

BOOK REVIEWS

The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965

James W. Sanders. *The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii, 278. \$16.25.

A part of the "Urban Life in America Series," James W. Sanders' study is a welcome addition to the history of Catholic education in the United States. In examining the development of Catholic schooling in Chicago, Sanders stresses the relationship of Catholic educational activities to the public schools of Chicago and surrounding suburbs that comprised the archdiocese of Chicago. An eminently local study, *The Education of an Urban Minority* has about it an immediacy and relevance not found in more broadly based works. Sanders makes good use of demographic evidence to reconstruct the development of parishes (both national and territorial), population shifts within the archdiocese, and the socio-economic mobility of Catholics.

Although the study is solidly grounded in demographic data that demonstrate the social, ethnic, and economic constraints place on the Catholic leadership in Chicago, Sanders gives ample consideration to the role of historical actors in the establishment of Catholic educational institutions. In particular, he shows how archbishops George Mundelein (1916-1939) and Samuel Stritch (1939-1958) were able to control their sprawling See fragmented by ethnic diversity and to wield power within Chicago and Illinois state politics. In understanding both the socio-economic constraints and the historical actors, we are thankfully spared the slightly paranoid social control studies of American education that postulate some vague but vastly powerful force (e.g., middle class values) which manipulated institutions and individuals in its own self-interest. Rather, *The Education of an Urban Minority* falls more logically within the social conflict model of schooling so admirably demonstrated in the work of such English historians as Brian Simon, Harold Silvers, and J. F. C. Harrison. By rejecting the notion that all education and all formal education, i.e., schooling, are intended solely to control, Sanders is able to see that religious and other nonpublic forms of schooling can serve as instruments of cultural, ethnic, and class advancement.

Given its disciplined focus, the study leaves several questions unanswered. In particular, since the secondary schools of the archdiocese were largely the property of religious orders and since national (i.e., ethnic) parishes were tolerated to an extent perhaps not usual in other dioceses, how "exceptional" was Chicago's experience? For example, the great bulk of Catholic high schools in the Detroit archdiocese were parochial (parish) institutions. Was this simply an accident of episcopal leadership? Or did the lack of parochial high schools in Chicago reflect the leadership's willingness to satisfy ethnic aspirations at the parish and elementary school but not at the secondary and higher educational levels? From his account of the political acumen of Cardinal Mundelein, one is led to speculate that these things did not happen fortuitously.

In recounting of the development of Catholic schooling, Sanders points out a significant religious and social failure of Catholic leadership and the Catholic laity in Chapter 12, "The Racial Crisis." Set against the racial climate of the dominant American society and those attitudes of the Catholic laity, Sanders examines the failure of archbishops Mundelein and Stritch to implement in the matters of parish membership and school admission policies what must have known to be their pastoral responsibilities. The setting up of an all-black parish and the policy that while black Catholics were welcome to attend services at any Church they could be members only of the single black parish effectively denied black Catholics who resided in white parishes the right to send their children to those parochial schools. In addition, religious orders were often reluctant to admit black students to their high schools lest they drive away their white students. Although the Catholic schools of Chicago were perhaps no more segregated than their public counterparts, still the failure of church leadership to deal effectively with this issue is yet another sad and painful commentary on religious values and beliefs.

Sanders' thesis is that Catholic schools in Chicago arose in response to the interest of Catholic leadership in preserving "the faith" and to the sense of alienation among the Catholics in Chicago. Indeed, it is this latter point, Catholic schools as bastions against

the coerciveness of the dominant Protestant society, that represents the major problem in Sanders' explanation of the history of Catholic education in Chicago. When the Catholic community in Chicago was poor, *ethnic*, and numerically weak, Church educational institutions served as a defence against the intolerance and assimilative attitudes of Chicago society. Sanders argues that Catholics finally came into their own economically and politically in the 1920's. The Catholic community that had initially been overwhelmingly working class now included a substantial middle class and the previously impotent Catholics became a "minority to be counted with." Given their new social and political power, i.e., their Americanization, Catholics should have sensed less need for protection and consequently less need for separate Catholic institutions. As the evidence demonstrates, however, Catholic educational institutions, particularly schools, grew substantially from the 1920's to 1965. It was only the decade after 1965 that witnessed a marked decline in enrollment in both urban and suburban schools.

If Catholic education were a symptom of its alienation, how does one account for the long delay between Americanization and declining Church Schools? For Sanders, the answer is the time needed for the "reality" to become part of the popular mentality. Catholics needed forty unbroken years of Catholic mayors and the election of a Catholic president to finally feel secure enough to abandon their schools.

When after the 1950's the Chicago Black Belt began seriously to erode the old Catholic city parishes, the Catholics who "fled" to the outer parishes failed to reproduce the schools they had abandoned. Thus, this failure to build new schools reflected the final Americanization of Catholic Chicago. In response to a possible economic argument, Sanders maintains that the effort would not have been any more demanding than that which had been required of Catholics in days of poverty and alienation. It is interesting at this point to cite the views of Andrew M. Greeley who in published studies, e.g., *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1976), and addresses, e.g., to the National Catholic Educational Association (1977), has argued that failure of Catholics to maintain their schools cannot be laid on the lack of interest among Catholic parents but rather on the failure of vision or nerve of Catholic leadership, clerical and lay. Since Greeley has been long associated with the Chicago area, one can only assume that his observations are particularly aimed at the Catholic experience and leadership in that archdiocese. In brief, Greeley's thesis is that Catholics want Catholic schools and are willing to finance them and that the decline in Catholic schooling is another example of the failure of Catholic leadership to grasp the fact that non-public schooling is a legitimate alternative to a public system with which so many people have become disaffected. Furthermore, the preference for Catholic schooling may have little to do with piety.

Indeed, given the major lapse regarding black Catholics, and the flight of white Catholics from the expanding black belt, it would seem natural that Catholic leadership, sensitive to changes of racial bigotry, was reluctant to build all-white schools in the new parishes. Although the period after 1965 is obviously an epilogue to this study, it does appear essential for future historians of Catholic education in Chicago and for that matter in the United States to test Greeley's hypothesis.

The most significant conclusion of the study is that whatever the "purpose" of the American Common School, the Catholic "system" was a monument to diversity. While urban public school systems were becoming models of bureaucratic centralization with little responsiveness to local interests, the Catholic schools of Chicago were manifestly without a "system." Except for religious orthodoxy, the archbishops made little attempt to effectively control the diverse educational institutions of the archdiocese. "Despite the Church's reputation for centralized authority and bureaucratic structure . . . the Catholic Church, as expressed in its school system, emerges as a nineteenth century exemplar of internal social tolerance and permissiveness in a society that condemned it as intolerant and undemocratic" (p. 226). The lesson of this excellent study is that we must examine all our educational practices and institutions anew, without the ideological blinders and rhetoric of the 1960's.

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