

Divergent Images of American and British Education in the Ontario Catholic Press, 1851 – 1948

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of international relations among Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom have generally been more concerned with activities and events than with underlying attitudes. Much attention has been paid to the chronicling of international involvements in the diplomatic, military, economic, political and educational spheres and to the unravelling of the tangled skeins which seem to relate these involvements to one another. However, the nature of the attitudinal contexts within which these phenomena had their genesis and which, no doubt, affected their development, has on the whole received little notice.

Where historians have addressed themselves to Canadian attitudes as well as conduct in the area of Canadian-American-British relations they have generally been impressed by a strong undercurrent of anti-American sentiment which has surfaced on numerous occasions in Canadian history. Craig, Creighton, Dafoe, Keenleyside and Brown, Lower, Morton, Wise and Brown and others have referred to it,¹ and Wise has traced the feeling back to the anti-revolutionary perspectives of influential groups in early Canada who enshrined their sentiments within a Burkean political structure designed to

¹ Gerald M. CRAIG, *Canada and the United States* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1968), p.68; Donald CREIGHTON, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Rev. ed.: Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1957), p.435; J.W. DAFOE, *Canada, an American Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), p. 91; Hugh L. KEENLEYSIDE and Gerald S. BROWN, *Canada and the United States: Some Aspects of Their Historical Relations* (Rev. ed.: New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p.41; Arthur R.M. LOWER, *Colony to Nation* (4th ed. rev.: Don Mills, Ontario: Longmans Canada Limited, 1964), p. 316; W.L. MORTON, *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1961), p.69; S.F. Wise and Robert CRAIG BROWN, *Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth Century Political Attitudes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 94-96.

prevent a democratic and republican coup in British North America.² Along with this strong element of anti-Americanism in Canadian attitudes, a related though subsidiary strain of pro-British feeling has also been discerned.³ This has been attributed partly to a genuine admiration for British culture and institutions,⁴ and partly, too, to a less disinterested concern for maintaining a countervailing force against the overwhelming cultural pressures from the United States.⁵ Nevertheless, although anti-Americanism and pro-Britishism have been recognized as important features of Canadian history, these sentiments have by no means monopolized attitudes in Canada. Canadian history has been interspersed with ample evidence of pro-American and anti-British feelings, although on the whole these seem to have been transitory or confined to minorities within the population.⁶

Lower has suggested that differences in family tradition, racial descent, religious denomination, and economic interest help determine the political attitudes of individuals and groups.⁷ This accords well with what Boulding terms the "stock of images" constituted by the attitudes of different groups in society,⁸ and also with what Mannheim refers to in his sociological generalization that "in accord with the particular context of collective activity in which they participate, men always see the world around them differently," because "it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations

² S.F. WISE, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," Ontario Historical Society, *Profiles of a Province* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), pp. 20-23.

³ LOWER, *op. cit.*, p. 445; John Bartlett BREBNER, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (Carleton Library, ed.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968), p. 311; Andre SIEGFRIED, *The Race Question in Canada* (Carleton Library, ed.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), pp. 98, 104; Frank H. UNDERHILL, "Some Reflections on the Liberal Tradition in Canada," Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), pp. 13-15.

⁴ Carl BERGER, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 102-103.

⁵ LOWER, *op. cit.*, pp. 445-446.

⁶ WISE and BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷ LOWER, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

⁸ Kenneth BOULDING, *The Image* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 55.

characterizing their common position.”⁹

It is against this background of Canadian attitudes toward the United States and the United Kingdom in general that an attempt is made here to examine the images of American and British education presented to their readers by spokesmen for one social group in one part of Canada – the editors of a series of Catholic papers published in Ontario between 1851 and 1948. It is assumed that the views presented do not differ significantly from those of the majority of the clergy and laity to whom they were expressed. It is felt that an appreciation of these views may help clarify the attitudinal setting within which the separate Catholic system of public education in Ontario developed for most of a century.

Editorials in the following papers were reviewed for the periods indicated – the *Mirror* (1851-1861), the *Canadian Freeman* (1862-1873), the *Catholic Record* (1884-1891), the *Catholic Register* (1893-1942) and the *Canadian Register* (1942-1948). References to American and British education were classified as to date, source, system and topic referred to, and attitude expressed. Attitudes were categorized as positive, negative or ambivalent (combining positive and negative elements).¹⁰ In the accompanying graphs, ambivalent references were valued as half-positive, half-negative.

The use of a few terms needs clarification: “Catholic” is used to signify Roman Catholic; “Ontario” is used instead of Canada West (official until 1867); “British” denotes what pertains to the British Isles, and not merely to Great Britain.

AMERICAN EDUCATION

The Catholic press in Ontario regarded American education as a dual phenomenon within which the vicious effects of a system of secular public

⁹ Karl MANNHEIM, *Ideology and Utopia : An introduction to lite Sociology of Knowledge* (New York : Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1936), pp. 3, 4.

¹⁰ In the original study, of which the topic of this paper formed a part, in order to test the validity of attitude assessments, 20 references were selected at random and distributed to each of 10 judges who were asked to rate the references according to whether they expressed a negative, positive or ambivalent attitude toward education in the political jurisdiction referred to. Of the 200 assessments made, 184 agreed with those of the author, with no reference being accorded more than three assessments which differed from his. This level of agreement was considered sufficient to warrant the inclusion of attitudes in the classification. See Denis C. O’DRISCOLL, “Ontario Attitudes Toward American and British Education, 1792-1950: A Comparative Study of International Images,” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan. 1974), p. 11.

schools were mitigated to some extent by the merits of Catholic private and parochial schools, to the benefit of American society in general. It seemed unjust to the Ontario Catholic press that conscientious Catholics in the United States should have to bear the burden of supporting both Catholic and public schools in order to render this national service. The generous spirit with which American Catholics appeared to bear this imposition was applauded, and was presented as an example to those Catholics in Ontario who might not fully appreciate the advantage of having publicly-maintained Catholic schools. Although the public support accorded Catholic schools in the province was often criticized as inadequate by the Catholic press, the Ontario dual system of public education was, nevertheless, considered far superior to the American common system. The latter, with its alleged negative consequences for society in general and for Catholics in particular, was instanced as what might transpire in Ontario if Catholics were not vigilant and committed in the cause of their separate schools. This overall perception of American education was, in essence, very stable, with important features of it continuing to find expression for most of a century. During that time the tone of Catholic press commentary was almost constantly and predominantly negative. (Table I).

Table I

REFERENCES TO AMERICAN EDUCATION IN EDITORIALS
OF ONTARIO CATHOLIC PRESS

	Negative	Ambivalent	Positive	Total
1851-1860				
1861-1870	5	4	1	10
1871-1880	2			2
1881-1890	6		1	7
1891-1900	1		4	5
1901-1910	4	1	1	6
1911-1920	3	1		4
1921-1930	11	4	4	19
1931-1940	5	3	1	9
1941-1950		1		1
Total	37	14	12	63

The public schools of America were distinguished, in the eyes of the Ontario Catholic press, for their lack of religious commitment;¹¹ for the

¹¹ *Canadian Freeman*, July 31, 1862; April 16, 1863; March 11, December 7, 1871. *Catholic Register*, January 23, May 22, June 5, 1930; March 28, 1940.

inequity which they inflicted on Catholic ratepayers who laboured under the burden of “double taxation”;¹² for the intolerance displayed by public school authorities toward the religious convictions of Catholic teachers and pupils;¹³ for the hostility with which the champions of public education – notably the Ku Klux Klan, the American Protective Association, and other groups, some with alleged Orange connections – endeavoured to injure the Catholic Church through its schools;¹⁴ for the superficial and limited pedagogical perspective which prompted the public schools to pursue the ephemeral, ostentatious and trivial in programme and teaching methods rather than undertake a sound, systematic and disciplined approach to studies of proven worth;¹⁵ and for the generally deleterious influence which the public schools exerted upon the social fabric and moral fibre of American society.¹⁶ What the *Canadian Freeman* charged in 1869 – that religion had been banished from the public schools and that, as a result, it was “a boast of Americans that they can produce a better educated, more enlightened and expert staff of rogues, pickpockets and burglars than any other people on earth”¹⁷ – was substantially repeated by the *Catholic Register* over fifty years later when it alleged that because of its “system of Godless training for the young, America today is reaping the whirlwind in homicide, suicide, race-suicide, crime and divorce, out of all proportion to the shortcomings of other nations.”¹⁸

Most references to American education were general in content, tending to be critical of the spirit and context of public education. However, allusions to specific incidents and crises were not infrequent. An incomplete list would include editorial commentary on the following: in 1871, the expulsion of a Catholic child from a public school at Hunter’s Point, New York, because he

¹² *Canadian Freeman*, July 31, 1862; March 16, 1865. *Catholic Record*, November 5, December 24, 1887; June 22, August 17, 1889. *Catholic Register*, February 28, 1895; June 24, 1909; May 19, 1921; April 4, 1935.

¹³ *Canadian Freeman*, June 24, 1871. *Catholic Record*, July 31, 1887. *Catholic Register*, May 2, 1895; May 22, 1930.

¹⁴ *Catholic Register*, May 18, 1916; August 31, November 16, December 14, 1922; June 28, November 1, 1923; September 4, 1930; September 28, 1933.

¹⁵ *Catholic Register*, September 19, 1908 ; July 8, 1909; November 11, 1915; August 28, 1919; August 13, 1931.

¹⁶ *Canadian Freeman*, April 16, 1863; March 11, 18, 1869. *Catholic Register*, June 24, September 2, 1909; July 28, 1921; November 6, 1922; June 11, 25 September 13, 1923; May 1, 1924; August 13, 1931; February 11, 1932; February 9, 1933; January 10, April 4, 1935.

¹⁷ *Canadian Freeman*, March 18, 1869.

¹⁸ *Catholic Register*, June 28, 1923.

would not stay for Bible reading;¹⁹ in 1891, the Bennett Act which threatened to close the parochial schools of Wisconsin;²⁰ in 1916, charges laid against a Catholic bishop in “Darkest Florida” on the grounds that it was a criminal offence for a white person to teach a black child;²¹ in 1920, a Michigan campaign which would prohibit private and parochial schools and which, the *Catholic Register* darkly forecast, would lead to an exodus of Catholics from that state into Canada;²² in 1922, the Oregon legislation which would forbid private and church schools there;²³ in 1923, the disallowance of Bible reading in public schools by court decisions in California and Florida;²⁴ in 1930, the case of a Catholic teacher in Monroe, New York, who was refused a teaching position on the grounds of religion until the State Commissioner for Education was obliged to intervene;²⁵ and, also in 1930, the manner in which the Encyclical of Pope Pius XI had been used as a weapon against Al Smith in his campaign for the Presidency of the United States.²⁶

In contrast to the evil influence of the public schools, the Ontario Catholic press claimed that American Catholic schools exerted a valuable conservative and patriotic influence by striving to preserve for posterity the principles of early America in the form of learning fortified by religion.²⁷ It was recalled more than once that this had been the ideal of George Washington who, when dying, had commanded that religion never be divorced from education.²⁸ The public schools were viewed as the products and promulgators of a different and alien perspective derived from immoral Prussia.²⁹ Catholics were said to share the pristine values of the founders of America, but not to be alone in this. Although “Masons, Kluckers, Knights of Pythias, Orangemen” and other self-styled patriots considered Washington’s views antique,³⁰ there were many enlightened and influential American Protestants who upheld his Christian values and recognized that

¹⁹ *Canadian Freeman*, November 30, December 7, 1871.

²⁰ *Catholic Record*, February 14, 1891.

²¹ *Catholic Register*, May 18, 1916.

²² *Ibid.*, April 8, 1920.

²³ *Ibid.*, August 17, November 16, December 14, 1922.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, October 25, 1923.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1930.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1930.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, August 17, 1922.

²⁸ *Canadian Freeman*, March 18, 1869. *Catholic Register*, November 16, 1922.

²⁹ *Canadian Freeman*, April 16, 1863.

³⁰ *Catholic Register*, November 16, 1922.

they were still honoured in Catholic schools though neglected elsewhere.³¹ Hence, these true patriots frequently commended the Catholic schools and even patronized them in preference to the public schools.³² Illustrious names were sometimes dropped by Catholic editors as evidence of this phenomenon, so that on one occasion when a prominent Ontario Orangeman undertook to castigate an Ontario convent for its “Popish aggression” in educating Protestant girls, the *Catholic Record* was quick to remind its readers of the favourable impression received by President Harrison when, accompanied by the Governor of Connecticut and a Supreme Court judge, he had visited a convent school in the United States. The paper found it “interesting to observe the difference of treatment accorded to these nurseries of education by such gentlemen of culture and refinement and that shown to the same establishments by illiterate bigots of the Sam Hughes stamp.”³³

Catholic papers in Ontario maintained that Catholic schools in the United States provided a superior type of education not only morally but academically as well.³⁴ The products of Catholic schools were said not to be surpassed by those of public schools in the race of life, but to be competing successfully with them for public awards and for entry into distinguished institutions of higher learning.³⁵ In their more conservative approach to education the Catholic schools of America were considered wiser than the public schools, which were hampered by the “ruffles,” “fills” and other fripperies said to characterize progressive education.³⁶ Thus the Catholic schools were held to be more beneficial to the individual and the nation because of their commitment to the basis of America’s greatness – a combination of religion and sound secular instruction.³⁷

The Ontario Catholic press undertook to defend American Catholics against the common charge that they sought to undermine the public school

³¹ *Ibid.*, October 25, 1923; September 4, 1930; August 13, 1931.

³² *Canadian Freeman*, April 16, 1863. *Catholic Record*, August 10, 1889. *Catholic Register*, May 2, 1895; July 8, 1909.

³³ *Catholic Record*, August 10, 1889.

³⁴ *Canadian Freeman*, April 16, 1863. *Catholic Record*, August 10, 1889; July 25, 1891.

³⁵ *Canadian Freeman*, March 30, 1865. *Catholic Record*, July 25, August 29, 1891. *Catholic Register*, June 7, November 1, 1923.

³⁶ *Catholic Register*, September 19, 1908; July 8, 1909; November 11, 1915; August 28, 1919; August 13, 1931; February 11, 1932; September 28, 1933.

³⁷ *Canadian Freeman*, March 18, 1869. *Catholic Register*, September 2, 1909; July 28, 1921; November 16, 1922; June 7, 1923; August 13, 1931; September 23, 1933; November 10, 1938.

system in the United States.³⁸ American Catholics were represented as seeking public support for their schools simply to provide more readily a truly American education for those who sought it without having to pay a double tax for the privilege.³⁹ It was remarked that while the inequity of American fiscal arrangements bore heavily on Catholics, these measures also penalized conscientious believers of other faiths, who were obliged to send their children and their taxes to public schools which catered only to the preferences of atheists and agnostics.⁴⁰ Those who would defend such punitive arrangements were declared by Catholic papers in Ontario to be not merely hostile to Catholic education but unpatriotic, and disloyal to the spirit of the Constitution, since they were rejecting the first principles and primal values of American society, which had accorded an important place to religion in education.⁴¹

The alleged imperfections and injustices of American public education were paraded before its readers by the Ontario Catholic press as a salutary if dreadful example of what they had been fortunate to escape. Despite the problems and inadequacies of Catholic education in Ontario, Catholics were repeatedly reminded to be grateful for not having to bear the burden shouldered so manfully by their co-religionists in the United States.⁴² American Catholics were said to envy Ontarians their separate school system and to confide to visitors from the province that “You have much greater reason in Canada to be loyal to the Government than we Americans, with all our boasted freedom.”⁴³ Nevertheless, it appeared that some Canadian “toadies,” who still hankered after the Ascendancy, did not appreciate this privilege and preferred, for social reasons, to send their children to the undenominational public schools.⁴⁴ Not only American Catholics but conscientious Americans of other faiths would consider themselves fortunate to be able to avail of a system like that of Ontario. These people feared for the future of the United States under the existing godless system of public education, and realized – according to the *Catholic Register* in 1909 – that the solution was to “get back to the Catholic system – let Churches teach,

³⁸ *Catholic Record*, December 24, 1887; February 14, 1891.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1887.

⁴⁰ *Catholic Register*, January 10, 1935.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, November 16, 1922.

⁴² *Canadian Freeman*, May 22, July 31, 1862; March 16, 1865. *Catholic Record*, November 5, 1887; June 22, 1889. *Catholic Register*, February 28, 1895; July 10, 1930.

⁴³ *Catholic Record*, June 22, 1889.

⁴⁴ *Catholic Register*, May 20, 1909.

and be inspected by the State, as here, and be paid for results.”⁴⁵

BRITISH EDUCATION

In the comments of the Ontario Catholic press on British education, English education figured most prominently, Irish education to a much lesser degree, and Scottish education scarcely at all. Over the century, the feeling toward education in the British Isles was one of qualified approval, with a gradual improvement evident as the decades passed. (Table II). The focus of attention shifted from Irish education in the nineteenth century to English education in the twentieth. English education, on the whole, came to be viewed more favourably than Irish education had been.

Table II

REFERENCES TO BRITISH EDUCATION IN EDITORIALS OF ONTARIO CATHOLIC PRESS

	Negative	Ambivalent	Positive	Total
1851-1860	2		1	3
1861-1870	5	2	1	8
1871-1880	1	1	1	3
1881-1890	1			1
1891-1900		1	1	2
1901-1910	3	2	2	7
1911-1920	1	1	4	6
1921-1930	3		1	4
1931-1940	1	1		2
1941-1950	1	4	2	7
Total	18	12	13	43

Education in England

The Catholic press in the mid-nineteenth century noted the neglect of popular education in England. This neglect was attributed to the connivance of Anglican church and gentry to restrict educational facilities in order to benefit the upper and middle classes of society. Thus the great intellectual

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1909.

potential of the mass of the people was seen to be left untapped.⁴⁶ This neglect was alleged to have led to a decline in England's prestige since the palmy days before the Reformation, when the Catholic seminaries, monasteries and colleges of England had been the envy of continental Europe. According to the *Mirror* in 1856, the root of England's domestic malaise and foreign ineptness, as evidenced in bread riots at home and the conduct of the Crimean War abroad, was the monopolization of education by the Established Church to the exclusion of the Catholic Church which had once made England great.⁴⁷

However, subsequent measures by the British government to end the Anglican monopoly of education did not meet with the approval of the Ontario Catholic press and brought about a change in its perspective. After 1870, the efforts of the state to remedy the lack of popular education by means of undenominational public schools, favoured by Dissenters, caused Catholics to view Anglicans in a more favourable light, for even less desirable than the traditional alliance of State and Established Church was the prospect of a new alliance between State and Dissent. The government now became the prime target of Catholic criticism for allegedly endeavouring to impose a godless education upon a Christian country.⁴⁸ Catholics and Protestants alike who opposed these efforts and undertook sacrifices to preserve and advance their church schools were commended.⁴⁹ To the Catholic press, all that was necessary and desirable to improve working-class education in England was that the government be more generous toward church schools.⁵⁰ Government measures to promote undenominational schools were taken as signs of a conspiracy against the Catholic Church by evangelical Protestants who sought a more covert but comprehensive and substantial form of establishment than the historical alliance between the Church of England and the British government.⁵¹

With the steady spread of the undenominational board schools created by the Education Act of 1870, the odium of the Ontario Catholic press was transferred to these schools and their supporters and away from the total system and the government which maintained it. The new board schools were branded as irreligious, and Dissenters, with whom they were associated, were accused of being opposed to the religious education of youth. This charge was common during the controversy created by the 1902 Education Bill to have church schools supported from local taxes – a proposal strongly resisted by

⁴⁶ *Mirror*, January 4, 1856.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Canadian Freeman*, April 2, 1863.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, April 2, 1863; August 31, 1871; February 22, 1872.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, February 27, 1868; February 22, 1872.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1872.

many Dissenting Protestants.⁵² Anglicans then and later were welcomed as allies against Dissenters in the struggle to preserve church schools in the face of competition from undenominational schools.⁵³

With the gradual acceptance of the 1902 settlement, which consolidated a pluralistic system of publicly supported denominational and undenominational schools in England, adverse references to English education began to decline in the Ontario Catholic press. Despite occasional flurries of criticism, a more positive image of English education began to emerge. The toleration by the government of religious attire in English schools had already been acknowledged,⁵⁴ and subsequently approval was accorded to the principle of public support and supervision of Catholic schools, with adequate safeguards for Catholic ideals;⁵⁵ the pluralism and decentralization of public education generally;⁵⁶ the stress on liberal rather than vocational and utilitarian studies;⁵⁷ the public financing of Catholic teacher-training colleges;⁵⁸ and the official encouragement of religious content in all schools.⁵⁹ The British government was occasionally reproved for allowing the burden of educational costs to fall more heavily on Catholics than on others, but these criticisms were quite mild.⁶⁰ It was acknowledged that, in general, there had been a great improvement in church-state relations since the 1902 Act, that conditions were no longer unsatisfactory,⁶¹ and that because of the regard officially and actively accorded religious values in public education, British society was in far better moral condition than the American.⁶² The Ontario government was frequently exhorted to be equally supportive of Catholic education in the province,⁶³ and the *Canadian Register* in 1942 urged its

⁵² *Catholic Register*, May 22, October 2, 1902; November 26, 1903; May 18, 1905; June 24, 1909.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1902; June 24, 1909.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1895.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, March 2, 1906; November 21, 1935. *Canadian Register*, November 14, 1942.

⁵⁶ *Catholic Register*, October 21, 1915.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1917.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1920.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1920; November 6, 1941.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1917; May 29, 1930. *Canadian Register*, May 22, 1943.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1917; September 2, 1920; November 21, 1935. *Canadian Register*, November 14, 1942.

⁶² *Catholic Register*, September 13, 1923.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, October 21, 1915; February 8, 1917; September 2, 1920; November 6, 1941; July 29, 1944.

readers to maintain an interest in the progress of Catholic education in England on the grounds that “ We should be interested if actions over there had no reactions here, and we know full well that British precedents have considerable influence on policy in Canada.”⁶⁴

Even the important educational reforms of the nineteen-thirties and the nineteen-forties did no more than ruffle the stilling waters of Ontario Catholic criticism of education in England. These measures, intended to effect closer cooperation and integration between the denominational and undenominational sectors of English public education, were criticized by the *Catholic Register* on the grounds that they called for additional expenditures which would fall more heavily on church schools.⁶⁵ Moreover, they seemed to be advanced with an eye to administrative efficiency rather than educational quality.⁶⁶ Anxiety was expressed that such measures might lead, as they had elsewhere, to uniformity and totalitarianism at the expense of diversity and freedom.⁶⁷ It was observed that the London *Times* had already protested the mockery of a nation fighting abroad for principles of freedom which it would not honour in the schools at home.⁶⁸ But English Catholics, it was claimed, would not shirk the issue. They had, in the past, asserted their rights in a manner which Ontario Catholics might study with profit. Though only a fraction of the population of England, their voices might be heard everywhere when a crisis affected their schools – in Parliament, in the *Times*, and at public meetings.⁶⁹ They could, moreover, count on the influential support of Anglicans and others who valued denominational schools.⁷⁰ The *Canadian Register* hoped, however, that a confrontation might be avoided, for Catholics were not reactionaries when reforms were necessary, provided that these reforms did not cost them their schools and that the funds to accommodate such changes were forthcoming.⁷¹ On the eve of the implementation of the great Education Act of 1944, these difficulties appeared at last to have been solved. The *Canadian Register* expressed satisfaction that a reasonable compromise had been reached in the matter of building funds and that, with the recommendation that religious instruction become mandatory in all

⁶⁴ *Canadian Register*, November 14, 1942.

⁶⁵ *Catholic Register*, May 29, 1930; November 21, 1935. *Canadian Register*, May 22, 1943; June 10, 1944.

⁶⁶ *Canadian Register*, August 14, 1943.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1942.

⁶⁸ *Catholic Register*, March 28, 1940.

⁶⁹ *Canadian Register*, August 14, 1943.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1942.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, August 14, 1943.

schools, a principle of Catholic education had been publicly upheld.⁷²

Education in Ireland

Irish education received a rather poor press during the few decades within which it was accorded some prominence in Ontario Catholic papers. This was particularly so in the eighteen-sixties, during which the Catholic bishops of Ontario were engaged in a struggle to protect and strengthen the provincial system of Catholic public schools in face of the spectre of its abolition and replacement by a comprehensive system of undenominational schools like that formulated for Ireland in 1831, and urged for Canada in 1858 by the Reform politicians George Brown and Thomas D'Arcy McGee.⁷³

In the early eighteen-fifties the Irish national school system was enthusiastically endorsed by the *Mirror* for contributing to the future greatness of the Irish people by making them literate and articulate in the English language.⁷⁴ However, by 1859 the Catholic press in Ontario had come to the support of the bishops in condemning the Irish national schools as godless institutions – although, by then, the national school system was already well on its way to being, in the words of an historian of Irish education, “twisted from its original non-sectarian moorings to a tacitly denominational position.”⁷⁵ Catholics were warned by their press not to be misled by politicians who would beguile them into substituting the Irish formula for the separate system of public schools already established in Ontario.⁷⁶ It was alleged that guarantees against the proselytization of Catholic children had ostensibly been built into the Irish national system by deceitful politicians, but that these guarantees had not worked. In consequence, the Irish people were said to have unanimously rejected the state schools and to have cheerfully undertaken the sacrifice of providing for their children in Catholic schools maintained by them through voluntary contributions.⁷⁷ The Irish national school system was said to have revealed itself as “a wily project” designed to secure public funds in order to prop up an ailing Protestant establishment and at the same time to proselytize the Catholic population of

⁷² *Ibid.*, July 29, 1944.

⁷³ This episode is considered within its religious and political setting in Franklin A. WALKER, *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Dent, 1955), pp. 219-249.

⁷⁴ *Mirror*, July 27, 1855.

⁷⁵ Donald H. AKENSON, *The Irish Educational Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 384.

⁷⁶ *Mirror*, September 9, 1859. *Canadian Freeman*, October 16, 1862.

⁷⁷ *Canadian Freeman*, July 31, 1862; April 16, 1863; March 16, 1865.

Ireland.⁷⁸ The heroism of the Irish people was commended to Ontario Catholics, and Catholic bishops everywhere were urged to emulate the stand of the Irish prelates against the principle of undenominational education and in favour of a public system of Catholic education which would operate at all levels – primary, intermediate and university.⁷⁹

By the eighteen-nineties, the threat posed to Ontario separate Catholic schools appeared to have passed, and the Irish national school system was finally acknowledged for what it had long since become – a fully denominational system of public schools under the management of the different churches, Catholic and Protestant. This tardy acknowledgement of Irish educational reality coincided with the bitter controversy which had arisen in New Brunswick and elsewhere over the issue of religious orders teaching in public schools. The *Catholic Register* saw the issue as overblown, and pointed to the happy situation in Ireland where government officials were fully tolerant of national schools being conducted by teaching orders in religious dress.⁸⁰ It complimented the Irish bishops on the progress made with their assistance, and advanced statistics on attendance and school buildings as testimony that education was not neglected when under the auspices of the Catholic Church.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

The Ontario Catholic press displayed a fairly high and constant level of interest in education in the United States and the British Isles. Editors were particularly interested in American education, which they referred to much more frequently, passionately and in greater detail than they did to British education. No greyness was acknowledged in American education—there was only black and white, juxtaposed. Public schools were anathema and seen to be the ruin of the nation; church schools – especially Catholic schools – seemed to provide the only hope of redemption. The threat posed by the proximity of a monistic, undenominational (even secularist) system of public education no doubt contributed to the intensity with which Catholic editors reacted when they contemplated American education. The blandishments of this model – already yielded to by legislators in British Columbia and Manitoba – seemed to underlie much of the hostility displayed by those who would abolish or circumscribe the Catholic public school system established so precariously in Ontario in the eighteen-forties.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1872.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, November 30, 1871.

⁸⁰ *Catholic Register*, May 2, 1895.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, December 13, 1894.

The embryonic, legal model of Irish education seemed akin to the American in its monistic undenominationalism. Although it soon developed into a thoroughly denominational system within the peculiar demographic context of Irish society, such an outcome could not be guaranteed if a similar system were planted in Ontario. Consequently, whatever might be the reality of the Irish national school system, it could not be acknowledged as remotely acceptable until the Ontario separate schools had become firmly rooted and

the Irish model had developed in such fashion that there was no likelihood of its being imported into the province.

English education held no great interest until the prospect arose in the later nineteenth century that its impoverished denominational sector would collapse and be superseded by the tax-supported undenominational one. This would result in a national system not unlike that of the United States. Only after this danger had been averted by the ratification of a pluralistic public system in 1902, could the English model be contemplated, with reservation at first but finally with considerable approval.

Education in the United States and the British Isles was primarily seen as a battleground between the forces of good and evil. With significant exceptions on both sides, Catholics tended to be ranked with the angels, non-Catholics with the powers of darkness. This situation was held to prevail in Ontario, too. As late as 1922, a Catholic editor warned his readers of a world-wide conspiracy to eliminate Catholic culture by abolishing Catholic schools, and he reminded them of Cromwell's alleged reference to Irish children – "If we kill the nits we shall get rid of the lice." He probably expressed the spirit if not the national origin of many of his fellows when he vowed that "while the Anglo-Saxon world is really the Anglo-Celtic world the Celt will see to it that the bigots shall not have their way."⁸²

This attitude probably has implications for the completeness and accuracy of the images which were received and subsequently transmitted by editors when they looked at education abroad. With a war being waged for the souls of children, there could have been little room in the editorial ranks for the detached and disinterested analyst. An editor was expected to be a vigorous and fluent apologist and, in the matter of educational commentary, he tended to fulfil this function very well. When the occasion demanded it, he referred to foreign models of education not as an exercise in impartial assessment but as a tract for the times. In this way, the faithful were instructed, both directly on what they should seek and avoid in Ontario schools, and indirectly on the official Catholic viewpoint on education. As well, they were roused by stories of heroism and perfidy in the struggle for Catholic schools elsewhere, and heartened by vigorous blasts at those who would deprecate the role of the Church in education at home or abroad. In their work, the editors of the Catholic press were probably no more subjective or any less committed to the projection of an exact, complex and balanced image than were the editors of other religious, political and educational papers in Ontario when they, too, chose to comment on education abroad. It would probably be risky to rely too heavily on any one of these different interpretations in order to understand what actually prevailed in education. It must be said of the Catholic editors, however, that more than many of their rivals they eschewed dullness when

⁸² *Ibid.*, August 31, 1922.

they got down to the business of educating their readers in what they maintained was the reality of American and British education, with all its implications for the people and the policy-makers of Ontario.