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Reforming education in post-partition Northern Ireland: state control and churches' interference

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ABSTRACT

After the partition of Ireland, the newly established parliament in Belfast was given control over education. The unionist government, mainly representing the majoritarian Protestant population, embarked on a reform of the pre-existing denominational education system and tried to persuade all the churches to transfer their schools to state control in exchange for public funding. Despite the sincere efforts of the first Minister of Education, the Catholic Church rejected interference in education from a government that its followers perceived as hostile, while the Protestant churches became increasingly intransigent in their demands for more control over state schools. In order to ensure their support, the government met their requests, ignoring the instances of teachers and principals who called for independence from clerical managers. The result was a segregated education system that contributed to maintain the deep divisions of the Northern Irish society.

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Introduction

Education and religion have long been closely intertwined in Ireland. The existence of two parallel educational systems, one Catholic and one Protestant, resulted from historical developments started by Henry VIII, who established Anglican schools run by the clergy to promote Protestantism and the English language. Later, in the seventeenth century, the Penal Laws prohibited Catholics from having their own schools, from hiring home tutors and from pursuing the education of their children abroad. Therefore, in order to provide non-Anglican children with the rudiments of arithmetic, reading and writing, it became customary for Catholic teachers to teach classes hidden in the countryside with a sentinel watching out for the authorities. Dominic Murray argues that the tendency by the Irish Catholic Church to distrust the state and seek independence in education can be traced back to this time.¹ However, such a tendency was not peculiar to Ireland because, especially from the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church systematically tried to resist state interference in education and, in particular, any attempt at secularisation.

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¹Dominic Murray, *Worlds Apart: Segregated Schools in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1985), 14–15.

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For example, in 1850s New York and in other urban areas of the east coast, Catholics implemented a system of parish-based schools, having failed to win public funding. Although parish-based schools developed slowly due to the scarcity of resources, the Church remained determined to offer an educational system alternative to the public one, to ensure that pupils were instructed according to the Catholic doctrine.² The content of the curricula delivered in state schools was a constant source of anxiety for the Church, which firmly opposed liberty of teaching, as the words of Pope Leo XIII in 1888 clearly show:

There can be no doubt that truth alone should imbue the minds of men. ... For this reason, it is plainly the duty of all who teach to banish error from the mind. ... From this it follows, as is evident, that the liberty [of teaching] of which We have been speaking is greatly opposed to reason ... in as much as it claims for itself the right of teaching whatever it pleases – a liberty which the State cannot grant without failing in its duty.³

In most cases, the struggle over education between the state and the Church resulted in the capitulation of the latter, as happened in France. Between 1881 and '82, the Minister of Public Education, Jules Ferry, promoted a series of reforms establishing a free, obligatory and secular system of primary education, an alternative to pre-existing parish schools. Catholic authorities strongly opposed Ferry's reforms, although in the end the Church had little choice but to compromise and accept the new system. As Eugen Weber demonstrates, the spread of state schools was essential to 'Frenchify' the whole country: institutionalised education inculcated patriotism, particularly through the teaching of French history and geography, and imposed the French language on a linguistically fragmented country that largely ignored the national vernacular.⁴ Schools had come to serve the transmission of a common language and culture as a shared medium for the national community. Love for the motherland featured prominently in the school-mediated culture because, at a time of extension of suffrage and mass mobilisation, France and other modern states needed to ensure the loyalty of their electorate.

In comparison with France and other European countries, the development of public education was slow and controversial in England. Andy Green claims that this was due to various causes, such as the lack of sharp ethnic divisions justifying the systematic imposition of an official language and culture through institutionalised education, the low number of educated functionaries needed by the state bureaucracy, and the reluctance of the middle class to send their children to the same schools where the working class would send theirs.⁵ In the 1830s, there was still no central authority regulating teacher training and national examinations, while schools received very little public funding. The system of voluntary schools, dominated by the Anglican Church that opposed state intervention in education as fiercely as the Catholic Church, was long

²Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: The History of the New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 33–45; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983), 171.

³Leo XIII, 'Libertas', *The Holy See*, June 20, 1888, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed January 15, 2019).

⁴Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 303–38.

⁵Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 208–307.

supported by the liberal ruling class until it became blatantly inadequate to meet the needs of the 1860s' economic development. The 1870 Education Act did ensure universal elementary provision; however, the system was not unified, education did not become compulsory until 1891, and voluntary schools remained much more numerous than state schools.

It should come as no surprise that in Ireland too the education system was fragmented and denominational. After the 1801 Act of Union brought the country under direct rule from Westminster, discriminatory measures against Catholics were abolished or loosened and the Church started to establish schools. However, the implementation of a National School System in 1831 sparked new controversy. The System was inspired by the principles advocated by the Kildare Place Society, which was founded in Dublin in 1811 to promote common schools for Protestant and Catholic pupils, as well as the reading of the Bible without comment instead of denominational religious instruction.⁶ Under the 1831 scheme, schools became non-denominational institutions providing separate religious instruction, often consisting of simple Bible reading, for the different denominations. Interestingly, the Catholic Church accepted the scheme. This was likely motivated by the fact that, although non-denominational in theory, in reality schools were to be run by local clergymen and, as Catholics constituted a vast majority in the country, they were in control of many institutions. Moreover, they accepted Bible reading because it did not interfere with what they really considered religious instruction: mass attendance. In fact, even under the Penal Laws, religion was rarely taught during illegal classes.

On the other hand, the reform was met with hostility by the Protestant churches. Not only did Protestants oppose simple Bible reading, but they also rejected Catholic clergymen running schools attended by Protestant children.⁷ Following almost a decade of campaigns against non-denominational education, in 1840 the government started to modify the National School System according to Protestants' wishes. The Catholic Church grew alarmed, but in the successive years all denominations in Ireland managed to gradually alter the system until, by the end of the century, it ran completely along religious lines. This was made possible by the already mentioned control of school management by clergymen and by the tendency of parents to send children to institutions controlled by their own church. Although all congregations rejected non-denominational education under state agency, Protestants and Catholics adopted different attitudes towards the state. In line with the general tendency of the Church, Catholics claimed autonomy in education and made the most of clerical school management to 'bend the rules' and ensure control of their own institutions. On the other hand, Protestants campaigned and demanded that the British government meet their requests.

Decades later, it was not a change in mentality but, rather, necessity that persuaded the Protestant churches in Ireland to seek state intervention in education. In the early twentieth century, British local authorities had progressively increased their control over state schools, which received additional funds in return; similar plans for Ireland raised enthusiasm among teachers, eager to gain some independence from the churches, and gradually

⁶Harold Hislop, 'Inspecting a Doomed Non-Denominational School System: The Inspectorate of the Kildare Place Society in Ireland, 1811–1831', *Paedagogica Historica* 35, no. 1 (1999): 177–91.

⁷Murray, *Worlds Apart*, 17.

among the Protestant clergy, while the Catholic Church expressed opposition. Strong support for educational reforms came from Belfast where, due to rampant population growth, many schools, especially small Protestant institutes, were overcrowded and in desperate need of funding increase. As Catholics had taken responsibility for providing accommodation to pupils in their hands, as the President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce admitted, their schools were better equipped than Protestant ones, although not immune from overcrowding. In 1919, when the Belfast Corporation appointed a committee to deal with the situation, representatives of Catholic wards boycotted it, asserting that they had sufficient schools, despite a previous statement by the Catholic Clerical Managers claiming that they needed further accommodation for around 4000 children.⁸

Because the situation remained dramatic, the Primary Education (Belfast) Bill was tabled in Westminster with the support of the Protestant churches. It was never examined because the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Ian Macpherson, believed that Irish education needed radical reforms to ensure greater state control over schools and he formed a committee, including representatives of English and Scottish boards, to formulate proposals. The committee worked for months, coming under increasing pressure from Belfast Protestant MPs, and finally presented the Education (Ireland) Bill in late November. The Bill envisaged the creation of a Department for Education absorbing the powers of the National Board, of the Technical Instruction section of the Department for Agriculture and of the functions of the Treasury regarding teachers' pensions. Other measures were aimed at rationalising the administration of education and improving its finances along the lines of the English system.

Not only the Church, but also Catholic public opinion, fiercely opposed the Bill. The fact that the Chief Secretary, a member of the British cabinet, was to be the President of the Irish Department for Education was perceived as a coercive measure. The Bishops expressed concern about foreigners administering education in Ireland with Protestant support and took pride in Catholics' promptness to fund their own schools, again denying the need for financial support from the state. Opposition to the Bill was not only coherent with the educational policy of the Catholic Church, as already explained, but was also due to the ongoing War of Independence between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Crown Forces. British initiatives were met with hostility and suspicion by the Catholic population, who were overwhelmingly in favour of independence. In the end, the Macpherson Bill was not given its scheduled second reading because Irish nationalist MPs managed to 'talk it out'. It was then withdrawn, as some form of self-government for Ireland involving education was becoming more and more likely.⁹

This article explores the formulation and implementation of the first education reform and its radical alteration during the first 10 years of existence of Northern Ireland, a time often overlooked by scholars. In fact, the importance of education for the peace process following the Troubles has drawn attention to recent decades, at the expense of the post-partition years.¹⁰ However, studying the government's progressive loss of control over education, the growing power of the Protestant churches and the isolation of Catholic

⁸Mary Harris, *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 23–4.

⁹Ruth Dudley Edwards, 'Government of Ireland and Education, 1919–1920', *Archivium Hibernicum* 37 (1982): 21–8.

¹⁰See for example: Seamus Dunn and Valerie Morgan, "'A Fraught Path': Education as a Basis for Developing Improved Community Relations in Northern Ireland', *Oxford Review of Education* 25, no. 1–2 (1999): 141–53; Alan Smith, 'Religious

schools in the 1920s serves to identify patterns characterising politics and society in Northern Ireland until the Troubles. The most relevant accounts of the period are provided by studies that are now rather dated and tend to focus solely on Ireland.¹¹ As this article demonstrates, considering contemporary trends in education elsewhere improves our understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, unlike previous works, this article devotes considerable attention to political changes affecting the region, thus enriching the analysis of the interaction between the government and the churches.

The use of a variety of primary sources underpins the exploration of the different, and often conflicting, attitudes towards education of the government, Protestant churches and Catholic Church, while also highlighting different shades of opinion within these parties. Since both Protestant and Catholic newspapers tended to support the official position of their respective churches uncritically, they have limited impact on this article. Nevertheless, an analysis of the press and of parliamentary debates is necessary to follow the official discussion on education reforms. The most important sources to examine the drafting of the first bill and the negotiations over its alteration ‘behind the scenes’ are private correspondence, resolutions from deputations and reports of meetings. These documents offer new insight into the priorities and strategies of the different actors on stage. Finally, despite the paucity of relevant material, this article also considers the position of teachers’ unions, thus adding another point of view to the debate on education reforms.

Partition and the 1923 Education Act

Religious segregation in education continued unchallenged while the Government of Ireland Act, approved by Westminster in December 1920, divided the island into a northern and a southern state with limited self-governing powers that included education. However, section 5 of the Act prevented both states from making:

a law so as either directly or indirectly to establish or endow any religion ... or give a preference, privilege, or advantage, or impose any disability or disadvantage, on account of religious belief ... or affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending the religious instruction at that school[.]¹²

This constituted a serious challenge to the existing education system as it implied that schools had to come under state control if they wanted to access public funding.

Elections for the Belfast and Dublin parliaments were held in May 1921. In the South, the elected 124 republican MPs boycotted the parliament and formed their own assembly, Dáil Éireann, while the IRA, unsatisfied with the degree of independence granted, continued the war in the attempt to establish a republic. In Northern Ireland, elections returned 40 unionists, six nationalists (Irish Parliamentary Party) and six republicans (Sinn Féin).¹³ As already mentioned, although political allegiance was not necessarily a

Segregation and the Emergence of Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland’, *Oxford Review of Education* 27, no. 4 (2001): 559–75.

¹¹See for example: Donald H. Akenson, *Education and Enmity: The Control of Schooling in Northern Ireland, 1920–1950* (Belfast: Queen’s University, 1973); Sean Farren, *The Politics of Irish Education, 1920–65* (Belfast: Queen’s University, 1995).

¹²Section 5, Government of Ireland Act, 1920.

¹³David Harkness, *Northern Ireland since 1920* (Dublin: Helicon, 1983), 9.

function of religious identity in 1920s Ireland, Catholics were generally pro-independence while Protestants were overwhelmingly unionist. Since the latter were concentrated in Belfast and in the north-eastern corner of the island, partition resulted in Northern Ireland having a two-thirds Protestant-unionist majority, and Southern Ireland being predominantly Catholic. In the North, the 12 newly elected Catholic MPs refused to take their seats, and a number of local bodies under republican control swore allegiance to the Dáil instead of the northern government.¹⁴

Although the war between the IRA and the Crown Forces, which continued until a truce in July 1921, was limited to the South, violence in Northern Ireland was still widespread and often assumed a sectarian connotation. The unionist government implemented a Special Constabulary that soon became a popular Protestant militia; its members lacked discipline and training and often abused Catholic civilians, but authorities systematically covered up their mistakes and crimes.¹⁵ Furthermore, impunity was not the only privilege enjoyed by the Special Constabulary. Almost all those who had lost their jobs due to the economic crisis applied to join the force, which became a system of patronage guaranteeing an income to one in four able-bodied Protestant men who enlisted by June 1922.¹⁶ At the same time, many of the 8000 Catholics expelled by their workplaces during riots in summer 1920 remained unemployed for years and continued to rely on support from international Catholic charities.¹⁷

Although historical narratives of polarised politics and society are often too simplistic to describe the complexity of post-partition Northern Ireland,¹⁸ at the time the attitude of the Belfast government did seem to confirm Catholics' expectations concerning their unfair treatment in a Protestant-unionist state. The majority of northern Catholics did not believe that cooperation with unionists was possible and supported the policy of non-recognition of Northern Ireland encouraged by southern Sinn Féin leaders in the hope of ending partition and uniting the country soon. On the other hand, northern Protestants confidently relied on the government and on the solid unionist majority in parliament to defend their interests. However, they were to be as disappointed as Catholics when, in spring 1923, the Education Act (Northern Ireland), more commonly known as the Londonderry Act, was passed.

The Act was based on almost two years of work by a Departmental Committee of Enquiry, the so-called Lynn committee, advising on education reforms, but was also deeply influenced by the Minister of Education, Lord Londonderry. A Conservative English MP who had family connections with Irish Unionism, Londonderry was chosen despite his lack of experience in education by the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig. Patrick Buckland describes Craig as a realistic politician who tried to keep more extreme unionists under control and, although he did his best to exclude nationalists from power, was not indifferent to the situation of the minority. Craig also attached great importance to education reforms: he advocated non-

¹⁴Patrick Buckland, *History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Books & Media Inc, 1981), 33–5.

¹⁵See for example Michael Farrell, *Arming the Protestants* (London: Longwood Pr Ltd, 1983); Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland 1921–2001, Political Forces and Social Classes* (London: Serif, 2002).

¹⁶Interview with Major General Solly Flood, June 23, 1922, Stephen Tallents papers, TNA, CO906/27.

¹⁷Belfast Expelled Workers' Fund, MacRory papers, ARCH/11/5/14, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive (COFLA).

¹⁸See for example: Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); Dennis Kennedy, *The Widening Gulf* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988); Bryan A. Follis, *A State under Siege* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

denominational education and increased public expenditure for teachers' salaries and school maintenance.¹⁹ He probably believed that Londonderry, as an Englishman and a moderate unionist, could approach the sensitive issue of education with some impartiality. However, although he had knowledge of Irish affairs, Londonderry's understanding of the education question in Northern Ireland was that of an outsider: he was committed to excluding all churches from any form of control and influence.²⁰ Despite the support of James Craig, his reform was met with hostility by all denominations, including the Protestant churches that had been involved in its drafting through the Lynn committee.

The committee was formed in September 1921 under the chairmanship of Robert John Lynn, Unionist MP for West Belfast. Londonderry asked all denominations to send representatives, but Cardinal Logue, Primate of Ireland, rejected cooperation with Lynn and his colleagues who, nevertheless, availed themselves of a few opportunities to consider Catholic views. For example, a member of the committee attended a meeting of primary school teachers in January 1922, where Catholics expressed their reluctance to accept control by public boards and asked that appointment and dismissal of teachers were reserved to school managers.²¹ Apart from this exception, Catholics refused to make their views known to Lynn and his staff. This choice has long been discussed by historians and is generally viewed as a mistake. Donald H. Akenson argues that Catholic authorities 'surrendered their last shred of influence at the very time when the basic character of Ulster's educational development was being determined'.²² Neil C. Fleming states that from Logue's refusal to join the committee 'all subsequent problems can be traced'.²³ Other scholars suggests that the fact that Lynn was vehemently anti-Catholic likely encouraged the Church to reject Londonderry's invitation.²⁴ Lynn was editor of the *Northern Whig*, a paper that, although unionist, was very critical of the British government and of Craig, and demanded much stricter measures against republicans. Speaking against ending partition and bringing the whole island under the rule of a Dublin parliament, Lynn stated that 'Ireland had never been one political unit. It is well-known that Ireland is not only divided into two parts, but that . . . there are two peoples in Ireland, one industrious, law-abiding, and God-fearing, and the other slothful, murderous, and disloyal.'²⁵

As already explained, the boycott of the committee was congruent not only with the policy of the Catholic Church rejecting any kind of state interference in education matters, but also with the nationalist strategy of non-recognition of the Northern Ireland state supported by the Dublin government. Another factor that likely contributed to Logue's decision was that every denomination was entitled to only one representative on the committee, regardless of the number of their adherents. Therefore, Logue's instances could easily be ignored by Protestant representatives who were in a majority

¹⁹Patrick Buckland, *James Craig: Lord Craigavon*(Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980).

²⁰Alvin Jackson, 'Stewart, Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest, Seventh Marquess of Londonderry', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²¹Report of 7th meeting of Lynn Committee, Papers of the Departmental Committee on the Educational Services in Northern Ireland, January 16, 1922, ED/13/1/198B, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

²²Akenson, *Education and Enmity*, 52.

²³Neil C. Fleming, 'Lord Londonderry and Education Reform in 1920s Northern Ireland', *History Ireland* 9, no. 1 (2001), 38.

²⁴Oliver P. Rafferty, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603–1983* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 210; John Privilege, *Michael Logue and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1879–1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 178.

²⁵Stormont papers, vol. 1, col. 308, 29 November 1921.

and, despite their differences, tended to form a united front to oppose Catholics. For example, representatives of the Anglican Church of Ireland, Presbyterians and Methodists founded the United Education Committee (UEC) of Protestant Churches, which constituted for many years the main interlocutor of successive Ministers of Education in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is unlikely that the presence of Catholic representatives would have influenced the final report of the committee; however, Logue's refusal did contribute to worsen relations between the government and the minority.

While Lynn and other members of the committee continued their work, educational services were officially transferred from Dublin to the northern Ministry of Education on 1 February 1922. On this occasion, Londonderry reiterated his commitment to denying privileges to any particular denomination, with a circular informing school staff that he was aware of the difficulties surrounding the question of education and was working to introduce a properly coordinated system, sympathetic to different educational interests.²⁶ Londonderry's goodwill clashed with the interference of the Dublin government and administration that not only delayed the transfer of documents to Belfast but also offered to pay the salaries of Catholic schoolteachers in Northern Ireland. As civil servants, teachers were required to swear allegiance to the King, but many Catholics refused to comply. After consultations between Michael Collins, southern Minister for Finance and main interlocutor of northern republicans, and ecclesiastical authorities in the North, the former agreed to finance Catholic schools, rejecting the authority of the Belfast government.²⁷

This initiative was short-lived. The payment of teachers' salaries soon proved to be a heavy financial burden for the southern administration. After Collins' death in August 1922, the southern government reconsidered the non-recognition strategy and stopped paying northern teachers' salaries from 31 October.²⁸ Teachers and managers who had been paid by Dublin then turned to Londonderry, who agreed to grant them funding after they signed a declaration of allegiance to the King. Although in the following years southern interest in the fate of the minority decreased, the effects of the payment of teachers' salaries and, in general, of Dublin support for northern Catholics were enduring. Unionists continued to perceive the South as an enemy power fomenting the minority's disloyalty even when, years later, nationalist MPs finally took their seats with the support of the Bishops concerned with the Londonderry Act.²⁹

The Bill was largely based on the 1902 Education Act applying to England and Wales, and on the interim report issued by the Lynn committee in June 1922.³⁰ Educational reforms in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England were aimed at ensuring a certain degree of administrative unity, thus finally filling the gap with other European countries. Following the creation of a single agency, the Board of Education, in 1899, the English Education Act established that local authorities were in control of public primary

²⁶Circular to Managers of Schools from the Ministry of Education of Northern Ireland about the Transfer of Educational Services to Northern Ireland, 25 January 1922, ED/32/A/1/5, PRONI.

²⁷Eamon Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994), 178–9.

²⁸Akenson, *Education and Enmity*, 45.

²⁹Sean Farren, 'Nationalist-Catholic Reaction to Educational Reform in Northern Ireland, 1920–30', *History of Education* 15, no. 1 (1986): 23.

³⁰Sean Farren, 'Unionist-Protestant Reaction to Educational Reforms in Northern Ireland, 1923–1930', *History of Education* 14, no. 3, (1985): 227.

education. This did not, however, really integrate the education system, which remained fragmented, but the new legislation was welcomed by the Anglican as well as by the Catholic Church because their schools started receiving state funding. Such provision, which, as already stressed, was illegal in Northern Ireland, was met with resistance from Liberals, Labour and various denominations in England. Despite widespread opposition, the Conservative government managed to pass it.³¹ Two decades later, Londonderry, himself elected a Tory MP in 1906, introduced local authorities' control over education in Northern Ireland.

Not too dissimilar to the 1902 Bill were the recommendations of the interim report by the Lynn committee, suggesting the creation of three kinds of elementary schools: state schools (class I), independent schools (class III) and an intermediate category (class II). The latter envisaged school managers appointed by both local authorities and the affiliated church; these schools received less funding than state schools but more than independent schools. Regardless of what kind of school they worked for, all primary teachers had their salaries paid by the Ministry of Education. Finally, instead of religious instruction, the committee recommended 'simple Bible instruction', a formula acceptable to all Protestant denominations and which met with enthusiasm in parliament. Nevertheless, Londonderry rejected Bible instruction because he believed it to be ultra vires to the Government of Ireland Act. He wanted unpaid religious instruction to be delivered outside school hours and only when the parents requested it in schools belonging to classes I and II.³² Despite its wide unpopularity, unpaid religious instruction was included in the final version of the Education Act thanks to Craig's support, thus dissatisfying both Protestants and Catholics.

At the Armagh Diocesan Synod, the Lord Primate of the Church of Ireland praised the Education Act because it enforced school attendance and regulated child employment, but he believed amendments to the religious teaching provision would be necessary, and recommended that schools were not transferred yet.³³ Many Protestants wrote letters to unionist papers fearing that Catholics on local boards would have a say over their schools once they had been transferred. This was unlikely because, due to the abolition of Proportional Representation for local elections approved in September 1922, nationalists and republicans retained a majority only on a few boards, while unionists were over-represented on most councils. Nevertheless, they felt Catholics were privileged because, even if they did not transfer their schools and received less public money, they were in full control of appointments and religious instruction. There were, however, a few dissenting voices within the Protestant community. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland endorsed the government's action against 'sectarian teaching at the expense of the public rates' and pointed out that 'education unmixed with sectarian bias is the privilege of all classes of the community'.³⁴ But the most enthusiastic supporters of the reform were Protestant teachers. Already in January 1922, primary school teachers informed the Lynn committee that they were ready to accept local authorities' control of teachers' appointments, while the Joint Urban District

³¹Green, *Education and State Formation*, 306.

³²Fleming, 'Lord Londonderry and Education Reform', 38.

³³*Belfast Newsletter*, October 26, 1923.

³⁴Resolution on education bill from Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland to Prime Minister, July 25, 1923, CAB/9/D/1/1, PRONI.

Councils of Northern Ireland, which was boycotted by Catholics, preferred not to have any religious education in schools.³⁵ However, it seems that the Education Act won the approval of teachers across the religious divide.

Although dissent characterised the Protestant community more than the Catholic one, the fact that the latter refused to make their views known to the government does not necessarily imply uniformity of opinion. Unlike Protestants, Catholics were reluctant to express their concerns in the press. For example, the main nationalist paper in Northern Ireland lamented that, although plenty of information regarding the Londonderry Act had been provided, Catholic parents remained silent.³⁶ While the education question may not have proved divisive at the time, the Boundary Commission was destabilising the nationalist front. Envisaged by the Anglo-Irish Treaty establishing the Irish Free State in the South as a self-governing dominion in December 1921, the commission was to redraw the border between Northern Ireland and the Free State in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. Whereas unionists were unanimously committed to the defence of the territorial integrity of Northern Ireland, nationalists were divided between those more sceptical towards the commission, whose terms of operation were very vague, and those who anticipated transfer to the Free State.³⁷

Even the most optimistic Catholics, who hoped that the Boundary Commission would substantially reduce the territory of Northern Ireland to make its existence unworkable, had to admit that this would not be a quick outcome and, in the meantime, concern about the consequences of the Londonderry Act was growing. Catholic Bishops feared that because nationalists were underrepresented on local boards, they would be overwhelmed on education committees, and encouraged Catholic schools to remain independent. Catholics generally resented that, despite paying their share of taxes, their schools were not granted adequate funding, but a more bitter controversy arose over another issue affected by the reform: the training of teachers. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Church, fiercely opposing state-run teachers' training, obtained public funds for denominational colleges. Since then, St Mary's College in Belfast had provided teacher training for northern women, but there were no similar institutions in the North for Catholic men, who had to attend southern colleges. After partition, this became a problem.

In 1922, Stranmillis University College was established in Belfast to provide state-funded teacher training for men and women of all religions, but the Church refused to allow Catholic men to train alongside Protestants. When, in the following year, the Education Act recognised St Mary's College and granted financial support, it did not provide for the establishment of a training college for Catholic men because they were expected to attend Stranmillis. The Bishops suggested that northern Catholic men continue to attend southern institutions, but Londonderry rejected the proposal because the school curriculum was very different there. The situation escalated rapidly, and the Bishops forbade Catholic schools to employ teachers trained at Stranmillis. Nevertheless, the college received 172 applications from Catholics out of a total of 420 applicants. Interestingly, 113 of the 172 Catholic applications came from women.³⁸ Because,

³⁵Report of meetings, Departmental Committee on the Educational Services in Northern Ireland, ED/13/1/198B, PRONI.

³⁶*The Irish News*, April 3, 1923.

³⁷Paul Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission and its Origins, 1886–1925* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2011).

³⁸Stormont Papers, vol. 3, col. 356, April 17, 1923.

according to the Education Act, committees could not select teachers based on their religion, these applicants probably preferred to work in state schools rather than in Catholic institutions, despite contrary claims by the nationalist press.³⁹ This caused concern among Protestants who feared that Catholic teachers might be employed in class I and II schools.

As happened in the past, the question of teachers' training fostered antagonism within the Catholic community. The predominantly Catholic Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), which remained an all-Ireland trade union even after partition, had long advocated university training for teachers as a means to raise the profession and improve education, but lamented the lack of support from the Catholic hierarchy. At the INTO annual congress in April 1923, a strong divergence between the teachers and the Church clearly emerged. Cormac Walsh, INTO President, was very critical of the Bishops in Northern Ireland and, although he admitted that various aspects of the Education Act needed amendments, he praised the new training provisions, which also were met with unanimous approval by the delegates.⁴⁰

In the following years, representatives of the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education found it very difficult to negotiate a settlement. In 1924, a deputation appointed by Joseph MacRory, Bishop of Down and Connor, was received by the Ministry's assistant secretaries. MacRory, a staunch supporter of the non-recognition policy, had expressed anti-Protestant sentiments on more than one occasion, and firmly believed in the moral supremacy of the Catholic Church.⁴¹ The deputation he appointed insisted on asking for the establishment of a Catholic training college despite the low number of male teachers. In the attempt to find a compromise, Londonderry agreed that Catholic men training at Stranmillis could reside in a separate hostel and, although he initially expected the Church to pay for its building, he finally accepted to make a substantial contribution. Nevertheless, MacRory was not satisfied. His deputation reluctantly accepted the association of Catholics and other students in organised games, but they asked for separate ground for recreation and demanded that the Catholic hostel be separated by a wall from other hostels. This time, the Minister did not agree on the separating wall and other 'unreasonable requirements', and negotiations broke down.⁴²

After the death of Cardinal Logue in November 1924, Patrick O'Donnell became Primate of Ireland. Unlike MacRory, O'Donnell was sceptical of the non-recognition policy, and was on friendly terms with Londonderry.⁴³ The Minister invited him to join an Education Advisory Council, stressing that he was anxious that this body gain respect and confidence from the whole population of Northern Ireland. The correspondence between the two clearly indicates that Londonderry sincerely hoped to involve O'Donnell and the Catholic Church in his work to reform the education system. However, the Bishop rejected the invitation and refused to cooperate with the government until the question of male teachers was settled.⁴⁴ Church and Ministry representatives repeatedly

³⁹See for example: *Irish News*, June 11, 1925.

⁴⁰*The Irish News*, April 4, 1923.

⁴¹Brendan Lynn, 'MacRory, Joseph', *Dictionary of Irish Biography (DIB)*.

⁴²Memorandum on the reception of a deputation by the ministry in reference to the training of Catholic men teachers, June 20, 1924, ARCH/10/3/18, COFLA.

⁴³Patrick Maume, 'O'Donnell, Patrick', *DIB*.

⁴⁴Correspondence between Londonderry and O'Donnell, November 1924, O'Donnell papers, ARCH/10/3/19, COFLA.

met in the first months of 1925, until they agreed that Catholic men could be trained in London at St Mary's College in Hammersmith, run by the Vincentian Fathers.

The 1925 Amendment Act

The Protestant community did not welcome the terms of the agreement on the question of Catholic men's training. Robert Lynn complained about the cost of training teachers in London, which was £76 13s. per annum for each student, while each man training at Stranmillis cost £75 a year.⁴⁵ The agreement over teacher training was not questioned in the following years, but it did contribute to foster Protestant discontent. The fact that the state would allow religious instruction without taking responsibility for its provision constituted a major source of disappointment. Furthermore, many feared that in predominantly Catholic areas local authorities would appoint non-Protestants to work in state schools. In early 1925, Protestant church leaders and prominent Orangemen meeting in the Assembly Hall of the Presbyterian Church in Belfast signed a petition asking the government to amend the Londonderry Act.⁴⁶ Whereas the Prime Minister could easily ignore Catholic discontent, he could not afford to dismiss his own supporters, particularly with general elections scheduled to take place at the beginning of April.

After Craig replaced Londonderry at the negotiation table with a less intransigent attitude than that of the Minister of Education, a compromise was found by mid-March, just before the start of a large campaign organised by the UEC. Demonstrations were called off at the last minute while an amending bill was urgently dispatched to London to receive Royal Assent before the imminent dissolution of the Belfast parliament. The bill removed the prohibition of Bible instruction during school hours and allowed the religious beliefs of teachers to be taken into account for appointments. Despite complaining about the impossibility of receiving advice on a potential conflict with section 5 of the Government of Ireland Act, the Secretary of State, 'moved by the desire of not causing to your [Craig's] government the embarrassment' of reserving the bill for full deliberation, finally proceeded and Royal Assent was granted.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the controversy was not completely settled as the March amendment bill set a precedent encouraging the churches to insist on their requests even after the elections. The UEC imposed two conditions for the transfer of Protestant schools: the delivery of religious instruction by teaching staff on a programme to be approved by the school managers and the possibility to terminate the contract of any appointed teacher who was found objectionable on religious grounds.⁴⁸ Since Londonderry refused to apply public monies to the teaching of any particular religious belief, UEC representatives turned to Craig once again, while the unionist press accused the government of 'astounding and at present quite inexplicable perversity' and the Presbyterian Assembly denounced their betrayal.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the organisation of Irish Protestant

⁴⁵Stormont papers, vol. 6, col. 173, April 23, 1926.

⁴⁶Farren, 'Unionist-Protestant Reaction to Educational Reforms', 231.

⁴⁷Letter from Abersorn to Craig, March 13, 1925, ED/32/B/1/2/17, PRONI.

⁴⁸Correspondence between the UEC and the Ministry of Education about Religious Instruction, April–May 1925, ED/32/B/1/2/17, PRONI.

⁴⁹*Northern Whig*, June 10, 1925.

National Teachers strongly protested against those who wanted to ‘secure compulsion on, and clerical control of, the teachers’ by ‘heartless and despotic managers’.⁵⁰

Despite the teachers’ support, in summer 1925 Londonderry was forced to compromise again. The UEC obtained the guarantee that teachers in transferred schools would deliver simple Bible instruction during school hours. Furthermore, teacher appointments were no longer exclusively in the hands of regional education committees, but had to receive the approval of school committees, where clerics hoped to retain their seats once their institutes were transferred.⁵¹ Catholics were alarmed by the Prime Minister’s promptness to bypass Londonderry and amend the Education Act that only two years earlier was approved thanks to his support. It is likely that this contributed to the decision of nationalist MPs to take their seats after the elections. Nevertheless, whereas the Protestant churches sent many deputations to the government, the Church and Catholic representatives did not seek meetings with Craig and Londonderry. Although on this occasion the Minister did not, unlike for the implementation of the Lynn committee, invite Catholics to make their views known, once again the Church missed the opportunity to have a say in the education question. This did not prevent the nationalist press from condemning the agreement as the capitulation of the government to the Protestant churches, contesting the argument that simple Bible instruction was non-denominational because teachers were supposed to read passages without interpreting or explaining them. But, asked the *Irish News*, how could pupils benefit from that? It was likely that teachers would have no choice but to intervene and clarify what they read to the children, and they would do so from their own religious point of view.⁵²

According to Sean Farren, internal political divisions within the minority prevented their representatives from contesting the new amendments to the Education Act for breaching section 5 of the Government of Ireland Act.⁵³ However, the failure of nationalist MPs to challenge the government did not only derive from disagreement and lack of organisation. Since the early 1880s in Ireland, the Bishops had formed an alliance with the Parliamentary Party guaranteeing that MPs would defend Church interests in Westminster, with particular attention to the question of Catholic education.⁵⁴ The Church designed the education policy while politicians acted accordingly. But, unlike the nationalist press, it seems that the Church was not interested in exposing the inconsistency and hypocrisy of the government, which could suggest that the Catholic hierarchy did not oppose the amendments in principle. After all, they allowed greater religious influence on education.

The new Minister and the 1930 Education Act

Following the leaked publication of the Boundary Commission’s report, which all parties found deeply disappointing, the governments of the Free State, Northern Ireland and UK agreed in December 1925 that the boundary would stay as it was. This removed a major

⁵⁰*Northern Whig*, June 22, 1925.

⁵¹Farren, *The Politics of Irish Education*, 77.

⁵²*Irish News*, June 26, 1925.

⁵³Farren, *The Politics of Irish Education*, 76.

⁵⁴Emmet J. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and the Fall of Parnell, 1888–1891* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1979), part I, xvii.

existential threat to Northern Ireland, emboldening unionists and disappointing nationalists. Now that partition had become permanent, the non-recognition policy was completely abandoned and nationalists sought to redress their grievances through parliamentary attendance. At the same time, Lord Londonderry, embittered by changes to his reform and lack of support from his colleagues, resigned. Nationalist MPs paid tribute to his impartiality and to his sincere will to meet Catholic requests, while among unionist MPs only the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Education and MP for the Queen's University of Belfast, John Robb, recalled 'the earnestness and ability which Lord Londonderry brought to the task which had been entrusted to him'.⁵⁵ Londonderry was replaced by Lord Charlemont, an ex-member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a paramilitary organisation created in 1913 to resist any attempt to bring the North under the jurisdiction of a Dublin parliament.⁵⁶ The UVF had a strong sectarian connotation and was composed exclusively of Protestants; Charlemont himself proved ready to grant more power in education to the Protestant churches. Nevertheless, he was not anti-Catholic and tried to be impartial and well disposed towards the minority, as the case of Kilrea Convent School, in county Londonderry, demonstrates.

Kilrea Convent School was a voluntary school, attended by 79 children, which had been equipped and established without any cost to the public because the Church paid for it. The school provided a high standard of education, as Charlemont admitted. When the school applied for recognition in order to receive public grants, Mrs Chichester, one of the two women elected to the northern parliament in 1921, and a former member of the Lynn committee, took a personal interest in the application.⁵⁷ A staunch unionist, her involvement with the issue was likely the result of her concern with education and of the fact that her family was the main landowner of Kilrea. Many Protestants in the area opposed the recognition of the Convent School and the granting of public funding, arguing that the pupils could be accommodated at St Columba's Public Elementary School. Mrs Chichester provided Charlemont with a detailed list of pupils and of their addresses and managed to persuade the Minister that the pupils attending the Convent School lived too far from St Columba's.

The Minister agreed to grant provisional recognition for one year, dismissing protests as 'entirely political and sectarian'. In his letter to Mrs Chichester, Charlemont instanced a man, Mr Kidd, who had complained to the Minister that recognition 'would be a blow to unionist workers like himself'. Charlemont believed that Mr Kidd should be happy to know that Catholic children in a recognised school would receive an education broadening their views, whereas in a voluntary school 'the children can be brought up on histories extremely denominational and distinctly – what shall I call it? – nationalist in teaching'. Charlemont was suspicious of Catholic schools and his intervention in Kilrea was primarily motivated by a desire to bring the instruction of Catholic children under state control to avoid the delivery of nationalist content, more than by a sincere commitment to grant equal opportunities to the minority. At the same time, the Minister rejected claims such as those by Mr Kidd, as he wrote to Mrs Chichester: 'I

⁵⁵Stormont papers, vol. 7, col. 1221, May 13, 1926.

⁵⁶William Murphy, 'Caulfield, James Edward Geale', *DIB*.

⁵⁷Bridget Hourican, 'Parker, Dame Dehra', *DIB*.

cannot say how strongly I object to the idea that a unionist government is brought in, not only to maintain the union, but also to humour the sectarian prejudices of all unionists.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, Charlemont's good disposition clashed with the intransigence of the Catholic hierarchy, which increased after the death of Cardinal O'Donnell in 1927 and the designation of MacRory as Primate of Ireland. MacRory was soon invited by the Minister to join a new Advisory Council on Education, but the Archbishop rejected the offer. Despite the failure of the Boundary Commission and the end of the non-recognition policy, the Church still refused to cooperate with the government in the design of education reforms. On the other hand, representatives of the Protestant churches were more than happy to meet with Charlemont. The Minister, however, misunderstood their intentions as he assured Craig that he did not expect a new campaign by the churches against the 1923 Education Act to start soon.⁵⁹ He was quickly disabused. The churches, and the Orange lodges, were determined to secure further changes to the Londonderry Bill, and in the following years they demanded and obtained several meetings with Ministry officials.

Consultations became more intense in 1929 as the Minister started preparing new amendments to the 1923 Education Act. When Charlemont met a deputation of the Grand Orange Lodge in April 1929, he promised that the new amendment would guarantee that no Catholic teachers could be appointed to Protestant schools, that Bible instruction would be obligatory in class I and II schools, and that all the churches would have a representative on regional committees.⁶⁰ Such promises were in line with the government's attempt at strengthening its support. Just before the general election in May, Proportional Representation for parliamentary elections, a safeguard of the minority rights envisaged by the Government of Ireland Act, was abolished. Nationalists protested vehemently, but the British Government, which had already tolerated amendments to the Education Act violating section 5 of the Government of Ireland Act, did not intervene. In the end, the abolition of Proportional Representation did not significantly harm Catholic representation, but it succeeded in damaging small parties, such as Labour, that competed against unionists for Protestant votes.⁶¹

As consultations on the amending bill continued, not only the various churches but also school principals and teachers were very keen to make their views known to the government. The INTO asked for more representation on regional committees. The Principal Teachers' Union and the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) urged the government to make a statement to reassure Protestant teachers 'who emerging gradually and painfully from the slavery of clerical control, fear to have the yoke re-placed on their necks, and the shackles re-riveted'.⁶² Later in the year, elementary teachers' unions appointed a committee to consider the proposed amendments to the Education Act,

⁵⁸Correspondence between Lord Charlemont and Mrs Chichester, November 1926–January 1927, ED/32/A/1/44, PRONI.

⁵⁹Letter from Charlemont to Craig, July 10, 1928, Proposals of the United Education Committee of Protestant Churches and Grand Orange Lodge on various matters in regard to educational administration, ED/32/A/1/58, PRONI.

⁶⁰Note of interview with Charlemont by a deputation of the Grand Orange Lodge, April 23, 1929, Proposals of the United Education Committee of Protestant Churches and Grand Orange Lodge on various matters in regard to educational administration, ED/32/A/1/59, PRONI.

⁶¹Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979), 225–7; John H. Whyte, 'How Much Discrimination was There under the Unionist Regime, 1921–68?', in *Contemporary Irish Studies*, ed. Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 3–4.

⁶²Letter from Isaac McLoughlin, Newtownards branch of the Ulster Teachers' Union to the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, 6 May 1929, ED/32/A/1/59, PRONI.

and demanded that, as representation was assured to the Protestant churches on various committees, including those regulating teacher training, then teachers and other bodies had the same right.⁶³ Craig and Charlemont decided to avoid public statements as they did not want to disappoint the Protestant churches, but tried to reassure the teachers by arranging a meeting with them. This, however, did not happen until the following year.

The series of meetings preceding the approval of the new Amending Bill is well documented. On 1 April 1930, when the First Reading of the Bill commenced in parliament, Charlemont met with a Catholic deputation composed of the Bishop of Derry Bernard O’Kane, six clergymen and 12 nationalist senators and MPs. Archbishop MacRory did not attend. During the meeting, nationalist leaders expressed their disappointment at the failure of the Minister to invite Catholics to the negotiating table while framing the reform bill. They claimed that the situation had fundamentally changed since 1923, when they had not been in a position to accept government invitations. Because the Bishops and the Catholic clerical managers’ association submitted their views and made themselves available for a meeting, they expected the government to seek their cooperation. However, they were told Catholics should have asked to meet with the Minister explicitly, as Protestant delegations did. Charlemont did not mention that the Church had systematically rejected his and Londonderry’s invitations in previous years, but seemed to imply that, if nationalists wanted their opinion to be considered, they had to meet with him and not simply submit their views.

This meeting was overall fruitless. The delegation complained that, because most Catholic schools remained voluntary, Catholics payed taxes to assist in providing schools for Protestants, while also funding the building of their own. The Bishop of Derry promised that Catholic schools would submit to any conditions such as proper upkeep and efficiency of the secular side in order to receive public funding for building, but would not accept any interference in teacher appointments from local committees. Furthermore, the delegation insisted that simple Bible teaching was ‘a repudiation of the Catholic view of the Holy Scriptures’, and no Catholic child could attend transferred schools.⁶⁴ In the end, Charlemont promised that the Bill under consideration would not take anything away from voluntary schools, but he also stressed that simple Bible teaching was not the only form of religious instruction allowed in transferred schools since catechetical instruction could be arranged with the teachers if required. This, however, did not impress Catholic representatives.

Two weeks after the Catholic representatives, deputations from the main teachers’ unions were received by Charlemont and by his permanent secretary, Bonaparte Wyse. INTO proposed committees governing groups of local schools instead of single-school committees because they feared that, especially in rural areas, local clergymen would easily dominate such committees, thus reinforcing a denominational education system. Interestingly, three unionist MPs, John Johnston, Robert Johnstone and John Davison, supported the proposal. Davison complained that, although the system remained theoretically nondenominational, it was sectarian in practice as managers had the right to appoint teachers. In order to counteract the

⁶³Letter from the three Unions of elementary teachers of Northern Ireland, October 1929, ED/32/A/1/80, PRONI.

⁶⁴Interview with a deputation representing Catholic interests, April 1, 1930, Deputations for Education Amending Bill, 1930, ED/32/A/1/81, PRONI.

potential religious bias of appointments, UTU suggested that, in the case of dismissal by the manager, teachers could appeal to the Minister. However, Wyse objected that Catholic teachers would have the Bishop of the diocese as referee and the Minister himself seemed reluctant to deal with the dismissal of Catholic teachers.⁶⁵

Charlemont and Wyse also met with the Association of Education Committees and with the Belfast Education Committee. Both representations expressed concern over the Amending Bill introducing a number of regional committee members who were not elected but nominated by the Ministry. They feared that, to encourage the transfer of schools and satisfy the request of the churches, those nominated would be the clergymen transferring the schools. The 1923 Act envisaged that the party transferring the school had representation only on the local committee, not on the regional committee that had jurisdiction over all schools in the area. Both representations, including Revd Boyle from the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church, believed that 'the real reason for the demand was so that denominational or sectarian interests should be satisfied'. Wyse tried to explain that the provision was to ensure that teachers appointed to a transferred school would be in harmony with the opinions of the parents even when the education authority was of different views. In the end, the Minister proved himself more receptive to the instances of the Education Committees than to the issues raised by the Catholic Church and by teachers' unions, and he agreed to reduce the number of nominated members.⁶⁶

The new Amending Bill did not take anything away from voluntary schools, as Charlemont promised to the Catholic delegation, and offered them grants of 50% on capital expenditure, thus encouraging Catholics not to transfer their institutes. On the other hand, the Bill practically turned state schools into Protestant schools. It guaranteed that if 10 or more parents so demanded, class I and II schools would be required to deliver Bible instruction. Moreover, schools were obliged to provide facilities and opportunities for distinctive religious teaching through the voluntary agency of teachers or clergymen who were given the 'right of entry' by the relevant education authorities.⁶⁷ The Bill guaranteed that old managers, generally clerics, of transferred schools would have at least half of the places on the school committee, and the latter would have the power to forward names of potential teachers. As the Association of Education committees had earlier complained, the system could easily be abused: the name of a nominee recommended by the school committee would be put together with two names of unsuitable candidates, thus leading the relevant education committee to approve the nominee.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The spirit of the Londonderry Act was missing from the new Bill, despite Craig's claim that it simply clarified 'what was the intention of Parliament when the Act was passed in 1923 ... we have no intention ... to penalise any section of the community no matter

⁶⁵Interview with deputations of Principal Teachers' Union, Irish National Teachers Organisation & Ulster Teacher's Union, April 16, 1930, Deputations for Education Amending Bill, 1930, ED/32/A/1/81, PRONI.

⁶⁶Interview with Belfast Education Committee, April 16, 1930, Deputations for Education Amending Bill, 1930, ED/32/A/1/81, PRONI.

⁶⁷Farren, *The Politics of Irish Education, 1920–65*, 94–5.

⁶⁸Representation of the Association of Education Committees, April 11, 1930, Deputations for Education Amending Bill, 1930, ED/32/A/1/81, PRONI.

what their religion may be'.⁶⁹ Certainly, religion, both as a school subject and as the main factor for cultural differentiation in the deeply divided society of 1920s Northern Ireland, was central to education reforms. While Londonderry tried to marginalise it by subtracting power from all the churches, the unionist government, anxious to strengthen its electoral base and to ensure the survival of Northern Ireland, did not resist the pressure of the Protestant churches. After Londonderry's resignation, nobody in the government defended nondenominational education, despite their personal beliefs. Although rare, there were examples of inter-denominational education, particularly in the grammar school sector and in technical colleges, as H. M. Knox observes.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the failure to impose state control helped perpetrate educational separation based on religion. Although a system founded on denominational schools exists in many countries, as Dunn and Morgan point out, in Northern Ireland this is problematic because it reflects a deeply segregated society.⁷¹ Even though overcoming education segregation is nowadays considered fundamental to the success of the peace process, recent initiatives have promoted collaboration between schools while protecting their denominational ethos at the same time, in an attempt to bypass parents' hostility to integrated education.⁷²

Such hostility can only be explained by tracing the historical origins of the Northern Irish educational system. This approach allows us to go beyond the internal polarisation of society to consider external factors, such as the influence of the English system, which contributed greatly to the peculiarities of Irish education. Whereas in the rest of Europe the state became the only national institution capable of maintaining an efficient educational infrastructure, in England the churches long retained power within a fragmented system. The historical reluctance of the British government to intervene in education helps explain the difficulty encountered by the unionist government. Although by prioritising the requests of the churches the government finally accorded preferential treatment to the Protestant community at the expense of the Catholic one, its plans initially contrasted with those of its supporters. As Londonderry's reform tried to impose state control, the Protestant churches complained and later negotiated, while the Catholic Church simply rejected any interference in education. The three parties had different interests. In the end, the government not only overlooked nationalist requests, but also ignored bodies, such as teachers' unions, whose demands did not merely reflect their religious affiliation, thus reiterating its commitment to denominational education.

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⁶⁹Stormont papers, vol. 12, col. 724, April 9, 1930.

⁷⁰H. M. Knox, 'Religious Segregation in the Schools of Northern Ireland', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 21, no. 3 (1973): 309.

⁷¹Seamus Dunn and Valerie Morgan, 'The Social Context of Education in Northern Ireland', *European Journal of Education* 26, no. 2 (1991): 181.

⁷²Tony Gallagher, 'Shared Education in Northern Ireland: School Collaboration in Divided Societies', *Oxford Review of Education* 42, no. 3 (2016): 362–75.

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