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BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

GRAHAM P. MCDONOUGH, NADEEM A. MEMON, & AVI I. MINTZ (Eds.). *Discipline, Devotion, and Dissent: Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic Schooling in Canada*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. (2012). 208 pp. \$39.99 (paperback). (ISBN 13: 978-1-55458-841-1).

The compatibility of faith-based schooling with interculturalism, multiculturalism, and secularism is constantly questioned in plural societies such as the Canadian one. Such schooling is often labeled as being divisive, indoctrinating, and less inclusive in terms of civic and citizenry values. *Discipline, Devotion and Dissent* presents an examination of Canadian Jewish, Catholic and Islamic schools by offering perspectives on some of their experiences. The contributors seek to cover three main themes: (1) What aims and practices characterize Canada's faith-based schools? (2) How faith-based schools reconcile the demands of their faith with the expectations of the larger society? And (3) how do these schools respond to internal dissent? By dissent, the authors refer to the act of internal criticism and differences within faith-based schools' classrooms. This volume, which is organized in ten chapters, covers a huge range of issues such as the history of faith-based education in Canada, the sacred-secular relationship, and the diversity of faith schools.

The editors, McDonough, Memon and Mintz, are, respectively, university professors at Victoria University, Wilfrid-Laurier University, and Tulsa University. They offer a collection of scholarly articles arranged in three parts, covering reflections and fieldwork on Canadian Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic schools. The first part "explores how Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim communities have conceived of the aims of their schools and how these aims are manifested in their curricula and teaching methods" (p. 10). In chapter one, Epstein draws our attention to the complexity and diversity of Jewish day schools. The second chapter, by D'Souza, argues for the distinction of Catholic education based on the universal ethos of Catholicism. Finally, Memon explores the history surrounding the establishment of the first Canadian Islamic School.

The second part addresses the question of how faith-based schools respond to the challenges of citizenship. It explains how these schools take citizenship education seriously in order to prepare their students to be functional citizens. The first chapter, by Beiles, argues for a plurality of liberal values, which is modeled in a case study of the Toronto Heschel School. In the second chapter, Donlevy discusses the values of “respect for the Other, fairness, the common good, and democracy” (p. 121) and their importance to Catholic education. In the third chapter, Ahmed borrows Tariq Ramadan’s model of “Integration and Post-Integration” to look at the standing of London (Ontario) Islamic School.

The third part examines the ways in which faith schools may view and respond to internal dissent, which refers to internal tensions and critics within these schools. It also explores questions that “elicit internal differences and point to questions at the core of the school’s mission” (p. 10). Firstly, Pomson and Schnoor, argue for the interdenominational status of the Downtown Jewish Day School. This claim is based on the fact that this school is populated by students coming from a broader spectrum of Jewish denominations. Secondly, McDonough presents the Catholic Church’s position on birth control and homosexuality. Finally, Ahmad argues for the role of Islamic schooling in promoting critical thinking and open-mindedness. Nonetheless, the final chapter, by Mintz, provides a summary and an analysis of the previous chapters; it draws our attention to the fact that faith-based schools are enormously diverse and should not be treated as a single entity.

This book is one of the few works to address Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish Canadian schools in one volume and to draw comparisons and conclusions from the work presented. Concurrently, the book demonstrates how these schools can and should function in a democratic plural society. It indicates that the key is in cultivating “an identity that is at once grounded in their own traditions and oriented toward the requirements of democratic agreement” (p. 103).

While acknowledging faith-based schools’ challenges and their complex relationship with the Canadian society, the contributors look at the appropriate approach that these schools should embrace to deal with their internal dissent. The book as a whole is an advocate for religious schooling. Likewise, most of the articles, in particular Ahmad’s and D’Souza’s, seem to approach the subject from, what Zine (2008) calls, a *critical faith-centered epistemology*, which challenges the privileging of secular knowledge as the exclusive vantage point for teaching and learning. According to this epistemology, secular knowledge is no less dogmatic than religious-based knowledge and should be viewed as an ideological position rather than an unbiased assumption.

Besides McDonough’s and Mintz’s articles, this book does not include an *actual* opponent’s view of faith-based education. It also restricts the focus to Catholic schools, which, unlike Jewish and Islamic schools, lend themselves to the scholarly scrutiny of the Church as a single entity. While suggesting

that faith-based schools are contributing to the evolving Canadian identity, the book does not directly address popular claims against religious schools such as divisiveness, indoctrination, intolerance, and the state's rights in education. The latter is addressed in Thiessen's book: *In Defence of Religious Schools and Colleges*, which provides a strong defense of faith-based institutions. Furthermore, in chapter six by Asmaa Ahmed, a statement such as "society would be diminished in the absence of well-operated schools dedicated to educating the young into their parents' religion" (p. 164) may seem as a strong claim that overemphasize the "undeniable" role of faith schools but, nonetheless, needs to be supported by more academic research on other Canadian faith-based schools. Regardless, the purpose of the book's components is not only to contextualize faith-based schools, but also to provide immense critique and analysis. That said, the issues covered in this collection make it a precious and valuable source for scholars and young researchers in the field of religious education in the Canadian Diaspora and elsewhere.

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