

Thiessen, E.J. (1993). *Teaching for commitment: Liberal education, indoctrination and Christian nurture*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 332 pp. (Softcover).

This book deals with a topic which is central to the public discourse of Canada and the United States. Its very title *Teaching for Commitment* will, as the author acknowledges, evoke a dismissive response from the dominant section of modern society which views the very existence of "confessional" schools and colleges as violating the fundamental principles of a liberal education.

Thus the author sets up the framework for the argument, and sets out to refute the thesis that religious instruction is inescapable from indoctrination. Here is a spirited defence of confessional religious education and the concept of Christian nurture. The reader is rewarded, in a forceful narrative, with a strong endorsement of the view that a religious education is possible without indoctrination.

Although his scholarship is extensive and his frame of reference covers philosophy, epistemology, ethics, education, and theology, the style of the work is combative and sometimes even polemical. In the post-Vatican II era, Catholics have been invited by Pope John XXIII, in particular, to explore the richness of the past and to learn from it.

There is a crude liberal view of religion, and of Catholicism in particular, which sees it as being incapable of embracing the principles of pluralism. The Decree on Religious Freedom (1965), the fruits of much discussion and reflection at Vatican II, is an important point of departure for debate on this topic.

The writings of John Courtney Murray are of great value also in attempting to find a common language of discourse with liberal society. Much of contemporary misunderstanding concerning the relationship between religion and knowledge rests on an ahistorical concept of the role of church in society. For example, the Catholic church at the end of the 20th century has evolved in its educational views. It feels far less threatened by liberal society. It is not an institution under siege.

Therefore, the need to become polemical over the role of religion in society has been replaced by a self-confident willingness to discuss and debate with peoples of all faiths and of none.

Thiessen's work reflects the historical context in which the Christian/secular dialogue has been taking place. In a world where galloping

political correctness tends to replace open-minded discussion, this book makes its contribution for fairness and respect in intellectual exchanges between Christians and secularists.

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