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Rausch's "Educating for Faith and Justice: Catholic Higher Education Today" - Book Review

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Thomas P. Rausch (ed.)

Educating for Faith and Justice: Catholic Higher Education Today

Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010 pb 165pp \$19.95

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Education, ranging from traditional K–12 parochial schools to higher education, has always been essential to the overall mission of the Catholic Church. The Church's commitment to higher education in the United States has resulted in 235 Catholic colleges and universities, mainly of the Jesuit tradition. In his book, Thomas Rausch provides the reader with a thorough understanding of the history, background, and mission of Catholic higher education. Rausch summarizes: "Catholic higher education is concerned fundamentally with the human in all its dimensions, its highest achievements, its contemporary suffering, and the faith that gives it meaning. With its origin in the medieval universities and the Jesuit network of schools in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholic higher education from the beginning has been founded on the humanities, with their liberating, humanizing potential, seeking a deeper understanding of human persons in their many-faceted reality—interpersonal, social, creative, political, economic, and religious. Thus Catholic higher education aims at the education and transformation of the individual" (p. 56).

While the commitment to higher education is still a priority for the Catholic Church, Catholic colleges and universities have wrestled with their identity since the mid-1960s. As formal academic requirements have changed from the original European theological models, the result has been a de-emphasis on what makes Catholic institutions unique as compared to other religious higher education institutions. The universities may be Catholic in name, but the distinction of how these schools differ from other faith-based higher institutions is often not evident. For example, hiring practices of faculty have affected the culture of the institutions. As the student populations of the universities have increased, faculty from a variety of faith traditions have been recruited for the academic emphasis, resulting in faculty populations who are not all Catholic. This has had an impact on how Catholic faith traditions are taught throughout all areas of the institution. In addition, the transition to more academic structures from the theological focus has often excluded faith

development of the students. Those endeavors are often passed on to student life offices, thus limiting the Catholic mission of teaching of faith and social justice issues campus-wide.

The challenges of educating young people in the 21st century have also impacted the Catholic institutions. According to the data from the Pew Forum Study, one-third of youth raised in the Catholic Church no longer identify with the church, with Catholics losing more in numbers than other faiths. Further, students are often not attached to the church and have disconnected themselves from faith traditions.

In order to address the lack of Catholic faith traditions and promote social justice issues among their student populations, many Catholic institutions have dedicated institutional resources to reviving these important Catholic traditions. Five contributing authors to this book, all professors in Catholic universities, were invited to describe the specific efforts their institutions have employed to strengthen the Catholic faith traditions, especially as related to issues of social justice. Believing that students do care about faith and justice issues in the world, these institutions have created programs on their campuses that are organized and designed to lead students into active examples of connecting faith, justice, and world issues. Specific examples of these programs include Catholic studies programs, a pilgrimage to Rome, community-based learning, praxis-based learning, and immersion trips. The programs are distinctly tied to the overall Catholic mission of impacting students for faith and justice, yet distinct in how the programs are carried out to meet the needs of each institution. Each author describes the purposes of their own program, sharing results from both student and faculty growth and insights throughout the duration of the program. These programs appear to be effective in meeting their objectives, although the impact beyond the institutions has yet to be measured.

Rausch's book is a call to revive and renew the overall purpose and mission of Catholic higher education. As Rausch states, "If Catholic higher education is to reach young people today, it must address the real problems of the world in which we live. Justice, with its concern of the disadvantaged and the suffering, must be central" (p. 55). This book could provide other faith-based institutions with examples of providing opportunities for students to experience the impact of connecting faith

and social justice outside the walls of the university, reaching out to the world beyond.

Eloise Hockett