Openness with Roots

Openness with Roots:
Education in Religion in Irish Primary Schools

By

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For my nieces and nephews

Ingrid, Nikki, Tom, Lucy, Amy, Rory, Gaby, Alana, Michael, Sean

and for my grandnieces and grandnephew

Aria, Eve, JoJo, Theo

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FOREWORD

DR KEVIN WILLIAMS

Caroline Renehan is one of the most diligent scholars in Irish academic life, having acquired two Master's degrees and two doctorates and I have had the privilege of being her teacher on two occasions–for her first and second Master's degrees. Her two doctoral dissertations are in very different areas, the first in theology and the second in empirical research in education. Both are available in book form but this is the first of her Master's degrees to be published as a book. Her achievements need no further commendation, so I shall take this opportunity to make some observations regarding the context of her arguments.

The four points that follow as a foreword to the volume are offered in the spirit of John Locke, who envisaged the work of the philosopher as "under-labourer". As he puts it in the introductory "Epistle to the Reader" in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, her or his job is to clear the "ground a little" by removing "some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge".[1] There are some considerations that need to be taken into account in analysing the profile of religion in schools and these considerations apply whatever one's position, i.e., the fundamental orientation of one's belief system.

Firstly, the status of religion in education prompts serious disagreement in most countries and different jurisdictions have different approaches to the issue. Contexts vary enormously. In Ireland the vast majority (over 90%) of schools in the primary sector are under denominational patronage, that is, they are sponsored by Churches or religious bodies. And this is where we are in respect of the control and management of schools; we are not starting with a clean slate. This is a matter of history rather than of a current conspiracy on the part of the Churches. Whether state support for religiously-affiliated schools is desirable from civic and educational perspectives and whether this support will prove financially realistic in the future are large questions. Changes are certainly afoot and the Department of Education and Science is seeking to curtail the dominance of religious patronage. Recent years have witnessed increasing demand for Educate Together schools and the opening of Community National Schools under the sponsorship of

Vocational Education Committees. Yet whatever school systems are put in place, we live now in a world in which we find ourselves in servitude to the scarce resources of this world rather than in some ideal universe of total harmony and of limitless resources where all demands can be met to the total satisfaction of everyone.

Secondly, reasoning on educational issues in not simply a matter of invoking a particular legal framework; it must be informed by appropriate philosophical and empirical research. A distinction must be observed between legal and educational/moral grounds for decisions. It is not sufficient simply to invoke a constitutional provision, a law or even a judicial determination as if this ended all moral and philosophical discussion about sponsorship of schools. In any case, although judicial determinations are binding in law, these determinations derive from judgements about the weight to be placed on different elements in a mosaic of principles.

Thirdly, it is necessary to be circumspect in the use of the language of rights with regard to schooling. The rhetoric of rights should not be promiscuously invoked in political discourse because, in making a claim based on rights, particularly weighty and compelling moral considerations are being invoked. The deeply felt and ardent wishes of adults about the kind of school that they would like their children to attend do not necessarily convert to a right. As Loren Lomasky puts it, rights are the "heavy artillery in our moral arsenal"[2] and there are limits to what can be demanded as a right, either as a liberty or as an entitlement. There is a whole knot of confusion about wishes or desires, freedoms and entitlements, and especially about obligations in the sense of charges that can be made of others. There is a distinction to be observed between freedom and rights and in particular between the right to education and the right to a particular kind of school. Children in Ireland have a right to education and parents have the freedom to send their children to a school of their choice. But this does not mean that parents have a right, in the sense of an entitlement, to have a particular kind of school. The following analogy might make this clear. Citizens have both a right and a freedom to get married and the state has an obligation to respect this right, but the state does not have an obligation to find partners for people.

Fourthly, it is common to hear the rights of parents invoked in discussions, but I am not persuaded that conferring all rights on parents rather than on children themselves is always in the best interests of these children. The primacy given to parents' rights does not do justice to the capacity of young people to make these decisions themselves regarding religion, especially at senior cycle at second level. It is both futile and

educationally reprehensible to attempt to subvert young people's capacity for what John Hewitt calls "the stubborn habit of unfettered thought".[3] In any case, religious believers and secularists do well not to underestimate this "stubborn habit" in young people. Opponents of formative education *in* religion can seriously exaggerate the susceptibility of young people to indoctrination in this area. The classic account of resistance to the catechetical project of the school is to be found in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where James Joyce gives powerful imaginative expression to the human capacity to resist the proselytizing designs of adults. Stephen Dedalus, like Joyce himself, turns away from the Catholic faith that he found in so many respects appealing and which was urged so insistently upon him.

As is obvious from these words, determining the status of religion in schools requires much deliberation on complex questions. I recommend Caroline Renehan's book as a contribution to enabling us to think a little more clearly and accurately about the issues involved.

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This book would not have been possible without the wise counsel and invaluable guidance of my good friend and colleague in the Mater Dei Institute, Dr Kevin Williams. A great debt of gratitude is due to Kevin's sharp eye and learned advice from the outset of the work to the point of providing the book's title. I am also very grateful for the patience, encouragement and assistance of a number of my friends and colleagues in the Mater Dei Institute, including Dr Dermot Lane (recently retired as President) and Dr Gabriel Flynn. In addition, I should like to thank my friend, Dr James O'Higgins Norman, Dublin City University, for energetic debates on some of the topics contained in the book and Ms Sharon King of St Patrick's College for her supportive conversations. I should also like to thank Ms Anne Hession, St Patrick's College, Prof John Sullivan, Liverpool Hope University and Dr Patricia Kieran, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick for whose expert advice in religious education I am very grateful.

Special mention and gratitude is due to St Patrick's College Research Committee for granting a fund towards publication costs of the book. I very much appreciate the generosity of the College during these straitened times and the College's recognition of the necessity for research in education in religion at primary level.

I was also in a very privileged position to have been able to enlist the assistance of Dr Gráinne Treanor as my proofreader. Gráinne not only read countless drafts of the text with great diligence, patience and accuracy but she cared for the text in an especial way, as if it were her own.

Finally, I am most grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing Ltd. for their personal and professional interest in the publication of this work. Ultimately, it is the confidence of the publisher that makes it all possible.

INTRODUCTION

This book explores the historical legacy and current debate concerning Education in Religion in the Republic of Ireland, focusing on the primary school sector and on denominationally managed schools in particular. A significant feature of these schools is a commitment to communicating religious truth claims to children who attend them. This activity goes beyond teaching merely *about* religions and beliefs. Taught within the broader context of a denominational school ethos, religion is a fundamental part of the school curriculum whereby its aim is to lead children to a mature faith and is visualised by the school and the faith community to be a life-long process. In light of the increasing diversity of religious and non-religious world views in Ireland, the relationship between religion and formal education in school has become one of increasing contention. The matter is all the more complex due to the Catholic Church's managerial control of the vast majority of the country's State funded primary schools. The rationale behind the book, therefore, is to consider two areas of importance, with the intention of contributing to the current debate arising from the aforementioned complexity. These are (i) the appropriateness of Irish primary schools in continuing to provide denominational religious education in state schools (ii) the appropriateness of denominational schools in providing an exclusively phenomenological programme of religion without undermining their mission to educate in a given faith tradition.

The situation pertaining to education in religion in this country did not materialise out of a vacuum. The rationale is thus grounded in a synopsis of Ireland's historical legacy outlined in the first two chapters respectively. Chapter One offers a brief account of education in religion from the Bardic Schools through to the Powis Commission on Primary Education, covering the period from 1475 until 1870. The second chapter traces education in religion through most of the twentieth century, commencing with the Foundation of the Irish State in 1922 and culminating in the Education Act of 1998. The purpose of Chapters Three and Four is to focus on aspects of two important documents pertinent to the current debate. Chapter Three thus makes reference to a report prepared by the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) opening a discussion relating to religion and education from a human rights perspective. In doing so, the

IHRC makes the point that this is an issue with which every country throughout the world has to grapple. Chapter Four is concerned with the more significant of the two documents. At the request of the Minister for Education, the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was set up chiefly to examine denominational school patronage and the disparity between that system and contemporary Ireland's increasingly diverse society. The rationale behind the fifth and final chapter of this book is to examine the role of religion as a subject in the denominational school. It will be shown that a radical shift may take place in future years by removing faith-based religion from its timetable slot during the school day and replacing it with a purely phenomenological approach to the teaching of the subject. Some of the implications of this possibility are teased out in the final chapter by means of contribution to the current debate.

It is important to note from the outset that one of the most difficult challenges for anyone attempting to deal with the relationship between religion and education is that of language. A plethora of terms abound as to the meaning of "Religious Education", which would make of it a study in its own right. The task of explaining such terminology in any depth, however, is not within the remit of this book. To attempt that task would be to distract from the debate and the rationale behind the endeavour undertaken. Nonetheless, some clarification is required prior to commencement. The phrase "education in religion" is used in general throughout the text as a broad, general *modus operandi*. Thus an essential point is being made. That is, the focus is placed on the role of *education in religion*, not on *religion in education*. This is a significant matter of emphasis and the former phraseology better expresses the essential essence of education in religion as it is understood in the context of this text. Cognisant also of the need to refer to both denominational and phenomenological approaches to education in religion in the final chapters of this work, terminology advised by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in their report has proven extremely helpful and will be referenced in due course.

CHAPTER ONE

IRELAND'S HERITAGE

Education in religion in Ireland cannot be fully appreciated without reference to the trials and tribulations of its early historical context. Therefore, the specific purpose of this chapter is to trace that history, albeit in synopsised form, from the Bardic times after 1475 until the eve of the Foundation of the State in 1922. The broad sweep proposed outlines the contours of the various systems of education for consideration, taking account of the Bardic Schools, an insight as to why Ireland was bestowed with the ancient, anecdotal title, "Land of Saints and Scholars", the effect on education in religion arising from the Tudor period, the Penal Laws, the Hedge Schools, Catholic Emancipation, the National School System and The Royal Commission of Enquiry into Primary Education or, as the latter is otherwise known to educational historians, the Powis Commission.

The Bardic Schools

Although the time of their foundation is uncertain, the Bardic order developed from the ancient pre-Christian Celtic tradition of the Druids and its position in society can be traced back from that pre-historic tradition.[1] Out of the Bardic tradition there emerged a rare but important aspect of Irish life, that of the Bardic school, which was to impact directly on daily life for a period of around 1,500 years. The subjects studied in the Bardic schools consisted mainly of history, genealogy, language, literature and law, which were all taught through the medium of the native Irish language. In these schools, a broader study of history began to focus more on Irish history and a general study of law became more focused on Irish law, otherwise known as the Brehon Law system. This law system originated from an oral tradition, passing its customs down from one generation to the next until the seventh century, from which time written laws came into practice. According to Ginnell, poets composed verse for laws and genealogy, including their own indigenous system of dating from Celtic times until the seventeenth century, encouraging their students to

memorise poetry rather than prose, as it was considered easier to learn.[2] The task, however, was to preserve and interpret the law as opposed to expanding it. Depending on one's perspective, Brehon law was progressive by today's standards. For example, it recognised divorce and equal rights between the genders as well as paying attention to the environmental conditions in which they lived. In respect of criminal law, offences and penalties were outlined in detailed fashion. Brehon law preferred restitution to retribution for wrongdoing, with homicide or bodily harm being punishable by means of the so-called "eric" system, calculated by a scale and applied against the offender in just measure. Capital punishment was not among the range of penalties available to the Brehons. The absence of either a court system or a police force suggests that people living and working within the Brehon law structure had strong respect for the law.[3]

The Bardic schools were pre-Christian and a separate institution to ecclesiastical schools, remaining until the seventeenth century. Today, these schools might be termed "lay" schools and it was from these that their poets, the Brehons (judges), historians, doctors and other professional people graduated. Education in these schools ran parallel to education in the monastic or ecclesiastical schools, pointing to an educational tradition outside the Church as well as within it. Their officers were laymen living and working along analogous lines with the great schools of the clerics. Auchmuty claims, therefore, that the Bardic schools retained everything that was best in ancient Irish culture[4]. Nonetheless, their school buildings were little more than ordinary houses or huts occupied by the chief poet (File) and the professor (Ollamh). Where the professor led, the school followed, although the poet usually remained, since he was normally attached to the local king.[5] When the Bardic schools did at last become Christian, however, they were not associated in any way with the famous monastic schools.

Land of Saints and Scholars

In the monastic schools, the focus on religion in relation to learning and Ireland's past is well expressed in the praiseworthy phrase, the "Land of Saints and Scholars". Salafia was to say of this Golden Age:

> The fierce and restless quality which had made the pagan Irish the terror of Europe, seems to have emptied itself into the love of learning and the love of God and it is the peculiar distinction of Irish medieval scholarship and

> the salvation of literature in Europe that the one in no way conflicted with the other.[6]

It was through the influence of the monastic schools in the eighth and ninth centuries, founded originally in the sixth century for young men intended for the Church, that schools and colleges spread rapidly all over the country.[7] In these schools, secular as well as religious (ecclesiastical) learning was well catered for. Their subjects of discipline included divinity, the scriptures, the classics, literature and science. In these great seminaries, religion in education appears to have sat seamlessly alongside education in secular subjects. As time progressed, religion and education became intertwined with love of God and love of learning. In the words of Raftery, "the history of the labyrinthine connections between the Churches, the State and schooling in Ireland … dates back at least to the sixth century".[8] Not all of their students were destined to enter the Church, however, for a large proportion of them were the sons of chiefs and kings preparing to take their place in civil or military life.[9]

A sense of the seamlessness between life and education, education in religion and other disciplines for young men in the monasteries is summed up in a novel by Follet.[10] Subsequent to losing his parents and entire family in a murderous rampage, a youth named Philip was taken in by the local Abbot. Philip began to behave badly, as if he had been imprisoned unjustly, by subverting official authority. He broke eggs, loosed horses, stole food when it was unnecessary, mocked the infirm and insulted his elders, only stopping short of sacrilege, as the Abbot would forgive him everything but that. However, within a twelve month period of his entry into the monastery, Philip's behaviour began to improve. Follett writes:

> There was no single reason for his return to normality. The fact that he got interested in his lessons probably helped. The mathematical theory of music fascinated him, and even the way Latin verbs were conjugated had a certain satisfying logic … [He] began to find some kind of solace in the daily round of prayers and services. And so he slipped into adolescence with the organization of the monastery on his mind and the holy harmonies in his ears.[11]

This fictional story was based on life and education in monasteries such as that founded by Colmcille (or Columba, the son of a Donegal Chief) at Iona. The monasteries facilitated the spread of Christianity to the Orkney and Shetland Islands in Scotland and also to northern England. Another significant figure, Columbanus, who was born in Co Meath, emerged from the austerity of Celtic Christianity and became one of the most outstanding sources of cultural, educational, and spiritual renewal in

Europe. Travelling from Ireland to Italy, he and his followers established numerous monasteries in France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy, which became strongholds of safety, education, employment and culture amidst the turmoil of the Dark Ages. These monasteries continued for centuries to serve both religious and social life in Ireland at one and the same time. The typical monastery was like a small village of huts and small houses surrounding the central church. The Irish Church at this stage was largely independent of the structure and influence of Rome; hence it developed along its own idiosyncratic lines. By the twelfth century, the great European monastic orders such as the Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians built enormous monasteries, abbeys and priories throughout the country.

The Tudors

The establishment of the monasteries, however, did not signify peace in Ireland. The Vikings habitually invaded and plundered the monastic establishments, well aware that the monasteries housed many valuable items such as gold chalices, scriptures, paintings and even surplus foods. Although a considerable number of the monasteries had been destroyed during the Viking raids, the ultimate destruction came at the hands of the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Plunder may rob society of its wealth, but colonisation aims to steal the spirit, the heart and the soul of society. So it is, Dunn argues, that, from:

> the early days of the Tudor conquest, schooling in Ireland became intimately bound up with the process of colonisation and with the consequent ascendancy of the English language.[12]

In the same way, education in religion became part of Tudor policy in respect of the Church of England's Reform tradition. According to Glendenning, the Tudors were the first to legalise the promotion of the religious principles of the Reformation.[13]

As the Irish dioceses became anglicised in the early sixteenth century, the Irish episcopacy failed to reform the quality of its leadership. Some Irish bishops, however, made significant attempts to educate their adherents in religion with a certain level of dynamism through religious observance. In this period, the nominations of the bishops in the colonised zones (Dublin, Meath, Kildare, Leighlin, Ossory and Ferns) were under the authority of the King. Despite local canvassing for Irish bishops, according to Lennon:

> [t]hose favoured for sees in Anglo-Ireland were usually well-trained English-born canon lawyers and servitors who were expected to double as secular administrators.[14]

Regardless of the dual responsibilities of the English bishops in Ireland, their record as diligent pastors and spiritual supervisors to their respective communities was taken seriously. These men faced not only the cultural divisions of the day but, as an institutional Church, they were closely interconnected with the secular, socio-political elite through financial endowment and patronage.

The crown, for its part, also depended to some extent on the Church as a source of patronage for clients, expert officials and financial gain. Even as late as the 1520s, neither the Church nor the State made any serious attempt "to centralise ecclesiastical jurisdiction, revenues and patronage".[15] This period of congenial but perhaps guarded reciprocity between Church and State did not last, however, partially due to the appointment of John Alen to the archbishopric of Dublin in 1529. He was the former commissary-general to Cardinal Wolsey's legatine court in the Reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) and a single-minded man of the reform era. Although his episcopacy was only of six years duration, ending in his violent death, he raised important questions about the nature of the Church and royal ecclesiastical control in Ireland, both of which were to last for many decades. After Henry VIII, at the outset of the Reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), certain concessions were permitted in order to appease the Irish Catholics. For example, a Latin version of set prayers could be used where English was not understood or spoken and church ornaments such as statues and vestments, not favoured by the institutional Church, were permitted.[16]

By the time of the reign of Henry's daughter Elizabeth I (1558-1603), the established Church and royal ecclesiastical control came into greater effect. Elizabeth declared herself, through key Acts of Supremacy, to be:

> the supreme governor of the Church of Ireland, against whose authority it was potentially treasonous to preach…[and] 'she incorporated'…an oath to be sworn by principal ecclesiastical and civil office-holders.[17]

Here the State tried to take a firm hold, dictating what happened in devotion and in the religious life of the people. This is evident specifically in the second Act of Supremacy, in which Elizabeth ordained that liturgical practices in Ireland should be compliant with the laws of The Book of Common Prayer (1552). Furthermore, attendance at holy services on all subjects was compulsory under penalty of fines and determination

of offences was to be administered by towns' mayors and other justices of the peace.[18] These attempts at reformation in Ireland did little for Elizabeth specifically in terms of educating people in the religion which she propagated. According to Ellis, Elizabeth's Church faced an identity crisis readily recognisable but equally less remediable. As Ellis recounts:

> The Elizabethan settlement required a full-scale campaign of evangelization … Irish born reformers like Bishop Brady, Lord Chancellor Cusack and Chief Baron Dillon tended to advocate a more persuasive campaign based on preaching, education and the liturgical use of Gaelic to generate popular enthusiasm for reform … Brady, Lancaster and Long all promoted projects to endow local schools and campaigned for the establishment of a university … The interest in Gaelic as a reform medium led to the publication in 1571 of a catechism … the first Gaelic book printed in Ireland … a Gaelic New Testament was also begun … but appeared far too late to help the Elizabethan church.[19]

The idea was to educate through wholehearted propaganda, a policy which would create an active preaching ministry to reform surviving followers of popery in the Gaelic parts of the country.[20]

Penal Times

From 1612 onwards, the religious distinctions between the English Protestant and the Irish Catholic became more pronounced.[21] Following the Battle of the Boyne (1690), the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland came increasingly to the fore, dominating education in religion through the reform tradition. Tudor policies were instrumental in spreading the influences of the Reformation for approximately the next century and a half. Glendenning recounts that, throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries:

> England relied upon a comprehensive series of repressive legislative measures, (the Penal Laws), to implement its policies in Ireland thereby affecting four crucial areas of Catholic life; property; religion; personal disabilities and education.[22]

Education in religion, delivered from the perspective of Catholic Christianity, was particularly adversely affected by these laws, as Catholic teachers were forbidden either from teaching or running a school. Any teacher or member of the clergy found not adhering to these laws received punitive treatment, mostly in the form of heavy fines, with senior Church

officials having to pay heavier fines than their lower clerical counterparts. School teachers, at the bottom of the hierarchical order, were expected to pay the least in monetary retribution.[23]

According to McManus, however, the purpose of these acts was not to reduce Catholics to ignorance and servitude, but instead to force them to send their children to schools where they would have to avail of the education in religion already on offer. This education was Protestant. The goal was to train Catholics to become loyal to the Protestant crown.[24] Raftery holds a less benign interpretation. Going further, she claims that Catholic education was eroded, particularly given the passing of the Act to Restrain Foreign Education (1695). This Penal Law act forbade Catholics from sending their children to Catholic education centres in countries such as Spain and France.[25] It would appear that Hyland and Milne support this latter interpretation when they state specifically that the Act was intended to protect children from being educated anywhere by "any Jesuit, seminary priest, friar, monk, or other popish person".[26] Although such historians disagree to some extent as to how rigorously these laws were enforced, no doubt enforcement depended on the attitudes of local magistrates bringing or hearing particular cases, some of whom were rigorous and others of whom were likely to be more liberal.

Regardless of historical interpretation, within approximately ten years of the passing of the Penal Law Act of 1652, toleration of the government long enjoyed by Catholics had come to an end, thus ensuring that they were deprived of every means possible to threaten the position of the dominant minority rulers.[27] This meant that, although Catholic parishes were left intact, parish priests had to be registered. All other clergy were forced to leave the country on pain of death and no Catholic chapel could have a steeple or a bell. In respect of education, no Catholic could teach school or send their children abroad for education. As late as 1920, Sean T. O'Ceallaigh (1882-1966), the second President of Ireland (1945-1959), tells of the long standing insidious effects of the Penal Laws, when he writes in a memorandum to Pope Benedict XV (1920) that:

> The position of Irish Catholics is a cruel one … The injurious social and economic results of these anti-Catholic laws will not be overcome for generations. To the present day we suffer political injury inside and outside of Ireland, simply and solely because we are practicing Catholics … An ex-minister of France confessed to me that the reason why Ireland remained so long unsuccessful in her struggle for independence and got so little assistance from foreign countries, was the fact that we are a Catholic nation.[28]

O'Ceallaigh continues in his memo to the Pope that "Ireland suffered and fought and bled while the oppressor repudiated, blasphemed and persecuted it".[29] The effect of the Penal Laws, however, did not prove to be the deterrent undoubtedly intended by their authors. Rather, it might be said that these oppressive laws of their time resulted in an unintended consequence, the so-called illegal "hedge schools".

The Hedge Schools

Such was the commitment of the poorer parents that they sent their children to the hedge schools in order to afford them the opportunity of the best education available during those times. For the same reason, the more prosperous Catholic parents, despite the Penal Law prohibition, sent their children to be educated on the continent. Sporadic schooling for the children of the hedge schools was provided secretly by travelling teachers (sometimes referred to as pay schools because the teachers were given some form of remuneration or other). Lessons in these schools took place, as the name suggests, mainly in the open air, at the sunny side of a hedge or in cabins during inclement weather, in return for either fees and/or lodgings.[30]

Given that teaching had to take place surreptitiously, the schools were hidden away from public view. McManus spells out the difficulty for the travelling teachers and their pupils in the following way:

> A pupil was usually placed on sentry duty to warn the master if a suspicious-looking stranger was approaching … arrangements were then made to reconvene at another location on the following day … the master knew he would rely on the hospitality of the people, as he moved from one location to the next "earning a little perhaps by turning his hand to farm work, or, when he dared, by teaching the children of his host".[31]

These school masters taught at considerable risk to their own freedom and evidence is not in short supply to show that prosecutions were delivered against them, particularly whenever political turmoil was encroaching. One such period was the Jacobite scare (1714).[32] Corcoran, for example, reported nineteen indictments against the Catholic hedge schoolmasters summonsed before the Limerick grand jury alone (1711-1722). Any schoolmaster who contravened the Penal Laws could be imprisoned for up to three months and be fined twenty pounds. Furthermore, he could be banished to Barbados and expect the death penalty if he returned to Ireland.[33] On the same matter Dowling observes that:

> … the schoolmaster was liable to be punished with the greatest severity; his life was at stake as well as his freedom. In the Commonwealth Records we find … "that such persons corrupt the youth of this Nation with Popish principals. Such school masters to bee secured, and put on board of such ship bound for the Islands of the Barbadoes".[34]

Nonetheless, the majority of the Irish population clung, defiantly, it might be said, to their traditional religion, and Catholicism and Irish identity had become more or less synonymous. Fear of persecution did not prevent the spread of hedge schools. As early as 1730, the Catholic diocesan statutes of Dublin required every "parish priest to have a schoolmaster in his parish to teach Catholic doctrine".[35] These men kept a careful watch on education in religion. Corish observes that the hedge schoolmaster "was expected to teach Catechism … If he did not he was carpeted; if he could not he was instructed".[36] Two reasons are evident for this watchfulness. Firstly, it was because of the attempts of the Established Church to convert the indigenous population to Protestantism and, secondly, it was because the hedge schoolmasters were gaining control in education through a private, pay operated system. As time passed, there was also a two-fold outcome. Firstly, the priest and the hedge schoolmaster worked together in close cooperation and, secondly, the hedge schools became tolerated. Furthermore, as subsequent generations of liberal Protestant planters came to see themselves as Irish, they began to question the injustice of the repressive system of the Penal Laws. This, coupled with the influence of the eighteenth century Enlightenment values throughout Europe, resulted in the persecution of Catholics becoming untenable.

Catholic Emancipation

In that more enlightened climate, the priest-teacher relationship in education flourished, albeit unofficially. By the time of the Catholic Relief Act (1782), when Catholics were permitted to teach school, the hedge schools still had the loyalty of the native population. This relief act was the beginning of a process which involved reducing and removing many of the restrictions on Catholics which had been put in place by the Penal Laws.[37] The most significant measure, however, was the Catholic Relief Act (1829). This Act was the culmination of the process of Catholic Emancipation throughout the nation following a vigorous campaign on the matter by Irish lawyer, Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell, a democrat who had experience with the social and economic problems of the Irish through his

work in the minor courts, obtained firm support from the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, the Whigs and the liberal Tories. He had seen the effects of English rule on the Irish. His crusade was to liberate the Irish socially, economically and politically by taking one step at a time within the system. Ultimately, his aim was Home Rule, but Catholic Emancipation was the first step, given that it already received support in the House of Commons. O'Connell thought that, once there were Catholic Members of Parliament in the Commons, they might be likely to use their influence in the interests of Home Rule for Ireland.[38] Mescal rejoices in the consequences of Catholic Emancipation:

> After the long night came the inevitable day … It is in an Irish saying that one should pray for the soul of Daniel O'Connell on hearing the chapel bell. With regard to the Mass, the removal of Catholic disabilities by the Emancipation Act was the necessary condition of all later progress. Priests and people could then set themselves without fear of dungeon or gibbet to build less unworthy homes for their Eucharistic Lord.[39]

Mescal, as we can see from the above, defines his understanding of the struggle in terms of justifying the religious basis of education and the fortification of Irish Catholics in their resolve. That resolve harks back to an earlier age, once almost vanquished but now returning, according to his thinking. He goes on:

> It is now widely conceded that the old people exhibit an almost patriarchal fervour in the practice of their religion, which centuries of persecution could not impair, and the younger people certainly have this awesome and almost super-human example all about them.[40]

In this refrain, Mescal exhorts Irish educationalists to aim at carrying on this tradition while at the same time concerning themselves with the application of modern research and experiment in order to ensure the future of the religious life of the country's people.[41]

Overall, within the context of the time-frame of Catholic Emancipation, Glendenning observes that, between the years 1800 and 1869, the Church of Ireland (that is, the Established Church in Ireland) and the Church of England were united by the Acts of Union (1800). This law set up the Church in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland as one United Church of England and Ireland whose doctrinal essence, discipline and government would be the same as "are by law established for the Church of England".[42] During this period there was increased activity, particularly by a considerable number of voluntary religious groups showing an interest in education. On the Protestant side, societies were set up such as

the London Hibernian Society, the Baptist Society for promoting the gospel in Ireland and the Sunday School Society, some of which were in receipt of public funding while openly proselytising.[43] Neither the funding nor their proselytising practices escaped the notice of the Catholic population, giving them cause for concern. In that context, religious orders such as the Ursuline Sisters, the Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy, the Loreto Sisters and the Christian Brothers began laying their own specific foundations to ensure that children would be taught the values of Catholic Christianity.[44]

The National School System

As far back as 1787, a consensus had been emerging on the part of the government whereby it was believed that some form of state intervention should promote the idea of united or "mixed education", where all religions would be catered for in one school.[45] Two years subsequent to Catholic Emancipation, a mixed education plan began to take shape nationwide as a National School System. A document known as the Stanley Letter (1831) helped the British Government to establish a legal basis for national schools in Ireland. It was penned by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Edward Stanley, and addressed to the Duke of Leinster.[46] Of particular significance was the introduction of the responsibility of the management of schools to that of a Patron. Patronage was and still is inextricably linked to the place of education in religion. The catalyst was the Stanley Letter. Stanley's plan was to separate education in religion, which normally took place during the school day, from other subjects on the curriculum. The outcome was intended to:

> … afford combined literary and moral, and separate religious instruction, to children of all persuasions, as far as possible, in the same school, upon the fundamental principle that no attempt shall be made to interfere with the peculiar religious tenets of any description of Christian pupil.[47]

The complexity of education in religion from this juncture and the control of this education began to resurrect itself in a different way from the days prior to the Relief Acts. Although the problems concerning education in religion remained, the oppression and violence evident during Tudor times and throughout the period of the Penal Laws had decreased significantly. Nonetheless, difficulties for the Government in Ireland were always under the surface, ready to erupt at any time. Williams' observation of the situation is as follows:

> Awareness of the potential for social disharmony deriving from the "crazy knot" of identities, the aspiration to separate religious from cultural and national identity formed part of the impulse behind the attempt to introduce a multi-denominational school system in the nineteenth century. The aim of the architects of the system of national education that was eventually established in Ireland in 1831 was therefore to promote a shared identity on the part of the inhabitants. The multi-denominational system that was introduced limited the remit of the state to secular learning and assigned responsibility for religious education to the respective churches.[48]

That "crazy knot" of identities was and still is the kernel of the problem.[49] The Government's intention in 1831 to establish multi-denominational schools, by divorcing secular education from education in religion, was hardly likely to be accepted by those parents who wished their children to be educated in a denominational context. The struggle for power between the churches and the state, presumably in the best interests of the children of the nation, was gathering momentum. While both were clamouring for control it was the churches, especially the Catholic Church, that were gaining ground. The churches and the state clashed or, as Coolahan expresses it:

> This conflict between state and church on the control of schooling pursued a tortuous and labyrinthine path resulting in the state's retaining the concept of a de jure mixed system which, from mid-century onwards, became increasingly denominational in fact.[50]

In addition, it is open to question as to whether the Government was truly concerned with a mixed education principle of non-segregation in education. Glendenning argues that the Government's interests were based less on altruism and more on their desire to foster the advancement of the English culture and language. Furthermore, she claims that the government wished to experiment with state-aided education which would have proven unpopular with the people of England at the time.[51] On the other hand, the various denominational churches perceived the mixed system to be contrary to their firmly held religious beliefs, particularly in respect of non-denominationalism. The Presbyterians, for example, had difficulty with the unpaid National Board of Commissioners, which had been set up to oversee the new National School system. Their chief concern was the denominationally mixed nature of that board and its power over school texts and teachers. Furthermore, the Bible was no longer the centre of education. The Church of Ireland was unhappy that education in religion was to take place outside of literary instruction and that its control was being weakened in education.[52] For its part, the

Catholic Church, by far the strongest denomination, accepted the new system at first, but became increasingly suspicious of it in a relatively short period of time. Raftery remarks thus:

> The Catholic Church had a complex relationship with the system; while it initially tolerated it for any potential benefits to Catholic children, it became hostile to the principle of mixed education. By 1836, the Christian Brothers had openly demonstrated their concern with the influences of Protestantism and British culture, and they withdrew their schools from the system.[53]

From that time onwards, Catholic teachers and their employers (the parish clergy) were ever more closely allied in education. As a result, education in religion and correspondingly school ethos (or characteristic spirit) was firmly established under the control of the patron in national school management. The onus was then placed on the patron (usually the bishop or ecclesiastical authority) to request permission to establish a school and, once this was granted, a subordinate manager (usually the local clergyman) was delegated with responsibility to follow through. So it was with the passing of time that the Stanley plan was adapted as opposed to adopted, not only by Catholic denominational schools, but by all contemporary denominations, to meet their respective requirements and objectives.[54]

The informal system of the mixed educational principle contained in the Stanley plan grew weaker in the face of the stronger denominational interests. As for parents who wished their children to be educated in a denominational context, one would expect that their wishes had been granted, although one legal commentator, Osborough, is somewhat more dubious, hinting that parents were "persuaded to perceive" the value of elementary education in denominational terms.[55] Persuaded or otherwise, freedom to practise religion was of the utmost importance to parents and those who wished that their children be taught accordingly had to be taken into account. Hence, the so-called "conscience clause" was introduced into provision for education. This was an important term permitting parents to withdraw their children from religious services and religion lessons that were deemed to violate their religious principles (although in principle it applied to any subject to which the parents objected).

Glendenning outlines the significance of the conscience clause from Stanley's time through to today by listing the following acts pertaining to it. She writes:

> The conscience clause has an ancient lineage which can be traced from the Stanley plan for primary education (1831) down through various measures such as: the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act 1878, s 7; the

> Government of Ireland Act 1920, s 5; the Irish Constitution of 1922, Art 8; the Constitution of Ireland 1937, Art 44.2.4 and the Education Act 1998, s 30(2)(e) … the Minister … shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student…[56]

In order to comply with such acts, timetabling of education in religion had to be accommodated from 1831 onwards so that instruction in secular subjects and instruction in religious subjects were provided separately. Children were therefore separated from each other in their classrooms at times during the religion period, to the extent that even the classroom resources required manipulation. One such example is given by Glendenning when she refers to the use of a blackboard, where one side of it was marked "Secular Education" and the other side of it was marked "Religious Instruction". The blackboard was turned around depending on which subject was being taught.[57] The inevitable consequence was that all children would recognise the separate status given to these two important bodies of knowledge but also, of course, the dichotomy between them.

Although it had been Stanley's vision to promote harmony in multi-denominational education, this became well-nigh impossible, partially due to the fear of proselytism among the various denominational school agencies. No doubt there was a power struggle between the Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian proponents, who were in mutual disagreement. At the same time, each of these was also in a power struggle against the government. All parties, it could be said, fought to mould the national school system as they saw fit, but each was, in its own way, sincere for the betterment of the education of the children of the country. The power issue was the inevitable side effect. Nevertheless, it can be said that the structure of the elementary system of education set up by Stanley in 1831 remains effectively unchanged up until today.

The Royal Commission of Enquiry into Primary Education (Powis)

In order to avoid an impasse between the State and the churches, the Government tacitly accepted the findings of the Royal Commission of Enquiry into Primary Education set up under the chairmanship of Lord Powis (1868-1870). After the Powis Commission, the National School system effectively became segregated into denominational institutions or, in the succinct phraseology of Ó Buachalla, the schools were "undenominational