

Urban Catholic Education: The Best of Times, the Worst of Times, by Thomas C. Hunt, David J. O'Brien and Timothy Walch. Peter Lang, 2013. 221pp. Hb., £86.00/US\$139.95, ISBN-13: 9781433117787; Pb., £24.00/\$38.95. ISBN-13 : 9781433117787.

Reviewed by Matthew Hoven, St. Joseph's College in the University of Alberta, hoven@ualberta.ca

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U.S. Catholic schools are a remarkable socio-educational movement within America's religious mosaic. With attendance exceeding five million during the 1960's enrolment crest, the schools were an exceptional achievement for improved education and protection of religious identity. Since then, the number of these privately-funded schools has shrunk dramatically, often due to increased tuition costs. But that is only part of the story that *Urban Catholic Education* wishes to explain. The book expands beyond this basic narrative and reports how schools have been forging new identities in the midst of social and demographic adversity over the past half century.

The edited book is comprised of ten local accounts of urban Catholic schools that tell the story of a changing landscape, especially with the end of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent loss of thousands of religious sister teachers. Each chapter—usually about fifteen to twenty pages in length—is comprised of details about the challenges faced by leaders engaged in the school movement. In the introduction, a brief historical overview up to 1965 contextualizes the more recent histories. The following chapters—some better written than others—detail school closures, the flight of Catholics to the suburbs, new school structures, alternative funding strategies, and some stories of prominent lay persons and bishops. Readers learn of the effects of racial clashes in Boston during the civil rights movement, not to mention recent difficulties caused by sexual abuse scandals in the archdiocese. The fighting spirit of Philadelphia Catholics is underlined in their determinedness to save a system so well-supported by Catholics that at one time it was tuition-free. Different challenges distinguish newer cities like San Antonio and San Francisco, while New Orleans' educators strive for renewal after Hurricane Katrina. The development of the Cristo Rey high schools in Chicago integrates a corporate work-study program to assist with tuition while teaching job skills and encouraging confidence among its Hispanic students. In light of the examination of local changes, the final chapter highlights successful strategies to offer hope for the schools moving forward.

What then is the future of U.S. Catholic schools? Comparing current schools to those of the heyday of American Catholicism will inevitably lead to a sense of inadequacy among current promoters of the movement. New initiatives provide some optimism, but much is stacked against the schools. Increased staffing and technology costs, along with mixed support from Catholics, makes a replay of the past impossible. And that is the book's underlying argument. The authors wish to re-shape explanations detailing the shrinking movement in order to re-brand identity for the future. Otherwise, the schools will never escape the shadow of greatness from one half a century ago. Of interest will be how a leaner, more adept schooling movement will adapt and change to local communities over the next fifty years.