

3-1-1998

# Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education From Colonial Times to the Present, by Timothy Walch

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## Recommended Citation

Teegarden, R. A. (1998). Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education From Colonial Times to the Present, by Timothy Walch. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 1 (3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0103132013>

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what research reveals about Catholic schools. I recommend that these two chapters be read as a unified whole to give the reader a clear picture of the choices that Catholic schools are facing as they attempt to define their mission for the future.

What follows in chapter four is a serious survey of the major themes in liberation theology and critical pedagogy. Both disciplines understand their task as presenting a new understanding of what it means to be human and Christian in a transformative way. For those not familiar with either liberation theology or critical pedagogy, this chapter provides an excellent summary of the major contributions of writers in these movements and concludes with a clear "integrative model" of liberation theology and critical pedagogy.

I highly recommend this work to Catholic educators looking for resources on Catholic identity and the integration of social justice into the school's educational mission. This book should be part of every faculty library as a resource tool to be consulted in developing the school's vision.

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## **PARISH SCHOOL: AMERICAN CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL EDUCATION FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT**

TIMOTHY WALCH. NEW YORK:  
CROSSROAD PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1996.

*Reviewed by Robert A. Teegarden*

**T**imothy Walch's *Parish School* weaves a rich tapestry as it tells the story of Catholic education in America from the Colonial times to the present. The warp of his fabric highlights six themes central to Catholic education: survival, immigration, a variety of responses, adaptability, community, and identity. The woof of his loom portrays a kaleidoscope of people, places, politics, and power. The woven images tell the story of risks taken, of adventures to foreign lands, of conflicts both in and out of the Church, of powerful leadership, and of more sanguine times in American Catholic education. In one sense, though, *Parish School* depicts a seamless garment, one whose recurring themes include the preservation of faith of its children and their preparation for productive roles in society.

*Parish School* sheds light as both treatise and thesis. It unravels the long and rich influence that the American Catholic educational organizations have

had on education in America. The breadth of Walch's loom spans the era roughly from 1565 in Florida to 1994 in Cleveland. And while his story ends in the mid-1990s, *Parish School* advances the efforts of Catholic education in America by suggesting further research on why America's Catholic schools do what they do, why they have had the impact they have had, and what tomorrow might hold.

Far from being a sanitized history of American Catholic education, *Parish School* tells of the struggles with anti-Catholic movements in America and of struggles within the Church over the validity of the mission of Catholic schools. Like the fabric of time, the story of American Catholic education highlights the diversity within the Church itself. Some believe in Catholic schools and some don't. At one time Catholic schools reached 50% of the Catholic youth in America. It's estimated that Catholic schools reach less than 12% today. Walch echoes the hard questions asked about the validity, purpose, and justification for these institutions. This history reveals power struggles between priests and parents over governance issues. If parents are the primary educators of their children, how complementary is the Church in support of that duty? Who should determine the content of curriculum?

*Parish School* is just as far removed from the tendency toward the political correctness of the late 20th century. Rather than inventing a history to fit the mood of the times, Walch embroiders only with facts.

Walch points out that the success of Catholic education in America sits squarely on the shoulders of the teachers in the classroom and the parents of the students. Walch focuses on the heroic efforts of the myriad orders of religious sisters who staffed America's Catholic schools through the late 1960s. But he also notes the tremendous sacrifices that were necessary to organize, build, and maintain these Catholic schools through two world wars, three world conflicts, the massive immigration movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the fluctuation of world economics, and the rise of the common school. Parishes in general and parents in particular made the sacrifices necessary for these schools to survive. But as Walch notes repeatedly throughout his work, the efforts of the local folks were subsequent to the direction and support of the episcopal ordinary.

Walch notes that in their efforts to heal the horrendous scar left by the Civil War, many in the country wanted to minimize anything foreign and maximize what is common in America. Catholic schools (and the Catholic Church) were challenged by the anti-foreign rhetoric of the likes of Congressman James G. Blaine of Maine. The very appearance of the common school movement, however, challenged the foundations of Catholic schools in America. The subsequent state compulsory attendance laws also heightened the dialogue both within and without Church organizations. Even Rome was brought into the mix. In 1875 the Vatican called on the prelates to

do everything in their power to prevent Catholic children from attending public schools. Even absolution could have been denied to “obstinate” parents who refused to comply. The bishops of America responded with the councils of Baltimore in 1884. Dr. Walch notes, however, that both sides in the argument shared one common belief—that education was a vital part of American society.

*Parish School* graphically portrays the almost logarithmic growth of Catholic schools in America between 1920 and 1964. National Catholic organizations seek one voice for Catholic education in America. Issues of survival now become issues of human rights and due process of law. The world grows up. So does the Church.

Walch appropriately paints the post-Vatican Church as a “Generation of Crises.” Declining enrollments through 1990 force yet again a variety of responses to the needs of Catholic education in America. The loss of vocations in the Church opens the door to more lay participation in Church ministry. The immigration movement is now from the south rather than the east. But no religious orders accompany this movement. At the moment of their success, Catholic schools begin to experience a decline. The pattern repeats.

What was once an ideological question gives way to pragmatism. Power rather than principle is the real issue as Catholics once again consider survival. This “Crisis of Success” ushers in the last decade of the 20th century. For those involved in Catholic education—parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, priests, and bishops—*Parish School* is a good read. It gives perspective to the dialogues about Catholic education as the Church stands on the threshold of the third millennium. In one sense there is really nothing new; what we experience today we’ve experienced before. In another sense, the future is limited only by our vision. And regardless of the issue before us, regardless of our part in this grand enterprise, Walch reminds us that we are all cut from the same cloth.

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## **DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL (2ND ED.)**

EDWIN J. MCDERMOTT, S.J. WASHINGTON, DC:  
NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, 1997.

*Reviewed by Maria Ciriello, O.P.*

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