The Past is Prologue: American Catholic Education and the New Century

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Abstract
The author of a recent history of American Catholic education points to three ongoing traditions “tenacity, adaptability, and identity” as evidence that parochial education will continue well into the next century. In this personal essay, Walch challenges pessimistic assessment of Catholic education that appeared in Phi Delta Kappan. He also highlights other, more positive assessments of Catholic schooling. Walch concludes that even though American Catholic parochial education will never again attain the position of influence it had in the mid-20th century, parish schools will remain important education laboratories for the coming century.

DOI
10.15365/joce.0403062013

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Recommended Citation

For me, and Shakespeare, “the past is prologue;” or, more properly, “What’s past is prologue” spoken by evil Sebastian in Act II, Scene I of The Tempest, means that what has happened up until now only sets the stage. We are the creators of our own lives and the authors of our own story. In context, Sebastian says these words exactly to get Alonso to commit a new version of a past evil. I suggest we learn from all these quotes. What’s past is prologue. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives, and, therefore, an important day to make a change. And let us remember the past, and learn from it, so that we do not remain savages or infants (see Santayana’s full quote here: George Santayana), but learn from the past and boldly create a different future. The author of a recent history of American Catholic education points to three ongoing traditions “tenacity, adaptability, and identity” as evidence that parochial education will continue well into the next century. In this personal essay, Walch challenges pessimistic assessment of Catholic education that appeared in Phi Delta Kappan. He also highlights other, more positive assessments of Catholic schooling. Walch concludes that even though American Catholic parochial education will never again attain the position of influence it had in the mid-20th century, parish schools will remain important education laboratories for the coming century.

Responses