

BOOK REVIEWS

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LEADERSHIP IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

DEIRDRE J. DUNCAN AND DAN RILEY (EDS.), HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS, 2002.

Reviewed by Timothy J. Ilg

In *Leadership in Catholic Schools*, Duncan and Riley have compiled a collection of papers that provides a framework for Catholic school leaders to analyze the issues facing Catholic schools in the 21st century. Although the papers specifically address the realities of leadership in contemporary Australia and New Zealand, the wealth of information contained in this book will be helpful for school leaders in any country. The editors asked the contributors to share their perspectives on the major challenges within Catholic education and on the place of the Catholic school in secular society. Catholic schools have experienced demographic changes in the last decade and must contend with serious social issues such as the shifts in the traditional family structure, a greater disparity of wealth within countries, technological advances, students with special needs, and highly diverse student populations. While addressing these important issues, the authors have addressed the place of the Catholic school in secular society. More importantly, they have raised the question of retaining Catholicity within the schools while operating in such a society.

In the first four chapters, the authors address the mission of Catholic schools. Tony Kelly opens with an informed discussion of the distinctive characteristics of Catholic education with its emphasis on community and the value of the human person. Kelly notes the importance of community spirit and the feeling of “people involved in something bigger than themselves” (p. 16) as key elements to the Catholic school identity. Theresa D’Orsa probes the changing demographics of Catholic schools and their impact on the historic mission of the schools. D’Orsa calls for moving to a broader conceptualization of evangelization without undervaluing the schools’ historic mission of ministering to the local Catholic communities. She challenges educators to think through the issues and seek to exercise the familiar mission in new and different ways. This section of the book concludes with two articles challenging Catholic leaders to

develop new strategies for preparing lay people to take over the roles of religious in maintaining the religious identity of the schools and to find new ways to integrate the religious, educational and social purposes of Catholic schooling within the context of a modern culture. David Hutton asserts and develops the position that elements of Catholic school identity are independent of society. He reviews the common purposes which all Catholic schools pursue through an historic perspective. This is must reading for those administrators involved in strategic planning.

In his essay “Catholic Schools – The Time Is Now,” Joe McCorley has skillfully combined the call for a radical new message for Catholic schools and the search for new models of authentic Christian leadership to challenge administrators to seek new organizational structures. His description of the “living unit” will be of particular interest to administrators who are seeking alternative structures within large Catholic schools. McCorley envisions education as a web of small learning, living units interconnected across the school. Although the concept of the living unit might seem far-fetched, his discussion of radical relationship building and “strange attractor” is helpful, visionary thinking.

The next three authors focus on the reality of leadership in Catholic schools. Anne Benjamin defines school leadership within the perspective of engagement with society. She maintains that the proper relationship between Catholic schools and society is one of interdependence, interaction, and involvement. Educational leaders have a responsibility to facilitate and encourage such interaction in the exercise of their leadership responsibilities. Thèrèse Power cautions school leaders to lift the “glass ceiling” that still confronts women in their quest for leadership in Catholic schools. This hard-hitting article challenges parishes and dioceses to review their current practices and develop strategies to address the gender bias in many school settings. Kelvin Canavan’s article describes in detail the highly successful planning and appraisal process of “the Sydney cycle.” Management teams might consider incorporating this framework into a long-term strategic planning process.

The remaining chapters address some important challenges facing Catholic schools in the current decade. In the Tasmanian situation, Paul Stevens discusses the impact of declining enrollments and economic instability on the long-term viability of Catholic schools. His analysis of burgeoning non-Catholic enrollments and the Church’s commitment to retain Catholicity within the schools raises the question of the sustainability of core values while operating in an increasingly secular society. Marketing Catholic schools, according to Deirdre Duncan, is one of the new realities for educational leaders in our consumerist society. She cautions Catholic school administrators not to compromise the schools’ core values to follow the market and increase enrollments. With the expansion of vouchers in the United States, Patrick Lynch’s discussion of the New Zealand Private Schools Conditional Integration Act might be interesting reading for those educators concerned about increased state support for Catholic schools. Lynch documents the successes of the move in 1975 to place the

Catholic schools under the country's state school system. While preserving the special character of the schools, Church leaders have been able to open up a wide range of resources that enabled the schools not only to survive, but to flourish. A chapter on student rights is a reminder to all administrators that Catholic school leaders must be increasingly cognizant of legal issues and school law. The issues confronted by public school administrators throughout the years have now become part of the private school scene.

This book raises many serious issues confronting Catholic schools today. It provides an informed perspective of these issues and documents their historical origins. A reader will not always agree with the positions offered, but an open, public policy debate will be helpful in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by Catholic schools in this competitive environment.

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