davantage sur l'acquisition cognitive, rationnelle et objective des connaissances et des notions relatives au catéchisme. » (p. 145).

Il reste beaucoup de choses à vérifier à partir de là. Retrouverait-on les mêmes différences en examinant d'autres congrégations, en faisant porter l'analyse sur d'autres matières scolaires? Le champ de recherche est ouvert. En tout cas, ce livre vient conforter ceux qui croient que le renouveau pédagogique n'a pas commencé avec le rapport Parent ou avec la série *Viens vers le Père* (1963). Mais il va plus loin. Il montre qu'il y a renouveau et renouveau : certains ne changent que l'enveloppe, la présentation, alors que d'autres visent au coeur du contenu.

Le livre est bien écrit, sans faute d'orthographe (un exploit pour l'édition québécoise !), bien illustré; on déplorera cependant l'absence d'une photo de soeur Saint-Ladislas. Autre regret : l'A. n'aurait-elle pas pu recourir à des sources orales? Mais ne boudons pas notre plaisir : ce livre nous fait réfléchir, et sur l'essentiel. Une étude intelligente, vous disais-je.

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Elmer J. Thiessen. *In Defence of Religious Schools and Colleges.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Pp. 368.

Egerton Ryerson, arguably called the father of Canada's English-speaking school system, advanced in Upper Canada a provincially controlled public school system that was to be free and compulsory, one that promoted social stability and was "non-sectarian" Protestant. In his well-known 1846 *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada*, Ryerson asserted the *"absolute necessity of making Christianity the basis and the cement of the structure of public education"* (p. 32; italics Ryerson's).

But Ryerson's vision failed in at least two respects. First, he was forced to allow Catholic schools to exist alongside the more common Protestant ones – and to fund them up to grade 10 from general taxation revenues. Second, the Protestant Christian basis of the public school system gradually yielded, first to a Judeo-Christian morality and then, by the end of the twentieth century, to a secularism that avoided the consideration and study of religion.

Educational leaders, backed by the courts, held that in the pluralistic society that Canada had become, only a secular approach would not give offence to the broad spectrum of religious views represented in the public schools.

Religiously based schools never disappeared from the Canadian scene, however. In British Columbia, although Catholic schools existed since the province joined Confederation in 1871, no government funding of religiously based schools was available until 1977. But Mennonite, Christian Reformed, Seventh Day Adventist, and other evangelical Protestant Christian schools blossomed in the second half of the twentieth century. These were complemented by Jewish schools and, more recently, by schools guided by the Islamic and Sikh faiths. In the past decade in Alberta, religiously based schools have become alternatives within the public school system. Ironically, the increasing number of religious schools can be attributed at least in part to the increasing secularization of most Canadian public schools.

Supporters of religious schools uphold the United Nations-backed principle that parents have the prior right to determine the type of schools that their children attend. By excluding religion, they claim, public schools have become anti-religious since they neglect faith in the transcendent as an important dimension of life. Opponents, on the other hand, have accused religious schools of being divisive, intolerant, and indoctrinating. Especially when provincial governments have considered changing the financial or structural arrangements for independent schools, the debates surrounding these issues have been heated – and have often involved both questionable claims and dubious logic.

Elmer Thiessen's carefully argued book defending the existence of religiously based schools and colleges is, therefore, a welcome addition to this debate. It should facilitate a more reasoned discussion between proponents and opponents of religious schooling. Thiessen's basic thesis is that since schooling cannot be neutral or value-free, a uniform state system is inherently illiberal and undemocratic. Therefore, a government monopoly that upholds uniform schooling is a violation of religious freedom. He argues, instead, for an educational pluralism where schools balance initiation into a particular worldview tradition with an appreciation of those universal values without which democratic societies cannot function.

Thiessen reaches this conclusion after using most of his book to defend religious schools and colleges against specific charges. Almost every chapter deals with one specific, common accusation

against religious schooling. These include allegations that such institutions promote divisiveness, cultivate intolerance, allow parents to override the rights and needs of the state, violate academic freedom, undermine the principle of separation of church and state, advance elitism, indoctrinate their students, encourage censorship, and foster fundamentalist fanaticism. While refuting each accusation on both empirical and analytic grounds, Thiessen emphasizes that he is defending the principle of religious schooling, and not making "a blanket defence of all religious schools and colleges" (p. 5).

A public school teacher, Thiessen cannot be accused of being a right-wing fundamentalist. He asserts that religious fanaticism, including intolerance for diverse points of view in the schools, "is wrong, and deserves universal condemnation" (p. 183). He adds that religious schools and colleges must be strong advocates of the virtue of tolerance. They must help students look at other people and other worldviews with deep respect, without regard to the particular beliefs they hold. They must teach students to be tolerant without weakening their commitment, but at the same time, combine commitment to truth with cognitive humility and with openly living with a degree of uncertainty.

Thiessen argues that making exclusive truth claims does not necessarily lead to fanaticism. He presents evidence that "devout Christians are more open-minded and tolerant than the average citizen" (p. 189). He contends that initiation into some kind of worldview is inevitable in education, and that the danger to society is not so much an education for commitment as is education that leads to students believing in nothing very deeply at all. Thiessen concludes that government-endorsed pluralism in the schools should parallel the pluralism we experience generally in Canadian society.

That does not mean that Thiessen is a libertarian with respect to schooling. Indeed, he opposes for-profit privatization of schooling. He argues that while parents have the right to choose the basic direction of schooling for their children, the state will always have an important role to play. Governments, he says, must set standards, ensure that children receive a minimal level of education, including basic competencies for functioning in a liberal democracy, and protect children from neglect or abuse.

Thiessen's careful and even painstaking reasoning throughout the book represents a major contribution to the current debates about choice in schooling. Yet at times I wish he had gone several steps further. In the chapter on tolerance, for instance, he fails to

consider the limits on tolerance or how tolerance can flourish in a society only if that society as a whole upholds certain basic values such as veracity, responsibility, and compassion. He also fails to deal with the difficult question of where we draw the line and forbid certain types of religious schools to operate in a democratic society (for example, those that openly foster racial superiority or civil violence, or do not tolerate opposing points of view).

Throughout the book, Thiessen addresses the question of pluralism. In the end, he argues, Enlightenment liberalism as well as postmodernism undermine true pluralism. His alternative is to search for reconciliation between individualistic modernism and communitarian postmodernism, a so-called "middle ground." But here Thiessen glosses over the fact that the basic worldviews represented by liberal modernism and constructivist postmodernism may well be incompatible and cannot be "reconciled." What Thiessen calls a "middle way" may well have to be quite a different third way, perhaps related to critical realism, but needing to be worked out in more depth.

Most of Thiessen's lines of reasoning are not new. The value of his book is that the arguments for and against religious schooling are all brought together in one volume, and that Thiessen's meticulous analysis builds a compelling case for the existence and funding of religiously based schools. If you believe that the state has an obligation to uphold a uniform public school system in order to ensure the health of our democratic society, you will not likely agree with Thiessen's conclusions. Nevertheless, you will benefit from his arguments and be able to enter the debate in a more informed and responsible way.

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Marlene Shore, ed. *The Contested Past: Reading Canada's History – Selections from the Canadian Historical Review.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 353.

The Contested Past is a collection of excerpts from articles, letters to the editor, and Notes and Comments from the *Canadian Historical Review (CHR)*, the flagship journal of the Canadian historical profession, since the journal's inception in 1920. The