Chapter 2
The Impact of Faith-Based Schools on Lives and on Society: Policy Implications

Charles L. Glenn

Introduction

Several years ago, a large-scale study of the effects of different types of schooling upon the subsequent attitudes and behaviors of adults, holding constant a whole host of background factors, found that those who had attended Catholic and Evangelical schools differed in significant ways, not only from those who attended public schools, but also from each other.

My purpose in the first part of this chapter is to offer a possible historical explanation of these differences, without minimizing the theological factors which may also be at work, and to offer some very preliminary suggestions about what we might expect to find as the effects of attendance at Islamic schools in the American context.

The second part of the chapter will explore the implications of these findings for public policy in North America and also in Western Europe, where the Muslim presence is increasingly perceived by many Europeans as menacing, and where policy-makers are struggling with the role of educational systems in turning the children of Muslim immigrants into citizens of the host societies. This discussion will be far from complete in this brief chapter, of course, but it will serve to anticipate what I hope to accomplish in my next book.

In short, I will use the different outcomes of Catholic and Evangelical schooling in the United States to explore the historically-contingent nature of educational experience, and to make some suggestions about what we can anticipate about the effects of Islamic schooling in the United States. One of my conclusions will be that there is no reason for panic about the desire of many Muslim parents to provide a distinctive schooling for their children; another will be that wise public policy responses can increase the beneficent effect of such schooling.

C.L. Glenn (✉)
Education Leadership and Policy, Boston University, Boston, MA 2215, USA
e-mail: glennsed@bu.edu

The Cardus Study

The study, coordinated by Professor David Sikkink of Notre Dame University, sought to assess the long-term effects of different 'families' of secondary schooling: public, Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, non-religious independent, and homeschooling. The research involved analysis of results from a previous large-scale survey of individuals aged 24–39 who could be distinguished by the type of secondary schooling which they received:

> unlike other studies in the field, the statistical analysis – controlling for over 30 variables known to impact development, such as the closeness of one's relationship to parents, religious service attendance, race, and educational attainment – was better able to isolate the effect of school type on the spiritual, socio-cultural, and educational outcomes of students six to 21 years after high school graduation.[1]

Rather than paraphrase its conclusions, I will simply quote them below:

> In many cases, the difference in outcomes between Catholic and Protestant Christian schools is striking. Catholic schools provide superior academic outcomes, an experience that translates into graduates' enrollment in more prestigious colleges and universities, more advanced degrees, and higher household income. In Catholic schools, administrators put a higher value on university than their Protestant Christian peers, and Catholic schools' academic programs consist of more rigorous course offerings across the board. While some of these factors may be due to the longer history and larger size of the schools, these results are too important to "explain away." At the same time, however, our research finds that the moral, social, and religious dispositions of Catholic school graduates seem to run counter to the values and teachings of the Catholic church. For example, students graduating from Catholic schools divorce no less than their public school counterparts, and significantly more than their Protestant Christian and nonreligious private school peers. Similarly, having attended Catholic school has no impact on the frequency with which those graduates will attend church services, and Catholic school graduates are less likely to serve as leaders in their churches.[2]

On the other hand,

> In contrast to the popular stereotype of Protestant Christian schools producing socially fragmented, anti-intellectual, politically radical, and militantly right-wing graduates, our data reveal a very different picture of the Protestant Christian school graduate. Compared to their public school, Catholic school, and non-religious private school peers, Protestant Christian school graduates have been found to be uniquely compliant, generous individuals who stabilize their communities by their uncommon and distinctive commitment to their families, their churches, and their communities, and by their unique hope and optimism about their lives and the future. In contrast to the popular idea that Protestant Christians are engaged in a "culture war," on the offensive in their communities and against the government, Protestant Christian school graduates are committed to progress in their communities even while they feel outside the cultural mainstream. In many ways, the average Protestant Christian school graduate is a foundational member of society. Despite these positive findings regarding the behaviors and dispositions of their graduates, however, Protestant Christian schools show difficulty balancing the various demands of the market – that is, the development of faith, learning, and cultural engagement – and end up falling short in the academic development of their students.[3]

---

[1] Cardus (2011), 12.

[2] Cardus (2011), 13.

[3] Cardus (2011), 13.

What can explain the different outcomes between Protestant and Catholic schools, and the fact that each family of schools seems to produce results which are quite different from the stereotypical view of them? After all, the popular view is that Catholic schools are all about producing religious devotion, no doubt at the expense of intellectual effort, and that what the study calls Protestant Christian (though outsiders would commonly refer to them as 'fundamentalist' or 'evangelical') schools are all about producing fanatics who are alienated from the wider society.

Of course, field-based research on such schools has revealed a picture much closer to the results of the Cardus study. There is abundant research on Catholic schools, most notably that by Coleman and Hoffer[4] and by Bryk, Lee, and Holland;[5] that on Protestant schools, a more recent phenomenon, is more sparse, but includes important studies by Alan Peshkin and by Steven Vryhof. The positive results of both types of schools include strong commitment to civic values. This has been confirmed by national examination results: '[t]he 1998 civics report card by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) states that students in private schools (both Catholic and non-Catholic) have higher average scores on the NAEP civics tests than their peers in public schools.'[6] Alan Peshkin's study of a 'fundamentalist' school in Illinois found that the students had more socially-tolerant views than their counterparts in the local public high school.[7]

Our concern here is not with exploring further these differences, and how they are manifested, but with understanding how they may reflect the historical moment in which Catholic and Protestant schools find themselves, and what implications such an understanding may have for public policy, especially in relation to the emerging phenomenon of Islamic schools.

Development of Catholic Schooling in the United States

To greatly over-simplify, Catholic schooling in the United States developed in opposition to the Protestant character of the common public elementary school and the semi-public academies. Public schools during the nineteenth century (and indeed in many communities until after the Second World War) expressed a Protestant understanding of the nature of a good education, including the use of the Bible for both instructional and devotional purposes. Cooperation among Protestants who differed on various points of doctrine and practice led to schools with a religious character that all could support. As I have shown in some detail elsewhere, the 'Common Public School' movement associated with Horace Mann was permeated by Protestant religious themes and motivations;[8] Mann himself insisted on the

---

[4] Coleman and Hoffer (1987).

[5] Bryk et al. (1993).

[6] Campbell (2001), 224.

[7] Peshkin (1986), 336.

[8] Glenn (1988), chapter 6: 'The Common School as a Religious Institution.'

central role of religion and the Bible in schools. In the last of his 12 annual reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann noted the Catholic criticism of the common public school:

> a rival system of "Parochial" or "Sectarian Schools," is now urged upon the public by a numerous, a powerful, and a well-organized body of men. It has pleased the advocates of this rival system, in various public addresses, in reports, and through periodicals devoted to their cause, to denounce our system as irreligious and anti-Christian.[9]

In his *Tenth Report*, Mann had stated that the 'policy of the State promotes not only secular but religious instruction,'[10] in his *Eleventh Report* he claimed that '[i]t is not known that there is, or ever has been, a member of the Board of Education, who would not be disposed to recommend the daily reading of the Bible, devotional exercises, and the constant inculcation of the precepts of Christian morality, in all the Public Schools,'[11] and the year after that, in his valedictory 1848 report, he made the religious character of the common school his central theme. After a panegyric to the importance of moral education as the central mission of the common school, Mann pointed out that

> it will be said that this grand result, in Practical Morals, is a consummation of blessedness that can never be attained without Religion; and that no community will ever be religious, without a Religious Education. Both these propositions, I regard as eternal and immutable truths. Devoid of religious principles and religious affections, the race can never fall so low but that it may sink still lower; animated and sanctified by them, it can never rise so high but that it may ascend still higher.… The man … who believes that the human race, or any nation, or any individual in it, can attain to happiness, or avoid misery, without religious principle and religious affections, must be ignorant of the capacities of the human soul, and of the highest attributes in the nature of man.[12]

As a result, he told the Board and his widespread public, 'I could not avoid regarding the man, who should oppose the religious education of the young, as an insane man;' in his role as government official, he had 'believed then, as now, that religious instruction in our schools, to the extent which the constitution and laws of the state allowed and prescribed, was indispensable to their highest welfare, and essential to the vitality of moral education.'[13]

Catholics did not disagree that religion was an essential aspect of education, but they resisted the form which it took in the common public schools that were developing across the northern states. As early as 1828, Bishop Fenwick of Boston complained that 'all the children educated in the common schools of the country are obliged to use books compiled by Protestants by which their minds are poisoned as it were from their infancy.' In 1840, the Catholic bishops formally charged that 'the purpose of public education in many parts of the country was to serve the

---

[9] Mann (1849), 102.

[10] Mann (1847), 233.

[11] Mann (1848), 9.

[12] Mann (1849), 98–99.

[13] Mann (1849), 103, 113.

interests of heresy.'[14] As the Catholic population of the country grew dramatically through immigration, the demand for their own schools grew as well, informed by the experience many of them had had in publicly-funded denominational schools before immigrating to the United States.

In Germany, one of the two major sources of Catholic immigrants in the nineteenth century, schooling was organized, under government supervision, on a denominational basis, a model that continued as the various German states (apart from Austria) were brought together by Bismarck in the 1870s and would persist into the 1950s and, in some *Laender*, into the present.[15] In Ireland, the other major source of Catholic immigrants, government-sponsored schooling began in 1831, with a National Board 'composed of men of high personal character, and of exalted station in the Church,' that is, in both Protestant and Catholic churches, to provide financial support to local schools. Almost all 'National Schools' took on either a Catholic or a Protestant character; by 1852 only 175 schools out of 4,795 were under joint management.[16] This publicly-funded denominational model of schooling persists in Ireland today, despite some modifications in recent years. To take a final example, the heavy influx of French Canadians who came to New England's factories after 1860 came from a province where publicly-funded schooling was organized on a denominational basis.[17]

In short, Catholic immigrants – and especially the clergy who occupied a leadership role and were greatly concerned to prevent assimilation of their parishioners into the Protestant majority – were accustomed to publicly-funded Catholic schools and regarded the existing schools as unacceptably Protestant and thus hostile to maintenance of the beliefs and loyalties that they wished to promote in their children. It was quite natural for them to seek a share of the public funding available for schools to support their own schools, and in fact such arrangements were made for a time in a number of local communities, including Lowell, Massachusetts, Manchester, New Hampshire, and Poughkeepsie and other communities in New York State.

Generally, however, the Protestant majority reacted strongly against this demand for separate Catholic schooling, charging that it would prevent the children of immigrants from becoming loyal American citizens who shared the prevailing political and cultural values. It was widely believed, among the Protestant majority, that the very nature of Catholic schooling was contrary to fundamental principles of American life, aiming to produce adults unable to think for themselves and totally subordinate mentally and spiritually to their church. 'Catholicism in this country,' wrote Samuel Spear in 1876, 'depends for its life and progress upon two conditions: first, a large and continuous importation of foreign-born Catholics;

---

[14] Dunn (1958), 207, 211.

[15] See Glenn (2011) for a detailed discussion.

[16] See Akenson (1970) for a detailed discussion.

[17] See Dufour (1997).

second, home production, by educating the children of Catholics into the faith of their parents and the faith of the Church.… Ignorance and despotic control are historically the strongholds of Catholicism.' There was a dangerous 'inconsistency between what the Catholics desire and the whole genius and nature of our political institutions.'[18]

Decades earlier, influential Protestant clergyman Horace Bushnell of Hartford delivered an address in 1853 on the role of the common school in relation to Catholic immigrants. Americans had been extremely generous, he told his audience of elected officials and leading citizens, in admitting immigrants to all the privileges of a free society, but 'they are not content, but are just now returning our generosity by insisting that we must excuse them and their children from becoming wholly and properly American.' The ungrateful Catholic immigrants wanted 'ecclesiastical schools, whether German, French, or Irish, any kind of schools but such as are American, and will make Americans of their children.' Overlooking conveniently how many private academies had long been receiving public funding – and including religious instruction in their programs – he drew a sharp distinction: 'Common schools are nurseries thus of a free republic, private schools of factions, cabals, agrarian laws, and contests of force… The arrangement is not only unchristian, but it is thoroughly un-American, hostile at every point to our institutions themselves.' Bushnell found it 'a dark and rather mysterious providence, that we have thrown upon us, to be our fellow-citizens, such multitudes of people, depressed, for the most part, in character, instigated by prejudices so intense against our religion.' It was his hope, however, that through the common public school 'we may be gradually melted into one homogeneous people.'[19]

Difficult as it may be for us to understand, most Americans in the nineteenth century thought of Catholicism as 'sectarian' but were equally confident that Protestantism was not, and were deeply suspicious of the intentions of the growing number of Catholics among them toward fundamental aspects of American civic life. In the 1870s, many Americans reacted strongly against the intransigence of the Catholic Church of Pius IX against fundamental principles and freedoms of modern life. The fact that most American Catholics were exemplary citizens did not reduce majority concerns about the intentions of the church hierarchy and the supposed influence of 'sectarian' Catholic schools on children from Catholic families. 'One foe of Rome contended that the Irish would assimilate if the priests did not keep them separate. Another thought that the priesthood drove the Irish into reluctant hostility to public education.'[20]

This fear of the effects of Catholic schooling would continue for many decades. The National Education Association, in 1891, warned that parochial schools initiated the children of immigrants into foreign traditions that threatened 'distinctive Americanism,' and 30 years later a Methodist bishop in Detroit warned that 'the parochial school is the most un-American institution in America,

---

[18] Spear (1876), 28.

[19] Bushnell (1880), 299–303.

[20] Higham (1955), 29.

and must be closed.'[21] It was this continuing and deeply-rooted perception that Catholic schooling was a problem that would lead to the Oregon popular initiative legislation requiring pupils to attend public schools, legislation struck down by the United States Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (*268 U.S. 510*) in 1925 with the ringing words, 'the child is not the mere creature of the State.'

In this context, it is not surprising that Catholic education, along with other aspects of Catholic institutional life, developed an inward-looking and defensive attitude. As an historian of immigration has put it, 'the fact that people tend to react defensively to displays of hostility goes far in explaining the rapid expansion and consolidation of the comprehensive Catholic educational system between 1890 and 1914.'[22]

Over time, however, and especially after the Second World War, American Catholics became part of the mainstream in countless ways, including (as survey research has demonstrated again and again) on issues that might be expected to distinguish them, such as attitudes toward birth control and divorce. Despite a last flurry of anti-Catholic rhetoric around the 1960 election, and the strong sales of Paul Blanshard's book *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949, 1958), it seems fair to say that those Catholics who see themselves as representing a minority position over against the prevailing American culture are the exception. The very fact that only a few Catholic colleges and secondary schools represent themselves to potential students and their families as traditionalist and thus exceptional says much about the majority of Catholic institutions.

From being counter-cultural institutions, in fact, most Catholic schools and colleges now boast – not unjustly, as the Cardus research shows – their superior academic results. 'We find that on almost every measure, Catholic schools are providing superior academic programs, resulting in admission to and attendance in more high-ranking colleges and eventual advantage in years of education and higher degrees.'[23]

The primary focus of Catholic schools, then, as reflected for example in the survey of administrators as part of the Cardus study, is on equipping their students to be successful in selective colleges and professional schools and thus in life. The striking inter-generational mobility among American Catholics since the Second World War is evidence of how effectively they have done so.

Development of Separate Protestant Schooling in the United States

As we have seen, most American schools in the nineteenth century – and, indeed, for the first half of the twentieth – were marked by a generic Protestant flavor that, though theologically bland and undemanding, reflected what most non-Catholic parents wanted for their children. There were of course major variations depending

---

[21] Ross (1994), 24, 68.

[22] Weiss (1982), xvii.

[23] Cardus (2011), 31.

upon local circumstances. For most non-Catholic parents, this generic Protestantism, though silent about the great drama of sin and salvation, seems to have been quite satisfactory, especially when accompanied with regular reading from the Bible and other devotional practices. 'So successful were Protestant efforts to demonstrate the compatibility of the Bible with increasingly secular education that individual states continued into the twentieth century to pass laws *requiring* Bible-reading in public schools: Pennsylvania in 1913, Delaware and Tennessee in 1916, Alabama in 1919, Georgia in 1921, Maine in 1923, Kentucky in 1924, Florida and Ohio in 1925, and Arkansas in 1930.'[24]

After the Second World War, however, religious practices in public schools were successfully challenged in a series of cases, mostly in federal courts, based on the 'Establishment' clause of the First Amendment. Within a few years, all such practices had been removed and, indeed, religion (especially Christianity) was seldom mentioned, even in subjects like history, literature, art, and music where this led to a marked impoverishment of the curriculum. As psychologist Paul Vitz showed, the public school curriculum was censored to present a view of reality that would give students the impression that religion was totally irrelevant to the real world.[25]

One of the responses to this quite sudden transformation of American public schools, formerly infused with Christian motifs, to strictly secular settings was a rapid expansion of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant schools, as well as of homeschooling. Millions of parents concluded that the public schools were no longer a fit place for their children, and sought alternative forms of education informed by the biblical perspectives no longer available – in however attenuated a form – in the public schools.

Public reactions, especially among professional educators, to this phenomenon often echoed that toward the development of Catholic schooling in the nineteenth century: Protestant schools and homeschooling were accused, on the basis of no objective evidence, of divisiveness, of promoting intolerance, and of unfitting children for their future role in American society. These charges are exemplified in a book by a professor of legal studies at Cornell University. Public authorities, Professor Dwyer argued, would be fully justified in ignoring 'a child's expressed preference for a kind of schooling that includes the practices' of indoctrination and crippling of personality which the author claims characterize religious schools. Overriding the child's decision (not to mention that of her parents) 'would be appropriate and even morally requisite.' Thus, religious schools *may* be permitted as an alternative, but only if they conform themselves to public schools through abandoning such 'harmful practices' as 'compelling religious expression and practice, teaching secular subjects from a religious perspective … and making children's sense of security and self-worth depend on being "saved" or meeting unreasonable, divinely ordained standards of conduct'.[26] So farewell to educational freedom, and to religious freedom.

---

[24] Fessenden (2005), 807.

[25] Vitz (1986).

[26] Dwyer (1998), 164–5, 179.

The contrast between the stated purposes and the long-term outcomes of Catholic and Protestant schools, therefore, may largely be the result of their different stage of historical development. As the Cardus report puts it,

> We wonder if the longer history of Catholic schools and the focus on academic excellence as a means of social and economic mobility has caused an apathy among Catholic school leaders as relates to developing the faith, whereas the more recent history of Protestant Christian schools, coupled with their graduates' belief that U.S. culture is hostile towards their values, is promoting a greater emphasis on overtly strengthening the faith of their students.[27]

This seems just right, and helps to explain why Catholic schools are no longer perceived as a threat to American citizenship, while every controversy over school vouchers or tuition tax credits is sure to feature warnings about evangelical Protestant schools which are considered – by the liberal opinion-makers – as beyond the pale for their condemnation of gay marriage and other shibboleths of contemporary elite culture.

In fact, however, there are already signs that many Protestant schools are evolving toward higher academic standards, in part based on parental expectations.[28] The Cardus sample included many adults who attended such schools in the 1990s, and recent developments, such as the formation of a new network of schools committed to matching the academic standards of independent schools without sacrificing faith-development, offers the possibility that the apparent trade-off experienced by Catholic schools may not be necessary. It should be noted, in fairness, that there seems to be a reawakened interest in the Catholic school world for reviving the faith-development mission without sacrificing academic rigor.

The Challenge of Islamic Schools

Just as evangelical Protestant schools are sustained by a conviction on the part of parents and educators that elements of the mainstream culture are toxic to the appropriate development of children into adults prepared to put obedience to God ahead of compliance with peers, with popular media, and even with government, so the growing number of Islamic schools in Western Europe and North America reflect – and evoke – similar concerns. Thus a recent book on Muslims in Britain warns about

> private Islamic schools. Many of these are run by Islamists who teach children that their primary loyalty is to Islam rather than to their countries of citizenship … Religious schools should be encouraged to teach civics, history, philosophy, and critical thinking, as well as the tenets of their faith.… Governments should not provide financial assistance to any school that fails to meet these basic standards.[29]

---

[27] Cardus (2011), 20.

[28] See Council on Educational standards and Accountability www.cesaschools.org.

[29] Baran and Touhy (2011), 195.

In fact, 'Islamic schooling in the United Kingdom represents a situation in which education has emerged as a primary space in which fundamental questions about the societal inclusion and belonging of minority communities are negotiated.'[30] Similarly, in the Netherlands,

> in recent years a sense of alarm and urgency has arisen concerning the failing integration of religious and ethnic minorities in Dutch society…There also are worries about whether Islamic schools foster separatism and hostility. It is suspected that sometimes those schools use religion courses to disseminate anti-Western propaganda. And finally, there are more general fears that Dutch society is disintegrating.[31]

Nor was the United States exempt from such concerns, similar to those about Catholic schools 150 years ago but expressed in a contemporary form when, in March 2007, 'an online petition requesting that Islamic schools be banned entirely was circulated, charging that such institutions are imposing religion and backward traditions on children.'[32]

In such a climate of suspicion, it would not be surprising if those connected with Islamic schools saw themselves as under attack and struggling to maintain their distinctive perspective and pass it on to their children, just as did Catholics in the nineteenth century and evangelical Protestants in the 1970s. 'Residing within culturally incongruent spaces, migrant Muslim communities seek to shelter their children and youth from negative outside influences.'[33]

Just as Bushnell and others charged that the effect of parochial schools was to prevent the children of immigrants from mingling with American children, so 'critics of separate [Islamic] schools argue that this sense of "safety" and comfort breeds an unhealthy insularity by secluding these children and youth from other non-Muslim peer groups.'[34] In fact, however, Jasmin Zine's study of four Islamic schools in Canada found that

> Students clearly respond to the peer support, religious freedom, and camaraderie that Islamic schools engender but do not see themselves as essentially living separatist lifestyles or not being conscious of the world around them. In other words, they do not see centering their Islamic identity as a negation of their Canadian identity or their role as active citizens.[35]

Other researchers have suggested that 'the Muslim school is serving as a pathway for students as well as adults to cultivate social trust, leadership skills, and community values commonly associated with citizenship and civic engagement.'[36]

These are just the sorts of outcomes that we would predict, based on the Cardus study of the effects of evangelical Protestant schools. Islamic schools are not

---

[30] Mandavile (2007), 226.

[31] Vermeulen (2004), 49.

[32] Haddad and Smith (2009), 3.

[33] Zine (2009), 39; see also Zine (2008).

[34] Zine (2009), 48.

[35] Zine (2009), 62.

[36] Cristillo (2009), 79.

yet producing the strong academic results[37] that we see in the case of Catholic schools – that may take a generation of efforts – but they can be expected to produce graduates of good character and commitment to the communities in which they live.

Policy Implications

If we step back for a little from the American scene, we can see that conflicts over schools proposing an alternative understanding of life based on non-negotiable religious convictions are an international phenomenon that has recently taken on a new urgency in many countries. A notable feature of contemporary educational policy in most Western democracies is that religious differences have generally been accommodated, including with public funding. Beginning in the 1970s for three decades, conflicts over education in Europe were more likely to arise from cultural than from religious differences, cultural differences associated with immigration, or from religious differences understood by elites to be essentially cultural. This perception was no doubt related to the secularist conviction that religion was a phenomenon of the past, combined with the stark contrast between the customs of many of the families who followed the labor immigration of the post-war period and those prevalent in the host societies. It was only as the second and third generations deriving from that immigration came to maturity, largely abandoning their ancestral cultures but turning to Islam in ways that, for many of them, was more fervent than the practice of their parents, that religion has re-emerged as the predominant source of conflict.

Countries with written constitutions, at least among Western democracies, commonly provide an explicit commitment to freedom of religion within an essentially secular state. Modern states, aside from those few still under Communist rule, are seldom defined as 'atheist' or in any sense hostile to religion. On the other hand, apart from the Islamic world, it is unusual for a state to have a religious character or to extend official recognition to a single religion; among the largely symbolic exceptions are the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries. Characteristically, a modern state is *secular* without being secularizing, at least in theory, supporting and interacting with all religions which are represented among its citizens without extending preferential treatment to any. In practice, as we have noted in the case of Paul Vitz's research, the state's silence about religious matters can convey the message that these are unrelated to the important purposes of life.

The State plays only a limited role in the religious sphere, in Western societies, but creates space for religious groups to be active in accordance with their own self-defined aims and aspirations and to advance and promote their values and beliefs in a spirit of respect for the rights of others. Although it seems likely that this owes more to historical developments and the balance of political forces than to the working out of a theory, it is often justified in the name of 'subsidiarity,' which

---

[37] Onderwijsraad (2012).

became one of the founding principles of the European Union. In the words of Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, 'in order both to maintain and make fruitful the movement for social improvement supported by the State, and to bring the State back to its true nature, it is necessary that many functions now exercised by the State should be distributed among the various autonomous organs of a pluralistically structured body politic.'[38]

To the extent that citizens are motivated by religious considerations, they have a right to have these considerations taken seriously as having profound normative significance, indeed as offering a personal identity which deserves respect. Religion is not, for most people, however, an exclusively private matter; it is exercised through association with fellow-believers, and in the 'public square'. Legal scholar Stephen Carter has pointed out the importance of such a 'community of meaning: a group of people, voluntarily associated with each other, struggling to make sense of the world.'[39]

European countries have made different choices about how to manage the relationship between religious organizations and the State, including strict separation, a concordat with the Vatican, or a national church as in England. In other countries the specific technique of recognition of religion and state support of churches is used. These historically-determined arrangements are facing new tests as they seek to come to terms with Islam. As Olivier Roy points out, 'in every Western country, Islam is being integrated and not following its own traditions but according to the place that each society has defined for religion, from Anglo-Saxon indulgence to Gallic suspicion, although the former needs to be less naive and the latter less pathological.'[40]

There has been a growing recognition that religious organizations can play a valuable role in meeting a variety of human needs that are not strictly religious. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is the position taken recently by philosopher Jürgen Habermas, that

> [t]he neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen. This is incompatible with the political universalization of a secularist world view. When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language in public debates.[41]

The starting point for such recognition is the social and moral influence of religion on citizens and on the society in general. 'The ultimate basis for the church's legal status vis-a-vis the state,' said a German Catholic leader in 1969, 'rests on the

---

[38] Maritain (1998), 27. For contemporary applications to a variety of social domains, see Colombo 2012 and the chapter therein on education in Lombardy by Glenn.

[39] Carter (1998), 27.

[40] Roy (2007), 94.

[41] Habermas (2006), 51.

fact that the pluralistic state has to turn to social groups that establish and preserve values, and this the churches are better able to do than other social groups.'[42]

With some exceptions, in fact, governments rely upon schools with a religious character to help to meet the demand for education, and the specific demand of some parents for faith-based schooling. In so doing, however, they raise difficult issues. Educational freedom is consistent with rival social policies, those seeking to promote individual development (liberalism) as well as those concerned about the perpetuation of freely-chosen communities within the civil society (communitarianism). What it cannot be reconciled with is a state monopoly on the formation of the loyalties of youth and their perspective on how and to what ends to live their lives. Totalitarian regimes seek to achieve such a monopoly;[43] but pluralistic democracies recognize that there is no freedom more basic than that of seeking to shape the beliefs and convictions of one's children.

Even within democratic systems, however, government commonly seeks to use schooling to inculcate common norms of loyalty and citizenship, while it is in the nature of religious organizations and communities in largely-secular societies to seek to maintain and pass on the particular norms and beliefs that distinguish them from the surrounding culture. This tension has led critics of faith-based schools like Amy Gutmann to charge that, however successful they may be in their academic efforts, they tend to undermine citizenship and divide loyalties, making it more difficult for citizens to engage in the 'rational deliberation' which, according to the critics, is the essence of democracy.

From the perspective of educational freedom, there is a constant danger that the state school itself will take on an ideological character, expressing and communicating a specific view of the world.[44] Is it conceivable, in fact, that a real education, worthy of the name, could fail to be based upon, and to convey, such a worldview? Can we conceive of the neutrality of the state school as simply a vacuum of perspective and commitments, or is the reality that there is always a 'message' which is being communicated to pupils, even if it is a message of relativism and indifference, the 'imposition of a specific form of materialism'?[45] Is there not a danger that, as a thoroughly-secular legal scholar put it,

> the prevailing orthodoxy in most public schools is a negative one. There is order, but there is no community. Many schools are not simply moral vacuums, they are culturally confusing and devoid of significant shared values..... For many students, acculturation in public schools is learning to abandon home or subculture values; to relate to others through roles and rules rather than as whole persons and community members; and to deny meanings, feelings, and intellect.[46]

---

[42] Spotts (1973), 284.

[43] See Glenn (1995) for a discussion of schooling under communist regimes.

[44] Braster (1996).

[45] Coleman and White (2011), ix.

[46] Arons (1986), 71.

There have, of course, been periodic efforts to define a secular faith that could serve in place of traditional religion as the guiding principle of an education. In the United States, Horace Mann thought 'the pure religion of heaven' could be distinguished from all denominational differences; John Dewey promoted a 'Common Faith.' Ferdinand Buisson in France a '*Foi laïque*.' More recently Louis Legrand sought to identify 'a new unifying ethic, acceptable to all.'[47] These efforts, it is fair to conclude, had only limited success when first made, and have even less credibility today.

What has taken their place in elite discourse about education is the need to help pupils become autonomous, 'reflective critical thinkers,' and this is now (often without much reflection) one of the assumptions of many teachers and those who train them. Making this a primary goal of a freely-chosen school is admirable; making it a public policy imposed on all schools and pupils is profoundly undemocratic. Political philosophers like Amy Gutmann

> see the demands of civic virtue as requiring a form of autonomous deliberation about matters relating to the common good which include the capacity to evaluate values, commitments, and ways of life. Once developed, however, this capacity cannot be confined to the political realm and its development leads to a form of autonomy which is exercised across wider aspects of the life of the person, including those which fall into the "nonpublic" domain.[48]

William Galston has provided an eloquent refutation, from a liberal perspective, of such liberal overreach.

> At the heart of much modern liberal democratic thought is a (sometimes tacit) commitment to the Socratic proposition that the unexamined life is an unworthy life, that individual freedom is incompatible with ways of life guided by unquestioned authority or unswerving faith. As philosophical conclusions, these commitments have much to recommend them. The question, though, is whether the liberal state is justified in building them into its system of public education. The answer is that it cannot do so without throwing its weight behind a conception of the human good unrelated to the functional needs of its sociopolitical institutions and at odds with the deep beliefs of many of its loyal citizens. As a political matter, liberal freedom entails the right to live unexamined as well as examined lives–a right the effective exercise of which may require parental bulwarks against the corrosive influence of modernist skepticism.[49]

As K. Anthony Appiah points out, the continued health of alternative frameworks of belief and life-orientation is essential if personal freedom itself is to be meaningful.

> We believe that children should be raised primarily in families and that those families should be able to shape their children into the culture, identity, and traditions that the adult members of the family take as their own. One liberal reason for believing this is that this is one way to guarantee the rich plurality of identities whose availability is, as I have said, one of the resources for self-construction.… But once we have left the raising of children to families, we are bound to acknowledge that parental love includes the desire to shape children into identities one cares about, and to teach them identity related values, in particular, along with the other ethical truths that the child will need to live her life well.

---

[47] Legrand (1981), 78.

[48] McLaughlin (2003), 131.

[49] Galston (1991), 253–4.

> A state that actively undermined parental choices in this regard in the name of the child's future autonomy would be a state constantly at odds with the parents: and that would be unlikely to be good for the children.[50]

Martha Nussbaum has reminded us recently that, in their exercise of freedom in post-traditional societies like Western Europe and North America, 'some people do actually choose lives involving authority and constraint.'[51] Nor is this choice necessarily an indication of a lack of the moral courage which liberals claim to admire; this courage can be learned 'from parents who set themselves against the dictates of popular culture' and thus in turn give youth 'the emotional capacity necessary to act on concerns they may have about the life they are being raised to endorse.'[52] According to Olivier Roy, what he calls 'neo-fundamentalist Islam' – like evangelical Christianity – is by no means a passive acceptance of cultural traditions; it is, rather, a sphere where autonomy is exercised through

> the importance of self-achievement, attempts to reconstruct a religious community based on the individual commitment of the believers in a secular environment (hence the blossoming of sects), a personal quest for an immediately accessible knowledge in defiance of the established religious authority, the juxtaposition of a fundamentalist approach to the law (to obey God in every facet of one's daily life) with syncretism and spiritual nomadism, the success of gurus and self-appointed religious leaders, and so on. Islam cannot escape the New Age of religions or choose the form of its own modernity.[53]

In short, any attempt to promote a secular worldview based upon the ideal of unconstrained choice among values and life-direction is inconsistent with liberal democracy; it is a misguided effort 'to protect the values associated with liberalism by being illiberal.'[54]

What is emerging in Western Europe at present, because of the growing visibility and activity of Islam, is a renewed focus on religion as an issue for educational systems. In the United States, by contrast, conflicts over the accommodation of religion in public schools and over whether non-public schools with a religious character can benefit from public funding have been constant since the 1950s. It is more true than ever that there is 'a notable similarity between Europe and the United States: educational institutions serve as a major battlefield for the negotiation of religious differences.'[55]

Whether or not public funding is provided, government oversight must balance between the need to promote integration and participation in society in general and the importance of encouraging initiatives by minority communities. In practice, institutional autonomy cannot be absolute when the interests of children are at stake, but must be subject to being modified and redefined, subject to the principles

---

[50] Appiah (2003), 71–2.

[51] Nussbaum (2012), 128.

[52] Burtt (2003), 190.

[53] Roy (2004), 6.

[54] Berger et al. (2008), 105.

[55] Berger et al. (2008), 81.

of accountability, performance assessment, and financial audit. Finding the right balance between government oversight and the promotion of autonomy for educators and freedom for parents is perhaps the leading educational policy issue that many countries are facing today.[56]

The emergence of new religiously-separate schools is a considerable shock for those secularists who had confidently assumed that they were a phenomenon of a less enlightened age and would soon pass from the scene. A thoughtful account of the new political activism of Muslims in Western Europe notes how 'European debates revert to the same syllogism, again and again. If they have not abandoned their faith, Muslims are religious fundamentalists. Since choice is meaningless among fundamentalists, only victims or bullies are Muslims.'[57] This is clearly not an appropriate basis for respect toward or the integration into European society of millions of individuals of the second and third generations deriving from immigration whose primary identity is not as Moroccans or Turks but as Muslims, whether they attend a mosque or not.[58]

Legitimate concerns are expressed about whether religiously-separate schools will prevent integration into the host society; this is precisely the charge that was brought against Catholic schools in the United States during the nineteenth century, only to be disproved by the salient role that such schools played in the transition of language, culture, and loyalty. Of course one cannot guarantee that the same process will occur with Islamic schools in Western societies, but there is no intrinsic reason to believe that it will not. After all, most Muslim parents want their children to learn what they need to be successful in the host society, without surrendering to aspects of popular culture that they find offensive … and who can say that they are wrong?

Christopher Shannon has argued out that the 'path to meaningful diversity lies not in the refinement of abstract, neutral, universal principles that affirm the dignity of all faiths and value systems, but in the fostering of alternative local institutions rooted in very particular faith and value systems.… the public school system remains in the vanguard of promoting false universalisms.' The goal of secular liberalism was to segregate religion into the private sphere, a sphere which shrinks all the time as government takes on more and more functions previously carried out by families and voluntary associations, including religious communities. But a good case can be made that the self-segregation of some religious groups is usually a temporary measure and

> marks a retreat only from the Enlightenment ideology of liberal universalism, not from participation in the political institutions that are, admittedly, the legacy of this ideology.… The fostering of local institutions, rooted in distinct, particular traditions, promises the most meaningful alternative to both the religious intolerance of the past and the secular intolerance of the present.[59]

Policy-makers are challenged with finding the right balance between respecting the right of voluntary communities formed around shared religious convictions to nurture their children in those convictions, and ensuring that those children

---

[56] See Glenn and De Groof (2012) for details on more than 60 national systems of schooling.

[57] Klausen (2005), 209.

[58] Laurence and Vaisse (2006), 95, 167.

[59] Shannon (2001), 134, 136.

grow into citizens capable of functioning cooperating and deliberating with fellow-citizens nurtured in other convictions, or none.

It would be helpful if they paid more attention to the historical evolution of religious schooling, as exemplified by Catholic schooling in the United States, an evolution from the status of shelters from a hostile culture to enablers of confident and successful participation in a shared civic space. If evangelical Protestant schools are still somewhere further back on this journey, it is largely a matter of historical timing; most were established, with scanty resources, within the last 40 years. The Cardus report reminds us that

> when Catholic schools became a means of social and economic mobility, the emphasis shifted from faith and ethnic identity to academic rigor, while Protestant Christian schools are now in the period of their history primarily concerned with preservation of religious identity.[60]

There is no reason to doubt that Protestant schools will continue to improve their academic quality, or that Islamic schools, in turn, will increasingly do so. There is every reason to hope that both will make the strong contribution to civic virtue and engagement that the Cardus study noted among graduates of Protestant schools.

The lesson for policymakers should be to create incentives and provide support for the improvement of the academic quality of the faith-based schools which parents choose, while taking care not to interfere with their character-formation by seeking to impose a uniform system of values – as Dwyer, Gutmann, and others recommend – that would undermine their distinctive approaches to what it means to live an admirable life. Religious freedom in a pluralistic society should extend to how parents seek to guide the development of their children; indeed, there is no dimension of freedom that has greater consequences. After all,

> it can be argued that mainstream public schools also impose a singular moral hegemonic viewpoint based on secularism and Eurocentrism.… these masquerade as universal ways of knowing, but are culturally situated viewpoints that are in opposition to faith-centered worldviews and also engage fidelity to a particular partisan worldview or view of "the good life."[61]

The State has no business imposing such a worldview through a monopoly on publicly-supported schooling or on interference with the worldviews promoted by faith-based schools.

References

Akenson, D. H. (1970). *The Irish education experiment: The national system of education in the nineteenth century*. London: Routledge/Kegan Paul.

Appiah, K. A. (2003). Liberal education: The United States example. In K. McDonough & W. Feinberg (Eds.), *Citizenship and education in liberal-democratic societies* (pp. 56–74). New York: Oxford University Press.

---

[60] Cardus (2011), 23.

[61] Zine (2009), 43.

Arons, S. (1986). *Compelling belief: The culture of American schooling*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Baran, Z. with Emmet Tuohy. (2011). *Citizen Islam: The future of Muslim integration in the West*. New York: Continuum.

Berger, P., Davie, G., & Fokas, E. (2008). *Religious America, secular Europe?* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Braster, J. F. A. (1996). *De identiteit van het openbaar onderwijs*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff.

Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Holland, P. B. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burtt, S. (2003). Comprehensive education and the liberal understanding of autonomy. In K. McDonough & W. Feinberg (Eds.), *Citizenship and education in liberal-democratic societies* (pp. 179–207). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bushnell, H. (1880). *Life and letters*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Campbell, D. E. (2001). Making democratic education work. In P. Peterson & D. E. Campbell (Eds.), *Charters, vouchers, & public education* (pp. 241–265). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Cardus education survey: Do the motivations for private religious Catholic and Protestant schooling in North America align with graduate outcomes? Hamilton, 2011.

Carter, S. L. (1998). *The dissent of the governed: A meditation on law, religion, and loyalty*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, J. S., & Hoffer, T. (1987). *Public and private high schools: The impact of communities*. New York: Basic Books.

Coleman, E. B., & White, K. (2011). Introduction. In *Religious tolerance, education and the curriculum*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Colombo, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Subsidiarity governance. Theoretical and empirical models*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cristillo, L. (2009). The Case for the Muslim School as a Civil Society Actor. In Y. Y. Haddad, F. Senzai, & J. L. Smith (Eds.), *Educating the Muslims of America* (pp. 67–83). New York: Oxford University Press.

Dufour, A. (1997). *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec*. Quebec: Boréal.

Dunn, W. K. (1958). *What happened to religious education? The decline of religious teaching in the public elementary school, 1776–1861*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dwyer, J. G. (1998). *Religious schools vs children's rights*. Ithaca: Cornel University Press.

Fessenden, T. (2005, December). The Nineteenth-Century Bible Wars and the separation of Church and State. *Church History*, *74*(4), 784–811.

Galston, W. A. (1991). *Liberal purposes: Goods, virtues, and diversity in the liberal state*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Glenn, C. L. (1988). *The myth of the common school*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Glenn, C. L. (1995). *Educational freedom in Eastern Europe*. Washington, DC: Cato Institution Press.

Glenn, C. L. (2011). *Contrasting models of state and school: A comparative historical study of parental choice and state control*. New York/London: Continuum.

Glenn, C. L. (2012). *The American model of state and school: An historical inquiry*. New York/London: Continuum.

Glenn, C. L., & De Groof, J. (2012). *Balancing freedom, autonomy, and accountability in education* (Vol. I–IV). Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers.

Habermas, J. (2006). Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State? In J. C Ratzinger & J. Habermas (Eds.), *Dialectics of secularization: On reason and religion* (B. McNeil, Trans.). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Haddad, Y. Y., & Smith, J. L. (2009). Introduction: The challenge of Islamic Education in North America. In Y. Y. Haddad, F. Senzai, & J. L. Smith (Eds.), *Educating the Muslims of America* (pp. 3–19). New York: Oxford University Press.

Higham, J. (1955). *Strangers in the land: Patterns of American nativism, 1860–1925*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Klausen, J. (2005). *The Islamic challenge: Politics and religion in Western Europe*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Laurence, J., & Vaisse, J. (2006). *Integrating Islam: Political and religious challenges in contemporary France*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Legrand, L. (1981). *L'école unique: à quelles conditions?* Paris: Scarabée.

Mandavile, P. (2007). Islamic education in Britain: Approaches to religious knowledge in a pluralistic society. In R. Hefner & M. Q. Zaman (Eds.), *Schooling Islam: The culture and politics of modern Muslim education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mann, H. (1847). *Tenth annual report to the Massachusetts State Board of Education*, Massachusetts, USA.

Mann, H. (1848). *Eleventh annual report to the Massachusetts State Board of education*, Massachusetts, USA.

Mann, H. (1849). *Twelfth annual report to the Massachusetts State Board of Education*, Massachusetts, USA.

Maritain, J. (1998). *Man and the state*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

McLaughlin, T. H. (2003). The burdens and dilemmas of common schooling. In K. McDonough & W. Feinberg (Eds.), *Citizenship and education in liberal-democratic societies* (pp. 121–156). Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2012). *The new religious intolerance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Onderwijsraad. (2012). *Artikel 23 Grondwet in maatschappelijk perspectief: Nieuwe richtingen aan de vrijheid van onderwijs*. Den Haag.

Peshkin, A. (1986). *God's choice: The total world of a fundamentalist Christian school*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ross, W. G. (1994). *Forging new freedoms: Nativism, education, and the constitution, 1917–1927*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Roy, O. (2004). *Globalized Islam: The search for as new Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Roy, O. (2007). *Secularism confronts Islam* (G. Holoch, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Shannon, C. (2001). *A world made safe for differences: Cold war intellectuals and the politics of identity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Spear, S. T. (1876). *Religion and the state, or, the Bible and the public schools*. New York: Dodd, Mead.

Spotts, F. (1973). *The churches and politics in Germany*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Vermeulen, B. P. (2004). Regulating school choice to promote civic values: Constitutional and political issues in the Netherlands. In P. J. Wolf & S. Macedo (Eds.), *Educating citizens: International perspectives on civic values and school choice* (pp. 31–66). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Vitz, P. (1986). *Censorship: Evidence of bias in our children's textbooks*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books.

Weiss, B. J. (1982). Introduction. In *American education and the European immigrant, 1840–1940*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Zine, J. (2008). *Canadian Islamic schools*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Zine, J. (2009). Safe havens or religious 'ghettos'? Narratives of Islamic schooling in Canada. In Y. Y. Haddad, F. Senzai, & J. L. Smith (Eds.), *Educating the Muslims of America* (pp. 39–65). New York: Oxford University Press.