



Catholic Education and Schools

The Facts

I believe you will agree that there is much to applaud in the American Catholic school system, however we cannot but notice the decline of Catholic schools. Since 1990, we can safely say that for every new Catholic school that has opened in the USA, two have closed. Although Atlanta is a relatively young Archdiocese, it too has seen its share of closings, such as St. Joseph's High School, Sacred Heart Elementary, Our Lady of Lourdes, and St. Anthony's. One of the major reasons for this is the lack of financial assistance from the United States government. Up until the mid 19th century, a public school was understood to be one serving the public purpose. This is also how Catholic schools are seen in most free thinking countries like Australia, Canada, France, Belgium, Ireland, England, Spain, and Germany to name a few. However in the mid 19th century, an anti-Catholic bias began to sweep across our nation and started redefining public schools as schools that are sponsored and controlled by the government. It was determined that they and they alone deserved tax support. Private schools, including Catholic schools, are seen as those operating under nongovernmental auspices, therefore not deserving of aid from tax sources. Today, for the most part, this is how the

USA operates withholding assistance from every school except government controlled schools. In this withholding of assistance, they join China, Cuba, North Korea and Mexico. Not very good company to say the least, but this is also a grave injustice. After all, "The child is not a mere creature of the state" as determined by the 1925 U.S. Supreme Court case *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. As the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, it's time for America to live out the dictates of its creed. If the U.S. Department of Education were to clarify public education to mean "any school that serves the public" and was held accountable by the authority of President Bush's "America 2000" Education Plan, we would already meet that criteria. Elementary education is really "an extension of parental education. It is extended and cooperative home schooling" according to Peter Redpath, 2005 Newman House Press. Parents, not schools, not Church and definitely not state, have the primary moral responsibility of educating their children. It is the responsibility of the State in justice to see to it that parents are given the freedom to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children. This is their right and not a privilege. It is the responsibility of the state to protect this right of its citizens by seeing to it

that all funding and subsidies are not just given to public schools. Funding and subsidies should follow each student to the school of their choice. It is time for our people in public office to do the right thing. Be upright and serve and protect the rights of all our citizens and not just the few.

Fr. William Byron S.J. is correct in recognizing that we live in a time of shifting values. But the questions are "What do we value as a nation?" What do we value as a family and as individuals? We can answer these questions by reflecting on where we invest our time and money. Another question we should address is how we have come to value this rather than that? From where do our values emerge and with whom do we share them? These are really educational questions because in the end, education plays a crucial role in shaping our values. It weaves a web of value sharing, a network of shared meanings which form a culture. Cultures after all are defined by their dominant values, according to *Origins* Vol. 20, No 9, 1990.

Our Catholic institutions of learning have greatly benefited our nation, and to let them die on the vine or have them compromise their values would be no less than a travesty.

Our nation as a whole today is richer for our Catholic Education and Schools.

* *More information to follow on this topic next week.*