Abstract

The issue of intolerance is increasingly being brought to our attention. (See, for example, a recent publication by Jay Newman, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). A task force recently appointed by the Government of Alberta in response to the Keegstra affair was assigned to study the problem of intolerance within our education system and in our society generally. The committee's report gives expression to a very commonly held position, namely, that the key to fostering tolerance in a society is to maintain a strong and uniform public school system, and that the proliferation of private/alternative/separate schools will foster intolerance in our society.

The purpose of this article is to refute this belief by clarifying the concept of "tolerance," uncovering some problematic assumptions underlying the opposition to educational pluralism, and considering relevant empirical evidence.

Résumé

De plus en plus de nos jours, on attire notre attention sur le problème de l'intolérance. (À titre d'exemple, voir la publication récente de Jay Newman, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982). Un groupe de travail récemment constitué par le gouvernement de l'Alberta à la suite de l'affaire Keegstra s'est vu confier las tâche d'étudier le problème de l'intolérance dans la province au sein du systéme d'èducation et de la société en général.

Le rapport de ce groupe de travail exprime une position très répandue selon laquelle seul un système d'éducation public fort et uniforme favoriserait le développement d'un esprit de tolérance alors que la prolifération d'écoles dites privées, "alternatives" ou séparées encouragerait l'intolérance dans la société.

Dans son article, l'auteur veut réfuter cette assertion populaire en clarifiant le concept de "tolérance", en exposant certaines suppositions problématiques qui sous-tendent l'opposition au pluralisme en éducation et en considérant une évidence empirique sur les attitudes que développent les écoles privées "alternatives".

Elmer John Thiessen*

EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM AND TOLERANCE[1]

The problem of racial and religious intolerance is increasingly being brought to our attention today. In an important recently published book, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance* (1982), Jay Newman warns against thinking that religious intolerance is something that has disappeared with the crusades and the holy wars of long ago. Newman maintains that religious intolerance is "a grave social problem." It actually "thrives" in some places (Newman, 1982, pp. 162, 172). There would seem to be indications that intolerance is in fact growing in many countries of the world.

* Medicine Hat College (Alberta)

There would also seem to be a growing interest today in cultural diversity and ethnicity (Pratte, 1978, p. 147; Harris, 1982, p. 223; Greeley, 1974). The demands relating to cultural diversity and ethnicity have been particularly troublesome for educational policy-makers (Pratte, 1978, p. 147). Thus we find that our schools are increasingly being challenged to take into account cultural diversity and ethnicity as well as to take on the task of fostering tolerance which is essential in coping with the phenomena of cultural diversity and ethnicity (Joyce, 1982).

There is, further, a renewed sensitivity concerning the structure of our educational institutions and the question as to which kind of structure might best foster tolerance in a society. It is often maintained that a uniform and state-maintained system of education is the best way to bring about a greater level of tolerance. On the other hand, it is frequently argued that independent schools, particularly those whose independence is defined and justified in terms of different religious/philosophical orientations, foster intolerance.

This commonly-held position has a long history. John Dewey, for example, who is in many ways the father of North American education, was very much concerned about the divisiveness of smaller associations within a society, and thus he defended the public school as a means of providing "a wider and better balanced environment" in which there would be an "intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions and unlike customs" (Dewey, 1916, pp. 25-27). More recently, Paul Hirst (1985) has objected to separate schools because "such schools necessarily encourage social fragmentation in the society along religious lines." The education in such schools "is likely to be ghetto-istic, concerned to preserve the tradition against other possibilities, favoring a large measure of social isolation and possibly indifference, even hostility, towards others" (Hirst, 1985, pp. 16-17).

This position is also maintained in two recent government reports, one published in Great Britain by the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (1985), and the second published in the Canadian province of Alberta by the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding (1984a). The British report, also and hereinafter referred to as the Swann Report, does not specifically introduce the notion of tolerance, but it does argue generally for the position that independent religious schools are dangerous and that, given the pluralism of British society, there is a need to give all students a common educational experience.[2] The issue of tolerance is, however, specifically addressed in the Alberta report of the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding, hereinafter referred to as the Alberta Report or Committee, or simply the Committee. The Alberta Committee repeatedly cautions against the proliferation of independent religious schools and lauds the virtues of a strong and state-maintained system of education, which is described as providing "the best armor against unacceptable intolerance, lack of understanding, discrimination and stereotyping" (Committee, 1984a, p. 19).[3] I believe the Alberta Report reflects many of the dimensions of the more generally held position concerning the relation between educational pluralism and tolerance and thus will concentrate mainly on this report as the context in which the widely-held position concerning the cause of intolerance and its cure will be criticized.

It should be noted that the focus of this paper has been very deliberately narrowed to the specific question: Is there a connection between educational pluralism and intolerance? There are obviously other important factors that must be taken into account when evaluating the issue of educational pluralism, such as the rights of the child, parents, and society at large, as well as the difficult question as to the proper balance between these various rights. Economic considerations have also become a major issue in the debate over educational pluralism. Then there is the important

question as to whether independent religious schools can fulfill the objectives of true education or whether they only indoctrinate. These and other issues which need to be dealt with in an overall assessment of the merits of educational pluralism have been examined elsewhere and will not be dealt with here (See for example Aspin, 1983; Coons & Sugarman, 1978; Hirst, 1985; McLaughlin, 1984; Manley-Casimir, 1982; Thiessen, 1982, 1984).

Neither will this paper consider the important question of tolerance as a virtue or as an educational aim (See Horton & Mendus, 1985; Joyce, 1982). I am interested in critically evaluating the above position from a liberal point of view where tolerance is considered to be a virtue and where its cultivation is considered to be an important educational aim of schools in a liberal democratic society. The main thrust of this paper will be to examine the concept of tolerance with a view to correcting some misconceptions that underlie the belief that educational pluralism leads to intolerance. This will then provide a basis for a review of some empirical and related arguments for and against the claim that the existence of independent religious schools promotes intolerance in a society.

The Concept of Tolerance

In discussing a possible causal relationship between educational pluralism and intolerance, it is of the utmost importance, first of all, to be clear about the meaning of intolerance. It will be argued that the position that the existence and growth of independent schools creates intolerance in a society rests on basic misconceptions concerning the nature of intolerance. Drawing on the work of Preston King (1976), Jay Newman (1982), and Peter Nicholson (1985), I wish to develop a more adequate notion of the concept of intolerance.

The Alberta Report devotes only two short sentences to the elucidation of the concept of tolerance and its opposite.

> Tolerance means a respectful attitude to others and to their inherently human right to hold opposing viewpoints even though one may not agree with those viewpoints.
>
> Intolerance is not the disagreement of one person with another, but is the damning of one person or group by another and the intent to subject that person or group to suffering. (Committee, 1984a, p. 3)

Although this description claims to be talking about tolerance generally, it quickly becomes apparent that it is dealing with the narrower concept of religious intolerance. The general notion of tolerance can refer to persons, beliefs, or actions. It is, as Newman (1982, p. 7) points out, the element of belief that makes religious tolerance more complex than other forms of tolerance. The Committee's description focusses on the belief component of religious intolerance when it refers to the problem of holding "opposing viewpoints," or of having "disagreement of one person with another." What follows will focus primarily on this narrower concept of religious intolerance rather than the concept of intolerance generally.

The notion of tolerance first of all presupposes deviance and disapproval. Tolerance involves "an attitude towards something that is not liked, loved, respected or approved of" (Newman, 1982, p. 6). Religious tolerance, therefore, presupposes that one finds the religous beliefs and practices of others objectionable.

It should further be noted that the subject of the deviation and disapproval which calls for tolerance must not be considered trivial (Nicholson, 1985, p. 160). If the subject is trivial, it may be ignored, but indifference must not be confused with intolerance, as is pointed out by various

writers (King, 1978, p. 56; Joyce, 1982, p. 177). The tolerant person must care a lot about what is tolerated. It matters. This also rules out cases where one is uncertain about the objectionableness of the item implicated (King, 1976, pp. 25f). Religious tolerance, therefore, only exists where one is quite sure that one strongly disapproves of the religious beliefs, attitudes and behavior of those being tolerated.

The way we should respond to that with which we disagree brings us to another essential feature of tolerance. Newman puts it thus: "Tolerance involves tolerating, that is, accepting, enduring, bearing, putting up with; it involves acceptance in the sense of refraining from any strong reaction to the thing in question" (Newman, 1982, p. 6). The Alberta Report, therefore, correctly observes that "tolerance [i.e. religious tolerance] means a respectful attitude to others and to their inherently human right to hold opposing viewpoints" (Committee, 1984a, p. 3). We must be careful, however, not to limit our considerations to the religious beliefs alone. Religious tolerance also entails that we will endure, put up with, certain kinds of religious behavior, attitudes, etc.

Some of the terms introduced by Newman are admittedly vague, though I suspect some degree of vagueness is probably unavoidable. We should, however, try to spell out what it means to refrain from any strong reaction or exercise of power to suppress. Newman attempts to become more precise by defining a strong reaction as one which involves the use of force: "violence, threats, deception" (Newman, 1982, p. 18). Newman seems to have three different kinds of force in mind — physical force, i.e., violence; psychological force, i.e. threats, and epistemological force, i.e., deception. The Alberta Report can also be interpreted as referring to these three kinds of force when it objects to causing a person or a group to suffer, the damning of a person or a group and the making of unfair or inaccurate judgements (Committee, 1984a, pp. 3, 69). Much more could be done to clarify the notion of force, but this will have to suffice. Religious intolerance, therefore, will be understood to mean an attitude which refuses to accept, to endure, to bear, to put up with someone's holding and expressing or acting on contrary religious beliefs which one considers to be significantly inferior to one's own religious or irreligious beliefs. Stated in the affirmative, a religiously intolerant person reacts too strongly to another person's religious opinions and behavior and seeks to hurt him/her physically, psychologically or by distorting his or her religious position.

But is Newman's two-sided response (i.e., accepting and refraining from any strong reaction) all that is required in order to describe a person as religiously tolerant? There are some who would argue that tolerance has another more positive requirement build into it. For example, if I merely bear, endure, or put up with Hindus living in my city, and even allow them to build a temple, and if I refrain from other forcible means to stop the spread of Hinduism, but if I otherwise ignore them and refuse to even associate with them, am I really a tolerant person? Do we not also expect some positive attitudes such as liking or affection, and even some outward expressions of love towards Hindus? Here we must be careful not to demand too much, for example, that the tolerant person cultivate friendships with all Hindus in the city, because clearly that is not possible, even with those of a person's own faith. We must also be careful not to make the requirements of tolerance too demanding so as to obliterate the first feature of tolerance discussed above, involving the elements of deviance and disapproval.

Here it needs to be stressed that there are two essential features of tolerance which seem to be contradictory. What is tolerated is both rejected and accepted. Newman therefore describes tolerance as "half-hearted; it is the acceptance in one sense of something one does not accept in another

sense'' (Newman, 1982, p. 5). Newman's description also points the way to resolving the apparent paradox inherent in the notion of tolerance. Although we reject the item in question, we refrain from any strong reaction in the light of some other priorities such as the value of the freedom of religion generally (King, 1976, pp. 27ff).

In response to those who maintain that acceptance in the sense of refraining from any strong reaction is not enough, that we need to add some more positive requirements to the acceptance pole of tolerance, it needs to be pointed out that tolerance is very much a matter of degree (King, 1978, pp. 51ff). Acceptance can be at a minimal or maximal level, though the maximal level must never be defined in terms of complete acceptance, as this would eliminate the rejection pole of tolerance. We must also keep in mind that an item can be accepted on different levels. I may choose to associate with a person at some levels, such as in business, but not at other levels such as the home, the club, and the church (King, 1978, p. 53). At each of these levels, one can tolerate in different degrees. Thus, we always need to inquire into what area and to what degree a tolerator is tolerant (King, 1978, p. 53). For the purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that religious tolerance requires some positive attitude and expression of love towards those one is tolerating. Again we cannot pursue the clarification of these difficult notions of liking, affection and love, but I think they are sufficiently clear to make sense of this requirement of tolerance.

There is one final aspect of the notion of tolerance that needs to be dealt with. A complicating aspect of tolerance is that ''there are certain actions in our society such as bigotry and racism that a society should not tolerate'', and thus tolerance is ''not always understood as a praiseworthy act or virtue'' (Committee, 1984b, p. 3; Newman, 1982, p. 6). Thus, there are limits to tolerance (Nicholson, 1985, pp. 169f). We can only require that a tolerant person tolerate that which is acceptable from a moral point of view. We cannot and should not be tolerant of a religion that condones the sacrifice of infants, for example.

We turn now to some basic misconceptions underlying the position being evaluated in this paper. The first misconception concerning tolerance, that is at least implicit in the Alberta Report and that is often made explicitly by those charging that independent schools foster intolerance, involves the suggestion that separation in and of itself entails intolerance. Here we must be careful to distinguish between two different claims. Most often, it is claimed that the existence of independent schools *causes* intolerance. This is an empirical claim. Those making the claim often go on to make another quite different claim, a conceptual claim, which they seldom distinguish from the first, namely that independent or private schools by their very nature are intolerant because they are separate. This comes out most clearly in a quotation from a County Board of Education which is included in the final Alberta Report.

> The mere existence of private schools (possibly including some separate [i.e. Roman Catholic] schools) may in fact be in direct violation of the cause (of tolerance). Private schools by their very nature tend to be excluding institutions. . . . (Committee, 1984a, p. 108)

The Committee expressed a similar viewpoint in its interim report when it stated that private schools ''by their very nature'' do not adequately meet the spirit and intent of the underlying principles of the Committee (Committee, 1984b, p. 15. See footnote #3). Here we see that it is because private schools exist as independent schools which exclude the poor or those with a different philosophical or religious orientation, that they are said to promote intolerance *by their*

very nature. Two properties, independence and exclusiveness, are here identified as evidence of intolerance.

Now there is some truth in the association of separation with intolerance. It has been argued that tolerance does entail some desire to associate with, and even an active, outgoing expression of this desire to associate with those one is tolerating. But if tolerance requires some degree of association, it is equally important to note that tolerance also requires some degree of separation, and this highlights the fundamental error of those who want to make a conceptual link between separation and intolerance. Tolerance, as we have seen, involves an attitude toward something that is not liked, loved, respected or approved of. In other words, there is some distancing from that which one is tolerating. Tolerance entails some degree of separateness. I can only tolerate another who is different from me. We do at times talk of tolerating ourselves, but we are then objectifying one aspect of ourselves that is less than ideal, i.e., we are distancing ourselves from that which is in need of tolerance in ourselves. Tolerance entails separation and it is wrong to associate intolerance with separation in and of itself.

The implausibility of this conceptual identification of separateness and intolerance can be further seen by carrying such identification to its logical conclusion. If independent schools, by their very nature, are intolerant, then independent churches, independent clubs, yes, even independent homes, by their very nature, must breed intolerance. In fact, all individuality will be seen as an expression of intolerance. The only way to avoid intolerance is to deny all distinctions, all individuality, all separateness, and this is simply absurd.

We see this same error in the strongly assimilative or melting-pot tendencies which have characterized North American education. John Dewey boldly praised "the assimilative force of the American public school" (Dewey, 1916, p. 26; See also quotation in Committee, 1984a, p. 107). It is rather easy to accept the ideal of tolerance after one is sure that every one is being assimilated into a majority mould by an effective system of state-maintained education, but that is not, nor will it lead to genuine tolerance. Tolerance presupposes differences and separation. Assimilation must not be confused with tolerance, a confusion which unfortunately pervades the entire Alberta Report as well as the Swann Report, despite the latter's occasional explicit rejection of assimilation as a proper response to pluralism (Swann Report, 1985, pp. 4, 198).

Further, and as the Alberta Report itself recognizes in places (Committee, 1984a, pp. 98f), togetherness and homogeneity do not in themselves foster tolerance, as is abundantly clear from the many broken marriages in our societies today. But, neither does separateness necessarily foster intolerance. There are some other factors at work, quite different from the fact of separateness or togetherness, which are the key to fostering tolerance or its opposite. The confusion inherent in associating separateness with intolerance is in fact enchanced by identifying separation with some of these other factors. For example, in its interim report, the Committee made this statement: "Clearly, no society can function if any significant number of its people withdraw into self-righteous isolation" (Committee, 1984b, p. 16). Yes, self-righteousness does foster intolerance, but students and teachers in independent schools need not display a self-righteous attitude. The possession of self-righteousness is a contingent matter, and need not be part of the separation of independent schools, and separateness does not in and of itself entail intolerance.

Newman (1982), identifies another prevalent misconception about intolerance, a misconception which is also found in the Alberta Report and in the charge that independent religious schools promote intolerance. An error often made is to assume that tolerating a religious belief is primarily

a matter of making a judgement about the content of that belief. But this cannot be so because when Unitarians or athiests tolerate a Catholic's belief in "p" (e.g. God exists in three persons), there is no way that they can "accept" or "endure" p. The Unitarian or athiest rejects p, and believes the Catholic ought to reject it too. Religious tolerance is therefore not so much concerned with the belief itself as with "someone's holding" that belief. It involves the adoption of a certain attitude towards the Catholic's "believing" of p (Newman, 1982, p. 8).

The Alberta Committee was very concerned that a curriculum audit be performed on the texts and study materials being used in independent or private schools in Alberta. This in itself raises some problems because there would seem to be a misplaced focus on beliefs being held, rather that on the attitudes towards the holders of these beliefs. The Committee concluded that the curriculum being utilized in some private schools in Alberta is "intolerant and unacceptable" (Committee, 1984a, p. 111). More specifically, the Committee objected to statements found in certain curricular units of private schools which referred to other religious faiths as "false" or "godless, wicked and satanical" (Committee, 1984a, pp. 111ff; See also Swann Report, 1985, pp. 474ff, 496ff).

But should the classification of another's beliefs as false be viewed as a case of intolerance? The answer is no. As we have already seen, religious toleration necessarily presupposes that we disagree with another person's beliefs. In fact, the Alberta Report itself, when describing the nature of tolerance, recognizes that "intolerance is not the disagreement of one person with another" (Committee, 1984a, pp. 3, 92). Tolerance is required precisely because we do disagree and because we consider another person's position to be false. But we must still respect and love the person who holds these beliefs which we consider to be false.

And what about the worrisome classification of another's viewpoint as "godless, wicked and satanical?" Is, as the Committee holds, "the damning of one person or group by another" intolerant (Committee, 1984a, pp. 3, 92)? No. Within an orthodox Christian framework, this is in fact the way in which the unbeliever is seen. The Apostle Paul, for example, argues that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18). But, Paul at the same time argues that we are to love wicked persons, bless them, respect them and live in harmony with them (Romans 12: 9-12). If that's not tolerance, what is?

Karl Marx had some very negative things to say about religion. Does that make Marx intolerant? No. Given Marx's presuppositions, we can well understand why Marx considered religion to be the opiate of the masses. We need to respect the integrity of a belief system, and recognize that with any belief system, given its presuppositions, certain things will be classified in certain ways, even in negative ways. These need to be understood, and they can be criticized, but they must not be categorized as examples of intolerance. To determine whether or not those who believe such things are intolerant, we need to examine their attitudes and actions towards the actual people with whose beliefs they differ.

Here a difficulty arises because it is not always possible to separate beliefs from the holder of those beliefs. Some people's wicked beliefs lead to wickedness. Some are really wicked (e.g. cold-blooded murderers, bigots, etc.), and there is surely nothing wrong or intolerant about our saying so or about our refusing to put up with their attitudes and actions. There are limits to tolerance, as was pointed out earlier. Thus we find Jesus at times seemingly very "intolerant" of the Scribes and Pharisees whom he damned as wicked hypocrites (Matthew 23; cf. Matthew 13:49; 16:4; 18:32; 22:18). I suspect, though, that most of us would agree that they well deserved such

condemnation. Yet Jesus was a very tolerant person who taught his disciples to be tolerant and condemned intolerance (See Luke 9:5, 55). The key problem here, of course, is that of identifying those people who are justifiably labelled as wicked and whose actions we need not tolerate. Clearly, history is replete with terrifying examples of unjustified intolerance because people were wrongly identified as wicked. But we must be careful not to generalize and assume that labelling peoples' beliefs and even people themselves as wicked is necessarily to be intolerant. They may deserve these labels and our definition of what it means to respect these people as people will need to be modified somewhat.

There is, however, a way in which a curriculum can be intolerant, but this must be clearly distinguished from the above misconception. It has been argued that tolerance involves refraining from any strong reaction to that which is being endured or put up with. This means one must avoid the use of force, including epistemological force where one distorts that with which one disagrees. The Alberta Committee was therefore justified in using among others, the following criteria in evaluating curricula:

1. Where judgements of others are to be made, do the programs and supporting materials promote fair assessments, avoiding unfair or inaccurate judgements based on alleged general characteristics relating to racial or ethnic origin, religious affiliation, age, sex, or disability?

6. Do the programs and supporting materials implicitly convey the nature and value of critical thinking in constructing our everyday interpretations of the world and the people within it? (Committee, 1984a, p. 69).

Overlooking for the present some problems inherent in these criteria such as determining the precise meaning of "unfair", "inaccurate", and "critical thinking," I believe there is something right about these criteria. The real problem with the Committee report is that it would seem that the evidence, and nearly the only evidence given, for claiming that there are unfair or inaccurate judgements in the curricula of private schools, is the labelling of other religions and philosophies as false, godless, etc. But this cannot be called unfair or inaccurate from within the perspective of the Christian religion as has already been argued. One way in which the curriculum could be unfair is to fail to make the child aware that there are alternative religions (See quotation in Committee, 1984a, pp. 108f).

However, there is nothing within the Christian perspective which makes this awareness impossible. McLaughlin (1984) has ably demonstrated this possibility by showing that religious parents can aim at cultivating both faith and autonomy, the latter requiring exposure to alternative religions. In fact, as was pointed out by some critics of the interim report of the Alberta task force, the specific curriculum which was found to be offensive by the Committee went on to encourage students to study other religious groups and to consider inviting people of different races and faith communities to the class (The Goof on the Godless, 1984, p. 23). This surely meets the criteria of fairness and openness, as well as the aim of eventual autonomy.

It might be thought that the sixth criterion mentioned above, concerning the fostering of openness and critical thought, might be more problematic for independent schools. After all, are these schools not narrowly committed to one particular religious perspective which they consider to be the truth, and which they are unable to evaluate openly and critically? (cf. Committee, 1984a, p. 113; cf. p. 108; Ghitter, 1983, pp. 17f).

I would argue, however, that there is nothing intolerant *per se* about a religious school claiming to have the truth and to teach the truth to its students. All of us have convictions about what is true or false and we seek to persuade others of our convictions, and this in itself must not be interpreted as a sign of intolerance.[4] Nor can we glibly equate intolerance with a dogmatic or doctrinaire attitude or environment as is done in the Alberta Report (Committee, 1984a, p. 106; 1984b, p. 12), because as William James (1956, p. 14) has so pointedly stated, all of us "dogmatize like infallible popes" about most things.[5] We also need to be very careful about applying the label "dogmatic" because the term is hopelessly subjective and all too often is simply indiscriminately applied to all those with whom we differ. I would suggest that it is only if we deny others the right to believe contrary to our beliefs, or if we use force in persuading others, etc., that we can be accused of being intolerant. There are, of course, added problems in all this when we deal with children with whom we seem to be unable to avoid using "force" in some sense, but there is not time to deal with this problem here.

With regard to openness and critical thought, there is again nothing incompatible about being committed to a position as true and, at the same time, being open to re-evaluating this position at any time. John Hull, one of the leading British thinkers in religious education, has ably defended the possibility of critical openness as part of Christian teaching and nurture in Christian schools and churches (Hull, 1984). Independent religious schools can and do encourage openness and critical thought, a point which the Committee is forced to concede (Committee, 1984a, pp. 113, 90, 92).

There is one final error underlying the tendency to associate the religious commitment of independent schools with intolerance. It is often assumed that the only way to be tolerant is to adopt a relativist position with regard to truth (See Joyce, 1982, pp. 173f). This assumption is clearly found in the Alberta Report as well as in the Swann Report and is in part the basis of their opposition to independent religious schools.[6]

What is being suggested in these reports is that tolerance is necessarily linked with an epistemology which states that there is no right way, that different positions are equally positive or excellent, that there is flux in the marketplace of ideas, and thus we should avoid a blind and narrow commitment to a particular position. In other words, the only adequate foundation for religious tolerance is the acceptance of epistemological relativism. To be tolerant means to be a relativist.

Here I concur with Jay Newman who in his treatment of the foundations of religious tolerance devotes an entire chapter to refuting "the pernicious doctrine of relativism" (Newman, 1982, p. 8; Ch. 3). To show that the doctrine of epistemological relativism is unsound is beyond the scope of this paper. More to the point is Newman's claim that the association of religious tolerance with relativism "not only conflicts with the nature of religious commitment, but also conflicts with the true nature of tolerance" (Newman, 1982, p. 9). Religious tolerance, as we have seen, presupposes disagreement, and hence a negative attitude towards the beliefs of the person one is being tolerant towards. But, epistemological relativism undercuts the very possibility of having a negative attitude towards others' differing beliefs. Thus we see there is a logical incompatibility between tolerance and relativism.

Further, truth claims need to be taken seriously, not only in religion, but in all areas of study. The moral challenge of religious tolerance is one of maintaining a positive attitude to the *persons* holding beliefs that we disagree with, and of defending their right to hold and propagate these

beliefs, even if we consider them to be false. Tolerance and commitment to a position can and must go hand in hand.

Empirical and Related Arguments

Thus far, our argument has been concerned mainly with conceptual analysis and clarification. Some readers will no doubt have been putting up with (i.e. tolerating) this philosophical exercise, perhaps somewhat impatiently, waiting for what they consider to be truly important, empirical argument. I agree that it is very important that we examine empirical evidence regarding the questions at issue in this paper, because too often answers to these questions are based on nothing more than vague hunches and hasty generalizations.

We must not be too hasty, though, because conceptual clarification is a prerequisite to effective empirical argument. Before expanding on this point, however, I want to suggest that the previous section is in fact more closely linked to empirical argumentation than may at first be apparent. I would suggest that the conceptual analysis of the previous section has already considerably weakened empirical arguments for associating educational pluralism with religious intolerance. Many of the arguments underlying the commonly made criticisms of independent religious schools rest on misconceptions concerning the nature of tolerance. For example, if tolerance is thought to be incompatible with commitment to truth claims, then it is rather easy to find evidence that independent religious schools promote intolerance, since such schools are committed to affirming certain positions as truth. I have argued, however, that religious tolerance is not only compatible with, but requires commitment to truth claims. Thus, one kind of seemingly plausible empirical argument for the association of independent religious schools with intolerance is shown to be unwarranted. The same could be said of the other misconceptions concerning the nature of intolerance.

Before actually examining the empirical evidence, we should take note of several considerations that make it difficult to settle these questions in a definitive manner. The first has to do with the difficulties inherent in providing an empirically measurable definition of tolerance. It has already been suggested that some aspects of the concept of tolerance such as refraining from strong reactions and the illegitimate use of force are necessarily vague and thus will resist precise definition which is essential to empirical measurement. The second problem has to do with the complexity of the questions at issue. There are many factors at work in moulding a child's attitudes and thus it will be difficult to isolate a cause/effect relationship between educational pluralism and tolerance. It is also difficult to measure the overall and the specific effects of a uniform and state-maintained system of education against a system of educational pluralism. These difficulties contribute to a third and final problem that seems to plague research in the social sciences especially. Empirical research concerning human behavior and attitudes is notorious for being subject to variable interpretations. This point is well illustrated in an important review article of the research done in a related area concerning the relationship between religious commitment and ethnic prejudice (Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974). After a review of all the published empirical studies on the subject up to the date of publication, Gorsuch and Aleshire conclude that the data can be interpreted in quite opposite ways, and thus either interpretation is really premature (Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974, pp. 289 f). I suspect this same kind of ambiguity will pervade empirical arguments concerning the relationship between educational pluralism and tolerance.

Given these problems, we must be careful not to expect too much from empirical argument; I believe it is nevertheless worthwhile to briefly explore this route. I have two objectives in mind: (a) to identify the kinds of empirical data that need to be taken into account in coming to a conclusion concerning the questions under consideration; (b) to provide an outline of empirical evidence which will call into question prevailing opinion against independent religious schools.

It is useful to consider empirical evidence concerning the problem at issue from two different perspectives. The first has to do with the actual results of attending independent religious schools. Are graduates from these schools more intolerant than their counterparts from state-maintained schools? The second treats the problem from a broader perspective, taking into account the structure of educational pluralism and its opposite. Is there something about the very structure of educational pluralism which causes more intolerance in a society than a system of education that is more uniform and state controlled?

In dealing with the first question, it needs to be pointed out, first of all, that intolerance can be fostered in state-maintained schools. This is, in fact, conceded in the Alberta Report and the Swann Report, and both reports make reference to research that bears out this conclusion.[7] The Alberta Report also makes passing reference to evidence showing that independent religious schools need not, and in fact do not, foster intolerance in a society. Twenty per cent of Alberta students are in Roman Catholic schools. Although fully funded by the Alberta government and thus often viewed as part of the public education system, these Catholic schools nonetheless form a separate system of education whose separateness is based on religious differences. The Report suggests that "it is demonstrated by the Catholic schools in this province that a religious context for education does not, in and of itself, create intolerance or narrow-mindedness" (Committee, 1984a, pp. 90, 92; cf. p. 109). No hard evidence is given for this "demonstration," but it would appear that these schools have not had a noticable effect in fostering intolerance in Alberta society.

There has been some significant research done on the effects of independent religious schools on students' attitudes to others. The best known empirical study of Catholic schools is probably that undertaken by Greeley and Rossi in the United States. Greeley and Rossi found no trace of a 'divisive' effect of Catholic schools, and actually found graduates from Catholic schools to be more tolerant in certain respects than graduates from non-Catholic schools (Greeley & Rossi, 1966, pp. 116, 130, 136f). Hornsby-Smith (1978) draws a similar conclusion in one of the first comprehensive reports of empirical studies of Catholic education in England and Wales.

Hornsby-Smith also addresses the seemingly obvious counter-example of Northern Ireland where the divisiveness of denominational schools is often thought to be clearly evident. His response to this seeming counter-evidence is "that where a main function of denominational education is the socialization of successive generations into sectarian myths and hatreds and where this process is underpinned by the persistence of rigid socio-economic inequalities," these schools may in fact contribute to the perpetuation of prejudice and discrimination (Hornsby-Smith, 1978, pp. 24f). But these schools need not function in this narrow and destructive manner. In fact they can have very positive aims and in some ongoing curriculum projects in Northern Ireland, these same schools have been shown to be able to contribute to greater levels of tolerance and understanding (Greer & McElhinney, 1984; 1985). Greer (1985), in another article, reviews the research already done and then reports on his own research concerning attitudes of openness and tolerance among pupils in denominational schools in Northern Ireland. He concludes with a note of optimism because he found that openness and tolerance increased significantly with the older pupils in an

age range of 12-16. He also found that young people most favorably disposed to religion were the most open to other religious traditions (Greer, 1985, p. 275).

The consideration of schools in Northern Ireland provides a useful bridge to the second and perhaps even more important empirical argument concerning the relation between educational pluralism and tolerance. We need to look beyond the actual results of attending independent schools and examine the overall consequences of a *system* of education which is thoroughly pluralistic. We need to ask what *structure* of education best promotes tolerance, a pluralistic or a more uniform and state-maintained system of education? With regard to Northern Ireland, we need to ask whether the best way to overcome the intolerance that plagues that region is to retain the system of denominational schools, encouraging these schools to introduce programs that promote better understanding and tolerance, or to eliminate denominational schools entirely and introduce a system of integrated schools where Catholics and Protestants share experiences and thus learn to tolerate each other? The latter approach is in fact being tried in Northern Ireland, and Hornsby-Smith (1978, pp. 24f) draws attention to research which has shown that attendance at such mixed schools is only marginally associated with the reduction of prejudice and intolerance. Given the success of reconstructive curriculum projects within denominational schools themselves, it would seem that we need to look beyond the conflict in Ireland to see if there is a more general answer to the question as to whether an integrated or a pluralistic school system is a better way to bring about tolerance in a society.

Here again we must not expect definitive conclusions, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a system of educational pluralism does not foster intolerance and that it may be even more successful at promoting tolerance in a society than a uniform and state-maintained system of education. Again we can only outline the kinds of evidence that seem to support that conclusion.

We could point, first of all, to various countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria and Switzerland, which have experimented with educational pluralism in varying degrees (See Schultz, 1968; Kerr, 1960), and which have had a long reputation for religious tolerance. Perhaps this structural pluralism in education has itself been a contributing factor in the development of these tolerant societies.

There are several types of educational pluralism found in Canada, and again it would be difficult to maintain that these pluralistic structures have increased levels of intolerance in Canada.[8] In fact it might even be the case that such structural pluralism has served to enhance the cause of religious tolerance in Canada.

Newman points out that "the ability to accept religious pluralism is a necessary condition of religious tolerance" (1982, p. 75). The best, and perhaps the only way, to develop this ability to accept religious pluralism is to institutionalize pluralism. Too often religious pluralism is made to be something very nebulous by interpreting religion as something that belongs entirely to the private domain. This tendency, which is especially apparent in liberal thinking, misconstrues the nature of religion and religious pluralism. Religious pluralism must be expressed in terms of a plurality of religious institutions in society, and it is the existence of such institutional pluralism which will encourage citizens to be tolerant.

John Stuart Mill, in his classic defense of liberty, argues along similar lines and goes on to warn about the dangers of a monolithic system of education.

> All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body (Mill, 1859, Chapter 5).

Mill's analysis of the dangers of a uniform system of public education is unfortunately all too true, as various examples attest.[9] What is curious is that liberal thinkers assume that somehow a democratic power structure is immune to this danger, and thus they strangely ignore Mill's clear-sighted application of liberal principles to the field of education. We simply need to face the fact that not only is a public system of education in a democracy no guarantee against intolerance, but that there is a terrible danger that it can serve to reinforce the intolerance that is shared by the majority in a society. Thus, J.S. Mill wisely warns against the "tyranny of the majority" and proposes a system of educational pluralism as a key to ensuring that tolerance will be maintained and enhanced in a society.

Conclusion

Against the claims that a system of educational pluralism fosters intolerance and that the best way to foster tolerance in a society is via a uniform and state-maintained system of education, it has been contended, first, that these claims rest to a large extent on some serious misconceptions concerning the nature of tolerance; second, that these claims are not supported by empirical research; and last, that there is some evidence to support the very opposite of these claims. In other words, a system of educational pluralism might in fact be more effective than a uniform and state-maintained system of education in fostering tolerance in a society.

All this is not to suggest that independent religious schools might not at times cultivate intolerant attitudes. I have been primarily concerned to refute the *general* assessments often made against independent religious schools and in favor of a uniform and state-maintained system of education with regard to their tendencies to foster tolerance or intolerance in a society. Instead of engaging in the indefensible task of trying to show that independent religious schools generally foster intolerance, I would suggest that we need to concentrate our efforts on defining the principles that should govern such schools so they will more consistently promote attitudes of tolerance, understanding and respect towards others, and I would point out that many of the positive suggestions made in the Alberta Report and the Swann Report concerning how state-schools can foster tolerance, understanding and respect for others could be applied equally well to independent religious schools.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this paper were read at a Toleration Workshop at the University of York, February 4, 1986, under the auspices of the Morrell Studies in Toleration, and at a Cambridge branch meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, February 19, 1986. I am very grateful for the useful criticisms and suggestions offered on these occasions. I am also indebted to Medicine Hat College for granting me a sabbatical during which time this paper was researched and written.

2. The Swann Report (1985) is very much concerned about eliminating prejudice and intolerance in British society in the light of the serious problems that have emerged since the post-war large-scale immigration,

resulting in some two and a half million British citizens now belonging to recognizable ethnic minorities. After reviewing the arguments for and against separate voluntary schools for other ethnic and religious groups, the Committee expresses serious "misgivings about the implications and consequences of 'separate' provision of any kind" (p. 510). The Committee argues that the establishment of separate schools for ethnic minority communities "might exacerbate the very feelings of rejection which they are seeking to overcome" (p. 519). The Report clearly suggests that the narrow confessional approach to education which characterizes denominational schools is at variance with the cultivation of attitudes of appreciation and respect towards all faiths and belief systems (pp. 518f, 474f, 496f). Having come to these conclusions the Committee also calls into question the long established dual system of educational provision in Great Britain, involving state-maintained schools and voluntary church-related schools, and recommends that the Department of Education review the 1944 Education Act "to see whether or not alterations are required in a society that is now very different" (p. 520). Throughout the Report it is argued that it is only if all pupils share a common educational experience that they will be adequately prepared for life in a truly pluralistic society (p. 508). Hence the title, "Education for All".

3. The Alberta Report (1984) had its origin in what has come to be known as the "Keegstra affair" in Canada. In December of 1982, Jim Keegstra, an Alberta high school social studies teacher was fired for anti-Semitic teaching. He was subsequently stripped of his teacher's licence and then convicted and fined for willfully promoting hatred against Jews. It was in response to this Keegstra affair and the resulting "tarnishing of Alberta's image on both a national and an international basis, as well as a serious eroding of public confidence in our educational system," that the government of Alberta, on June 27, 1983, established the Committee of Tolerance and Understanding, in order to undertake a review of the school system and its curriculum and to make recommendations regarding ways in which greater tolerance and respect for human rights could be achieved (Committee, 1984a, pp. 7f).

   Although the Committee softened its position somewhat in its final report, and although the Committee does at times seem to reject the claim that independent schools necessarily promote intolerance (Committee, 1984a, p. 109; 1984b, p. 15), the overall thrust of the report is to warn against the proliferation of such schools and to maintain that a strong and state-maintained system of education is a key to fostering tolerance in a pluralistic society (Committee, 1984a, pp. 17, 19, 34, 88, 101, 106, 109). A fundamental principle underlying the report is that in order to enhance tolerance and understanding and respect for each individual in a diverse society, "we must, wherever possible, encourage shared experiences among the diverse population in our schools" (Committee, 1984a, p. 17). Clearly independent religious schools "do not adequately meet the spirit and intent" of such a principle (Committee, 1984b, p. 15), whereas the state-maintained public (common) schools do, and hence it is argued that "wherever possible, the public education system must be strengthened and society must not permit it to become unnecessarily weakened, eroded or fragmented" (Committee, 1984a, p. 17).

4. I have attempted to refute the oft-assumed relation between seeking to persuade others (i.e. proselytizing) and intolerance in a paper entitled "Proselytizing Without Intolerance" (Thiessen, 1985).

5. John Hull, in defending the compatibility of Christian commitment and critical openness, refers to Karl Popper who defended the role of dogmatism in science, "pointing out that only if the adherents of theories defend them vigorously, try by every scientific means to secure them against attack, try to adapt them to meet objections, and set high standards for their overthrow, can science be protected from the situation where theories are lightly advanced and easily given up" (Hull, 1984, pp. 221f).

6. Ghitter, chairman of the Alberta Committee, as well as others quoted in the report have problems with those "who contend that theirs is the right way" (Ghitter, 1983, p. 17; Committee, 1984a, p. 108). Two of the criteria the Committee used in its curriculum audit reveal a relativistic standpoint. Programs and supporting materials were evaluated in terms of whether they helped "to nurture a positive self image in all students by taking an essentially positive approach to human similarities and differences," and as to whether they conveyed the idea "that excellence in human endeavor may be found in different ways in all human groups" (Committee, 1984a, p. 69). The Committee is enamoured with "the give and take in the marketplace of ideas," but is concerned about "the desire for narrow certainty," about those who are unable "to assay the limits of truth," about those who are "blinded by partisanship" to their own belief system (Committee, 1984a, pp. 109, 113; cf. p. 106). We find the same kind of emphasis in the Swann Report, which states a preference for the phenomenological approach to religious education which eliminates categorization of religions as true or false, superior or inferior (Swann Report, 1985, pp. 474ff, 496f).

7. In an audit of the curriculum in state-maintained public schools supervised by the Alberta Committee, about 10% of the approximately 3,600 resources reviewed in the audit were judged by the Audit Committee to be problematic or unacceptable in terms of fostering tolerance (Committee, 1984a, p. 72). Various critics of the Alberta study also found it necessary to remind the Committee that the specific case of fostering intolerance which prompted the study in the first place did not occur in an independent religious school but in a state maintained school (see, for example, Heat on Christian Schools, 1984, p. 26). The Swann Report also concedes that all is not well in state-maintained schools which were found to reinforce existing attitudes of racism and intolerance (Swann Report, 1984, Ch. 5; p. 23).

8. In the province of Newfoundland, the entire school system is presently divided along denominational lines with several smaller denominations cooperating to form an "Integrated School District" (see a booklet prepared by the Denominational Education Committees of Newfoundland, 1976). Yet, I am not at all aware that there is a greater degree of intolerance in Newfoundland than there is in other provinces of Canada which have a more uniform system of state education. Mention has already been made of the constitutionally entrenched system of Catholic education which exists in many provinces of Canada as a second major system of education alongside the public system or as an alternative within the public system of education. Yet, after over a century of this structural dualism in Canadian education, we find Catholics and non-Catholics co-existing in a peaceable manner. A dual system of education has not fostered intolerance in Canadian society and the Alberta Committee is forced to concede this point (Committee, 1984a, pp. 90, 92).

9. For example, Hitler's success in re-educating the German population into a horrifyingly intolerant state of mind was in part due to the fact that he had a public system of education at his disposal. Hitler also closed down all forms of alternative education. The Alberta Committee report is probably referring to this sad historical phenomenon when it admits that "one of the lessons of history is that repression of minority groups can most readily be found in societies where the educational system is taken over by authoritarian power structures which impose rigid philosophies and closed attitudes upon the educational system" (Committee, 1984a, p. 20). The United States, with its long history of prejudice and intolerance against blacks has also had a long history of public education which served to reinforce public attitudes. There are some blatant examples of prejudice and intolerance in Canadian history as well, some of which Mr. Ghitter himself cites (1983, pp. 13f), and which the Committee found to be re-inforced in the textbooks used in Alberta public schools (Committee, 1984a, pp. 73f; see also "'Ghitterizing' the Texts", 1985, p. 41). The Swann Report also reports on the problem of common schools reinforcing existing racism (Swann Report, 1984, Ch. 5).

REFERENCES

Aspin, D.N. (1983). Church schools, religious education and the multi-ethnic community. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 17* (2), 229-290.

Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups. (1985). *Education for all: The report of the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups (The Swann Report).* London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Committee on Tolerance and Understanding. (1984a). *Final report of the committee on tolerance and understanding.* Edmonton: Government of Alberta, Department of Education.

Committee on Tolerance and Understanding. (1984b). *Private education in Alberta: Discussion paper 1.* Edmonton: Government of Alberta, Department of Education.

Coons, J.E. & Sugarman, S.D. (1978). *Education by choice: The case for family control.* Berkeley & Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press.

Denominational Education Committees of Newfoundland. (1976). *The school board.* St. John's, Newfoundland: Government of Newfoundland.

Dewey, John. (1916). *Democracy and education.* New York: The MacMillan Co.

Felderhof, M.C. (Ed.). (1985). *Religious education in a pluralistic society.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Ghitter, R. (1983). Tolerance. *Address to the Alberta School Trustees Association.* Nov. 28. Unpublished paper. 35 pp.

'Ghitterizing' the texts! Tolerance police weed out stereotypes and sexism. (1985). *Alberta Report,* Feb. 15, 1985, p. 41.

The goof on the godless: The committee's prize case of intolerance caves in (1984). *Alberta Report,* May 21, 1984, p. 23.

Gorsuch, R.L. & Aleshire, D. (1974). Christian faith and ethnic prejudice: A review and interpretation of research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 13,* 281-307.

Greeley, A.M. (1974). *Ethnicity in the United States: A preliminary reconnaissance.* New York: Wiley & Sons.

Greeley, A.M. & Rossi, P.H. (1966). *The education of Catholic Americans.* Chicago: Aldine Press.

Greer, J.E. (1985). Viewing 'the other side' in Northern Ireland: Openness and attitudes to religion among Catholic and Protestant adolescents. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 24* (3), 275-292.

Greer, J.E. & McElhinney, E.P. (1985). *Irish Christianity: A guide for teachers.* Goldenridge, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.

Greer, J.E. & McElhinney, E.P. (1984). The project on 'Religion in Ireland' an experiment in reconstruction. *Lumen Vitae, 39* (3), 331-342.

Harris, John. (1982). A paradox of multicultural societies. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 16* (2), 223-233.

Heat on the Christian schools. (1984). *Alberta Report,* March 12, 26-32.

Hirst, P.H. (1985). Education & diversity of belief. In Felderhof (1985), pp. 5-17.

Hornsby-Smith, M.P. (1978). *Catholic education: The unobtrusive partner.* London: Sheed and Ward.

Horton, J. & Mendus, S. (Eds.). (1985). *Aspects of toleration: Philosophical studies.* London & New York: Methuen Publishers.

Hull, J. (1984). Christian nurture and critical openness. In Hull, J. *Studies in religion and education.* London: The Falmer Press, pp. 207-225.

James, William. (1956). *The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy.* New York: Dover Publications.

Joyce, R.J. (1982). Pluralism, tolerance and moral education. *Journal of Moral Education, 11* (3), May, 173-180.

Kerr, A. (1960). *Schools of Europe.* London: Bowes and Bowes.

King, Preston. (1976). *Toleration.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Manley-Casimir, M.E. (Ed.). (1982). *Family choice in schooling: Issues and dilemmas.* Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.

McLaughlin, T.H. (1984). Parental rights and the religious upbringing of children. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 18* (1), 75-83.

Mill, J.S. (1859) *On liberty.* London: Longmans.

Newman, J. (1982). *Foundations of religious tolerance.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Nicholson, P. (1985). Toleration as a moral ideal. In Horton & Mendus (1985), pp. 158-173.

Pratte, Richard. (1978). Cultural diversity and education. In Strike, K.A. & Egan, K. (Ed.). *Ethics and educational policy.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 147-167.

Schultz, W. (Ed.). (1968). *Schools in Europe*. Vol. I & II; Part A & B. Weinheim/Berlin: Verlag Julius Beltz.

Thiessen, E.J. (1982). Indoctrination and doctrines. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 16* (1), 3-17.

Thiessen, E.J. (1984). Indoctrination and religious education. *Interchange, 15* (3), 27-43.

Thiessen, E.J. (1985). Proselytizing without intolerance. *Studies in Religion, 14* (3), pp. 333-345.

Weaver, R.M. (1948/1984). *Ideas have consequences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.