



McKinney, S. J. (2018) A complex relationship. *Open House*, 277, pp. 3-4.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/167433/>

Deposited on: 21 August 2018

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow_
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

A Complex Relationship

By

Stephen J. McKinney

This final article in the series will discuss the reaction of the Catholic Church to the 1918 Act and the gradual process towards integration in the state funded sector in the 1920s and 1930s. Section 18 on denominational schooling in the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 offered the Catholic community the opportunity to sell or lease their schools, retain their denominational status, continue accepted practice in religious observance and instruction and the right to approve their own teachers. The history of the relation between Catholic schooling and the state after the 1918 Act remains complex. This article will focus on four main points of the history in the 1920s that would be influential on the transfer of the Catholic schools. The first point is the initial decision to lease the Catholic schools to the local *Ad Hoc* Education Authorities. Second, the article reviews the case of St. Mary's R. C. School Whifflet. Third, the serious challenges to the strategy to lease the Catholic schools are examined and the fourth point is a discussion of the Bonnybridge case.

The Catholic Church decided to lease the schools rather than sell, except for the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles which decided to sell three of their seven schools. One of the reasons for the decision to lease was the anxiety that the *Ad Hoc* Education Authorities that had been set up by the 1918 Act might not be sympathetic to Catholic schools and Catholic education. The Diocesan Education Board collected the rental income and the money acquired from the leasing of the schools was to be used to establish post elementary schools where they were required. The building of new elementary schools would be the responsibility of the local parish. A dispute arose in the early 1920s between the Church and the *Ad Hoc* Committee in Lanarkshire over the proposals for the expansion of St. Mary's R.C. school, Whifflet. The Diocesan Education Board favoured an extension to the building at a cost of £8,500 to be met by the Archdiocese of Glasgow. The *Ad Hoc* Education Committee preferred the option of erecting a new school that would cost between £20,000 and £25,000 and they were prepared to pay the costs. After extended discussion and debates, the Lord Advocate in 1924 ruled that under the terms of the lease the costs of any structural alterations or rebuilding would be the responsibility of the Archdiocese of Glasgow. Ironically the two sides were to work more closely after this decision.

The Archdiocese of Glasgow was to face very serious challenges to its strategy to lease the schools rather than sell. The deep economic depression of the 1920s had a devastating effect on the industrial areas of the West of Scotland. Families struggled with greatly reduced incomes and the Catholic families were no exception. There was less money to contribute to the local Churches and those Churches that had mortgages on recently built primary schools were beginning to default on the interest payments. This was compounded by an increase in the number of Catholic children of around 10%. In 1928 the Archdiocese of Glasgow decided to change the strategy and began the process of transferring the schools to the local *Ad Hoc* Committees.

Another case that caused great debate was the Bonnybridge case. The Catholic clergy in Bonnybridge sought a separate Catholic school for the increasing number of

Catholic children in the area. They made the request to Stirlingshire Authority but this was refused on the grounds that the Authority had insufficient funds to build a new school and there was surplus accommodation in existing schools that catered for all denominations. The Church appeals to the Scottish Education Department to compel the transfer were unsuccessful. The Department stated that it did not have such powers but could consider the transfer of an existing Catholic school. A new Catholic school was built in Bonnybridge and completed in 1925. The request for the transfer to Stirlingshire Authority was refused and the case was referred to the Scottish Education Department which permitted the transfer in 1928. Stirlingshire Authority took legal action in an attempt to have this decision reversed. The First Division of the Court of Session approved the transfer but a later appeal to the Inner House upheld the case of Stirlingshire Authority. Finally, the trustees of the new school appealed this decision and the House of Lords supported the transfer in 1929. This series of events and final outcome are often interpreted as consolidation that the Authority had the responsibility to accept Catholic schools that had been built after the 1918 Act under the conditions of section 18 (7) of the Act.

The recruitment of a sufficient number of qualified Catholic teachers remained a serious difficulty and, at times, a pressing one. The conscription of male teachers in the Second World War, for example, was to exacerbate the situation. After the Second World War the socio-economic and educational opportunities that emerged are considered to be highly beneficial for Catholics. The opening up of access to Higher Education (and financial support for students) in the 1950s and the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1960s enabled higher numbers of young Catholic men and women to obtain school and University qualifications. Some members of the Catholic community became more socially mobile and, arguably, a Catholic presence was established in the professions. In the 21st century, Catholic schools have been publicly validated by two SNP First Ministers: Alex Salmond (2008) and Nicola Sturgeon (2018) who both accepted invitations to deliver the annual Cardinal Winning lecture at the University of Glasgow. Furthermore, Catholic schools have proved increasingly popular with many families of other Christian denominations, other faiths or of no religious faith.

There are, however, serious challenges for Catholic schools in Scotland in the contemporary era. There are recurrent debates in the press around the continued existence of state-funded Catholic schools often grounded in unsubstantiated claims of a relationship between Catholic schools and sectarianism. Other challenges facing contemporary Catholic schools are the same challenges that have troubled Catholic schools throughout their history from the early 19th century: the recruitment of sufficient numbers of Catholic teachers and the poverty of many children attending Catholic schools. To this can be added a more recent challenge that at times can appear intractable. The census results of 2001 and 2011 demonstrate a consistent picture in the number of Catholics who are willing to self-identify as Catholic. The figure has remained static at 15.9%. Recent government surveys suggest a decrease to 13.8%. This level of self-identification is not mirrored in the declining practice rate in the Catholic community. The fall in the number of practicing Catholics leads to a lack of religious literacy in some families. Increased numbers of Catholic children have little experience of sacraments and prayers and do not receive support in their spiritual life at home. Catholic teachers can now face a variety of forms of poverty in the classroom, including spiritual poverty.

References

Bain, A. (2011) The significance of the Bonnybridge School Case of 1922-1929 for Catholic education in Scotland. *The Innes Review* 62.1, 70-81.

McKinney, S.J. (2015) The historical and contemporary debate about the relation of Catholic schools in Scotland and the social problem of sectarianism. *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica – Journal of Theories and Research in Education*. Volume 10, No. 1. Open Access:
<https://rpd.unibo.it/article/view/4680>

Paterson, L. (2003) *Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Treble J. H. (1978) The development of Roman Catholic Education in Scotland 1878-1978. *The Innes Review*, 29 (2) 111-139.

Treble, J. H. (1980). The working of the 1918 Education Act in Glasgow Archdiocese. *The Innes Review* 31 (1) 27-44.

A full list of references is available on request.

Stephen McKinney is Professor of Education in the School of Education, University of Glasgow.