



From the office of the Archbishop

Pastoral Letter on Separate Schools

Dear Faithful People:

During the past few weeks, the place of religious education in our public school system, and more specifically, the right of the Catholic people of Halifax to their own specially designated public schools, has been widely publicized and discussed. This discussion was occasioned by the extension of the city school system into the areas soon to be annexed to Halifax. All the while the special committee appointed by the Board of School Commissioners to study the matter and to make recommendations to the Board was proceeding with its work. When the committee publicly invited briefs last August expressing the views of interested persons, the Archdiocese and other Catholic organizations and individuals made submissions setting forth the historical background and positive values of the Halifax School System as it relates to Catholics and to citizens generally. Other than that, to avoid any action or statement that would appear to be prejudicial to the work of that committee, I have taken no active part in the discussions.

Now that the Committee has made its recommendations public, and the Board has accepted them, I wish to share with the people of the Archdiocese living in the present City of Halifax and in the areas to be annexed, the deep concern we have for maintaining and fostering religious education as a part of the educational process carried on in our schools.

The Church has always fostered religious education in our schools. Because the schools exist to help parents carry out their God-given duty of training their children by word and example. Children are given by God, our Father and entrusted to their earthy parents. These in

turn share their responsibility with teachers. The fact that educational methods for secular subjects have advanced does not mean that education for eternity no longer has a place in the curriculum. Parents familiar with the new developments in religious education are aware of how it too is advancing with the times.

Education, undoubtedly, is a tremendous task. It has always been recognized that parents alone cannot fulfill it. Other institutions of society must assist. This is immediately apparent when the demands of formal education are considered. This, in fact, is what has led to the establishment of systems of schools and educational facilities in every developed country.

It is important to insist that the school does not duplicate the work of the devout family, but rather that family and school reinforce each other. In the absence of strong Catholic family background neither the school, nor any other known agent or institution short of the divine, can produce a high level of religious fervor; but neither can the family, without the help of the school, accomplish nearly as much as the two together.

For generations, in fact for centuries, the Church was foremost in helping parents in the schooling of their children. In Halifax City, the schools begun by religious groups were taken over by the City in 1865. By recognizing the rights and divergencies of the citizens and students, the school system has worked successfully for more than one hundred years. Thus, in

this City, there has been provided the possibility of an education suited to the needs of the entire population, whatever their religious convictions. The rights

of all have been respected in a school system which guarantees a respect for religious truth and a fostering of sound morality.

If the religious education program for Catholics in the City of Halifax has been successful until now, this is due to the generous dedication of Catholic teachers. They have willingly made great sacrifices of time and effort, over the years, to supplement the academic program by religious instruction and the inestimable testimony of their own lives.

Many citizens of Halifax have endorsed a petition alleging in effect that the Halifax School System is un-ecumenical, divisive and uneconomical. I fear that some may have signed quickly and without adequately considering the reasons for retaining the present system.

In spite of the fact that Halifax is recognized throughout Canada as being in the lead in promoting the spirit of ecumenism, it has been claimed by some, that the religious element in the school system is destructive of ecumenicity. To say so is to reduce ecumenism to some bland form of togetherness. In reality

it must be a dialogue based on knowledge, convictions, and mutual respect for the religious beliefs and practices of others. There can be no ecumenism unless there first be a solid grounding in one's own faith. The home and the school are the obvious places where this grounding will be provided. Truly educated men who know the teaching of their Church, will always be the first and most effective ecumenists.

The principles are enunciated and supported by the documents of the Second Vatican Council particularly the Decree

on Ecumenism and the declarations of the Council on Christian Education and Freedom of Conscience. Lest anyone think that this is a position peculiar to the Catholic Church, we might recall that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Covenants also affirms: "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms", and "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

Some of those who are opposed to Catholic schools have described the system as antiquated. While such a statement has an emotional appeal in a world where change is the order of the day, of itself it proves nothing. Whether a system is good or not does not depend on whether it is old or new but on whether it is accomplishing a good and worthwhile purpose.

Another emotion-charged assertion is that the Halifax School System is divisive. Expressions such as "Segregation" and "Separatism" have been used to describe the present situation in the Halifax schools. To give way to the fear of social stigma that such words imply, would be to act in an unreasonably manner. If those who term the Halifax system divisive mean that it divides brother against brother and cuts one off from social communication with neighbour and fellow citizen, this assertion must be firmly denied. The facts of the matter to date simply do not support this.

It must be noted too, that segregation properly understood is not always bad. Canada has chosen cultural pluralism which departs from the attitude that our country is bound either by an "act of informity" or by a "melting pot"

approach to differences in people. If Canadian cultural pluralism is to mean anything more than words, it means that the ethnic, religious and cultural groups have a right to shape their social institutions (and this includes schools) according to their values. To deprive the citizens of one part of the City of Catholic schools, if they wish them, would be discrimination.

Sometimes economic necessities are offered as an argument against our Halifax system. It may be said, briefly, that nobody is asking for the building of unneeded schools or the hiring of duplicate staff. Annual financial reports for existing City schools provide no logical basis for stating that the division of schools by religion costs the City more than a division on geographic lines alone. There is no waste of space and there is no proof of duplication of services in the present system. The extension of the City system into the areas to be annexed need not increase costs if the implementation is carried out gradually over a period of time as population demands.

We can be grateful that the recent discussions have prompted parents and school authorities to re-examine the values and purposes of the Halifax System, and that the reaffirmation of the rights and wishes of Catholic parents will encourage the strengthening of religious values in all schools.

In a true ecumenical spirit, we can look forward to a deeper understanding among all citizens, a better City, and a fertile ground for achieving the ultimate goal of ecumenism, oneness in Christ.

Faithfully yours in the Lord

JAMES M. HAYES
Archbishop of Halifax

Let me say this about that...

By KEN CLARE

The Gazette's criticism of the proposed extension of the Separate School system into the newly annexed areas of Halifax county is based on one factor: that students in that area, who will be most directly affected by the move, have not in any way been consulted; they have not had any voice in the matter. Even if one were not critical of this extension, it would have to be agreed that the method of carrying it out has been totally undemocratic.

We will not make any comment on the quality of separate schools of Halifax as compared with the non-Catholic ones; this cannot be done on the basis of relative merit—neither have very much.

Any difference between the two systems is only that of slight degree, not of kind.

The Archbishop's Pastoral Letter expresses to the flock a particular philosophy of education. This philosophy is not his alone; it is the basis for both systems found in this city.

His philosophy can be best seen in this quotation from his letter:

"Because the schools exist to carry out their God-given duty of training their children by word and example." And what marvelous insight this is.

"word and example" — the basis of a child's education. Not to mention discipline in huge quantities.

"word and example" — no questions asked, garbage, relevant or not no one ever thinks to stop and ask, true or not is a dangerous thing to think about, shovelled down innocent throats for a long twelve years.

"word and example" — and while someone learns to emulate the trained seal in front of him he is keeping very quiet and very still and trying hard not to think, and if he succeeds it hurts a lot less. And soon he doesn't even have to try.

"Training" — not questioning, not thinking about anything, not education. All who have read this far can be assured, of course, that similarities they might draw between this system and the one used in initiate members of the armed forces into the life they must lead, are coincidental—as much as it is coincidental that it is also the same system used in businesses, in "higher" education, in government, etc.

The slight degree of difference between the two school systems also deals with the whole question of training. Religion is based on the mystical concept of "belief", which is misdefined by those who guess about these things as something unprovable, something you can't prove but which you somehow realize is true. Of course the way "belief" is arrived at is hardly spontaneous — it is inculcated through training — and training serves only to solidify the present grotesquely oppressive school system. Such a criticism must be made of any religious training in the school.

Near the end of the letter, the good shepherd writes: "We can be grateful that the recent discussions have promoted parents and school authorities to re-examine the values and purposes of the Halifax system. . ."

It is difficult to see how the kind citizens of Halifax, most of whom have been exposed to our educational prejudices, and who, therefore, have never really questioned, can have carried out this re-examination.

With this in mind, we pray to God to give our leaders wisdom.