Journal of Catholic Education

Volume 1 | Issue 1 Article 15

9-1-1997

The Contemporary Catholic School, by Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe, & B. O'Keeffe

Edwin J. McDermott
University of San Francisco

Recommended Citation
McDermott, E. J. (1997). The Contemporary Catholic School, by Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe, & B. O'Keeffe. *Journal of Catholic Education, 1* (1). http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0101151997

THE CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC SCHOOL: CONTEXT, IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

TERENCE MCLAUGHLIN, JOSEPH O'KEEFE, AND BERNADETTE O'KEEFFE, EDS. FALMER PRESS, 1996.

Reviewed by Edwin J. McDermott, S.J.

This book divides its research on Catholic schools in the United Kingdom and the U.S. into four sections and 21 chapters. The first section describes the context of the Catholic schools as discussed during the summer 1993 conference in England on "The Contemporary Catholic School and the Common Good." In the second chapter Anthony Bryk, as keynoter, shares the research he completed in his 1993 book, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Other authors weave together history, research, philosophies, and theologies of Catholic schools in the United Kingdom and compare these aspects to those found in Catholic schools in the U.S. The comparisons are striking, while the contrasts are important for a study of these two systems. The "Common Good" is the theme running throughout the book. Five of the contributions are from the U.S. and 15 are from the U.K.

In Part 2, "The Identity of Catholic Schools," Thomas Groome asks the question, "What Makes a School Catholic?" His answer is divided neatly, clearly, and enthusiastically into five theological characteristics along with three "cardinal" characteristics which he identifies as personhood, justice, and Catholicity. This chapter and the one by Terence McLaughlin set the stage for a study of the distinctive mission of the Catholic schools. McLaughlin warns against conforming to norms of secular education and seeks to introduce a process "to bring an appropriate understanding of Catholic educational aims and values to bear upon the range of familiar policy questions" (p. 138).

Part 3 focuses on "Social Justice, Diversity and the Catholic Schools." Five of the six authors in this section are from the U.K. Joseph O'Keefe, S.J., recalls the "unequivocal historical precedent for serving immigrants in U.S. Catholic schools"(193). In his conclusion he calls for the Church to keep that legacy alive in the inner-city schools in the United States and to serve the "most underprivileged children" and the poor (p. 193).

Statements from the Bishops' Conferences on both sides of the Atlantic are quoted as theological background for serving people of other faiths or no faith. It is in this context that Vince Murray describes the changes at St. Philip's R.C. Sixth Form College and the changes in the enrollment patterns that led to the closure of the school. Murray asks the question, "How many Catholics does it take to make education Catholic?" (p. 245).

The final section of the book points the way into the future. Teachers, it is stated, will be renewed through professional communities of hope and dialogue. Religious education, according to Father Gallagher, distinguishes between "fides quae" and "fides qua," that faith which we believe and the faith which is a "personal search and journey to and in faith" (p. 287).

Written by two of the editors, Joseph O'Keefe, S.J., and Bernadette O'Keeffe, the last chapter reviews current research into Catholic schools. Some of the themes are: leadership, the role of the superintendents, financing schools, marketing, and service to the inner-city schools. More research is needed to make new decisions about the inner-city schools. Unique to the U.S. is the urgent need for Catholic schools for the Hispanic population.

I strongly recommend this book to superintendents and all who are in positions of leadership in Catholic schools. It includes both theory and practice. Some essays describe the ideal while others focus on the harsh realities. It is provocative, yet hopeful.

Tom Groome's chapter is my favorite. However, even as I suffered "disequilibrium" in reading the forceful presentations on the need to have Catholic schools in the inner cities for the poor, the minorities, and children of many faiths or no faith, I was forced to examine more deeply my basic assumptions about evangelization and pre-evangelization and the preferential option for the poor.

On the issue of the "Common Good," this book goes far beyond the treatment of the "Common Good" in Bryk's book. Reviewing the status of Catholic schools in the U.K. and the U.S. is a learning experience of comparing and contrasting systems. The Church schools in England and Wales have studied the impact of non-Catholics in the schools and they are seeking "a coherent educational policy" (p. 218) to direct their future student population. In the last few pages of the book, the editors suggest that the "body of social teaching seems at the present time ill-equipped to provide" (p. 308) the raison d'etre of the Catholic school.

Those who plan to study the research of this book must obtain copies of the many documents published by the Catholic Conferences in the U.K. At the same time, the contributions from the U.K. would have been enhanced by references to documents from the U.S. Catholic Conference, such as *To Teach As Jesus Did* and the statement of principles, *Support for Catholic Schools* (1990).

Edwin J McDermott, S. J., is currently a faculty member in the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership, School of Education, University of San Francisco, CA. He has a long and distinguished career of service to Catholic education.