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Review of Buchanan and Gellel's "Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in Schools"

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Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in Schools

Michael T Buchanan and Adrian-Mario Gellel (eds), New York: Springer, 2015, \$129 hbk, ISBN: 978-3-319-20924-1, 312 pp.

This expansive collection of 24 chapters remains true to its title throughout. Edited by a Catholic educator from Australia and one from Malta, it represents the current conversation in Roman Catholic education worldwide—a movement experiencing anomie because of pluralism, changing demographics, declining church attendance, and, obviously a new and quite different Pontiff.

Several themes run through this volume, prominent among them that Catholic educators need to sharpen the distinction between catechesis and the kinds of classroom education that properly belong in day schools. Some authors deal with this distinction in epistemological terms; they see a tension between the Church's passing on through the generations (unchanged) what God revealed to the apostles and what we might simply call *education*, presumably conducted in classrooms that function as “free zone[s] of inquiry” (p. 57). Other authors deal with the catechesis/education tension by examining some of the diverse, plural, and even hostile contemporary contexts in which Catholic educators now carry on their work.

A second major theme is that Catholic education must keep its ultimate end in view—that is, human flourishing and the dignity of persons. Third, Catholic educators need to attend more closely to students because, ultimately, they are collaborators in articulating what faith means and will mean. Readers of this journal will find it interesting that several authors mention worldview and the need for schools to help their students develop Christian worldviews. Also, several authors (but certainly not all) note that Catholic schools deal with some of the same questions as other Christian schools—a refreshing recognition.

The authors of the first seven chapters, “Theoretical Foundations,” deal with historical, epistemological, theological, and aesthetic aspects of Catholic education. In chapter 4, Roebben perhaps catches the catechesis/education tension (and the goal of this first quarter of the book) best by asking if Catholic education can expand its purposes from socialization to humanization. Scott offers a succinct treatment of this same question in chapter 5.

The last three-quarters of the volume are organized along geographic lines. The first section deals with Australia, Hong Kong, and South-East Asia, focusing on the tensions Roman Catholic educators face in diverse settings. Writing about early childhood education in Australia, for example, Grajzonek explores the tension of teaching Catholic children while respecting those who are not Catholic. In light of the prickly relationship between Beijing and Hong Kong's Catholic educators, Chan notes that Catholic educators there have answered the pressure to conform to national goals with renewed effort to clarify their Catholic identity.

The next several papers deal with European contexts. In "Aren't They Too Young," Dillon agrees that children must learn how to live faithfully in plural settings, but she argues that finding a home in one's own faith community and one's own religious identity should precede exposure to multi-faith conversation. She is no jingoist; she believes in the *dialogue school* model where all voices are welcome but Catholic faith drives the program. Theo van der Zee raises questions about religious identity as well, focusing on the place of explicitly religious education in the overall program of Catholic education within a plural, European context. I cannot report on them here, but papers on Germany, Scotland, and Poland round out the Europe section.

Chapters related to Nigeria and South Africa continue the themes raised in the Asia and Europe chapters. In her paper about Catholic education in Nigeria, for example, Ugbor makes clear her support for the same dialogue model that Dillon described for Belgium. Ugbor's adjectives happen to be *transformative* and *integral* (p. 219), but she calls on educators to show hospitality to non-Catholics without apologizing for the Catholicity of Catholic schools. The chapters on American and Canadian education strike a common chord: Catholic education in those jurisdictions will continue to encounter rough waters. The last two chapters treat Brazil and Chile, both of which share features with European countries: secularization, pluralism, uncertainty about the contents of religious instruction in public schools, and how to retain Catholic identity while welcoming inactive or non-Catholics who wish to attend Catholic schools.

The contributors to *Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in Schools* have explored questions that are not going away: pluralism, diversity, curriculum, nominally and non-Catholic school populations, and the professionalism of teachers of religion. Because such issues have come to stay, this volume will serve for some years as an essential part of library collections and as a resource for specialists. Like all books, it has weaknesses, but its global scope and range of topics makes it a worthwhile purchase.

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