

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Predictions, predilections, hunches and educated guesses about the next ten years

The temptation to play prophet is normally a seductive one. To peer into the future is always great sport, and by the time the future becomes the present most people will have forgotten what you have predicted. So if you were wrong, there is little danger of being caught; and if you are right, you can always remind people of your prediction in the past.

But if you engage in predictions about the next ten years in Catholic education, you run certain special dangers. It is impossible to discuss the Catholic schools, it would seem, without taking a stand either for or against them. If you attempt to treat the schools as a phenomenon—like, say, the Rocky Mountains—to be analyzed and reported on but neither praised nor condemned, you run the risk of being damned as a conservative. You must be either for or against the schools, and if you are not against them, you are inevitably construed as their defender. At the risk, however, of being accused by Daniel Callahan of being a frolicsome cleric, I shall endeavor in this article to be neither for nor against the schools, but merely to report on what I think their future looks like.

There are really four kinds of predictions that I intend to make: First of all, there will be predictions based on present data. These predictions will assume that the trends substantiated by existing data will continue. The second kind will be little more than educated guesses, based, not on any systematic data collection, but on personal impressions. The third kind will also be a guess, but here a guess based not so much on personal impressions as on personal opinions—opinions that will be hard to substantiate in any solid fashion. The fourth kind of prediction will be what the sociologist would call a “normative prediction”; it will express not so much what we think the future will be, but what we think it ought to be.

Any series of predictions of the sort described in the last paragraph is bound to be a pretty free-wheeling affair. Nevertheless, we will endeavor to dis-

tinguish among the various kinds of predictions, so that we will not attempt to pass off as a projection something that can be little more than a guess, or to masquerade a guess as a hope.

My first prediction is that Catholic schools will continue to exist and will expand. This kind of prediction seems so self-evident that it would hardly be worth making, were it not that a certain body of opinion in the United States apparently suspects that the Catholic schools will not continue to exist. Whether they ought to continue or not is not the question at issue here. It seems to me quite clear, for several reasons, that they *will* continue.

First of all, no formal organization ever commits suicide; no organization ever dismantles itself. Organizational suicide is especially unlikely when the demand for the organization's product is at an all-time high. Many of the problems the Catholic schools now have come not from an under-demand but from an over-demand. It is difficult to tell someone that he ought to go out of business when his product is popular.

The second reason why the schools will continue to exist is that in the current shortage of classroom space, at all levels of education, the public authorities could not tolerate the removal of 12 per cent of the available desks. Curiously enough, Catholic schools were free to come into existence but are not free to go out of existence.

The third reason that Catholic schools will continue to exist is that Catholics, by and large, like their schools. In our study, “The Effects of Catholic Education,” we found that an overwhelming majority of American Catholic parents are in favor of parochial schools. The criticisms leveled at the schools by American Catholics have largely to do with their physical facilities; that there are simply not enough schools and not enough classrooms in the existing schools. The basic reason people have for not sending their children to Catholic schools is simply that the schools are not available.

Nor can this favorable disposition toward Catholic education be written off as the result of lack of education on the part of parents. As a matter of fact, the reverse seems to be true. The more education a parent

FR. GREELEY, whose sociological work at the University of Chicago has taken him deeply into the study of Catholic education, returns to our pages with several important predictions on the subject of our schools.

has, the more social prestige he has, the more likely he is to send his children to Catholic schools. Those who take their children out of Catholic schools manage to get a certain amount of publicity. But the overwhelming majority of parents, especially parents in the new upper middle class, are not taking their children out of Catholic schools; they are, on the contrary, demanding that they be admitted.

Undoubtedly, in some areas of the country, there will be modifications of the extent of Catholic education. Certain grades and certain levels may well be discontinued in various sections, but talk of the disappearance from the educational scene of the Catholic schools or any substantial part of them is based either on wishful thinking or on a complete unawareness both of the American educational situation and of the attitudes of most American Catholics.

My second prediction is that, of children in Catholic schools, the number in primary and secondary schools may well increase but will never exceed 50 per cent of the Catholic school-age population. Present levels—45 per cent of grammar school children in Catholic schools and about one-third of high school children in Catholic high schools—represent close to an all-time high. Catholics are becoming more and more well-to-do in this country, and it seems to be the well-to-do, especially, who are demanding parochial education. Hence money may be available in the future, not only to hold the percentages at the present level but slightly to increase them.

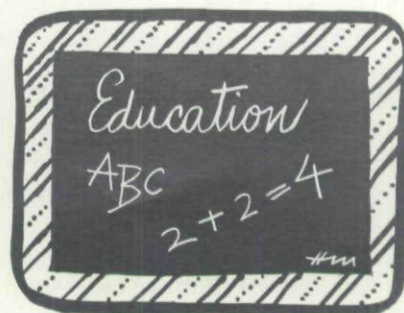
It is also true that, because of the smaller number of children born in the 1950's, the rate of increase in the demand for parochial grammar and high school desks is likely to decline somewhat in the next two decades. But the next two decades are likely to see a considerable increase in the rate of demand for college desks. It seems very likely that, of Catholic students of college age, the percentage in Catholic colleges will decline in the next two decades.

One comment should be made, however, about the fact that less than half the Catholic children in the country are in Catholic schools. It would appear that somewhere in the neighborhood of one-third of the Catholic children in the country are not likely candidates for any formal religious instruction. For reasons that are not altogether clear, but that may point to the existence of a rather large missionary problem within the American Church, it would seem that approximately one-third of the Catholic parents in the country are not interested in religious education for their offspring, in school or out of school. (Presumably, these people are "nominal" Catholics; they list their religious affiliation as Catholic when asked by an interviewer, but do not attend church regularly or become involved in Catholic activities of any sort.) Thus, some 40 per cent of children in Catholic schools

may actually represent about three-quarters of those who are potential recruits for any kind of Catholic training.

It should be noted, further, that situations vary from diocese to diocese, depending on the size of the city and the section of the country involved. Thus, in some large urban dioceses, the proportion of potential students actually to be found in Catholic schools is rather high, while in other smaller and rural dioceses the proportion is rather low. Some dioceses may be considered Catholic school dioceses and other dioceses CCD dioceses. The charge that Catholic education selects a privileged elite for its intensive training may well be true; but this elite is an elite that is largely determined by geography and ecology, and not by other factors.

My third prediction is not based on existing data, but is rather a hunch based on what seem to be changes of opinion within the American body politic. It seems safe to guess, however, that within the next several years there will be some form of state aid for Catholic education. This aid may not be all that is wanted by Catholic educators, but nevertheless it seems to be in the cards. Signs of changing public attitudes on the subject of Federal aid to church-related schools can be seen, not only in the shift in mass public opinion as reported by the Gallup poll,



and the shift in elite opinion as reflected in the changed editorial stand of the *New Republic*, but in the Administration's proposed school-aid program as well. The American public seems at last to have recognized that Catholic schools account for the education of about one-sixth of the country's population, and that to ignore this sizable element in American education in any plans for improvement would be, in the long run, detrimental to the whole of American education.

My fourth prediction is that the Catholic schools will continue to be criticized—especially within the Church. Furthermore, I suspect that this criticism will grow in intensity, especially among those who have attended Catholic schools, and, if the truth be told, especially among those who teach in the schools

or are associated with them in an administrative capacity. It is inconceivable, with the new-found freedom of the *aggiornamento* and the increase in education and occupational status of Catholics, that criticism could possibly grow less. The major criticism of the schools will continue to be that Catholic schools are not turning out the kinds of Catholics the Church needs in this particular era of its history. The schools will be accused of not producing dedicated, enthusiastic, committed Christian laymen and laywomen.

Two comments should be made about this continuing criticism. First of all, the criticism, while it is articulate and vociferous, represents the feelings of a minority, indeed, a small minority. Our survey data would lead us to suspect that less than five per cent of the Catholics in the country will criticize the schools for these reasons. The criticism does not represent, as some Catholic educators would lead us to believe, a massive assault on the principle or practice of Catholic education. Because the critics are only a minority, however, it does not follow they are an unimportant minority.

As a matter of fact, they may be too small for the good of Catholic education. Criticism is the indispensable prerequisite of growth. The problems Catholic schools face may well be not that they are being criticized but that they're not being criticized strongly enough, articulately enough, or by enough people. Even when their criticisms seem to be unbalanced or unfair, the critics of Catholic education must be listened to, because they are the ones who will stimulate Catholic schools to greater growth and self-improvement. If Catholic educators do not listen to the criticisms of this minority at the present time, they may find that, in a quarter of a century or so, the voice of the small minority will be the voice of the overwhelming majority and then Catholic education will assuredly be in trouble.

Second, it seems to me that because in the past the defenders of Catholic schools have promised too much, the minority *expects* too much of Catholic education. To be sure, we have paid all kinds of lip service to the idea that the school cannot undo what the home does; yet we still have not honestly admitted that the contribution of the school, while important, can hardly be overwhelming. It is a mistake to suppose that the school that deals with the child five hours a day, five days a week, for a rather small segment of his life, can overcome the effects of home, family, neighborhood, peer group and the mass media. American Catholics and American Catholic educators are not alone in expecting too much of formal education; such expectations seem to be held by the

entire American society. We look on schools as workers of miracles, when actually they are only places where people learn a certain number of skills and a certain amount of knowledge. The school, at best, can have only a relatively small impact on the life of an individual or on the history of the development of a community.

Our Catholic schools, in fact, will turn out that different kind of Catholic needed for the age of Vatican II only when the whole American Church is dedicated to producing this new kind of Catholic. The question seems to be not whether the school can do the job by itself, but whether, in the absence of the school, there is another institution that can make the limited contribution to the development of dedicated Catholic laymen that the school presently seems to be making.

My fifth prediction is that Catholic educators will continue to over-react to criticism. I predict that they will do this, not because they are Catholic educators, but because they are educators; and it is the nature of the species to react violently to any form of criticism. Even when he realizes that his reaction may obtain more publicity for the criticism than it would receive otherwise, the educator cannot resist the temptation to start screaming when he feels he is being attacked. Certain Catholic journalists have expressed surprise at the violence of the reaction to criticism within Catholic education. They would not be so surprised if they paid some attention to the reaction of any educator, no matter what his religion, to any form of criticism.

My sixth prediction is that the most creative element of American Catholicism will continue to be recruited in substantial measure from Catholic schools. Indeed, the most penetrating criticisms of American Catholicism will be made precisely by that element of the Catholic population trained in Catholic schools. I base this prediction both on existing data and impressions and on a theoretical consideration. One has the impression that most of the articulate critics to be found in the Catholic Liberal Establishment have attended Catholic schools, indeed, many of them Catholic colleges and not a few of them Catholic seminaries. Further, my experience with various Catholic Action movements in the Chicago area gives me the impression that the people who founded and have maintained these organizations have, by and large, had Catholic educational backgrounds. The organization I know best, the Chicago Area Lay Movement, was made up almost entirely of people who had gone to Catholic schools.

There are excellent theoretical reasons for believing that our creative elite will tend to come out of Catholic schools. Those who have been in Catholic schools, especially Catholic high schools and colleges, are

much more likely to be plugged in on the communications network in which the ideas of liberal Catholicism are propagated in the United States. Thus, if you are to find out even about the existence of publications such as *Commonweal*, *National Reporter*, *The Critic*, *AMERICA* and *Ramparts*, and if you are to find out about the existence of publishing houses like Helicon, Herder and Herder, and Sheed & Ward, you must at some point in your life encounter people who already know about these institutions. It is not in the Catholic schools alone that these things are known, but the chances of your coming into contact with the ideas of the Liberal Establishment are heightened greatly if you go through the Catholic schools. Thus, three-fourths of the readers of *Commonweal* have attended Catholic colleges.

My seventh prediction is that freedom will continue to be a major issue in Catholic education. Let me say first of all that there is no particularly strong evidence that there is less academic freedom at Catholic colleges than at other colleges. Only one Catholic school is on the American Association of University Professors censure list. The studies of Prof. Hinrichs would indicate that there is in Catholic higher education widespread sympathy toward the ideals of faculty participation in government recommended by the AAUP. Fr. John Malone's excellent study of faculty participation in nine Midwestern colleges and universities was unable to find much dissatisfaction among lay faculty in their situation at the schools. As a matter of fact, it was the clerical faculty that was most likely to be critical of school administration.

Yet even if the Catholic colleges are no less free than other colleges, according to the standards of the AAUP, there is little reason to be complacent on the subject of freedom. Unfortunately, the suspicion that the Catholic schools are unfree places is likely to persist. Catholic colleges must therefore be like Caesar's wife. They must be totally above suspicion on the matter of academic freedom; they must, in fact, lean over backward so as not to give any justification for the charge of abusing freedom. Indeed, the standards in the AAUP should be viewed merely as a minimum essential and not as the ultimate goal of freedom in Catholic education.

In a larger sense, however, there must be more freedom in all levels of Catholic education. Whatever elements of authoritarianism remain from the past, when it may have been relevant, are no longer relevant in contemporary American society. And yet we can expect authentic freedom for the children of God in Catholic education only when there is this freedom everywhere in the American Church. Only when the religious and clergy who teach in the Catholic grammar schools, high schools and colleges are free from the oppression under which many of them must live

and work, can we expect the true spirit of Christian and American freedom to be found in Catholic education. It is no exaggeration to say that the sooner this happens, the better. There are some grounds for cautious optimism about the improving conditions of freedom within the American Church, but one would hesitate to make any absolute predictions, at least at this precise moment.

8th
It seems fair to predict that in the years ahead the Catholic schools will continue to be accused of being "divisive." Even though there is virtually no research evidence to back up this accusation, it is too popular, too easy to make, for us to expect that it will be abandoned within the foreseeable future. The contrary proposition, namely, that Catholic schools actually have accelerated the assimilation of the Catholic population in American society, is supported by some research evidence. "Divisiveness," however, has been too popular a slogan to be abandoned without overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Even if there is overwhelming evidence, it still seems too important for the personality systems of some critics ever to abandon the notion that Catholic schools *have* to be divisive.

One can further predict that there will be a large increase in research in Catholic education. We do not really know much about either the history or the social organization of Catholic schools. For a long time, anyone suggesting that such a study ought to be made was considered at best suspicious, and possibly even dangerous. There seems to be a change in attitude, however. Catholic educators are beginning to realize that they have much less to fear from competent research than they have from criticism of armchair experts.

The tendency seems now to be in the other direction; research is sought for uncritically, and is expected to provide magic answers to problems. While there will be an increase in the importance of research in Catholic education, it seems reasonable to expect that research findings will not be received with enthusiasm by those whose assumptions the findings challenge. Everybody is for social research as long as it confirms his own assumptions. When it goes against them, the research is likely to be viewed with great suspicion and the researcher is likely to be accused of all sorts of terrible things—such as being a conservative, or an optimist.

It is also safe to predict that, as the years go on, academic "excellence" will receive increasing emphasis in Catholic education. Some of these emphases will be merely verbal, as "excellence" becomes another empty and meaningless slogan. On the other hand,

great progress has been made in improving the Catholic schools in the last two decades, and there is every reason to believe that this progress will continue to be made.

At the present stage of the game, one's impression is that Catholic higher education is perhaps no better and no worse than the average to be found in American colleges. This still leaves a considerable amount of room for improvement, but also indicates that considerable improvement has been made. There is also some reason to think that Catholic grammar schools and high schools are considerably better than the average to be found in the giant urban school systems, although perhaps not as good as some suburban school systems. Here again, there is considerable room for progress. None the less, the evidence of great progress in the last two decades is almost overwhelming, and those who reject such evidence do so more for ideological reasons than for any other. According to the view of these critics, Catholic schools simply cannot get better.

Whether in the next decade or two there emerges a great Catholic university or group of first-rate Catholic liberal arts colleges remains to be seen. Whether the money, the vision, the freedom, the personnel, can be gathered to produce such top-quality schools is still open to question. Yet there can be no doubt that

the need for an outstanding university or a couple of first-rate liberal arts colleges is urgent. Until such schools emerge, the critics of Catholic education can argue that while Catholics may be able to produce something better than mediocrity, they are not yet able to produce true academic greatness.

Again, I would like to predict that the teaching of theology and religion will dramatically improve in Catholic schools in the decade to come. I say I would like to predict this because I feel that such an improvement is absolutely essential. My hunch is that the basic justification for a Catholic educational system is not that it turns out dedicated, enthusiastic and zealous laity, but that it turns out a theologically literate laity. It may not be within the schools' power to produce total personality change, but it is surely within their power to communicate certain basic elements of knowledge. The greatest service that Catholic education can render to a larger American society is to produce Catholic lay people who have a mature and sophisticated understanding of their own religious tradition.

It may not be too harsh to say that, as of now, the schools have done only a barely adequate job in this area, that teaching of religion and theology in Catholic education is so far woefully weak. There are, of course, many attempts to improve the quality of re-

*colleges
conducted by
the congregation
of the*
**SISTERS
OF THE
HOLY CROSS**

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE

and Graduate School of Sacred Theology
for Women

NOTRE DAME, INDIANA

DUNBARTON COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

WASHINGTON, D. C.

HOLY CROSS COLLEGE

DACCA, EAST PAKISTAN

CARDINAL CUSHING COLLEGE

in the greater Boston area
BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

COLEGIO SANTA MARIA

SAO PAULO, BRAZIL

For further information, please address Director of Admissions of any of the colleges.

ligious instruction. The appearance of new textbooks and new teaching methods on the grammar school and high school level, as well as the emergence of a couple of excellent theology programs in certain Catholic colleges, are promising signs.

But there is still immense room for improvement. As a matter of fact, if the religious education in Catholic schools is to be brought into conformity with the teachings of Vatican Council II, there is a staggering amount of work still to be done. And it must be done in the very near future. It will also become necessary to abandon the notion that anyone who wears a Roman collar or habit of a religious order is qualified to teach religion or theology. It is required that we do more than merely concede theoretically the need for as advanced professional training for theology teachers as for anyone else. This concession must be carried into long-range practical programs. I wish I could report that I see a large number of these programs beginning; but the truth of the matter is that, at least at the present time, there are only a very few.

I would further predict in the next ten years there will be much more experimentation in Catholic education, so as to learn whether the results, whatever they are, that have been obtained by a comprehensive school system can be produced with less expenditure of personnel and resources by alternative methods. It seems to me that such experimentation is almost built into the present situation. With more sophisticated CCD texts and methods, with a growth of various shared-time and released-time programs, and with the emergence of parish educational systems outside of the formal schooling, there is reason to think that Catholic education in the United States will present a much more varied picture in the next decade than at present.

I do not foresee that some of these newer approaches will replace Catholic schools, but I do see them as providing alternatives to Catholic schools in rural areas or in growing suburban regions where the development of a comprehensive Catholic educational system is not feasible. Whether these alternative methods will be viewed as potential rivals of the existing Catholic educational system, or as supplements to it, is a question whose answer I do not perceive in my crystal ball.

I must confess, for example, that I am somewhat disturbed by the tendency of certain Newman chaplains to insist that the Newman club is now *the best* way for Catholics to participate in higher education. I can understand that Newman chaplains, having been looked upon until recently as sort of second-rate par-

ticipants in higher education, should now strive to turn the tables. While this is understandable, it is neither constructive nor helpful and may actually delay the day when we will have a balanced and cooperative approach to the alternative methods of religious education.

This brings me to my final prediction, one that is much more of a hope than a firm forecast of what will happen. I should like to see, in the next ten years, a far more comprehensive vision of religious education among Catholics. Thus, I think the term "Catholic education" should apply not merely to the parochial schools and not merely to education from ages 6 to 21.

I would like rather to see the educational resources of the Church (money, personnel, physical equipment) devoted to a comprehensive and balanced plan for a total educational approach, so that the schools, the CCD, the Newman clubs, adult education programs and newer educational forms will all be considered parts of one master plan. I am not advocating the establishment of one super-organization to administer this plan, but I would like to see some consensus amongst the various interested parties as to the goals of the plan and the places in the development of the plan to be filled by the respective educational institutions.

Thus, for example, it seems to me an almost incredible waste that the many million-dollar educational plants that the Church has available to it in our country are used in many instances only five hours a day, five days a week, 40 weeks a year, and remain dark, lonely and empty the rest of the time. The expansion of the use of educational facilities to encompass not only grammar school and high school students, but adults—indeed, every member of the Christian community—seems to me to be an absolutely essential part of any educational plan developed by American Catholics.

The use of the school buildings for an expanded educational program may, of course, draw down upon us the anger of a few fussy Mother Superiors and a few neurotic janitors. But these relics of the past must not be permitted to stand in the way of the future. The immense amount of money that has been poured into the physical equipment of Catholic education in the country must not be permitted to go to waste. We cannot tolerate a situation in which these buildings stand idle and empty.

It is fashionable in certain journalistic circles to predict trouble ahead for Catholic schools. If trouble means challenge and opportunity, then trouble there will be. If trouble means that challenges will not be met and opportunity will not be seized, then my crystal ball does not provide any predictions. But of course it could not. This part of the future depends upon the free-will decisions of human beings.

