Issues of Faith-Based Education in the United Kingdom

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A Case for Catholic Schools

By

Andrew B. Morris

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However, while expressing my wholehearted thanks for all the help I have received, I must make it clear that the views and opinions expressed in the book, any omissions, misinterpretation or errors that it may contain, are my own sole responsibility.

Andrew B. Morris
September 2023

FOREWORD

I am very pleased to be associated with the publication of this book.

The public debate about schools of a religious character is often to the fore at this time. Sometimes it is driven by those who are ideologically committed to the separation of all religious belief from education. This means that as Catholics we always have to be ready not only to defend our schools but also to give a positive and systematic account of their character and achievements. Values which shape education should always be explicit. There is no such thing as 'value-free' education.

For this reason, I welcome Dr Morris' scholarly and methodical approach to the case for Catholic schools. He has gone to great trouble to assemble and establish an evidential basis which describes in detail the history, the legal situation and the achievements of Catholic schools over the last fifty years. Evidence as presented in this book is a good antidote to rhetoric and gratuitous assertions.

All who are interested in the debate on the place of schools of a religious character will find this book of great interest. This will include those who lead, teach in and support our Catholic schools as well as those who are interested in the issues that feature in this debate and who are prepared to take on board the evidence and detail which should inform that debate itself.

I thank Dr Morris for his work.

Vincent Nichols
His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Birmingham
8th September 2008

PREFACE

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, most members of the Catholic Church take the existence of its state-maintained schools (almost) for granted. It was not always the position. The creation and continued existence of a state supported Catholic sector has at different times been a matter of some considerable controversy.

The sector's current character and distribution can be attributed, arguably, to two key decisions of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales taken some ninety years apart. The first, taken as a collective body after the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, was to make the provision of Catholic elementary schools their highest priority. The second, in response to the political settlement of 1944, was to pursue voluntary aided status for their existing and future schools. The underlying rationale for both decisions was their concern to provide an effective mechanism for the transmission of Catholic faith and culture for a predominantly poor and working-class Catholic community, and secure control over the style and content of religious instruction. Catholic schools were to be the places where people learned their Catholicism becoming, with the home and church, a tri-partite self-sustaining community structure.

The decision to build such schools has involved the Catholic community in considerable capital expense over the years, and the acceptance of an on- going financial responsibility for their maintenance and improvement. In so doing, the Church has become a net contributor to the cost of providing the national education system. Catholic schools seek to provide an education that is appropriate to any civic institution, but taught within a religious context that permeates all aspects of their day-to-day activities. They are expected to provide high educational standards and exercise a particular duty to care for the poor and disadvantaged. That concern for the poor and under privileged is not new but has formed a central element of the bishops' educative mission for over 150 years. Initially, it was expressed in the drive to build elementary schools before churches. Today, it is reflected in their espousal of voluntary aided and comprehensive status for diocesan schools, together with a rejection of pupil selection by ability or aptitude.

The commitment of the Catholic Church to providing schools is evidence of the value it has always placed upon education. As such, it argues that, in serving the common good[1] it is right and proper for Church schools to receive state support[2] for their role in providing an appropriate environment for parents who want a Catholic education for their children; especially since those parents are contributing to the education of others who prefer some other type of state supported school.[3]

However, the Church's view has not always received universal approval. Partly because of the political landscape in England since the Reformation, the role of religious belief in state sponsored education became a particularly thorny issue during the period leading up to the passing of the 1870 Education Act that established the dual system of education in England. It also formed the basis of non-conformist opposition to the Education Act of 1902 which reorganised education on a municipal basis. The Education Act of 1944 appeared to overcome much of the sectarian rivalry that marked the passing of its 1870 and 1902 predecessors. It seemed to offer new opportunities for the development of a national education system that could accommodate differing religious opinions and provide both equal opportunity and greater social equity.

During the next fifty years, for the most part, that early promise seemed to have been fulfilled. The previously bitter controversies over the place of Catholic schools within the newly entrenched dual system certainly diminished and they became an accepted and unremarked feature of state maintained provision, almost ignored in the major government reports on the future development of education written in the late 1950s and 1960s.[4] Clearly, their expanding presence had not become a focus of any social conflict and they were no longer regarded as an actual or potentially divisive influence. Indeed, it is perhaps apposite that, in recognition of the general acceptance of the Catholic sector, the first major sociological study of the sector, published in 1978, was entitled 'Catholic Education: The Unobtrusive Partner'.[5]

Nevertheless, significant obstacles remained. The new secondary schools that were required under the provisions of the 1944 Act created severe financial difficulties for the bishops. In all their dealing with the government both in the period leading up to the publication of the bill and following its enactment, they had sought, unsuccessfully as it turned out, for equity in the financial support provided by the government when building schools for the Catholic population. Their position was set out in pamphlets published in the early 1950's [6] when the actual and potential

cost of school provision seemed as if it might be too much for the Church to sustain.

Since then, financial, social and political circumstances have changed. The financial burden has reduced as the level of government grant aid towards the capital costs of providing voluntary aided schools has risen over the years, from the initial 50% in 1944 to 75% in 1959, 80% in1967, 85% in 1975 to its current 90% level in 2002. In contrast, socio- political disputes about the continuing role of the Catholic sector within the state system have returned, especially so in recent years,[7] following the present government's policy of using diversity in educational provision as a mechanism for raising standards, and encouraging different church or faith groups to establish schools as a way of achieving that objective,[8] particularly in the secondary sector.

The thrust of much popular criticism seems to be directed at perceived problems associated with the provision of schools for minority ethnic faith communities, established as a result of mass immigration starting in the 1950s. The arguments in favour of, so called, minority faith schools within an increasingly secular and pluralistic society, closely parallel those of the Catholic bishops over a century earlier. The antagonisms these new schools seem to have generated have once again made the role and existence of Catholic schools a controversial matter.

Consequently, though many years on from those early arguments setting out the bishops' case for equity in the degree of financial support given to Catholic schools within the state system, it is, perhaps, time to re-present the Catholic position. Unlike the original, however, this new 'Case for Catholic Schools' is not concerned with arguments about financial equity, though that remains a matter of concern. Instead, in a series of connected essays, it will draw heavily upon the work of specialists in various areas – philosophical, historical, sociological, educational, political, legal and theological – in an attempt to explain to both proponents and sceptics of religiously based educational provision, how the maintained Catholic sector originated, what it seeks to do and how it makes a positive contribution to society.

As in the 1950s, there is a case to be made. It will, of course, be partial but also seek to be fair and balanced. The intended audience is general rather than scholarly (but with extensive explanatory notes provided for those who may wish to pursue the basis for the propositions put forward). The context is the diminishing understanding and practice of religion in an

English society that is sometimes sceptical about the Church's presence within the educational system. It is hoped that the case being made will be of particular interest to those who value Catholic schools in particular, and church schools generally. It may also be of value to the Church's traditional partners in local and central government with whom we share a responsibility for the successful education of current and future generations of children, but who possibly have a limited understanding about the genesis or purposes of Catholic schools.

Most importantly, it seeks to provide a summary of supportive arguments for the Catholic sector that may be of use to those whose task it is to present the case for Catholic schools in their local circumstances to others who may not have much sympathy with the existing dual system as seen from the perspective of voluntary sector providers.

Notes

1 This concept is regarded by the Catholic Church as having universal application and is defined as the sum total of social conditions which allow people, as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and easily. There are three essential elements within the concept: i) respect for the individual and the natural freedoms that are indispensable for their personal growth; ii) social well-being and development of the group, and; iii) peace and justice. For a fuller explanation see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) §§1905-1912.

2 Gravissimum educationis [Declaration on Christian Education] (1965) in: A. Flannery (ed) (1981) *Vatican Council II: The conciliar and post conciliar documents*, Leominster, Fowler Wright, pp. 725- 737.

3 The bishops' argument that the state should provide financial support for the Catholic sector equal to that given for non-denominational schools was a consistent element in their discussions with government from the earliest times of state education, see, *The Catholic Attitude on the Education Question*, (1906) and *The Catholic Attitude on the Education Question*, (1929) both published by the Catholic Truth Society. It is neatly summarised in the bishops' Declaration on Education of 1928 – see the Acta [minutes] of their annual Low Week meeting, Tuesday April 17th, 1928 –*"That precisely the same facilities of education should be given to those who regard definite religious teaching as an essential part of education as those who attach no such importance to teaching of that character."*

4 For example, neither Catholic education nor Catholic schools appear in the index and glossary of the Central Advisory Council for Education Report *'15-18'* for the Ministry of Education (Crowther Report, 1959). The CACfE Report *'Half Our Future'* (Newsom Report, 1963) is similarly

lacking. Its only recognition of the sector is a short description to social conditions of a Catholic community in Lancashire and, in another section of the Report, comments that, concerning the spiritual and moral education of 13–16-year-olds, *"For Church of England and Catholic schools the situation will be markedly easier in some respects".* The CACfE Report *'Children and their Primary Schools'* (Plowden Report, 1967) also sees no need to acknowledge the existence and implications of a dual system of education despite the fact that some 30% of the schools they were studying were Church schools.

It is also noticeable in all three reports how little input there was from official (or unofficial) representatives of the Catholic sector.

5 Written by the sociologist Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, himself a Catholic with, perhaps, a partisan interest, without which such a book would not have been contemplated by academics of the period.

6 *The Case for Catholic Schools* (1951; 1955), London, Catholic Education Council; *The Cost of Catholic Schools* (1955) London, Catholic Truth Society.

7 In recent times, questions about the place (if any) of religiously based education within the state-maintained system has been the subject of much scholarly debate – see, for example, Gardner, R. et al., (2005) *Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict?* London, Routledge Falmer; Judge, H. (2002*) Faith Based Schools and the State: Catholics in America, France and England*, Oxford, Education Symposium Books; Parker-Jenkins, et al., (2005) *In Good Faith: Schools, Religion and Public Funding*, Aldershot, Ashgate, – as well as more polemical contributions in the popular press and other media outlets attacking religious belief. For example, see articles by Polly Toynbee, P. (2001) 'Keep God out of class', in *The Guardian*, Friday November 9th; Toynbee, P. (2006) This is a clash of civilisations – between reason and superstition, *The Guardian*, Friday April 14th; Beckett, F. (2001) 'Holier than thou', in *The Guardian*, Tuesday November 13th; Dawkins, R. (2001) 'Children must choose their own beliefs', in *The Observer*, Sunday December 20th (presented in the form of an open letter to the then Secretary of State, Estelle Morris); Porteus-Wood, K. (2004) Scale down religious schools or face a disaster for race relations, *National Secular Society*, 9th June, http//www.secularism. org.uk (accessed 9th June 2004); National Secular Society (2007) The public don't want more faith schools, and they will be divisive, *http//www.secularism.org.uk*(accessed 10th September 2007).

8 See, for example, Department for Education & Skills (2001), *Schools Achieving Success,* London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office; Treasury Minutes on the Nineteenth Report from the Committee of Public Accounts 2003-04, *Making a Difference: Performance of maintained secondary schools in England*, presented to Parliament by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, June 2004 (Cm 6244), § 25.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Catholic Community in England[1]

Using the term 'Catholic' to define one specific social group in England can be problematical. There are members of the established church who use the term Catholic of themselves in the sense that they "belong to the universal Christian Church". In doing so, they distinguish themselves from 'Roman Catholics', i.e. those Christians who acknowledge the primacy of the papacy in religious affairs. Since this document is concerned, essentially, with the latter group, for the sake of clarity throughout this document they will be termed 'Catholic' and their ecclesiastical institutions will be titled as belonging to the 'Church'. Where referring to the former, the term 'Anglican' and 'Church of England' will be used. It is hoped that the convention will not give any offence.

Like all communities, that of the English Catholics has changed over time in response to differing political, social and demographic circumstances. From the Reformation to the early nineteenth century, they comprised a community almost entirely excluded from the social, economic and intellectual life of mainstream society. But despite the violent disruption of medieval piety and religious practice that accompanied the break from Rome by Henry VIII, the resultant ascendancy of the Elizabethan episcopacy and subsequent severe restrictions of penal times, small pockets of recusant Catholic aristocracy, lesser gentry and common laity, retained their traditional religious allegiances, beliefs and, as far as was possible under the changing circumstances and religious influences at home and abroad, their Catholic practices.[2]

During the half-century between 1778 and 1829, the structure of anti-Catholic legislation that had developed since the Reformation was dismantled. By 1820, the social leadership of the Catholic aristocracy had ceased to be of real significance in the composition and activity of the Catholic community at large which was beginning to be concentrated in

the emerging industrial cities, swollen by Irish Catholic immigrants from the 1790s onwards and the gradual population drift from the countryside. It has been estimated that in 1770 there were about eighty thousand Catholics in England and Wales. By 1850 that figure was nearer seven hundred and fifty thousand, approximately a tenfold increase. About a quarter of those were living in the northern cities of Preston, Wigan, Liverpool and Manchester.

Over the next one hundred years there was a gradual but steady increase in the size of the Catholic population. In 1912 it numbered some 1.7 million; by 1962 it was 5.6 million.[3] Following the pattern of the previous century, the Church was strongest in Durham, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Cumberland, Northumberland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Warwickshire and London. In Lancashire and Durham there were large rural Catholic populations, but the rest were mainly urban, working class and still relatively poor. By the time of the outbreak of war in 1939 there were indications of a gradual movement from the inner cities to the suburbs and the emergence of a more affluent and educated Catholic middle class. However, for the most part, Catholic communities remained concentrated in relatively small urban parishes each with its own church and elementary school. As populations expanded so, more or less, did the associated buildings, and in doing so they retained a measure of religious insularity. For example, it was not until the succession of John Heenan as Archbishop of Westminster in 1963, just after the Second Vatican Council began, that there were any significant ecumenical encounters with other churches.

The strength of religious self-identification also fostered a degree of social separation. As such, it could be argued that English Catholics formed a recognisable minority subculture with its own religious, social and moral norms of behaviour, value systems, attitudes and beliefs well into the 1950s. The following description of a Catholic working-class community in Lancashire is, perhaps, a fairly typical example of Catholic social circumstances more generally during much of the first half of the century.

Family Life and General Social Behaviour

"The (Roman Catholic) parish clergy hold a unique position in dockside parishes, however relaxed some parishioners may be in religious observance. The parents are amenable to quite slight pressure from the school, perhaps because the school has been under the Sisters for nearly a century, though the general moral standpoint that we all share has a good deal to do with it. People are decent and good-living; there are strikingly few broken homes and illegitimate children. Families are still fairly large,

> *and there is a great family sense so that, even when mothers are out at work, there is always some relative, usually the grandmother to turn to ... Although there is a great deal of talk of "murdering" and "battering", I have only come across two cases in six years of girls severely beaten by father or mother. The parents are foolishly generous and quite inconsistent in their treatment of the children who are adept at evading consequences. The bad language shrieked from the top balcony of the tenements sounds appalling but appears to be rather a maternal safety valve than a heart-felt threat. Indeed, the children are very much loved and secure in their family affection. Every new baby is welcomed to an extra-ordinary extent. The girls are very kind to little ones and to the old. I have never come across an instance of rudeness or unwillingness to oblige an old person, though this may be due to caution, since grandparents are still powerful. They are rude to neighbours, carrying on family quarrels with gusto, and fights are common. I have much work in keeping fights out of school, and it is horrifying how even "good" girls all flock to watch a fight anywhere. The girls will fight as fiercely as the boys if they get the chance. Most girls stay up very late but few stay out. Those who do, stay on the tenement landings in the semi-darkness with the boys. Their main amusements are gambling, singing or cat-calling, horse-play and some sex-play. Sexual laxity is rare in this district under school leaving age. I have had no schoolgirl mothers and only three girls who have tried their hand at soliciting or got into the company of a prostitute by choice. Girls marry very young, so, whilst doing all we can to deter them from marriage before 18, we do our best in the Fourth Year to give them some training for their career as wife and mother."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Newsom Report', 1963, §56)

In the years immediately after the war, Catholics retained their ascribed and recognizable identity as a religio-ethnic subculture. By the 1950s they had become a significant, but still minority, community, representing nearly 11% of the population. A decade later, numbers had risen to 5.6 million, just over 12% of the total. From today's perspective, those years represent a numerical high watermark which, in their history since the Reformation, was something of an anomaly and the expansion of Catholic numbers that lasted into the 1960s was to be followed by a relative decline that could be seen in a whole range of indicators, for example, in lower mass attendance, fewer numbers of active priests, fewer marriages and a reducing birth rate.[4]

Many commentators cite the 1960s as the start of quite dramatic and profound changes in social attitudes in England. The Catholic community was not immune from them. Somewhere around the late 1950s and early 1960s there was a distinct shift in the Church. Some saw the Second

Vatican Council as the defining moment of change since it legitimated a new and distinctly different way of looking at the nature of the Church, which had significant consequences in every sphere of its activities from worship and liturgy to its relationship to the world. Others argued that an older ideological homogeneity of an authoritarian Catholicism began to break up earlier with the death of Pope Pius XII in 1958. The precise date, if it is possible to be definite about a process, is, perhaps, irrelevant. What is important is that the laity's sense of what it meant to be Catholic fundamentally changed.[5] A Catholic identity today is much less a communal and ascribed mark as it was in pre-war years, but is to some extent chosen, a result of individual, voluntary choice. Between the pre- and post-war generations, Catholic social identity has been transformed as the distinctive sub-cultural solidarity of the first part of the twentieth century has begun to dissolve. In particular, the attitudes of younger generations of Catholics have converged with the mores of the wider and increasingly secular society, albeit retaining some tribal-like cultural and religious allegiances.

At the beginning of the third millennium, precise numbers for the Catholic population in England and Wales are difficult to establish. Estimates made by individual parish clergy of the number of Catholics known to them give a figure of approximately 4.14 million, close to 8% of the population. It is not generally regarded as being particularly precise and is probably an underestimate of the real numbers. For example, it takes no account of the existing and sizeable ethnic Catholic communities[6] served by chaplains to foreign immigrants. It will not include significant numbers of people who regard themselves as Catholics but whose attendance at mass in any particular parish location may be intermittent or very infrequent. Nor will it have accurate data about economic migrants from central Europe arriving in Britain as a result of the extension of European Union borders, simply because central government has no adequate monitoring mechanism in place. Anecdotally, many thousands are Polish (and presumably in most cases Catholics). Whether they will settle permanently, or simply be part of a transient migration is, as yet, unknown. The Catholic Directory for England and Wales for 2006 suggests that Catholics comprising approximately 12% of the total population.[7] However, the accuracy of the Directory's statistical data has been severely criticised8 and, given the known decline in the numbers of Catholic youngsters enrolled in Catholic schools over the past thirty years, it appears an unduly optimistic assessment. The truth may well be found somewhere between these two figures.

The National Education System in a Changing Social Climate

The beginnings of the national educational system were set within a predominantly Christian culture. For the most part, a mutually supportive linkage between education and Christianity was accepted as part of the natural order. Areas of dispute tended to be denominational in character. For the majority population religion adherence was important, though there were many, particularly city dwellers, for whom religious practice was minimal. For those with political and social authority, however, disputes about the nature and role of religious belief and instruction in state supported schools were central during the period leading up to the passing of the 1870 Education Act. They also formed the basis of non-conformist opposition to the Education Act of 1902 that reorganised education on a municipal basis.

The co-ordinated national system introduced by the 1902 Act was largely a compromise, retaining a dual system having, broadly, two different types of school. Those provided by the newly created local authorities were maintained by government grants and local rates. Voluntary, or non-provided schools as they were designated, were funded, mainly, by Christian denominations and maintained by them with the assistance of some Government grant, but not by local rates. Secular instruction in both types of school was under the directions of the local education authority. Religious instruction was in accordance with the voluntary school's trust deed but strictly non-denominational in local authority schools.

Whether Britain could be regarded still as a Christian country during the fifty years leading up to the next great reform of the educational system following the Second World War is debateable. Despite the seeming strength of the established church and evidence of Christian practice during that period, there was also widespread religious apathy. However, an underlying assumption that the practice of Christian religion remained the societal norm is implicit in the provisions of the Education Act 1944 concerned with religious education (sections 23-30) and made explicit in Schedule 5 of the Act that set out the procedure for preparing a locally agreed syllabus for religious education to be taught in state provided 'county' schools.[9] But during the 1950s presumptions about a Christianised Britain, and the extent to which Christianity should underpin the educational system became less tenable.

A report prepared for the Ministry of Education in 1959 noted the shared common spiritual heritage of the 15 to 18-year-olds whose future education it was considering, but argued that while they needed a faith to live by:

> *"they will not all find precisely the same faith and some would not find a faith to live by" [but] "would be aware of the different metaphysical assumptions that are made in different circles ... ."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Crowther Report', 1959, §§66; 75)

Four years later a second report for the Ministry of Education was more equivocal about the school's role in contributing to the spiritual and moral development of pupils.[10] It recognised the decline in religious sensibilities, noting:

> *"the existence in any particular county school of teachers of various [Christian] denominations would be less likely to affect their ability to co-operate in the school's task of religious and moral upbringing than had been the case a generation ago."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Newsom Report', 1963, §158)

It also acknowledged the developing plurality of attitudes within the country that could create difficulties for schools, arguing:

> *"... a hundred years ago nearly all good men would normally have given the same answers to the problems which beset the young immediately in their courtship habits and prospectively in their conception of the marriage relation. Today Christians and agnostics would still agree in their attitudes but it would be stupid to deny that there are profound differences."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Newsom Report', 1963, §163)

On the other hand, the report suggested:

> *"... there will be much common ground which Christian and agnostic may travel together ... [and] support the concept of natural law."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Newsom Report', 1963, §164)

Despite their concerns, members of the committee felt able to agree four recommendations supporting the role of Christian religious instruction and worship in local authority schools as a potent force for good.

In contrast, the Plowden Report on the primary sector, submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Science just three years later in October 1966, was unable to come to a unanimous view. Symptomatic of

their concern was its preference for the term Religious Education rather than the phrase Religious Instruction (as used in the 1944 Act). While a majority of the members were in favour of mainly Christian education and worship in schools, their recommendations were more concerned with resolving perceived problems than providing wholehearted support. They advocated flexibility in interpretation of the existing law allowing pupils to be withdrawn from religious lessons and worship (though not suggesting any change). They wanted better parental advice about withdrawing their children from such activities, improved religious education training for teachers and an enquiry into the way religion should be presented to primary school pupils. In addition, there were two minority reports. One was supported by just two of the twenty-five members. They were particularly concerned about the difficulties facing parents who wished to exercise rights of withdrawal when no alternative programme of moral or ethical education existed and drew attention to (unspecified) difficulties in drawing one up. They concluded:

> *"... the attempt should be made to determine what it is that we wish our children to learn in ethics in a society which is increasingly rejecting the sanction of supernatural revelation."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Plowden Report', 1966, pp. 492-3)
> (Extract from a 'Note of Reservation on Religious Education')

The more significant minority opinion, supported by six members, including A. J. Ayer, the eminent philosopher, came to the conclusion that religious education was not a suitable subject to be taught in primary schools, arguing that the necessary involvement of theology in Religious Education made it both too recondite and too controversial a subject for inclusion in the curriculum. In doing so they acknowledged they were not in accord with mainstream public opinion and, in seeking an alternative which might address public concerns, they accepted that it was:

> *"... not easy to see what form the syllabus of moral and social education could take [and] far from wishing to deny the importance of this branch ofeducation [thought] it should arise out of the general life of the school."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Plowden Report', 1966, pp. 489-92) (Extract from a 'Note of Reservation on Religious Education')

Given their analysis of mid-1960s Britain which led to their minority view, it is difficult to see how they expected the hoped for generalised Christian life might be generated and sustained. In the event, during the last forty years, English society has seen an accelerating trend away from

any specific Christian underpinning of its cultural attitudes, values and practices. The secularisation of society, with its predominately humanistic, liberal and materialistic values has become the new orthodoxy. No longer do government and its agents look to Christian principles for their guiding principles for determining public policy. At the beginning of the third millennium, the general consensus is that, for good or ill, we live in a liberal, pluralistic and secular society where, in the name of tolerance, governments of different political persuasions have adopted an attitude where all lifestyles that are not positively harmful to the state are accorded equal status. In today's political discourse, truth seems to have become relative and any claims to the contrary, including religious views, are deemed to be strictly matters for private consideration.[11]

The Catholic Community and its Schools

Schools provide one of the major formal ways in which the knowledge, understanding and achievements of one generation are handed on to the next. They are an important mechanism for developing and transmitting values, attitudes and a vision of the very nature of humanity which, in turn, impacts upon the society in which they function. To understand and evaluate the significance of any school or school sector, it is important to understand its cultural background. This is probably especially relevant in England where schools have traditionally been regarded as communities in their own right, with implicit and explicit values, attitudes and practices that define their general culture. In other words, to understand today's Catholic schools we need to know something of their origins.

Schools have always played an important part in Catholic life. From the earliest times the Church regarded them as one of the chief instruments for catechising and civilising society. Until the severe legal restrictions on the teaching and practice of Catholicism in England were repealed, the survival of an educated Catholic community owed much to schools established outside the country. Subsequently, for the Catholic laity, what we might now describe as secondary education was centred on Catholic independent schools established, mainly, by religious orders. This chapter is, however, not concerned with their educational activities, important though they are,[12] but with the provision made by diocesan bishops in response to the difficult economic, social and political realities facing a mainly working class and immigrant Irish community during the latter part of the nineteenth century. This was a community that was particularly vulnerable, not just because of its poverty but also because of its ethnic

origins and Catholic allegiances.

Partly because of the administrative structure of the Church, it could be argued that the bishops have never been able to establish a single comprehensive coherent and co-ordinated strategy for Catholic education in England.[13] On the other hand, their intentions have been clear. The existence, nature and distribution of Catholic maintained schools in England at the beginning of the 21st century can be attributed, arguably, to two decisions of the English Catholic bishops taken some ninety years apart. The first, taken as a collective body after the restoration of the hierarchy[14] in 1850, was to make the provision of Catholic elementary schools their highest priority.[15] The second, in response to the political settlement of the 1944 Education Act, was to pursue voluntary aided status for their existing and future schools. Both required the bishops to make a huge financial commitment to education. The rationale for both decisions was the need, as they saw it, to provide an effective mechanism for the transmission of Catholic faith and culture for the Catholic faith community.

Between 1770 and 1850, there had been a dramatic increase in the numbers of Catholics living in England, caused, mainly, by the influx of Irish immigrants from 1790 onwards. Their need for employment, coupled with a general drift away from the countryside caused by the rapid industrialisation of society, led to the concentration of large numbers of poor working-class Catholics in the inner cities. It was against this background that the bishops first made their commitment to build Catholic elementary schools.

They were determined to compete with the schools provided by local School Boards following the Education Act of 1870 despite the latter being better equipped, larger and more efficient. Their central purpose in so doing was to secure control over the style and content of religious instruction. Catholic schools became the places where people learned their Catholicism. Together with the church or chapel they served as an essential focal point, providing stability, a sense of belonging, of pride and self-assertion and solidarity with the wider Catholic community. In 1869, Education Councils were set up in each diocese to further the building of elementary schools. There were three hundred and fifty Catholic elementary schools in 1870. A decade later there were over seven hundred and fifty, established mainly through the Education Councils and provided through the financial support of a predominantly poor working-class community.

As the Catholic population in England steadily increased and the state took a greater role in educational matters, the bishops responded to the provisions of the Education Act 1902 and accepted a great financial burden in order to achieve their aim of providing sufficient places in Catholic schools to meet the increasing demand. While meeting the costs of adapting, improving and extending existing schools, they also found the resources to build new ones. Ninety-six were built between 1914 and 1930.

During this period, the Catholic population was still mainly located in the major industrial cities. The following description of a Lancashire community in the late 1950s is perhaps typical of many during much of the first half of the century.

> *"The girls are all drawn from the immediate neighbourhood within an area of a half square mile, all of the same racial and religious stock, Irish and Catholic, and almost all are the children of unskilled labourers who are in full employment. The community is very stable despite slum clearance and most of the children are descended from former pupils."*
> (Central Advisory Council for Education, 'Newsom Report', 1963, §55)

Though the pattern of Catholic settlement remained much as it had been throughout the period from 1850 to the first part of the twentieth century, at the outbreak of war in 1939 there were indications of a gradual but persistent move from the inner cities towards the expanding suburbs. This trend was to continue and accelerate in the immediate post war period. The extension of secondary education following the 1944 Education Act encouraged the breakdown of insularity as Catholic secondary schools drew their pupils from several parishes, often many miles apart. On the other hand, the priority still given by the bishops to a distinctive Catholic education, provided in its own schools, helped the Catholic community to preserve some sense of its own religious identity and doctrines and a feeling of membership of an extra-national religious society.

The 1950s saw an expansion of Catholic educational provision in response to the rapidly rising post war birth rate, renewed Irish immigration and significant numbers of Catholic refugees who had been displaced by the war choosing to settle in England. As a result, arguably, of successful Catholic schooling in the post war years, a more extensive and wealthier Catholic middle class developed and in the mid-1960s the existing gradual dispersal of Catholic families into the suburbs accelerated. That demographic movement was accompanied by changes in patterns of belief and adherence to traditional values and practice that had been features of

Catholic life for generations. There was also the start of a general and rapid decline in the overall pupil population. The trend has been reflected in the Catholic community.

The number of Catholic pupils in Catholic maintained schools peaked in 1974 at 0.94 million. In 1980 there were approximately 0.76 million, in

1990 some 0.68 million and in 2003 there were 0.63 million Catholic pupils attending Catholic schools in England and Wales.[16] That gradual decline has led, for the first time for over a century in many parts of the country, to the number of available places in Catholic schools exceeding demand from baptised Catholics. Some, but not all, of the now surplus capacity has been removed by reorganising, closing or amalgamating schools.

Those trends, together with the repeal of legislation introduced in the 1980 Education Act designed to secure the religious character of Catholic schools by limiting their intake to baptised Catholics, and the popularity of church schools with parents generally, has led to an increase in the proportion of non-Catholic pupils on roll in many Catholic schools. In addition to the more disparate intake there were significant cultural changes accompanying the renewal of the Church following the Second Vatican Council. Coupled with the rise of a market oriented educational climate, these developments have created tensions both within and for Catholic schools as they grapple with twin roles as both religious and civic institutions working within an increasingly secularised post-Christian society.[17]

The bishops' policy statements have adjusted to the new circumstances of falling school rolls and an evolving multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society.[18] In some individual cases, responding to the immediate social circumstances where the school is located, Catholic schools have changed their role, seeking to be a benefit to the community as a whole, sometimes in collaboration with other Christian denominations in joint church schools, rather than providing education solely for the faith community of baptisedCatholics.[19] Nevertheless, the educational vision of a place in a Catholic school for every baptised catholic child, so clearly articulated some 150 years ago, continues to be the prime reason given by the bishops for providing and supporting Catholic schools.[20]

However, debates about the role and purpose of Catholic schools in the current market driven economy raise questions about the ways, if any, that

Catholic schools are different and distinctive from other state supported institutions.[21] Both Christians and those who reject the validity of using God as the basis on which human activity and education should rest, acknowledge that if schools do adopt Christianity as a rationale for their educational aims, such a religious stance must, necessarily, impact upon the nature and style of the curriculum provided and the emphasis schools place on the purposes of the pupils' studies.[22] Cardinal Basil Hume put the case most strongly when he argued at the Catholic Education Service National Conference in Birmingham that, in current English society:

> *"Disputes over the purpose of education reflect a much deeper conflict in our society over what it is to be human. We are in fact in a battleground of competing ideologies, fighting for the minds and imaginations of the young, offering rival views of human fulfilment and happiness."*
> (Hume, B., 1995, p. 3)

The State Maintained Sector in the Third Millennium

Currently, some 35 percent of primary and 16 percent of all secondary schools in England and Wales are defined by the government as having a religious character. The vast majority have been provided by the Church of England and the Catholic Church, but there are also a small number provided by minority Christian denominations, some Jewish, Muslim and Sikh schools, together with a few joint ventures by different Christian denominations working together in a variety of partnerships. The Catholic-maintained sector in England and Wales provides education for some 0.79 million pupils in 2,203 schools.[23] In England, the Catholic sector educates approximately 0.72 million children representing approximately 9.6 percent of the pupil population.[24]

One might have thought that, given the well-documented decline in formal religious practice during the latter part of the twentieth century,[25] there would be a lessening of public interest in religious-based schools and an increase in those sharing secular educational goals. This is clearly not the case. The reality of today's educational world sees an increase in disagreements about its fundamental purposes and greater parental demand for choice as to where and, perhaps to a lesser degree, how their children are educated. In our secular, pluralistic and avowedly tolerant society, this reality probably guarantees some form of diversity of provision as a philosophical and political necessity.

The Education Act 1996, section 11(2), placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to "… exercise his powers with a view to (among other things) improving standards, encouraging diversity and increasing opportunities for choice." Recent documents have expressed the current government's intention to encourage diversity of provision, particularly in secondary education[26] culminating in the Education and Inspection Act 2006, section 2, which places a duty on local authorities to secure diversity of provision and increase parental choice. The expressed political rationale is that diversity promotes innovation and higher educational standards. Nevertheless, a commitment to diversity cannot be open-ended and is not necessarily a self-evident social good. On the contrary, many argue that diversity of provision is undemocratic, discriminatory and a source of social unrest.

In one sense, perhaps, it is inevitable that the dual role of Catholic schools, supporting Catholic parents in transmitting Catholic culture but also working for the common good of a post-Christian and highly secularised society, will highlight tensions between secular and religious values. It has been the subject of comment by Catholic bishops on a number of occasions. The following statements, some twenty years apart, are typical:

> *"In our own time, there is much in the law and in the behaviour of people which is quite contrary to the teaching of the Gospel. Our Catholic communities must quite deliberately reject much of what is described as progressive in our society."*
>
> (Mullins, D., 1981)

> *"Multi-cultural Britain cannot be negotiated in purely secular terms … nowhere is this more important than in education …"*
>
> (Nichols, V., 2002)

Bishop Mullins argued further that, in providing Catholic schools, the Church was not simply rejecting and condemning what it observes in civil society, but showing religious activity to be a normal part of everyday life.

> *... the Catholic school should ensure that its very nature is proclaimed like a beacon to the world at large so that the very act of attendance can be seen as a significant religious activity".*
>
> (Mullins, D., 1985)

This is a view that needs to be reaffirmed and articulated in contemporary circumstances against those who argue that religion must only exist as a private activity and others who are, once again, questioning the right of parents to send their children to schools that are in conformity with their

own philosophical and religious beliefs, on the basis that to do so might promote social disharmony.[27]

Throughout, reference has been made to Catholic schools as a sector, implying a degree of uniformity of purpose and character. However, while there may be many similarities that justify doing so, it must be recognised that there will be significant variations between schools, both in their understanding of their mission and the pupil population they serve; perhaps more so today than in previous decades. The degree of religious understanding and adherence to the Catholic faith shown by parents will vary. School governors, appointed by the Church to secure and develop the religious character of the school, will have varying levels of personal adherence and may differ in their understanding of, and commitment to, the religious dimension of Catholic education as defined by the Ordinary of the diocese. Catholic teachers are also likely to have different levels of faith commitment. While such differences may not impinge upon their pedagogical competence, their ability to contribute towards developing and sustaining the Catholicity of the school may be affected. In addition, not all teachers in Catholic schools are themselves baptised Catholics. This is particularly the case in the secondary sector where some 46 percent of the teaching staff are not Catholics; in the primary phase it is much lower, approximately 19 percent (Catholic Education Service, 2003). The same will be true of the pupil population where numbers of non-Catholic pupils have risen when places became available because of the declining birth rate. Significant numbers of non-Catholic pupils may have an influence on the nature of the school and the education it can provide though implications for pupil attainment, if any, have not as yet been empirically tested to any great extent.[28]

Notes

1 This section is a very simple summary of a complicated story. For those who require a much fuller description of the changing Catholic community in England there are a number of excellent general histories which have served as sources for this chapter, for example, Battersby, W. J. (1950) *Secondary Education for Boys;* Battersby, W. J. (1950) *Educational Work of the Religious Orders of Women*; Gwynn, D. (1950) *The Irish Immigration*, and *Growth of the Catholic Community*; Hughes, P. (1950) *The English Catholics in 1850*; all to be found in: G. A. Beck, (ed) (1950) *The English Catholics 1850-1950,* London, Burns Oates.
Other sources include, Bossey, J. (1975) *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850,* London, Darton, Longman & Todd; Evennett, H. O. (1944) *The Catholic Schools of England and Wales,* Cambridge, Cambridge

University Press; Norman, E. (1986) *Roman Catholicism in England,* Oxford, Oxford University Press; McClellend, V. A. & Hodgetts, M. (eds) (1999) *From Without the Flaminian Gate,* London, Darton, Longman & Todd; Hornsby-Smith, M. P. (ed) (1999) *Catholics in England 1950 to 2000,* London, Cassell; Kennedy, P. (ed) (2001) *The Catholic Church in England and Wales 1500-2000,* Keighley, PBK Publishing Ltd.

More detailed local histories, particularly of immigrant Irish communities, also provide some fascinating details of the social deprivation that the Catholic bishops sought to alleviate. For example, see various essays in R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds) (1985) *The Irish in the Victorian City,* London, Croom Helm; R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds) (1989) *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939,* London, Pinter; and

R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds) (1999) *The Irish in Victorian Britain,* Dublin, Four Courts Press.

2 Descriptions of lay people's experience of religion before, during and after the Reformation and the subsequent penal years are given in, for example, Duffy, E. (1992) *The Stripping of the Altars,* New Haven & London, Yale University Press; Matthew, D. (1950) *Old Catholics and Converts*, in: G.A. Beck, (ed) (1950) *The English Catholics 1850-1950,* London, Burns Oates; Norman, E. (1986) *Roman Catholicism in England,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

3 Though there was a real and significant increase in the Catholic population, some have argued that the startling rise in numbers over this period can partly be explained by new statistical techniques – see Norman, E. (1986), *Roman Catholicism in England,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

4 Estimates suggest that, largely as a result of high levels of Irish immigration in the late 1950s, the Catholic population increased from 4.7 million or 10.7% of the total population in 1951 to 5.6 million or 12.2% in 1961. In the early 1960s one in eight marriages was solemnized in a Catholic church and the proportion of Catholic infant baptisms as a proportion of total live births had risen to 16.1%. In the two decades after the end of the war the number of parishes increased by one fifth from 1,910 to 2,320 and the number of priests by one quarter from 6,257 to 7,808. In the early 1960s a whole string of indicators peaked: Mass attendances around 2 million; child baptisms around 134,000; receptions (conversions) around 15,000; confirmations around 81,000; and marriages over 46,000 with 50 per cent between two Catholics. The corresponding figures thirty years later are 1.1 million; 75,000; 6,000; 46,000 (for 1985); and 17,000 (with the proportion of marriages between two Catholics around one third).

An illustration of the rapid changes in Catholic numbers in at least one part of the country can be seen in the case of the Diocese of Middlesbrough. It was created, together with the Diocese of Leeds, when the Diocese of Beverley was split into two in 1878 because of the increasing Catholic population, particularly in the cities of Hull and Middlesbrough. Numbers continued to increase into the second part of the twentieth century with

churches and schools being provided to meet the resultant demand. In contrast, at the beginning of 2005, the bishop issued a consultation document on possible parish reorganisation in 2006, noting a one third drop in Sunday Mass Attendance over a period of twelve years, from nearly 30,000 in 1992 to under 20,000 in 2004.

5 For a much fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Hornsby-Smith, M. P. (1999) English Catholics in the New Millennium, in M. P. Hornsby-Smith, (ed) (1999) *Catholics in England 1950-2000,* London, Cassell; also Hulmes, E. (1999) Faith in Crisis: From Holocaust to Hope 1943-2000, in: V.A. McClellend and M. Hodgetts (eds) (1999*) From Without the Flaminian Gate,* London, Darton, Longman & Todd.

6 Afro-Caribbean; Albanian; Austrian; Belorrusian; Brazilian; Chaldean; Chinese; Croatian; Czechoslovakian; Eritrean, Filipino; French; German; Ghanaian; Goan; Greek; Hungarian; Iraqui, Chaldean and Syrian; Italian; Keralan (Latin and Syro-Malabar Rite); Korean; Latin American; Lebanese; Lithuanian; Maltese; Melkite; Nigerian; Polish; Portuguese; Slovakian; Slovenian; Spanish; Tamil; Ukrainian; Vietnamese.

7 See *Catholic Directory of England and Wales* (2005) Manchester, Gabriel Communications Ltd, pp. 924-26.

8 See Spencer, A. E. C. W. (2006) *Facts and Figures for the Twenty-First Century – An assessment of the statistics of the Catholic community of England and Wales at the start of the century*, Taunton, Pastoral Research Centre.

9 Those who wish to obtain a greater understanding of the social conditions and public attitudes of the period up to and including the implementation of the 1944 education Act would do well to read Barnard, H. C. (1947) *A History of English Education from 1760*, London, University of London Press; Beales, A. C. F. (1950) The Struggle for the Schools in: G. A. Beck (ed) (1950) *The English Catholics 1850-1950,* London, Burns Oates; Bossey, J. (1975) *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850,* London, Darton, Longman & Todd; Curtis, S. J. (1948) *History of Education in Great Britain,* London, University Tutorial Press Ltd; Evennett, H. O. (1944) *The Catholic Schools of England and Wales,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Finan, J. (1975) *Struggle for Justice,* Stoke-on-Trent, Catholic Teachers' Federation; and Norman, E. (1986) *Roman Catholicism in England,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

10 The Newsom Report was concerned with the education of pupils aged 13-16 of average and less than average ability attending (mainly) the secondary modern schools of the time.

11 In theory, social liberalism is agnostic about moral truth. So, for the state, promoting the common good consists in legislating to establish instrumental conditions for harmonious living based on the maximising of individual freedom and access to material welfare. This is not, of course, the understanding or teaching of the Catholic Church – see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), London, Burns & Oates.

12 Battersby, W. J. (1950) Secondary Education for Boys, in: G. A. Beck,