

9-1-2001

Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth, by Oliver V. Brennan

Finola Cunnane

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Recommended Citation

Cunnane, F. (2001). Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth, by Oliver V. Brennan. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 5 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0501112013>

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However, he suggests that such things as the sharing of sacraments, the traditions of saints, and Marian spirituality can offer much to the relational perspective of Catholic school education.

Most United States Catholic educators have some understanding of the history and development of Catholic education in our country. However, for most, undertaking *Catholic Education: Inside-Out/Outside-In* will be akin to walking into a play during the third act. Without the necessary background regarding Catholic schools in Great Britain, readers may be overwhelmed by the political references in many of the essays. Furthermore, for Catholic school educators hoping to find new inspiration and motivation for their endeavors, several of the essays written in the style of a dissertation encumbered by numerous and distracting references may disappoint. Despite these shortcomings, one should not overlook the scholarly reflections and insights that form the basis of this work and in particular, the observations offered by those contributors outside the Catholic school framework.

Rev. Joseph D. Massucci is the chairperson of the Department of Educational Leadership and coordinates the Catholic School Leadership Formation program in the School of Education and Allied Professions at the University of Dayton.

CULTURES APART? THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY IRISH YOUTH

OLIVER V. BRENNAN, VERITAS PUBLICATIONS, 2001.

Reviewed by Finola Cunnane, S.S.L.

Why are many young people who were reared in families characterized by a strong commitment to the Church becoming indifferent toward the faith community in which they were nurtured and socialized? This is the question that exercises the mind of the author of *Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth*. While there is clear evidence that a spiritual hunger exists among the rising generation, young people are rather lukewarm toward institutionalized religion except, of course, for a baptism or wedding!

Cultures Apart? is a challenging and very insightful book written by Dr. Oliver V. Brennan, formerly the Director of Pastoral Studies at the Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland, and now pastor in one of the most rapidly growing parishes on the east coast of Ireland. Much of the research that led to the writing of this book was done at Fordham University, New York, during his pursuit of doctoral studies. Brennan brings his professional and pastoral expertise to bear on this fascinating study of culture and its impact on the beliefs, values, and practices of young people today. He believes that the

better we understand contemporary youth culture the more effective we will be as educators, religious educators, youth leaders, pastors, and parents.

This book examines the paradigmatic shift that is occurring with regard to young people's affiliation with the Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly as reflected in their meager participation in the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. The author cites the results of various surveys to indicate a significant social and cultural shift following rapid economic expansion, something that parallels similar developments in other advanced and prosperous societies in various parts of the world. In examining the impact of sociocultural change on the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior of young people, this unique Irish situation is considered within the context of similar changes in other countries in an increasingly postmodern age. Since the Church-culture relationship in Ireland has evolved to mirror that throughout Western civilization, both the sources used and the conclusions drawn are pertinent to the indifference of youth throughout the Western world.

Cultures Apart? offers many academic insights into the ways in which Ireland has changed in recent decades as well as into the lived culture of young people. It is clear that the Church often has difficulty in communicating with this new youth culture. The chapter entitled "The Voices of Contemporary Irish Youth," in which the author, using five personal case studies, highlights some of the realities and challenges facing the Church, will fascinate many readers. These five stories from the rising generation make for extremely interesting reading and each of us is probably familiar with young people such as these irrespective of where we live in the developed world.

On the basis of the research that went into the writing of this book, it appears that the biggest challenge facing the Catholic Church in Ireland, and churches in the developed world generally, does not center on the lack of religious faith or a lack of openness to the religious dimension of human existence. The author points out that

While one should not underestimate the many elements in a consumerist, commodity-driven culture that diminish interiority and block the openness that is a prerequisite for hearing the message of the Gospel among large numbers of young people, the greatest threat to meaningful Church affiliation appears to be coming from a post-modern culture that is increasingly supplying the framework in which young people live. This is especially characterized by dissatisfaction with religious institutions, rampant relativism, pluralism, and apathy, as well as a reluctance to take part in ritual that is not deeply experienced. (p.130)

Since human existence at the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity is heavily marked by postmodern sensibilities, an authentic and

effective approach to religious education and pastoral ministry must take serious account of this new reality that is open to the religious dimension of human existence and yet presents problems for institutionalized religious faith.

According to the author, effective religious education and youth ministry “will require an attitude of openness and a willingness to dialogue with what may appear at times to be an alien cultural environment” (p. 193). On the basis of young people’s spiritual openness and their search for community, Brennan’s final chapter explores a religious educational and pastoral response to the reality facing the Church today. He also outlines a number of principles that should underpin the successful enculturation of the gospel message into the landscape of contemporary youth culture.

Finola Cunnane, S.S.L., Ph.D., is director of religious education, Diocese of Ferns, Ireland.

THE CATHOLIC CHARACTER OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

JAMES YOUNISS, JOHN CONVEY, JEFFREY MCLELLAN, EDS., UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS, 2000.

Reviewed by Mary C. Mullaly, FMA

Contemporary Catholic education is presented in this informative book by means of a panoptic array of dynamic issues that Catholic schools encounter in fulfilling their mission and heritage.

Editors James Youniss, John Convey, and Jeffrey McLellan, through a series of 11 essays, address the *raison d’être* for Catholic schools: their religious and Catholic character. These essays are relevant to those inside the system who seek a deeper knowledge of the Catholic school’s uniqueness, history, and culture. They are also relevant to those outside the system who seek to understand the Catholic school’s contribution to wider society and humanity as a whole through its religious, moral, and cultural values.

The cultural context in which Catholic schools operate is very complex and differs from what it was at the beginning of the 20th century. Debates and discussions arise as to whether the Catholic school is still measuring up to its standards of the pre-1960s era or is taking advantage of the possibilities Vatican II envisioned for its future. The book’s introduction maintains that this form of debate can distract us from a fundamental point, that “history does not move backward in time and any viable religion must be practiced and understood in the context of real lives and living cultures” (p. 8). *The Catholic Character of Catholic Schools* addresses this thesis. The key

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