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NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY.

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DESPITE THE BELIEF OF SOME EDUCATORS, PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONTINUING SEGREGATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN LARGE CITIES. DATA GATHERED BY A CATHOLIC SOURCE SHOW THAT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN RACIALLY CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS "HOLD" THEIR WHITE STUDENTS AND IN FACT ARE BETTER INTEGRATED THAN ADJACENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS. MANY NEGROES AND PUERTO RICANS SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS FOR WHAT THEY THINK IS A BETTER EDUCATION, AND MANY WHITE STUDENTS TRAVEL INTO GHETTO AREAS TO ENROLL IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS. BUT FOR THE NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS TO PLAY A MORE DIRECT ROLE IN HELPING TO SOLVE URBAN EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS, THEY MUST DROP "CHAUVINISTIC" GOALS AND CONCENTRATE ON EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY, AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS MUST CONSIDER PRIVATE SCHOOLS AS COOPERATIVE PARTNERS. PROPOSALS FOR SUCH COOPERATION HAVE BEEN IN THE FORM OF OFFERS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOMS AND STAFF TO RELIEVE OVERCROWDING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TO PROVIDE SPECIAL PROGRAMS "WITHOUT PROSELYTIZING," COOPERATION IN EDUCATIONAL PARKS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE EXTENSION AND BROADENING OF FEDERALLY FUNDED PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS. HOWEVER TO BRING ABOUT MORE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS MIGHT MAKE PRIVATE CONTRACTS WITH PARENTS TO PAY FOR EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN AT ACCREDITED SCHOOLS OF THEIR OWN CHOICE. IN THIS WAY THE CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT WOULD INCREASE BECAUSE THE PROFIT FOR THE CONTRACTOR WOULD BE "'WHOLLY CONTINGENT UPON RESULTS'." THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA'S CITIES, SPONSORED BY THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 16-18, 1967. (NH)

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NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS AND
EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

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Introduction

With an enrollment of close to ten million students, the nation's nonpublic schools are a central factor in the issue of equal educational opportunity. Any discussion ignoring their potential contribution to the solution of the problem is shortsighted.

This paper attempts to do two things: First, to indicate how parochial and private schools affect the academic rating and socio-economic composition of urban public schools. Second, to suggest ways in which nonpublic schools can help provide for equal educational opportunities in the cities.

Interaction of Public and Nonpublic Schools

Public and nonpublic schools in large urban areas do not exist in a vacuum. Richard P. Boardman in a study appearing in the Urban Review for November 1966, proposes "That the presence of parallel education systems

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in an urban area has consequences for the form and quality of educational services in that area."¹ The Boardman study is the first serious attempt to document a theory that many public and private school educators have talked about for many years. In this writer's opinion it is successful. Boardman's conclusions are worth noting here because they form a background against which our particular concerns will take on greater clarity.

Boardman's study was conducted in a typical northern city where the parochial school enrollment was approximately 10,300 and the public school enrollment was 24,400. About 60 percent of the total city population was Catholic. In this city, which Boardman calls Mittelville, parochial schools enroll only half of the Catholic school-age population. Inasmuch as 95 percent of the Negro population is non-Catholic and 50 percent of the Puerto Rican population is "functionally non-Catholic," the ethnic composition of each school system is effected. Program offerings in both school systems likewise reflect the makeup of the student body.

Boardman concludes:

Given that two or more educational systems are present in any given urban community, it is important to determine under what circumstances the relationship between the systems can be considered constructive. It seems apparent from the description of the situation in Mittelville that dysfunctional elements are present. By allowing those aspects of the relationship to continue, the public system has no choice but to suffer the consequences...

At some point it must become apparent to parochial and public educators alike that the troublesome educational consequences of maintaining the present relationship are out-

weighting the advantages for a particular system. When, for example, the size and relative strength of one of the systems begins to influence the size and direction of the other, it becomes important to reevaluate the structure and goals of all educational services in the area. Failure of the two systems to develop an adequate exchange of ideas on education can reduce the effectiveness of that education for the entire population.

Implicit in Boardman's study is the fact that nonpublic schools attract children whose socio-economic status is relatively high. While the parochial schools generally show a wider range of socio-economic status than independent non-church-related schools, nonetheless many people living in urban areas tend to send their children to nonpublic schools if they can afford to. For example, some Protestants, both Negro and white, send their children to Catholic schools to get what they believe is a better social and academic environment for them. For this reason it is conceivable that in certain inner-city neighborhoods the public schools could become academic "dumping grounds."

But what of the nonpublic school becoming a "refuge" for white children in the cities, contributing to the further segregation of the public school? Up to the present time there has been relatively little statistical research to back up the charges and the countercharges made on the issue. In order to glimpse the real truth it will be necessary to examine what happens in large cities like New York, Washington, Chicago, etc. A paper prepared by the Research Institute for Catholic Education in New York State entitled, "Do Catholic Schools Really Promote Segregation," reports on the problem as follows:

When the New York City public schools lost nearly 25,000 white pupils in 1966, it was stated or implied by some that these white children had fled into parochial schools.

This kind of assertion is demonstrably false. In fact, there is mounting evidence that parochial schools slow down the flight of whites from a changing neighborhood and act as a stabilizing force. A close examination of changing neighborhoods seems to reveal that the Catholic school has greater "holding power" for whites than does the public school and has a special role to play in integration. A number of considerations are pertinent here:

1.) An ethnic survey of Catholic elementary schools during 1966 revealed that the Catholic elementary school enrollment in Manhattan was 46% Negro and Spanish-speaking; in Manhattan and the Bronx together, it was 30% Negro and Spanish-speaking. These figures exist despite the fact that only a very small percentage of Negroes are Catholic. It is intriguing to note that 20% of the Negroes in the Catholic elementary schools in Manhattan are not Catholic.

2.) A 1964 ethnic survey of Catholic elementary schools in Manhattan and the Bronx revealed that in 35 racially mixed neighborhoods the Catholic elementary schools were better integrated than were the neighborhoods.

3.) Even in the relatively small community of Malverne (Long Island), the fleeing white pupils did not enter Catholic schools. During the past few years, the Catholic elementary school in Malverne has had no increase in the usual number of first grade applicants, and the total enrollment has actually decreased slightly. The same is true of other small Long Island communities such as Freeport and Roosevelt.

4.) A survey of Catholic elementary schools in Manhattan and the Bronx revealed that there was a higher percentage of relatively integrated Catholic elementary schools than was the case in the public school system. The New York City Board of Education classifies any school not having more than 90% white or more than 90% minority group (Negroes and Spanish-speaking) enrollment as a "mid-range" school. To be very specific, in this method of classification, only 12 out of 48 Catholic elementary schools in Manhattan are more than 90% white.

5.) A close analysis of long-term trends in large cities strongly suggests what is really happening. When minority groups such as Negroes and Spanish-speaking people begin to move into an area, some white parents of Catholic school children refuse to panic and move. (Perhaps they value Catholic education very highly and fear that they will be unable to get their children

into another Catholic school if they move.) The local public school soon becomes almost completely non-white, while the parochial school starts becoming integrated. This has already happened in Washington, D. C., and it now seems to be happening in the City of New York.

6.) For 100 years, the Catholic school has served mostly the poor and the immigrant. In addition, the Catholic elementary school has usually enjoyed a broader mixture of social and economic classes than has the public school.

The public school has been somewhat handicapped because it tends by its very nature to be a local neighborhood school; in a typical area of any city or suburb there are five public elementary schools, each serving a section of the area and each drawing pupils from a limited territory (each territory usually quite homogeneous in social and economic class). The one Catholic elementary school serving the same area would draw from all five sections and from all of the social and economic classes represented (including the very poor because little or no tuition was being charged until recently).

Now it appears that the Catholic elementary school may have a special role to play in helping to integrate the races. The previously mentioned facts suggest this. In addition, consider two case studies:

(a) The Nativity School, a Catholic elementary school in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, enrolls 766 pupils of which 441 are Negro and Spanish-speaking. The other 325 pupils are white. These white children are bussed from 31 white neighborhoods into the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto and into an integrated school. The obvious motivation of the parents is a desire for Catholic education for their children. They are willing to bus little children into an integrated school in order to get it.

(b) The Catholic secondary school known as Rice High School in the heart of Harlem has 913 students. Of these, 324 are Negro and Spanish-speaking boys. More than 500 white boys from white neighborhoods come into the Harlem ghetto and into an integrated high school in order to obtain a Catholic education.

7.) What about the 25,000 white pupils who fled the New York City public schools in 1966? Certainly they did not go into the New York City Catholic elementary schools because the total enrollment of the Catholic schools decreased in 1966 by 5,000. Nor did the 25,000 white children from the New York City public schools flee

into other denominational schools; their enrollments have not registered such a notable increase. Nor did the 25,000 fleeing whites go into private, non-denominational schools; their total enrollment in New York City is 26,000.

Where did the 25,000 fleeing white children go? A little reflection should convince anyone that the thousands of white children fleeing the public schools in the inner city each year are going into public schools elsewhere — there is no other place for them to go. Incidentally, a simple investigation of transfer records would reveal precisely to what schools they have transferred. But no one seems interested enough to make such a study. The charge that Catholic schools promote segregation is inaccurate at best, slander at worst.

Nonpublic Schools and Equal Educational Opportunity

Any discussion of the role the nonpublic school can play in solving the educational problems of the cities must begin with two basic assumptions:

1. Nonpublic school educators must be willing to renounce any and all chauvinistic goals and concern themselves exclusively with the improvement of educational opportunities for the total community.
2. Public school educators must be willing to accept nonpublic schools as partners (not competitors) in the search for equality of educational opportunity.

Given a reasonable amount of agreement on these two assumptions a mutually fruitful exploration of solutions can proceed.

Last spring I made the following proposals and they seem as valid to me now as they did then:

City-surburban exchanges of pupils from Catholic schools, with 'cooperative ventures between rich and poor parishes,' including after-school and special projects.

Where appropriate an offer of available Catholic classrooms and staff to public schools to relieve crowding and to provide 'special programs for children who need them most -- without proselytizing.'

Cooperation with public schools in educational parks and supplementary centers, where children from wide geographic areas could come together, 'with better education for all.'

Initiation of programs that extend the influence of the school and the parish into the home in new forms 'to reach even infants and to help parents provide the intellectual stimulation for their children that flows almost automatically into middle-class homes.'

Construction of new schools with new curriculums and parish programs in the inner cities.

Perhaps the place where nonpublic schools could play their most effective role would be at the kindergarten-preschool level. Here the federal government is committed to spending large sums of money for education of socially disadvantaged children under the compulsory attendance age, and is able to make grants to nonpublic schools and other private agencies for Head Start programs. Nonpublic schools have proven themselves effective in these areas. Would it be impossible to broaden the programs now in existence and mount more substantial programs for children whose ages ranged from 3 to 5 years.

The problem of funding any worthwhile programs is an acute one for nonpublic school educators. In the 1967 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I., Donald A. Erickson and Andrew M. Greeley, in a chapter entitled "Nonpublic Schools and Metropolitanism", proposed the following:

Grants of public funds to nonpublic schools to pay for tuition of pupils from low-income families. The amount of the grant could be related to the economic situation of the parents and could be contingent on approval of a plan which would integrate Negro or low-income white pupils with the existing clientele of the school.

Grants of public funds to nonpublic schools which have proven their ability to specialize in programs for the socially disadvantaged. Such grants might be stipulated for expenses beyond the normal cost of operating a school, and might go to schools with a successful record of serving the disadvantaged.

Tuition grants to needy parents to allow them to send their children to nonpublic schools, under conditions worked out with and approved by the local public school administration.

Proposals such as this would require court tests, but the public mood is now favorable to novel and experimental procedures for attacking the complex problem of urban-metropolitan society, and the courts would probably find it in the public interest to use government funds through private and even church agencies so as to serve disadvantaged children and youth better.

These suggestions are not intended to imply that Catholic and other nonpublic schools can or should take over the function of educating a majority of disadvantaged children. No doubt the public schools must carry the major responsibility. And major improvements in public schools should be paid for at the same time that nonpublic schools receive smaller amounts of money for their special contributions. There is evidence in several cities that the public school system regards the Catholic system as an important resource and is prepared to recommend the use of public funds for cooperative attack on urban educational problems.

The final proposal I shall make, (and it is unquestionably the most controversial), is based on the concept of freedom of choice for all in education. It is the Milton Friedman — Christopher Jencks idea wherein: "Government, preferably local government units would give each child, through his parents a specified sum to be used solely in paying for his general education; the parents would be free to spend this sum at a school of their own choice, provided it met certain minimum standards laid down by the appropriate government unit. Such schools would be conducted under a variety of auspices: by private enterprises operated for profit, nonprofit institutions established by private endowment, religious bodies, and some even by governmental units."

Professor James Coleman, author of the Coleman Report agrees that if there was a private contractual arrangement in education the performance of

children would increase because "the profitability (is) wholly contingent upon results," for the contractor.

The U. S. Chamber of Commerce report, "The Disadvantaged Poor: Education and Employment" endorses the concept. "The results of such a fresh approach would very likely be dramatic. Great changes would probably take place in our educational system, and especially in our public school system. But change and innovation are needed, and the results might be salutary indeed." Certainly this idea is worth serious discussion.

Conclusion

The freedom and independence of the nonpublic school should enable them to carry out challenging experiments that can benefit all of American education. It would be pompous to suggest that the nonpublic school can solve the problem of equal educational opportunities for all. But it would be shortsighted not to recognize that they can help achieve a real breakthrough.