



ILLUSTRATION BY JIM MCLACHLAN

CATHOLIC SEPARATE SCHOOLS: AN AMBIGUOUS LEGACY

KENNETH WESTHUES is a professor of sociology at the University of Waterloo. He has written extensively on education in Canada.

IF THERE IS ANY GENERAL LESSON IN THE ORGANIZATION of schools in Canada, it is that once legally enshrined, institutional arrangements outlast the reasons for their initial establishment. Precisely how schooling might more reasonably be organized in our time, in light of today's economic and political realities, is admittedly unclear.

Perhaps each province should run a single public school system, as a couple already do and as states do south of the border. Maybe school taxes ought to be spent on vouchers that allow parents to send their children to any of numerous competing schools, as the Ontario Economic Council has recommended. How much control should appropriately rest with the federal government, the provincial governments, local boards, teachers and parents is a matter of legitimate dispute. But whatever arrangement would best suit Canada today if schools were being organized from scratch, it would surely not be one based on a division of citizens into two categories, Catholic and other. Yet this is the arrangement that has

been handed down to us, the one entrenched in our constitution, the one that confronts most Canadians as an historical fact. It is a curious inheritance.

THE LAW IN HISTORIC CONTEXT

HAVING CONQUERED QUEBEC BY 1763, and shortly thereafter lost thirteen southward colonies, Britain arrived in the nineteenth century with an unwieldy hodgepodge of possessions in North America. Her subjects on this continent were divided in almost every way one can name: geographical location, economic base, language, ethnicity, religion, affluence. Confronted by this circum-

stance. Britain initiated a process that reached completion only in 1949, when Newfoundland entered the Canadian confederation—the process of joining these vastly different peoples into a common political entity. Only in union, so it was reasonably thought, lay strength enough to resist the large and aggressive republic of the United States.

The first important step was the arranged marriage, in 1840, of the two largest and most vulnerable colonies, Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). The first of these, or at least its populated southern part, lay like a British foot dangerously wedged between Michigan and New York. The second was mainly composed of French Catholics without ancestral allegiance to the British crown. In neither of them was the population large: 450,000 people lived in the first, 650,000 in the second. Already in the United States there were 17,000,000 people. In the face of such numbers and of the dynamism of their society, it was vital to forge some kind of bond between the two principal colonies left of British North America, whatever compromises might be required.

The compromises would indeed be great, for Upper and Lower Canada had little in common except subjection to the same imperial rule. Present-day Ontario was newly settled, alive with enterprising immigrants from Britain and the United States. It was overwhelmingly English-speaking and Protestant. Its citizens partook of the adventurous, freethinking, liberal and capitalist culture then germinating in England, Scotland, northern Europe and the United States. By contrast, Quebec was a much older society, a mini-replica of prerevolutionary France. Its people were not just French and Catholic, but steeped in an agrarian, feudal, precapitalist culture wherein tradition was valued above all. By the 1840s, Upper Canadians lived in the Age of Reason.

Lower Canadians cherished the classical Age of Faith.

Small wonder, then, that so much was made of an odd similarity between the two colonies: that each included a small minority of residents who by religion belonged in the other colony. About 15 percent of Upper Canadians were Roman Catholics—some francophone, others of Scottish and Irish origin. Similarly, about 15 percent of Lower Canadians were English-speaking Protestants or Anglicans

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—some of them in the mercantile elite of Quebec and Montreal, others United Empire Loyalists who had settled in the eastern townships. An attractive principle for uniting the two colonies was thus to grant to the respective minorities in them essentially the same religious prerogatives. Catholics in Upper Canada, that is, would enjoy the same freedom of religion as Anglicans and Protestants in Lower Canada.

Now this principle of tolerance, this common norm for uniting two antagonistic societies, entered public discussion at roughly the same time as did the idea of mass public schooling. Accordingly, when the legislature of the new United Province of Canada passed in Kingston its School Act of 1841, it not only called for the establishment of "common" or public schools throughout its jurisdiction, but also implemented the principle of reciprocal tolerance of minority religious rights. The relevant clause read as follows: "Whenever any number of the Inhabitants of any Township or Parish professing a reli-

gious faith different from that of the majority of the Inhabitants of such Township or Parish, shall dissent . . . with reference to any Common School in such Township or Parish, it shall be lawful for the Inhabitants so dissenting . . . to establish and maintain one or more Common Schools . . . and to receive from the District Treasurer their due proportion, according to their number, of the monies appropriated by Law . . ."

Whenever anyone asks where Catholic separate schools in English Canada come from, there is no better answer than the School Act of 1841. For the British North America Act of 1867 (by which New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were added to the fledgling nation) only guaranteed the survival of such schools wherever they had been established earlier. And the Constitution Act of 1982 only reaffirmed the status quo in this respect.

The important point is that the very idea of a dual public school system in Canada, one for Catholics and the other for everybody else, derives from that historic compromise between Ontario and Quebec in 1841. It was a trade-off between these two provinces. The arrangement was made (like so many other arrangements in Canadian history) to induce the two most populous provinces to share the same political bed. In this respect as in others, the remaining provinces were expected to manage their affairs more or less in keeping with the Ontario-Quebec compromise.

But only Alberta and Saskatchewan fulfilled this expectation explicitly. Although the school acts of these two provinces have had peculiarities of their own, their effect has been to create the same kind of dual systems as in Ontario and Quebec. Indeed Alberta has funded Catholic schools even through the secondary level since the dawn of this century, and Saskatchewan since 1964. Only

in 1984 did the Ontario government decide to follow suit.

The Manitoba case stands in sharp contrast. There the anglophone Protestant immigrants of the late nineteenth century, having outnumbered the earlier French settlers and seized power from them, simply outlawed tax-supported Catholic schools and established a single public system. Enforcement of the provisions of the BNA Act has proven politically impossible in Manitoba even to this day. The few Catholic schools in existence there are funded privately.

The same is the case in British Columbia, though Catholic schools in the westernmost province share in the limited public funds made available to all nonpublic schools. Beyond the Rockies the very idea of a dual Catholics-and-others school system is alien. Catholics there are a Johnny-come-lately minority, proportionately smaller than in any other province, accounting for only 20 percent of citizens.

A dual, publicly funded school system is alien also to Maritime traditions, but with important differences. All three of these provinces have had well-rooted Catholic minorities from the start. All three have been influenced by the terms of the Ontario-Quebec compromise. In New Brunswick and eastern Nova Scotia, to some extent also in Prince Edward Island, Catholics and Protestants have tended to live geographically apart. The net effect, in practice if not by law, has been that most Maritime Catholic children have been able until recently to attend identifiably Catholic schools.

Finally, Newfoundland has an indigenous arrangement of its own, established altogether outside of the political compromises of Canadian history. There is no public school system, but instead a publicly funded coterie of denominational school systems. The Catholic Church controls one of these. Catholic

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In sum, if one's view of Canada centres on Ontario and Quebec, and if it is focussed through the lens of legal precedent and constitutional guarantee, then the division of youth into Catholic and non-Catholic for purposes of schooling is eminently reasonable. The division is taken for granted as the right and proper Canadian way of doing things. Not surprisingly, Catholic bishops and pastors tend to take this view, since it satisfies Rome's demand for the education everywhere of Catholic youth in Catholic schools. Predictably as well, this view is attractive to administrators and teachers in Catholic schools—it furthers their personal career interests. It has the allegiance also of most Canadian lay Catholics, for the majority still live in Ontario and Quebec, and a dual school system is part of the landscape in which they have been born and raised.

The same view is held by many non-Catholics as well. When in the spring of 1984, Ontario Premier William Davis announced the extension of public funding of Catholic education to the upper years of high school, he declared that it seemed "the right thing to do." He was hardly unaware, of course, that this dramatic change of policy might win his party

votes from the ever-swelling Catholic proportion of the electorate. But Mr. Davis has long represented the classic vision of Canada as a compromise between WASP Ontario and Catholic Quebec. He knows that reciprocal tolerance of minority rights is essential to that compromise. If his puzzling decision—costly to his popularity among public-school teachers and administrators—is seen in light of his manifest passion for Canadian unity, at least some of the puzzlement disappears.

TRENDS THAT MAKE LAW OBSOLETE

FOR ALL THE LEGAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF this dual school system in Canadian culture, and despite the affirmation of it reflected in Mr. Davis's recent change of heart, at least five major trends in Canada over the past century give to this system a clearly anachronistic character.

There is first the general process of secularization, the lessening of the importance of religion in the lives of most citizens. On the basis of repeated national surveys, Alberta sociologist Reginald Bibby has concluded that religion is simply no longer on the minds of about half of all adults in this country. "Rather than turning to religious answers new and old," he has written, "these Canadians consciously and unconsciously, rationally and non-rationally limit reality to the perceivable (empiricism) and in everyday life live out the correlate of materialism, whereby the perceivable world becomes the object of their attention and commitment." Back in 1840, so the available evidence suggests, Canadians were overwhelmingly believers. However much they differed in their catechisms and forms of worship, they looked upon the Christian scriptures as no less true than the equations of basic arithmetic.

They prayed every day. They lived literally in fear of the Lord. By now a much smaller proportion of the population actually believes—as this term has traditionally been used. In 1946, 60 percent of Protestants went to church weekly; today only about 27 percent do so. As recently as 1965, 83 percent of Catholics attended Mass at least on Sunday; by now the percentage has been reduced by half.

the same secular- ization process has affected Catholic schools

It is sometimes imagined that the dual school system in Canada means religiously oriented schools for Catholics and secular ones for non-Catholics. This was not at all the original meaning. There has never been in this country any principled exclusion of religion from public schools. On the contrary, the early public schools actively taught a nondenominational kind of Protestant Christianity. Only gradually have creationist history, Bible studies and prayer been reduced to a single "Our Father" at the start of the day, if that. Albeit with a certain time lag, the same secularization process has affected Catholic schools. Not many decades ago most teachers in Catholic schools were nuns, women whose dress, celibacy and whole way of life asserted the priority of sacred over secular. Today's mainly lay teachers reflect the increasingly secular way of life of Catholic Canadians at large. Now to the extent that religion loses its importance in Canadian culture, the maintenance of two religiously defined school systems becomes no longer necessary. Nominal Catholics need not be kept separate from nominal Protestants. That is why more

than a third of Catholic parochial schools in the United States closed between 1965 and 1976. American law does not keep Catholic schools in existence beyond the point at which Catholics quit making sacrifices in support of them. In most of this country, by contrast, Catholic schools persist by force of inertia, even after their religious foundation has been undermined.

A second, related trend has been the increasing salience of language, as opposed to religion, among the bases of social cleavage. In the formative decades of Canadian society, the population was considered to be divided basically into Catholics and Protestants. It was assumed that all francophones were Catholic, and that their language would receive more than enough protection in the Catholic schools of their communities. Linguistic rights were thus subsumed under religious rights, and the law was framed in terms of the latter. Separate French schools would not be permitted in Ontario, for instance, but instead separate Catholic schools where classes would be taught in French in francophone locales.

With the passage of time and progressive cultural secularization, language rights have come to be asserted more and more independently of the religious factor. Militance on behalf of French language and culture has steadily intensified in Quebec, especially since the Quiet Revolution, but that revolution is defined in part by the wrenching of control of Quebec's public schools away from the Catholic hierarchy and clergy. Especially since the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of 1965, moreover, the federal government has actively promoted French in the schools of English Canada, irrespective of their Catholic or non-Catholic ties. French is now the language of instruction in numerous classes and schools run by public boards. Such arrangements antagonize activists for the

Catholic church, even while they satisfy those francophones whose allegiance to the church has waned. In many other settings, by contrast, St. John's, Newfoundland, for one, schooling in French has become available only in the Catholic system, to the displeasure of the mainly professional non-Catholics who want their children to grow up fluently bilingual. In sum, the new legal safeguards for the French language have intruded upon the older safeguards for the Catholic religion. The solution of having four kinds of schools—French Catholic, French public, English Catholic, and English public—is unworkable in all but a few communities. Conflicts are likely to arise repeatedly until some new principles for the organization of schooling are agreed upon and laws changed accordingly.

A third trend that renders the entrenched duality of schooling obsolete has been the growing demand for autonomous development by provinces in the western and Atlantic regions. Recent conflict between these provinces and the federal government has derived only in part from hostility between their mainly Tory governments and the Trudeau Liberals. The conflict has arisen in greater part from the peripheral provinces' resentment of domination by the economic and cultural interests of central Canada. These provinces rightly conclude that their interests tend to be overlooked in compromises between Ontario and Quebec. By now they have sufficient strength of population and wealth, moreover, to cease being acquiescent adapters to arrangements made by and for the two founding provinces. At the turn of the century, the four western provinces embraced only half a million Canadians. Their population today is seven million, and their per capita income is about the same as Ontario's and Quebec's. No longer are they content to let Canada be defined in central-Canadian terms. The Atlantic provinces

remain relatively poor, of course, and their population has not appreciably enlarged,

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but similar attitudes are also apparent there. Newfoundland in particular, which but 30 years ago entered Confederation with great humility, has in recent years stridently reaffirmed its separate history, culture, and interests.

The relevance of this trend here is that the rightness of allowing Catholics their own tax-supported schools is likely to be doubted increasingly in the Western and Atlantic provinces. For the *raison d'être* of these schools in Canadian culture is embedded in the original Ontario-Quebec compromise. To the extent that this compromise is rejected as a norm of public policy in the other provinces, the need to allow separate Catholic schools on the Ontario model comes into question. Already in the Maritime provinces, many school boards show reluctance to make the informal arrangements, common in the past, for segregating Catholic children. If school reform in Newfoundland should lead to the establishment of a single public system, the schools of the Catholic Church are unlikely to fare better than those of the Salvation Army or the Pentecostals. In British Columbia even now, the Catholic Church enjoys no special educational prerogatives, and few signs point to the restoration of these prerogatives in Manitoba. In Alberta and

Saskatchewan, separate schools for Catholics are more secure, being legally and bureaucratically entrenched. But what will probably become more obvious in the years ahead is that a dual school system that divides Catholics from non-Catholics is much more an Ontario-Quebec institution than a Canadian one.

The fourth change in Canada that calls into question the duality in schooling ordained by law is the progressive homogenization of culture and centralization of power. In the mid-nineteenth century, this was a land of small towns and farm communities, separated from one another by ethnicity, religion, politics, economic base, and not least by poor roads. The technology for creating a mass culture—telephones, radios, motion pictures, television, automobiles, expressways, and so on—had not yet been invented, much less put in place. Most Canadians still owned the means of their livelihood: farms, mills, shops, stores, little factories. In this milieu, schools were understood to be mainly a local responsibility, to be controlled by local school boards and supported by locally collected taxes. In this societal context, and especially since Catholic settlements tended to lie geographically apart from Protestants, Catholic schools could indeed be different from their Protestant counterparts. Genuine pluralism in schooling could more easily be achieved. Even now, oldtimers recall how particular teachers, principals, school boards or pastors gave highly distinct identities to the schools they served.

By now all this has changed. Just the ten largest metropolitan areas in Canada embrace almost half the population. Few Canadians any longer work in enterprises of their own, and the majority are employed by large bureaucracies. The primary influence on children's values is not a local community centred on family and church but distant agents of mass

culture—from Michael Jackson to Big Bird, from Wayne Gretzky to Pacman. Following the trend, schools and school boards have been increasingly consolidated into larger units, provincial governments have become prime funding agents, and control is concentrated steadily more in provincial bureaucracies and province-wide professional organizations of teachers. The result is that schools increasingly resemble one another. It is hard for any school to go its own way, given the standardized culture the mass media instill in Canadian youth, and given constraint by a common set of provincial regulations and teachers' demands.

Research shows scant differences in moral values or achievement between graduates

The implication of this trend for a tax-supported Catholic school system is that the difference between it and the public system becomes like the difference between McDonald's and Burger King, between CP Air and Air Canada, or between Eaton's, Simpson's and the Bay. The difference in each case is real. There are loyal patrons of McDonald's who would never eat at Burger King. But in a perspective with any breadth at all, the similarities matter more. Research shows scant differences in moral values or achievement between graduates of tax-supported Catholic schools in Canada and graduates of public schools. One can argue that competition between two large systems must at least be preferred to a public-school monopoly. Neither alternative comes close to what those who framed the School Act of 1841 had in mind.

The fifth and final trend important here is the growth, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population, of nonconformist denominations. Almost all non-Catholic religious bodies in the formative decades of this country were mainly Protestant, and their adherents could be persuaded to support the kind of common schools that Egerton Ryerson and other educators proposed. Catholics were the only important minority in Canada whose religion was so different as to warrant separate schools. In the whole province of Canada in 1842, there were only 1249 Jews, only 946 members of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1981, by contrast, there were 300,000 Jews, 100,000 members of Reformed churches, and in both communities keen interest in schools of their own. Meanwhile other immigrants have brought with them strong convictions unserved by either public or Catholic schools. There are now about 100,000 Muslims in Canada, 70,000 Hindus, 70,000 Sikhs, 50,000 Buddhists, 350,000 members of Eastern Orthodox confessions, and 200,000 Mennonites. Still further, some Christian sects have defied the secularization trend and built large congregations of ardent believers who do not feel at home in public schools. The 1981 census reported 145,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, 340,000 Pentecostals, and 125,000 members of the Salvation Army.

It is important to keep these figures in perspective. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and United churches still embrace 73 percent of Canadians, and a further 8 percent report no religious preference. Still, in many locales the question is legitimately raised as to why publicly funded separate schools should be available to Catholics but not to other religious minorities. The question is the more pointed where these other minorities show a distinctness and commitment unmatched by the Catholic community. Currently only Newfound-

land gives full tax support to the schools of any of these newer minorities, though geographical separation and informal arrangements allow for some additional religious segregation in schooling in other provinces. In Manitoba and British Columbia, Catholics have joined with other denominations seeking governmental subsidies for private schools. But none of this was anticipated in the School Act of 1841 or in the BNA Act, and the laws of most provinces are inadequate to deal with the new religious minorities.

THE PROBABLE FUTURE

FIVE WELL-DOCUMENTED TRENDS IN Canada have just been pointed out: secularization, the growing priority of linguistic over religious rights, rising demands for autonomy in the western and eastern provinces, cultural homogenization, and the growth of new religious minorities. In

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light of these trends, the maintenance of a public school system divided into two parts, one Catholic and the other not, has become obsolete, ill-suited to the realities of Canadian life. The question is where we go from here.

The most likely prospect for the future is an increasingly homogeneous system of schooling for all Canadian youth, irrespective of either province or religious affiliation. The safest prediction is that as years pass it will make less and less difference which tax-supported

school in Canada a child attends, for the character and curricula of all of them will become progressively more uniform. The language difference will remain, of course, but mainly as a mask for underlying similarity of the knowledge and values being learned. For the forces of mass culture—the TV networks, video games, popular music, and so on—show no sign of lessening. From Bonavista to Vancouver Island (and from Miami to Edmonton), youth are more and more subjected to a common package of heroes, pastimes, fashions, consumer goods, skills and ideas. Still more important, the economy in which they hope to find jobs is an increasingly singular economy, dominated by a shrinking number of large corporations and governmental bureaucracies. This is to say that life outside the school is becoming steadily more of one piece, stretching all across this continent and beyond. As pluralism declines in the economic and cultural spheres at large, it must perforce also decline in formal education. However organized, schooling cannot be more diverse in substance than the society it serves.

Provinces may well preserve and even enlarge the autonomy in education to which they are constitutionally entitled, but it will be a useless autonomy so long as the forces of economic and cultural centralization continue unchecked. Just a few decades ago, Quebec's school system was indeed different from Ontario's. The elementary schools, classical colleges and universities of that province taught a different subject matter and different values than did the schools of Ontario. They could afford to, because the reality of life in Quebec was different: it was agrarian, church-centred, economically and culturally traditional. By now the classical colleges have become CEGEPs, and they bear striking resemblance to the community colleges of Ontario. This is no accident, for economic and cultural realities in

the two provinces are increasingly the same. Or consider that the Ontario government has recently decided to phase out Grade 13, while the Newfoundland government has added a further year beyond Grade 11. From where comes this pressure to bring both these provinces into conformity with the North American norm of ending high school with Grade 12? The pressure comes from the progressive integration of economic and cultural life as a whole under the tutelage of a small number of private and public corporations.

The fate of Catholic schools in this predictable process of standardization can be expected to vary from one province to the next. But since the process is intimately bound up with the increasingly materialist values of Canadian life as a whole, nowhere will the classic educational goals of the church meet with much success. There is likely to be continued erosion of the extralegal prerogatives of the church in the Maritime provinces. A dwindling minority of strongly committed Catholics may keep some parochial schools open in Manitoba and British Columbia, but not enough to serve more than 10 or 15 percent of Catholic youth. In these five provinces the vast majority of Catholic children will come or continue to be enrolled in increasingly standardized public school systems. Perhaps they will get time off for voluntary religion classes, perhaps not. Little difference will be made in either case. The hierarchy's demand for tax-supported Catholic schools on the Ontario model is not likely to be heard with much sympathy.

In Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan, by contrast, the dual school system will probably remain in place, despite its obsolescence. The reason was spelled out in the first sentence of this article: that entrenchment in law allows institutional arrangements to persist long after their underlying rationale has been lost. Close

to half a million children are currently enrolled in the separate schools of Ontario alone. Thousands of teachers and

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administrators have spent their whole careers in the separate system, and they are organized in their own associations. They have separate buildings, equipment, training programmes, budgets, and so on and on. Eliminating the legally guarded bureaucratic division now in place could happen only in a climate of revolutionary change—a climate for which there is scant evidence in Canada. Over time, moreover, duality of schooling in these provinces has come to be taken for granted in the public mind. It is accepted as integral to the Canadian way of life, rather like hockey, the Queen, or the Senate of the federal Parliament. Inertia is a powerful force.

But powerful, too, are the forces of centralization in our economy and culture. Hence Catholic schools in these latter provinces, as also in Quebec and Newfoundland, are likely to assume an increasingly secular character, and to become progressively less distinguishable from other schools. There will still be religion classes and occasional Catholic liturgies, but otherwise the knowledge and values represented will be part of the Canadian mainstream. Even now, for instance, it is hard to find much difference in board-faculty relations between the separate and public systems. Issues of conflict are fairly similar, and so are the tactics of bargaining. Pay scales and fringe benefits do not differ greatly. One should not expect them to. The prime reality of life in any society is how its politics and

economy are organized, how work is done, what products are made, where power lies. It is a single reality that faces both school systems, and both are organized on such a large scale that they cannot fail to respond to that reality. No wonder their responses are similar.

As this article is being written, the separate school boards of Ontario are worrying about a demand of the Ontario government that has accompanied its decision to complete funding of separate schools through the secondary level. The demand is that the expanded Catholic high schools not discriminate against non-Catholic students seeking admission or against non-Catholic teachers seeking employment. The school boards fear that meeting this demand will diminish the distinctness of their schools. Of course it will. But that distinctness is already weakened, and will be further, by forces in the economy and culture at large. Whether the characteristic is income or occupational prestige, unemployment rate or retirement age, church attendance or contraceptive use, attitude on capital punishment or fear of nuclear war, Catholic Canadians do not differ much any more from non-Catholic Canadians. Why then should a mainstream Catholic school system differ much from a mainstream non-Catholic one? It shouldn't. Increasingly, it won't.

OPPOSITIONAL TRENDS

AS NONACADEMIC CANADIANS KNOW perhaps better than sociologists, of course, the probable future is not a necessary one. Pointing out where current trends lead is an important exercise, one the paragraphs above have accomplished in brief for one institution. But quite a few Canadians regret the loss of pluralism, the decline of diversity, the homogenizing process to which we all are subject. The emergent

order of life—uniform, materialist, and centrally controlled—scares all who still believe that human beings have a right to autonomy and individuality, the right to pursue their respective, creative purposes.

Such thinking has found expression in a variety of efforts at school reform. One clear example was the move to "open-concept" schools in both separate and public systems about fifteen years ago.

The Canadian economy is not very open to individual initiative, not very respectful of human dignity

Concurrently, high-school curricula were made more flexible, fewer courses being obligatory and more innovative ones becoming available. By now the tide has turned, more structured styles of learning are back in place, and the rage is mastery of computers. There is an important lesson in this reversal of educational philosophy. No large-scale school system can depart very far from the direction of the economy, lest its students graduate unprepared to meet the demands of the adult world. The fact is that the Canadian economy is not very open to individual initiative, not very respectful of human dignity, and it becomes less so year by year. For only a small minority of carefully chosen jobs do corporate employers hire people to "do their own thing." There is simply no point in preparing students for a world that does not exist. The task of knuckling under becomes thereby only more difficult.

Oppositional thinking is also behind the proposals, commonly discussed in this decade, to replace current school organ-

ization with a system whereby parents could send their children to any of numerous approved schools, the latter being funded from tax monies according to their enrollments. Some schools might be highly structured, others geared to individual creativity. There would be Jewish schools, Mennonite schools, and secular ones. Some might cater to exceptionally bright children, others to slow learners. A competitive market of schools would be established, offering their various brands of educational commodity, and parents could spend their tax vouchers on whichever school might best suit their purposes. Such a voucher system on the one hand conforms to prevailing trends, since it would introduce a market mentality into still another aspect of life. But the market envisioned would be decentralized and diverse, more like the markets of early capitalism than like the oligopolistic markets of our time. The system would restore a measure of power to parents and allow the expression of alternative values. It could be introduced, moreover, at least conceivably, without violating the constitutional guarantee of separate schools for Catholics in Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. Catholic schools could still exist, supported by vouchers instead of directly by local taxes and provincial grants. But other religious bodies would now also have opportunity to establish separate, publicly funded schools.

One of the most common objections to a voucher system is that it would be divisive of the Canadian population. A better objection is that it would not be divisive enough. The evidence of Newfoundland is telling in this respect, since for more than a century this province has had formal religious pluralism in schooling. The funding has been direct rather than by voucher but with much the same result. The Jehovah's Witnesses have had their own schools, the Catholics theirs, the

Pentecostals their separate ones, and so for Anglicans and members of the United Church. Yet there is no province in Canada with a more culturally homogeneous population. Newfoundland has been called "probably the only true English-speaking nation left in North America." The reason is that the Newfoundland economy was historically as monolithic as the Canadian economy as a whole is fast becoming. The bulk of families fished for a living, and their lives were controlled by a small mercantile elite. No matter that children were divided by religion for purposes of schooling. Such division served to enflame groundless prejudices and to fuel recreational hostilities. But the graduates emerged sharing a common outlook and culture, because the political and economic reality facing them was singular.

In Newfoundland, of course, the competing schools have all functioned at roughly the same per-student cost. One can argue that a voucher system that would allow schools to supplement a common tax grant with varying rates of tuition might result in a more genuine pluralism. This argument has some validity. There already exist in most provinces private schools that charge very high tuition and serve the progeny of elite, propertied families. These schools do indeed differ from publicly funded ones, partly because of the exceptional class origin of the students enrolled, but also because of the enriched educational experience they can afford to provide. A voucher system that allowed supplementary tuition fees would in effect subsidize these bastions of privilege. The situation would be similar to the allowance of extra billing by physicians in provincial health-insurance plans, an arrangement that subsidizes from the public treasury the superior health care enjoyed by a well-off minority. But in schooling as in health care, the vast majority of citizens cannot afford to pay large additional charges and must be con-

tent with the level of service public funds allow. Given a common level of per-student expenditure, with or without a voucher system, the schools of an increasingly homogeneous society will be increasingly homogeneous.

pluralism in education is an illusion except where there is pluralism in politics

The bottom line is that those Canadians who seek a rebirth of variety, opportunity, and respect for personal autonomy through a decentralized system of schooling, a voucher system or some other kind, are misdirecting their efforts. They are expecting more from schools than schools can deliver. The important point remains: pluralism in education is an illusion except where there is pluralism in politics, the economy, and culture at large. So long as the same TV channels are beamed from coast to coast, the same rock videos are watched, the same outlets line standard shopping malls, the same few companies make shoes, newspapers and doughnuts, and the same Canadian establishment presides over us all, it doesn't make a great deal of difference how publicly funded schools are organized. Canadians who seek decentralization of power and expansion of opportunity for personal development could target their energy more effectively on economic institutions than on scholastic ones.

In the meanwhile, as personal autonomy continues to decline and the economic package is ever more tightly tied, no seeker of change need be dismayed that in four provinces of English Canada separate Catholic schools continue to be

funded from the public treasury. For as nearly all Canadians are by now aware, the Catholic Church has emerged in this strange time as a major champion of human dignity and individual rights, and as a major critic of the oligopolistic capitalism that defines life now in Canada. The pope's encyclical on work, his speeches during his visit to this country, and repeated statements of the Canadian Catholic bishops all are evidence that today's church is preaching economic and social change—and change in the direction of decentralization and democracy. Indeed, it is hard to find any organization of comparable significance in this country that is promoting a practical philosophy so humane, so valuable as a source of direction for efforts to improve our way of life.

schools may serve as conduits for the spread of Catholic social thought

No one should imagine that this philosophy will make some vast difference in what happens in elementary and secondary Catholic schools. For all the reasons reviewed above, these schools will remain less Catholic than North American. Much of the difference that is made, moreover, will derive from the church's eccentric code of sexual ethics. Catholic school boards will continue to audit their teachers' marital statuses, and Catholic students will continue to study how natural ways of preventing conception differ from unnatural ways. But even a realist can hope that contemporary Catholic social thought might penetrate Catholic separate schools enough to make these schools a little different from their public counterparts, and different in a

progressive way. Two forms of penetration can be entertained at least as possibilities.

First, the schools may serve as conduits for the spread of Catholic social thought to the younger generation of Canadians. It is at least conceivable that a place can be found in social-studies curricula for systematic study of the church's teaching on the economy and on politics. Older students can be assigned to read documents such as the pope's speeches here in Canada on workers' rights, international inequality, or native peoples, and to bring their reactions to classroom discussion. The main themes of such documents can be conveyed in simpler terms to the lower grades. Such teaching assumes, of course, that teachers themselves have encouragement and incentive to study Catholic social thought, both from church documents and from the writings of progressive Catholic thinkers, so that their religious affiliation becomes less a matter of weekly obligation than of thoroughgoing personal commitment. Such opportunity for teachers in turn assumes that Catholic school boards see themselves as more than mere guardians of traditional faith. These are big assumptions. Yet already in many Catholic schools one finds administrators and teachers articulating forcefully a well-informed, distinctly Catholic social consciousness. This is a hopeful sign. Out of the spread of such a consciousness could come the creation of the new political options we so urgently need.

A second way in which Catholic social thought might penetrate Catholic schools and make them truly different from their public counterparts is less likely but potentially of greater importance. It is through the adoption of more cooperative structures and techniques of administration. More and more, so all the evidence suggests, school systems in Canada are run as if they were private-profit corporations. Stockholders (ratepayers) elect a

board of directors (trustees), which hires employees (teachers) to turn raw material (children) into saleable commodities (graduates employable on the labour market). The board treats the teachers as if they were hired hands. The teachers behave like recalcitrant wage workers, taking strike action if necessary to get a good price for the labour they sell. But such an adversarial relation between trustees and teachers runs counter to Catholic social thought. So indeed does the whole insti-

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lution of capitalist wage labour. If the church's teaching were taken seriously in Catholic schools, this whole model of administration would be rejected in favour of alternatives founded on a cooperative ethic, alternatives that would vest authority in councils composed of trustees, administrators, teachers, pastors, and nonteaching staff. Needless to say, such alternatives conflict with established custom and law. But so does the church's teaching. The question is to what extent a Canadian Catholic school system is going to reflect the selfish materialist values of the capitalist economy, and to what extent the humane Christian values of the Catholic Church.

To be sure, the prospect that separate schools might actively promote and internally implement the practical philosophy offered by the church springs mainly from wishful thinking. So even more does the

prospect that such promotion and implementation might have major effects in the wider society. Perhaps, to quote the poet Edward Young, "our wishes lengthen as our sun declines." But how delightfully ironic it would be if the Canadian provision of tax funds to Catholic schools, a provision designed to keep the lid on things, had the effect in our time of instigating social and economic change.