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Mary Katherine Hamilton

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MORAL OUTRAGE IN EDUCATION

DAVID E. PURPEL. NEW YORK: PETER LANG PUBLISHING, 1999.

Reviewed by Sr. Mary Katherine Hamilton, I.H.M.

Do educators have an almost instinctual inclination to turn new awareness into a lesson plan for someone else? I have been pondering this because of the renewed interest in the social teachings of the Church and am heartened by this renewed focus.

Perhaps that is one reason why I found David Purpel's latest book, *Moral Outrage in Education*, so important. Employing the paradigm of the prophet tradition, Purpel challenges educators to make connections between assessment of "unnecessary" human suffering and the focus of educational work, to give primacy to social justice, "the nonnegotiable, permanent, and solemn responsibility to work for the elimination of unnecessary human suffering" (p. 161).

Moral Outrage in Education is a collection of David Purpel's essays, some having appeared previously and some published for the first time in this text. The essays reflect his ongoing endeavor to situate his work in education within a larger life commitment to justice and to ground his work in matters of spirit and moral vision.

The book is divided into four sections. The first discusses the nature of education's responsibility to the struggle for social justice. In the second, Purpel examines three recent alternative curricular approaches to conventional schooling and affirms and critiques aspects of character education, service learning, and holistic education.

The third section explores the intersection of education and spirituality. Purpel contends that "genuine transformation is an education that emphasizes the processes [of] awe, faith, the struggle for ultimate meaning, commitment, confession, moral outrage, and grief" (p. 201). Acutely aware of the limitations for such transformation within the culture and the profession, he nonetheless argues that, "we are not primarily educators, we are first of all God's agents, active partners in the covenant to create a community of peace, justice, love and joy who, parenthetically, have decided to exercise our responsibilities to this project in places called schools and universities" (p. 204).

The fourth section is an autobiographical essay which provides greater insight into the influences that have shaped Purpel's thinking and commitments, and, in turn, offers the opportunity to consider those shaping influences in the reader's life.

Purpel (1989) provoked the educational community by speaking of a

moral and spiritual crisis in education. His deepest hope was “to develop a more liberating discourse on the intimate relationships among society, culture, and education” (p. x) by enriching educational theory with a moral and religious discourse. Ten years later, he gives voice to his own moral outrage at the continuing intolerable human suffering in the world and in education’s frequent complicity with such suffering.

One criticism of the text is that, as a collection of essays, it is repetitious. However, this should not dissuade anyone from reading this book. Given the renewed focus on the social teaching of the Church, *Moral Outrage in Education* would make an excellent selection for discussion among educators who might subconsciously assume that the lessons are for someone else.

REFERENCE

Purpel, D. E. (1989). *The moral and spiritual crisis in education*. Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Sr. Mary Katherine Hamilton, I.H.M., is a faculty member in the School of Education at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

BY NATURE EQUAL: THE ANATOMY OF A WESTERN INSIGHT

JOHN E. COONS AND PATRICK M. BRENNAN. PRINCETON, NJ: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1999.

Reviewed by George E. Schultze, S.J.

Our culture commonly speaks of human equality without proving that such equality exists. The Declaration of Independence was based on this notion and academic and civil leaders defend it, but no one adequately shows us why we should hold this belief as true. By and large most people believe in human equality, and subsequently, human rights. However, these rights will never be firm if they arise from assertions or religious traditions that others fail to accept. Coons and Brennan attempt to show the truth of human equality in a fair, conscientious, and scholarly manner. They accept the conventional use of terms like “freedom” and “equality,” recognizing the validity of linguistic philosophy, and sympathetically study the works of earlier western philosophers and theologians who have investigated the nature of the human being.

We know that as human beings we are unequal in many ways — height, appearance, intelligence, and so on. It means little to say that all human beings are equal because they possess height and intelligence when we know

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