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100 years of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918

By

Stephen J. McKinney

Abstract

The Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 is regarded as a key moment in the move towards full state funding for Catholic schools in Scotland. This article provides some insights into the historical context of the Act, the implications of the Act for Catholic schools in Scotland and the retention of a distinct Catholic denominational school status. Prior to the Act, the voluntary Catholic schools were maintained by heroic fundraising efforts, careful management, the self-sacrifice of teachers and in many cases by the expertise of the religious order and congregations. Post Act, the gradual move to full integration of the Catholic schools would lead to the state-funded Catholic school system that operates in contemporary Scotland.

Introduction

This year marks the centenary of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918. This Act is of fundamental importance in the process towards full state-funded Catholic schooling in Scotland. While the Catholic community commemorates the Act and the legacy of the Act, it is instructive to revisit the events leading up to the Act, the Act itself and the immediate effects of the Act. This article will commence with an examination of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1872. This Act offered the opportunity for Catholic schools to become part of the state-funded school system. The Catholic Church declined this offer as it was felt that the conditions of the acceptance would not protect the distinct denominational status of Catholic schools. The next section discusses the serious challenges faced by the Catholic community as they struggled to maintain their schools. This is followed by a close examination of section 18 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918. This Act provided a renewed opportunity for the Catholic schools to be state-funded and this opportunity did protect the distinct denominational status of Catholic schools. The final sections explore the Catholic response to the Act, the anxieties about the position of new Catholic schools that were built after the Act and the progress towards full state funding.

The Education (Scotland) Act, 1872

The importance of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 for Catholic schools in Scotland cannot be understood without an examination of the educational context in Scotland that preceded the Act. This examination will commence with a discussion of another important Act, the Education (Scotland) Act, 1872, and the implications of this Act. The 1872 Act aimed to improve the uneven provision of schooling across Scotland and, in particular, at the primary or elementary level.¹ The Act introduced a national Board of Education and local school Boards that would operate the Board (or public) schools. The Act also introduced compulsory schooling in Scotland for all children aged 5 to 13.² The Act provided an opportunity for the various types of schools that were already in existence, including Christian denominational schools, to

become incorporated into the new emerging state-funded school system. At that time the largest groups of denominational schools were Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland, Catholic and Episcopalian. The Catholic and the Episcopalian Churches chose not to accept this offer. The Catholic Church made this choice for a number of reasons. The new state Board schools would be non-denominational and the Church was anxious to retain the denominational status of the Catholic schools.³ The teaching of religion and religious observance was to be at the beginning or the end of the day or at both the beginning and the end of the day. This represented a clear distinction between the secular and religious in schools.⁴ This caused concern about the continuation of the integration of religion and religious observance throughout the school day in a Catholic school. There were serious reservations that the 'non-denominational schools' would in effect favour a Church of Scotland agenda.⁵ Further, the Catholic Church was unhappy that the Catholic schools, built by the Catholic community in Scotland, would be handed over to the state without compensation.

The challenges for Catholic schools in the post-1872 context.

The Catholic Church now faced some very serious challenges in maintaining Catholic schools in Scotland. There would be no building grants for the Catholic schools and no assistance from the rates nor any exemption from rates.⁶ There was some government assistance for the Catholic schools, but this was only available once the school had been built.⁷ The Catholic communities were called upon to extend their efforts in fundraising for the schools. At the same time, they were raising money to build new churches and contributing to the Saint Vincent De Paul Society which was supporting some of the poorer children to attend Catholic schools, notably in the east end of Glasgow.⁸

Compulsory attendance at school meant greater efforts to ensure that the children attended. The majority of the Catholic population relied on unskilled or semi-skilled employment for the family income and many of the Catholic families lived in poverty. All or most of the members of the Catholic families were expected to work and the children were withdrawn from school as quickly as possible to contribute to the family income.⁹ The Catholic population of Scotland had been growing steadily since the beginning of the 19th century and the demand for Catholic schooling had increased. The influx of Catholic families fleeing the series of famines in Ireland in the middle of the century placed further pressure on Catholic schools.

There was a serious shortage of qualified Catholic teachers and an over reliance on Pupil-teachers in Catholic schools. Some men and women from Scotland who sought a Catholic qualification travelled to St. Mary's Hammersmith (founded by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee), Mount Pleasant, Liverpool (founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame) and to Wandsworth (founded by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart).¹⁰ These three institutions were some of the forerunners to the present day St. Mary's University Twickenham, Liverpool Hope University and Roehampton University. It was, however, expensive to travel and study in England and the opening of Notre Dame Teacher Training College for women in Glasgow in 1895 by the Sisters of Notre Dame provided an accessible Scottish site to acquire Catholic teaching qualifications. Later in 1906, teaching certificates from England were no longer accepted and all Catholic teachers had to be trained in Scotland, at Notre Dame

for the women and the men were based at St Kentigern's hostel and trained at a provincial training centre (later they were trained at Jordanhill from 1921).¹¹

There were some harsh realities for those teaching in Catholic schools. The Catholic teacher often had to teach in badly equipped classrooms in barely adequate buildings.¹² They often taught larger classes than the teachers in the Board schools and the wages were sometimes considerably lower. Treble provides the comparison between the assistant master in a Catholic elementary school in Glasgow in 1917 receiving an average salary of £94 1s 6d and the teacher at the same grade in the Board school receiving £154 12s 0d. The limited financial resources available to school managers in Catholic schools restricted their ability to respond to the requests for a fairer remuneration by Catholic teachers.

The schools that were managed by the religious orders and congregations were acknowledged to be the best Catholic schools and among some of the best schools in Scotland. There are a number of good examples mainly in Glasgow and the West of Scotland where the highest concentration of the Catholic population was located.¹³ The Sisters of Notre Dame opened a high school adjacent to the Teacher Training College in Glasgow in 1897. Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy opened schools in Glasgow and Bothwell. The Marist Brothers opened schools in Glasgow (1858) and Dumfries (1873). The Jesuits opened a school in Glasgow in 1859. The Faithful Companions of Jesus opened a school in Paisley in 1889. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the religious orders and congregations was in providing some form of Catholic secondary education at a time when there were very few Catholic schools at this level.

The pressure on the Catholic school system was exacerbated by the raising of the school leaving age to 14 in 1901. The Pupil-teacher scheme was abolished in 1906. This was a cheaper option for Catholic schools and this then created further problems for maintaining the teaching workforce in Catholic schools.¹⁴ The average number of children attending Catholic schools (that were receiving some form of government grant) in 1872 was just over 12,000. By 1918, this figure had risen to almost 94,000. The First World War brought rising costs and the pay for Catholic teachers became more inadequate. Some commentators have stated that the system of Catholic schools was at breaking point by the time of the introduction of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918.¹⁵

The Education (Scotland) Act, 1918

There were a number of key aims of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918. One aim was to simplify the administration of education.¹⁶ The Education (Scotland) Act, 1872 had established around 1,000 local school Boards. The responsibility for school education was transferred to 39 county and city authorities under the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918.¹⁷ A second aim was to provide greater provision of secondary school education. The Education (Scotland) Act, 1872 had focussed primarily on the primary or elementary schools. The secondary school system needed to be restructured and expanded. A third aim was to provide an opportunity for the remaining voluntary denominational schools to enter into the state-funded system. Section 18 of the Act focussed on Voluntary or Denominational schools and some key

points were addressed.¹⁸ It is important to note that this section does not specifically refer to Roman Catholic schools but to denominational schools. Any denominational school that was transferred to the state would be sold or leased to the state (section 18, 1). The existing staff in any such denominational school would be 'taken over' by the education authority and would receive a salary that was appropriate to their position and was commensurate with that of a teacher in the same position in other schools managed by the same authority (section 18, 3, i). Teachers appointed to these denominational schools would have to possess the appropriate qualifications to teach that were recognised by the education authority. However, the Churches would approve the teachers on the grounds of religious belief and character (section 18, 3, ii). The religious observance and religious instruction would not be less than that which was 'according to the use and wont of the former management of the school' (section 18, 3, iii). There were two further points that were to be of great importance. A denominational school that was established after this Act could be accepted into the state sector, with the permission of the Department (of education), under the conditions of section 18 (section 18, 7). Where a need could be demonstrated by a denomination for a new school it was lawful for the education authority of that area to provide the new school (section 18, 8). This would also be under the conditions of the Act.

The Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 was in many ways an extraordinary opportunity for the voluntary Catholic schools. They would be able to enter the state-funded school system and legally retain and safeguard the denominational features of the Catholic schools. The Catholic schools would be sold or leased and not simply handed over without compensation. The Catholic teachers would be paid at the same rate as the other teachers and this financial gain and increased status would help the Catholic teachers form the 'backbone' of an emerging Catholic middle class.¹⁹ The Catholic Church had the right to approve the religious belief and character of Catholic teachers and religious observance and instruction could continue according to 'use and wont' and not be confined to the beginning and/or end of the school day. There were, however, some lingering anxieties about the acceptance of subsequently built voluntary Catholic schools and the construction of new Catholic schools by the local authority.

The Catholic response to the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918

Although it was acknowledged that the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 was very beneficial for Catholic schools, The dioceses initially opted to lease their schools rather than sell their schools with the exception of Argyll and the Isles, which chose to sell three of their seven schools in 1919. The Archdiocese of Glasgow decided to continue building their own new schools, which they would then lease to the local authority. The school Boards were replaced by *ad hoc* committees and the Catholic Church ensured that they were well represented on the new authorities. Nevertheless, the Archdiocese of Glasgow had concerns that some of the members of the new authorities were hostile to Catholic schools.²⁰

In the end it was probably a combination of greater trust and expediency that led to the selling of the schools to the authorities in the Archdiocese of Glasgow. There was a dispute in the early 1920s about whether St. Mary's school in Whifflet should be expanded or rebuilt. The Church favoured expansion and would pay for this while the

ad hoc education committee offered to pay for a new school. The Scottish Education Department decided for the Church but, ironically, this would lead to greater cooperation between the Church and *ad hoc* committee. The economic crisis in the 1920s, the contraction of the mining and engineering industries and the subsequent unemployment had a major impact on the living standards of many people in the West of Scotland.²¹ Many families in the Catholic community who had survived on limited resources now struggled to meet the necessities in life. This meant that many were no longer able to financially support the Church as before and as a result the individual Churches could not afford the mortgage payments on the local Catholic schools. The Catholic schools were at breaking point just prior to the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 and now they faced another breaking point. Faced with this situation the Archdiocese of Glasgow sold most of its schools to the local Councils by the mid 1930s.

Concluding Points

There would still be many important milestones and challenges in the growth and development of Catholic schools in Scotland in the inter-war years and beyond. The need for qualified teachers continued and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart opened St. Margaret's Training College for Catholic women in Edinburgh in 1919. This would be merged with Notre Dame in 1981 to form St Andrew's College of Education. In 1999, St Andrew's College merged with the University of Glasgow and formed the Faculty (now School) of Education. The St. Andrew's Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education in the School of Education has a key role in the preparation and support of teachers for Catholic schools. The Catholic secondary sector would expand and provide the opportunity for some of the Catholic children to progress to Further and Higher Education. The introduction of comprehensive education and grant assistance to attend university, in the Post World War II era, would be hugely beneficial for the social mobility of the Catholic community in Scotland. Contemporary Catholic schools remain state-funded and retain their denominational status in 2018 and this is a major outcome of the legacy of the introduction of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918.

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¹ Findlay, I.R. (1973) *Education in Scotland*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, p.24.

² *The Education (Scotland Act), 1872*, sections 3-8; 69.

³ Treble, J. H. (1978). The development of Roman Catholic Education in Scotland 1878 – 1978. *The Innes Review* 29 (1) 111-139.

⁴ *The Education (Scotland Act), 1872*, section 68.

⁵ Treble (1978), p.111.

⁶ FitzPatrick, T.A. (2000). Catholic Education. In H. Holmes (Ed.), *Scottish Life and Society, Volume 11*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press.

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- ⁷ FitzPatrick, T.A. (1986) *Catholic Secondary Education in South-West Scotland before 1972*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, p.443.
- ⁸ McKinney S.J. (2017) Catholic schools in Glasgow and caring for the needs of those who are poor. In Whittle, S. (ed.) *Vatican II and New Thinking about Catholic Education*. London: Routledge, pp. 99-100.
- ⁹ Treble, (1978) p.120-121.
- ¹⁰ FitzPatrick, T.A. (1995) *No Mean Service. Scottish Catholic Teacher Education 1895-1995*. Glasgow: St Andrew's College. pp. 24-30.
- ¹¹ FitzPatrick (1995) pp.51-53.
- ¹² Treble (1978), p.119.
- ¹³ FitzPatrick, T.A. (1986) *Catholic Secondary Education in South-West Scotland before 1972*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, pp.25-29.
- ¹⁴ Skinnider, M. (1967) *Catholic Elementary Education in Glasgow, 1818-1918*. In Bone, T.R. (ed.) *Studies in the History of Scottish Education*. London: University of London Press Ltd, p.44.
- ¹⁵ Kenneth, Br. (1972) *Catholic Schools in Scotland 1872-1972*. Glasgow: John S. Burns & Sons.
- ¹⁶ Paterson, L. (2003) *Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.56.
- ¹⁷ Findlay (1973), pp. 24-25.
- ¹⁸ Education (Scotland) Act, 1918.
- ¹⁹ Ross, A. (1978) *The Development of the Scottish Catholic Community 1878-1978*. *The Innes Review* 29 (1) 30-55.
- ²⁰ Treble, J. H. (1980). The working of the 1918 Education Act in Glasgow Archdiocese. *The Innes Review* 31 (1) 27-44.
- ²¹ Treble, (1980) p.39.