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A Word from Our Editor

The present edition of *The Catholic Educator* offers hearty fare on a panoply of topics concerned with enabling Catholic education to survive and even thrive. From the correspondence we receive, I know that you find this a valuable product of the Catholic Education Foundation. Don't keep this resource or the Foundation a secret; pass on to other educators and those committed (or who should be committed) to Catholic schools this information.

From May 13 to May 15, I have the privilege of representing the Foundation at an international congress meeting in Barcelona on the topic of "depersonalization" in contemporary society and will address the congress on the importance of Catholic schools in an era of secularization. I would like to share with you the conclusions of that talk.

As many of you know, a genuine Catholic school "system" is, for all practical purposes, an American invention. Yes, there are Catholic schools all around the world, but parish-based or diocesan-sponsored schools aimed at the general Catholic population is not common elsewhere (although the United Kingdom comes close in some ways and does have government aid for their Catholic schools).

In the course of the paper, I attempt to use the American reality as a kind of template for a much greater reality, showing how the Church in the United States responded to an anti-Catholic threat in the nineteenth century by fashioning her own school system and how that school system has served both the Church and the broader society very well. The secularization taking Europe by storm and menacing the United States to a lesser but nonetheless problematic degree can only

be held off and even reversed if the Church is able to offer her members an alternative vision of life and what sociologists call a viable "sub-culture" (actually, the Catholic "sub-culture" is the real culture, while what society is offering is not a culture at all). In essence, that is what St. Benedict did as the decadent Roman culture was breathing its last, and that alternate vision saved not only the Church but western culture. The principal agent of that renewal was a monasticism which founded schools everywhere. What emerged in relatively short order was the glorious Middle Ages — the Age of Faith — with the good, the true and the beautiful producing a superabundance of magnificent works of literature, art, music and architecture.

Believers need to be convinced – and then need to convince everyone else – that the Fathers of Vatican II got it right when they declared in *Gaudium et Spes*: "Without the Creator, the creature vanishes" (n. 36). History supports that assertion. Just look at the bloodshed of every godless movement of modernity from the French Revolution to the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War to the murderous campaigns of the Nazis and Communists. Clearly, "without the Creator, the creature vanishes."

An education devoid of God is an anti-education. Let me conclude with some very insightful observations of the convert-monk and poet of the twentieth century, Thomas Merton. Reflecting on some years of his boyhood spent in France between the two world wars, he contrasted a state school in the village with a Catholic one:

When I think of the Catholic parents who sent their children to a school like that, I begin to wonder what was



wrong with their heads. Down by the river, in a big clean white building, was a college run by the Marist Fathers. I had never been inside it: indeed, it was so clean that it frightened me. But I knew a couple of boys who went to it. They were sons of the little lady who ran the pastry shop opposite the church at St. Antonin and I remember them as exceptionally nice fellows, very pleasant and good. It never occurred to anyone to despise them for being pious. And how unlike the products of the Lycée they were!

When I reflect on all this, I am overwhelmed at the thought of the tremendous weight of moral responsibility that Catholic parents accumulate upon their shoulders by not sending their children to Catholic schools. Those who are not of the Church have no understanding of this. They cannot be expected to. As far as they can see, all this insistence on Catholic schools is only a money-making device by which the Church is trying to increase its domination over the minds of men, and its own temporal prosperity. And of course most non-Catholics imagine that the Church is immensely rich, and that all Catholic institutions make money hand over fist, and that all that money is stored away somewhere to buy gold and silver dishes for the Pope and cigars for the College of Cardinals.

Is it any wonder that there can be no peace in a world where everything possible is being done to guarantee that the youth of every nation will grow up absolutely without moral and religious discipline, and without

the shadow of an interior life, or of that spirituality and charity and faith which alone can safeguard the treaties and agreements made by governments?

And Catholics, thousands of Catholics everywhere, have the consummate audacity to weep and complain because God does not hear their prayers for peace, when they have neglected not only His will, but the ordinary dictates of natural reason and prudence, and let their children grow up according to the standards of a civilization of hyenas.¹

Here at the Catholic Education Foundation, we are committed to staving off the emergence of another generation growing up “according to the standards of a civilization of hyenas.” Won’t you join us in that effort?

Reverend Peter M. J. Stravinskias, Ph.D.,
S.T.D.
Editor, *The Catholic Educator*

¹Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1998, 56.



Young Activists Adding Fuel to Antiabortion Side

I went to the March for Life rally Friday on the Mall expecting to write about its irrelevance. Isn't it quaint, I thought, that these abortion protesters show up each year on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, even though the decision still stands after 37 years. What's more, with a Democrat in the White House likely to appoint justices who support abortion rights, surely the Supreme Court isn't going to overturn *Roe* in the foreseeable future.

How wrong I was. The antiabortion movement feels it's gaining strength, even if it's not yet ready to predict ultimate triumph, and *Roe* supporters (including me) are justifiably nervous.

As always, we in Washington enjoy an up-close view of the health of various causes because of the city's role as the nation's most important setting for political demonstrations. In this case, I was especially struck by the large number of young people among the tens of thousands at the march. It suggests that the battle over abortion will endure for a long time to come.

"We are the pro-life generation," said signs carried by the crowd, about half its members appearing to be younger than 30. There were numerous large groups of teenagers, many bused in by Roman Catholic schools and youth groups. They and their adult leaders said the youths were taught from an early age to oppose abortion.

"People our age are going to be the ones to change, to be the future leaders," said Lauren Powers, 16, who came with a group from an all-girls Catholic school in Milwaukee.

After I asked to interview them, a group of eighth-graders from St. Mark School, a private Catholic school in Catonsville, sang a song they wrote, based on a Miley Cyrus tune:

Hands up for saving the babies;
Bad doctors go away . . .
We're saving the babies;
You know they're going to be okay.

Also contributing to the confidence among abortion opponents are some recent political and judicial events. In the House version of the health-care reform bill before Congress, conservatives succeeded in inserting a remarkably strong antiabortion provision. And in November, antiabortion Republican candidates won governor's races in Virginia and New Jersey.

And although he still lacks the five votes needed to scrap *Roe*, which established a constitutional right to abortion in 1973, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. warned explicitly in a Supreme Court decision Thursday that there was no "inexorable command" that the court must preserve past rulings.

"If you'd asked me six months ago, I'd have been discouraged. Now I'm not discouraged," especially because of the election results, said Thomas J. Hogan, a member of the board of directors of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, which organized the rally.

Asked about the prospect of overturning *Roe*, he shrugged. "Will we ever attain it? Who knows," he said. "We haven't stopped,"



he added, and the presence of so many young people is "very promising."

Activists who support abortion rights conceded that there's less energy among young people on their side of the debate.

"Unfortunately, I feel my generation is a little complacent," said Amanda Pelletier, 20, co-director of the abortion rights group at American University. "It just doesn't seem to be a very hip issue."

Erin Matson, action vice president for the National Organization for Women, said that the current political climate is "terrifically hostile" to abortion rights and that her group hopes to organize a national march similar to a huge rally for NOW's side of the issue in 2004.

Matson criticized President Obama and Democrats in Congress for having "put forth the most punitive proposed restrictions on abortion in my lifetime." She referred to the provision in the House bill sponsored by Rep. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), which would prevent women who receive federal insurance subsidies from buying insurance that pays for abortions.

Matson and Pelletier were among fewer than 100 abortion-rights supporters who demonstrated in front of the Supreme Court on the anniversary of *Roe*.

Young people in the March for Life said they thought they were more opposed to abortion than people in their parents' generation because they had more information about the issue, in part because of their education.

"We start learning early on why it's wrong. I don't think they got the chance to do that,"

said Kelly Brennan, 17, who came here with a group from Archbishop Ryan High School in Philadelphia.

Although all of the school and youth group trips were voluntary, one adult leader said she'd urged the students to come because of her own deep feelings.

"I've seen the pain that abortion causes women," said Michelle Fabian, youth minister of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Lancaster County, Pa. She said her mother still "can't listen to a vacuum cleaner without shuddering" because it reminds her of the equipment used when she had an abortion before Fabian was born.

When feelings run that raw, this issue could stir controversy for 37 years more.

Robert McCartney
Washington Post
January 24, 2010



Down but Not Out in Catholic Suburbia

Inner-city parochial schools are not the only ones struggling

Tim Busch has an answer to the epidemic of closing Catholic schools. And it has nothing to do with vouchers.

It couldn't come at a more critical moment. Over the next few days, nearly 2.2 million students and their families will celebrate Catholic Schools Week. Though the Catholic school system remains America's largest alternative to public education, the number of both schools and students is roughly half what they were at their peak in the mid-1960s. According to the National Catholic Education Association, the trend continued last year, with 162 Catholic schools consolidating or closing against only 31 new openings.

Amid the gloom Mr. Busch offers a prescription for revival: End the financial dependence on parish or diocese. Build attractive facilities. And compete for students.

St. Monica's School joins about 1,267 Catholic schools that have closed since 2000 as enrollment nationwide has dropped by 382,125 students, or 14 percent, according to the National Catholic Education Association.

If that sounds like a business formula, it is. Mr. Busch is a good friend I came to know through Legatus, an association of Catholic CEOs. Spend any time around him, and you'll find he believes that America needs Catholic schools more than ever, and that they can compete with the best. To prove it, he's helped start up two privately run Catholic schools — St. Anne Elementary

School and JSerra High School, both in southern California.

Now, there are plenty of upscale Catholic schools with waiting lists — especially those run by religious orders. But here's a fact that gets little mention: a Catholic education is in danger of becoming a luxury for the middle class. It's hard to be optimistic about the future of Catholic schools in our inner cities if Catholics cannot make a go of these schools in the suburbs, where most Catholics live.

Do the math. In my area of New Jersey, for example, a Catholic high school whose tuition clocks in at \$15,000 a year is deemed a bargain. For a family with three or four kids, the total tuition can top \$3,000 a month. Young middle-class families struggling with a new mortgage and high property taxes can find themselves squeezed: not wealthy enough to pay, not poor enough for aid.

In Mr. Busch's case, he says he got the idea for starting up St. Anne after he and his wife went looking for a Catholic school for their first child — and were depressed by the dilapidated facilities they found at many schools. Ultimately he and his partners settled on a model where parents take responsibility for operating the school, with the diocese ensuring the teachings are authentically Catholic. It's a division of responsibility much in line with Vatican II, freeing up pastors to be pastors while tapping into the financial, legal, and business abilities of lay people.



In some ways, it's liberating for both. Schools replace lay boards that merely advised a pastor or bishop with lay boards that raise money, build facilities, and actually run the place. The appeal to a bishop is this: We'll help you provide an authentic Catholic education to more children — and it won't cost you a dime.

For those who complain that such schools serve only the rich, Mr. Busch says that financially stable schools have more wherewithal to offer those in need (even without endowments — the next step — St. Anne and JSerra have more than 10% of their students on financial assistance). He further points out that need is by no means limited to money. "Some children have wealth," he says. "But having wealth does not insulate you from problems like divorce, substance abuse, loneliness, a culture saturated in sex, and so on. These kids need the Catholic message as much as everyone."

Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., agrees. "Catholic education is such a value both for Catholics and for society that we want it to be accessible and affordable for all who see its intrinsic value We are fortunate that many lay people are committed to this cause — and are helping us 'think outside the box' so that Catholic

schools will thrive in this new decade and beyond."

Mr. Busch's privately run Catholic schools, of course, are not the only new model showing promise. The 24 Jesuit-based Cristo Rey high schools across the country do a terrific job through an innovative work-study program. The bishop and his flock in Wichita, Kan., embraced a stewardship model that calls upon all parishioners to give 8% of their gross income, which allows the diocese to make all its Catholic schools tuition free. And Catholic universities such as Notre Dame and Boston College are reaching out to help run Catholic elementary and high schools.

"We can't wait for vouchers, and we can't look to the old model of relying on our pastors and bishops to come up with the money and answers," says Mr. Busch. "If we want Catholic schools for our children and our society, we have to adopt new models that let us compete."

William McGurn
Wall Street Journal
February 1, 2010



Notre Dame, Tucson Diocese form Partnership to Help Catholic Schools

The University of Notre Dame and the Diocese of Tucson have agreed to designate three parish schools in Tucson as the nation's first Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education Academy Schools. Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas and Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education officials announced the plan Jan. 29 at the Bishop Moreno Pastoral Center in Tucson. "This is an exciting moment," Bishop Kicanas said. "It's a great joy to have this new partnership to enhance and foster the formation of our young people ... to strengthen our schools and community involvement." The five-year partnership with the Alliance for Catholic Education — beginning with the 2010-11 school year — aims to achieve comprehensive excellence in academics and

school administration. It emphasizes enhancing school leadership, curriculum, instruction, professional development, financial management, marketing and Catholic identity. Above all else, the bishop said, the goal of the program is "to provide a Catholic education of the highest quality to underserved communities." The initiative is led at Notre Dame by Holy Cross Father Joseph Corpora, the Alliance for Catholic Education's director of university-school partnerships. Father Corpora is a former pastor with nearly 20 years experience in parishes and schools serving Latinos.

Catholic News Service



Catholic Schools: Cultivators of Priestly Vocations

Catholic Schools Week in the midst of the Year for Priests lends itself to reflection on how much of an impact our Catholic schools can have on a priestly vocation. I thought it would be most effective to do this based upon the role Catholic schools played and continue to play in my own vocation.

My thirteen-year journey through Catholic schools began in the spring of 1995 when I entered first grade at St. Mary's Primary School in Taunton. I had just spent two and a half years at a public school in the city of Boston and, even at the age of six, I was able to notice the vast differences between the two institutions. The public school was huge with thousands of students in large classes and was one of the noisiest places I can remember; St. Mary's was smaller and more intimate. The public school was chaotic; St. Mary's was ordered and had a true sense of peace.

From first through fifth grades at this school, St. Mary's helped to form me not only academically but also as a Catholic. We had daily religion classes and prayers. We regularly attended Mass and prayed the Rosary. The pastor of St. Mary's at the time, Fr. William Costello, was known to all the students, and always appeared approachable and available to us whenever he was at the school. My teachers continually urged all the students to know the faith.

I received First Holy Communion in second grade and shortly after that, initial thoughts of the priesthood began. By the time I was in fourth grade, my Halloween costume was a cassock and "padre hat." Mrs. Carol Zopatti, a fifth-grade teacher, used to bring us over to St. Mary's Church so often to help with "cleaning," that the church, which is quite an imposing

structure, became a place which were comfortable visiting and genuinely enjoyed spending time in.

From sixth to eighth grade, I attended Taunton Catholic Middle School. I became an active altar server at both my parish and the school and I relished every opportunity to serve at the altar. In these years many of my teachers, and even classmates were beginning to encourage and support my priestly vocation. Fr. Maurice Gauvin regularly used to come to celebrate Masses, hear confessions and be a priestly presence to us.

I had known probably from third grade on what a religious sister was, but I didn't have one as a teacher until seventh grade. Sr. Marie Baldi, SUSC, was a wonderful example to us of someone who had given her life to the service of God. She was full of joy in letting others know the blessings of a life lived for God and the happiness one receives by passing on the Catholic Faith to younger generations.

In 2002 I started high school at Xaverian Brothers High School in Westwood, MA. Here, too, I found many positive influences from both faculty and peers towards a priestly vocation. The academic work became much more challenging for me, but the spiritual dimension of the school was not lost. Students were able to participate in daily Morning Prayer with the brothers, and faculty offered a prayer before every class. The theology classes got progressively more difficult ranging from Church History and Scripture, to Morality and The Nature and Existence of God. Several of the school's theology teachers and campus ministers obviously considered their work more than



merely a job; rather they saw it as a vocation and an opportunity to bring students closer to Christ.

By the time I graduated from high school in 2006, I was spiritually prepared to begin discerning a call to the priesthood. There was so much support and encouragement from my peers and teachers in the Catholic schools until then that it seemed neither awkward nor out of place to say that's what I wanted to do with my life.

In November 2006, after a period of three months at the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, I was almost certain that God was calling me to the priesthood. The following August I entered seminary and to this

day I believe that responding to God's call when I did was one of the most rewarding decisions I have ever made in my life.

I write this not to suggest that if parents send their children to Catholic schools that they will necessarily become a priest or a religious. I tell my story, rather, to show that Catholic schools are a place where a vocation is fostered. I look back with gratitude on so many vivid examples throughout my years in Catholic schools of how God planted and so many others nourished seeds in me of the vocation to the priesthood.

Christopher Peschel
The Anchor
January 29, 2010



Milwaukee's Voucher Graduates

More evidence of 'what works.'

President Obama's fiscal 2011 budget calls for a 9% increase in federal education spending, and he has famously said that the money should go to "what works" in education. So he ought to take another look at Milwaukee, where the nation's oldest and largest publicly funded school voucher program is showing academic gains.

A report released last week by School Choice Wisconsin, an advocacy group, finds that between 2003 and 2008 students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program had a significantly higher graduation rate than students in Milwaukee Public Schools.

"Had MPS graduation rates equaled those for MPCP students in the classes of 2003 through 2008, the number of MPS graduates would have been about 18 percent higher," writes John Robert Warren of the University of Minnesota. "That higher rate would have resulted in 3,352 more MPS graduates during the 2003-2008 years."

In 2008 the graduation rate for voucher students was 77% versus 65% for the nonvoucher students, though the latter receives \$14,000 per pupil in taxpayer

support, or more than double the \$6,400 per pupil that voucher students receive in public funding.

The Milwaukee voucher program serves more than 21,000 children in 111 private schools, so nearly 20% more graduates mean a lot fewer kids destined for failure without the credential of a high school diploma. The finding is all the more significant because students who receive vouchers must, by law, come from low-income families, while their counterparts in public schools come from a broader range of economic backgrounds.

Vouchers are of course taboo among most Democrats, and Mr. Obama has done nothing to stop Congress from killing the small but successful voucher program for poor families in Washington, D.C. The Milwaukee program has survived for 20 years despite ferocious political opposition, and it would have died long ago if parents didn't believe their children were better off for it.

Wall Street Journal
February 7, 2010



The Real “Crisis” in Catholic Education?

A story in the October 12 issue of *Time* Magazine, for which I once worked, on the “crisis” in Catholic schools, brought me back to a question I have been asking myself for several months: what’s the connection between the health of Catholic schools and the health of the Catholic Church? And should we be asking that question instead of the ones that most journalists are asking about the imploding Catholic school system?

Time’s writer, Gilbert Cruz, does an admirable job describing the problems facing the world’s largest private school system, and identifies most of the usual suspects — disappearing nuns and priests (cheap labor), changing demographics (the flight of Catholic parish money from the inner cities), and, of course, an outdated business model. (I found many of the same things in researching my stories on Catholic education for *Education Next* and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.)

Cruz does misunderstand the significance of the charter school threat — and Sol Stern does an admirable job of explaining the danger of “public school reform schemes” in his blog — but for the most part Cruz avoids the elephant in the room: *THE* Catholic Church. What is the official Church doing to save its schools?

I don’t doubt for a moment that many Catholics are worried — and many are working hard to “save” their schools and “the system.” And Cruz, like others, talks about the various experiments (like the Jesuits’ *Cristo Rey* network and the conversion of parish schools to charters — see Andy Smarick’s comprehensive report

for Seton Education Partners about Washington, DC’s experience), but doesn’t he wonder where the Church’s bishops are?

Yes, there are a few, like J. Terry Steib of Memphis, who have taken up the cause of inner-city poverty and education, but their efforts are a tiny blip in the American Catholic world. The occasional bishop or cardinal will lobby “the state” for a tax credit, but you don’t hear much from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Does all this sound familiar — a very powerful education establishment overseeing a system that is crumbling; lots of small reforms, around the edges? The American *public* education system, by most accounts, is broken, despite taxpayers throwing billions of dollars at it. And the American *Catholic* school system is disappearing, despite the fact that the number of Catholics has nearly doubled (from 45 million to 77 million) since 1965.

The similarities in plight are not incidental, despite the supposed high wall between Church and State. And we know that there have been terrific battles about how high and real that wall is. In fact, the Catholic school system was launched by prelates worried that the public system had been overtaken by Protestants — and was out to get them. They weren’t wrong. John Dewey pronounced the Catholic church “inimical to democracy,” many states outlawed Catholic schools and it took a Supreme Court decision, in 1925, *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters*, to declare unconstitutional an Oregon law that required public school attendance (a law meant to keep Catholic children out of Catholic schools).



All of this leads one to the not very remarkable conclusion that there's something in the air that's not quite Catholic and not quite secular that is perhaps causing our schooling malaise. My own theory is that the Church and the State — their leaders and a good many of their followers — have simply lost faith. Catholics really don't believe in God and secularists are no longer very sure about democracy. It's no wonder that neither believe that schools are the way, the truth, and the light: we've given up on our ability *to know*. We no longer build shining cities of learning on hills — by hand, with sweat, toil and tears; we build big-box stores on flat land and call them schools. (See Martha Derthick's "The Decline of the Stately School.") As a nation — and this is as much a problem with Catholic educators as their secular counterparts — we have grown comfortable looking the other way in the face of certain realities (we prefer reality TV). We claim, for example, that Catholic schools are disappearing because of inner city poverty, forgetting that the people who built the Catholic education system were impoverished immigrants. We mourn the loss of nuns, without giving much thought to the character of the institution that they were part of — or the institutions that their replacements come from.

There is, in both spheres, a severe identity crisis. Or to see it another way, we have all succumbed somewhat to the religion of relativism, expressed in so many fifth-grade classes today (Catholic and public), by the odd phenomenon of giving Gold Stars to everyone. Without striving for "truth" or God, we are left with nothing more to aspire to than getting a job, which all depends, as we know, on whom you know, not what you know.

One need not be a cynic to see the intellectual mush that this educational anarchy has created. In one issue of a recent *New York Times* (August 30, 2009) there were two stories (one on page 1 and the other page WK1) about the new trends in letting children read—and eat—whatever they want.

No wonder there is a new movement for national standards. Standards, please! Is there an adult in the house? Is *Lord of the Flies* on any reading list?

E.D. Hirsch has just written yet another book attuned to the educational temper — or distemper! — of our times. This one, *The Making of Americans: Democracy and Our Schools*, is about why a core curriculum is needed for the preservation of our republic — a republic, madam, if you can keep it. "Our educational thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the schools as the central and main hope for the preservation of democratic ideals and the endurance of the nation as a republic," writes Hirsch. And he quotes the master seer of American identity, Mr. deTocqueville, who observed (in 1831!) that "it cannot be doubted that in the United States the education of the people powerfully contributes to the maintenance of the democratic republic."

So too Catholics, it would seem, have forgotten the necessity of schools to the health of their faith — a faith, madam, if you can keep it. When the Church was fighting to find its place in that new republic, it, too, turned to schools as the vehicle for ensuring its future. The bishops who convened at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 determined to write a catechism for Catholic children —



the famous *Baltimore Catechism*, which was a standard text in Catholic schools for the next 80 years, its questions and answers about the Church and God learned, by rote, by millions of children, in a fashion that might put Muslim madrassas to shame — and then issued what today would be considered a terribly draconian and medieval (parochial?) order: “All Catholic parents are bound to send their children to the parochial schools.” Such schools were not even built yet, so the Council, in the words of the National Catholic Education Association, issued “a demand that all Catholic parishes open schools within two years.” Hup-two!

Though some will disagree about whether immigrants made the American Catholic Church or the American Catholic Church made the immigrants, the 1884 decisions by the bishops stand as the foundational documents of a school system that so prospered that, by 1965, it was educating one of every eight children in the United States. The question is — and this is the question behind Hirsch’s plea to revive a core curriculum in public schools – can the Church survive without its schools? Just as the crisis in our public school system may be one tied to a deeper dysfunction in our culture that only a shared and common

knowledge base can resolve, so too the Catholic school crisis may need to be solved by Catholics asking themselves what it is they believe.

Though loss of nuns, changing demographics, and lack of funds are the most common explanations for the Catholic school system’s dissolution, and are important to consider, I think we can also find answers to the current crisis by understanding the lessons of 1884.

It could be that the crisis in the Catholic school system is what political observers call “the God Gap.” Our public schools are constantly faced with the question of whether and how to teach God — is character education a suitable replacement? — but it could very well be that Catholics are struggling to understand whether God had anything to do with the success of their school system and whether they can get by without Him.

Church and State? It does look like we’re in this together after all.

Peter Meyer, blog of 10/19/09
Education Next
www.educationnext.org



Preaching Choice in Obama's Hometown

"The voucher movement seems to have been born, or seems to have been started as a Republican idea. That's the way Democrats look at it. That's the way black lawmakers look at it. This is a Republican idea. This is what the Republicans want to push on us. ...We don't seem to see public schools not working in your area."

The speaker was the Rev. James Meeks, explaining black resistance to vouchers. The venue was a sold-out lunch put on by the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI). The result? Something new in Windy City politics: a powerful black Democrat reaching out to a free-market think tank to force reform on the city's most hidebound institution — the Chicago public schools.

James T. Meeks does not fit the usual stereotype of a voucher advocate. To begin with, he is founder and senior pastor of Salem Baptist Church of Chicago, the largest African-American church in Illinois. He serves as executive vice-president for Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Oh, yes: He is a Democratic state senator who chairs both his chamber's education committee and the legislature's Black Caucus.

A few years back, Barack Obama named him someone he looked to for "spiritual counsel." Now the man they call "the Reverend Senator" has done the unthinkable: He's introduced a bill to provide vouchers for as many as 42,000 students now languishing in Chicago's worst public schools. He tells me he thinks he can get enough Democrats on his coalition to get it through.

"I'm banking on the difficulty Democrats will have telling these parents, 'No, you're not going to have choice. Your kids are locked into these failing schools.'"

Right now, national attention on Illinois is focused on the possibility that Republicans may take the U.S. Senate seat once held by Mr. Obama. But Collin Hitt, the IPI's director of education, notes Mr. Meeks may have the more far-reaching narrative.

"There is an irony that the highest-profile push for vouchers in America today is in Illinois, while the highest-profile opposition to vouchers is also from Illinois," says Mr. Hitt. The latter reference is to President Obama, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, and Sen. Richard Durbin, Illinois Democrats whose opposition pulled the plug on a popular, bipartisan voucher program in our nation's capital.

As his remarks make clear, Mr. Meeks appreciates the disincentives that make vouchers such a political orphan. Pro-voucher Republicans open themselves to a double whammy: opposition from suburban voters who are happy with their kids' public schools and equate vouchers with bringing blacks into those schools; and only tepid support from African-Americans who are wary of GOP intentions. Meanwhile, any Democrat who dares to back vouchers will immediately find himself at war with the most powerful and unforgiving special interest in his party: the teachers' unions.

That's what Mr. Meeks meant when he spoke to IPI of the difficulty of Republicans using "our statistics" — that is, failure rates for inner-city public schools — to promote "a Republican idea" for largely black



schools. He's also frank about why he's embraced that idea after years of banging the drum for more money. As he recently told one local TV interviewer, the money isn't there. With Illinois \$13 billion in debt, parents do not have "ten years to wait for Democrats to fund schools."

Certainly he's not a man to hold his tongue. He speaks frankly about elected officials "owned by unions." About politicians who send their own kids to private schools — while opposing the choice for the less fortunate. In 2006, he gained notoriety for language in a fiery sermon that appeared directed at Chicago Mayor Richard Daley.

"We don't have slave masters," he said. "We got mayors. But they still the same white people who are presiding over systems where black people are not able . . . to be educated."

Whether this was fair to Mayor Daley, it's hard to contest the point about the school system. Even conceding there was progress during the years Mr. Duncan served as CEO

of the Chicago public schools — especially on charters — half the students who make it to ninth grade still won't see a high school diploma. Mr. Meeks invokes an even more dispiriting statistic: Only eight out of 100 Chicago public school students will graduate from a four-year college.

"If the American Dream includes sending your kids to college," he asks, "what is Chicago saying to these parents?" Good question.

In the last presidential campaign, Americans responded to a candidate who spoke of a new politics of hope and promised to reach across the aisle. It hasn't turned out that way in Washington. But back in the city the President and his education secretary left behind, Mr. Meeks believes he has found a reform that will give Chicago school parents change they can believe in.

William McGurn
Wall Street Journal
February 23, 2010



Cardinal Brady Defends Right to Maintain Faith Schools

CHILDREN “HAVE a right to be trained and formed in the worship and prayer of the faith community to which they belong,” Catholic primate Cardinal Seán Brady has said.

“I believe we should never apologise for insisting that our rights as a community of faith are respected and treated on the same basis as the rights of others. This is what we expect from a society which claims to respect pluralism and diversity,” he said.

“All parents, whatever their denominational background, have this right to have their children educated in accordance with their religious convictions.

“This right is recognised in international instruments of human rights, including the European Convention on Human Rights.”

Speaking to the Catholic Principals’ Association conference in Cookstown, County Tyrone, yesterday, he said: “We should never apologise for our convictions about Catholic education. I suggest rather that we reflect upon its proud history, its purpose and achievements.”

He continued that “renewing our stewardship of Catholic schools has to involve renewing our commitment to respecting and promoting the right of children in our schools to be led and formed in authentic worship of God in the Catholic tradition.”

That, he said, was “not some optional extra. Children and their parents have a right to expect a Catholic school to provide children with a formation in prayer and worship.” He

called on the principals “to support the trustees of Catholic schools in their efforts to ensure that the ethos and defining character of Catholic schools are maintained in any process of restructuring and change in education policy or provision. That ethos and character are entrusted to trustees for protection. I believe they are to be conserved conscientiously and scrupulously.”

He said that “consequently, the trustees will not support any change in management arrangements for Catholic schools in Northern Ireland which undermines existing rights of trustees in relation to employment, management or area planning.

“The Catholic community has invested too much in their schools and in securing recognition for the rights of Catholic education to now see those rights diminished.”

He continued: “We will not support any proposal which diminishes the current legislative status of the Catholic network of schools or the existing rights of Catholic trustees in respect of employment, management or area based planning.”

Catholic trustees would also continue to support efforts of the Protestant churches to have their rights respected, he said. It was “vital that we support each other in upholding the principle that parents have a right to schools which promote a religious ethos.”

Patsy McGarry,
The Irish Times
February 26, 2010



Catholic Schools: Partners in Faith with Parents

Denver news media have reported in recent days on the case of two children of a lesbian couple in Boulder. The couple was informed by Sacred Heart of Jesus parish school that the older child, whom they were enrolling in kindergarten for next year, would be allowed to attend kindergarten but would not be able to continue into first grade the year after. Their younger child would be welcome to finish preschool, but not continue into kindergarten. Many have wondered why. Sacred Heart of Jesus parish has borne the difficult publicity surrounding this issue, but archdiocesan policy was followed faithfully in this matter, and the policy applies to all Archdiocese of Denver schools.

Some background is important. Then we'll turn to the human realities involved.

Catholic schools began in this country in the early 19th century. Catholics started them as an alternative to the public schools of the day, which taught a curriculum often hostile to Catholic belief. In many ways times have changed, but the mission of Catholic schools has not. The main purpose of Catholic schools is religious; in other words, to form students in Catholic faith, Catholic morality and Catholic social values.

We take great pride in the academic excellence of our schools as well. The reason is simple. A strong, well-rounded academic education helps to create mature citizens who contribute to the wider community. It's also true that some of our schools exist as a service outreach in largely non-Catholic communities. Many of our schools also accept students of other faiths and no faith, and from single parent and

divorced parent families. These students are always welcome so long as their parents support the Catholic mission of the school and do not offer a serious counter-witness to that mission in their actions.

Our schools, however, exist primarily to serve Catholic families with an education shaped by Catholic faith and moral formation. This is common sense. Other religious traditions do the same according to their beliefs, and at a heavy sacrifice. We need to remember that Catholic families pay twice for a Catholic education: through their taxes, they fund public education; then they pay again to send their children to a Catholic school. The idea that Catholic schools should require support for Catholic teaching for admission, and a serious effort from school families to live their Catholic identity faithfully, is reasonable and just.

That's the background. Now to the human side of a painful situation. The Church never looks for reasons to turn anyone away from a Catholic education. But the Church can't change her moral beliefs without undermining her mission and failing to serve the many families who believe in that mission. If Catholics take their faith seriously, they naturally follow the teachings of the Church in matters of faith and morals; otherwise they take themselves outside the believing community.

The Church does not claim that people with a homosexual orientation are "bad," or that their children are less loved by God. Quite the opposite. But what the Church does teach is that sexual intimacy by anyone outside marriage is wrong; that marriage is a sacramental covenant; and that marriage can only occur between a man and a woman.



These beliefs are central to a Catholic understanding of human nature, family and happiness, and the organization of society. The Church cannot change these teachings because, in the faith of Catholics, they are the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The policies of our Catholic school system exist to protect all parties involved, including the children of homosexual couples and the couples themselves. Our schools are meant to be “partners in faith” with parents. If parents don’t respect the beliefs of the Church, or live in a manner that openly rejects those beliefs, then partnering with those parents becomes very difficult, if not impossible. It also places unfair stress on the children, who find themselves caught in the middle, and on their teachers, who have an obligation to teach the authentic faith of the Church.

Most parents who send their children to Catholic schools want an environment where the Catholic faith is fully taught and practiced. That simply can’t be done if teachers need to worry about wounding the feelings of their students or about alienating students from their parents. That isn’t fair to anyone — including the wider school community. Persons who have an understanding of marriage and family life sharply different from Catholic belief are often people of sincerity and good will. They have other, excellent options for education and should see in them the better course for their children.

Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput,
O.F.M. Cap.
Denver Register
March 10, 2010



New Report Shows Economic Benefits of Catholic Schools

A newly released report by the Sage Policy Group, Inc., has found that Catholic school students in the Archdiocese of Baltimore produce higher test scores, are more likely to graduate and are more likely to attend and graduate from college than their public school counterparts.

The study found that the presence of Catholic schools is of disproportionate benefit to older and lower-income communities, with Catholic school graduates expected to earn more money and support more jobs, income formation and business sales in the broader economy.

Catholic school graduates will contribute more to state and local government coffers than their public school counterparts, the study said, and are more likely to emerge as societal leaders and organizers.

The Sage report also noted that Catholic schools reduce state and local public educational expenses by tens of millions of dollars every year and can be a stabilizing presence in older communities.

“All policymakers and donors should be aware of the myriad benefits produced by Catholic schools and their graduates,” the report said, “and should be willing to support emerging models that are successfully building Catholic school capacity anew, including in older communities with large numbers of low-income residents and in newer communities that are yet to enjoy the benefits of being able to select a Catholic education.”

Sage analysts determined that the schools of the Archdiocese of Baltimore support nearly 5,400 jobs in the region associated with

labor income of \$212 million. The report found that Catholic schools in the Baltimore Archdiocese saved Maryland \$180 million in 2008-09, including \$72 million in Baltimore County and \$22 million in Baltimore City.

“Based on the average cost of supplying educational services to a public school student in Maryland,” the report said, “the State of Maryland saved roughly \$200 million per year in expenditures due to the presence of Catholic school capacity. This equals over \$380 million total funds saved by state and local governments per year.”

Citing high Catholic school test scores, which rank above the national percentile rankings, the report said higher educational attainment translates into higher lifetime earnings.

Sage analysis showed that for every 23,100 Catholic school graduates, lifetime earnings will be \$5.2 billion more than for the equal number of public school graduates. That translates into approximately \$225,000 per graduate over the course of a working lifetime, the report said.

The report noted that in the 2008-09 school year, 82 percent of graduating seniors from Archdiocese of Baltimore high schools were preparing to attend college. “Once one adds in data for those set to attend two-year colleges,” the report said, “the number rises to an astonishing 97 percent or more than 30 percentage points higher than the public school proportion.”

George P. Matysek Jr.
The Catholic Review
March 4, 2010



A Setback for Educational Civil Rights

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked me to become one of the founding members of the newly formed U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, African-Americans drank at separate water fountains and our schools were segregated. A decade later, when people came together to march against these injustices, the idea that a black man could ever be elected president of the United States was still something for dreamers. My experience with that great movement gives me a particular appreciation for the historic importance of the presidency of Barack Obama — and the new dreams that his example will inspire in our young.

If Martin Luther King Jr. told me once, he told me a hundred times that the key to solving our country's race problem is plain as day: Find decent schools for our kids. So I was especially heartened to hear Education Secretary Arne Duncan repeatedly call education the "civil rights issue of our generation." Millions of our children — disproportionately poor and minority — remain trapped in failing public schools that condemn them to lives on the fringe of the American Dream.

For all these reasons, I was deeply disappointed when Sen. Richard Durbin (D., Ill.) successfully inserted a provision in last year's omnibus spending bill that ended one of the best efforts to give these struggling children the chance to attend a safe and decent school.

That effort is called the Opportunity Scholarship program. Since 2004 it has allowed thousands of children in Washington, D.C., to escape one of the

worst public school systems in the nation by providing them with scholarships of up to \$7,500.

Despite its successes, it is now closing down. On Tuesday the Senate voted against a measure introduced by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I., Conn.) that would have extended the program. Throughout this process Mr. Duncan's Education Department and the White House raised no protest.

Much has been written about the crisis in education, and the effective resegregation of our public schools. It's clear who is paying the price. A study a few years ago from Johns Hopkins University highlighted the terrible disparity of the current system: Nearly half of our nation's African-American students, nearly 40% of Latino students, but only 11% of white students attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm.

Many of the parents using Opportunity Scholarships chose Catholic schools for their children even though they are not Catholic themselves. That's no coincidence. When others abandoned the cities, the Catholic schools remained, and they continue to do heroic work.

At Notre Dame we launched our own efforts to bolster this mission. Our Alliance for Catholic Education, for example, takes talented young men and women, trains them to see teaching as a career, and then sends them into struggling inner-city schools such as Holy Redeemer in Washington, D.C.

But these inner-city schools can't do it themselves. Recently the Archdiocese of



Washington announced that Holy Redeemer would be forced to close its doors at the end of the year because the families who send their children to the school are unable to afford it without the financial aid they receive from this program. The Archdiocese stated that "decisions last year by the U.S. Department of Education and by Congress to phase out the federal D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program . . . negatively impacted Holy Redeemer's financial situation."

Of Holy Redeemer's 149 students, 60 were on Opportunity Scholarships. Unlike so many of their peers, these kids were on their way to college. Now they have to find some other safe haven. Others will never get the chance at all.

I know that some consider voucher programs such as the Opportunity Scholarships a right-wing affair. I do not accept that label. This program was passed with the bipartisan support of a Republican president and Democratic mayor. The children it serves are neither Republican nor

Democrat, liberal or conservative. They are the future of our nation, and they deserve better from our nation's leaders.

I have devoted my life to equal opportunity for all Americans, regardless of skin color. I don't pretend that this one program is the answer to all the injustices in our education system. But it is hard to see why a program that has proved successful shouldn't have the support of our lawmakers. The end of Opportunity Scholarships represents more than the demise of a relatively small federal program. It will help write the end of more than a half-century of quality education at Catholic schools serving some of the most at-risk African-American children in the District.

I cannot believe that a Democratic administration will let this injustice stand.

Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C.
Wall Street Journal
March 17, 2010



An Episcopalian, an Atheist, and a Jew Walk into a Catholic School. . .

Meet the (non-Catholic) patron saints of inner-city Catholic education

Robert W. Wilson speaks with a calm, almost gentle, voice. With his wire rim glasses and closely cropped gray beard, Wilson could easily be mistaken for a senior professor at a small liberal arts college. But Wilson is not an academic. He is a legendarily successful Wall Street investor. Retired since 1986, the 83-year-old Wilson now devotes much of his time to philanthropy.

Among his many achievements, Wilson is the single largest benefactor of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York. Since 2007, he has donated over \$30 million to inner-city Catholic education.

He is also an atheist.

“I remember the first time I had lunch with Cardinal Egan,” says Wilson, a touch impishly. “We were finishing up, and he said, ‘Well, now that you’ve given all this money to our schools, I should try to convert you.’ I said to him, ‘Well, Cardinal, if you do, I suppose I should try to convert you. The only problem is that if I succeed, you’ll lose your job.’”

Wilson belongs to an elite order: non-Catholic donors who are the patron saints of inner-city Catholic schools.

“It Was Just a Form Letter”

“I never gave money to educational institutions until 2007,” says Wilson. “Most of the rich people I know were already giving a lot of money to education — charter schools, private schools, colleges, universities. I decided that

there were plenty of people in this field. I chose to direct my resources elsewhere.”

Wilson plans to give away 70 percent of his net worth before he dies. “My primary interest has been conservation,” Wilson told *Portfolio.com* in December 2007. He is drawn to “the idea that but for my money, this building or piece of land or that animal would be gone.” Wilson describes himself as a “substantial donor” to the World Monuments Fund, the Nature Conservancy, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Over the last 10 years, his contributions to charity have totaled about \$500 million; to reach his goal, he believes he will need to give away another \$100 million or so.

Wilson’s philanthropy is born of a fortune he earned in a long and storied career on Wall Street. He started investing in 1949 with a \$15,000 loan from his parents. Middling returns marred his first years. Around 1963, he began investing in jet aircraft technology and commercial carriers. From there, he enjoyed a series of spectacular successes. By the time he retired at age 59, he was worth \$225 million.

Wilson was a masterful hedger whose career has been compared to those of George Soros and Warren Buffett. “Wilson’s investment strategy was to go both long and short,” notes financial author Brett Fromson. “Long because he believed in the long-term future of America, and short because he never wanted to be wiped out in a downturn.” “I was always net long,” adds Wilson, “because I never wanted to get up in the morning hoping that things would be getting worse.”



Catholic schools were brought to Wilson's attention by what must be history's most outrageously successful direct-mail fundraising letter. "I got this letter from Susan George, the executive director of the Inner-City Scholarship Fund," Wilson explains. "It was just a form letter from a mass mailing. It pointed out how little Catholic schools cost per student — and how superior their results are."

"Well," Wilson continues, "I checked it out, and discovered that the Catholic schools really don't get much support other than from Catholics who support the Catholic Church. I decided that this is one group of schools that I could support. Their enrollment has declined precipitously in the last 20 years, and I thought seeing these schools just disappear would be intolerable. Worst of all, nobody seemed to be doing much about it — including the Catholics themselves."

The direct-mail fundraising letter yielded a \$22.5 million contribution to the Inner-City Scholarship Fund. It was the single largest donation to Catholic schools in the history of the Archdiocese of New York. It funded scholarships that enabled more than 3,000 low-income students to attend inner-city Catholic schools.

To commemorate the occasion, Cardinal Egan hosted a ceremony at Immaculate Conception School on Manhattan's East 14th Street, across the street from Stuyvesant Town. "I am an atheist," Wilson said, but the gift "is about getting an education. The donation has nothing to do with religion." When he took the podium, Cardinal Egan disagreed — politely.

A Culture of Performance

Peter T. Grauer speaks quickly and precisely. There is a note of urgency in his voice. Partly it

is a manifestation of his commitment to Catholic education; he is the president of the Inner-City Scholarship Fund. Partly it's because he's speaking during a 15-minute break between sessions. It's the annual board meeting at Bloomberg LP. Grauer is chairman of the board.

"I'm not Catholic," says Grauer. "I grew up in a household that was Presbyterian and Episcopalian. My mother was one and my father was the other. I don't really remember who was which. I went to Sunday school at both places, but these days I don't spend a lot of time in church, I'm ashamed to say."

"But," Grauer quickly adds, "what I care about is the kids. I want to make sure they have an opportunity to get a good education. I believe that the delivery mechanism in Catholic schools is really good. It equips these kids to ultimately go on to higher education and become productive citizens — maybe even work for Bloomberg. I don't think too much about whether a school or a donor or a student is Catholic or non-Catholic. I just think about rallying the troops to raise as much money as we can to make sure these kids have a decent opportunity."

A range of studies, past and present, validates Grauer's point. In 1982, James Coleman co-authored *High School Achievement*, which found that, after adjusting for family background, Catholic high schools consistently outperformed public high schools on every measure of academic achievement. Those findings were validated in 1993, when three researchers published a highly regarded study, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, which detailed the benefits of Catholic education, especially among at-risk populations.



More recent evidence has further buttressed the case for the superiority of Catholic education. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — sometimes called “the nation’s report card” — is widely considered the gold standard among student achievement tests. In 2008, it released a report on long-term trends in reading (1971–2008) and mathematics (1973–2008). In each category, and for every age group, students in Catholic schools outperformed students in public schools. In 2006, NAEP assessments in civics and U.S. history found that Catholic schools again significantly outperformed public schools. The list goes on.

These achievements are all the more remarkable given that Catholic schools serve an increasingly low-income, minority, and non-Catholic student population. The trend lines are striking. According to the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), in 1970, minority students accounted for just over 10 percent of the Catholic school population. Today, minority students make up nearly 30 percent of the Catholic school population. Similarly, non-Catholic student enrollment has risen from under 3 percent in 1970 to almost 15 percent today.

“Now, there’s a very simple reason why a foundation with a definite Jewish background — you might even call it a Jewish foundation — gives to Catholic schools,” says Donn Weinberg, chairman of the Baltimore-area Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. “It’s that the Catholic schools in Baltimore and across the country take all comers. They’re educating poor kids in Baltimore — predominantly from black families. In other American cities, they serve mostly Latino families. Either way, these are usually kids from very low-income families.”

“There is another, somewhat intangible, benefit to Catholic schools,” Weinberg adds. “Part of their mission is to impart American civic norms and values to their students. Of course, they’re not the only schools that do this. But they definitely focus on the character, as well as the minds, of their students.”

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation ranks among the 20 largest foundations in the country, with assets of nearly \$2.5 billion and annual giving of almost \$100 million. It is dedicated to assisting the poor by funding direct service organizations; within its mission, an emphasis is placed on supporting the elderly and the Jewish community. “By funding Catholic schools,” notes Weinberg, “we’re fulfilling our mission, which is to help people who are on the lower end of the economic spectrum.”

Perhaps most impressive of all, Catholic schools spend considerably less money per pupil than public schools to achieve these results. According to the NCEA, in 2009–10 the mean per-pupil cost at a Catholic elementary school is \$5,436; at a Catholic secondary school, \$10,228. The National Center for Education Statistics has found that the mean per-pupil cost at a public school is \$9,683. (The study does not differentiate the cost per pupil between elementary and secondary schools.) Since elementary schools enroll more students than secondary schools, and since secondary schools are usually more expensive than elementary schools, it stands to reason that Catholic schools, on average, get better outcomes for fewer dollars.

Another report from the NCEA puts the aggregate effect in stark relief. As the nation’s largest single provider of private education, Catholic schools save the American taxpayer \$20.5 billion each and every year.



A Moment of Crisis

On March 4, the Archbishop of Baltimore announced plans to shutter 13 of the Archdiocese's 64 schools at the end of the 2009–10 school year. The decision will displace more than 2,100 students — nearly 10 percent of the 22,700 students in the archdiocesan school system. “If we keep this up,” Archbishop Edwin O’Brien told the *Baltimore Sun*, “in a dozen years we won’t have a school system.”

Baltimore is the most recent episode in a long-running story. Statistics compiled by the NCEA reveal that enrollment in Catholic primary and secondary schools peaked around 1965, when almost 5.5 million students attended roughly 13,000 Catholic schools across the country. By the early 1970s, the numbers of both schools and students began to drop. Those declines have never been reversed. By 1990, there were approximately 2.5 million students in 8,719 schools.

The situation today is, if anything, even bleaker. For the 2009–10 school year, about 2.1 million students are enrolled in 7,094 Catholic schools (of which 5,889 are elementary and 1,205 are secondary schools). This year, 24 new Catholic schools are slated to open. But 174 others will be consolidated or closed. Elementary schools have been the hardest hit.

The difficulties facing Catholic schools are enormous. But the scale of the challenge is inspiring some non-Catholic donors to step forward.

“We’re not a Catholic foundation,” says Tom Marino, executive director of the Memphis-based Poplar Foundation. “Nobody associated with the foundation is Catholic. That’s not the

reason we’re associated with the Memphis Jubilee Catholic Schools.”

Between 1999 and 2004, the Diocese of Memphis re-opened eight previously closed Catholic schools. The re-opened schools are known as “Jubilee Schools,” named in honor of the Year of Jubilee proclaimed by Pope John Paul II in 2000. Today, the schools educate more than 1,400 students. Of the total student population, 86 percent are African American; 81 percent are non-Catholic. Accustomed to a litany of school closures, Catholic school supporters sometimes refer to the effort as the “Memphis miracle.”

The effort required major philanthropic support — over \$60 million to date, for construction, renovation, and endowment funding — which came from both Catholic and non-Catholic donors. “Poplar has been involved with Jubilee from early on,” explains Marino. “Our core mission is education for low-income kids in Memphis, Tennessee. So it made perfect sense for us to partner with the Jubilee Schools. That’s exactly who they’re serving.”

“When I became a bishop in 1993, I was shocked that our schools were closing,” Bishop J. Terry Steib recently explained in a 2008 report by the Fordham Institute. “I thought, ‘that’s not the Church’s way.’” Steib saw Catholic schools — particularly in the inner cities — as a vehicle for evangelization. (Steib, himself African-American, had always hoped to be assigned to missionary work in Africa.) “It is the mission of the Church to be where others aren’t.”

Steib tapped a hard-charging Philadelphia-born grandmother to lead the effort. Mary McDonald moved to Memphis in 1976 and spent over 20 years working in diocesan schools, picking up a doctorate along the way. Her new assignment



plunged her into some of America's poorest zip codes. She never flinched.

"Everything for us boils down to leadership," says Marino. "That's what first drew us to the Jubilee Schools. When you've got competent, committed, and compassionate leaders like Bishop Steib and Dr. McDonald, you can overcome enormous obstacles. They give their hearts, minds, and entire lives to accomplishing the mission: helping every child achieve their God-given potential. And they do so not just by promoting academic excellence, but also by cultivating personal responsibility, social skills, and leadership, all balanced by faith and a sense of service to others."

The Poplar Foundation views its support for the Jubilee Schools as one component of a ranging reform strategy. "There is no one answer to the dilemma faced by Memphis," says Marino. "There are multiple answers to this problem. If we find the right people to work with, we say yes to Catholic schools, yes to Christian schools, yes to charter schools, and yes to traditional public schools. The common denominator is great leadership."

A Fresh Set of Eyes

In one important regard, non-Catholics enjoy a comparative advantage over their Catholic counterparts when it comes to supporting inner-city Catholic schools. Non-Catholics were not raised within the parochial school system. They are not habituated to its practices, nor do they feel deferential to its traditions. They can see Catholic schools with a fresh set of eyes — spotting problems and identifying solutions.

Stephen Schwarzman

Stephen Schwarzman has pale blue eyes. When he smiles, they light up, making him look younger than his 63 years. But when those eyes fix on something, they can quickly turn cool and analytical, capable of instantly sizing up possibilities.

From a young age, Schwarzman had a gift for seeing opportunities. He grew up in a solidly middle-class Jewish family in the Philadelphia suburbs. His father owned a retail goods store that specialized in linens, bedding, and other dry goods. When Schwarzman was 15 years old, he began thinking of strategies for taking the store to scale. He approached his father with a plan to open more stores and expand into a national chain — "like Sears." (His father declined.)

Years later, Schwarzman would draw on those talents when he joined Peter Peterson in forming the Blackstone Group. They launched the partnership in 1985, with a balance sheet of \$400,000. In early 1987, Blackstone created its first private equity fund, and soon became a global leader in alternative investment management. Twenty years later, Schwarzman led Blackstone to a \$7.7 billion initial public offering.

In addition to his continued service as chairman and CEO of Blackstone, Schwarzman serves in a wide array of civic and nonprofit roles. He is chairman of the board at the Kennedy Center, a trustee of the Frick Collection, and a board member of the Asia Society, the New York Public Library, and the Inner-City Scholarship Fund.

"I have always been a big supporter of education in general," says Schwarzman. "I'm especially impressed with the commitment the Archdiocese



of New York has made to educate more than 40,000 inner-city students with a solid values-based academic program. They have achieved fantastic results — 98 percent of the seniors graduate, and 97 percent of these graduates plan to pursue post-secondary education — especially for a student population that’s 93 percent minority, where 50 percent live near or below the poverty line.”

Schwarzman praises the Inner-City Scholarship Fund for its “focus on accountability, both for students and teachers, which provides a foundation for academic and personal success.” He expresses his admiration with contributions of both money and time. “I make annual donations to support the organization,” continues Schwarzman, “as well as sponsor 30 children. (Over the next few years, this number will grow to over 100 children.) I take my role as a sponsor very seriously and keep in touch with my students on a regular basis.”

But perhaps Schwarzman’s biggest contribution is the donation of his innate problem-solving skills. While touring Sacred Heart School in the Bronx, it occurred to him that private scholarship funds needed to do a better job assuring low-income parents that tuition assistance would flow without interruption. The best way to attract committed parents is to present these scholarships not as tenuous annual grants, but rather as continuous 12-year pathways.

For middle-class, suburban Catholic families, although parochial school tuition can be a burden, it is rarely a deal-breaker. Not so, Schwarzman realized, for inner-city parents. “Many children who receive tuition for grade school lose sponsorship for high school. They are then forced to go back into the public school

system — an interruption that can be very disruptive.”

Schwarzman’s eyes light up. “It would be wonderful if we could find a way to keep these kids in the Catholic school system throughout their educational career.” It’s a problem he and others are now looking to solve.

Russ Carson

“I’m an Episcopalian,” says Russ Carson, “but my wife, Judy, is Catholic. We’ve been married for 39 years. When people ask me why I give to Catholic schools, I tell them — facetiously — that she made me do it. But the real reason is simple. It’s because Catholic inner-city schools work.”

In 1979, Carson co-founded Welsh, Carson, Anderson, & Stowe (WCAS). With total capital of \$20 billion under its management, WCAS is one of the country’s largest private investment firms. He’s also involved in a wide variety of civic and philanthropic activities. He chairs the board of trustees at Rockefeller University, the board of overseers at Columbia Business School, and the Endowment for Inner-City Education.

Carson co-founded the Endowment for Inner-City Education in 1997, and it now provides tuition scholarships to nearly 8,400 low-income children annually, allowing them to attend high-performing elementary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of New York. Through it and other, related organizations, the Carsons have provided more than \$40 million in funding to scholarship programs, capital repair efforts, and programmatic support to 105 inner-city Catholic schools in the Archdiocese...



Robert W. Wilson

“I think it’s a bit of a gamble,” says Robert Wilson, the retired investor, atheist, and guardian angel of New York City Catholic schools. “It’s a long shot. But if it works, it will spread throughout the country, and it may help to save these schools.”

Wilson is referring to the Catholic Alumni Partnership, a pilot program he is funding. Its goal is to help Catholic elementary schools open a new revenue stream by reconnecting with their alumni. After all, very few elementary schools — especially in economically marginal neighborhoods — have the resources to staff even a part-time alumni development officer.

Wilson spotted a missed opportunity. “Private schools cannot survive without their alumni,” he insists. “And the reason there’s not a tradition of alumni support in Catholic schools is that for years they have had lots of nuns and priests. It kept costs low enough that the schools could rely on their parishes for support. But now without a volunteer workforce, labor costs have gone up. And Catholic schools haven’t mobilized their alumni at all.”

Recent research has confirmed Wilson’s intuition. One study has found that 82 percent of the alumni of Catholic elementary schools would donate to their schools if they were asked. The problem? They’ve never been asked.

Wilson helped launch the Catholic Alumni Partnership to create a sustainable fundraising program, with alumni support as its foundation, at every Catholic elementary school in the Dioceses of Bridgeport, Buffalo, Norwich, and Rockville Centre, as well as the Archdiocese of Hartford. (The Diocese of Brooklyn and the Archdiocese of New York also have a pilot

group of schools participating in the program.) It is working with 303 schools, which together serve more than 100,000 elementary school students.

“It cost me somewhere between one and two million dollars just to get the names and addresses of all the schools’ alumni onto a computer,” says Wilson. “Now I’m involved in a further \$8 million program — of which I will fund 70 percent, and the various Catholic dioceses will come up with the rest — to actually go on out and fundraise among alumni.”

Perhaps the most visible result of Wilson’s efforts to date has been the launch of ClickYes.com. The website features an introductory video by Regis Philbin — class of ’45 at the Bronx’s (since-closed) Our Lady of Solace Grammar School—as well as links to Facebook groups and secure-donation portals. “It is certainly not the most impressive website in the world,” sighs Wilson, “but it’s probably better than nothing.”

“I started out by getting weekly results,” he explains. “I realized that was going to get me nowhere, so I told myself, ‘At the end of three months, let’s see how we’re doing.’ I can say that I recently had lunch with a major figure in the Catholic Church. He checks in more often than I do, and he thought things were going better than expected. He’s cautiously optimistic. But until the three months is over, I’m not going to jump to any conclusions.”

An Opportunity for Innovation

“I don’t have time to sort through all this,” said David Weekley. He glanced down at the mountain of papers in front of him. “This — I’m not even going to look at this. I’ll tell you what.



Come back tomorrow with a two-page executive summary. Then tell me how much you want.”

The young Jesuit was momentarily speechless. Fr. T. J. Martinez, S.J., had heard about Weekley, who has a reputation for funding programs he believes in — but only after asking tough, pointed questions. Even still, the young priest was slightly taken aback. He had expected Weekley to embrace his proposed project. “He pulls no punches,” Martinez recalls, a broad smile breaking across his face.

Weekley is something of a legend around Houston. At age 23, he founded a home construction company, David Weekley Homes. He has since built it into the country’s largest privately owned homebuilder. David Weekley Homes has won hundreds of industry awards, including National Builder of the Year, the National Housing Quality Award, and America’s Best Builder. *Fortune* has named David Weekley Homes as one of America’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” a total of seven times, including a 17th-place ranking in 2008.

Weekley is equally well known for his Texas-sized generosity. He devotes 50 percent of his income and, perhaps more impressively, 50 percent of his time to philanthropy. He supports a wide range of charities, but is particularly drawn to nonprofits that offer leverage, sustainability, and scalability.

When looking for leverage, Weekley wants opportunities where his dollars will catalyze bigger, better, and faster returns. When looking for sustainability, he likes to see nonprofits with external funding mechanisms, so they are not solely dependent on perpetual charitable dollars. And when looking for scalability, he tries to spot

charities with the leadership, vision, and desire to grow and serve more people.

Martinez had approached Weekley, thinking he had a good match on all three criteria. Martinez wanted to open the first non-tuition-based Catholic school in Texas. He wanted to launch a Cristo Rey high school.

Cristo Rey schools may very well be the most exciting innovation in contemporary American private education. The schools were designed to resolve the deeply conflicted business model of contemporary inner-city Catholic education. On the one hand, in the absence of public support, urban parochial schools must charge tuition to cover operating expenses. On the other hand, such tuition payments are increasingly outside the reach of the low-income families the schools intend to serve. Private scholarships have alleviated some of the tension, but they do not address the fundamental contradiction.

Cristo Rey schools may have found an elegant solution to the problem. Each and every Cristo Rey student is required to take a part-time, entry-level office job through the school’s Corporate Work Study Program. For these jobs, each student shares one full-time position with three other students. Together, the team of four students rotates so that each member works a full business day on a different day of the week; every fourth week, one member of the four-person team puts in a second day. The regular work cycle has allowed the schools to design a staggered curriculum so that no student ever misses class for work.

Crucially, students assign their earnings to their Cristo Rey high school. The average salary per job (a job that is shared by four students, that is) is just over \$25,000. These salaries cover approximately 65 percent of the cost of each



student's education. Since 1996, when the original Cristo Rey High School opened in Chicago's gritty lower west side, private philanthropists have led a major, nationwide replication effort. Today, there are 24 schools in 18 states and the District of Columbia. (Six more are in development.) The schools serve nearly 6,000 students in total, 89 percent of whom are either African-American or Hispanic. The average family income of a Cristo Rey student is \$35,682 per year.

Between the Cristo Rey model's potential for sustainability (through its work program) and scalability (through the network's ongoing rapid growth), there was a lot for Weekley to like. "I was aware of the Cristo Rey model and found it interesting," says Weekley. ("In fact, I might have read about it in your magazine," he adds.) "So when someone came and said they were starting a Cristo Rey school in Houston, I was curious. It seemed like it could be a natural fit."

"I liked the idea because it was private, Christian education," says Weekley. ("I grew up Presbyterian," he explains. "Once I got married, my wife told me that I was really an Episcopalian. So I've been an Episcopalian for 20 years. And now, I'm back, Presbyterian again. The kids wanted to go to a church that was closer to our home.") "Plus, they had wonderful, passionate people with a total focus on the underserved here in Houston. But these folks just didn't have the experience in fundraising."

So Weekley, true to form, started looking for ways to leverage a potential contribution. "I met with the chairman of their capital campaign, a wonderful gentleman named John O'Shea. He was very generous and had a real passion for the school, but he had never run a capital campaign like this. Well, I ran the Kinkaid School's \$45

million capital campaign, so I gave him some advice about where he could find some help. Then I made a \$250,000 matching grant for the school's board. I wanted my gift to be leveraged — and it would be, with this matching grant — so I think it helped them move the school to a different place."

Today, thanks to Weekley and other generous Houstonians, Martinez is president of Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory School. The school, located on the city's east side, opened its doors in August 2009. Its first class of 82 students was 72 percent Hispanic and 23 percent African-American. Every child comes from a family close to or below the federal poverty line. Many students entered at a fourth- or fifth-grade achievement level; by mid-year, 25 percent were taking sophomore classes.

Martinez, who often pairs his Roman collar with an enormous Lone Star belt buckle, describes his first encounter with Weekley as a "watershed moment." Sure, the south Texas native (who sometimes styles himself "Fr. Fiscal Responsibility") has a master's in education from Harvard and a law degree from the University of Texas. But he credits Weekley with teaching him "how to market the school to businessmen, so they get it quickly."

A Spur to Competition

Many donors support private schools generally — and Catholic schools specifically — as part of an overarching education-reform strategy. They hope that by supporting private schools, they will introduce a measure of healthy competition into American public education.

"One of the arguments in favor of private schools," says Donn Weinberg, chairman of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, "is



that they provide competition to the public school system. With competition, the public school system would have to respond, otherwise it would lose students — and funding.”

To achieve that goal, the Weinberg Foundation has long supported private schools — Catholic, secular, and Jewish — in its principal geographic-funding areas: Maryland, New York, northeastern Pennsylvania, and Hawaii. (Weinberg also focuses on Israel and the former Soviet Union.) Since 2003, it has contributed nearly \$2.9 million to Catholic schools and scholarship funds in Baltimore, Hawaii, and Scranton, Pennsylvania. In addition to those donations, on February 5, the Weinberg Foundation announced a capital grant of \$1.2 million for Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Baltimore, Maryland.

“What we’ve seen,” says Weinberg, “in Baltimore at least, is that the public school system took up the challenge. In a market-like environment, it has improved as a result of competition from the private system. Our funding of Catholic schools, Jewish schools, and so forth, has worked, at least in Baltimore. It has forced the public school system to take notice and to step up. And now, the public schools have improved — in some places, dramatically — as a result of the forces of competition.”

That competition is starting to cut both ways. “Now the private school system needs to respond in kind and find a way to compete more effectively with the public school system,” Weinberg notes. “What we would like to see, I think, is more of this back-and-forth from competition to make both systems, public and private, ever better.”

Other donors have seen the same dynamic take an interesting turn. In Memphis, increasing

competition has given rise to increasing collaboration.

“I’m an Episcopalian who currently attends a Presbyterian church and is fascinated by Buddhism,” says Barbara Hyde. A golden retriever puppy plays underfoot as she prepares for an upcoming trip to London. “So I guess you could say I’m ecumenical in my spiritual life, just like we’re ecumenical in our philanthropic investments.”

Barbara Hyde is the president of the J. R. Hyde III Family Foundation and a director of the J. R. Hyde Sr. Family Foundation. (The two Memphis-based entities share office space and staff; together they are known as the Hyde Family Foundations and hold about \$145 million in assets.) The Hyde Family Foundations have three major portfolios, one of which is improving K–12 education in and around the city of Memphis.

“At the Hyde Family Foundations, our mission is simple when it comes to education,” says program director Greg Thompson. “We are about closing the achievement gap. Period.” To that end, the foundations fund three key areas: high-performing schools, human capital, and policy advocacy. “Our partner schools include district, charter, independent, and faith-based schools,” notes Thompson. “Their success demonstrates that a top-notch education can be delivered through a variety of school systems.”

A major beneficiary of Hyde’s strategy has been the Memphis Jubilee Catholic Schools. The Hyde Family Foundations were a critical, early funder in the effort; their ongoing support includes a \$5 million challenge grant made in 2007. Barbara Hyde has been particularly pleased with the way Jubilee Schools are



engaged with other reform-minded Memphis schools.

“What we’re seeing is the district looking closely at what other schools — charter and Catholic — are doing, and learning from it,” says Hyde. “We’re getting beyond the ‘us-them’ attitude and toward a much more cooperative ‘let’s learn from each other’ approach. Perhaps we’re moving beyond the benefits of competition, and into the benefits of cooperation.”

The impulse toward mutually advantageous cooperation is a Hyde family hallmark. Barbara Hyde’s husband, J. R. (“Pitt”) Hyde III, is one of the most accomplished entrepreneurs in Memphis. After years of running the family’s wholesale food distribution business, in 1979 Pitt Hyde opened an auto parts wholesale store in Forrest City, Arkansas. Today, 30 years later, AutoZone is a *Fortune* 400 company with \$6.5 billion in annual sales and over 4,200 stores in the United States and Mexico.

A core principle of AutoZone’s business model is teamwork on behalf of customer service. All employees — including corporate executives, whenever they set foot in an AutoZone store — wear the same company uniform. When customers walk in the door, “AutoZoners” have 30 seconds to greet them.

The Hyde Family Foundation is working to cultivate that same sense of collaborative teamwork among Memphis educators. “I’m forever an optimist,” says Barbara Hyde, “but I think in Memphis we’re beginning to see a much higher level of collaboration and openness from the district and the school board. The accomplishments of the Catholic schools and the high-performing charter schools demonstrate, in very real ways, what’s possible for student

achievement among at-risk kids. Their example discredits the excuses that have stood in the way, in the past, of real reform.”

A Challenge to Catholics

When Fr. Martinez had finished pitching his plans for a Cristo Rey high school to David Weekley, Weekley leaned back and looked at the ceiling. He paused for a moment, and said, “You’re going to have a hard time getting people to fund this. A lot of folks are going to think, ‘the Catholic community needs to help its own.’”

Weekley’s observation points to a final motivation for many non-Catholic donors to Catholic inner-city schools. They hope to challenge high-net-worth Catholic donors. They hope to inspire even more Catholic philanthropy. And they hope to demonstrate to all philanthropists — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — the full worth and value of America’s beleaguered inner-city Catholic schools.

“You know the 80/20 rule?” asks Robert Wilson. “It holds that in any project 20 percent of a group does 80 percent of the work. There are a lot of rich Roman Catholics in that 20 percent, but we need many more. Moreover, I believe that if more Catholics start supporting these schools, more non-Catholic money will become available.”

Of course, a great many Catholics are already generous supporters of these inner-city schools. But there is much more to be done. And it is a challenge that wealthy and generous Catholics are able, inclined, and well-positioned to undertake.

“People who give \$5, \$10, or \$20 never make nonprofits thrive,” adds Wilson. “There’s always



got to be some big money. True, all of these Catholic schools were built by small contributions from massive numbers of working-poor Catholics. But that was when there were plenty of priests and nuns. Nowadays, the Catholic Church doesn't have — pardon the phrase — slave labor. To cover costs, there have to be more, larger donations.”

“You know,” says Wilson, “Catholic schools are either going to continue to contract or they're going to start expanding again. Nothing stays the same. I used to say when I was on Wall Street, ‘You're either making money or losing money. You can't just stay even.’”

Christopher Levenick
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