



## Renewing the Mind: A Reader in the Philosophy of Catholic Education

Topping, Ryan N. S., ed.  
Catholic University of America Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: administration | Catholic higher education | educational philosophy

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Topping's book addresses implicitly his concern with contemporary misalignments in Catholic higher educational philosophy. He problematizes several trends that downplay truth-finding and inhibit the freedom of learning. It is his contention that education exists to guide students in learning to order their affections - *ordo amoris* - besides merely attending to the love of knowledge. For him, education should facilitate learners' growth towards becoming whole persons. He claims that education is wrongheaded when its direct focus is only on developing skills and overcoming problems of incivility, toleration, and economic sustainability. His book makes clear a fear that in a highly de-Christianized western education, curricula can overestimate the value of the social sciences and overprize the importance of honing techniques, competencies, and self-esteem, and programs are ranked by what would benefit the economy and generate income for its graduates. He expresses this conviction in a variety of ways and contends that if these misaligned trends are not corrected, a crisis awaits the educational industry and even the progress of civilizations.

*Renewing the Mind* is not a monograph devoted to defending an educational philosophy. Nonetheless, Topping invites rethinking current educational trends with a hope for substantive change. He introduces select humanist resources on education from classical antiquity, medieval and early modernity, along with papal writings by Leo XIII, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. Excerpts include writings by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Basil the Great, Bonaventure, Hugo of St. Victor, Aquinas, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Michael de Montaigne, Hyacinthe Sigismond Gerdil, John Henry Newman, Maria Montessori, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and Christopher Dawson, among others. Readers will appreciate a bird's-eye view of western educational ideology through the selected readings. These are organized in

four parts: nine essays on aims of education, seven essays on matter of learning, nine essays on methods of teaching, and thirteen essays on renewing Christian orthodoxy, learning, curriculum, culture, and Catholic schooling in our milieu.

Topping's inclusion of Plato, Aristotle, Anglican Ronald Knox, and Protestant C. S. Lewis to represent "a philosophy of Catholic education" may puzzle some readers. Why did he not include other non-Catholic Christian thinkers in Catholic collection? Also, why did he collate a largely western, Eurocentric intellectual resource as a primer to the philosophy of Catholic education, when more Catholics today reside in Latin American and the Caribbean and only a quarter of Catholics live in Europe (Pew Research Study on Global Christianity, 2011)? There is no shortage of Catholic and non-Catholic thinkers from Latin America that are impacting Catholic higher education and the book could have benefited from their inclusion. If Topping hopes to reach an ecumenical readership and build bridges with non-Christian cultures, then the missing links of African, Asian, and Latin American Christian (and non-Christian) resources are necessary. If he would include pre-Christian Plato and Aristotle, why exclude Confucius and other schools of thought in other parts of the world on education, virtuous development, and ethics?

Criticisms aside, the volume presents fine excerpts on pedagogy for parents, teachers, and administrators, and would be a good supplementary reader for an undergraduate course on the Catholic philosophy of education.

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