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## Catholic Education: The Future is Now, by James Mulligan, CSC

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Likewise, the domain of public schools has a broad range. Many large inner-city public schools register low achievement scores, are beset with multiple social issues, and contend with powerful teacher union constraints which limit their agency. By contrast, smaller and less bureaucratic suburban schools feature strong funding and high achievement and often model themselves on and measure themselves against successful independent schools.

As many researchers have documented, size is a very important variable in determining school effectiveness. The enterprise of education began as a cottage industry and operates best on a human, (i.e., small) scale. Large size is daunting in schools, and parents and students seem to understand this intuitively. The attractiveness of charter schools, independent schools, and Catholic schools depends to a great extent on their manageable size. In addition to organizational and structural features that favor their success, Catholic schools are generally smaller than public schools, thereby affording more opportunities for personal contact and better communication between adults and adolescents.

Despite the limitations imposed by its brevity, *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* provides an informed perspective on Catholic schools at the end of the twentieth century. It also raises important research and public policy questions regarding the ability of these valuable institutions to survive in a competitive and economically driven society. As a practitioner in both Catholic and public schools, I strongly recommend this book for reading and reflection.

*Peter B. Holland has served as superintendent of the Belmont (MA) Public Schools since 1988. He is co-author with Anthony Bryk and Valerie Lee of Catholic Schools and the Common Good, published by Harvard University Press in 1993.*

## CATHOLIC EDUCATION: THE FUTURE IS NOW

JAMES MULLIGAN, CSC, NOVALIS, 1998.

*Reviewed by Merylann J. Schuttloffel, Ph.D.*

Catholic education currently enjoys popular and professional success in educational circles. Remarkably, even secular educational reformers seek solutions within the Catholic educational framework. If this enjoyable situation carries a risk, however, it is the danger of generating a complacent Catholic educational constituency. James Mulligan, in *Catholic Education: The Future Is Now*, cries out such a warning to his fellow Canadians, a warning U.S. Catholics should heed about the risk of complacency.

Mulligan examines the unraveling of our northern neighbor's Catholic school system in the province of Newfoundland. Mulligan lays out his case study clearly and carefully. He begins with a description of modern culture in Canada today, which seems strikingly familiar with its focus on consumerism and materialism propagated through a global economy and a neoconservatist political strategy.

Mulligan assists the novice scholar of the Canadian educational system to recognize both its differences from and similarities to the United States system. In Canada, Catholic schools are one of two educational choices in a government system. Catholic schools exist and teachers live within specific governmental guidelines stated by law and protected by the courts. Catholic school teachers share much with their comrades in the public schools including the complications of a negotiated contract.

There are similarities with the U.S. system. The quest for qualified Catholic teachers and principals with the appropriate theological formation challenges both U.S. and Canadian systems. Mulligan uses the Newfoundland case study as a negative model in leadership formation. Throughout his argument, Mulligan challenges Canadians to recognize the inherent difference between Canadians who choose to work in the Catholic system and their counterparts in the public system.

Newfoundland becomes the prime example of what happens when the public, including employees of the Catholic system, cannot discern a distinct purpose for the Catholic system. In 1997, the citizens of Newfoundland voted to abolish the two-school system. The rationale of those opposed to the two-school system rested on the premise that this action would save money. It was a reasonable position in a poor rural province where two small schools existing in the community seemed redundant. But, as Mulligan explains, the opposition's position was plausible only because no one clearly articulated a significant purpose for maintaining the Catholic schools.

Ironically, the most powerful words Mulligan can record on the importance of Catholic teachers within the Canadian Catholic schools were written by Mr. Justice Robert Sharpe, as he wrote his opinion on Section 136 of Ontario's 1985 Education Act which challenged the Catholic schools' right to give hiring preference to Catholic teachers. In his statements upholding the Constitution Act of 1867, Sharpe describes the importance of teachers who could adequately transmit the vision of life integral to Roman Catholic faith and tradition. Mulligan reminds us that Sharpe's words present a challenge to Catholic educators as they represent an ideal that cannot be compromised.

Mulligan does not duck the argument that many Newfoundlanders used the vote to reflect their displeasure with a Church steeped in scandal. Numerous clergy pedophile cases had torn the province apart, stressing the goodwill of citizens toward the Catholic Church to the breaking point. However, Mulligan does not allow the anti-Church argument to overshadow

his more important point: that a lack of clarity about the purpose for Canadian Catholic schools was the foremost reason for the loss of Catholic education in Newfoundland. Mulligan proclaims that the other provinces are not immune to the same fate—thus the title of his book and the urgency of his argument.

Mulligan posits an argument that unless discrete plans exist for the spiritual and theological formation of Catholic school teachers, the future is lost. His central point communicates convincingly the requisite teacher and leadership formation if Canadian Catholic schools are to survive.

Mulligan's plan for spiritual leadership formation calls on the Canadian Church, often through the very voices of Catholic school teachers, to enlist the best instructors in Catholic theology and spiritual direction to guide the formation of novice teachers. He speaks of a threefold poverty holding back teacher development: a poverty of theology, a poverty of learning, and a poverty of spirituality. A poverty of theology reflects the numerous popular jargons found in Catholic school mission statements. A poverty of learning demonstrates that young teachers reflect their microwave culture. They seldom read, indulge in reflective thought, or seek to improve themselves beyond the barest requirements. Young teachers who exhibit a poverty of spirituality reflect their culture of activity and noise. There is not adequate time for contemplation and prayer. Mulligan recognizes that these are not symptoms of ill will by the novice teachers, but more a lack of direction from their leaders. Mulligan holds current Catholic educational leadership culpable for the shortcomings of novice teachers.

Mulligan encourages veteran teachers to practice a model of leadership that supports Catholic formation for teachers, students, and the entire community. His plan is ambitious, but he shares several diocesan models that are in successful operation. Ontario's teacher and leadership formation program was shaped by Mulligan and bears the imprint of his priorities.

Mulligan's text portrays a pivotal moment in the history of Canadian Catholic education. U.S. Catholic educators may read and attribute the events to a different national context, but Mulligan's lesson is larger than Canada. He calls out a warning to U.S. Catholic educators that a lack of distinct purpose and a muddling of priorities can dismantle a Catholic system from within. In Canada, the political opposition had its greatest ally in a complacent Catholic population, including Catholic school personnel. U.S. Catholic educators should heed Mulligan's emphasis on the importance of giving resources to teacher and leader formation.

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