Mario O. D'Souza

A Catholic Philosophy of Education: The Church and Two Philosophers.

Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 290, Pb. \$32.95.

The radical commitment and radical openness encouraged by the Jesuit motto, "finding God in all things," characterizes Basilian Father Mario D'Souza's illuminating book, *A Catholic Philosophy of Education: The Church and Two Philosophers*. D'Souza writes that the book contains a Catholic philosophy of education more than a philosophy of Catholic education as it provides a Catholic understanding of education in general. While this is true, the main focus is on Catholic schools, in particular how their Catholic heritage and mission are assets that enable them to provide an integrated, holistic education to students diverse in their interests and needs, their cultures and religions.

Central to this task is the question of the one and the many, of universality and particularity, of commitment and openness. In the introduction, D'Souza reveals that his ability to value both flows from his own experience as a student in a Catholic school in Pakistan, particularly how the religious and cultural diversity of the students, faculty, and curriculum produced "happy friendships," an expansive understanding of what it means to be human, a commitment to lifelong learning, strong faith, and a desire to be of service to all (5–6). Resonating with this experience and providing strong philosophical foundations for education, D'Souza considers in seven chapters the documents of the Pontifical Congregation for Catholic Education and the work of Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan.

The first chapter introduces resources from Vatican II on Catholic philosophy of education, and it locates them within philosophical works that preceded and followed the council. It treats even-handedly the Thomism and neo-Thomism that flourished from the late 1800s to the beginning of the council, reminding the reader that in *Aeterni patris*, Pope Leo XIII proposed Thomism more as a method than a doctrine, one he hoped would provide unity amidst the disarray caused by incomplete and competing worldviews like materialism, individualism, scientism, and positivism. In surveying various works by Catholic philosophers before the council, D'Souza introduces themes he will continue to develop throughout the book, such as the orderly interdependence of creation and the need for holistic approaches that promote the "physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and religious" flourishing of students (32). D'Souza agrees with John O'Malley's thesis that Vatican II shifted the church's style as much as its priorities, as well as Francis Sullivan's and Lonergan's specification that the shift was from classicism to historical consciousness. The emphasis on *communio* and personhood complete his general comments on the council.

D'Souza devotes only a couple pages to the council's declaration on education, *Gravissimum educationis*, and summarizes it as an admonition to form the "whole person" even though the document does not use this exact term. He finds that after the council, Catholic thought on education was influenced less by philosophy and more by scripture and theology, and like the council it emphasized personal conversion and promotion of the common good.

Chapter two introduces Maritain and Lonergan as Catholic philosophers of education. He has chosen them from among many thinkers whose theories he finds valid because he believes they "complement and enhance" the church's teaching that promotes universality as well as particularity (54). Both authors applied and developed the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas. Maritain's writings aimed at unity of the person and of society. He wrote that students are the main agents of their learning, and teachers must adapt themselves to students, as students must to teachers. More important than the formal lesson are "the truths that teachers profess and live by," their "personal witness to truth" (58). Following Thomas, Maritain highlights the supernatural origin and end of human persons that manifests itself in a "disinterested desire to know" and requires us to cooperate with God if we are to progress in truth. Lonergan agrees, and adds an analysis of the way people naturally come to know through experiencing, questioning, understanding, and judging. Since human beings are also affected by sin and grace, a Catholic philosophy of education would need to account for the many ways they affect us concretely in history. For D'Souza, while Maritain's thought "is largely in keeping with some of the philosophers who flourished before the Council, Lonergan represents the tradition after the Council, even though his work on education was written beforehand" (77).

Chapter three applies the CCE documents, Maritain's thought, and Lonergan's to "The Aim and End of the Catholic School: The Role of Knowledge and Learning." The ultimate end of a Catholic school, as for human life in general, is union with God. But the proximate aim of schools is first and foremost to help students gain knowledge. This aim is viewed in the context of its ultimate end. Parents are ideally a child's primary educators. Priests are educators too, "responsible for imparting Christian doctrine," and not merely in homilies. Students require an education that feeds the whole person and allows them to critically integrate the learning that comes from multiple sources, including culture and a complex of academic subjects. While academic growth is the main purpose of schools, "the Catholic school has as its aim the critical communication of human culture and the total formation of the individual" (83, taken from CCE, *The Catholic School*, para. 36). The individual is not simply to serve her/himself and grow in power and wealth, but rather to grow in freedom and heed the "call to serve and to be responsible for others" (85, from

ibid, para. 56). Personal, critical inquiry is a focus, and lessons “should not be housed in a non-committed neutrality” (86, *Educating together in Catholic Schools*, para. 7). Cultural and religious diversity are to be celebrated “as rich with educational possibilities” (90). Maritain provides detail to the CCE documents, with some warnings (such as against believing that everything can be taught) and some counsels (like of the need for liberal arts to prepare people of all types for work and leisure). Lonergan’s transcendental method emphasizes the particularities of place, time, and culture, but still finds a way to obtain objective knowledge and avoid the relativism so common today. Central to this is the need for conversion, including the existential discovery of one’s own agency and responsibility.

In the fourth chapter, on “The Unity of the Student,” D’Souza writes of the need to promote unity both within each student and among students. The CCE documents “all” refer to “education of the whole person, with one making sixty references” (116, the one being *Consecrated Persons and Schools*). As part of this holistic education, the documents and D’Souza don’t shy away from talking about sex education. About this and other topics, young people are exposed to a bewildering array of competing viewpoints on what is true, good, and beautiful. Too often they turn to drugs and alcohol to alleviate loneliness or worries about their futures. They need adults who have the wisdom of experience to help them make informed, critical assessments. To assist in this, schools need to educate students in affect and discernment to help them to use their freedom well and to become ever more free (117, *Educational Guidance*). Freedom is understood not simply as the absence of constraint but the result of knowledge and good choices. Education, when done well, should increase freedom rather than constrain it. It should make us more human, more at peace within and with others. Perhaps D’Souza’s most potentially controversial part of the book—and where he seems to depart from CCE documents—is his suggestion that Catholic schools teach non-Catholics their own religions, as was done at his Catholic school in Pakistan. He advocates for it because “[r]eligious instruction is essential to the personal formation of students [...]. In an interreligious world, the religious identity of each student must be recognized and protected” (115, cf. 182). Maritain’s writings support the CCE document’s call for an education that integrates the liberal arts and humanities with sciences, intellectual with moral and social development. Maritain criticizes the prevalence of rote learning geared toward passing exams. In his section on Lonergan, D’Souza adds the level of deliberation, decision and judgment to the previous levels of experience, understanding, and judgment that he covered in earlier chapters. Throughout these levels, questions are the primary motivator and the standard for objective knowing and responsible deciding. Lonergan also highlights the

value of the arts, since people tend to live their lives on an artistic, symbolic level and the arts liberate our senses, intelligence and affect, helping us to explore and fulfill our potential.

Chapter five, “The Vocation of the Teacher,” continues the previous chapter’s concern for holistic education towards freedom. Summarizing the CCE’s *Catholic School*, D’Souza writes, “Teachers are forming whole persons, not just their minds, but also their behavior, their language, their expressions, the very heart of their being. Freedom is an internal disposition, and teachers must be aware of all that hinders this disposition from being realized in the integral development of the student as a person” (145). Particular attention is paid to the role educators at Catholic schools play in fostering Christian faith and love in their students. Since “faith is principally assimilated through contact with people whose daily lives bear witness to it” (145, CCE *Catholic School*), “there is a parallel need for the comprehensive education of lay teachers, particularly in religious education” (145, referring to CCE *Religious Dimension of Education*). CCE documents reject relying on religious educators and chaplains for the religious instruction of students. Instead, all “Catholic teachers are called to adopt a common worldview and attitude to life, secured on a hierarchy of values” (148, CCE *Catholic School*). Teachers must make good use of new technology, but they should be aware that “easy access to information [...] when it is not selected with critical awareness, ultimately favors widespread superficiality [...] impoverishing reason, but also imagination and critical thinking” (149, CCE *Educating Today and Tomorrow*). From Maritain and Lonergan, D’Souza draws out the role of teachers as artists and doctors, whose work pays close attention to nature and cooperates with natural patterns of growth.

The sixth chapter, “Society, Culture, and the Common Good,” details the social implications of the three sources. It begins with various challenges facing contemporary society, all of which have a partial view of what is true and good: materialism, individualism, hedonism, pragmatism, idealism, relativism, nihilism, and excessive reliance on technology. Against this, the Catholic school as Catholic should seek to transform society by an educational program that promotes “care for others, for the cosmos, and for one’s relationship with God” (180). A Catholic school’s primary, proximate aim is to promote its students’ intellectual development, their knowledge of facts, ability to dialogue, to think critically. And while knowledge is a good in its own sake, it also—for the CCE, Maritain, and Lonergan—finds a higher fulfillment in promotion of the common good, which includes not only the material, economic well-being of all persons, but also their liberation. Maritain advocates a balance of progressive and conservative elements: “teachers have neither to make the school into a stronghold of the established order nor to make it into a weapon to change

society" (190; *Education of Man*, 155). To promote harmony in diverse communities, Maritain promotes both personal friendships and just social orders. Lonergan agrees. He highlights the need for common meaning and values for fostering cooperation, and he reimagines traditional virtue as modern authenticity to ensure such cooperation is loving of God, neighbor, oneself, and the world. D'Souza praises how Lonergan "provides society, culture, and the search for the common good [with] the ability to avoid the Scylla of the nostalgia for complete cultural systems, such as classicism, and the Charybdis of relativism and individualism" (207).

The seventh and final chapter meditates on the Basilian motto, a prayer addressed to God: *Bonitatem, et disciplinam, et scientiam doce me* (Teach me goodness, discipline, and knowledge). The three requested lessons form an outline for the chapter. D'Souza criticizes the contemporary narrowing of education to job training and hopes we heed the CCE, Maritain, and Lonergan in their broadening of education to preparing students "for adulthood, for a career, and for citizenship," for "freedom and liberation" not just "material prosperity, financial security, accumulated wealth, and individual success" (212–13). He laments the lack of attention paid to religious instruction at Catholic schools: "Catholic students are often woefully ignorant of the basic elements of the Catholic faith at the conclusion of their schooling in ways that would not be tolerated in their study of other scholastic subjects ..." But he also condemns "an inward-looking Catholic education for Catholics." He calls for dioceses and parishes to collaborate more with Catholic schools and colleges, particularly in the formation of their Catholic teachers and students. "Church attendance once a week may have been sufficient in a world that could identify a broad Catholic culture. Such a world has long passed" (216–17). D'Souza celebrates the opening of Catholic culture to all cultures and disciplines, and he calls on members of all places and disciplines to work together to form "particular Catholic philosophies of education sensitive to local, national, and continental particularities" while still maintaining "an appreciation of the whole" (218). He hopes that, like Lonergan, we might avoid "the Scylla of the traditionalist, and the Charybdis of the modernist" (221) and for this he proposes the Basilian motto with its "the three virtues" of goodness, discipline, and knowledge, as values that "can unite democratic societies marked by religious diversity and cultural plurality."

I would conclude this review with brief compliments, criticism, and hope. I found the book to be very lucid in its language, and insightful and balanced in its content. A few key themes were embraced throughout the book: (1) the need for unity, wholeness, integration, (2) the goodness of pluralism or diversity, (3) freedom or liberation as an end, (4) the importance of promoting the

common good or kingdom of God. I found these themes to be important and inspiring. However, at times their embrace seemed so tight that they were never let go, which, in my opinion, caused some unhelpful repetition that could have been avoided by more strict adhesion to chapter or section headings and more precise organization within sections. Despite this, D'Souza's work is well worth reading and discussing, and I would encourage him to produce a companion book that builds on this with his own Catholic philosophy of education, perhaps organized under the three Basilian values or the four themes enumerated above.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00502005-19