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## The Catholic Character of Catholic Schools, edited by James Youniss, John Convey & Jeffrey McLellan

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effective approach to religious education and pastoral ministry must take serious account of this new reality that is open to the religious dimension of human existence and yet presents problems for institutionalized religious faith.

According to the author, effective religious education and youth ministry “will require an attitude of openness and a willingness to dialogue with what may appear at times to be an alien cultural environment” (p. 193). On the basis of young people’s spiritual openness and their search for community, Brennan’s final chapter explores a religious educational and pastoral response to the reality facing the Church today. He also outlines a number of principles that should underpin the successful enculturation of the gospel message into the landscape of contemporary youth culture.

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## THE CATHOLIC CHARACTER OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

JAMES YOUNISS, JOHN CONVEY, JEFFREY MCLELLAN, EDS., UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS, 2000.

*Reviewed by Mary C. Mullaly, FMA*

Contemporary Catholic education is presented in this informative book by means of a panoptic array of dynamic issues that Catholic schools encounter in fulfilling their mission and heritage.

Editors James Youniss, John Convey, and Jeffrey McLellan, through a series of 11 essays, address the *raison d’être* for Catholic schools: their religious and Catholic character. These essays are relevant to those inside the system who seek a deeper knowledge of the Catholic school’s uniqueness, history, and culture. They are also relevant to those outside the system who seek to understand the Catholic school’s contribution to wider society and humanity as a whole through its religious, moral, and cultural values.

The cultural context in which Catholic schools operate is very complex and differs from what it was at the beginning of the 20th century. Debates and discussions arise as to whether the Catholic school is still measuring up to its standards of the pre-1960s era or is taking advantage of the possibilities Vatican II envisioned for its future. The book’s introduction maintains that this form of debate can distract us from a fundamental point, that “history does not move backward in time and any viable religion must be practiced and understood in the context of real lives and living cultures” (p. 8). *The Catholic Character of Catholic Schools* addresses this thesis. The key

questions of the authors, and those upon which the book is posited, are: How are Catholic schools maintaining their religious character today, and what are the issues they must face in order to fulfill their Catholic heritage?

The comprehensive yet summative nature of the essays combines to make for a treat for an inquiring mind. The content of the chapters varies greatly in scope, addressing multiple issues that Catholic schools face today in order to fulfill their religious and academic missions. Following is a sampler of some of the fare.

John Convey reports results from a 1996 survey of bishops and pastors who were asked to describe their orientation to Catholic schools, a survey done to follow up a 1986 study (O'Brien) of the same topic. Of special note is the finding that priests are not as overwhelmingly supportive of Catholic schools as are bishops.

Other issues facing the future of Catholic schools, including the outlook of their continued religiosity, are dealt with in Mueller's study on religious sponsorship of schools run by the laity, Schuttloffel's insights on centralization and Catholicity in implementing curricula, and Galetto's and Elford's chapters on knowledge of core beliefs central to the Catholic faith in regard to both teachers and students. Carr examines the faith dimension in her study of principals' self-perceptions as leaders to cultivate students' religious-spiritual development.

Essays on the historical aspects of the Catholic school culture are included in the text. Jacobs examines the challenge of lay leadership accepting the mission that religious teachers once put into practice. Dooley gives a historical overview of theories and controversies in the field of religious education and concludes with a commentary on the implications of these developments for the Catholic identity of the schools. Walch describes three eras in the history of Catholic schooling in the United States, each era providing new challenges and opportunities. Schools, he concludes, must continually be open to change. Meagher tracks the role of Catholic schools in helping to form and sustain religious identity. His essay demonstrates why schools must adapt in response to changes within the Catholic population and its relationship to American culture.

For insight into the issues that formed and continue to mold Catholic education today, *The Catholic Character of Catholic Schools* is a must-read for anyone involved in Catholic leadership, administration, or governance. The book draws from the project "Legacy at the Crossroads: The Future of Catholic Schools," a study funded by a grant from the Lilly Foundation.

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