

Book Review

GRAHAM P. McDONOUGH, Beyond Obedience and Abandonment: Towards a theory of dissent in catholic education. McGill-Queen's University Press 2012, 307 pages, £18.99

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The book was published with the help of a grant from the University of Victoria and has been developed from McDonough's doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of education. As he acknowledges, some of the material in this volume has been published previously, for example, chapter 5 was published in the Journal of Moral Education Vol. 39 No. 4 pp. 421-36 (2010) as McDonough, 'Why Dissent is a vital concept in moral Education.' The book is clearly presented, consists of seven chapters with explanatory titles and subtitles. However it lacks appendices and a glossary which limits the use of the work to less specialist readers.

McDonough clarifies from the outset that the focus of the book is how to *dissent* without being accused of heresy or disobedience to Catholic teaching, to offer a contemporary Catholic vision of education to humanity and how he is concerned about the identity and purpose of Catholic educational institutions in contemporary society with all the attendant problems and challenges of globalization. One result of reading McDonough is to expand the depth and breadth of one's theoretical vocabulary with which to identify cases of dissent, how to approach a resolution in cases of dissent, and finally to know how to justify responses to criticism according to several theoretical lines of thought. McDonough undoubtedly wrote this book expecting educators in general, and Catholic educators specifically, to master the main issues in the literature on Catholic education and understand the complexities involved. He highlights how the practice of Catholic education and schooling is the subject of both much debate and controversy, but also much interest among clergy and laity with hope for the future.

The first part of the book (chapters one to three) scrutinizes the problems of writing on Catholic education through laying out and arguing for, a theoretical basis upon which a dissent-based reform of Catholic education theory can be made. McDonough remains consistent in presenting a solid picture to the reader regarding the difference between Catholic education and Catholic schooling: McDonough postulates a comprehensive model based primarily on a questioning method which he follows in his writing style, for example, what makes a school Catholic and how is this ethos maintained? (pp. 25, 28). His approach leads the reader to the conclusion that this is a model based upon both dissent and hope, and thus comes between the poles of complete and uncritical adherence to the Faith of the Church and complete rejection of Church teachings.

The first chapter sets out the spirit of this work through recounting the relationship between the Catholic concepts of hope and faith. The philosophical, technical and religious analysis and synthesis when discussing the three theological core virtues (faith, hope and charity), provide the basis for a wide canvass to investigate other virtues and their relationships in the frameworks of the New Testament and Catholic education.

McDonough's references the New Testament to maintain a theological context which stresses the importance of learning from and being inspired by Catholic literature. He also suggests a useful comparative analysis between the educational techniques found in the New Testament and those of current Catholic education and schooling. This analysis forms the basis of the methodology, the development of which is really the crucial element in the whole work

In highlighting the issue of dissent and the reasons leading to opposition to established structures McDonough succeeds

, in general, through referencing Paulo Freire's famous pedagogy of the oppressed arguing how difficult and dangerous it is to seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice when it comes to the pedagogy of religious education.

In chapter two, McDonough investigates the foundations of Catholic education, and the inter-connectivity between catechesis and religious instruction, and sets these out as a basis for a contribution to an educational theory in Catholic education based on the distinction that "all catechesis is religious instruction, but not all religious instruction is catechesis" (p. 39). Here, he focuses on cognitive as well as affective growth, to ensure holistic well-being and progress among students. McDonough widens the concept of Catholic schooling to the Christian community in general as not all students in the Catholic school are Catholic and it is actually a "civic institution" (p. 40).

Chapter two also considers the relations of educational foundations to concepts of authority, dissent and conscience. This chapter provides numerous suggestions and examples of obligations that may act as a constitution for one's life; one must have striven seriously to attach positive value..., one must seriously ponder whether one has the theological expertise to disagree..., one must examine one's conscience...(p.71). Those notions are controversial statements; they are in theory centred upon the learner's concerns to know about objections to prevailing teachings. This chapter clarifies that, each of, education, Magisterial, conscience, and dissent is of importance to the others and that therefore, logically and theoretically as well as practically, they are interconnected in the mission of the Church and of Catholic education (p.82).

Chapter three is extremely thought provoking to the reader as it investigates, discusses the challenges, and finally examines the changing face of Canadian Catholic education. McDonough clarifies the key reference point that Catholic education, doesn't take place in vacuum (p.83). In this context he usefully references Catholic documents and teaching on education from the Second Vatican Council to the present and the global influence of the Council. He makes telling points as he discusses the main concepts including the declaration on Christian education, Catholic identity, Christian formation, Catholic schooling and personal formation. Contemporary challenges in these areas have arisen as a result of ecclesiological changes and in providing greater details on these areas pre-empts any reader's questions (p. 103). McDonough also provides a broad critique to elaborate on each of his ideas especially when considering how Catholic philosophy in general is lacking an adequate and comprehensive philosophy of *Catholic education* (pp.117, 119). McDonough seeks to be objective and clear to certain degree, especially when he sets out the details of the theoretical interpretations of dissent and Catholic education (p.120), and in doing so he provides thoughtful and reasoned analysis to explain the different arguments relating to the changing theoretical background of the educational policies of Catholic schools in different time periods.

In chapter four, McDonough outlines a view of the development of Catholic educational theory based on a sequential analysis over time. In this context he demonstrates underlying continuities despite the differences which may appear to the readers. His aim is to bring understanding of the theoretical structure and the complications which take place in professional practice. For that, McDonough presents the aims and concerns of Catholic educators and the strongest conclusion he makes is when clarifying to the reader that there is not only one legitimate educational outcome as students learn about religion from within a religious institution (p.144).

In chapters five and seven McDonough discusses the theory and pedagogy of dissent. He suggests that dissent does not mean disagreement at a personal level; on the contrary, it grasps and expresses disagreement with a prevailing view or official decision (p.146). He identifies seven criteria that provide the basis of dissent concept.

- enfranchisement
- epistemological history
- contra-hegemonic position taking
- ethical purposes
- epistemological diversity within an association
- public expression
- the persuasive argument.

For McDonough the person who dissents wrestles with the moral questions of whether or not he or she should go against the established educational order: would dissent in this particular case be helpful, and is it being communicated in a morally acceptable way (p.160). He argues using Thomas Platt's view regarding the grounds of dissent and the expression of dissent, that both phrases govern the conception of a reasonable and responsible act (p.160). McDonough enhances the different facets of this concept by utilizing terms such as *justice* in and of itself and *concern for justice* which gives another constructive dimension to his arguments on the dissent issue. McDonough highlights the importance of dissent by clarifying the importance of addressing certain values perceived to have negative connotations such as; exclusion, elitism, or snobbery. Here he wants to reassure the reader that dissent has an ethical and epistemic adequacy and that this adequacy could be quickly eroded by emphasizing negative values. He develops these themes

to give weight to the theory and adds clarification to his theory by arguing that dissent is persuasive rather than intimidating (p.169).

In order to enhance his arguments McDonough discusses the scope of the pedagogy of dissent by setting out some details of it at a practical level. He mentions, for example, that it does not outline a curriculum nor is it a practical intervention that directly plans lessons. Whilst the theory and use of dissent is not limited in its application (though at this juncture McDonough indicates that not all theories can be practiced) to influencing administrative practices and the design and delivery of courses in schools, it is in fact a touchstone for informing decisions and practices at all times and all places. This kind of debate and discussion which McDonough raises takes the reader from the traditional to progressive pedagogical perspectives presented in advanced approaches to education. Any attempt to lead critical discussion to promote critical thinking about Catholicism is a complex task and McDonough succeeds in highlighting a wide range of intellectual and social considerations and tries to remain sensitive to the limitations of binary thinking. One of the most encouraging results is putting a degree of criticism into the Catholic educational pedagogical model so that Catholic educational institutions can make a stronger effort towards adding to what constitutes Catholic critical thinking and setting out how Catholic education should intersect with ecclesial citizenship and stressing the need for further philosophical and theoretical work to draw out more fully the possibilities and probable consequences.

Finally, reviewing the arguments in the sixth chapter, McDonough discusses the practical use of dissent to inform the development of theory. Here McDonough shows some of his study results that demonstrate both the pedagogical benefits and the systematic shortcomings within the range of currently accepted practice. Objectivity is dominant, because the critical commentary is clearly set out; the objective is improving Catholic education through theoretical discussion and recognizing the foundational value of theory in the context of religious institutions. The core of this chapter presents a study sample of procedural concerns of teachers and distinctions between passing on what the teacher believes to the student and how the student responds to the beliefs of the teacher. In this context the McDonough touches the heart of Dissent on his way from theory to practice to build the desired pedagogical model and the sought after pedagogical stances using convenient teaching techniques that help to reduce the level of offensive outcomes, to facilitate understanding before criticizing to encourage a questioning attitude (a scientific method of inquiry) on the right way to take and make decisions. McDonough presents the ideas in depth to show the ramifications of not looking beyond conventional pedagogy and attempts to prove the success of the progressive one.

McDonough's work assists in raising personal awareness of the challenges of dissent-based educational models being put into practice and presents a new way of considering how to involve all partners in Catholic education whether students, teachers, parents or external observers to look forward to a dynamic Church, witnessing for the Lord. Dissenting not for the sake of dissent but for a better and more holistic educational vision of life. Society is changing, educational theories are rapidly evolving and the Church may need to respond to be able to consistently affirm personal and practical involvement by all actors to ensure a spirit of communion and fellowship is supported in educational environments.