

Catholicism and the Curriculum: The Irish Secondary School Experience, 1922–62

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Through the nineteenth century the Catholic Church opposed rising state intervention in education and resisted it wherever possible. By the 1920s, Ireland was one of the few countries where the Church was satisfied with the school system, particularly in secondary education.¹ Here, where the majority of secondary schools were Catholic, successive governments left management in the hands of their owners, diocesan authorities, and religious orders, all the while accepting financial responsibility for maintenance. In return, schools were obliged to provide a required number of school subjects and to conform to requirements as to facilities and teachers.

"Ireland" means the twenty-six counties established as a distinct political entity since 1922, as The Irish Free State, Eire, and the Republic of Ireland. Before 1922, the entire island of Ireland was one administrative unit within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The political settlement of that year produced a division into the independent Irish Free State and the Northern Ireland state, which latter remained part of the United Kingdom. The Church was now in a position of great power in the newly independent state, whose population was more than 90 per cent Catholic,² the vast majority of the Protestant population being located in Northern Ireland.

The Church's power resided primarily with a hierarchy of twenty-seven prelates whose dioceses were grouped into four ecclesiastical provinces.³ They met as a body twice a year, whereas "regular administrative matters and questions of policy were handled by a standing committee of the four archbishops and five or six other prelates."⁴ Throughout the period 1922–62, the bishops opposed any joint responsibility between laity and clergy for schools.

"[T]he only format ever acceptable to the bishops was one in which direct control was exercised by either the secular clergy or members of religious orders or congregations."⁵

¹See J. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), 16.

²*Ibid.*, 3.

³D. W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898–1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 10.

⁴E. B. Tittley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling of Ireland, 1900–1944* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p. 5.

⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

Secondary schools, called diocesan colleges, came under the direct jurisdiction of the bishops and were run by diocesan clergy. These clergy presented ecclesiastical thinking on education through their association, the Catholic Headmasters' Association (CHA). Some orders of religious brothers and religious sisters independent of episcopal jurisdiction ran schools. Among these, the Christian Brothers were, like the CHA, consulted directly by the national Department of Education on matters of educational policy. Church protocol and internal politics were such that no religious order would build a school in any diocese unless invited to do so by the local bishop.⁶

Public discord among bishops and religious orders on educational matters was unknown. Equally, there was no tradition of the Catholic laity openly criticizing the clergy.⁷ The public face of unanimity makes it possible to speak of "the Church" in a generalized way..

The Church's primary task was "the salvation of souls" and thus it saw control of the schools as vital. It was well satisfied in the period here under consideration with its control of primary education. Most primary schools were managed by the local parish priest. The managers' most important prerogative was the appointment of teachers, subject to the regulations of the Department of Education pertaining to academic and teaching qualifications.⁸

The Church was especially anxious to maintain control of secondary schools. Titley⁹ draws attention to the role of secondary education in generating a loyal middle class whose members would perpetuate the Church's influence in Irish society and encourage their children to enter religious life. Secondary schools constituted fertile ground for the direct recruitment of priests, brothers, and nuns. Not only did this arrangement produce the required administrators of the "faithful" at home and of the numerous Irish Catholics who had settled in Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but it enabled the Church to send many missionaries to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Meanwhile provision of and attendance at secondary schools in Ireland was low. In 1924, the number of pupils in secondary schools was a mere 5 per cent of those enrolled in primary schools in the State. By 1960 this figure had increased only to 16 per cent. Major political parties showed little enthusiasm for the notion of free secondary education for all, preferring to continue with a very limited scholarship system designed to allow only extremely bright children of poor parents to progress beyond primary school. Some religious orders offered instruction for very low fees and, in some cases, accepted poorer pupils free of

⁶The Executive of the Teaching Brothers Association, "Teaching Brothers," in *Studies, Post-Primary Education: Now and in the Future* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1968), 58.

⁷J. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, 7.

⁸J. Duffy, *The Lay Teacher* (Dublin: Fallons, 1967), 27.

⁹E. B. Titley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling of Ireland, 1900-1944, passim*.

charge, but few profited from this. As late as 1961, only 13 per cent of the work force were professionals, managers, and employers, yet in the secondary schools their children heavily outnumbered those from lower status occupations. Children of unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers benefited least from secondary education.¹⁰

The lack of provision of secondary schools and the fact that only a small percentage of those who left primary school went on to secondary school each year was of little concern either to the Catholic Church or to the State since the numbers fulfilled their respective expectations of secondary education. The State looked to the secondary schools to produce an adequate number of suitably prepared individuals for the professions and for a variety of public and private occupations. Throughout the period the Catholic Church co-operated with the State in the pursuit of these objectives. In turn, the Church was afforded great latitude in the pursuit of its interests through the schools: development of a loyal middle class and recruitment of priests, brothers, and nuns.

BACKGROUND

From the 16th-century Tudor conquest of Ireland, schooling was intimately bound up with colonisation, and with the consequent ascendancy of the English language.¹¹ The Irish nevertheless maintained their Catholicism. Indeed, loyalty to Catholicism was strengthened by subjection to constant threat. The threat was most severe during the 17th and 18th centuries when a series of "Penal Laws" was passed aimed at the removal of all rights to property, religion and education from the "native" Irish.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the political climate became more favourable and the Church became a powerful interest group pressing its claims in educational matters with great tenacity. It had a commitment to the principle of denominational education at all levels. Its efforts, along with those of the Presbyterian Church and the (Anglican) Church of Ireland, ensured that the national schools which had been intended to provide a multi-denominational primary school education, were attended mainly by pupils from one particular denomination and managed by local clergymen.

All three churches sought to keep the secondary schools free from State control. After much debate, the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1878 was

¹⁰*Investment in Education—Report of the Survey Team* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1966), 51.

¹¹S. Dunn, "Education, religion and cultural change in the Republic of Ireland," in W. Tulasiewicz and C. Brock, eds., *Christianity and Educational Provision in International Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1988), 95.

passed.¹² Under that legislation, the Board of Commissioners for Intermediate Education aided secondary education through the award of fees to school proprietors and prizes to students on the results of public examinations. A conscience clause safeguarded pupils' religious affiliations during religious instruction classes. What resulted, however, was a mechanism to support denominational schools, privately owned, managed and staffed. The State provided no funds directly for the building or equipping of schools, operated no inspectorate until 1901, and did not concern itself with the uneven distribution of schools on geographical and social class lines. Individual secondary school managers determined the qualifications, salaries, and conditions of employment of teachers.

In independent Ireland from 1924 onwards, the State's responsibility for most education outside the universities was vested in a Minister for Education and a newly created Department of Education. Money now came to secondary schools as capitation grants and as salary increments to recognized teachers.¹³ Schools where Irish was the medium of instruction received additional grants. The Church liked an arrangement that provided state subvention while preserving the Church's managerial control.

For its part, the State wanted no controversy with the Church. The Department of Education stated in its first annual report that the State had assumed no responsibilities for the appointment of school principals, teachers, or managers.¹⁴ Although the Department inspected schools and exercised supervision through its grants to secondary schools, it was not concerned with founding secondary schools or financing their building.

Two new examinations were introduced—the Intermediate Certificate Examination, taken after a three-year course, and the Leaving Certificate Examination, taken after another two years. These examinations shaped the secondary school curriculum. In order to pass them overall, students generally had to pass in Irish, English, another language, history and geography, mathematics, and one other subject from an approved list.

The Certificates curriculum emphasized the Gaelic development of pupils, in contrast to the indifference to Gaelic of the curriculum of pre-Independence days. Equally radically, history and geography were now compulsory subjects with an Irish orientation. This use of schools to reshape national consciousness through a linguistic and cultural revival arose from a desire to give the children of the nation possession of what was seen as their national heritage.

¹²See J. Coolahan, "Church and State in Irish education 1900-20," in V.A. McClelland, ed., *The Churches and Education* (Leicester: History of Education Society, Conference Papers, 1983), 89-106.

¹³SPO. Dublin. Cabinet Files. File S.3092 entitled "Intermediate Education Commissioners' Order, 1923."

¹⁴*Report of the Department of Education for the School Year 1924-25 and the Financial and Administrative Year 1924-25-26* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1926), 7-8.

Teaching of Irish history was crucial to gaelicisation. Even though the history of Western Europe was well covered in Intermediate Certificate history and included under "special topics" in Leaving Certificate history, Irish history received high priority,¹⁵ an emphasis reinforced by examination questions that strongly favoured Irish history. This history was "shaped by nationalistic fervour" and a "desire to establish a legitimate continuity for Irish separatism."¹⁶

The approach to Irish history showed the concurrence of dominant ideologies of Catholicism and conservative nationalism. John Broderick has characterised this as follows:

The idea of history that we got was that we had been oppressed by our neighbours, the British, for seven hundred years; that the Catholic religion in particular had been suppressed and was persecuted; that there had been a great revival in the nineteenth century with Catholic Emancipation through Daniel O'Connell, and that Catholicism thrived under that, but that coming into the twentieth century we were being Englishified and we were becoming more and more part of the United Kingdom and that was why 1916 came about; this had to be broken, the Irish people had to be shown what their heritage was. In a capsule this was the history of Ireland.¹⁷

Educators encouraged the teaching of this perspective on Irish history through study of outstanding individuals and significant incidents. Teachers were informed that the continuity of the separatist idea should be stressed and that pupils should be imbued with the ideals and aspirations of revolutionaries. The other side of this emphasis on Irish language and culture was a bias against Protestant Anglo-Irish culture. This exclusion was blatant with respect to the teaching of English. Emphasis was on "Shakespeare's Historical Dramas and other suitable plays of the same period,"¹⁸ and on the poems of Scott, Byron, Longfellow, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, whereas no recognition was given to contemporary Anglo-Irish dramatists, poets, essayists, or novelists.

Professor T. J. Corcoran, the main architect of the programme, defended this lack of attention on the grounds that it protected pupils from exposure to a body of literature which was "rarely good in structure" and was strongly influenced by a Protestant ethos and materialist values.¹⁹ He also argued as follows:

Of great dignified, national prose writing, Anglo-Irish literature has none to show. In poetry, the best is an odd patch of fair second-grade quality....The

¹⁵Department of Education, *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools for the Year 1924-25* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1924), and subsequent years.

¹⁶R. Foster, "History and the Irish question," in C. Brady, *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 138.

¹⁷Daniel Murphy, *Education and the Arts: A Research Report* (Dublin: Trinity College Dublin, School of Education, 1987), 107.

¹⁸*Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools for the School Year 1924-25*, 7-8.

¹⁹See T. J. Corcoran, "The new secondary school programme in Ireland," *Studies*, 11, December 1922, 559-70.

cultivation of such material in Irish educational work would be a real national and linguistic misfortune.²⁰

Elsewhere, he argued that "what is called 'Anglo-Irish literature' deserves no preference"²¹ in the Irish secondary school curriculum. This rejection of works such as those of Berkeley, Goldsmith, Swift, Shaw, Wilde, and Yeats, was a further step in strengthening the connection between Catholicism and the nation-building enterprise. The fact that it also contributed to feelings of rejection on the part of the minority Protestant population²² was of little concern to either the Catholic Church or the State.

The Church was well satisfied from the early years of Independence that its educational interests were safeguarded by the administrative and curricular structures of the State. In turn, it cooperated with the State in gaelicisation. It soon became clear the Church was not prepared to accept gaelicisation beyond a certain level. In the 1920s, the President of St. Colman's Diocesan College, Fermoy, expressed fear that Irish would threaten the place of the classical languages in the curriculum,²³ and Mgr. Ryan of Cashel expressed opposition to "any method that would exclude the study of the English language in our schools," reminding listeners it was English that helped make Ireland "an apostolic nation."²⁴

Further reservations were voiced in 1934, the year in which a pass in Irish became essential for passing the Leaving Certificate examination overall. The argument was that any further emphasis on the Irish language could push Latin

²⁰T. J. Corcoran, "How English may be taught without anglicising," *The Irish Monthly*, 51, June 1923, 269.

²¹T. J. Corcoran, "Education through Anglo-Irish literature," *Irish Monthly*, 51, June 1923, 242.

²²The objections raised on the introduction of the requirement that a pass in Irish would be necessary from 1928 onwards for passing the Intermediate Certificate examination overall provide a good illustration of the criticism. See the CAIS Papers, Trinity College Dublin, Minutes of the 1924 AGM. Here it is argued that the regulation went against the spirit of freedom which informed the rest of the curriculum. This argument was taken up by the Warden of St. Columba's College, Dublin and the Headmaster of The High School, Dublin in the *Irish Times*, June 19, 1924. Here the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cashel argued also that the introduction of the regulation was unjust and not very sensible since the promotion of continental languages would be more advantageous in the development of trade and commerce. See also the *Times Educational Supplement* for a report on representation made by Dr. Gregg, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin and the Right Rev. Hanna, Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly, to seek a compromise with the Minister for Education on compulsory Irish.

²³*Times Educational Supplement*, December 8, 1924.

²⁴*Irish Times*, June 15, 1926.

out of the curriculum of boys' secondary schools.²⁵ When this became a possibility in 1936, the CHA objected in a lengthy public statement,²⁶ anxious that secondary school programmes in Latin provide the necessary groundwork in an essential subject for seminarians.

The Latin controversy surfaced again in 1937, following speculation about the re-balancing of subjects in the secondary school curriculum in the interests of gaelicisation. Headmasters worried about the future place of Latin in the schools, and declared opposition to any move from the "cultural and mental development" emphasis in the curriculum.²⁷ Similarly, the CHA declared its opposition to any system that would "unfairly depress the lawful position of Classics."²⁸ It also declared against any attempt to downgrade the position of English in the secondary school programme. A high standard of English, it argued, was essential in view of the country's geographical position, the need for contact with countrymen in America and elsewhere, and "the actual predominance of English as a spoken language in the world." The "missionary value of the language" was inescapable, for the Church was not prepared to sanction any domestic educational developments that might slow its work in this domain.

The severity of the Church's opposition was such that curriculum changes over the next thirty years upheld the pre-eminence of Latin and English. This, however, was only one of the ways the Church safeguarded its interests in the secondary school curriculum. The Church played a part in marginalizing, if not completely neutralizing, other educational interest groups, most notably parents, from contributing to the development of curriculum policy and practice. It cooperated with successive governments to stifle attempts to establish a national forum where curricular and managerial proposals could be discussed by representatives of the interest groups in the education system.²⁹

RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS ETHOS OF THE IRISH SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM, 1922–1962

From 1922 to 1962, the Catholic Church in Ireland was well positioned to ensure that a religious ethos permeated the secondary school curriculum. It staffed its schools primarily with priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters. In 1926, for example, there were 963 religious teachers and only 498 lay teachers in the

²⁵See *Times Educational Supplement*, January 7, 1933.

²⁶*Irish Times*, May 18, 1936.

²⁷See *Irish Press*, December 21, 1936; *Irish Press*, January 19, 1937.

²⁸A copy of the CHA's position dated January 20, 1938 was forwarded to the Christian Brothers' Education Committee and is in the Christian Brothers' Archives, Dublin.

²⁹National Library of Ireland. Minutes of the Commission on Vocational Organisation. Ms. 923, 2, 596–614; Ms. 928, 2197–221; Ms. 935, Memo No. 59; Ms. 939, Memo No. 160.

secondary schools.³⁰ By 1961 this ratio had changed only slightly in favour of lay teachers. Throughout the period the great majority of secondary schools were schools of the Christian Brothers, the Mercy Sisters, and the diocesan authorities. Accordingly, there was a significant degree of uniformity in the nature of the religious ethos of the schools.

Those in religious life gave daily teaching of religion in classes lasting about 45 minutes. They imparted dogma, morals, and Church history, and further taught senior pupils apologetics to help them defend their faith through systematic argumentation. Such teaching was normally didactic, Catholic doctrine being viewed as received truth handed down unchanged.

From the early years of the new State, public figures emphasized the importance of the schools in this enterprise. In 1928, Deputy (Member of Parliament) T. Sheehy from West Cork argued in the Dail (Parliament) that schooling should be concerned primarily with imparting "The Commandments, Christian Knowledge and The Catechism."³¹ A Fr. Denis Fahey³² made a case for the introduction of scholastic philosophy in the secondary schools, arguing it could lead to a foundation in the principles of Catholic ethics, while a certain N. Umis³³ expressed regret that the Irish Constitution was not as explicit as its counterpart in Poland on the role of religion in education.

These positions, however, were not representative. In the Pastoral Address of 15 August 1927, the Catholic bishops expressed satisfaction with the primary position of Catholic doctrine in the secondary school curriculum.³⁴ Similar sentiments were expressed over the next three decades. For example, in 1933, Rev. John C. McQuaid, Chairman of the CHA, while representing Ireland at the International Congress of Catholic Education at the Hague, was able to report enthusiastically on "the freedom of Catholic secondary studies within the national plan of the Irish Free State."³⁵ Similarly, the Council of Education established by the Minister for Education in 1950 to examine the curriculum of Irish schools, reported secondary schools were "strongly religious in character, religious motives having led to their foundation and religious bodies being, in the main, their trustees, patrons and managers."³⁶

³⁰Duffy, *The Lay Teacher*, 41-62.

³¹Dail Eireann Debates. Vol. 23, Col. 2480 (May 31, 1928).

³²D. Fahey, "The introduction of scholastic philosophy in Irish secondary schools," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 22, August 1923, 177.

³³N. Umis, "Poland-schools," *Irish Monthly*, 57, July 1930, 352.

³⁴"Pastoral Address," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 30, November 1927, 536.

³⁵T. J. Corcoran, "The International Congress of Catholic Secondary Education at the Hague," *Studies*, 22.

³⁶September 1933, 497.

³⁶Department of Education, *Report of the Council of Education: The Curriculum of the Secondary School* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1962), 80.

The Church was adamant that the teaching of religion as a school subject should be reinforced by adoption of a Catholic position, wherever possible, in the teaching of the other subjects on the curriculum. Rev. T. J. Corcoran,³⁷ the main architect of the secondary school curriculum,³⁸ strongly endorsed this view in 1923, arguing the teaching of history in the new secondary school curriculum should embody a Catholic spirit and a Catholic outlook.³⁹ Six years later he opined that all Catholic schools should provide a course in history "wherein the Church will have its fullest place as the directing force in all civilizations and progress."⁴⁰ He adopted a similar approach in his treatment of the place of science in the new programme, arguing that the work of Lord Kelvin, in particular, should be emphasised as "He stood for reverence on the part of science towards God, the Creator, and he openly proclaimed it,"⁴¹ while Pasteur's work was also worthy of extensive treatment because of his religious convictions.

Corcoran's position was echoed by Catholic lay observers, who argued the amount of time devoted to religion in schools should be increased,⁴² that "Catholic expansion, Catholic civilisation, and the history of Catholic thought applied to social action" should be given a prominent place in the teaching of history,⁴³ and that a graded set of "Christian geographies" should be produced for the purpose of dealing with geography from the point of view of "the great Encyclicals on Labour, on Property, on Social Order, from 1894 to 1934."⁴⁴

These arguments were in line with Pope Pius XI's *The Christian Education of Youth* of 1929 and *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931. The prescribed programme never became biased to the extent proposed in these arguments. However, the majority of secondary teachers were priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters, and had great freedom in running their schools and in their teaching. There was nothing to prevent them from adopting such an approach in the classroom, and many of them did so. The Church ensured a religious ethos was all-pervasive in

³⁷T.J. Corcoran, "The chapel and the classroom," *Irish Monthly*, 57, September 1929, 454.

³⁸Joseph O'Neill, "Father T.J. Corcoran: An Appreciation," *Studies*, 32, June 1943, 153-62.

³⁹T.J. Corcoran, "The new secondary school programme in Ireland - the teaching of history," *Studies*, 22, June 1923, 258.

⁴⁰T.J. Corcoran, "Advanced schoolwork in history," *Irish Monthly*, 57, December 1929, 626.

⁴¹T.J. Corcoran, "The place of science in general education," *Studies*, 22, September 1923, 416.

⁴²C. Malone, "School and university," *Catholic Bulletin*, 25, November 1936, 904-5.

⁴³A. O'Meachair, "Secularised school subjects," *Catholic Bulletin*, 26, December 1936, 902.

⁴⁴A. O'Meachair, "Teaching real geography," *Catholic Bulletin*, 26, December 1936, 992.

the curriculum, thus contributing to the development of a loyal middle class, reinforcing the view that Catholicism was a uniquely true religion.

Women, despite exclusion from decision-making in the Church, were viewed as central in perpetuating allegiance to the Church. As mothers, they had major responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the members of their families and for encouraging their children to enter religious life. To safeguard their children against the temptations of modern life, girls were told that when they became mothers they should bless their homes, dedicate them to the Sacred Heart, and pray for the protection of the Virgin Mary. Domestic science, a school subject taken by most girls, had a special place in their education. Through the 1940s and 1950s, in particular, annual Conferences of the Convent Secondary Schools stressed that a woman's role in life was to be a good wife and mother, and that the curriculum should prepare girls for this role, particularly through the teaching of domestic science.⁴⁵

The Church pursued its interests by eliminating content at odds with Church beliefs. On church-sponsored schools in general, King and Brownell⁴⁶ remarked in the 1960s on elimination of content portraying ways of life repugnant to the church. Consider the controversy over the Mother-and-Child Health Scheme of The First Inter-party Government of 1948-51. Dr. Noel Browne, new Minister for Health, sought to make radical changes in the area of public health. The previous government had passed the Health Act of 1947 as a basis of a national health scheme. Browne now sought to give effect to some of its provisions. In particular, he was anxious to provide maternity and medical care for children up to sixteen years of age free of charge, partly out of concern about high infant mortality in Ireland.

The Irish Medical Association, protecting its own vested interests, condemned Browne's scheme,⁴⁷ referring to "the dangers" of socialized medicine and political interference in medical affairs. Catholic bishops objected as well, vigorously denouncing a proposal that local medical officers give Catholic girls and women sex education lest it lead to family planning and abortion. The bishops opposed also a related clause enabling health authorities to cooperate

⁴⁵See the various reports in the CCSS Archives, UNISON Offices, Dublin, including Rev. H.J. Farrell, "The girlhood of Ireland and the Christian marriage," CCSS Report 1941, 79; Archdeacon McMahon, "Education in a changing world," CCSS Report 1949, 25.

⁴⁶A. R. King and J. A. Brownell, *The Curriculum and the Disciplines of Knowledge*, (New York: John Wiley, 1966), 26.

⁴⁷See J. Whyte, "Church, State and society," in J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1945-70* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979), 75.

with the schools to "safeguard and improve" the health and physical condition of children "and to provide for their education in matters relating to health."⁴⁸

Browne's abandonment of the scheme has been variously attributed to the pressure of the Irish Medical Association; to his poor relationship with Sean MacBride, the leader of his party; to the doubts of his colleagues as to its economic feasibility; but, above all else, to episcopal influence. The bishops outlined their objections to the health and physical education clauses as follows:

The right to provide for the Physical Education of the child belongs to the family and not to the state. Experience has shown that physical education is closely interwoven with important moral questions on which the Catholic Church has definite teaching.⁴⁹

In fairness to Dr. Browne, the limited correspondence available suggests that he contemplated only restricted provision of health education.⁵⁰ His views extended only to health education of youth, personal cleanliness, care of teeth, training in carriage and deportment, and remedial exercises for those with deformed limbs. Girls were to receive instruction on diet and the avoidance of certain types of work and recreation during pregnancy.

Catholic bishops were more worried by the absence of a legal guarantee that instruction would be in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church. They were also, of course, anxious to reduce to a minimum any sex education in the schools lest it divert attention from the great emphasis on encouraging entry to religious life.

It was considered necessary to include health and physical education clauses in the Mother-and-Child scheme because these areas were neglected in the school curriculum. However, the position taken by the bishops was sufficient to destroy Browne's scheme to deal with the situation. When a new government took office in 1951, complex and discrete consultations took place with the bishops. The result was the passing of a Health Act in 1953 which excluded the controversial clauses. By now the Church had secured a promise from the new Minister for Health, James Ryan, that the Act would not contain provisions concerning the health examination of pupils attending secondary schools lest they be given advice on sexual practices contrary to Church teaching.⁵¹ Many years would pass before anyone again dared to raise the question of the need for sex education and health education in Irish secondary schools.

⁴⁸See J. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, 152.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 421. For Brown's own views on this and other objections see N. Browne, *Against the Tide* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 141-55.

⁵⁰The correspondence which took place on the issue was published in full in the *Irish Times*, April 12, 1951.

⁵¹See CHA Minutes. Letter from Seamus O'Riain, Minister for Health, to the secretary of the CHA, April 18, 1953.

Saturating the curriculum with a religious ethos and excluding content at odds with Church teaching were not, however, the only ways the Church maintained an environment conducive to continual recruitment to their ranks and to the development of a loyal middle class. The training for religious life conducted by many religious orders and diocesan authorities ensured the development of teachers who did not promote any questioning of the Church amongst pupils. This "formation," as it was termed, was organized on a uniform programme. Inflexible rules regulated every detail of daily life under an authoritarian internal government.⁵²

It would be wrong to underplay the system's success in developing teachers who valued order, attended carefully to the preparation of school work, and worked hard for their students. Yet these same teachers might prove unable to engage in any but superficial personal relationships.⁵³ Indeed, a significant rule of religious orders held that friendships were not permitted to develop. This rule grew out of the notion that spirituality could only be built up by laying aside one's sensitivity and one's need for love and affection, although also necessary to assure chastity.

The religious life presented difficulties for religious teachers who felt that knowledge should be presented in a personalized way. Cloister or monastery experience was limiting. McElligott has described the life of priests who taught in diocesan colleges as follows:

A priest in a diocesan college may enter college as a boarder at the age of twelve, remain on after the age of seventeen or eighteen as a clerical student and, after ordination, continue to live within the walls of the college until released by the bishop to take up a curacy.⁵⁴

Members of religious orders were bound by rules forbidding them to discuss everyday dimensions of their lives, tensions of communal living, their reactions to instructions they did not agree upon, and other strains of religious life. Furthermore, they were discouraged from curiosity about happenings in the neighbourhood and instructed to avoid reading magazines.

⁵²J. Ryan, "A case study on social change—the changing direction of Irish Seminaries," *Social Studies*, 2, No. 3, June–July 1973, 252–3.

⁵³K. Burke, "An analysis of open and closed belief systems in a religious community," unpublished DiPsych Thesis, Department of Psychology, University College Dublin. 1970; F. Cole, "A study of factors related to interpersonal relationships in a religious community," unpublished MPsychSc Thesis, Department of Psychology, University College Dublin. 1970; M.B. O'Mahony, "The adolescent: His environment and priestly vocation in Ireland," unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Psychology, University College Cork. 1970.

⁵⁴T. J. McElligott, *This Teaching Life: A Memoir of Schooldays in Ireland* (Mullingar: The Lilliput Press, 1986), 52.

Discouragement of reading for pleasure amongst the religious had a special impact on schooling. Author John McGahern,⁵⁵ reflecting on his own secondary school education, stated that reading a book was considered “dissolute, a waste of time” unless it was to help pass examinations in order to get a job. In the diocesan colleges pupils were long subject to a rule which forbade them even to read newspapers or periodicals. Several papal and consistorial instructions at the beginning of the twentieth century laid particular stress on this rule,⁵⁶ and were relaxed in the 1940s only to the extent of allowing Catholic weekly newspapers and magazines into school libraries.

Overall, then, preparation of priests, brothers, and nuns discouraged questions about their way of life.⁵⁷ Teachers who underwent such a religious formation would, in turn, discourage the development of a questioning approach towards life amongst pupils.

Although a few pupils were educated by more intellectually-oriented orders, such as the Jesuits and the Dominican nuns, the great majority were discouraged from critical debate. Poet Thomas Kinsella, who attended O'Connell's School run by the Christian Brothers in Dublin, has argued that although the teaching process was efficient, “inspiration was not necessarily inherent in the system...it was a matter of running into exceptional people.”⁵⁸ Fellow artists Thomas Murphy,⁵⁹ Charles Harper,⁶⁰ and Robert Ballagh⁶¹ also attest to a lack of encouragement for the development of any questioning attitude to religious beliefs. As academic and poet Professor Brendan Kennelly puts it, “Catholicism introduced me to the notion that everything was answerable.”⁶²

Textbooks did little to compensate. They contained plenty of information but lacked illustrative material which might have appealed to the creative and imaginative powers of pupils. The texts for Irish were traditionally grammatical and held to the notion that selections of prose should be committed to memory, then

⁵⁵Daniel Murphy, *Education and the Arts: A Research Report*, 139.

⁵⁶See J. Corkery, “The origin, foundation and development of the Catholic Diocesan Boarding Colleges in Ireland,” unpublished MEd Thesis, University College Cork, 1977, 344.

⁵⁷T. Inglis, “Legalism and Irish Catholicism,” *Social Studies*, 7, Winter 1982-83, 37.

⁵⁸S. MacSweeney, “Poetic perspectives on education,” unpublished MEd Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1982, 59.

⁵⁹L. Finnegan, “Dramatic perspectives on education,” unpublished MEd Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1986, 94.

⁶⁰J. Ryan, “Artistic perspectives on education,” unpublished MEd Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1984, 122-3.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 36.

⁶²S. MacSweeney, “Poetic perspectives on education,” 93.

drawn upon in the writing of letters, essays, and descriptive passages.⁶³ Geography texts were geared towards questions of the "name," "state," and "describe" type that demanded rote learning. The Christian Brothers' *Outlines of Geography*⁶⁴ published in 1925, gave list after list of facts and covered the whole world, yet had only one map and no pictures, while J. Dennehy's *Ideal Geography*⁶⁵ provided definitions, descriptions, and long lists. Eleanor Butler's *Structural Geography of Ireland* was unusual in its narrative structure, encouraging student imagination. None of these works suggested personal investigation, handling of sources, or development of powers of empathy.

The standard history texts of the time, namely, Hayden and Moonan's *A Short History of the Irish People from the Earliest Times to 1920*⁶⁶ and Stephen Gwynn's *The Student's History of Ireland*⁶⁷ were equally content-dominated. They presented history as an accumulation of facts and "correct" interpretations of "revealed" knowledge. This "closed" approach to knowledge and the promotion of the view that "certainty" existed served the Church well.

Various rituals in the secondary schools played a part in developing a loyal Catholic middle class. Rules decreed the manner of daily prayer. *The Directory and Rules* of the Christian Brothers stated that on entering the classroom in the morning the Brother had to kneel and recite privately the "Prayer before School,"⁶⁸ with each pupil following suit. Likewise, every hour the clock struck in school, the pupils had to stand and say the Hail Mary. In similar vein, the Presentation Sisters required pupils to engage in spiritual recollection at noon each day.

Boarding schools were even more intense. Thomas Kilroy, in 1945 a first-year student at St. Kieran's Diocesan College, Kilkenny, describes how the school

⁶³ See, for example, D. M. Lynch, *Free Composition in Irish* (Dublin: Gill, 1923); O'Dalaigh agus S. O'Suilldhubhain, *Blatba na Gaedhige* (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 1924); O'Suilleabhain, *Seanchaidbeacht Pros agus Filidbeacht* (Baile Atha Cliath: Thom, 1924); B. Oireachtaigh, *Treoir ar Aistibh Gaedhige* (Baile Atha Cliath: Brun is O'Nuallain, 1943).

⁶⁴ Christian Brothers, *Outlines of Geography* (np., The Christian Brothers, 1925).

⁶⁵ This text is analysed in D. Langridge, "The development of geography teaching in Irish post-primary schools," unpublished PhD Thesis, University College Cork, 1973, 112.

⁶⁶ M. Hayden and G. A. Moonan, *A Short History of the Irish People from the Earliest Times to 1900* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1921).

⁶⁷ S. Gwynn, *The Student's History of Ireland* (Dublin: The Talbot Press Ltd., 1925).

⁶⁸ The Christian Brothers, *Directory and Rules of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Ireland*, (Dublin: The Christian Brothers, 1927), 294.

week was punctuated with prayer, how each day began with morning mass, and how weekends were "dominated by Sunday's religious duties."⁶⁹

Students in secondary schools were required to partake in religious ceremonies and processions, and to take the Sacrament of Confession regularly. The preparation ritual for Confession consisted of a systematic examination of conscience in which pupils considered their behaviour with regard to God, their neighbour, and themselves. They asked themselves whether they had prayed negligently, disobeyed their superiors, spread rumours, yielded to sensuality, or put off devotions to "unseasonable times."⁷⁰ In this way expectations were reinforced that a good Catholic was obedient, compliant, and devoted to the habits of the institution.

The strictness and order of the religious way of life were embodied in the routine of school life. In turn, this routine served to soothe conflict and support harmony amongst students, bind them together as members of the greater Catholic community, and protect them from outside influences or thinking at odds with Church teaching. An environment conducive to the Church's pursuit of its interests through the secondary schools was thus maintained and cultivated.

Loyal Irish Catholic middle-class minds were shaped also through religious icons and symbols. As McLaren has put it, religious symbols are a form of concretizing the transcendent qualities of God; "they provoke students to 'take notice'—to apprehend reality in a special way."⁷¹ Novelist Maeve Binchy shows how secondary school students in Ireland were led to view reality in this special way through her characterisation of the classroom world of statues, holy pictures, and little altars to the Sacred Heart and the Little Flower in her novel *Light a Penny Candle*.⁷² Cards carrying images of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints were used as prizes and encouragement awards.

Schools had rituals specifically designed to encourage pupils to become priests, brothers, and nuns. The annual school retreat was particularly important in this regard. It generally lasted about three days, during which students immersed themselves in prayer, religious reflection, spiritual exercises, and the reading of religious works. Pupils were introduced to the lives of the founders of the religious orders whose schools they attended and to the history of the religious

⁶⁹ L. Finnegan, "Dramatic perspectives on education," 70.

⁷⁰ Loreto Sisters, *Loreto Manual, Compiled for Use of Pupils Educated by Religions of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin* (Dublin: The Loreto Sisters, 1927), 62.

⁷¹ McLaren, "Making Catholics: The ritual production of conformity in a Catholic junior high school," *Journal of Education*, 168, No. 2, 1986, 66.

⁷² M. Binchy, *Light a Penny Candle* (Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), 108.

orders themselves. In all of this, there was, as Blanshard has pointed out, “constantly a favourable portrayal of the celibate priestly life.”⁷³

Schools invited guest lecturers from time to time to speak on “vocations,” and each year many religious orders sent representatives to schools to encourage pupils to become priests, religious brothers, or religious sisters, a campaign much assisted by the fact that most schools were single-sex institutions. Throughout the period the Church insisted on segregation except in a few rural areas where low enrollments made it unviable. A special meeting of the bishops in May 1926 declared: “Mixed education in public schools is very undesirable especially among older children.”⁷⁴ The following month the Minister for Education concurred, stating that there was a very strong objection “to having boys and girls taught in the same school.” Segregation remained in force.

Titley has characterised a major component of the motivation behind this policy as follows:

The segregation of the sexes in church-controlled secondary schools was directly related to their principal function—the recruitment of clergy. It was only by deliberately limiting opportunities for the development of relationships between the sexes that the constant flow to cloister, monastery, and seminary could be maintained.⁷⁵

Church policy was galvanised with the publication of Pope Pius XI’s *The Christian Education of Youth* in 1929. Emphasizing “modern aberrations,” the encyclical criticised “co-education” as “a promiscuous herding together of males and females on a completely equal footing.”⁷⁶ Twenty years later a specially convened committee of the Department of Education to consider possible reforms to primary, secondary, and vocational education, recommended “co-education should be avoided as far as possible.”⁷⁷

The system of recruitment of personnel for the religious life in segregated schools was successful. Besides supplying priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters to meet needs at home, the Church in Ireland became the second largest *per capita* contributor of missionaries in the Catholic Church, Holland being the largest.⁷⁸ Pupils raised money through concerts and bazaars, while school magazines appealed to their idealism with photographs of missionaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and with accounts of heroic activity in foreign lands.

⁷³ Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power* (London: Verschoyle, 1954), 12.

⁷⁴ Quoted in S. O’Buachalla, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), 429, n. 12.

⁷⁵ E. B. Titley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling of Ireland, 1900–1944*, 157.

⁷⁶ Pope Pius XI, *The Christian Education of Youth* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1970).

⁷⁷ State Paper Office. “Final report of the Departmental Committee, June 27, 1947,” Irish State Papers, S 13638.

⁷⁸ J. Duffy, *The Lay Teacher*, 3.

Pupils enrolled in school branches of such organizations as the Legion of Mary and the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association, which encouraged regular prayer and the value of "good works." School journals regularly published photographs of enrolled pupils coupled with laudatory accounts of their activities.

Some former pupils have argued that in their experience the religious ethos of schools created an environment of contentment rather than repression and anxiety.⁷⁹ Writer Mary Lavin recalls her love for the retreats, the incense, and all the ceremony associated with religion:

The rituals of the Child of Mary medal...had all kinds of sentimental things about it. You asked somebody to pin it on for you. I went for all of that. The holy pictures and the chapel; they were lovely. And we would perhaps go to Rathfarnham to see a veiling—a nun being received.⁸⁰

Similarly, poet John Montague recalls pleasant memories of devotions and processions.⁸¹ Travel writer Dervla Murphy states she was happy as a boarding student at the Ursuline Convent, Waterford in the mid-1940s, enjoying "the anonymity of it all."⁸² Both Maeve Binchy⁸³ and Edna O'Brien⁸⁴ have made similar claims. O'Brien stresses that she is not the central character in her novel *The Country Girls*, and that although the bleakness of the convent and the regimented life as portrayed in this novel illustrated life at the boarding school she attended in County Galway, she was happy there and "keen on learning." Others found the authoritarian approach to schooling claustrophobic. Professor Thomas Kilroy, for example, contends that "rigid codes of behaviour coupled with a moral code which operated on a level of guilt and fear rather than reason or love"⁸⁵ were damaging. Similarly, poet Eithne Strong argues that although she got a good education at Scoil Mhuire in Ennis, County Clare, there was "not enough space for contact with the outside world" and the "religious ethic was much too closed and narrow and crushing and stuffy and limiting."⁸⁶

Only toward the 1960s was there criticism from the rank and file among the clergy of various aspects of Catholic education in Ireland. Corporal punishment in Irish schools was queried⁸⁷ and fresh questions raised about the need for sex

⁷⁹ See the evidence of John McGahern and John Broderick in J. Andrews, "Education through the writer's eye," unpublished MEd Thesis, Trinity College Dublin. (1984), 28;164.

⁸⁰ D. Murphy, *Education and the Arts: A Research Report*, 115.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸² See J. Quinn, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl* (London: Methuen, 1986), 124.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸⁵ See L. Finnegan, "Dramatic perspectives on education," 70.

⁸⁶ See S. MacSweeney, "Poetic perspectives on education," 51.

⁸⁷ School-Children's Protection Organisation, *Punishment in Our Schools* (Dublin: School-Children's Protection Organisation, 1955).

education.⁸⁸ Rev. Dom. Matthew Dillon, examining relations between home and school, argued:

....it is hardly possible to understand the children and their problems unless one knows their parents and their homes. He [the teacher] must discuss the progress of the child frankly with the parent suggesting modifications of the home life and welcoming suggestions for improvements in the school regime.⁸⁹

Such questioning reflected a movement towards critical self-consciousness which was developing in the Church. This arose from

....a series of decisions and initiatives which were not inspired by any new theological vision of Irish origin, but which implied a new concern for the quality of Irish Catholic life.⁹⁰

Two Catholic journals, *The Furrow* and *Doctrine and Life*, became focal points for the new movement. *The Furrow*, for example, published articles criticizing Catholic boarding schools for taking young pupils who would be better off at home with their parents,⁹¹ and questioned the legalistic morality and religious formation promoted in boarding schools. It was not until the ecumenical movement in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, however, that self-questioning became more commonplace.

CONCLUSION

In accepting Catholic influence over secondary school education, Irish governments demonstrated between 1922 and 1962 that they did not espouse revolutionary and secular republicanism. It was not their intention to found secondary schools or to finance the building of them, nor to confront the Church on curricular matters.

The secondary school curriculum for the privileged minority showed a concurrence between the interests of Church and government. Each favoured reinforcement of the Catholic world-view through the teaching of religion as a school subject, the promotion of the Catholic position in the teaching of the secular subjects on the curriculum, and the permeation of school life with a Catholic ethos. Great emphasis was placed on the certainty of answers, strict discipline, and unquestioning obedience, while critical thinking was neglected.

⁸⁸ F. Von Gager, *Difficulties in Sex Education* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1953).

⁸⁹ Dom M. Dillon, *The Schoolmaster—Past and Present* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds Ltd., 1949).

⁹⁰ D. Fennell, *The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 29.

⁹¹ See *The Furrow*, 7, No. 12, December 1956. The essays have no titles. They were written by Fr. J. MacLoughlin, Principal of McDevitt Institute, Glenties, Co. Donegal, 729-32; W. Hederman, St. Patrick's College, Armagh; J. Cunnane, St. Jarleth's College, Tuam.

Other educational interest groups, particularly the lay teachers and parents, were unable to contribute to the development of curriculum policy and practice. Church actions were motivated by fear of a new curriculum unsuited to development of a loyal middle class or recruitment of priests, brothers, and nuns.

The effect of the Church and State combination in education in this way has been characterised thus by Hornsby-Smith:

....the religious socialisation of young Catholics was ensured, differentiation from Protestants and an ethnic sense of identity reinforced, the threat of secularising influences countered, hierarchial clerical control over the laity maintained and the power of the church to define morality extended. In exchange the church provided legitimisation for the state.⁹²

Church and State combined to maintain a political culture which, in its constant stress on Catholic nationalist uniformity and homogeneity, "proved quite hostile to any notion of politicizing internal social divisions."⁹³ Only after 1960 were educators to change attitudes towards the curriculum in the interest of meeting social and economic needs, helped by a more open-minded outlook in the wider society—a matter for another study.

⁹² M. Hornsby-Smith, "Social and religious transformations in Ireland: A case of secularisation?," in J.H. Goldthorpe and C.T. Whelan, *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 275.

⁹³ Mair, "Explaining the absence of class politics in Ireland," in J.H. Goldthorpe and C.T. Whelan, *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 404.