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## Catholic Education: Inside-Out/Outside-In, by James C. Conroy

Joseph Massucci

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### **CATHOLIC EDUCATION: INSIDE-OUT/OUTSIDE-IN**

JAMES C. CONROY, ED., VERITAS PUBLICATIONS, 1999.

*Reviewed by Joseph Massucci*

James C. Conroy, editor of *Catholic Education: Inside-Out/Outside-In*, sets upon the task of opening up an "honest, intellectually satisfying and provocative debate" (p. 11) about Catholic education in the British Isles. The editor invites individuals who operate outside Catholic education to dialogue with individuals who work from within, hence the subtitle "Inside-Out/Outside-In." The book is divided into two sections. The first part focuses on the reflections of those within the tradition of Catholic education; the second provides an opportunity for response from those outside. Of the 16 contributors to the volume, only 2 are native to the United States: Vincent J. Duminuco, S.J., of the Jesuit Center for Refugees in New York and professor at Gregorian University in Rome and Fordham University in New York; and Joseph M. O'Keefe, S.J., of Boston College. While the majority of the remaining contributors are from Great Britain, the issues presented prove to be thought provoking.

In the first section of Part One, the essayists focus on structural issues in Catholic school education. Included in the idea of "structure" are leadership, accountability, and identity. Of particular interest are three articles that address the issue of identity or the nature of Catholic education. This question challenges Catholic schools everywhere as they struggle not only to secure their place as institutions of academic excellence, but also to maintain their mandate to serve as a beacon of hope and a wellspring of the faith for each generation. In our increasingly secular world the purpose of Catholic schools takes on unsurpassed importance. Exploration of the identity issue leads to such considerations as professional preparation and qualities required of teachers in Catholic schools above and beyond their preparation for teaching within an academic discipline. The responsibility of the Catholic school to live and teach the faith is incumbent on all teachers, not just teachers of religion. Catholic school teachers are called to be men and women of the Spirit and to provide a living example of the Gospel message to the young people they encounter on a daily basis.

The second segment of Part One continues the theme of identity. The essence of membership in the Catholic faith is the willingness to subscribe to a particular set of beliefs that define Catholicism. Inherent in those beliefs are moral values that are being rejected more and more frequently in our modern world. The challenge for Catholic schools is to provide an understanding of our beliefs and values and a persuasive presentation of the values implicit in the faith; address the question of conflicting values modeled around us; and invite sustained, respectful, and open dialogue regarding our differences. Teachers will meet these challenges if they themselves have developed a personal spirituality rooted in Christ and nurtured by faith, prayer, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Perhaps the most compelling essay in Part Two was written by James M. Day. His reflections arise from personal experiences as a psychologist and educator who trained as a clinician and researcher. The article examines the importance of relationship in educational work. Day recalls a conversation with a young woman who discusses how the relationship between a particular teacher and the students influenced her view of learning and education and her decision to consider a career in education. One of the underlying points of the story from the perspective of the student is that if the student feels important, she will listen more effectively, give more of herself to the learning process, and learn more of what there is to be learned. Her faith in the teacher gives her the confidence to exceed what she previously thought was her best. Our learning depends on whether we are heard, misheard, or ignored. We learn by loving or in spite of it. The difference is enormous. On the one hand, we feel good about ourselves, our teachers, our classes. On the other hand, we may even feel resentment toward our teachers and our schools. The implications for Catholic faith education are tremendous. We come to faith by practicing it with others, by stories, words, and performances. Our contact with individuals who share our faith makes the words they speak mean something, inspires us, moves us to action.

The central paradox of Christianity returns us to an understanding that to teach we must surpass all of our uncertainties, that to achieve perspective we must be engaged in our desire, that to hear we must be permitted to speak, that to become responsible we must have been responded to. (p. 280)

It is up to Catholic educators to see to it that the vision of "relationship" positively influences the educational practices within the walls of the school. The author warns that:

Something apparently deeply ingrained in Catholic consciousness inclines people to be keenly aware of their place in a distinct hierarchy that is seen as something not to be challenged, even where it is regarded to be unfair, ill-informed or abusive. (p. 282)

However, he suggests that such things as the sharing of sacraments, the traditions of saints, and Marian spirituality can offer much to the relational perspective of Catholic school education.

Most United States Catholic educators have some understanding of the history and development of Catholic education in our country. However, for most, undertaking *Catholic Education: Inside-Out/Outside-In* will be akin to walking into a play during the third act. Without the necessary background regarding Catholic schools in Great Britain, readers may be overwhelmed by the political references in many of the essays. Furthermore, for Catholic school educators hoping to find new inspiration and motivation for their endeavors, several of the essays written in the style of a dissertation encumbered by numerous and distracting references may disappoint. Despite these shortcomings, one should not overlook the scholarly reflections and insights that form the basis of this work and in particular, the observations offered by those contributors outside the Catholic school framework.

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## **CULTURES APART? THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY IRISH YOUTH**

OLIVER V. BRENNAN, VERITAS PUBLICATIONS, 2001.

*Reviewed by Finola Cunnane, S.S.L.*

**W**hy are many young people who were reared in families characterized by a strong commitment to the Church becoming indifferent toward the faith community in which they were nurtured and socialized? This is the question that exercises the mind of the author of *Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth*. While there is clear evidence that a spiritual hunger exists among the rising generation, young people are rather lukewarm toward institutionalized religion except, of course, for a baptism or wedding!

*Cultures Apart?* is a challenging and very insightful book written by Dr. Oliver V. Brennan, formerly the Director of Pastoral Studies at the Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland, and now pastor in one of the most rapidly growing parishes on the east coast of Ireland. Much of the research that led to the writing of this book was done at Fordham University, New York, during his pursuit of doctoral studies. Brennan brings his professional and pastoral expertise to bear on this fascinating study of culture and its impact on the beliefs, values, and practices of young people today. He believes that the

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