THE ADVENT OF A PUBLIC PLURIFORMITY MODEL: FAITH-BASED SCHOOL CHOICE IN ALBERTA

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Four typical arrangements for relating faith to schooling were developed in Canada during the nineteenth century. All resulted from compromises between the assimilating traditions of Christian Constantinianism and Enlightenment liberalism. These arrangements only reluctantly accommodate the religious diversity within society. Although scholars classify Alberta's system as non-sectarian public schooling with minority denominational districts, evidence suggests the advent of a new pragmatic pluriform public school system. This new system contains many types of school authorities and structures; all but one permit some form of faith-based schooling. A broad spectrum of faiths is expressed within these school authorities.

Key words: school choice, religion, pluralism, public policy, social cohesion

La relation entre la confession religieuse et l'éducation a donné lieu à quatre types d'aménagements au Canada au cours du XIXe siècle. Ils étaient tous le résultat de compromis entre les traditions assimilatrices du constantinisme et du libéralisme du siècle des Lumières. Ces aménagements répugnaient à accorder une place à la diversité religieuse au sein de la société. Bien que les chercheurs qualifient le système d'éducation publique de l'Alberta comme non sectaire avec des districts pour certaines minorités confessionnelles, les faits observés semblent indiquer l'émergence d'un nouveau système d'école publique pragmatique et pluriel. Ce dernier regroupe de nombreux types d'administrations et de structures scolaires ; tous sauf un permettent une forme ou l'autre d'éducation confessionnelle. Un vaste éventail de confessions religieuses sont exprimées au sein de ces administrations scolaires.

Mots clés : choix d'école, religion, pluralisme, politiques publiques, cohésion sociale.

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Canadian arrangements for resolving the role of faith in schooling have shifted significantly and decisively in recent years. Quebec and Newfoundland, for example, have dramatically reduced the role of religion in their overall school systems. At the same time, Ontario broadened funding for its Catholic separate schools, while essentially prohibiting the teaching of religion in public schools and refusing to publicly fund faith-based and other independent schools. In contrast, Alberta has opened so many new opportunities for faiths and other philosophies to play various roles in its school systems that the overall system no longer fits any existing classification of faith and schooling. This article demonstrates that Alberta's school system now constitutes a distinctive new model: a *pragmatic pluriform public school system*.

Using 2001-2002 data from Alberta Learning,[1] we have examined two dimensions of the Alberta system. First, Alberta's school system has evolved into a system of systems. Eight distinct types of school authority are legally permitted to run schools.[2] By examining faith-based schooling within the public sector systems, we have considered the types and extent of faith-based plurality allowed within these school authorities, that is, public, separate, charter, francophone, and co-operatively federated school authorities. We have analyzed the types of structural arrangements used within these authorities that allow faith-based schooling, such as religion courses, alternative programs, 'de facto reserved' schools, 'de jure reserved' schools, and Hutterite schools. We then examined faith-based schooling in independent school authorities, home education, and First Nations on-reserve schools. We briefly describe the kinds of faiths that parents have chosen to express in the schooling of their children in all eight types of school authority.

In this study, we have used concepts such as religion, spirituality, and faith interchangeably. By faith-based, we mean more than the traditional sense of a connection between a school, program, or authority, and a particular church, denomination, or sect. A faith-based school or school program is operationalized as schools or authorities that publicly self-identify themselves as religious, openly affiliate with a religious group, or are run by, or exclusively serve, a religious group or society.[3] The evidence of schooling being faith-based varies from mandating religious observances, displaying symbols, offering religious

courses, to allowing faith to be integrated or permeated throughout the curriculum and practices of the school. Although religious diversity in Alberta's school system has become significant, Alberta is not Canada's Bible belt. Albertans are the second most likely to say they have "no religion" on surveys and Albertans attend religious services at among the lowest rates in Canada (see Bibby, 2002; Clark, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2003).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW FAITH-AND-SCHOOLING REGIME

Historically, the British North American colonies, and later the Canadian provinces and territories, experienced intense struggles over the place of faith, church, and state in schooling. The Constitution Act 1867 gave the provinces jurisdiction over education, enabling them to develop their school systems in response to local conditions and in accordance with their own public philosophies. The struggles over schooling between proponents of liberal enlightenment thought and supporters of various strands of Christianity during the course of the nineteenth century produced four distinct models of relating state, church, and faith to schooling (Manzer 1994, p. 33).[4] The current state of Alberta's school systems suggests the advent of a fifth model. This model is new not only because it respects a broad range of faiths within schooling but also because it does this through a wide variety of systems and mechanisms.

The significance of Alberta's new model is best portrayed against the backdrop of the four historic school regimes developed in Canada. Each of these models was forged during the nineteenth century conflicts of two historical traditions that sought hegemony in schooling—the historic Christian Constantinian tradition and the competing Enlightenment rationality tradition (see Hiemstra, 2005). Both traditions presumed that the state could legitimately establish and advance a preferred religion and/or philosophy to unify the state. The Christian Constantinian tradition wanted an established church to play the role of producing and propagating basic beliefs for unifying the state. In contrast, the Enlightenment rationality tradition sought to replace the established church by establishing a democratic common school to propagate rational, scientific values and so ensure social and political uniformity. This clash over the means for producing social uniformity and political

unity—an established church or established public school—masked the two traditions' deeper agreement over the legitimacy of a state establishing a single hegemonic and assimilating institution to propagate national values for unifying the state.

Using Manzer's (1994) typology, we present the four Canadian regimes that resulted from the clash of these two traditions. Before proceeding we added two additional observations to Manzer's description of these models. First, Manzer notes that the Enlightenment rationality tradition helped shape each model, but we add that this worldview was also propagated within and through the resulting schools. Second, Manzer's models fail to adequately include independent or private schools. Independent schools, and especially faith-based independent schools, are important to include in these models precisely because many were formed to challenge the belief, among other things, that states may establish a single common school system to impose one worldview on all citizens.

Manzer's first model, the non-sectarian public school regime, reflects a strict liberal understanding of the separation of church and state. This regime gives a government department rather than an ecclesiastical body authority over local, often board-run schools. Clergy are forbidden to play any authoritative role within the school systems, e.g. as teachers, trustees, or inspectors. Churches are prohibited from sectarian engagement with schools, e.g. instruction in religious dogma or creeds. Beyond prescribing a strict separation of church and state, Manzer's account of this model should be supplemented with the observation that its proponents clearly sought to impose liberalism through the common schools as a neutral basis for public life. When blended with Christianity, liberalism was styled as a superior type of "non-sectarian Christianity" that ought to be taught in the non-sectarian public schools (Manzer, p. 55). British Columbia adopted this regime in 1872 while Manitoba replaced its earlier *dual confessional school system* with this regime in 1890.

The second typical arrangement, non-sectarian public schools with minority denominational districts, was developed in Upper Canada, later to become Ontario, the product, Manzer argues, of "substantial compromises" (p. 65) between liberals and religious conservatives. Like the first regime, this model features public schools that are funded and

indirectly controlled by government. These schools taught the individualist and rationalist values of liberalism and, at least originally, incorporated non-sectarian Protestant practices. This model differed from the first, however, in that separate denominational schools were also permitted for Catholics and given public funding. These schools operated under strict supervision of the majority-controlled government education department, however, which ensured that curriculum and texts, testing and inspections, and teacher training and certification in Catholic schools were checked by majority Protestant and liberal values. The North-West Territories switched to this regime in the late nineteenth century and it was formally passed on to Alberta and Saskatchewan when they became provinces in 1905 (pp. 54-59).

The third type of regime, de jure non-sectarian, de facto reserved public schools, was produced as a compromise between liberalism and religious communities in the three Maritime Provinces. They prohibited sectarian practices in public schools, such as "teaching denominational doctrine and using denominational prayers and books" (p. 57). Alongside the expression of mainstream liberal values, the non-sectarian Protestant morals of the majority were also permitted in these schools. In practice, however, compromises were worked out with Roman Catholic minorities so that schools were de facto reserved for them when they were concentrated in isolated geographical regions. These schools were permitted to engage in sectarian practices, e.g. employing members of religious orders, wearing religious garb, and holding Catholic religious exercises before or after regular school hours (pp. 57-59).

Manzer's fourth model is the concurrent endowment of confessional systems. This regime rejects the central liberal premise that the state should control schooling and instead gives ecclesiastical authorities primary control over school administration and curriculum (p. 53). It still bears the imprint of the competing Christian Constantinian and Enlightenment rationality traditions, however, in that it gave schools only to the dominant Christian communities. Two versions of this regime emerged in Canada. After 1867, Quebec developed the dual confessional school system in Montreal and Quebec City where the non-governmental Council of Public Instruction was divided between Catholic and Protestant committees, each operating on an equal footing.

The Council was given power to make all important educational decisions. Manitoba and the North-West Territories also initially adopted this regime. The second version of this regime, the multi-denominational school system, was developed by Newfoundland and entrenched in the Canadian constitution when it became a province in 1949 (p. 54). This regime was more generous, at least to Christian groups, because it gave significant jurisdiction over education to a variety of churches, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostal Assemblies.

Each of these four regimes, to a greater or lesser extent, embodies the hegemonic claims shared by the two contending traditions: the state should either establish churches to run schools or directly establish common schools. In either case, schools are given the role of producing and propagating the beliefs required to achieve national unity. The thrust towards an assimilating role for schools in each regime negates or minimises school choice for minority groups. In contrast, Alberta has significantly altered its former non-sectarian public schools with a minority denominational districts model and developed a new pluriform public model that no longer seems to assume that a common school system and single ideology must be imposed to unify the political community. Although Alberta practices this in an ad hoc and pragmatic manner, its pluriform public system allows the expression of a wide variety of faith-based, philosophical, and cultural approaches within schooling.

Although elements of Alberta's system occur in other provinces, none has created both the breadth of systems and diverse types of faith-based schooling that distinguish Alberta's system from the hegemonic and assimilating character of Canada's historic school regimes. This is evident on a number of fronts. First, in the former North-West Territories, Roman Catholic separate and public schools received full legal and funding status. This system was continued when Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces in 1905. Although Alberta and Saskatchewan currently share this model with Ontario, Manitoba dropped support for Catholic schools in 1890 and Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador removed constitutional protection for denominational schools in 1997. Quebec turned its Catholic public

schools into predominantly linguistic schools and Newfoundland adopted a primarily non-sectarian provincial school system. Both provinces still allow religious courses and practices to be offered in public schools on parental request. The remaining provinces offer only partial public funding to Catholic schools, and then only as independent schools. Although in recent decades, Ontario extended public funding to Catholic high schools, it also made teaching religion in public schools illegal. Over half of Alberta's public school boards operate faith-based Hutterite schools, a practice begun in 1918 and also adopted by Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Third, although most provinces have legally recognised independent schools, Alberta was first to offer partial public funding to them in 1967. Today, five provinces partially fund independent schools, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and British Columbia. Fourth, many provinces have operated alternative programs in their public systems since the 1970s, but only Alberta permits faith-based alternative programs. Saskatchewan allows a partially analogous associate school arrangement, that enables faith-based independent schools to operate in contractual partnership with a public school system. Fifth, francophone schooling is offered and fully funded in most provinces today and some operate as francophone Catholic schools in Alberta and other provinces. Sixth, Alberta is the only province to allow charter schools to operate alongside other types of school systems.

In this article, we document the structure and nature of diversity within Alberta's pluriform public model. This system of systems approach offers opportunities for diverse faith communities to express their beliefs within their children's schooling (for an overview of the results, see Table 1). We argue that these developments amount to a type of public pluriformity in schooling that no longer, at least officially, requires the provincial school systems to assimilate children into a single official religion or public ideology.

Table 1

Alberta Students Receiving Faith-based Schooling by Type of School Authority, 2001-2002

Type of School Authority:	Students enrolled in type of faith-based schooling	Total students in type of school authority	% of the authority's students in faith-based schooling
• *De facto* reserved public schools	450	450	100%
• *De facto* reserved Hutterite public schools	3,109	3,109	100%
• *De jure* reserved public schools	661	2,959	22.3%
• Alternative faith-based programs in public systems	5,886	unknown	n/a
• Religion courses in all types of public schools	unknown[a]	n/a	n/a
All Non-Catholic Public Boards	10,106	406,305	2.5%
• Roman Catholic public schools	7,701	7,701	100%
All Public School Boards	17,807	414,006	4.3%
• Roman Catholic separate districts	120,483	120,483	100%
• *Roman Catholic alternative schools*	all[b]	unknown	100%
• Protestant separate districts	180	6,314	2.8%
All Separate Denominational Boards	120,663	126,977	95.3%
Charter School Authorities	0[c]	2,870	0%
Francophone School Authorities	1,656[d]	3,279	50.5%
Co-operatively Federated School Authorities	1,868	4,024	46.4%
Independent (Private) School Authorities	17,908	28,851	62.1%

Home Education and Distance Learning	unknown[e]	13,07	n/a
Aboriginal On-Reserve Schools	unknown[f]	8,556	n/a
Total students in all types of RC schooling	131,488[g]	n/a	n/a
Total students in non-RC faith-based schooling	27,718	n/a	n/a
Total students enrolled in this type of school authority	**159,206**	**588,563**	**27.1%**

[a] No data exists on the number of 'regular' public schools using faith-based courses or practices.

[b] All alternative schools in the Roman Catholic systems are faith-based, including the Jewish school(s) adopted by Calgary Catholic after being released by the Calgary Board of Education.

[c] Charter schools are the only type of school authority legally prohibited from expressing religion, although some argue that religion-like characteristics are present in some charter schools.

[d] This number includes only students attending francophone schools specifically identified as faith-based and excludes schools operating under Catholic francophone districts when the individual school does not itself claim a faith identity.

[e] Home schooled students are counted by the Alberta government with the authority under which they have registered and will only have been counted, therefore, as receiving faith-based schooling if this authority or program is officially identified as faith-based.

[f] No data is available for faith-based practices in the category of Aboriginal on-reserve schools.

[g] The Catholic student total includes: separate Catholic districts (120,483), Greater St. Albert Catholic [Public] Schools (7,701), Catholic students in St. Paul's co-operatively federated system (975 elementary and about 250 secondary), Catholic Francophone authorities (1,656), and Catholic independent schools (423).

PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS

Public school boards are only one of four types of school authority recognised by Alberta. Historically under the North West Territories ordinances, the first school established in a local district—whether Protestant or Catholic—was designated the public school. If members of

the minority faith, limited to either Catholics or Protestants, met legal criteria, they were entitled to establish a denominational separate school in the district. The vast majority of public schools became non-sectarian protestant schools. After the 1960s, the majority of Albertans tended to view these schools as secular. In 2001-2002, however, faith-based practices, observances, and/or courses were offered in public boards under six different structural arrangements.

Religion Courses in Regular Public Schools

Any public school in Alberta is legally entitled to offer courses about and/or in religion. Alberta Learning has approved three courses about religion for teaching in any high school: Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meaning 20, and World Religions 30. Designated as optional courses, local boards can prescribe these religion courses in their schools. Alberta Learning's Policy 1.2.2 (2003) also allows local school authorities to develop religious studies courses which reflect "particular views and belief systems" (Alberta Learning 2003a, January) for junior and senior high schools. These courses may teach a particular religion but at least 20 per cent of their content must address the comparative study of world religions. Although this option has primarily been utilised by Catholic and independent schools, public school authorities may also use, or approve the development of, these courses.

A local public school board can also "prescribe religious exercises for its students," if students are permitted to opt out (*School Act* s. 50(1)). Divergent practices have developed across the province. Calgary Board of Education, for example, adopted a policy officially banning prayer, while Edmonton Public Schools' board leaves this choice to individual schools.

Catholic Public Schools

The second structural arrangement allowing faith within a public school is the Catholic public school district where Catholics were the first to establish a school in a district. This option is impossible to use today because all districts now have public schools. Only one public district is Catholic today. The Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division was formed in 1995 with the amalgamation of existing Catholic public

districts in St. Albert, Morinville, and Legal, all founded as Catholic public districts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has with 7,701 students in 16 elementary schools and one high school.

De facto Reserved Public Schools for Geographically Concentrated Faith Groups

Faith-based schooling also occurs in public school systems when a board establishes informal, ad hoc arrangements with a geographically concentrated religious minority group to provide faith-based schooling tailored to that group. The Neerlandia Public Christian School, founded by a Calvinist Dutch farming community, has operated as a Christian public school since 1917 (Navis & Siebring-Wierenga, 1985, p. 714). Although it has operated as an alternative school since 1996, it maintains the character of a de facto reserved public school. Public school districts with high geographic concentrations of Mennonites have created three other faith-based de facto reserved public schools. In total, 450 students receive faith-based schooling in de facto reserved public schools.

De facto Reserved Hutterite Public Schools

A very unique form of de facto reserved schools is the Hutterite Colony schools, currently run by 24 of Alberta's 42 public districts. Hutterites are followers of the European Anabaptist reformer, Jakob Hutter, who started a separationist form of Christian living in 1528. They are Christian pacifists who reject most contemporary fashions, reject private property by living on communal farms where they hold all things in common, and believe in the full separation of church and state (Janzen, 1990; see Hostetler, 1974).

After facing difficulties in their latest location of the United States during WWI for speaking German and refusing military service, the Hutterites began moving to Canada in 1918 (Janzen, 1990, p. 9). The first Hutterite colony school in Alberta opened the same year. Historically, the government resisted direct legislative involvement with Hutterite schools, leaving each school district to accommodate the Hutterites through local agreements (Janzen, 1990, p. 148). A remarkably consistent pattern emerged. Public boards generally operate one school on each colony which they reserve exclusively for Hutterite students. These schools are small, ranging from 4 to 49 students and averaging 20.3

students per school. Hutterite Colony schools are taught in English by certified public school teachers who are most often not Hutterite. These schools are faith-based in the sense that they exclusively serve a single faith community, do so in accord with that group's views of separation from secular society, and allow before- and after- school classes in religion and German (Janzen, 1990). Male colony leaders teach these extra classes, and the materials used for German language instruction include "stories with strong moral messages, biblical scriptures, and Hutterite martyr ballads and other hymns dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries" (Hofer, 1998, p. 27).   Hutterite children generally receive schooling up to the eighth or ninth grade because Hutterite convictions lead parents to withdraw them at a young age. A total of 153 Hutterite colony public schools educate 3109 students.

De jure Reserved Public Schools

Another structural arrangement allowing forms of faith-based schooling to occur in public schools is unique to Alberta's Northland School Division. This division with only 26 schools, which covers over half of the geographical area of Alberta, primarily serves Aboriginal students. A Board of Trustees runs the district while each school also has a Local School Board Committee. The local board committee retains the power to "request the board to institute religious instruction" (Northlands School Division Act, 2000) and to nominate the teacher. This de jure protection for faith in particular schools is backed up by the right of local board committees to withdraw their school from the division if they feel inadequate provision for religious education has been made (Chalmers, 1985, p. 18).

   In 2001-2002, two of Northland's 26 schools opted to open with prayer and two offered Roman Catholic religious instruction. Three additional schools offered religious instructional programs in 2004-2005 (Annette Ramrattan, Superintendent of Schools, Northland School Division No. 61, personal communication, June 13, 2005). An estimated 661 students received faith-based schooling in de jure reserved public schools.

Alternative Faith-Based Programs Within Public Systems

A new type of arrangement allowing faith-based schooling in public systems is the alternative program. This arrangement constitutes a distinctive form of de jure reservation of schools for faith-based groups, in this case for minorities generally dispersed over a vast city or region. The first wave of faith-based alternative schools was started by the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) in 1978, with, eventually, two Jewish, two Logos Christian, and the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School. By 1983, however, a newly elected majority on CBE's board opposed faith-based alternatives and terminated the board's contracts with two Jewish and two Logos schools.

Initially, Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) was not particularly hospitable to faith-based alternative programs. In October 1975, EPS adopted the Talmud Torah School, a Jewish day school that had been operating as a private/independent school since 1912. This school had been started by Russian Jews who had fled persecution and were deeply committed to transmitting "the values, traditions and beliefs of their religion" to their children (Sweet, 1997, pp. 68). Although EPS officially considered it a "language school," Talmud Torah is described as "a Hebrew language school with a religious component" (Sweet p. 241). In the middle of Calgary's widely publicized conflict over religious alternatives, EPS adopted a policy excluding faith as a basis for alternative schools (Hop, 1982, p. 170).

THE EDMONTON MODEL: THE BLOSSOMING OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Ironically, Edmonton Public Schools has now gone the furthest of any provincial public system in using alternative faith-based programs. By 2001-2002, its policy had been reversed, allowing alternative programs in the areas of language and culture, subject matter, teaching philosophy, and religion (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001b). Edmonton Public ran alternative linguistic, academic, sports, girls-only, arts, and faith-based programs (Martin & Hiemstra, 2002). Faith-based alternative programs included eight Logos Christian programs (1,297 students), Edmonton Christian School (1,009 students), Millwoods Christian School (613 students), and Christian-based programming for home education. Other

cultural and language alternative programs also include religious or spiritual dimensions, e.g., Talmud Torah School and Aboriginal programs running in a variety of schools for different age groups. The Aboriginal programs often ensure "spirituality is a vital part of every day" (Amiskwaciy Academy, n.d.). Some bilingual language programs—16 French, 4 Arabic, 11 Chinese (Mandarin), 5 German, 1 Hebrew, 1 Spanish, 4 Ukrainian programs—teach their second language in a "way that children can be introduced to another country's culture" (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001a). The Arabic language program in Killarney Junior High, for example, offers an Islamic Studies Course (see Holubitsky, 2001) and students have opportunities to participate in "Killarney's Muslim Club activities" ("Arabic Program" n.d.).

Edmonton Public's alternative school practice has been dubbed the "Edmonton Model." *Time* magazine called it "the most imitated and admired public system in North America" (Catto, 2003, p. 82). This model grew out of key internal policy changes, including the elimination of school boundaries allowing student movement between schools, the introduction of site-based management, and opening up parental choice of programming (Dosdall, 2001). External historical factors encouraging the creation of this model were the 1988 amendment to the School Act s.16 (1a) overtly allowing religious alternative programs, unique district leadership, and competitive pressures brought on by the introduction of Charter school legislation in 1994.

FAITH-BASED ALTERNATIVES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

Today, most Alberta public boards offer some type of alternative programs and 10 of the 42 offer one or more faith-based alternative program. Elk Island Public Schools Regional Division, for example, offers numerous faith-based options utilised by 1,349 of its 16,244 students. In March 2004, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) loosened its prohibition against faith-based schooling when it adopted recommendations to introduce "curriculum related to world religion" (Calgary Board of Education, n.d) in high schools and to study the introduction of world religions in early grades. Even though CBE still refuses to "offer religious based alternative programs" (Calgary Board of

Education, n.d.), it officially funds the Salvation Army Children's Village, a school "motivated by Christian values and beliefs" and run for children with "emotional and behavioural difficulties" (Salvation Army, Alberta and Northern Territories Division, n.d.).

In 2001-2002, 5,886 students attended faith-based alternative programs in public schools. When students in other faith-based arrangements within the otherwise secular public districts are added, the total in faith-based public schooling increases to 10,106. Another 7,701 students attended faith-based schools in St. Albert's overtly Catholic public division (Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, 2007).

SEPARATE DENOMINATIONAL BOARDS

Separate denominational boards constitute a second type of public sector school authority that is constitutionally protected under the Alberta Act, 1905. Roman Catholic minorities opened the vast majority of separate denominational schools in the North West Territories, and later in Alberta. When Protestants were minorities in a district, they were entitled to open Protestant separate schools. Today, 17 of Alberta's 18 separate denominational systems are Catholic and one is nominally Protestant (St. Albert Protestant Schools, 2007).

Roman Catholic Separate Districts

Alberta law requires separate schools to have a denominational character, including offering formal religious education (Feehan, 2004). Although practices vary from district to district and school to school, common themes and emphases appear in Catholic schools. The Alberta Catholic School Trustee Association (ACSTA) says that in Catholic schools teachers work at "integrating faith into every instruction plan in every program" (ACSTA 1996a). ACSTA refers to the Vatican II [1965] document *Gravissimum Educationis*: "What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love"(ACSTA, 1996a). Furthermore, Catholic schools offer religious education (ACSTA, 1996a). ACSTA argues that schools and boards are meant to be Catholic, even on the administrative level (see ACSTA 1996a, pp. 4-5; ACSTA, 1996b; Ksiazek 1995). For the above reasons, many Catholics argue that

even school buildings ought to be separate (Howell & Olsen, 2002). Catholic boards legally may choose to hire only Catholic teachers and demand they conduct themselves in ways consistent with Catholic doctrine and moral teachings.[5] How Catholic schooling actually works in practice varies, depending on trustees, principals, teachers, and parents (see Clement, Doyle, & Mackie, 1994; Heustis, 2001; Unland, 2000).

Catholic Alternative Schools

A number of Catholic separate districts run alternative programs. These schools offer programs based on forms of plurality that crosscut but do not compete with the Catholic faith. Calgary Catholic, for example, runs alternative fine arts, language, and Aboriginal programs. An exception to the crosscutting plurality, however, occurred when Calgary Catholic partnered with two Jewish alternative schools after Calgary Board of Education (public) cancelled their contracts in 1983.

Protestant Separate Boards

The St. Albert Protestant School District is the sole surviving Protestant separate board. Although it now offers secular education, it runs two Logos Christian Education Programs that school 180 students (St. Albert Protestant Schools, 2002).

In 2001-2002, Alberta's Catholic separate denominational schools enrolled 120,483 students. When 180 students receiving faith-based schooling in Logos Christian programs in St. Albert Protestant District are added, a total of 120,663 students received faith-based schooling in separate denominational districts.

CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND SPIRITUALITY

Charter Schools constitute a third type of public sector school authority. In 1994, the School Act was amended to define charter schools as "a public school that provides a basic education in a different or enhanced way to improve student learning" (Alberta Learning, 2002a, p. 1). The government wanted only a small group of charter schools stressing a unique aspect of pedagogy, curriculum, or another focus to stimulate improvements in mainstream public and separate schools. Critics argued that charter schools were a strategy to marketise and privatise education

(Kachur, 1999; Robertson, Soucek, Pannu, & Schugurensky, 1995; Taylor & Benton-Evans, 2002). Structurally, however, charter boards must be non-profit and independently audited (Alberta Learning, 2002a, p. 3). They are eligible for the same per pupil funding from the province as other public schools but may not charge tuition fees (Alberta Learning, 2002a, pp. 1-2). Charter schools cannot deny access to any student. They must be operated by boards that ensure they comply with "charter board policies and the terms of the charter, as well as provincial legislation, regulation and policies" (Alberta Learning, 2002a, p. 3).

Charter schools are the only category of school explicitly prohibited by the School Act from being "religious in nature" (Alberta Learning, 2002a, p. 2). They are included in this study because several existing charter schools clearly demonstrate the difficulty of fully excluding religion from schools that celebrate distinct cultures.

The Mother Earth's Children's Charter School in Stoney Plain Alberta, for example, opened in September of 2003 to provide traditional Aboriginal education. The school's website denies it is religious, although its mission includes having students "discover the gifts given to them by the Creator and to foster a balance of their Spiritual, Intellectual, Physical, and Emotional selves" (Mother Earth's Children's Charter School, n.d.b). The website further states, "Smudge and prayer will take place in each classroom each morning to begin the day with positive energy" (Mother Earth's Children's Charter School, n.d. p. a; also see Holubitsky, 2003). This case illustrates how the wholism of Aboriginal worldviews can conflict with the Western bias that assumes certain areas of life can be free from religion (Vandevelde, 2000). In the same vein, the Almadina Charter School, established in Calgary in 1996 as an 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) charter school serving a predominately Arab and Muslim new-immigrant community, has raised public questions about its religious character. In his study of the school, R. J. Angus (2000) found many parents do see the school as Muslim, but he concludes that this is a mistaken belief and that ESL is the real basis of the school (p. 85).

Ten charter schools educated 2,870 students in 2001-2002, but none officially offer faith-based schooling.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND FAITH

The regional francophone school authority is a fourth type of public sector school authority overtly recognised by the Alberta government. Notably, francophone school authorities are fundamentally different from the French immersion programs offered in 174 public, separate, and independent schools in 2002-2003 (Alberta Learning, 2003d) because French immersion is designed for non-French students. In *Mahe v. Alberta* (1990), the Supreme Court of Canada ordered Alberta to provide first-language francophone communities with parent-controlled French schooling where numbers warranted. The intent of the regional francophone school authority structure created in 1993 is to "provide a schooling experience built around francophone language, culture and community" in order "to help correct the linguistic and cultural erosion suffered by students and the community" (Alberta Learning 2001, p. 11). Although the province funds them, additional federal funding is also available.

Significantly, francophone authorities are legally entitled to determine the denomination of their schools, and they may govern both denominational and non-denominational schools (Alberta Learning, 2001, p. 36; also see Alberta, 2000, s.199). Of the five francophone authorities, three overtly refer to the Catholic character of their system.[6] However, not all schools within a Catholic francophone authority explicitly state their commitment to Catholicism in their published mission and vision. Furthermore, because other options do not exist for non-Catholic francophone students, the Catholic francophone schools welcome students of other faiths. The schools typically allow students to be exempted from their 80 to 120 minute-per-week Catholic religion courses (École des Beaux-Lacs, n.d.).

In 2001-2002, seven of the sixteen schools representing 1,656 of 3,279 students in Alberta's five Francophone divisions overtly mention Catholicism in their mission or vision. Six additional schools that do not claim a Catholic identity operate within a division that does.

COOPERATIVELY FEDERATED SCHOOL AUTHORITIES

Although not mentioned in the School Act, a fifth type of school authority that has evolved in Alberta essentially constitutes a co-

operative federation of public and separate school authorities. The St. Paul Education Regional Division is the only case. Instead of amalgamating with equivalent boards in geographically distant communities, the St. Paul [Catholic] public district, Glen Avon Protestant Separate, and the County of St. Paul federated as a joint board composed of these three parties.

In 1995, St. Paul Education Regional Division ran dual track French/English Catholic schools, a single track Protestant Elementary school, a four-track Protestant/French, Protestant/English, Catholic/French, Catholic/English high school, eight county schools, two Hutterite and one Mennonite school (see Feehan, 2003). Since 2000, however, some of the co-operating boards have questioned whether their Separate Protestant and Public Catholic constitutional rights are properly protected in the existing co-operative federation. A solution is being designed that would reconstitutionalize this arrangement by protecting the right to preferential hiring, designate schools as Catholic, Protestant, or other, and set out guidelines for supervising each type of school (Feehan, 2003).

In 2001-2002, 975 students attended St. Paul's three Catholic schools, 510 attended the Protestant separate school, 35 attended the two Hutterite schools, 98 a Mennonite School, and another 1,972 students were schooled in secular public schools. Catholic students make up 55-60 per cent of the shared high school's 434 students and can access specially tailored Catholic programs (J. Champagne, personal communication, July 2003). Thus, a total of 1,868 students received faith-based schooling in this co-operative federation of public and separate school authorities.

INDEPENDENT OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND FAITH

Although not considered a public sector school authority, the government has officially recognised and partially funded independent or private school authorities. Over 250 private school authorities exist, although the vast majority operate only a single school. In 2001-2002, they educated about 4 per cent of Alberta students. Only 107 of Alberta's 327 independent schools were faith-based. The others were either Early Childhood Services or kindergartens, special needs, philosophical, or academic schools (Private schools belie stereotypes, 2001). Various other

independent schools are aimed at Aboriginal students, particularly young adults wanting to complete high school.[7] On average, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) reports that most independent schools receive approximately 40 per cent of the overall per-pupil funding given to the public sector authorities (AISCA, 2005).

Faith-based independent schools understand the role of faith in schooling in a variety of different ways, ranging from religious observances, morality, religion courses, to permutation and the integration of faith and schooling. In 2001-2002, fourteen of the 107 faith-based independent schools belonged to the Calvinist-oriented Prairie Association of Christian Schools, also known as Christian Schools International (PACS, 2005) and served 3,150 students. The Association of Christian Schools International, an evangelical grouping, lists 22 schools with a total of 5,845 students (ACSI n.d.). Three schools enrolling 1,218 students were members of both associations. The Alberta Provincial Accelerated Christian Education Association, using a conservative Christian program of studies designed in the United States, has seven member schools with 1,157 students (see ACE, nd.). There are 11 Seventh Day Adventist Schools with 776 students, five Lutheran schools with 641 students, six non-PACS Calvinist schools with 1,237 students, two Mennonite schools with 214 students, and nine other Protestant schools with 1,164 students. There are three independent Jewish Schools (451 students), two Islamic Schools (1,002 students), and a Punjabi Cultural school (Sikh) (34 students). Interestingly, there are also seven independent Catholic schools (e.g. Bosco Homes Society for Children and Adolescents) with 423 students (see Catholic Canada, n.d.; Gonzalez, 1999).

In additional to the above schools, which are accredited and receive partial public funding, a number of independent schools are classified by government as registered and are neither funded nor accredited. They still must allow monitoring by the Minister (see Alberta Learning, 2002b, pp. 3-5). The ten registered schools that are faith-based are Mennonite and educate 367 students.

Finally, Early Childhood Services (ECS, or kindergarten) may be run separately from existing schools. Ten of these free-standing ECS

programs are faith-based, independent schools. They educate another 233 students in Mennonite, Salvation Army, and Khalsa (Sikh) schools.

In 2001-2002, 17,908 of the 28,851 independent school students received a faith-based schooling. Thus, 32.7 per cent of Alberta's independent schools deliver some form of faith-based schooling to 62 per cent of the independent school students.

HOME EDUCATION, DISTANCE LEARNING, AND FAITH

The government recognises home education, an education program offered to a student by a parent, as an official part of the Alberta school system. In 1988, the School Act was amended to clarify the legal status of home schooling and to enable parents to affiliate with the local school board or an authority outside their home district. Since 1983, the government has offered per-pupil grants for home education, which are generally split between the family and the affiliated board (Wagner, 1998, p. 219). To complicate matters, however, home education may also be delivered as blended home education. For example, home education can be combined with a school-provided program delivered and evaluated by a teacher employed by a school board or accredited private school or with an "on-line program," that is, "a program offered by a school delivered electronically at a school site or off-campus, under the instruction and complete supervision of a certified teacher of a board or accredited private school"(Alberta Learning, 2003c).

The majority of parents choosing home education do so, at least in part, for religious reasons. Gerald Hiebert, president of the Alberta Home Education Association, noted in 2000 that "Parents practising fundamental and evangelical religions are by far the largest group to opt for home schooling" ("Number of Alberta's," 2000). A recent study of home education in Canada (Van Pelt, 2003) confirms this observation, showing that just over 83 per cent of home schooling parents chose "Protestant Christian" as their religious preference. An additional 9.5 per cent were Roman Catholic while a smaller percentage preferred Buddhist, Jew, Latter-Day Saint, Muslim, and New Age (p. 40).

Remarkably, several public school boards register and offer resources for faith-based home education. The Edmonton Public Schools' Argyll Centre, for example, offers faith-based home education programs

on the internet (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001-2002), as does the Pembina School District's Alberta Distance Learning Centre (Alberta Distance Learning Centre, n.d.). Catholic home schoolers can turn for services to agencies, such as, the St. Gabriel Cyber school, a joint initiative of St. Albert, Red Deer, and Medicine Hat Catholic Boards with 184 students (St. Gabriel Cyber School, n.d.), or the School of Hope, a Catholic distance learning program serving 1,792 students.

In 2001-2002, 13,076 students received home education either exclusively or as blended home education (Alberta Learning 2003c). These students are counted as receiving faith-based schooling only if they registered with a faith-based school in this study because provincial statistics place these students under the school authority with which they registered.

ABORIGINAL ON-RESERVE SCHOOLS AND FAITH

Schooling of Aboriginal students in Canada has a complex and often sad history. In particular, the damage done by residential schools, often run by churches and religious orders, is well documented (Miller, 2001). There are 44 First Nations, in three treaty areas, within Alberta. They are divided among 124 reserves across the province ("First Nations," 2001). In 2001-2002, 48 federally funded schools for Aboriginal students on reserves in Alberta educated over 8,500 students. The local First Nation band council operates these schools on reserves under the legal auspices of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (Krasaukas, 2004).

The federal government has exclusive right to legislate for Indians under the *Constitution Act, 1867*, S91 (p. 24). The provisions for the schooling of Aboriginal peoples, set out in the subsequent *Indian Act 1876*, allowed for Protestant and Roman Catholic schools on reserves (s. 118, 120, 121) and offered parents limited religious choice. The majority of a band could "determine the religious denomination of teachers in the reserve school, but the religious minority may establish a separate school if the minister approves" (Bezeau, 2006, chap.5, n.p.). Today, most reserve schools are non-denominational (Chalmers 1972).

The First Nations students attending off reserve schools under provincial jurisdiction in 2001-2002 are included in the numbers for the

above seven authorities. The Edmonton Public School Board, for example, estimated in 2002 that between eight and ten thousand Aboriginal students attend its schools (Simons, 2002). Some attend faith-based alternative programs. Edmonton Catholic also runs a number of programs aimed at Aboriginal students, such as Ben Calf Robe School (see Hryciuk, 2001). The remaining 8,556 Aboriginal students attended on-reserve First Nations schools in 2001-2002. Although most are nondenominational schools, several offer elements of faith-based schooling according to traditional Aboriginal spirituality as well as various Christian views.

CONCLUSION

The Alberta school system has become structurally pluriform, a system of systems that includes eight categories of school authority. Out of three million citizens, 551,156 Alberta students attended schools run by school authorities fully recognised and fully funded by the province, including 414,006 students in public schools, 126,977 with separate denominational school boards, 3,279 in francophone schools, 2,870 students enrolled in charter schools, and 4,024 students studying under the co-operative federation of public and separate school authorities. Another 20,842 students attended independent schools qualifying for partial funding, while 13,076 students received partially funded home education. Finally, another 8,556 Aboriginal students attended federally funded, First Nations schools on reserves across Alberta. This pluriformity of structures is deepened further by several mechanisms that some systems use to enable further faith-based school choice. Although this choice often occurs in an ad hoc manner, forms of faith-based schooling may be practised legally in all types of authorities except charter schools.

In addition to this structural pluriformity, Alberta's school system also features a plurality of faiths expressed alongside other types of diversity. Currently, Alberta schools allow Aboriginal, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, as well as other faiths and philosophies to offer forms of faith-based schooling. In 2001-2002, 159,206 Alberta students received some form of faith-based education in Alberta. Of these, 131,488 participated in Catholic programs.[8] A further 27,718 students attended non-Catholic faith-based schools and programs.

Overall, 27.1 per cent of Alberta's students received some form of faith-based schooling.

Alberta's 1905 model of non-sectarian public schooling with minority denominational districts has been transformed gradually to better accommodate the diversity living within the province. As a result, the system can no longer be characterised by its former thrust to assimilate citizens into one or two approved faiths or philosophies. Indeed, Alberta's system uses elements of, and mechanisms from, all four of Canada's historic models of organising faith, church, state, and schooling. The result constitutes a new pragmatic pluriform public model.

Reasons for the development of this model are neither immediately transparent nor simple. Future studies should examine the influence of Alberta's early multicultural diversity on the ability of its dominant Anglo-Protestant community to fully shape the school system in the assimilating directions it sought during the late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth century. Changes within the dominant liberal public philosophy within Canada, such as "ethical liberalism" (Manzer. 1994, p. 14) and the "choice enhancement state" (Koyzis. 2003, p. 60), seem to have led some to increasingly question the use of state power for imposing a single worldview on all citizens through common schools. Furthermore, the Alberta government's commitment to a competitive market model for schooling may, in our view, have unintentionally opened up windows for increased faith-based school choice. Finally, the peculiar characteristics of Alberta's original denominational school settlement, whereby some public schools became Catholic and some separate schools became Protestant, made it functionally difficult to impose a secular public system on all when this became an increasingly popular option in the 1970s. The legal reality of Catholic public schools and Protestant separate schools may have served to retain the legal degrees of freedom in Alberta needed to introduced mechanisms for faith-based school choice in public schools, when the drive to fully secularise diminished during the 1990s.

The meaning of the advent of a *pragmatic pluriform public model* in Alberta is also complex and raises difficult questions. Should religious plurality and organisational pluriformity be properly considered

political or social benefits, or are they problems that threaten social cohesion and therefore need to be overcome? May a state use coercive and assimilatory mechanisms in school systems to generate social cohesion within a religiously, philosophically, and culturally plural society? Because increasing numbers and types of religions and philosophies are found within Canada, is a pluriform public model for schooling the most tolerant and just means of accommodating this plurality? What are the educational conditions required for the peaceful coexistence of citizens in a diverse state? What is the significance of educational plurality for traditional Canadian conceptions and practices of multiculturalism, minority rights, religious freedom, and so on? How will a pluriform public model impact on educational administration, pedagogical and curricular development, school law, and Charter rights? Is the pragmatic character of Alberta's public pluriformity an advantage or disadvantage? Do issues of financial fairness, administrative plurality, and parental control over the fundamental direction of their schools require further principled elaboration and development of this model? The advent of increased faith-based school choice within Alberta's new pluriform public system should push these and other questions onto the priority list for future research and study.

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NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise noted, we have drawn data for this study from "Student Population by Grade, School and Authority, Alberta: 2001-2002 School Year," Information Services Branch, Alberta Learning, 2003. Faith-based components of schools were analysed using published, internet, and limited personal-interview data.

[2] *The Alberta School Act* defines *school* as "a structured learning environment through which an education program is offered to a student by: a board, an operator of a private school, an early childhood services program private operator, a parent giving a home education program, or the Minister."

Alberta. (2000 s.1(1y)).

[3] Although we argue that religious or equivalent philosophic worldviews shape the practices of all schools, faith-based schools are identified in this study as schools that specifically profess a religious faith.

[4] See Bezeau's (1995) similar typology, chapter 3, p. 27.

[5] On employment practices of denominational schools see Casagrande v. Hinton (1987); Caldwell v. Stuart (1984); Daly v. Ontario (1999); and Glenn and de Groof (2002 p. 173)

. [6] See Conseil Scolaire Catholique et Francophone du Sud du l'Alberta (n.d.); Conseil Scolaire Centre-Est (n.d.); and Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord (n.d.).

[7] For details and statistics on Alberta's independent schools see AISCA, 2005, AISCA, n.d, and Alberta Learning Professional Development and Certification Branch, cited in AISCA, 2002. Daune Plantinga, Executive Director of AISCA, provided helpful information, statistics, and perspectives on independent schools in Alberta.

[8] The Catholic student total includes: Greater St. Albert Catholic [Public] Schools (7,701), separate Catholic districts (120,483), Catholic students in St. Paul's cooperatively federated system (975 elementary and about 250 secondary), Catholic Francophone authorities (1,656), and Catholic independent schools (423).

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