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## *Private Schools as Public Provision of Education: School Choice and Market Forces in the Netherlands*

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Unlike parents in most areas of the United States, parents in different European societies have a real choice of comparable schools, both public and private, and they can exercise their options without paying very high fees. Most often the private schools are Catholic or Protestant schools that operate within the national educational system and receive state grants.

In international discussions on the expansion of parental choice and the private delivery of education, the Dutch arrangement quite often is regarded as “unique.” Central to the Dutch arrangement are two constitutional rights: the right of freedom of education and the right of public and private institutions to equal public funding. As a result, approximately 70 percent of Dutch parents send their children to schools that, although established by private associations and managed by private school boards, are nonetheless fully funded by the central government. In the opinion of national interest groups as well as national experts, this freedom of education and equal financing of public and private education from public funds makes the Dutch system exceptional.<sup>1</sup> Foreign observers have tended to agree with this assessment, as illustrated by a review of the Dutch education system by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and by the remarks of other international observers who have said, among other things, that “the evolution of the Dutch system of education is unique in the Western World.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the argument goes, the Netherlands offers an “experiment” in the private pro-

duction of education on a national scale, a century-old experiment that includes the entire education system. As Brown so concisely puts it, “The Netherlands is the only country with a nationwide school choice program.”<sup>3</sup>

These statements, however, are exaggerated. The Dutch educational system is not too far removed from the systems of other countries, as one can see in Dronkers’ analysis of European public and religious schools in chapter 11 of this volume. Religious schools in some other European countries also have a constitutional right to state financial support. Still, although these observers are exaggerating the uniqueness of the Dutch educational system, school choice in the Netherlands differs in several respects from school choice in other European countries, such as Germany and Belgium, with similar state-subsidized religious and public school sectors.

First, in most European countries with school choice, the religious schools are of *one* denomination, operated mostly by the Catholic Church or one of the Protestant churches, which at one time may have been the state church. This is not the case in the Netherlands, which was created in the religious wars of the sixteenth century and, as a result, became home to a large Catholic minority within an ultimately moderate Protestant state. The religious diversity of Dutch society promoted an early *de facto* neutrality of the Dutch Protestant state in relation to most Christian religions and thus to an early *de facto* separation between the dominant Protestant church and the state. Consequently, there was hardly a political battle on the juridical separation of the church and the state, as there was in France or Germany. Nor did the link between church and state linger on in the Netherlands during the twentieth century, as it did in the United Kingdom. The taken-for-granted neutrality of the Dutch state therefore owes itself to something other than the juridical separation of church and state.

Since the 1920s, in the wake of political struggles the century before, the Netherlands has had—in addition to the locally run public education sector—three main private sectors: Catholic, Protestant, and a smaller, religiously neutral sector, all with independent private school boards. The three main private sectors have been joined by other, smaller religious sectors—first Jewish, later Islamic and Hindu—and some small, private nonreligious sectors with a special didactic, first Montessori and Jena, later Steiner. Within the Catholic and Protestant school sectors there are national umbrella organizations that also function as lobbies. But they do not replace the autonomous school boards, nor do they coordinate all Protestant or Catholic schools. These school boards have the juridical form of a foundation (predominantly in the Catholic sector) or an association (predominantly in the Protestant sector), both with a high degree of self-selection of new board members.

Second, the equal subsidizing of all religious and public schools has promoted a diminution of prestigious elite schools outside the state-subsidized sector. As a consequence of equal subsidies and prohibition of the use of extra funds for teacher grants, smaller classes, and the like, there is not an institutionalized hierarchy of schools within each school type. In the Netherlands, you do not see the equivalent of the so-called public schools or independent grammar schools in England, nor do you see versions of the prep schools in the United States or the differences in quality that exist there between schools in the poor inner cities and those in the wealthy suburbs.

The distinctive situation in the Netherlands, in terms of the size of the private sector and the context in which private schools operate, provides a favorable setting for testing many of the arguments in the school choice and voucher debates. First, one can test the hypothesis that providing subsidies to private schools will make them more effective competitors of public schools and that the strengthened competition will force public schools to become better.<sup>4</sup> In order to test that hypothesis, the barriers to attending a school other than the one closest to a student's residence must be low. That is the case in the Netherlands, where schools are numerous, population density is high, public transportation is generally available, spending per pupil varies little, and money follows the student. Second, it must be possible to test the interaction of school choice, private schools, and external examinations. According to Bishop, private schools, being more sensitive to market pressures, will respond more radically to an external exam system than public schools will.<sup>5</sup> In the Netherlands, the government sets the examinations for each type of school—these exams influence access to tertiary education and job opportunities—while leaving schools a good deal of freedom to choose course materials and teaching method. And finally, the practice of repeating grades, *redoublement*, as a way of allowing some students extra time to achieve very demanding learning goals, can be examined. This practice is widespread in some European countries, and schools differ in their rates of *redoublement*, but by American standards the rates are very high in the Netherlands.

### Religious Schools in a Secular Society?

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the religious pillars in Dutch society have broken down rapidly. In 1947, only 17 percent of the population did not officially belong to any church; by 1995, that proportion had increased to 40 percent. The same trend can be seen in the votes for Christian Democratic candidates in national elections: in 1948, they gained 55 percent of the vote; in 1994, less than 30 percent. The Netherlands is considered

one of the most secularized of Western societies.<sup>6</sup> It would seem likely, then, that there would have been a decline in institutions such as religious schools, which depended on religious affiliation to recruit students. In the 1960s and 1970s, many experts anticipated precisely such a decline.<sup>7</sup> However, although a decline did occur in a number of organizations and institutions—unions, journals, clubs, and hospitals—related to or affiliated with particular religious groups, religious schools did not have the same problem. In 1950, 73 percent of all pupils in primary education were attending a nonpublic school; in 2000, the figure was 68 percent, although in recent decades Protestant and Catholic schools lost some of their share of the total private school market to other nonpublic schools. Specifically, the Catholic market share diminished from 65 percent of private schools in 1980 to 59 percent in 2000.

How, then, can one explain the nondisappearance of religious education or the failure of public schools to attract the growing number of children of nonreligious parents?<sup>8</sup> A temporary explanation is the strong involvement of the public school sector in the proposed but never realized educational reforms of the 1970s, which had two major effects. First, they hampered the ability of public schools to attract the majority of more traditional nonreligious pupils and parents. In addition, the political battles around these unrealized reforms—which aimed at creating a comprehensive high school similar to high schools in the United States and doing away with the existing hierarchy of different school types—gave religious schools enough breathing space to redefine themselves as schools based not only on religion but also on educational quality. But this temporary explanation needs to be supplanted by more permanent ones because the strong involvement of the public school sector in educational reform did not last long.

The issue of religious schools prospering in a secular society might be of interest to other modern societies characterized by an increasing number of religious schools and increasing pressure for public funding—and it might be even more interesting in societies with a less active religious population. The Dutch case might offer some insights into the mechanisms underlying the stability or increase in religious schooling in societies that are not particularly religious. Several explanations and theories attempt to explain this paradox.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the increasing irrelevance of church and religion in everyday life is not unique to the Netherlands; it is apparent in most European societies. And as in the Netherlands, the religious schools in these other societies did not dwindle away. On the contrary, the religious school sector in European societies with less active religious populations is either growing or is disproportionate to the percentage of religious citizens. This is true not only for

places that traditionally have had such schools, such as Austria, France, the Netherlands, and the old German *Länder* (states), but also for places such as Hungary and eastern Germany in which nonpublic schools were abolished under communist regimes.

One of the possible explanations for the popularity of religious schools even in secularizing societies is that nonpublic schools are generally more effective in their teaching than are public schools. Their better educational administration, stronger value-oriented relationship among parents and schools, and more deliberate self-selection process might be the most important mechanisms in producing their average higher effectiveness in Europe. Chapter 11 in this volume reviews the available evidence on differences in the effectiveness of public and religious state-funded schools in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Scotland.

### Various Explanations for the Survival of Religious Schools after Secularization

There are a number of possible explanations for the survival of religious schools after the secularization of a society. Nonpublic schools may or may not promote the separation of affluent from nonaffluent students. National examinations may reduce the differences in content and quality of public and nonpublic schools, making the latter more attractive. In the Netherlands, religious schools may enjoy a political advantage, and even nonreligious parents may appreciate the moral education that religious schools offer. Various explanations are examined below.

#### *Segregation of Public and Religious Schools*

A possible explanation for the attractiveness of nonpublic schools is that they can promote the segregation of more privileged or affluent students from less privileged or affluent students. This might be an important explanation for the stability of religious schools in irreligious societies, which still might desire such segregation.

Although both public and private schools take a fair—more or less equal—share in educating children from minority backgrounds, Karsten and other researchers have shown that segregation of children of immigrant workers and children of Dutch-born parents sometimes occurs along lines of nonpublic and public schools.<sup>10</sup> Some of this segregation can be explained by the concentration of both immigrant workers and public schools in the big cities.

Still, many children of immigrant workers would prefer religious to public schools. This preference for religious schools is due in part to the greater

openness of Catholic and Protestant schools to accommodating religious values, even those of religions other than their own, such as Islam. The importance of Islam to large groups of workers from Turkey, Morocco, and Suriname led to the establishment of state-funded Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands during the 1990s. It is still too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these schools, but they seem already at least as effective as (if not already more effective than) non-Islamic schools in comparable circumstances. Moreover, the early dropout rate is significantly lower in Islamic schools than in comparable non-Islamic schools. However, it is clear that these Islamic schools attract children of parents who are less integrated in Dutch society than parents from the same group who send their children to comparable non-Islamic schools.<sup>11</sup> The problem is comparing the costs and benefits of a possibly lower level of integration with those of a possibly higher level of scholastic attainment. Indeed, in the public debate, there has already been much opposition to Islamic schools on the grounds that segregation will hamper the integration of Islamic children into Dutch society. The strongest opposition comes from advocates of public rather than Catholic and Protestant schools, since the integration of all religious groups into one school has always been the ideal of public schools in the Netherlands.

Differences in the backgrounds of students admitted to the schools in the various sectors explain, on average, only one-third of the outcome differences among the schools. After controlling for differences in student background, the differences in effectiveness among public, Catholic, and Protestant schools are roughly the same as before controlling, a point that we elaborate on below. Religious schools do not, on average, have a better-qualified student body, so the social composition theory does not explain the attraction and the greater effectiveness of religious schools. However, when the number of pupils increases while the number of available good teachers decreases, some nonpublic schools can become more attractive for both teachers and parents. Nonpublic schools are better equipped legally to attract more and better-qualified teachers than their public counterparts. The attraction is not due to higher salaries but to advantages in working conditions, like smaller class sizes and less bureaucracy. In a situation in which there is an abundance of students, this difference might lead to a more discerning selection of entering pupils and thus to stronger social segregation among schools.

#### *National Examinations*

The mandatory national examinations in the Netherlands may have decreased the differences between public and religious schools in terms of both content and quality and thus made the latter more attractive to secular

parents. Bishop compared the degree of segregation in educational systems in America, Europe, and Asia and formulated interesting conclusions.<sup>12</sup> The use of national diploma exams at the end of secondary education raises scholastic achievement in both public and private schools. National exams also make the differences in quality between private and public schools more open to public inspection and debate, and therefore the differences tend to be smaller, especially if public and private schools both are funded by the state on a comparable basis. According to Bishop, private schools, being more sensitive to market pressures, will respond more radically to an external exam system than public schools will. As a consequence of these two factors, national diploma exams are an important means of decreasing school segregation. Nationally organized exams take place in the Netherlands both at the end of primary school and at the end of secondary school, as they have since 1968. Also, the results of these exams have been open to the public since the late 1990s.<sup>13</sup> National exams, together with fair publication of the results, can avoid strong social segregation of Dutch private and public schools.<sup>14</sup> However, even in an educational system with a strong tradition of national exams, schools are able to manipulate the grading of these exams by being more or less strict in their grading of the school part of the national exams.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Competition and School Sector Size*

Another explanation for the popularity of religious schools is that competition between schools—within and between the different school sectors for the best pupils or the most highly motivated parents—can make religious schools attractive to secular parents. The size of the private school sector is linked to the ability of private schools to select the most able pupils: the larger the private sector, the lower the possibility that private schools can skim only the cream of the crop and thus promote social segregation. This is an obvious explanation for the virtual lack of student background differences among the major public, Protestant, and Catholic school sectors in the Netherlands. Thus, Roeleveld and Dronkers found evidence that the effectiveness of all schools was the highest in districts in which no group of schools—public, Protestant, or Catholic—attracted a majority of the students but in which the size of all sectors was substantial.<sup>16</sup> Another finding that reinforces the competition argument is the lack of effectiveness of private religious schools that serve a student body with a very specific religious orientation.<sup>17</sup> The schools of religious minority groups like the orthodox Protestants attract their students because of religious considerations and do not need to compete with other schools. In general, their parents or students do not really consider other options in choosing a school.

But the relation between the size of the private sector and segregation among schools also depends on the rules governing admission to public schools and the opportunities for parents to choose within the public school sector. The less choice parents have in choosing a public school (due to required assignment to a neighborhood school, for instance), the higher parental demand will be for a private sector alternative to the assigned public school. When parental demand is stronger, nonpublic schools can be more selective in their admission policies. Therefore more parental choice among public schools also can decrease social segregation of public and private school students. But at the same time, increased choice can also increase the social segregation of *schools*, within both the public and the private sectors, as we discuss later. Another important aspect of greater parental choice is that social segregation of neighborhoods is not further enhanced by forced school assignment.

The smallest private school sector (besides the orthodox Protestant and the Islamic sectors) is the neutral private sector, which is still growing in the Netherlands. Often these neutral private schools are the more established and traditional schools or ones that offer specific pedagogical approaches (Montessori, anthroposophy). Here we find the highest degree of social and ethnic segregation—both among schools of this sector and between schools in this and other sectors—in accordance with Bishop's hypothesis.<sup>18</sup> The higher scholastic achievements of schools in the neutral private sector can be fully explained by the elite social composition of the student body.<sup>19</sup> If one controls for the social status of the student body, the neutral private schools tend to achieve less academically than comparable schools outside this sector. The lower effectiveness of the neutral private schools does not diminish their attractiveness, however, because their lower effectiveness is neutralized by their social composition. An explanation for this neutralization is that in the Netherlands admission to higher levels of education depends only on having a diploma, which Dutch students are more likely to obtain if they are educated alongside students from elite social circles.

#### *Political Protection of Religious Schools and Support for School Choice*

An oft-suggested explanation for the religious schooling advantage in the Netherlands is the strong position of religious schools, which enjoy the political protection of the Christian Democratic party through laws protecting freedom of education and which benefit from the dense administrative network of religious school organizations. This hypothesis has some validity. The central position of the Christian Democratic party on the Dutch political map until the mid-1990s made it possible to maintain the "pillarized"

school system<sup>20</sup> and the religious schools within that system—despite Dutch society's increasing secularization—and even to establish new religious schools in areas with low numbers of active church members. Nevertheless, active support from the Christian Democrats cannot fully explain the flourishing private religious school sector.

Much of the success of religious schools hinges on the fact that Dutch policymakers have made it easy for parents to “vote with their feet.” Despite many regulations and the strong formal position of religious schools, parents can favor other school sectors without facing serious geographical or financial barriers because of the free choice of schools—the Dutch public system, among other things, no longer contains catchment areas—and equal government funding of public and private schools. Schools are financed according to the number of pupils enrolled, and the way to establish a new school is to find enough parents who will send their children to that school. Several less powerful groups of parents—orthodox Protestant, Evangelical, Islamic, and Hindu—have recently used this mechanism of “voting with their feet” with success against the powerful, long-established organizations of private religious schools, founding schools of their own religious preference.

The essential question here, therefore, is why nonreligious parents did not use the same mechanism to increase the number of nonreligious schools or the number of pupils attending them. In the Dutch case, it is hard to argue that these nonreligious parents are less powerful or less numerous than the orthodox Protestant, Evangelical, Islamic, or Hindu parents and their organizations—in fact, the opposite might be true. Nonreligious parents are on average better educated and have more links with the established, large, and powerful political parties than the groups mentioned before. What we conclude is that nonreligious parents no longer feel deterred by the religious socialization of religious schools—that is, to the extent that religious schools still offer such socialization—and therefore do not see the need to change to nonreligious schools.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Higher Quality of Nonpublic Administration*

There exist slight differences in educational administration in public and religious schools that can explain some of the differences in academic outcomes, despite enforced financial equality and strong state control.<sup>22</sup> It is not the formal differences in educational administration but the stronger informal relations between board and teachers in the religious schools that in part explain the better performance of their pupils and therefore the attractiveness of religious schools for nonreligious students and parents.<sup>23</sup>

*A Conservative, Value-Oriented Education*

Another possible explanation is that irreligious parents prefer religious socialization because they still appreciate the moral values taught by their no-longer-adhered-to religion. However, it is clear from longitudinal research that the number of adherents to religious values among Dutch adults is decreasing, which contrasts with the stability of religious school recruitment. Only a minority of parents (about 30 percent, depending on the local situation) gives religious reasons for choosing a religious school for their children. If the appreciation of religious values by irreligious parents was an effective explanation of their choice of a religious school, that reason should show up in surveys more frequently. An important consideration, however, is that the values-oriented character of religious schools leads them to stress secular, nonreligious values (for instance, tolerance of homosexuals) as a significant aspect of schooling in the broader sense (Germans would call this *Bildung* and the French *éducation*). Public schools, with their religiously neutral status, tend to avoid discussion of value-oriented topics and instead stress instruction. Irreligious parents who think schooling should have a broad educational scope rather than only a narrower instructional purpose therefore choose the modern religious school for its expansiveness, which they consider an aspect of educational quality, rather than for the specific religious values that it teaches.

Today neither the Catholic Church nor the Protestant churches have a major influence on the curriculum of most religious schools, and—especially in the Catholic schools—religious education has decreased to the point that it involves simply the dissemination of factual information on various world views.<sup>24</sup> Several studies have shown in particular that the religious identity of Catholic schools has become very weak.<sup>25</sup> There are few traces left of specifically Catholic elements either in entry requirements for pupils or in the selection of personnel. One good reason for the breakdown of religious socialization is the increasing scarcity of teachers who are themselves religious, a lack that in the Netherlands can be explained by the positive relationship between level of education and degree of traditional religiousness. A majority of pupils in religious schools do not have an active religious background, and their parents do not want them to be heavily socialized in an outdated religion, but they do not object to having them learn factual information on various world views.<sup>26</sup> So there is a happy conjunction of the fact that it would be difficult for religious schools to provide strong religious socialization and the fact that only a small number of parents still want it. These schools offer, as the next-best alternative, factual information on different world views, which

a teacher who is not religious can relate as part of students' cultural education although such courses are often still known under the old title of religious education. The forced neutrality of public schools in relation to different world views and the moderate, secular values orientation of religious schools explain, in part, the attractiveness of the latter schools. Also, most nonreligious parents prefer a values-oriented education to strict neutrality, because they believe that becoming educated implies learning values.

Another explanation offered for the attractiveness of religious schools was their (on average) mild educational conservatism compared with the (on average) more progressive tendencies of public schools from the 1960s until the 1990s. Among the reasons for this mild conservatism were the differences in the exposure of public and private schools to social policy initiatives. The board of a public school was the municipal council. Because education is one of the major instruments that policymakers have to effect change, such councils might favor implementing educational experiments in order to accomplish political goals. In contrast, the boards of religious schools felt less need to embark on politically motivated educational experiments. This difference between the two might be changing due to the increasing scale of religious school boards and the delegation of the administration of public schools to more or less independent committees.

Another difference between public and private schools is that the former have less opportunity to avoid pressure from the national government because they cannot use the principle of freedom of education to shield themselves. Religious schools, on the other hand, can be obliged to conform to educational experiments only if they are forced to by a national law that declares the educational experiment a condition necessary to qualify for public funding. In all other cases, religious schools' participation in educational experiments is voluntary.

#### *Higher Cognitive Effectiveness of Religious Schools*

Dutch research contains ample evidence of the positive effects of Catholic and Protestant schooling on academic achievement.<sup>27</sup> These findings, all adjusted for differences in the backgrounds of students in public and private schools, are reported in terms of educational outcomes measured as dropout rates, test scores, degrees, attainment, and so forth, for both primary and secondary schools. However, there are a number of deviant results that defy easy explanations. The first deviation from the average higher effectiveness of Dutch religious schools is that public schools in regions where there is a majority of Catholic or Protestant schools have higher effectiveness than do public schools in regions where there is a majority of public schools, while

Catholic or Protestant religious schools in these regions are not more effective than public schools. Second, schools that are both nonreligious and private have, on average, lower effectiveness than public and religious schools, after controlling for the social composition of the student body.<sup>28</sup> This second deviation shows that it is not the private nature of the administration of religious schools that makes them more effective, but their religious background. The third deviation from the average higher effectiveness of Dutch religious schools is that orthodox Protestant schools do not have higher effectiveness than public schools or less strict Protestant schools.<sup>29</sup> The fourth deviation is that the higher effectiveness of religious schools might be restricted to a certain historical period (the late 1960s to the 1990s). If this is correct, a possible explanation is the dominance of religion as the basis of school choice before the 1960s<sup>30</sup> and the disappearance of the small-scale advantages of religious schools during the 1990s due to large-scale reorganization of the religious school sectors.

The reputation of religious schools for academic quality may be closely related to the exercise of deliberate educational choice. Because of the selection effect, parents' deliberate choice of an "unconventional" school (compared with a "default" choice for a common school) will increase the possibility that this "unconventional" school will become a community with shared values and dense social ties in which students perform better. The selection effect can apply and affect student achievement in either a religious or a public school. Roeleveld and Dronkers<sup>31</sup> found evidence that in districts where public, Protestant, and Catholic schools each failed to attract a majority of students, the effectiveness of all schools was the highest, after taking student composition into account. In districts without a dominant type of school, there is no such thing as a "default" school choice, and thus parental choice has to be more deliberate. In districts in which public, Protestant, or Catholic schools had either a very small share of the market (less than 20 percent) or a very large one (greater than 60 percent of all students), the effectiveness of these small schools was lower. In districts with a dominant share of one school sector, the "conventional" school choice is most common and parental choice is more by default. A practical consequence of these findings is that public schools in the two southern provinces of the Netherlands, where the large majority of schools are Catholic, are more effective than the Catholic schools; they also are more effective than the public schools in the two northern provinces, where public schools dominate.

Especially given the high secularization of Dutch society since the 1960s, religious schools have been forced to compete for students for motives other than religious ones, and they have been unable to rely on the religious seg-

mentation of society for new students. For religious schools, the notion of deliberate educational choice became important. Religious schools were, on average, better equipped for this competition partly because of their history. During the nineteenth century, Dutch religious schools won the struggle to attract the most students. They also have won the battle for students because of the relative flexibility of their private governance and administration.<sup>32</sup> Finally, religious schools have remained popular in secularized Holland because of their reputation for educational quality.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps public schools lost this battle because their leading advocates expected the religious school sector to break down automatically as a consequence of the growing secularization and irreligiousness of Dutch society and were far too optimistic about the attractiveness of the schools' "neutral" identity.<sup>34</sup>

Questions about the extent to which these differences between public and religious schools are permanently important are unsettled, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Most studies show differences in school effectiveness that vary with denomination, even after taking into account differences in pupil characteristics and student body composition. As far as these differences follow a regular pattern, the average effects are mainly negative for public schools, positive for private religious schools, and negative for nonreligious private schools. It seems that Catholic schools in particular—and to a lesser degree, Protestant schools—have distinguished themselves favorably. These results seem slightly more pronounced in primary education than in secondary education. Dutch religious schools do distinguish themselves by a reputation for offering educational quality, which, as research shows, is an important factor for parents who are choosing among schools.

#### *Higher Noncognitive Effectiveness of Religious Schools*

Most of the studies on school effectiveness are limited to the effects of a particular sector on the cognitive aspect of learning. Much less research has been undertaken to investigate possible differences between sectors in other, noncognitive domains, which are at least as interesting, particularly in the light of the pillarized history of the current Dutch school system, which is linked to the different religious socialization processes of the main religious denominations in Dutch society<sup>35</sup>. Education officials may only be paying lip service to the importance of the noncognitive results of education, however, as the Dutch Education Inspectorate measures only the cognitive, not the noncognitive, outcomes of schools.<sup>36</sup>

Van Marwijk Kooy conducted one of the first Dutch education studies that included outcomes in noncognitive domains.<sup>37</sup> Despite several differences in pupils' attitudes toward their school, the author concluded that there

are no great differences with respect to those attitudes among secondary schools of various denominations. In the early 1990s, Wittebrood analyzed approximately sixty secondary grammar schools on student attitudes like political interest and cynicism, political participation, authoritarianism, and ethnocentrism.<sup>38</sup> Although there were differences among sectors, most of the effects could be attributed to the religious, social, and ethnic composition of the school population. The sector of the school adds only some explanatory power and shows only slight effects of private religious schools on political interests. Vreeburg and Dronkers pay attention to possible lifestyle differences among students of secondary schools of various denominations.<sup>39</sup> Among other things, they investigate whether students at religious schools have more sober spending habits (for clothes, entertainment, and so forth), spend their time differently (reading, small jobs), and spend less money on gambling and drugs. Their analysis, based on data on more than 13,000 students from the *National School Survey* of 1994, shows that substantial differences between students of religious and public secondary schools do not exist, after controlling for individual student characteristics including the religiosity of the individual students.

Knuver investigates the relationship between class and school characteristics and the affective functioning of pupils, based on data collected in some 200 primary schools.<sup>40</sup> The study shows that the affective functioning of pupils—which includes their attitudes toward language and arithmetic, performance motivation, self-image, and attitude toward the school—is somewhat higher in Catholic schools than in public and Protestant schools. Hofman's analysis of private nonreligious schools, based on the same data, shows that the score for attitude toward the school is higher in Catholic schools than in Protestant schools.<sup>41</sup> Jungbluth, Peetsma, and Roeleveld also investigated pupils' assessment of their own well-being in primary education; they did not find systematic differences related to the sector of the primary school.<sup>42</sup> Driessen and van der Slik also found no differences in the self-confidence and well-being of pupils in primary schools related to school religious status, after controlling for the social and ethnic background of the pupils.<sup>43</sup> Braster compared the religious, social, and political value orientations of 2,087 youngsters (fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds) who attended different types of schools. After controlling for background characteristics such as religion, church attendance, educational level, age, and gender, he found that most effects of the denomination of schools disappeared.<sup>44</sup> Only attending an orthodox Protestant school showed any effect in terms of religious orientation. So in the three most important groups of schools in the Dutch education system—public, Catholic, and Protestant—no reliable dif-

ferences in the value orientation of their pupils could be found. Findings based on national survey data collected in 1999 show that this conclusion might be true to a larger extent.<sup>45</sup> Even for students in a small, orthodox religious school sector, no substantial attitudinal or behavioral effects of attending a religious school were found. A comparison of sector effects in a broad range of life-style domains showed no substantial differences among sectors, except for attitudes and behavior closely related to the religious sphere of life.

The picture of the nonacademic effectiveness of religious schools is far less clear than the picture of their academic effectiveness. Sometimes denomination-specific differences are apparent, but mostly they are not, especially after controlling for the individual characteristics of the pupils and their parents. On the whole, one cannot find evidence that Dutch religious schools are substantially more effective in the noncognitive domain, despite their claims along those lines.

### Negative Side Effects of School Choice in a Secular Society

Any social system has negative side effects, and that is also true for school choice in the Netherlands, which may contribute to educational differences between religious and public schools and to ethnic and social segregation. In addition, maintaining a dual system may increase the total cost of providing education.

#### *More Segregation of Schools*

As stated, the equal funding of private and public schools has reduced the number and size of prestigious elite schools. The equal financing of religious and public schools has prevented either from skimming off the best students. Before the 1970s, the choice of religious or public school generally was made not on educational but on religious grounds; therefore the long-standing existence of parental choice did not increase educational inequality in Dutch society. The educational differences between religious and public schools are recent and could be the start of a new form of inequality, despite efforts of the Dutch administration to diminish unequal opportunities for education. Differences in parents' knowledge of school effectiveness, which correlates with their own educational level, can perhaps be seen as the basis of this new form of inequality.<sup>46</sup> In the Netherlands as well as in other European countries, the importance of deliberate parental choice in promoting children's educational opportunities seems to be an important element in the persistence of educational systems with a substantial religious school sector, despite

secularization. But in a school system without a sizable private religious sector, parents' knowledge of school effectiveness can be an important factor in choosing the right school and neighborhood for their children.

Recent studies on the relation of school choice and ethnic segregation show clearly that ethnic and social segregation in primary schools is a general phenomenon in the Netherlands. This is the case for the education system on a national scale, as well in the large metropolitan areas in the western and southern parts of the country.<sup>47</sup> In the big cities the religious character of schools is not really an important factor in the segregation of students.<sup>48</sup> Protestant elementary schools in Amsterdam, for instance, have more children from non-Western families and also more children from Dutch families with a low level of education than the average for the city's schools as a whole. Only the populations of Islamic and Hindu schools are composed almost entirely of children from ethnic minority families with a low level of education. That contrasts with the private nondenominational schools, which have the lowest percentage of these children and often are completely white middle-class schools. They request a relatively high parental financial contribution and adopt a specific, often freer teaching method (for example, Montessori, Steiner, Jena), in this way ensuring that they select pupils from the "better circles." Ethnic and social segregation in primary schools is caused mainly by parental choice of school and aggravated by "gatekeeping" activities of school principals. The important point here is not that the distinction between "socially undesirable" and "socially desirable" schools is more or less equal to that between public and religious private schools. The main point is that the current, nonreligious interpretation of the constitutional right to freedom of education means free school choice by parents, both within and between the public and private sectors. This free school choice opens the possibility of ethnic segregation in primary schools, not necessarily only between school sectors, but more often among schools within the same school sector and neighborhood. The existence of free school choice, although beneficial even to public schools under certain conditions, thus can deepen the social and ethnic inequality of schools within the same neighborhood and thus in society at large.<sup>49</sup> This deepening of social and ethnic segregation of schools in the Netherlands might be neutralized by a less strong social segregation of neighborhoods, because free school choice does not force parents to find a house in a particular catchment area in order to obtain the right to enroll their children in a desired school located there. The net effect of school choice in the Netherlands on social integration—stronger school segregation but weaker neighborhood segregation—is impossible to know with certainty.

*Lower Costs per Religious School but also Reduced Economy of Scale*

Another explanation for the demand for private schooling may be the financial differences between school sectors. Dutch schools do not differ greatly in their fees. Religious schools charge certain extra fees, which are mostly used for extracurricular activities, but the choice of parents here can hardly be influenced by financial considerations. This irrelevance of financial criteria for school choice has been shown in various educational attainment studies.<sup>50</sup> Financial differences are not a good explanation for the existence of religious schools.

A dual educational system, however, is not less expensive than a single public system. Koelman estimated the extra costs of the Dutch system of public and religious schools at about 631 million Dutch guilders (about \$400 million) a year for primary education.<sup>51</sup> The extra costs come from maintaining the many small schools of different sectors in one community, given the small minimum number of pupils necessary to maintain a school. The government is making efforts to reduce these costs by increasing the minimum number of pupils in a school. In secondary education, this has led to a fusion of schools into larger units, but the mergers have been mostly within the public and religious sectors, with some tendencies to merge Protestant and Catholic schools into one Christian school. Moreover, there are indications that these mergers of nonpublic schools might have diminished their effectiveness advantage.<sup>52</sup> This fusion movement has partly collapsed in primary education because the government could not raise the minimum number of pupils to a sufficient level. The main cause of the failure has been pressure from smaller communities, which fear losing their only school. In contrast to the higher cost of maintaining small schools—public or religious—are the lower overhead costs of most religious schools, which are not obliged to use the more expensive municipal services but can shop around to obtain the cheapest and most effective assistance for administration, repairs, building, cleaning, and so on. Religious schools also use more voluntary help, owing to their more direct link with parents, which also lowers overhead costs. A total balance sheet of the lower overhead costs of religious schools and the higher costs of maintaining a multisector school system has never been agreed on, however, since all sides dispute the figures.

**Toward a Policy of Demand-Driven Nonreligious School Choice in the Public and Private Sectors**

An important recent development in education in the Netherlands is a proposal for a demand-driven policy that would not take the religious charter of a school into account in deciding whether to approve an educational estab-

lishment but would base decisions on quantitative criteria, like the number of prospective students. Such a change would have various ramifications.

#### *A Nonreligious Basis for School Choice*

Recent developments suggest that the disparity between the supply of schooling (organized around religious diversity) and demand for schooling in a predominantly secular society might lead to some adjustment in the regulations regarding the establishment of private religious schools in the near future. Notably, an advisory report published by the Netherlands's influential Educational Council might become the marker of an important change in the current system of choice. The Educational Council, commonly seen as a powerful watchdog for freedom of schooling, is proposing to adjust the educational system to fit the new social realities of Dutch society. In effect, the report radically reinterprets the design of the system of choice in education.<sup>53</sup> The Council argues that the government should no longer take the religious charter of a school into account when planning an educational establishment but should base such decisions solely on quantitative criteria (like number of students). This would remove from legislation all criteria regarding the need for a religious or philosophical foundation for a school. In practice, this would not necessarily result in the founding of new schools. In the current system, the denomination of the school also plays a part in the funding of a school that wishes to change or merge its religious direction. This school has to prove that there exists a demand for this changed religious direction that is not met by other schools in that region. If other schools already meet the demand, a change of the religious direction is not allowed. In a system in which a religious or philosophical charter is no longer a criterion for state funding, it is becoming easier to realize parental preferences through adaptation of the school's religious charter.<sup>54</sup> So, by providing for diversity along dimensions other than religious or philosophical lines, according to parental demands, it is hoped that the system would allow for more of a link between changing parental preferences and teaching. Furthermore, the system would be more consistent, no longer having as its rationale the religious diversity that Dutch society no longer exhibits.

With the adaptation of an educational infrastructure based on religion to a demand-driven system, the evolution of the current religiously based system to a system based on preferences other than religious ones—be they ideological, pedagogical, educational, or based on any other principle—could lie ahead. By basing the founding and closing down of schools on quantitative criteria, the proposal is expected to tip the balance between educational consumers and suppliers in favor of the first.

This would mean that educational supply is based on actual parental needs and demands. The decreased importance of religion in Dutch society and the enlargement of cultural diversity is reason to rid the school system of as many impediments as possible to creating maximal freedom for whoever manages to mobilize sufficient support for a school, no matter what the grounds.

*Bureaucratically Disguised Religious Schools*

What does this mean for the future of Dutch school choice? Most likely it will continue to exist, but in a transformed shape. The importance of the ideological and religious legitimacy of private nonprofit organizations increasingly will move to the background. That will happen, however, without any public renouncing of their ideological and religious identity, because religion and ideology still form the building blocks of society. In those cases in which a religious identity is abandoned, it will be traded in for one based on the effectiveness of the education offered. This effectiveness need not relate only to school results, but also to the extent to which the school offers students protection against the dangers of modern society (for example, dropping out of school, drugs). The legitimization of this efficiency will probably be rather multiform, ranging from ideological attention to certain didactics to religious identity or to a certain sociocultural composition of the student population. Because private, nonprofit organizations may provide adequate surroundings more easily, there will not be a movement to increase the number of state-run schools. To the contrary, schools that are at the moment being managed by a local or national government might increasingly become schools managed by private nonprofit organizations or something similar. In short, the most likely development would be a transformation toward a type of nonreligious or nondenominational education.

This transformation of private production of education based on religious and ideological organizations to a system based on private nonprofit organizations might also create new problems. The private delivery of education by nonprofit organizations does not automatically lead to economically efficient educational organization. A situation in which there are too many small schools governed by too many private nonprofit organizations leads to inefficiencies of scale and therefore to an overly expensive educational system. On the other hand, large nonprofit organizations, each managing many large schools, will not be very efficient either, because frequent and intensive involvement in the internal affairs of the school and with external authorities will diminish.<sup>55</sup> The cause of this is the necessary increase of bureaucracy and legal rigmarole. Therefore it will remain the task of the government, as

provider of the collective means for education, to continually strive to strike a balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

Private nonprofit organizations have another classical drawback: they may fall into the hands of a certain elite in society. The managerial control of education may, in such a situation, become an uncontrollable instrument of power. The current structuring of education on denominational grounds is a good illustration of just such a situation: there is a close bond between the administrators of denominational education and the Christian Democratic political party, which took up a central position in the Dutch political landscape for a long time. This classical drawback makes an active national government necessary in order to prevent unproductive concentrations of power in education. If the transformation of the education system toward a more private production of education takes place too quietly or is dominated by rhetoric and symbolism, this disadvantage might be even more serious. Any solutions, such as handing administrative power to parents or schools, also must indicate which groups will receive this power in situations in which parents or schools do not have adequate administrative or market resources at their disposal (for example, in poor neighborhoods). Given the inequality among schools and parents, it is unlikely that all schools and groups in society will be able to summon the resources to administer a school effectively.

## Discussion

The Dutch case shows that promoting more parental choice in education and more competition among schools can be a means to improve the quality of teaching, to decrease the level of bureaucracy in and around schools, and to reduce the costs within schools. The Dutch case also shows that it is possible to strike a fair balance between parental freedom of school choice and the aims of a national educational policy. It assumes, however, the equal funding and treatment of public and private religious schools by the state. Advocates of a strong market orientation and the absence of the state in education tend to forget these important conditions. Without these conditions, the introduction of religious schools will result in lower-quality teaching for the average student, more educational inequality, and a less balanced provision of education. A balanced combination of market forces and state involvement produces a better education for a larger part of the population than reliance on either the state or the market alone. Alone, either a powerful state or an almighty market inevitably will produce certain negative outcomes in education. For example, recent developments within the Dutch system show that free parental choice of public and private schools can increase social segrega-

tion among schools within the different school sectors, although parental choice does not necessarily increase the social segregation of different school sectors and can even soften the social segregation of neighborhoods.

The developments outlined earlier make the Dutch experiment interesting because they raise questions about why parents in a secularized society do not favor education that is managed by the government on behalf of that society but instead favor education managed by private organizations. Schools run by private nonprofit organizations will have, on average, more chances to achieve more effective management and to create a social network around those schools than schools that are run by local or national governments. This explanation of the existence of religious schools in a secular society cannot be seen as separate from explanations of the problems governments have in allotting quasi-collective services in other areas, such as health, social services, and the arts. In particular, the importance of maintaining face-to-face communication between parents and teachers while producing these quasi-collective services requires a less bureaucratic form of governance and administration. Private nonprofit organizations seem to be able to deal better with the two-sided, face-to-face demands of supplying quasi-collective services than private, profit-seeking organizations or public organizations. Therefore the former can produce quasi-collective services, under equal circumstances, more effectively and efficiently than the state or business organizations.

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