



3-1-2008

New Directions in Religious Education, by Finola Cunnane

Christopher J. Beza

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce>

Recommended Citation

Beza, C. J. (2008). New Directions in Religious Education, by Finola Cunnane. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 11 (3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1103102013>

This Book Review is brought to you for free with open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Catholic Education* by the journal's editorial board and has been published on the web by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information about Digital Commons, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu. To contact the editorial board of *Journal of Catholic Education*, please email JCE@nd.edu.

In concluding the book, Dykstra expounds on the theme of community faith by reviewing theological education. Dykstra highlights that religious community does not stop at our schools, but that faith community is carried out in our congregations as well. Dykstra explains, “Theological schools should not be—and, thankfully, are not—the only communities of faith and learning in our society. Every congregation should be, and every other religious institution” (p. 147). Dykstra’s idea points to the daily practice of our faith. It is easy to say an institution is Christian, but is it a Christian institution through actions and practice? Furthermore, what are the standards and outcomes that prove it is a faith-filled community?

Dykstra makes the point that our culture is not one that suits a Christian lifestyle, so Christians must practice their faith and thirst for a better understanding of our discipleship with Christ. With realistic views on society, Dykstra proves in theory that the practice of our faith is feasible in the 21st century. The point is well taken that even though there are mysteries within our great faith, it is up to the faith-filled congregation to satisfy our spiritual needs and evangelize not only through words, but through communal practice as well.

Dan Carroll currently serves as assistant principal at Sacred Heart High School in Waterbury, CT.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

FINOLA CUNNANE
 VERITAS HOUSE, 2005
 \$14.95, 208 PAGES

Reviewed by Christopher J. Beza

Is religious education a thing of the past, or has its time not yet arrived? In *New Directions in Religious Education*, Cunnane draws upon the wisdom and experience of Gabriel Moran, the renowned American Catholic who has written about religious education for nearly 40 years, to provide a new lens through which religious education can be perceived. Cunnane states, “the religious education learned in school frequently clashes with the lived experience of the young person outside of the school setting” (p. 19). This book

attempts to explain the current status of religious education and create a new perspective on the aspects of religious education.

Religious education is emerging as one of the most important issues facing today's world. Cunnane challenges the language used in religious education, referring to it as "a babel of language" (p. 8). To provide a basis for the discussion, Cunnane points to four qualities that Moran outlined as essential to the fullest meaning of religious education. Religious education should be international, that is, it must account for the array of national meanings of the term. Religious education must be inter-religious in that it affirms the importance of each religion in relation to all other religions. It must also be intergenerational, providing for a continuum of religious education for people of all ages. Finally, religious education must be inter-institutional, engaging the major institutions of society.

To establish the framework for a discussion on religious education, an explanation of the meaning of religious education is provided. Cunnane states, "religious education is that which affirms and ameliorates a person's work and, at the same time, brings him or her to the realization of being a co-creator with God in transforming the world" (p. 43). Cunnane calls upon the forms and meaning of teaching and education to develop the foundation for a discussion about religious education. This results in a paradigm shift from an ecclesiastical to an educational framework for religious education. It is within this educational framework that Cunnane provides a threefold explanation of religious education in chapters four, five, and six.

The solution to this problem may lie in a more holistic approach to religious education. "What is needed, therefore, is an educational model that is an interplay of family, schooling, work and leisure across the generations. Only when this occurs can people be educated towards psychological, social and religious maturity" (p. 78). Cunnane provides an analysis of the roles played by the family, school, and parish in providing this new direction for religious education. "What is needed is a language that honors both the religious and the educational in life, a language that would truly be worthy of the title religious education" (p. 81).

The first setting for the examination of religious education involves the family: "Education within the family takes place in a unique manner and in a way that differs from educational forms" (p. 99). In describing the family as an educational form, Cunnane examines three different themes: the family as educator, the family as teacher, and the family as moral educator. The family educates simply by being a family, through its successes and failures, growth and development throughout life. The family teaches by the way it models life, whether this is an educative model or not. "In the familial setting morality is taught on a daily basis through the manner in which family members interact" (p. 116).

The second setting for the examination of religious education involves the school. In describing the school as an educational form, Cunnane examines the school as educator, as teacher, and as moral educator and identifies the problem with the institutional understanding of school, mainly that it is directed at a single group, those from ages 5-18. Cunnane continues on to describe schooling as a lifelong process. "Schooling begins at birth and continues until the moment of death. Therefore, schooling is for people of all ages" (p. 128). The role of schooling is to provide literacy and academic instruction. Teaching as it pertains to religious education is intended to be academic, to teach the subject material of religion. This type of religious education is essential since it provides an understanding of one's own religion. "Within the school setting, morality is taught by other children and by the adult lives of all teachers and staff" (p. 142).

The third setting for the examination of religious education involves the parish. As with the two previous educational forms, Cunnane takes a look at the parish as educator, as teacher, and as moral educator. The parish educates by modeling a way of life to its community and by challenging that community to be instruments of social change. It is the responsibility of the parish to provide the setting for learning and teaching that will cultivate the academic development of the community. According to the author, "the parish teaches morality by being a virtuous community and a community of character" (p. 170).

This book is thought-provoking, challenging the reader to examine the various educational settings in which children learn. The reviewer found the writing to be succinct and the author's development of the argument to be clear. Perhaps the most applicable theme in the book is the assertion that religious education should not be limited to one setting. The reviewer agrees that because people experience life in a variety of settings, religious education must be provided within the framework of these experiences. Overall, this book is informative, though it lacks reference to research. Although this book initiates the discussion about religious education, it does not explicitly provide suggestions for the new directions in religious education as indicated by the title.

Christopher J. Beza is a teacher and administrator at St. Pius V School in Lynn, MA.