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A history of Catholic education and schooling in Scotland: new perspectives

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A History of Catholic Education and Schooling in Scotland: New Perspectives, by Stephen J. McKinney and Raymond McCluskey (Eds.), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 207 pp., £100.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-1-137-51369-4.

A distinctive feature (others can claim intractability) of Scottish education is how its dual system of state-funded schools operate in practice between non-denominational and denominational (*de facto* Catholic), which sometimes are located close to each other giving parents the opportunity to choose the type of school that aligns with their ontological and religious worldviews (McKinney and Conroy, 2015). As the Conroy-Bruce debate would also attest (see Conroy, 2001; Bruce, 2003), the broad outlines of the history of Catholic education in Scotland, including debates engendered by state support and legislative provisions, are known. Despite this, there are aspects, which are either ignored or not fully explored and thus new insights to be gained. Stephen McKinney's and Raymond McCluskey's edited book marshals material evidence, including primary sources to provide a nuanced and contextualised history of Catholic education and schooling in Scotland.

The book has nine chapters, including the introduction: two co-authored by the editors (McKinney and McCluskey), two single-authored by each of the two editors (McKinney; McCluskey) and five by different authors (Vaughan; Kehoe; O'Donoghue; McDermid; McHugh). Six of the chapters concern developments before and after the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918: the historical context of the 1918 Act (chapter 2); the distinctiveness of Catholic schooling (chapter 3); male religious Orders (chapter 5); lay Catholic women teachers (chapter 6); Presbyterian campaign against the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918 (chapter 8); and legal implications of the 1918 Act revisited (chapter 9). The remaining two chapters deal with the issue of women religious (chapter 4) and Catholic education beyond the school (chapter 8).

In short, the book highlights key events in the history of Catholic education in Scotland and touches on the role of Catholic schools towards preserving a Catholic identity, particularly for children of Irish Catholic migrants coming into Scotland in the middle of the nineteenth century. The book identifies intriguing anecdotes of resilience amidst insurmountable problems and the hapless situation for Catholic children in state schools, which after 1872 had adopted Presbyterian catechism. It gives an honest assessment of the financial position of Catholic schools, which made them unable to maintain facilities and pay their teachers, a situation caused in part due to an unfair state funding system that adversely affected Catholic schools but also complicated by a Catholic community comprised of a working poor class unable to support their children's education. The book shows that in the period between the two Acts (1872 and 1918) many of the pressing problems for Catholic schools had persisted, such as: lack of qualified teachers, poor pay for teachers, overreliance on pupil teachers, disproportionately large classes and truancy because many of the children either stayed home to do household chores or worked to supplement family incomes.

As this book reiterates, given the challenges facing Catholic schools, the significance of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918, becomes evident, because through its legislative provisions, Catholic schools could finally "... enter mainstream education while retaining its distinctive Catholic features..." (56). The book does not **paper over** initial Presbyterian anti-Irish Catholic sentiments and accusations of the 1918 Act favouring Catholics and calling the "Scottish people to safeguard their heritage which is a just and patriotic end" (153), to which episode in later years Presbyterians would look at with a "... *sense of embarrassment*" (p. 166, italics in the original).

Returning to the issue of nuance, context and insight, the book reveals a number of interesting issues, for example, regarding how in the early nineteenth century lay Protestant and Catholic individuals worked together in support of the development of Catholic schooling. Moreover, when the first Catholic school in Paisley was established (1816), a committee of twelve Protestants and twelve Catholics ran it. When the Catholic Schools Society was founded in 1817, it had fifteen Protestants and fifteen Catholics on its board. The President of that board was a Protestant manufacturer, to the chagrin of some of his fellow Protestants and amongst accusations that his ‘generosity’ was merely a ploy to please the Catholic workers he employed in his business “... without whom he would have been unable to operate” (16).

One important area ignored in extant literature but examined in some detail in this book is the contribution of women in the development and *flourishing* of Catholic education and schooling in Scotland. As the book notes, part of the reason for this neglect speaks to historical attitudes of “gender bias and a tendency to prioritise the activities of the male clergy” (63). Two types of Catholic women are identified and the impact of their work appraised. The first group were that of women Catholic religious among them, the Ursulines of Jesus in Edinburgh (1834), the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (1847), the sisters of Mercy (1849), the Good Shepherd Sisters (1851), the Daughters of Charity (1860) and later the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (c.1894). The second group of women carefully examined in the book concerns lay Catholic women teachers whose story is equally ignored despite “... that they made up the majority of schoolmistresses” (104), at time of an acute shortage of Catholic teachers. The various Catholic women both religious and lay “marked a turning point” (61) for Catholic education in Scotland for their role in supporting a parochial school system for the growing Catholic community. As the book points out, the Sisters of Notre Dame, for instance, were responsible for the establishment of the first Catholic teacher-training programme for women, a development that dramatically transformed a Catholic system of education in dire need of qualified teachers by empowering many young Catholic women to consider taking up a teaching career.

The importance of this book is that serves as a reference point to significant events, including the contribution of women in the development of Catholic education in Scotland from earliest times to events beyond the 1918 Act. It also references more contemporary issues and developments such as “... continuing difficulties in supplying the necessary teachers...” in the 1970s (191) and laments the failure of the Presbyterian Church’s (i.e. Church of Scotland) 2002 report to condemn categorically certain statements made in its 1923 report against Catholic schools. The book is carefully edited with each chapter adding a different dimension towards a critical and nuanced understanding of Catholic education and schooling in Scotland. This is a useful monograph for scholars, university academics, teachers and indeed anyone with a keen interest to understand Catholic education and its contribution to Scottish education itself, taking into account its configuration of a dual system of education, in which Catholic schools are an integral part of its denominational sector (see McKinney and Conroy, 2015).

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