of Catholic schools' relationship with U.S. culture at large. The bibliographies for the essays are extensive and cover a wide range of fields. The essays utilize the best techniques of current scholarship, but are configured as to be engaging for the non-specialist.

In focusing on the way that Catholic schools have been an integral part of national educational history, an acronym from public policy studies (PESTI: political, economic, social, technological, ideas in good currency) that captures the matrix of features influencing the craft and analysis of public policy may serve as a lens to view the many topics treated in this book. In multiple ways, *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest* fits this acronym into a Catholic education context, and in doing so makes the case that Catholic education needs to become a more pronounced voice in American educational debates. First, the essays address the shifting sands of the political (P) and historical interplay between U. S. educational policy and the foundation and flourishing of Catholic schools (see chapters by Timothy Walch; Paul Green; Fred W. Herron; Charles J. Russo; and Lawrence D. Weinberg). At times gratifying and at times maddening, the authors narrate the story of Catholic administrative and pastoral officials constructing parish schools by using the self-sacrifice of scores of sisters and brothers in the face of religious prejudice and legal wrangling. Conversely, episodes of racism, violence, and poor planning and leadership have thwarted the best intentions of visionary educators throughout the years.

Secondly, the economics (E) of Catholic schooling bears special attention as the authors interpret available data to portray the complex picture of how and why Catholic schools have changed, and why they are currently under much stress (see chapters by Gerald M. Cattaro & Kevin Smith; Stephen J. Denig; Gregory L. Chatlain & Barbara L. Brock; Joseph M. O'Keefe & Erik Goldschmidt; Bruce S. Cooper & Steven D'Agustino; and Leonard DeFiore). These chapters are crucial for the future proposals within the book as well as the efforts of benefactors and leaders who need to supplement rhetorical and religious understandings of Catholic schools with a data-rich comprehension of why enrollment, the decline of religious vocations, pay scales, health insurance rates and a host of related issues have placed many schools in precarious positions. Perhaps one of the most fascinating questions posed by Leonard DeFiore in his interdisciplinary analysis of Catholic school finances is why did the construction of Catholic schools not continue as Catholic populations moved out of cities and into suburbs? While the lost opportunity costs

can never be appropriately measured, such thinking will be a tremendous aide as Catholic school officials attempt to confront contemporary challenges.

The social (S) dimensions of Catholic schools covered by the authors exhibit nuanced understandings and proscriptive tones that bode well for schools if academic work can be translated into educational policy (see chapters by Gerald M. Cattaro & Kevin Smith, Donald A. Erickson, Stephen J. Denig, Gregory L. Chatlain & Barbara L. Brock, Laura Blackwell Clark & Claire E. Smrekar, Martin Scanlan, Joseph M. O'Keefe & Erik Goldschmidt, Bruce S. Cooper & Steven D'Agustino, and Leonard DeFiore). Viewing historical moments and current theological thinking as catalysts for educational innovation on behalf of children, the Nativity/Miguel and Cristo Rey Schools, the University Consortium for Catholic Education, as well as several other collaborations and partnerships, are highlighted as compound solutions to complex problems. In addition, the case for Catholic schools serving largely non-Catholic urban populations and the inclusion of students with disabilities as part of the Church's social mission rounds out the treatment of the social aspects of Catholic schools' current public profile.

While technology (T) as an educational tool and financial cost is not treated directly in the book, there are hints throughout several essays that other technological aspects have influenced and continue to exert pressures on Catholic school decision making. Whereas Donald Erickson warns of the problems associated with poor research methodologies and bias in reporting and interpreting Catholic schools' educational data, technological questions lurk beneath the surface in discussions of school construction and placement, as well as the incipient issue of charter schools and the many varieties in which they emerge on the educational scene of states.

The last category, ideas-in-good-currency (I) is woven throughout the book's treatments of issues with teachers, leaders, students, the legal status of state funding, and charter schools (see chapters by June Clare Tracy, Paul Miller, & C. John Tarter; Gregory L. Chatlain & Barbara L. Brock; Laura Blackwell Clark & Claire E. Smrekar; Martin Scanlan; Lawrence D. Weinberg; and Joseph M. O'Keefe, Bruce S. Cooper, & Patricia A. Bauch). These "ideas" motivate the public interest discussion as they expose the interlocking nature of Catholic schools' engagement with U. S. constitutional standards and the many proposals advocating education reform. The great challenge the authors indicate is that an inattention to teacher and leader development and compensation, the many dimensions of parental choice in education, and the legislative world in which Catholic schools now exist will not bode

well for the future of Catholic schools. Only by understanding the currents flowing through public discourse will Catholic schools be able to speak the language of the culture it seeks to evangelize.

Representing the most current vessel of John Carroll's "main sheet anchor of Religion in the United States" *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest* does many things well. While minute issues exist with some typographical errors and a reference to a website that does not function, the volume hints at a gap in Catholic educational studies. A great deal of the research cited by the authors was published some time ago. One of the audiences identified by editor Patricia Bauch, O.P., is for future researchers within the field of Catholic education. The need for such partnerships within the larger field of Catholic education across the many sectors of society is articulated uniformly by the several authors so that Carroll's vision comes into greater focus. To paraphrase the book's conclusion: It is the duty of Church officials to promote the interests of Catholic educational institutions so that the public function of Catholic schools can be a greater voice in the public square.

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