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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AT THE CROSSROADS: SURVIVAL AND TRANSFORMATION

JAMES YOUNISS AND JOHN CONVEY, EDS., TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, 2000.

Reviewed by Peter B. Holland

Public and Catholic schools have changed dramatically in the past decade, greatly influenced by the ferment in all social structures. Policy initiatives have created new organizational forms for schooling such as charter schools, choice in public schools, and vouchers for parents to determine the school for their children. Both Catholic and public schools have experienced major demographic changes which have exacerbated their funding issues. Contemporary schools must contend with a host of far-ranging issues such as changes in family social structure, a wider range of student capabilities and needs, the penetration of technology into our professional and personal lives, and a greater disparity in income and wealth among U.S. families. These issues and others exert enormous stress on families and schools and are reflected in the research reported in *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*.

How have Catholic schools been affected by the significant societal shifts of the past decade? *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* examines the operational characteristics of these institutions with special emphasis on minority students. The result is a compact volume which provides statistical detail on many aspects of contemporary Catholic schools and a concluding reflection which integrates the previous chapters and identifies financial constraints as the major barrier to the survival of Catholic schools. Composed of 10 chapters, this study is edited by James Youniss, professor of psychology and director of the Life Cycle Institute at The Catholic University of America, and John Convey, provost and professor of education at The Catholic University of America.

In Part I, the operational characteristics of Catholic schools are examined by researchers and scholars. Jeffrey McLellan reviews the rise and fall of Catholic school enrollments from 1940-1995. He finds that the reasons for the decline are threefold: the suburbanization of Catholics, racial population shifts in central cities, and the steep drop in the number of women religious teaching in Catholic schools. From studying the demographic trends in Catholic high schools from 1972-1992, Cornelius Riordan observes that contemporary Catholic high schools enroll more minority, female, non-Catholic, and higher socioeconomic status students than in 1972. Joseph Harris probes the funding dilemma facing Catholic schools. His work establishes baseline

data on parish income, tuition charges, and school costs at both the elementary and secondary levels. Maryellen Schaub compares teachers in Catholic and public schools on dimensions such as salary, job satisfaction, parental support, and teaching conditions. In studying achievement test scores of students in public and Catholic schools, Thomas Hoffer delineates areas of future research which might explain the differences noted.

Part II focuses on minority students in Catholic schools. Joseph O'Keefe, S.J., and Jessica Murphy provide extensive information on key factors in the school structure, finances, students, and staff of ethnically diverse Catholic schools. The level of detail drawn from their broad database provides a clear perspective on what these minority Catholic schools look like. Vernon Polite focuses on Catholic schools that were originally established for African American students. He identifies the rich histories of these schools and their increasing risk because of financial considerations. Sheila Nelson continues this focus on inner-city schools with her analysis of 33 urban Chicago Catholic schools. Her original research was conducted in 1987-88; nine years later, she revisited these schools to assess their organizational strength and viability based on four categories which emerged from her studies. Stewart Lawrence reviews data on the degree to which post-1970 Catholic immigrants send their children to Catholic schools. His work extends the study of minority families beyond African American to the new immigrants, largely from East Asia and Mexico.

The final chapter by Maureen Hallinan stands as a coda by connecting the research strands to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of Catholic schools. The conclusion evaluates Catholic schools against the benchmark of public schools using the three measures of academic achievement, social development, and training for citizenship, in addition to the unique Catholic mission of religious education. In each case, Catholic schools either hold their own or excel.

One might interpret the research to indicate that successful Catholic schools of the future need to adapt to their new populations, view problems as opportunities, read and interpret the signs of the times with precision and dispatch, remain true to their academic and social mission, and press for substantial public funding for their work. Hallinan identifies financial constraints as the most vexing issue facing Catholic schools and offers several proposals which may serve as a springboard for further discussion of financial viability of Catholic schools.

Some clarifications and elaborations come to mind in reading the final chapter. Neither Catholic nor public schools are monolithic. There may be more in-sector differences than between-sector differences within these schools. Catholic schools range from poor, small inner-city schools to larger, well-funded suburban schools which operate more like independent schools. These schools, in fact, often consider themselves as independent schools.

Likewise, the domain of public schools has a broad range. Many large inner-city public schools register low achievement scores, are beset with multiple social issues, and contend with powerful teacher union constraints which limit their agency. By contrast, smaller and less bureaucratic suburban schools feature strong funding and high achievement and often model themselves on and measure themselves against successful independent schools.

As many researchers have documented, size is a very important variable in determining school effectiveness. The enterprise of education began as a cottage industry and operates best on a human, (i.e., small) scale. Large size is daunting in schools, and parents and students seem to understand this intuitively. The attractiveness of charter schools, independent schools, and Catholic schools depends to a great extent on their manageable size. In addition to organizational and structural features that favor their success, Catholic schools are generally smaller than public schools, thereby affording more opportunities for personal contact and better communication between adults and adolescents.

Despite the limitations imposed by its brevity, *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* provides an informed perspective on Catholic schools at the end of the twentieth century. It also raises important research and public policy questions regarding the ability of these valuable institutions to survive in a competitive and economically driven society. As a practitioner in both Catholic and public schools, I strongly recommend this book for reading and reflection.

Peter B. Holland has served as superintendent of the Belmont (MA) Public Schools since 1988. He is co-author with Anthony Bryk and Valerie Lee of Catholic Schools and the Common Good, published by Harvard University Press in 1993.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION: THE FUTURE IS NOW

JAMES MULLIGAN, CSC, NOVALIS, 1998.

Reviewed by Merylann J. Schuttloffel, Ph.D.

Catholic education currently enjoys popular and professional success in educational circles. Remarkably, even secular educational reformers seek solutions within the Catholic educational framework. If this enjoyable situation carries a risk, however, it is the danger of generating a complacent Catholic educational constituency. James Mulligan, in *Catholic Education: The Future Is Now*, cries out such a warning to his fellow Canadians, a warning U.S. Catholics should heed about the risk of complacency.

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