Embracing Change: The remodelling of Irish Catholic primary schools in the 21st century

The task is huge. We are to bring the Gospel into a new century to face challenges we have not begun to imagine, to respond to opportunities we have not anticipated, with the great variety of gifts (I Cor 12: 4-11) which we do not fully realise we have.[1]

The Catholic Church exercises a vast influence on the Irish educational system through its patronage, management and ownership of primary and post primary schools. However many dispute whether this involvement is beneficial to Irish society, to schools and to the Church. Catholic schools exhibit variation in type (primary, special, secondary, community, comprehensive, fee paying) and contain radical (often associated with religious orders) as well as conservative elements. Consequently Irish Catholic schools are heterogeneous institutions 'characterised by internal differentiation and by internal ideological struggles'.[2] This chapter investigates some recent ideological struggles concerning the legitimacy, efficacy and future of Catholic schools in Ireland. It focuses on the key debate of whether Catholic schools, which inherited a nineteenth century structure and management system, can educate diverse religious and cultural groups in twenty first century Ireland while still maintaining their Catholic identity and mission. It concentrates mainly on Irish Catholic primary schools since the most intense recent debates have focused on them.[3]

The influential and long established tradition of Catholic involvement in Irish education can be interpreted in radically different ways. A positive reading suggests that the high percentage of Catholic schools in Ireland, their considerable academic achievements and emphasis on social justice, provide a valuable service to the learning community and to society at large. As a rule Irish Catholic schools are in a healthy financial position as they benefit from state funding while the Church maintains control over school ethos, the provision of Religious Education as well as ownership of many school buildings. Of late there is a discernable energy around Catholic schooling in Ireland manifest in a collaborative trustee body and innovative projects focusing on the role, mission and

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[1] Bishop Donal Murray, Lenten Pastoral, 2001
[2] Gerald Grace, *Catholic Schools: Mission Markets and Morality* (London and New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002), p108.

ethos of Catholic schools.[4] Moreover, the Irish hierarchy consistently supports Catholic schools with initiatives such as a National Catechetical Office, Catechetical Sunday, the commissioning of new Catholic syllabi and guidelines for RE in primary and post-primary schools, the commissioning of a National Directory, the establishment of a national Congress on RE as well as producing statements and documents on Catholic education.

On the other hand, it is possible to engage in a less positive reading of Catholic involvement in Irish schools. Catholic schools have been seriously injured by the withdrawal of religious teaching orders allied to public repugnance at the Catholic Church's role in recent child abuse scandals. Increasingly dissident voices suggest that the Catholic Church has unfairly monopolised the Irish educational system to its own advantage and cite as evidence Catholic enrolment procedures that disadvantage non-Catholics.[5] Additionally some see Catholic schools as redundant in a culturally diverse society. As the Irish Catholic population declines and parents simultaneously look for greater choice in educational provision, the prevalence of Catholic schools in every part of Ireland appears as a kind of inflexible systemic educational anachronism which serviced the educational needs of a bygone age yet fails to meet the needs of a changing society. If many send their children to Catholic schools some argue, it is not because they desire a Catholic ethos rather it is because they have no choice. Those less positively inclined towards Catholic education sometimes speak of Catholic schools as something they have endured, survived and recovered from. For others Catholic schools are Catholic in name only as they are 'market-driven, smart-targeted and commodified' secular organisations that are confused and embarrassed in equal measure by their Catholic heritage and mission.[6]

New wine in old wineskins: Can history shed light on the Irish school system?

The question arises as to why faith based schools are so prevalent in the Irish educational system and why the Catholic Church operates such an influential role within that system. Indeed it is impossible to understand the contemporary denominational Irish primary school system, which classifies schools

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[3] For a recent account of Catholic schools in Ireland see Grace, Gerald R, and O'Keefe, Joseph (eds), *International Handbook of Catholic Education Challenges for School Systems in the 21st Century*, Vol. 2 (New York: Springer, 2007).

[4] For example a collaborative trustee body CEIST (Catholic Education - an Irish Schools Trust) came into operation in 2007. The *Catholic School – Imagining the Future* (2002) project gave rise to a national conference and a renewed role for Catholic schools and the *Wellsprings* (2007) project concerns the ethos of Catholic schools.

[5] Gráinne Faller, "Is your child Catholic enough to get a place at school?" in *The Irish Times*, 1 May, 2007. Fionnuala Kilfeather, outgoing chief executive of the (National Parent's) council, says: "The assumption has to be made that a school, denominational or not, is a community school. If it is giving clear preference to children of one denomination over other children in the community, I think questions have to be asked."

[6] See Ned Prendergast and Luke Monahan (eds), *Reimagining the Catholic School* (Dublin:Veritas, 2003), p11.

according to religion, without understanding something of the historical context out of which it emerged. One of the ironies of the current Irish educational system is that it is at odds with the vision of its founder, EG Stanley (1799-1869), who opposed religious separatism in education. The national school system was not founded by an Act of Parliament but instead by a letter written by Stanley, the Chief Secretary of Ireland, to the Duke of Leinster, in 1831. In this letter, Stanley outlined his vision for a mixed or inter-denominational, national system of education. Mixed national schools meant that children from different religious traditions including Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist, would be educated together. It must be noted that the principle of mixed education was more politically than religiously motivated as it was envisaged that after the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a non-sectarian system of education could help neutralise radical political leanings. Indeed a written general moral and religious lesson exhorting tolerance and understanding was displayed prominently in every mixed classroom. A sample form of this *General Lesson* stated:

> Christians should endeavour, as the Apostle Paul commands them, to 'live peaceably with all men' (Rom. Ch. Xii. V. 17); even with those of a different religious persuasion. [7]

Despite this laudable emphasis on mutual respect, Stanley's vision of mixed education never came to lasting fruition. The story of the development of the Irish national school system is one where different denominations favoured segregated rather than mixed education. In one sense this is unsurprising since in 1826, prior to the founding of the national school system, the Catholic bishops made it abundantly clear that no Catholic teacher should be trained by those professing a different faith.[8] Subsequently Archbishop Paul Cullen (1803-1878), spearheaded Catholic resistance to the system of interdenominational national schools because he saw it as a proselytising and anglicising mechanism that was inherently dangerous for the faith of Catholic children. The Synod of Thurles (1850) condemned the state system of mixed education and warned that 'the separate education of Catholic youth is, in every way, to be preferred to it'.[9] It would be unwise to suggest that Catholics were the only ones who had difficulty with the mixed system of education.[10] Protestants, who were just coming to terms with the implications of Catholic emancipation in 1829, feared that a religiously mixed educational environment would be exploited by Catholics as a mechanism for proselytising Protestant children. Some Presbyterians objected to Catholics being given a seat on the Board of

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[7] Thomas Joseph Durcan, *History of Irish Education from 1800* (North Wales: Dragon Books, 1972), p15-16.
[8] Aine Hyland and Kenneth Milne (eds), *Irish Educational Documents Vol.1,* (Dublin: C.I.C.E., 1987), p 91. There were members of the Catholic hierarchy such as the liberal Dr. James Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, who supported mixed education.
[9] John Coolahan, *Irish Education history and structure (*Dubln: Institute of Public Administration, 1981)*, p18.
[10] J D King, *Religious Education in Ireland: a survey of catechetics in the primary and secondary schools, and in the training colleges and catechetical centres of Ireland* (Dublin: Fallons, 1970), p 6.

Education which administered funding for schools and they refused to submit joint applications for funding with Catholics. As a consequence of these concerns, by 1838 denominational education was allowed to take place in national schools during the school day and so the relevant clergy members came into school to provide segregated religious instruction for pupils. In such a manner the clergy gained increasing control of the educational system and by 1840 a local Bishop or clergyman from each denomination could apply to become a patron of a mixed school. The patron appointed a manager and the manager appointed, or dismissed, the teacher in the relevant school. This marks the development of a patronage structure that still exists as well as the powerful placement of religious authorities at the heart of the national system of education. The vast majority of schools were subsequently built on grounds owned by religious denominations so that the denominationalization and clericalization of the educational system gained momentum. When the national school system was established in 1831 it was intended *de jure* to be fully mixed or inter-denominational. However, the system that developed *de facto* was denominational and differed radically from Stanley's foundational principles. In the 1850s and 1860s the Catholic Church gained increasing power within the national system of education and it called for state funded education for Catholics. Likewise, Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican children were sent to their own denominational schools. Subsequently it was argued that the system of schooling provided by religious patrons was adequate to the educational needs of the people of Ireland and therefore there was no need for any alternative. In Ireland provision was never made for a separate system of primary schools controlled by the local authority, largely because it had been found by the Powis Commission in 1870 that voluntary effort had adequately met the demand for elementary education in this country.[11]

The gradual denominationalization of Irish schools is evident in statistics which show that by the early 1880s just over half (55%) of national schools were attended by both Catholic and Protestant children whereas this figure was reduced to over one quarter (28%) by 1912. The pattern of denominational and clergy-controlled national school continued in the twentieth century.

Practically all of the national schools are managed by boards which are chaired ex officio by clergymen and whose other membership is determined partly by church decision; in addition the legal trustees of the school property also come from the ranks of senior diocesan clergymen and church parochial officers. [12]

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[11] Áine Hyland, "The Multi-denominational Experience", in *Irish Educational Studies* (Dublin: Educational Studies Association of Ireland) Vol. 8, 1:1.

[12] S. O'Buachalla, *Educational Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland,* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press), p.205.

Some have argued that since independence the state has benefited financially from the involvement of the Churches in education. Religious or parish owned schools contribute financially to the building cost and maintenance of the school thereby reducing the State's financial obligation. For their part the Churches have benefited significantly from their involvement in education and they have been granted a huge degree of autonomy in the management of schools, in the formation and appointment of teachers, and in the design, delivery and assessment of syllabi for religious education.[13]

Catholic Schools Today

A brief historical overview shows that the Irish national school system evolved on denominational lines as a result of ecclesiastical objections to inter-denominational schooling. Catholic suspicion of inter-denominationalism was fuelled by the memory of religious discrimination in the penal laws. It is worth remembering that the Catholic Church stood to gain increased power through involvement in a denominational national system of education. In the Irish context religion was neither separated from education nor deemed peripheral to it. The idea of omitting religion in the name of equality of opportunity was unconscionable for the hugely influential religious bodies in the nineteenth century. According to the thinking of the time a corrective to religious discrimination was not the exclusion of religion from education but rather its placement at the centre of the educational enterprise in order to uphold the denominational rights of children and parents. In the twentieth century the *de facto* denominational structure of national schools was given support by the Government. For example, in 1965 the revised *Rules for National Schools* emphasised that 'the State provides for free primary education for children and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools'.[14]

When the Rules (for National Schools) were eventually revised by the Minister for Education in 1965, no cognisance was taken of the fact that not all national schools were attended exclusively by children of the same denomination. Neither was there any provision made for parents who might not wish their children to attend denominational schools…[15]

This denominational system may have suited the majority religious tradition but school provision gave relatively little choice to those from minority religious traditions and those with no desire for faith schools. Even the term 'denominational', meaning a subgroup within a religion, is a problematic descriptor of the current Irish system of primary education. In twenty first century Ireland there are

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[13] S Drudy and K Lynch, *Schools and Society in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), p75-6.
[14] *Rules for National Schools*, 1965. The phrase 'provide for free primary education' echoes article 42.4 of the 1937 Constitution.
[15] Áine Hyland, "The Multi-denominational Experience", p1.

eight types of primary school including Muslim, Jewish and Educate Together schools. None of these are subgroups within a religion so the application of the term is inaccurate.

Structural and ideological issues concerning Catholic involvement in education in Ireland

The question of whether the Irish denominational national school system, which evolved over the last one hundred and seventy plus years, is capable of adapting and responding to the educational needs of a culturally and religiously diverse post-modern society, must be taken seriously. This question focuses on structural and ideological concerns. From a structural perspective it explores whether a school patronage structure and management system which evolved in the wake of the Penal Laws, just after the Emancipation of Catholics in the nineteenth century, is adequate to the complex task of educating children in a radically different twenty first century context. From an ideological perspective challenging questions are raised about the desirability and legitimacy of religious involvement in the Irish educational system. These two concerns are inter-related and focus most acutely on the Irish primary school system where ninety three per cent of schools are managed by the Catholic Church. Consequently Catholic primary schools are particularly vulnerable to the suggestion that their patronage and recruitment of staff is over-representative of one denomination and under-representative of other religious and secular groups.[16] This in turn highlights the lack of an alternative state system of primary schools and the consequent lack of parental choice.[17]

A number of landmark events have focused national and international attention on these interlinked structural and ideological concerns. In the mid-nineteen eighties it was argued that a religious monopoly of state schooling in Ireland was unconstitutional.[18] The Irish Humanist Association stated that a religious-based, state funded, denominational primary school system was discriminatory. Central to its argument was the fact that such a system unjustly excluded those of a different religious affiliation or of those who were non-religious.

This is a major bone of contention for non-religious, tax-paying parents who feel strongly the injustice of a national school system which discriminates against their children…Allied with this is

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[16] The present Irish Primary School System consists of: 2,911 Catholic schools; 183 Church of Ireland schools; 44 Multi-denominational or Educate Together Schools; 14 Presbyterian; 4 Inter-denominational; I Jewish school; 2 Muslim schools; I Methodist school. Source: DES Statistics Section (2005-6).
[17] Dympna Glendenning, *Education and the Law* (Dublin: Butterworths, 1999), 1:02.
[18] Desmond Clarke, *Church and State: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1984). See Dympna Glendenning, *Education and the Law*, p99.

the issue of discrimination against teachers who may be barred from employment because of their religious or non-religious position.[19]

This perception of faith-based state-funded education as inherently discriminatory has been a recurring *leitmotif* in recent discussions about Catholic education in Ireland. Commentators such as Fintan O'Toole see Ireland's primary education system as 'a system funded by a secular state and run to an overwhelming extent by lay people….according to the ethos of one Church'.[20] Others focus on the by-product of Catholic education and blame it for turning the population into 'a crass, money-grubbing (*sic*), vulgar, possession-worshipping population without finer philosophical values'.[21]

These concerns about Catholic education have been given considerable national and on occasion international coverage. In 2005, in the wake of the publication of the Ferns Report, Liz O'Donnell of the Progressive Democrat Party made a speech in the Dáil calling for a radical examination of the 'Church's almost universal control of education' and an end to the 'special' relationship which the Catholic Church enjoyed with the State. What was extraordinary about her speech was the explicit and irresponsible link that she made between the religious management of Catholic schools and child sex abuse. She stressed that there were child protection concerns in relation to the Church's management of schools and argued that in the light of its 'systemic mal-administration and dereliction of duty to protect children' the Catholic Church could not be entrusted with the management of schools.[22] O'Donnell conflated and confused two separate issues and in so doing rashly undermined the Catholic system of school management.

It must be noted that serious objections to the State's support of the system of primary education in Ireland, where ninety eight per cent of schools are denominational, have come from other sectors. In 2005 a United Nations Committee (On the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination) received a submission which argued that the Irish Government failed to fund and provide an adequate choice of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools for Irish parents, teachers and children. In 2006 a Council of Europe's Advisory Committee urged the Irish authorities 'to pursue their commitment to widen schooling options, including in terms of non-denominational

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[19] Dick Spicer and Ellen Sides, *The Humanist Philosophy* (Bray: Humanist Publishers, 1996), p58.
[20] Fintain O'Toole, *The Irish Times*, October 12, 2004.
[21] Emer O'Kelly '"The church is responsible for today's moral mess" in *Sunday Independent*, 11, November 2007, p.23.
[22] Liz O'Donnell stated 'the Church is neither democratic nor accountable. In many ways it is a secret organisation – with its own diplomatic service, civil service, laws and self-regulatory codes, which have failed the public…' She also emphasised the Church's 'systematic mal-administration and dereliction of duty to protect children'. Liz O Donnell Dáil statement on Ferns Report, Wednesday November 9, 2005. October 24, 2007.

and multi-denominational schools, in a manner that ensures that the school system reflects the growing cultural and religious diversity of the country'.[23]

Race, Religion and a Shortage of Places – a recent debate in Primary Schooling

The Catholic Church has been aware of this backdrop of critique and dissatisfaction with the current school system but despite this it has generally focused its energy on supporting and managing its schools. However the failure of parents to find primary school places for over ninety non-Catholic children in Balbriggan, north County Dublin, in September 2007, has acted as a barometer indicating the desire to change the current system.[24] The lens of public scrutiny focused on the Catholic Church as the majority and according to some, the monopoly stakeholder in Irish primary education. Under current equality legislation denominational schools have the right to maintain school ethos by giving priority of place to children of the school's faith.[25] In the North Dublin district of Balbriggan, one unforeseen consequence of this policy, allied to a paucity of primary schools, was the exclusion of over ninety mainly black children from existing local schools. When headlines such as *Black Children Left Out of Irish Schools* circulated in media reports, Ireland's school system came under considerable criticism. As the largest stakeholder in Irish primary education, the Catholic Church was vulnerable to the suggestion that it was excluding religious and ethnic minority groups.[26] The children without school places were almost all black and while the majority of them were Irish born, some were of Muslim, evangelical Protestant denominations or of no religious faith. Media reports suggested that children without baptismal certificates were excluded from Catholic schools. It was alleged that what was operative in this instance was a school system that discriminated on racial and religious grounds. The Balbriggan crisis was seen to indicate that Ireland had difficulty integrating its

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[23] 'The Committee encourages the State party to take fully into consideration the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/IRL/CO/2, , par. 18) which encourages the promotion of the establishment of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislative framework to eliminate discrimination in school admissions .'
http://www.educatetogether.ie/2_campaigns/humanrightsandirished.html

[24] Alison Healy "106 children left without school places in Dublin" in The Irish Times Friday, September 14, 2007.

[25] 'An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to the admission…of a person….where the establishment is a school providing primary or post-primary education to students and the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, it admits persons of a particular denomination in preference to others or it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of that denomination and, in the case of a refusal, it is proven that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.' Equal Status Act, 2000. 7 (1) c.

[26] See CBS News September 5, 2007 for an article titled "Black Children Left Out of Irish Schools", with a subheading "Black Immigrants to Ireland Struggling to Find School Places: 1st All-Black School to Open". Paul Rowe CEO of Educate Together opened Bracken Educate Together National School, on September 24, 2007. He stated 'We have been disappointed by the media description of this school as being "a school for blacks" and wish to state categorically that this is not the case. Bracken Educate Together National School operates the same 'first come first served' enrolment policy of other Educate Together schools and

increasingly diverse population and that its school system, including its Catholic schools, was deficient in responding to the task.[27] This prompted the Equality Authority to express concern at 'the emergence in effect of segregated primary school provision for black and minority ethnic students' and it suggested that 'management groups could no longer use an exemption allowed under the Equal Status Act if this had the effect of excluding persons of other religions or other races'.[28]

All those involved in primary schooling in Ireland contributed to the ensuing debate. The Minister of Education strongly defended existing legislation and the exemptions afforded to schools under the Equal Status Act while announcing the imminent piloting of a new model of community primary schools under Vocational Education Committee (VEC) patronage.[29] This led to speculation that a new sector of State financed and controlled primary schools was being introduced.[30] The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) called for a National Forum on Education to discuss all issues pertaining to education in a non-confrontational manner. Educate Together expressed the view that there was no evidence of institutional racism in Irish patronal bodies yet it stated 'there is profound, embedded and institutionalised religious discrimination throughout the system particularly at primary level. This discrimination is the responsibility of the State, not of schools or religious bodies.'[31]

For its part, the Catholic Church was not silent on the issue of the structural deficits of the Irish educational system. Archbishop Martin emphasised that the Catholic Church could not be held responsible for the State's lack of planning in the area of education and stressed that he 'would be very happy to see a plurality of patronage and providers of education. I have no ambition to run the entire education system in Dublin…And it is not my job to provide teachers and classrooms…that is the State's job'. [32] The Church robustly countered the notion that it was interested in monopolising the Irish educational system or that it discriminated against religious minorities.[33] It emphasised that its primary duty was to provide Catholic schools for Catholic parents while taking seriously its mission to serve the educational needs of the wider society. Furthermore Church authorities stressed

will not permit any discrimination in access on religious, racial, cultural or social grounds.' *The Electronic Newsletter from Educate Together* (*ETEN*) Vol. 7, No.8, 5th October, 2007.

[27] CBS News September 5, 2007.

[28] Seán Flynn, "School admission Policies open to equality challenge" in *The Irish Times*, September 13, 2007, p.1.

[29]. Marie O'Halloran, "Hanafin defends policy on schools", *The Irish Times*, September 6, 2007.

[30] Diarmuid Martin warned that an exclusively State run system of schooling would not necessarily improve upon the denominational system and he cited the example of England as a system which had become overly politicised.

[31] *ETEN* Vol. 7, No.8, 5th October, 2007.

[32] *The Irish Times*, Thursday, September 6, 2007, p.1.

that it was inappropriate to blame it for a shortage of school places since its duty was to provide schools primarily for Catholic parents and children while the State's duty was to plan for the entire population's schooling. Archbishop Martin succinctly affirmed 'The Catholic education system has been far-seeing and has provided Catholic schools for Catholic parents. We have done our job, if there are others who are left without schools they should not blame us.'[34]

That said, the Irish Catholic Church has recently illustrated its consciousness of the need for change. Its document *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future* (2007) posits that a publicly-funded denominational school system is a basic human right for parents who wish to send their children to such schools. However the document is characterised by a recognition of the need for a plurality of models of provision and educational providers in Ireland. Furthermore the Catholic Church has placed an increased emphasis on working collaboratively with other patronage bodies. The basis of this pluralism, which the Church welcomes, is the recognition that the educational system of a country must adapt in order to address its population's changing educational needs. Not only is the Church using the rhetoric of change it is simultaneously imagining what that structural change might look like. Diarmuid Martin, perhaps the most outspoken member of the hierarchy on the issue of Catholic schooling, has spoken of 'divesting current Catholic schools' thereby, in certain circumstances, relinquishing Catholic patronage and management. He envisaged this type of reconfiguration in situations where there is a surplus of Catholic schools and a need for alternative types of schooling.

> Take an area where there are five schools………..over a period of time, and in consultation with parents and teachers, you could rationalize that and ensure you have sufficient number of schools for Catholics and other patrons.[35]

Moreover the Catholic Church is involved in a consultative process with those for whom it is providing a service. Bishop O'Reilly, Chair of the Bishops' Commission for Education, has signalled that qualitative research into parental choice and satisfaction with the Irish Catholic school system is being undertaken by the Bishops' Council for Research and Development.[36] In general one can say

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[33]Diarmuid Martin cited St. Teresa's school (in Balbriggan) and Scoil Choilm (Diswellstown) as examples of schools 'almost exclusively made up of children with an international background'. Séan Flynn "Archbishop says State to blame for schools crisis" in *The Irish Times*, Thursday, 6 September, 2007, p.1.

[34] *The Irish Times*, September 6, 2007, p.1.

[35] *The Irish Times*, 6 September, 2007.

[36] At the Press Conference to launch *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future* Bishop Leo O'Reilly, Chairman of the Bishops' Commission for Education stated 'In order to ascertain the desires of parents in this regard the Bishops' Council for Research and Development is carrying out quantitative research among parents who send their children to Catholic schools in Ireland. A preliminary report from this

that the Bishops' attitude to schooling in Ireland is marked by a recognition of the need for change and the importance of collaboration with the main stakeholders in Catholic education, other patronage bodies and the Government. Commentators unsympathetic to the Catholic position may note that it is only when the existing school system shows significant signs of fracture that the Church has begun to adopt the rhetoric of change, knowing perhaps that the status quo is untenable. On the other hand the fact that the Church has begun to embrace the notion of change is positive, although whether or not the idea of divesting Catholic schools moves beyond rhetoric remains to be seen.

Can Irish Catholic primary schools address the educational and religious needs of 21st century Ireland?

At the heart of this debate on Catholic education is the question of whether the Catholic school system is capable of addressing the needs of the Catholic community which it serves as well as the needs of an increasingly diverse Irish society. Even if an alternative system of schools develops under non-denominational or state patronage the question remains whether Catholic schools are capable of addressing the needs of a religiously plural society. In recent years Ireland has become religiously and culturally diverse at a pace more accelerated than its closest neighbour the United Kingdom. [37] Up to the early 1990s Ireland was home to a comparatively small percentage of minority religious groups. Nevertheless it is well documented that Ireland has been religiously and culturally diverse for millennia. The ancient religious practices of the Celts are visually embodied in numerous sculptural monuments dotted around Ireland. Christianity came to Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries and flourished with the aid of monastic communities that functioned as centers of evangelism and learning. There is evidence that Jews arrived in Ireland in the year 1079, and while the number of Jewish immigrants in the twelfth and thirteenth century was small, more substantial communities of Jews settled in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[38] The Jewish community has exercised considerable influence on Irish life. In Joyce's *Ulysees*, Leopold Bloom, arguably one of the most iconic characters in the whole of Irish literature, is both Jewish and Irish. In the post-reformation era the plantation of Protestant English and Scottish settlers in Ulster by 1610 had

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research will be available to the Conference in December and a full report will be complete for the March Conference. This will give us valuable information not only in relation to the wishes of parents for the education of their children but also the role they see for the Catholic school. As a result of this research we hope to be in a better position to plan for the time ahead.' http://www.catholiccommunications.ie/pressrel/02-october-2007.html accessed November 13, 2007. See also Patsy Mc Garry "Pluralism in education best, says bishop", in *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, 3 October, 2007, p.11.

[37] In contrast England has a long history of ethnic diversity where minority ethnic groups compose 9% of its population.

[38] Maurice Ryan, *Another Ireland* (Stranmillis College: The Learning Resources Unit, 1996), p.1.

huge implications for a religiously plural society. The arrival of French speaking Huguenots who fled to Ireland in the 17th century left a distinctive legacy in paces such as Portarlington (St Paul's Church) Dublin (Huguenot Cemetery off St Stephen's Green) and Lisburn (Christ Church Cathedral). Sizeable numbers of Hindus settled in the North of Ireland in the early twentieth century and members of the Sikh community came to Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s.[39] Furthermore documentary evidence suggests that a small active Muslim community was established in Ireland from the 1950s onwards.[40]

Since the early 1990s Ireland has witnessed extraordinary change in its population's composition and religious affiliation. The population has become ethnically and religiously diverse at an accelerated rate relative to many of its European counterparts.[41] For instance between the 2002 and 2006 censuses, the number of non-Irish nationals who were resident in the State increased by eighty seven per cent.[42] The 2006 Census revealed that over ten per cent of the usually resident population in Ireland were composed of non-Irish nationals. These recent population changes have been propelled by a variety of factors including a rapidly growing economy and immigration.[43] Under more favorable economic circumstances the majority of immigrants in the late 1990s were returning Irish nationals who had emigrated in previous decades.[44] This changed significantly in the twenty-first century when the number of non-Irish immigrants outnumbered returning Irish nationals. The growing number of individuals seeking asylum in Ireland has risen dramatically from the mid twentieth century when successive groups of Hungarian (1950s), Chilean/ Vietnamese (1970s), and Iranian (1980s) refugees took came to Ireland. Numbers of people seeking asylum rose from just

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[39] At present the majority Sikhs are located in the Dublin region. There is a *Gurdwara* in Ballsbridge and the Irish Sikh Council is based in Dublin and actively provides support for the Sikh community.
[40] The Dublin Islamic Society was founded in 1959.

[41] Nearly 420,000 (10%) persons who were usual residents of the State in April 2006 indicated that they had a nationality other than Irish. The corresponding figure in 2002 was 224,000 (5.8%). 'Comparing Ireland to other EU countries underlines its rapid changes. During 1990-1994, Ireland was the only country among the member states of the EU-15 with a negative net migration rate. In contrast, between 1995 and 1999, Ireland's average annual net migration rate was the second highest in the EU-15, surpassed only by that of Luxembourg. And according to recently released Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data, by 2002, the estimated share of non-nationals in Ireland's population had surpassed those of the UK and France, countries with much longer immigration histories.' Martin Rhus in Ireland: A Crash Course in Immigration Policy, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), Oxford University, http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=260

[42] 'Non-Irish nationals who were resident in the State increased from 224,000 to 420,000 (+87%) over the same period. The fastest growing categories were EU nationals, apart from Irish or UK nationals, along with Africans and Asians. Polish nationals numbered 63,300 while the number of Lithuanian nationals was 24,600.' *2006 Census Summary* (Dublin: Central Statistics Office), p.25.
[43] Between 2002-2006 there were 46,000 more immigrants than emigrants annually. *Census 2006 Preliminary Report*, Central Statistics Office.

thirty-nine applications in 1992 to a peak of over eleven thousand in 2002. Apart from those seeking asylum in Ireland, the robust economy continues to attract many international companies and immigrant workers.

This new wave of immigration has had a dramatic effect on Ireland's religious and educational landscape. The Muslim community in Ireland has increased from a relatively small population of around one thousand in 1992 to an official census figure of 32,500 in 2006. The Christian communities have also experienced major change as a consequence of immigration and migration. A significant example is that the Orthodox community which doubled in number between 2002 and 2006. The 2002 census marked the end of a long period of decline for the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches and the 2006 census reveals that this growth has continued. Since May 1, 2004, the inflow of migrant workers from ten new EU member States, means that large numbers of Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Slovakian, Estonian, Hungarian and Czech workers are now living in Ireland. Indeed the numerous Catholic economic migrants who have come to Ireland from countries such as Poland have contributed both numerically and pastorally to the Irish Church. Their presence has fostered an increased variety of Catholic ritual and spiritual life. The Irish Catholic newspaper has a weekly page written in Polish which caters for its changing readership and the translation of a recent pastoral letter into Polish indicates that the Catholic Church is beginning to address its faith community in diverse ways.[45]

When it comes to Irish schools, however, there is relatively little research on the impact which new religious groups and immigrant communities are having on the Catholic primary and post-primary sector. This is not to suggest that those working in Irish schools are not acutely aware of the need for 'ongoing inservice, upskilling and training' to cater for Ireland's diverse population.[46] It is simply to place Irish Catholic schools in the context of a larger international trend where there is a lack of research into religious diversity and Catholic schools. J. Kent Donleavy comments that while reviewing the literature on non-Catholic students in Catholic schools:

> …there was a paucity of information dealing with the topic. In fact, after a search which included contacting individuals in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America, and Canada, all that was revealed was a small 25-page, opinion-based pamphlet…a

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[44] 55% of inward migrants in 1999 were returning Irish nationals. See the Immigrant Council of Ireland, *Labour Migration into Ireland* (Dublin: ICI, 2003).

[45] Bishops' Conference Pastoral Letter, *Blogoslawiony jest owoc Twojego Iona* (2007).

[46] *Intouch* No. 81, 2006, p 27. Every decade the INTO carries out a survey of members' attitudes and approaches to the primary curriculum. The results for its 2005 survey show that teachers specified the teaching of non-nationals as an area in need of attention.

short comment in a recent book…a series of qualitative studies primarily from one researcher…and a tangentially relevant number of doctoral and masters degree theses….In all other respects, the academic literature was silent. Ostensibly, the topic seemed by this lack of attention to be of little significance to the Catholic community.[47]

The situation, while needing improvement, is not as drastic as Donleavy presents. For instance in the UK there have been a number of recent reports into teaching world faiths in Catholic schools[48] and in Ireland some small-scale research has been carried out on diversity and inclusivity in Catholic schools.[49] One study argues that Ireland's denominational and confessional primary school system 'does not allow for equal recognition or respect for difference'.[50] The researcher, Anne Lodge, conducted interviews with people of minority belief and people of personal belief,[51] about their experience of denominational primary education. While Lodge's research sample is small, her research concluded that: children sometimes feel alienated because of their different religious or personal beliefs; sacramental preparation heightens this sense of exclusion and alienation; bullying and teasing can be based on the perception of the child as religiously different;[52] and that both participation in and withdrawal from Religious Education can be problematic. This research is worrying as it contends that 'differences in belief are denied in the denominational primary system and those whose beliefs are different are rendered invisible and subordinate'.[53] This study is given some support by preliminary findings from a five-year research project into education systems in

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[47] J. Kent Donleavy "Ten Dimensions of Inclusion: Non-Catholic Students in Catholic Schools", in *Catholic Education*, 10: 3, (2007), pp.293-4.

[48] Ann Casson 'The Teaching of Other Faiths in Catholic Schools in the North East' (Farmington Fellowship, 2003) and Catharine Speroni 'Teaching Other Faiths in the Catholic Primary School' (Farmington Fellowship, 2005). Astley J, Francis LJ, Wilcox C, Burton L , "How different is religious education in Catholic schools?", in *International Journal of Education and Religion*, 1: 2 (2000). Deirdre Mc Govern '*Hospitality to the Other in Faith-based schools'*, Ph.D. research, University of Glasgow.

[49] Micheál Kilcrann, "Welcoming the 'New Irish''', in R Topley and G Byrne (eds), *Nurturing Children's Religious Imagination,* (Dublin: Veritas, 2004), p.86ff*; *Patricia Kieran, "Promoting Truth? Inter-faith education in Irish Catholic Primary Schools", in *Teaching Religion in the Primary School Issues and Challenges*, (Dublin: INTO, 2003), pp119-130. P.J.Boyle "Engaging with Ethnic Minorities" in Ned Prendergast and Luke Monahan (eds), *Reimagining the Catholic School* (Dublin:Veritas, 2003), pp141-153. Cooke Michael, "Interfaith Perspectives: More questions than answers" in M. Hayes and Liam Gearon, (eds), *Contemporary Catholic Education*, (Leominster, Grace wing, 2002). Masters Theses St. Patrick's College, DCU: Micheál Kilcrann, *The Challenge to Primary Religious Education posed by a Multicultural Society* (2003), Helen Bhreathnach, *Living with Difference & Discovering a Common Heritage: Bringing Nostra Aetate into the Primary School Religious Education Programme in the light of the Writings of James Dunn* (2004).

[50] Jim Deegan, Dympna Devine and Anne Lodge (eds), *Primary Voices:Equality, Diversity and Childhood in Irish Primary Schools* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2004), p.32.

[51] Lodge in Deegan, *Primary Voices*, p22.

[52] See Chapter 6 on Religious Belief especially section 6.4 on 'Harassment' in Lodge, A & Lynch, K., *Diversity at School*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2004.

[53] Lodge, Primary Voices, p.32.

thirteen EU member states. The preliminary report entitled '*Include-ED*' suggests that with regard to initiatives dealing with equal opportunities and intercultural education Irish schools are ahead of their European counterparts in preventing social exclusion. When it comes to the issue of initiatives in the area of religion Irish schools are less noteworthy. Include-ED's preliminary findings for Irish schools states:

> ..in terms of the recognition of cultural and religious diversity within schools, major reforms need to be undertaken in particular at primary level. The report also stresses the importance of creating schools in which all religions can freely and equally find their expression.[54]

These are serious charges and Irish Catholic schools must ensure that in addressing the religious and educational needs of the Catholic community they do not marginalize or ignore those who are religiously different. However, while taking such studies seriously, the Catholic Church must also implement and promote its own positive teaching on Catholic schools as inclusive schools. The Catholic Church teaches that Catholic schools should promote 'civil progress and human development without discrimination of any kind'.[55] The very word catholic originates from the Greek *kath'holou* which means 'according to the whole' or 'universal'. To be Catholic is to be called to live a life focused on inclusivity. This inclusivity does not involve an abandonment or dilution of the Catholicity of a school. Catholics are called to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, to build communities of service for others, in a just and loving manner. Catholic institutions, including schools, should not be immune or unresponsive to the religiously different but are called to witness to their faith in Jesus Christ in the vibrant context of religious difference without diluting that faith.

The Church's own teaching and tradition should function as a major source of guidance for those involved in Catholic education. The Church recognises the unity and dignity of all human life since 'humankind form but one community..all stem from one stock which God created'.[56] Successive recent documents testify to the fact that inter-religious dialogue is a crucial imperative for

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[54] Georgina O'Halloran, "Irish Schools top of EU class in tackling social exclusion", in *The Irish Times*, 14 September 2007. Bishop O'Reilly quotes from the Include-ED preliminary report to substantiate the view that Catholic schools are inclusive schools. 'We are very happy to see that the preliminary results of a five-year research project on education systems in 13 member states of the EU by staff at Dublin City University (The title of the study is "Include-ED") found that Irish schools are far ahead of their European counterparts in preventing social exclusion. Catholic primary schools are acknowledged to be among the most inclusive in the country.'

[55] *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium,* (Congregation for Catholic Education,1997), Par. 16.

[56] *Nostra Aetate*:*The Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-Christian Religions,* (Vatican 11, 1965), Par.1.

Catholics.[57] Addressing the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue in 2007, Pope Benedict XV1 insisted 'research and interreligious and intercultural dialogue are not an option but a vital necessity for our time.'[58] In a sense the controversy surrounding his address at Regensburg in September 2006 has served to augment and reinforce the Pontiff's emphasis on the need for inter-religious dialogue.[59]

When it comes to schooling it appears that Catholic teaching on inclusivity is sometimes unknown or invisible in the very centres where it is most relevant. The Church rejects the notion of a values or a religiously 'neutral' school. [60] Catholic education 'focuses on the human person in his or her integral, transcendent, historical identity' and this includes religious identify.[61] Vatican 11 teaches that governments 'must acknowledge the right of parents to make a genuinely free choice of schools'.[62] Where Catholic schools exist the Church readily acknowledges that not all members of the Catholic school community are Catholic and it offers general principles on how Catholic schools might include and celebrate religious diversity while being true to its own mission and teaching.[63] The Church upholds its mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to evangelise but it does so in a manner which explicitly recognises human freedom and the rights of all to follow their conscience.[64] Vatican 11's Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis,* makes it clear that the Church cherishes non-Catholics who attend Catholic schools.[65] So the Church teaches that Catholic schools are not restricted to Catholics and are open to those who share its educational project.[66]

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[57] *Nostra Aetate;* Evangelii Nuntiandi: *On Evangelisation in the Modern world* (Paul V1, 1975); *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1984). *Redemptoris Missio*, (John Paul 11, 1990).

[58] *Zenit*, February O1, 2007.

[59] Cardinal Tauran, newly appointed President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue told Vatican Radio: "I think it (his appointment) is a sign of the importance that the Pope gives to dialogue among religions, in particular with Islam.....' Speaking about the link between his appointment and the Regensburg address in September 2006, he added 'I think it had a decisive influence, because thanks to the reactions, the Pope was able to clarify his words," the cardinal said. "By reading the Pope's speeches to the ambassadors of Arab countries, and also to those who have come from Asia to present their credentials, you can see a common thread in the thought of the Pope, who thinks that interreligious dialogue is important for peace, and that religions are at the service of peace." *Zenith,* June 27, 2007.

[60] *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Par. 10.

[61] *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* , Par. 10.

[62] *Dignitatis Humanae: The Declaration on Religious Liberty* (Vatican 11, 1965), Par.5.

[63] *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith,* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982) ,Par. 3; *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, (1988) Par. 6; *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium,* Par. 16.

[64] *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) Par. 3.

[65] *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) Par. 9.

[66] *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Par. 6.

The Catholic Church does not wish to render invisible the 'religious other' in the Catholic school or to coerce the religious or non-religious other into conformism to Catholic belief and practice. Rather, it teaches that the 'Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterise different civilisations.'[67]

This does not mean that Catholic schools relinquish their mission for evangelization and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in deference to the students of other world faiths which they serve. *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) asserts that while elements of truth can be found in other world religions this does not cancel the call to faith and baptism in the Catholic Church.

….a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law.[68]

So the manner in which a Catholic school includes and educates members of different faiths is crucial. It prohibits any form of discrimination and coercion. The Church presents the Catholic school as a lively center of proclamation, apprenticeship and dialogue between people of different social and religious backgrounds.[69] Still one might question whether or not people involved in Catholic schools are familiar with this positive body of Church teaching on inclusivity. Furthermore one might wonder if this teaching is recognisable in the Irish system of Catholic schools where there is sometimes little freedom of choice for religious or non-religious minorities and where inter-religious learning is in its infancy.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a positive and negative appraisal of the Catholic system of education. It focused on structural and ideological concerns surrounding Catholic primary schools in Ireland. The Catholic Church's current management of schools was placed in the larger historical context of the emergence of a *de facto* denominational system of schooling in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

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[67] This mirrors *Nostra Aetate*, Par 2 ,which exhorts 'Sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.'

[68] *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Par. 6.

However the limitations of that denominational system, where the Catholic Church currently manages the majority of primary schools without any viable alternative for a significant number of parents and children, is undeniable.

As a country on the cusp of change, Ireland is attempting to forge a via media between its traditional system of informal denominational education and the excesses of rigid formality. While striving to accommodate the needs of all creeds and none, it desires to protect its existing denominational system on behalf of the majority of parents.[70]

The call for reform and the establishment of an alternative primary school structure has originated from a variety of sources including the Catholic Church. The Church teaches that it is wrong for any sector to monopolise the educational system of a country.[71] Further it prohibits coercion in the matter of education and delineates the government's duty to 'acknowledge the right of parents to make a genuinely free choice of schools and of other means of education'.[72] Catholic teaching on education supports change and choice so that no child is coerced into attending a school where their family's faith or conscience is compromised. The Catholic Church has pledged to work collaboratively with other patronage bodies and the government to respond to Ireland's changing educational and religious needs. The Church in Ireland has rightly supported the call for a pluralism of patronage bodies and the need for greater choice. In supporting choice the Catholic Church is remaining true to its own teaching which acknowledges parents rights 'to determine, in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of religious education that their children are to receive' or not to receive as may be the case.[73]

As Ireland becomes more religiously diverse Catholic schools are called to serve the needs of a religiously plural society. The teachings of Vatican 11 encourage Catholics to 'acknowledge, preserve and promote' the spiritual and moral goods found among the followers of other religions and the values in their society and culture.[74] Catholic schools must celebrate and make visible their commitment to the Catholic faith, which is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel focused on social justice and love of neighbour. They can not be indifferent to the plight of children who are

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[69] Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (John Paul 11, 1995) Par. 2, see also *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* , Par. 11.
[70] Dympna Glendenning, *Education and the Law*, 1.13.
[71] *Gravissimum Educationis*, Par 6.
[72] *Dignitatis Humanae* Par. 5
[73] *Dignitatis Humanae,* Par. 5.
[74] *Nostra Aetate* ,Par. 2.

excluded in a school system where it is the majority shareholder. They have a duty to work for structural reform so that there is greater equality of provision.

Today Catholic schools need to be less apologetic and more self-conscious and self-confident about their Catholic identify and mission. Ironically in an educational system which offers greater choice, Catholics will begin to reflect more profoundly on the religious foundation and ethos of their Catholic schools and to select them for religious as well as educational reasons. There are already new projects, a new trustee body, and new signs of life in Irish Catholic schools. In response to the question as to whether these schools can respond to the needs of a religiously plural society it must be stated that many Catholic primary schools are already providing high quality education and support for religiously diverse groups. One suspects however that they are motivated more by guidelines from the Department of Education and Science and the INTO rather than the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church needs to continue to publicise and implement its teaching on inclusivity and freedom of educational choice. The challenge facing Catholic schools is to remain faithful to the specific, unique and particular message and mission of the Catholic tradition while simultaneously being welcoming, open and respectful to the truths and wisdom, the vision and values found in other faith traditions.

Catholic schools are challenged to live out this tension in their patronage systems, school management structures, enrolment policies, mission statements, and in their day to day life. The fact that the Catholic Church has begun to embrace change is a great sign of hope.