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Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses

Victor J. Klimonski, Kevin J. O'Neil, & Katarina M. Schuth
Liturgical Press, 2005
\$19.95, 200 pages

Reviewed by Timothy Jarotkiewicz

The Catholic Church in the United States, much like the country as a whole, is becoming increasingly diverse. As educators at seminaries and theological schools attempt to train the seminarians and lay ministers of the future, they often find that their students come from a wider range of backgrounds than ever before. Whether facing diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, culture, age, socioeconomic status, educational background, or religious attitudes, administrators and faculty members often struggle to adapt their programs to meet the needs of their students.

Between 1995 and 2001, a series of dialogues called the “Keystone Conferences” took place to address the challenges experienced by those who prepare seminarians and lay ministers for the work in the Church. Twenty seminaries and theological schools participated in the project, and their contributions were assembled to create *Educating Leaders for Ministry*. Bringing together personal stories, empirical data, and research on best practices, *Educating Leaders for Ministry* provides a practical framework for leadership to respond to the complex needs of the current generation of students.

The book examines three issues encountered by seminaries and theological schools: (a) accommodating the rich diversity found among their student bodies, (b) helping students to integrate theological studies and ministry practices into the context of their own values and beliefs, and (c) assessing both student progress and the effectiveness of program curriculum and pedagogy. As each issue is examined, the various contributors offer concrete principles and practices to help educators refine their programs. Although the target audience consists of administrators and faculty members of graduate theological and ministry programs, the book's lessons on inclusive teaching methods and multiple learning styles are just as relevant to parish pastors and those who work in adult education.

The themes of diversity, integration, and assessment permeate discussion in *Educating Leaders for Ministry*. The book begins by offering recent statistics and profiles of actual seminarians and lay ministry students, thus providing an overview of the various backgrounds found in schools. After identifying the patterns of diversity, the authors present specific methods for creating a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, and ideas for developing curricula and instruction that accommodate diversity. In the chapters on integration, they present guidelines for faculty members to follow as they direct students through the process of integrating the spiritual, pastoral, and academic components of their programs. By encouraging faculty members to revisit their rationales and goals behind assessment, the authors hope to help them see assessment as part of the overall seminary and lay ministry formation process, rather than a merely routine activity.

Because the responsibility for adapting curriculum and instruction falls on faculty members, the book provides numerous ideas to prepare and assist teachers in this process. This is especially true in the area of assessment since teachers hold the primary responsibility of assessing whether students have fulfilled the goals of the program. Calling on schools to build “communities of wisdom” among the faculty, the authors offer a blueprint for faculty development with concrete examples of activities and methods that foster group action toward change. Once again, these methods would apply to any group seeking to refine its mission and promote a sense of community among its members, not simply graduate schools.

Educating Leaders for Ministry also includes a chapter on the effects of new technology on pedagogy in theological and seminary programs. Advances in technology promise to revolutionize the ways that religious training takes place and ministry is conducted. In the future, distance learning and web-based community sharing will likely occur on a regular basis. Faculty and students alike have the responsibility to explore the possible uses of technology in the context of their programs so that the Church leaders of tomorrow might acquire new and innovative ways to incorporate technology into their ministry.

Seminaries and theological schools are charged with the enormous task of preparing the future religious and lay leadership of the Church for the challenges of the new millennium. In order to accomplish this task, the learning institutions must change themselves. While this is a seemingly enormous task that involves responding to the needs of diverse student bodies, supplying students with the framework to integrate their academic, spiritual, and pastoral work, and encouraging faculty to develop more effective means of assessment,

Educating Leaders for Ministry can serve as a guide to those teachers and administrators who would tackle those challenges.

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Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children

Ronald Rolheiser, Editor
Crossroad, 2006
\$19.95, 237 pages

Reviewed by Sister Barbara Kane, O.P.

Anyone who has bemoaned the fact that a family member, friend, or student has stopped practicing the faith now has a resource for addressing the problem. *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children* is the fruit of a group of four symposia held in Ottawa, Canada and San Antonio, Texas. The goal of these meetings was to explore the challenge to become “Missionaries to Secularity.” In the first part of the book, Rolheiser defines the challenge and the results of the symposia. A middle section provides sound bites from the meetings. The third section includes seven excellent essays by different authors to support the material in the book.

Rolheiser cautions the reader not to look at secularity as the enemy of God and Church. “While secularity mandates freedom from religion, it also mandates freedom for religion” (p. 41). Secularity has brought many goods even as it has led to the excesses complained about by many today. The reader is challenged to “love the world, even with its moral inadequacies and in its sometimes hostile attitude toward faith and the religion” (p. 43). “The secular world will respond to us precisely, and only, when it first recognizes and feels our love” (p. 46). Rolheiser suggests that the reader use the metaphor of adolescence to describe secularity—a time when traditions and beliefs are questioned, and sometimes, rejected outright. This is a time of growth that one must experience in order to mature into adulthood. It can be difficult personally and for the family but often leads to stronger parent-child relationships