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**Nineteenth Century Debates about the Need for Catholic Schools as a Legitimate
Alternative to the Public School System in the United States:
Lessons from Yesterday, Implications for Today**

Major debates about the need for Catholic schools during the nineteenth century capture the passion and tensions around the question of what it means to be Catholic and American. In this essay we look at two major case studies that bring together a polyphony of voices addressing the question of why Catholic schools are needed—or not—within the overall American experiment. The essay shows how key debates leading to the establishment of the largest network of schools sponsored by one single denomination in the country was the result of four streams of arguments: philosophical/theological, educational, political, and cultural. The essay offers important insights for similar conversations as well as for others that remain unfinished as Catholics and other Christians continue to wrestle with the idea of denominational education in the secular State.

The nineteenth century was a remarkable period in the history of American Catholicism. So it was for the United States, a young nation that had declared its independence from the British Crown only in 1776. American politics during this century would be characterized by an effort to give meaning to the idea of being a Modern nation, established to “form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”¹ The achievement of these noble ideals would face colossal. Not only the nation had to work hard to maintain its original Union (thirteen states) together despite major differences and competing claims about what government should be, but also it had to manage major additions to its rapidly expanding territory.² Right in the middle of these developments, the young nation found itself

¹ Constitution of the United States of America.

² The following major additions took place in the nineteenth century: Louisiana Purchase (1803); annexation of the Republic of Texas (1843); incorporation of the Oregon Territory (1848); annexation of most of the South West via

immersed in a painful Civil War (1861-1865), a major defining moment in shaping the emerging American identity. After the war and the multiple territorial additions, the expanded Union remained together. However, it was a much more diverse Union. In turn, slavery had been abolished. It was time to heal and to develop a sense of common character. It was also time to focus on strengthening socio-political structures that would build cohesion. The shaping of the educational system would be at the heart of these efforts.

Millions of Catholic immigrants from Europe, along with immigrants from other faith traditions, crossed “the big pond” and arrived in the United States, a young nation that was pretty much in flux. They were searching for the American Dream, the hope of a new beginning while searching for better conditions of life. In 1830 the total population in the country was about 13 million; only 3 percent Catholic. In the following decades large waves of immigrants would make their way into the U.S. shores: 1.5 million in the 1840s, 2.5 million in the 1850s... 5.2 million in the 1880s. Many of them were Catholic. By the end of the nineteenth century, about 19 percent of the entire U.S. population was Catholic, already the largest single denomination in the country until today.³ Despite the growing Catholic presence throughout the nation, a sentiment of anti-Catholicism brewed negative attitudes and decisions, many of them expressed in the legal system, against this group in various parts of the country. Catholics were often perceived as outsiders, intruders, incapable of obeying U.S. authorities because of their allegiance to a foreign leader (i.e., the Pope in Rome), and rather incompatible with the American experiment.⁴ Interestingly enough, the centuries-old tensions between Protestant and Catholic Christians colored many of the conversations about national identity despite the Constitutional separation of church and state.

For most immigrants this was a once-in-a-life-time journey. The idea of returning would promptly fade in their minds; many did not even entertain it. Whatever the United States of America was to become then, it had to incorporate the experience, vision, and contributions of the new immigrants, a fifth of them Catholic. For Catholics, the changes and conflicts of America, as many referred to the United States, would inevitably become their own changes and conflicts. Soon they would have to address the question: is it possible to be American and Catholic? The debates in the eighteenth century about public education and the argument that Catholics needed their own separate schools yielded important arguments to eventually answer such question.

Competing Promises

At the beginning of the 1840s, New York City had seven Catholic schools. The first Catholic school, St. Peter’s Free School, existed in the territory of the diocese before this ecclesiastical unit was established in 1808.⁵ It also preceded any of the schools sponsored by *The Free School Society* (later *The Public School Society*) in the city, which later would constitute the core of

the Treatise Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848). In less than fifty years, the United States of America tripled the geographical size of its territory.

³ See James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 94-144; Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2003), 36.

⁴ See Massa, 18-39.

⁵ New York became an Archdiocese in 1850.

New York's public school system. St. Peter's benefitted from an arrangement that allowed it to receive public funds for its operations. This was possible thanks to the 1795 "Act for the Encouragement of Schools" that allowed the use of surplus funds from the city's treasury to support private and religious schools. In 1825 administration of the funds moved to the Common Council of the City of New York and, under the lobbying efforts of *The Public School Society*, funds were denied to all denominational schools. By the 1840's *The Public School Society* not only held control of most public schools in the city, but also instituted a "non-sectarian" religious instruction, which focused largely on Bible instruction and moral values. Religious or denominational instruction would progressively be removed from the school setting and eventually lead to the emergence of the Sunday School alternative. Protestants in general embraced the dual model. Catholics protested not only because of the defunding of their schools but also because Bible instruction and teaching of moral values, which remained as part of the curriculum, was largely done from an implicit Protestant perspective, often with anti-Catholic undertones.

One important conviction underlying the opposition to funding denominational schools with public funding was enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*"⁶ The First Amendment would eventually become the key reference point to challenge any efforts to use public funds for any religious activities, including education led by faith-based groups. Yet, during the first half of the nineteenth century the educational system of was still in formation. Catholics saw no contradiction —neither did many Protestants or legislators—in using government funds to schools sponsored by religious denominations since they were offering a service that the local communities were not appropriately offering. The arrangement was practical and it served at the time. Secularists and others who did not welcome Catholics would maintain continuous opposition to any form of funding for their schools. Another issue at stake during this time was the fact that religion remained an integral part of the curriculum in public schools. The key question was not whether to teach religion or not, but what would be the content of religion classes.

In Massachusetts this was exactly one of the questions that drove important conversations in the development of the Common School Movement, to which the name of Horace Mann is closely linked. In 1837 Mann became the head of the Board of Education of Massachusetts, the first such institution in the country. As such he advanced a series of reforms strengthening public education, which eventually would spread throughout the country. Mann argued for wide accessibility to public schools and the best quality of teachers. Schools should prepare children with the values of a free society to participate in it in light of those values. He opposed religious sectarianism in education, a rather common situation undermining the progress of public education in Massachusetts early in the century and before. On this he was in line with a law passed in 1827 by the Massachusetts legislature making education free to all children and limiting sectarian approaches to teaching religion. Nonetheless, he remained open to the idea of teaching of religion in public schools. In his *First Report* to the Board of Education in 1838 he noted a major deficiency in moral and religion teaching in public schools: "Entirely to discard

⁶ The First Amendment was adopted in 1791. Italics mine.

the inculcation of the great doctrines of morality and of natural theology has a vehement tendency to drive mankind [*sic.*] into opposite extremes... Against the tendency to these fatal extremes, the beautiful and sublime truths of ethics and of natural religion have a poisoning power.”⁷ Once again, the teaching of religion was to be non-sectarian. When done, it needed to focus on principles common to all sects or religious groups. This also applied to the selection of books that were to go in the libraries of public schools. Although this vision was challenged publically and legally, in the end it prevailed.⁸

One thinker who took issue with Mann’s proposal of teaching principles common to all sects or religious groups was Orestes Brownson (1803–1876), a rather prolific writer and a well-recognized public voice. He spent great part of his life on a religious search. Baptized a Presbyterian as a young man, he later joined other Christian denominations, spent some time with the Transcendentalists in New England, and in 1844 converted to Catholicism where he stayed until his death. His main vision for education was rather constant throughout his life. In his several essays on the topic, Brownson resisted the reduction of education to mere schooling. He firmly believed that the future of the young nation would greatly depend on the quality of the education it offered for its young. For Brownson, “Education is something more than the ability to read and write and cypher, with a smattering Grammar, Geography, and History into the bargain. *Education is the formation of character.*”⁹ The only way to achieve such character was explicit religion, not the neutral approach to religion that Mann and his associates were proposing in the Common Schools which, according to Brownson, was failing to produce virtuous citizens. He firmly believed that “There is no foundation for virtue but in religion, and it is only religion that can command that degree of popular virtue and intelligence requisite to insure the popular government the right direction and a wise and just administration.”¹⁰ When proposing what religion would be best to fulfill such goal, he was certain that Catholicism was the best fit. For him, Protestantism had proven to be inadequate insofar as it had placed religion under the control of the government and the people. Catholicism, on the contrary, offered a model that commanded the people and took care of them. His proposal certainly did not lack strong reactions and critiques, particularly in a context that breathed the air of anti-Catholicism. Three points are worth highlighting here. First, for Brownson education and democracy went hand-in-hand and the best guarantor of effective education, that is education that shapes character and virtue, is religion —for him Catholicism. Second, Brownson was convinced that Catholicism had much to offer to the shaping of American identity. He wanted a “Catholicizing of America.” But for this to happen he also knew that Catholics needed to become more Americanized.¹¹ Thirdly, he believed that the Common School enjoyed a lot of potential and he had no objection about Catholics sending their children to them. Public education was better than no education at all, indeed. Besides, Catholics needed to get involved in these schools. His remarks, largely articulated in the 1850s caused some uproar among Catholics who were arguing

⁷ Horace Mann’s *First Report to the Board of Education* in 1838. Cited in Raymond Benjamin Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1929), 42.

⁸ See Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools*, 163-180.

⁹ Orestes Brownson, “An Address on Popular Education Delivered in Winnisimmet Village, on Sunday Evening July 23, 1837 (Boston, Press of John Putnam, 1837), p 3. Cited in James M. McDonnell, *Orestes A. Brownson and Nineteenth-Century Catholic Education* (New York, NY: Garland, 1988), 95.

¹⁰ Brownson, “Catholicity Necessary to Sustain Popular Liberty,” in *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, 2, 4 (October 1945), 517.

¹¹ See Mc Donnell, *Orestes A. Brownson and Nineteenth-Century Catholic Education*, 63-64.

for the need of Catholic schools to exist and be supported by the State. Most reactions to his ideas were negative, including that of Archbishop Hughes in New York.¹² In fairness to Brownson, he was a strong supporter of Catholic schools, a support that would increase towards the end of his life as he became increasingly aware of the broken promises of the public school system. Yet, he wanted strong Catholic schools, capable of rivaling any public school in its curriculum and formation. He often found with pain that the quality of many Catholic schools left much to desire and did not hesitate to indicate that the success of these schools would depend on the quality of education they offered. Catholic schools needed to be good and Catholics needed to attend them to remain Catholic. It was by retaining their religious identity that Catholics would make a major contribution to the larger American society. In Brownson we encounter a nineteenth century thinker who believed in the compatibility of the American project and the Catholic experience. At times he was ambivalent about such fusion yet remained hopeful that it was possible.

Let us return to New York. In 1840 the Governor of New York, William H. Seward, reopened the possibility of denominational schools receiving funding from the city, to which the seven Catholic schools rapidly responded with requests. The Common Council rejected the petition arguing that it was unconstitutional to do so and it would open the door to other organizations to do likewise. Bishop John Hughes of New York zealously protested the decision denouncing the various anomalies Catholics saw in such schools, starting with teachers indifferent to Catholic sensibilities, “the Scriptures without note or comment—the selection of passages, as reading lessons, from Protestant and prejudiced, authors... the comments of teachers, of which the Commissioners cannot be cognizant—the school libraries, stuffed with sectarian works against us... a combination of influences prejudicial to our religion, and to whose action it would be criminal in us to expose our children at such an age.”¹³ From this perspective, it was almost unconscionable for Catholic parents to send their children to public schools. Bishop Hughes appealed to the state legislature in Albany. The legislature did not rule in favor of Catholics by granting them public funds for their schools, yet took control of public funding away from *The Public School Society* and gave it to district and local governments. In 1850 Bishop Hughes wrote: “The time has almost come when we shall have to build the schoolhouse first and the church afterward.”¹⁴ Here we find early glimpses of the argument that would eventually lead Catholics to establish the largest network of denominationally sponsored schools in the country.

Should Catholics Support Public Schools?

December 7, 1884 was the last session of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, a gathering that had begun on November 9. The issues discussed were complex; yes, worthy of the complexity of the experience of being Catholic in the United States at the time. Baltimore III saw in action a body of archbishops, bishops, abbots, and many others who revealed an intricate system of hierarchical relationships that by and large reconnected Catholics to their traditional roots yet raised eyebrows among others, insiders and outsiders, committed to what had become the Americanizing project. The Catholic Church in 1884 was a much stronger institution

¹² Ibid., 124-146.

¹³ Cited in Robert R. Newton, *The Evolution of the New York Archdiocesan School System, 1800-1967* (1982), 11. Essay available online via Boston College library system.

¹⁴ Cited in Ibid., 12.

compared to that of just a few decades earlier. The U.S. Catholic population had gone from 200,000 people in 1808 to a strong presence of 14 million members—13 million people lived in the entire country at the beginning of the century! There were more than sixty dioceses throughout the U.S. territory, compared to just Baltimore in 1800. Less than 500 priests and about 900 nuns served an incipient Catholic population in the 1840s while nearly 10,000 priests worked alongside roughly 50,000 nuns at the end of the century to meet the needs of their fast-growing communities. Thousands of parishes had been created. About 200 Catholic schools had opened by the 1840's; at the time of Baltimore III there were more than 2,500 and soon afterwards that number would grow almost five times.

Among its various pronouncements about education, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore decreed: "Bishops are exhorted to have a Catholic school in every parish and the teachers should be paid from the parochial funds." Furthermore, "For children who attend the public schools, catechism classes should be instituted in the churches." Finally, "Parents must send their children to such schools unless the bishop should judge the reason for sending them elsewhere to be sufficient. Ways and means are also considered for making the parochial schools more efficient. It is desirable that these schools be free."¹⁵ At the heart of this command to erect parochial schools, the sense of obligation of sending Catholic children to them, and the provision that solid faith formation were offered to those children enrolled in public schools were the same arguments that sparked earlier debates about the need for Catholic schools in New York and other parts of the country. Baltimore III seemed to have sealed the deal. Catholics were greatly concerned about the increasing secularization in public schools. Catholic bishops, intellectuals, and educators often spoke about the need for education to be at the service of the "fundamental questions" of life, faith, and morals. How to ask such questions if religion was not part of the public school curriculum? At the same time, Catholics were concerned at how the Bible was read in public schools and the anti-Catholic spirit in these institutions. Many accused Catholics of being against bible literacy and even of being enemies of the American culture.¹⁶ Incidents such as Catholic children in public schools being ridiculed because of their faith or being expelled for not attending school on holy days certainly increased the tension. For many Catholics, erecting their own schools was the most viable solution. Doing so also would address, though not in a satisfactory way, the question of funding for education. Parishes were to support the schools. It seemed like a rather Solomonic decision. But the question was far from over. A new debate would soon ensue.

Between 1891 and 1893 Catholic education in the United States would witness an interesting chapter of its history, namely the "Catholic School controversy." The rapid expansion of the network of Catholic schools led many Catholics to adopt an increasingly negative attitude towards public schools, often ignoring any positive elements in them. The attitude was somewhat arrogant and usually defensive. In turn advocates of public schools strongly critiqued the expansion of the Catholic denominational school system, citing its development as a sign that Catholics had little regard for American institutions (and its Protestant roots) and were more concerned about foreign, religious allegiances than about those more pertinent to American identity. The arguments were not new, yet they had increasingly polarized. Bishops were perceived as the champions of the "Catholic position." However, in 1890 the National Education

¹⁵ Decree 13 of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884).

¹⁶ See Phillip Gleason, "Baltimore III and Education," in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 4 (1985), 282-283.

Association meeting in Sr. Paul, MN invited Archbishop John Ireland, head of that Archdiocese, to address the group. In his address he surprised many by extolling the merits of the State School and expressed the desire to see both the public and the Catholic school systems working toward some form of unity. He declared himself a friend and an advocate of the State School. He agreed with the compulsory nature of public education. Ireland also indicated that the main reason for the existence of Catholic schools was the hostility towards religion in public schools. He raised the issue of double-taxation that Catholics endure while paying their taxes and not being able to subsidize the education of their children in Catholic schools. For this he offered a twofold solution. On the one hand, to teach religion in public schools as it is the case in other parts of the world. The emphasis would be determined according to the majority of the children in the land, namely Protestantism, provided that denominational schools are also funded and are assessed according to established educational standards. On the other hand, that parish school buildings be used as State schools during school time in which religion is not taught at all, yet after that period of time religious activities could take place without a problem.¹⁷ In his diocese such experiment was already taking place in Fairbanks and Stillwater.¹⁸ Reactions to Archbishop Ireland's words were largely negative among Catholics. Letters from various sources went back and forth to Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore, Archbishop Ireland, other bishops concerned about the Catholic school question, and even the Pope in Rome. Archbishop Ireland traveled in 1892 to Rome to defend his position and explain some of his ideas about education. In the end, Archbishop Ireland received the support not only of Cardinal Gibbons and other moderate bishops, but also of Pope Leo XIII.¹⁹ The Fairbanks-Stillwater arrangement was short-lived, eventually rejected by the school boards and opposed by several sectors.

While Archbishop Ireland's ideas and provisions could be read as the pragmatic side of the controversy, a more theoretical debate was ensuing during these years. In 1891 Rev. Thomas Bouquillon, Professor of Moral Sciences at Catholic University of America, wrote an essay entitled *Education, To Whom Does It Belong?* The essay was commissioned by Cardinal Gibbons with the hope of providing some theoretical grounding to settle the School Controversy. Catholics in the United States and in Rome, including bishops and intellectuals, by and large asserted that there was no such as thing as the natural right of the State to educate. Compulsory public education and having the state teaching morals as well as religion (e.g., Bible), therefore, were modernistic aberrations. Only the family and the Church—and the schools established by the Church—could be said that have such right. On the contrary, this was a question that Protestants and many others in the United States had already solved in favor of the State around the 1840's with the emergence of the Common School Movement.²⁰ Baltimore III had stated: "The three great educational agencies are the home, the Church, and the School"²¹—the State was explicitly excluded. Rev. Bouquillon's essay was a provocative piece that argued that the State also shares in such right:

¹⁷ Archbishop John Ireland's Address to the National Education Association during its 1890 annual meeting, "State Schools and Parish Schools," cited in Daniel Flavian Reilly, *The School Controversy, 1891-1893* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1969), 48.

¹⁸ Immaculate Conception Parish in Faribault, MN and St. Michael's Parish in Stillwater, MN, as part of the Poughkeepsie Plan. Archbishop Ireland was not the only one using this model. Other dioceses were also implementing it. See Reilly, *The School Controversy*, 76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180-183.

²⁰ See *Ibid.*, 8, 17.

²¹ Baltimore III, cited in Reilly, *The School Controversy*, 107.

Education: to whom does it belong, is the question with which we started out. We now make answer. It belongs to the individual, physical or moral, to the family, to the State, to the Church, to none of these solely and exclusively, but to all four combined in harmonious working for the reason than man [*sic.*] is not an isolated but social being. Precisely in the combination of these four factors in education is the difficulty of practical application. Practical application is the work of the men [*sic.*] whom God has placed at the head of the Church and the State, not ours.²²

The essay was immediately the target of strong critiques. Bouquillon's argument went at the heart of what traditional Catholics had come to treasure about education and wanted to preserve this right as the Church's and parents'. The zeal to affirm the uniqueness of this right had led some bishops in past decades to refuse the sacraments to children attending public schools.²³ Baltimore III explicitly prohibited such practice. Some critics of Bouquillon insinuated that the author's concessions to the State were likely the result of the influence of Enlightenment ideas to which he had been exposed as someone born and educated in France—an *ad hominem* attack to discredit his work, indeed. Among the most fervent respondents were Jesuits thinkers engaged in the question of education, particularly Rev. R. I. Holaind from Woodstock Seminary in Maryland and Rev. Salvatore M. Brandi from the journal *Civiltá Cattolica* in Rome, among others.²⁴ Hoiland offered six rebuttal points. He argued that a non-Christian State cannot have educational rights, the right to education cannot be given to everyone since not everyone has jurisdiction everywhere, granting this much to the State interferes with parental rights, only the Church can teach the central truths of morality, the State could perhaps develop schools but only when there is no legitimate authority to do so and that is not the ideal, and the State cannot have control of that for which it has no competence.²⁵

Bouquillon crafted two follow up essays²⁶ responding to his critics almost to no avail since each time he wrote he received similar replies. However, much was changing in the minds of Catholics in the United States towards the end of the nineteenth century as they discerned more deeply their identity as Americans. Something was also changing in the Church worldwide as Papal writings and other documents wrestled with idea of Modern States and the role of the Church in them. It would be in the twentieth century when Rev. Bouquillon's ideas would be vindicated and some of elements of the pragmatic—some would say progressive—vision of Archbishop John Ireland would eventually become part of mainstream American Catholicism. Such process of vindication had begun already at the end of the nineteenth century. In November of 1892 Pope Leo XIII sent Archbishop Francis Satolli as his envoy to the United States to oversee in person the situation and find a solution to the Catholic School Question. Satolli's final report was in many ways an affirmation of Ireland's and Bouquillon's efforts to look at Catholic

²² Thomas Bouquillon, *Education, To Whom Does It Belong?* (Baltimore, MD: J. Murphy, 1891), 31.

²³ Ironically, the children of Orestes Brownson's son (named Orestes Brownson, Jr) in 1869 were refused the sacraments by Bishop John Hennessey when the young Orestes declined to send them to Catholic schools. At that time Orestes, Jr. taught and led a school in Iowa where the majority of teachers were Catholic.

²⁴ See Reilly, *The School Controversy*, 106-133.

²⁵ René Isidore Holaind, *The Parent First: An Answer to Dr. Bouquillon's Query, "Education: To Whom Does It Belong?"* (New York, NY: Benziger, 1891).

²⁶ Thomas Bouquillon, *Education, To Whom Does It Belong? A Rejoinder to Critics* (Baltimore, MD: J. Murphy, 1892) and *Education, To Whom Does It Belong? A Rejoinder to Civiltá Cattolica* (Baltimore, MD: J. Murphy, 1892).

schools in a much wider framework. Four brief excerpts of Archbishop Satolli's final fourteen-proposition document are worth citing:

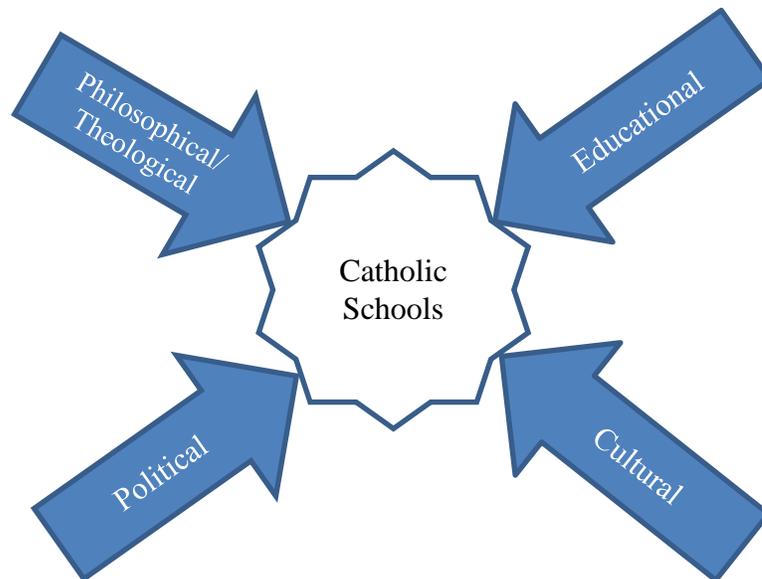
Proposition III: "When there is no Catholic school at all, or when the one that is available is little fitted for giving the children an education in keeping with their condition, then the public school may be attended with a safe conscience..."

Proposition V: "We strictly forbid any one, whether bishop or priest, and this is the express prohibition of the Sovereign Pontiff through the Sacred Congregation, either by act or by threat, to exclude from the sacraments, as unworthy, parents who choose to send their children to the public schools. As regards the children themselves, this enactment applies with still greater force."

Proposition VI: "[The Church] holds for herself the right of teaching the truths of faith and the law of morals in order to bring up youth in the habits of a Christian life. Hence, absolutely and universally speaking, there is no repugnance in their learning the first elements and the higher branches of the arts and the natural sciences in public schools controlled by the State, whose office it is to provide, maintain and protect everything by which its citizens are formed to moral goodness, while they live peaceably together, with a sufficiency of temporal goods, under laws promulgated by civil authority."

Proposition VII: "The Catholic Church in general, and especially the Holy See, far from condemning or treating with indifference the public schools, desires rather that, by the joint action of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, there should be public schools in every State, according as the circumstances of the people require, for the cultivation of the useful arts and natural sciences..."²⁷

Polyphony of Perspectives



²⁷ Cited in Reilly, *The School Controversy*, 271-276.

During my presentation at the REA meeting I will use this graph to highlight the various voices and arguments that coincided in the development of the argument in favor of Catholic schools in the United States during the nineteenth century. Using a musical metaphor, I will illustrate, in light of the above two case studies, how when one of the voices in the polyphony changed its “tune,” the others eventually had to adapt and in the process give way to a fresher understanding of the idea of Catholic identity expressed through education.

Into the 20th Century: Questions for Conversation

What did we learn from the nineteenth century debates about the need for Catholic schools in a socio-political context shaped by the Constitutional separation of church and State?

Are you familiar with similar debates in the 20th century that have directly affected ways in which Christians understand their role in defining education as well as their participation in the larger efforts to educate children and youth?

Are there any unresolved issues in the conversation about the rights of churches and the state to provide education?

Is the United States a Christian nation? If so, how is this reflected in the way Christians are educated in the public school system?

Can/should faith-based schools be authentically denominational (e.g., Christian, Muslim, Jewish) and American in our day?

What challenges does contemporary secularism pose to the education of Christians in public schools and in denominational schools?