

the Catholic Educator

Recovering an Authentically Catholic
Philosophy of Education

Toward an Authentically Catholic Educational Philosophy

Posted on March 2, 2011 by theCatholicEducator

As mentioned in my initial blog, the point of *The Catholic Educator* is to consider what is necessary for a renewal of our Catholic schools in the United States. It is my contention that central to this renewal is the need for an authentically Catholic philosophy of education. At the peak of Catholic school enrollment in the United States one could find several, if not many, books on just this topic: Catholic educational philosophy. I have four or five of these tomes from the 40's, 50's, and 60's on my bookshelves. Since that time, virtually nothing has been written on educational philosophy from a Catholic perspective. Moreover, the nuns, brothers, and priests who ran the Catholic schools at that time brought specific nuances to a general Catholic educational philosophy according to the charism of the order to which they belonged. As the number of religious educators dwindled and lay men and women took their place, we lost, not only those nuances to educational philosophy according to various charisms, we also seemed to have lost the entire tradition of Catholic educational philosophy. In its stead grew a secular educational philosophy as taught in schools of education and absorbed by the laity who were increasingly in charge of the Catholic schools. We now find ourselves, as Catholics, with schools that are largely absent a truly Catholic educational philosophy and that are in need of its recovery and renewal. On one hand we need a recovery, because we must connect such an educational philosophy to the doctrinal teachings of our Catholic Faith and to the broader Catholic philosophical heritage. On the other hand, we also need a renewal because we must take this foundation laid by holy men and women, restate it in modern terms, and unite to it any real advances that modern theory and practice provide.

In the past ten years or so, maybe more, there has been a real effort among bishops, pastors, and leaders of Catholic schools to renew the Catholic identity of our schools. This is good, but the fact that our schools need to renew their Catholic identity is a sign that we have lost the underlying educational philosophy. Furthermore, for all their effort, this renewal of Catholic school identity will fall short of its promise unless and until an authentic Catholic educational philosophy undergirds it. The secular educational philosophy in place at our Catholic schools simply cannot be the proper basis for a Catholic education, identity, and culture at our schools. As Omar Gutierrez points out in his blog [Education for the Kingdom of God](#), education along Catholic lines requires presumptions that are often at odds with those at large in modern culture. He writes:

At its heart education functions along presuppositions about what we are, and from that, what we should know. The methods, the content, the ends of education are all functions of what we believe of the human person. Since this is the case and since the Church has a very specific understanding of the human person, certain forms of education simply cannot be reconciled with the Catholic ethos anymore than socialism can be.

In future posts I hope to continue to make the case for a renewed Catholic philosophy of education and to elaborate on the methods, content, and ends of education which are in harmony with our Catholic Faith and tradition. In my next post I want to suggest some books which I believe can help Catholic educators begin to recover a Catholic philosophy of education. Until then, enjoy more of Omar Gutierrez's select blogs on education

at [Regnum Novum](#).

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