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Women Religious and the Development of Scottish Education

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The establishment of the Ursulines of Jesus in Edinburgh in 1834 marked a turning point for Catholicism in Scotland, but it was with the arrival of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (1847), the Sisters of Mercy (1849), the Good Shepherd Sisters (1851) and the Daughters of Charity (1860) that a new era of female-led educational activism really began. Having come to Scotland to help the Church cope with the growing number of Highland and Irish migrants in the urban centres, it was these communities that reached deep into the industrial and rapidly urbanising heartland. In contrast to the Ursulines, who were more closely aligned with Scotland's affluent Catholics, the other communities, whose origins were French and Irish, worked with Church and community leaders to construct a Catholic parochial education system that would reach working-class girls and young women. While some had convent boarding schools for the daughters of the middle and upper-middle classes to ensure their own financial survival, their mission was to provide

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S. J. McKinney, R. McCluskey (eds.), *A History of Catholic Education and Schooling in Scotland*, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51370-0_4

education to and support for the poor and those women shouldering an ever-expanding responsibility for Scotland's socio-economic development as vital participants in the industrial labour force.

This chapter highlights the emergence and development of a system of Catholic female education between the early 1850s, when women religious began to assume the bulk of the responsibility for elementary education, and the early years of the twentieth century. It concentrates on the teaching sisters, thereby illuminating an important dimension of Scotland's educational tradition. In contrast to both England and Ireland, Scotland was a nation that had successfully used education to maintain a distinct identity. The system of Catholic education that emerged from the mid-nineteenth century reflected that.

Unlike England, where elementary 'educational provision for the masses' depended upon the generosity of philanthropists,[1] Scotland's existing parish school system had provided some basic form of schooling to most children. The legacy of this iconic, though somewhat invented, tradition of 'democratic' education has been central to constructions of Scottish national identity, yet few scholars or commentators have considered how Catholic education fits with that. As a correction, this chapter gives this educational legacy greater legitimacy by emphasising the role of women religious in the promotion of female education after 1850. In focusing their efforts on girls and young women, these Roman Catholic sisters, while expanding the social authority of Catholicism, dramatically expanded the base of Scottish education and made it more democratic than it had ever been.

The proliferation of infant and girls' schools, Sunday schools, boarding schools and night classes for female factory workers corresponded with the growing number of Irish and Highland Catholics, who congregated in Scotland's urban centres, and with the rise in the number of Catholic converts who had been influenced by John Henry Newman's Oxford Movement. The school system established and developed by the pioneering religious communities was taken to the next level by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, arguably the most professional teaching congregation in the world. Their sole focus was teacher training and, prior to 1894, when they established their college and convent at Dowanhill in Glasgow's leafy and prosperous West End, no Catholic teacher training

programme had existed in Scotland. Their arrival ushered in a dramatic transformation in Catholic education and changed the way that countless young women thought about their futures.

Women religious have had a profound influence on defining the progress and direction of Catholic education in Scotland and yet their contributions have been seriously neglected. Gender bias and a tendency to prioritise the activities of the male clergy is certainly a big part of the problem, but the media's tendency to conflate Scotland's Catholic schools with the legacy of sectarianism has made legitimate and historically informed public discussions of Scottish education difficult.[2] It is likely that if more people were encouraged to consider the ways in which the Catholic system enabled the Scottish nation to make good on its promise of a truly democratic system of education, as opposed to arguing about its perceived divisive nature, a healthier conversation about the legacy of Scottish education as a whole would start to unfold. In this respect, but also in many others, researching women's roles in the development of Catholic education would be a major step forward.

In her 1990 chapter on the state of Scottish education, Helen Corr noted that 'one of the most powerful and enduring myths to permeate Scottish society is that Scotland has traditionally enjoyed a more equal and open educational system than England'.[3] As a pioneer researcher in the field, Corr was well placed to deliver this critique, but she was not alone; Lindy Moore, who is best known for her work on women and education in north-east Scotland, made a similar observation.[4] Slowly there came to be awareness, though largely only among female scholars, that class, race and gender needed to be incorporated as categories of analysis when considering the historical legacy of education. The fact that neither Corr nor Moore paid attention to the women in the Catholic schools at the time was unfortunate, but it was due to a fundamental lack of foundational research. No one had visited the convents to request access to their archives and no one had considered their pupils. The absence of Catholic women was conspicuous given their influence over the development of modern Scotland's educational landscape.

It was surprising that women religious were almost completely ignored among scholars investigating the Catholic system. J. H. Treble's important and influential examination of Catholic schools between 1787 and

1978, for example, gave women religious just two quick mentions and overlooked, completely, their male counterparts.[5] While Thomas A. FitzPatrick's essay on Catholic education in Glasgow and south-west Scotland offers some very useful background information about the development of the system before 1872, he too only mentioned the work of sisters twice.[6] John McCaffrey's thoughtful piece on education and the Scoto-Irish experience, which argued that education was one of the main ways in which Irish Catholics were able to 'become part of Scottish society without becoming absorbed by it', also missed this component, despite acknowledging that the teaching sisters held the Church's educational efforts together.[7]

The tendency for scholars to concentrate on the priests and the bishops, who took on the roles of school managers, instead of on the religious personnel, who were actually active on the ground in the schools, has obscured the reality of education in Scotland. An important shift began in the mid-1990s when two articles appeared: the first by Bernard Aspinwall, one of the most prolific historians of Catholicism in Scotland; and the second by Ian Stewart, a teacher and researcher. They published articles in the *Innes Review*, the journal of the Scottish Catholic Historical Association, which drew attention to the influential role played by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in providing Scotland with female teachers and in expanding educational provision for women more generally. Up until this point, such work was a completely 'unexplored area', but their research was soon complemented by FitzPatrick's *No Mean Service*, which also focused on the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.[8] Sr. Dorothy Gillies, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, had written a small book for the congregation about the first superior of the Glasgow community in the late 1970s, but unfortunately it was not widely distributed or consulted by scholars.[9] This preliminary base has since been expanded by Jane McDermid, Francis J. O'Hagan, Robert A. Davis and me, who began to explore the significance of the relationship between Catholic women, the religious communities and education in Scotland.[10] While O'Hagan and Davis sought to normalise the contribution made by the religious communities, male and female, by including them in a study considering the links between Catholic education and national identity in Scotland, McDermid and I undertook new research specifically on

Catholic women—lay and religious. McDermid's exploration of the experience of girls and young women as learners and my detailed interrogation of the roles and experiences of women religious and their communities have broadened significantly the perspective on the gendered nature of Catholic education in Scotland and are informing understandings of the expansion and assimilation of Scotland's Catholic community.[11] Based on my extensive work with the archives of numerous religious congregations and communities, I have also compared the experience of teaching sisters in Scotland with those in Canada as a way of expanding existing perspectives on women religious and their links with the development of 'national' cultures.[12]

An Overview of Growing Provision

As John F. McCaffrey once observed, the whole purpose of having a Catholic system of education was to shape the 'religious and moral' character of Scotland's Catholics, but basic literacy and 'general information suited to the needs of the modern age' were also part of the package.[13] A Catholic Schools Committee was founded in Glasgow in 1817 by industrialists and entrepreneurs, who relied heavily upon Irish migrant labour. Its purpose was to provide schooling for their workers. Religion was not to be taught and classes were to be run at night to ensure that the daily running of the factories was not interrupted.[14] Beyond the five schools that it had managed to establish by 1825, there was no real movement until the Ursulines of Jesus arrived in Edinburgh in 1834. Two young women from Morayshire, Agnes Xavier Trail and Margaret Teresa Clapperton, had been sent to France for their novitiate with the Ursuline mother house in the hope that they would return to Scotland and establish a community in Edinburgh. It was a successful enterprise and by 1841 there were 14 sisters, and 20 years later this number had grown to 16 choir sisters and 10 lay sisters.[15]

The potato famines that struck much of Ireland and large parts of the Scottish Highlands in the mid-1840s sparked a migrant crisis, and Glasgow and its surrounding districts were soon flooded with desperate people arriving in search of food, support and employment. Unable to

cope with the humanitarian crisis unfolding around them, some of Glasgow's more proactive priests, such as Rev. Peter Forbes, began to make desperate pleas to religious communities in France and Ireland to send sisters to set up convents in Glasgow. Luckily for them, the number of women entering the religious life was expanding rapidly, and the number of active women religious (those who took simple as opposed to solemn vows and undertook works of charity outside of their convents) proliferated.

The first sisters arrived in Glasgow on 18 June 1847; they were two Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Mother Adelaide Vaast and Mother Veronica Cordier, and their benefactress, Constance Marchand. They were followed two years later by five Sisters of Mercy from Limerick: Mother Moore; Sr. M. Clare McNamara; Sr. M. Catherine McNamara; Sr. M. Joseph Butler; and Sr. M. Clare Kerrin.[16] As I have detailed elsewhere, both of these pioneering communities experienced significant challenges before they were firmly established in the city, but they each engaged with teaching almost as soon as they arrived.[17] It was their early efforts which laid the foundation for Scotland's Catholic school system.

Religious communities could not simply go where they pleased—they had to have the permission of the local bishop, and so the communities that established themselves in Glasgow and elsewhere did so because they had been invited. It also tended to be the case that religious communities were concentrated in areas where the population was stable enough to support them and where there was the most need. In Scotland, therefore, the majority of the religious communities were concentrated in and around Glasgow, but other foundations were also made in centres like Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee. Consequently, it was in these areas where the bulk of the Catholic schools were located, and while the efforts were led by the women themselves, important partnerships formed between sisters and priests; some were difficult but others were extremely productive. George Rigg, a native of Kirkcudbrightshire and student of Blairs College and Scots College, Valladolid, had served as a school manager and parish priest in Edinburgh before being assigned to Perth in 1855. He was widely recognised as a champion of education and as someone who worked well with women religious, though this might have had something to do with the fact that three of his sisters and at least five of his cousins had joined the Sisters of Mercy in Glasgow.[18]

In 1865, 18 years after the Franciscan Sisters first arrived in Glasgow, an education commission was established to investigate the state of education in the city. Glasgow was Scotland's largest city and was teeming with industry and international trade links. For a number of decades following the famines, Glasgow was a prime destination for economic migrants and, as a consequence, the number of Catholics ballooned.[19] The Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy, despite directing some of their attention to informal nursing work in response to epidemic disease, were teachers first and foremost and had prioritised the establishment of schools for infants, girls and young women. What they had been able to accomplish between their arrival and 1865 impressed inspectors and was highlighted in the *Report on the State of Education in Glasgow* prepared by the education commissioners, James Greig and Thomas Harvey.

When Greig and Harvey started their investigation of the city's existing school provision in the mid-1860s, they hardly knew where to begin. Equipped with a list of existing schools from the Lord Provost, they arranged their studies around districts, as opposed to parishes, to link up with the boundaries used for the 1861 census. Included within the report that they presented to Parliament in 1866 was substantial information about the city's Catholic schools, the teachers who ran them and the registered children, including some information about their families. While they observed that there were 19 Catholic schools with 3,498 pupils on the rolls and an average attendance of 2,790, what struck them was the ubiquity of women religious.[20] The Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy were the principal teachers in 10 of these schools, whereas the Marist Brothers and the Jesuits ran four between them; five others were in the hands of lay mistresses and masters. These women religious were consistent in their focus that made them stand out in the eyes of the education commissioners:

> Apart from the education, we were struck, in the girls' schools especially, with the harmony existing between the Nuns or Sisters and their charges. The good manners and respectful tone of the children contrasted favourably with any other school for the same class in Glasgow. There is indeed something attractive and pleasing in the sisters' schools. There is an air of tranquillity and refinement about the Sisters themselves.[21]

The schools they ran were, for the most part, parochial but the Franciscan Sisters also ran a convent boarding school and the Marists and the Jesuits each ran a boys' college. In addition to these schools were two Catholic industrial schools and two Catholic reformatories that were also managed by the religious communities. The industrial schools were for 'vagrant' children or for 'criminal' children under 12, and the reformatories were for 'criminal' children over 12. The Franciscan Sisters managed the girls' industrial school and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who had arrived from France in 1850, ran the girls' reformatory at Dalbeth; the boys' industrial school was run by the Marist Brothers and the reformatory was managed by a layman.[22] By no means did these schools and institutions include all the city's Catholic children since a number were 'scattered up and down in Protestant schools' and others did not go to school at all.[23]

The commissioners linked the expansion of Catholic schools to the city's growing Catholic population and according to them they were almost everywhere: 'Indeed it may be said that they are everywhere except in Blythswood'.[24] The drive to build Catholic schools was accelerating across urban Scotland, and beyond Glasgow the presence of women religious and their schools was being felt in Dundee, Edinburgh and Perth but also in Inverness, Aberdeen, Dornie, Elgin, Coatbridge, Lanark and Leith as the nineteenth century progressed. The proliferation of schools by the 1860s was remarkable given that a Catholic system did not actually exist prior to the late 1840s.[25]

Such an aggressive campaign of school building put significant pressure on already limited financial resources.[26] The teaching sisters were an invaluable resource during this critical period because they came from congregations which placed the education of girls and young women at the heart of their socio-religious mission and possessed significant authority as religious personnel. They had specialist skills, provided a form of teacher training to their membership and were extremely cost-effective—compared with lay teachers, both male and female, women religious were cheaper. Having taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, they could share resources and make limited funds stretch far, and although there were times when their salaries got communities through hard times, usually when new foundations were being established, they did not stop

working if they did not get paid. Their membership of communities belonging to increasingly international congregations afforded them a degree of security that was unavailable to the majority of the young women they taught. This is not to suggest that the sisters, especially the pioneering ones, did not face hardship, but rather it is a way of highlighting the fact that no matter how hard many of their pupils worked, acute poverty and necessity continued to force countless bright young women into factory, mill or other work throughout the century. What also set the sisters apart from lay female teachers was that there was no risk of them leaving to get married or to have children. Convent culture, its simplicity, contemplative atmosphere and the congregational rule by which all sisters lived shaped the culture of the schools they ran.

It has been noted, in relation to England, that educational reform progressed relatively smoothly because convents were able to attract 'educated middle- and even upper-class women to the teaching profession',[27] but the same can be said for Scotland. Communities like the Ursulines of Jesus, whose members tended to come from society's upper ranks, and middle-class communities, like the Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, ran the boarding schools which populated the ranks of the next generation of teachers. In Scotland, the sisters paid significant attention to their boarding schools because they were their lifelines. There is no doubt that the women religious were dedicated, through their vows and congregational rules, to provide service to the poor, but it would be incorrect to suggest, as some have done, that the Catholic education system originated in the schooling of poor children because it was very much a mix.[28] In fact, for those religious communities whose focus was only teaching, boarding schools almost always ran alongside the parish schools.

In spite of the class distinctions, which definitely informed the development of education, poverty was an issue that extended across Scotland and affected all the religious communities, both in terms of the funds they were able to access and the extent to which they influenced the life prospects of those who attended their parish schools. A culture of education had to be established and this was hampered by the irregular attendance of many of their pupils. Poor parents saw no practical value in sending their children to school when they could be sent off to work to

earn a wage or kept at home as minders for younger siblings. Poverty forces people to make these kinds of difficult choices, and since the relevance of education had yet to be fully appreciated by many of the poorest families, the sisters, like other teachers across Scotland, faced an uphill battle. In his letter to Harvey and Greig about the state of the schools in St Joseph's parish (Glasgow), Rev. Henry Thomson explained that although some of the parents could read, almost none could write and so trying to convince them that school was more important than work was practically impossible. He also observed that in spite of the Factory Acts, which were first passed in 1833 to protect children from exploitation, jobs in the silk mills, potteries, foundries, glassworks, paper mills and match works were still readily available to them. It was not so in the cotton mills, however, since they were more regularly policed.[29] The repercussions were definitive and stand as one of the main reasons why so many Catholic children failed to 'realise their true potential'.[30]

Democratising Education

As noted above, ensuring that Catholic schools existed at all and seeing to it that children attended them with some degree of regularity was a challenge, but it was one that needed to be met if education in Scotland was to become truly inclusive of religious minorities. One of the points highlighted in the introduction was that the pivotal role that women played in the development of Scottish education has been largely overlooked. In part this is because popular impressions are difficult to shift and the affection that many have for the romantic image of the local parish school master endures. What many fail to recognise is that these local figures were heavily dependent upon their wives and daughters.[31] Exploring the female contribution will provide a more complete understanding of what Scotland's national tradition actually looked like. Considering the contribution of the teaching sisters, what is clear is that they were central to bringing Scotland's Catholic schools to fruition and ensuring their firm establishment, as part of the national landscape, by 1900.

Following the landmark 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, which brought elementary education under state regulation and passed author-

ity for education to locally elected school boards, the Catholic Church opted to run its own system. The decision to opt out of the state system was taken by the Church leadership because, in addition to being sceptical of state interference, it was felt that board schools promoted Presbyterianism and put the religiosity of Catholic children at risk.[32] O'Hagan and Davis are two scholars who have considered the links between education and national identity in Scotland and they observe that at a time when education across Europe was being absorbed by various states, the legislation introduced for Scotland in 1872 represented a move in the opposite direction because it empowered the established Church.[33] In spite of having its own schools, the Catholic Church was still required to ensure that they adhered to the regulations of the Act, and without access to rate support, the Church relied even more heavily upon communities of teaching sisters. They tended to be concentrated in the urban centres, but as the nineteenth century progressed, their influence began to extend across Scotland. Often this was indirect as the women, who had been taught by them, began to take up teaching positions all over including in rural areas where the sisters themselves were unable to go.

It was in the classrooms, in the spaces that existed between the state and the Church, where the influence of the women religious was most keenly felt because not only did they provide classroom teachers but their growing communities and the foundations that sprung up in new locations across many parts of Scotland enabled them to implement a degree of standardisation that had been largely absent. This strengthened education overall, but it was an extremely difficult period for Catholic schools since the cost of maintaining them was crippling. The endemic financial instability and the persistent lack of qualified teachers were major challenges that were exacerbated by the Church's decision, from 1872, to run its own system and by the new emphasis on provision and performance.

On the eve of the Act, the Church established an Education Committee of the Eastern District (ECED) and linked it with London's Crisis Fund Committee, which had been established at the behest of the Catholic Poor School Committee to create a uniform structure across Catholic education in Britain. The ECED dealt with Catholic schools across the whole of Scotland's Eastern District including those in Edinburgh,

Dundee, Lochee, Haddington, West Calder, Kilsyth, Dalbeattie, Linlithgow, Dumfries, Crieff, Stirling, the Borders, Arbroath and Perth, and it was responsible for allocating its share of the grant money. While it was obvious to everyone that more schools needed to be built to accommodate the growing number of pupils, the conditions of the grant income specified that the money could not be used for the construction of schools or to support schools which doubled as chapels.[34] The service provided by the teaching sisters was critical to the system's survival. In 1878, women religious were teaching in 14 of the Eastern District's 48 Catholic schools, whereas male religious, namely the Marist Brothers, were in five others. It is fair to speculate that sisters had trained or taught the majority of the lay teachers who were running the rest.[35] It was a similar situation in the Western District, where Glasgow was located, where the sisters were also training and managing scores of pupil teachers.[36]

In the decade following the 1872 Act, the number of grant-aided parish schools in Scotland rose from 65 to 138, and one of the consequences of this growth was the feminisation of the teaching profession; in this respect the Catholic schools were part of a broader trend across Scotland since women were cheaper to employ than men.[37] Interestingly, though, the feminisation of teaching within the Catholic system had started decades earlier, when communities of women religious first began to establish themselves in Scotland's urban centres. One of the issues, though, was that access to support was unequal. Aspinwall estimated that the number of Catholic parish schools in Scotland ballooned from 90 in 1875 to 180, with roughly 60,000 pupils in less than two decades.[38] Irregular attendance notwithstanding, classrooms were still packed and teachers, particularly young and inexperienced pupil teachers, were overwhelmed and exhausted. Women religious were fortunate because they could count on constant support from their communities, whereas the lay teachers often worked alone and without the same level of support and guidance. This affected the progress of a number of Catholic schools, and according to one scholar these young women struggled, much more than their Board-school contemporaries, with inferior equipment, big class sizes and poor buildings.[39]

The convert surge, in the wake of the Oxford Movement, influenced Catholicism in Scotland dramatically and transformed female education

in an attempt to align it more closely with Victorian ideals of femininity. The number of women entering the religious life grew significantly during this period and the personal and collective missions they embraced did much to shape a social welfare agenda where women were at the heart of social transformation. The religious life offered women the opportunity to fulfil their ambitions of service to God through public works of charity, and the work they undertook helped them to acquire a level of self-confidence that lay women simply did not possess. These factors are difficult to quantify, but they had a significant impact on the personal development of countless young women.

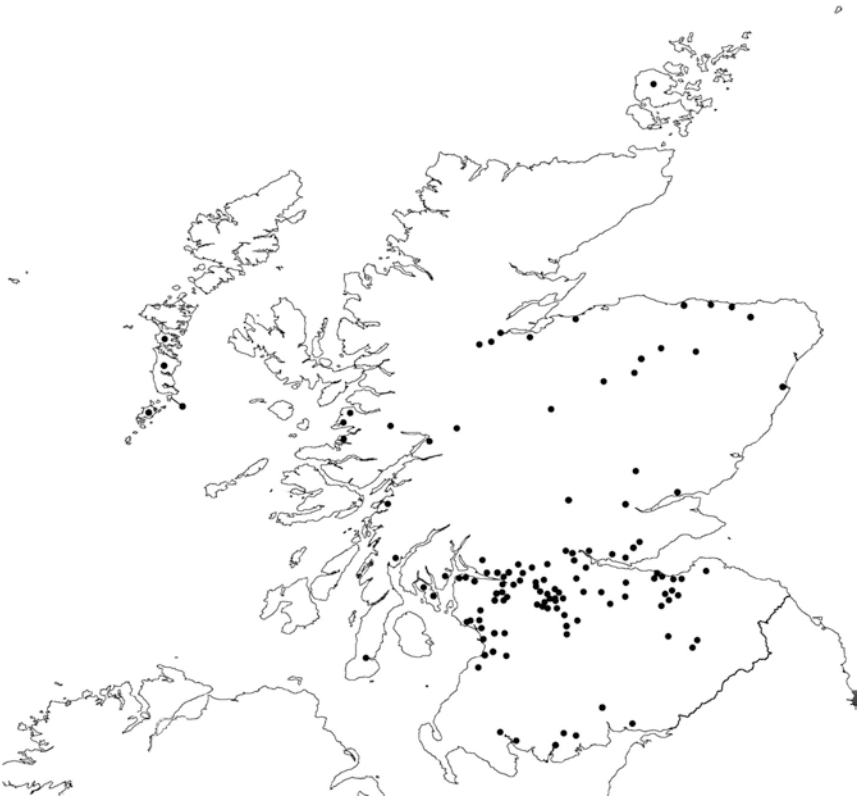
The primary objective of a teaching sister was to ensure that her pupils would become dutiful Catholics with a firm grasp of the Church's teachings, but for those who became teachers themselves, valuable skills were passed on in the process. The sisters' connections with European congregations meant that their teaching techniques were constantly shared and regularly updated which put them at a distinct advantage over their non-religious colleagues. It needs to be remembered that the majority of teachers, both lay and religious, had not attended training college, and in fact, the number of untrained teachers in Scotland's Catholic system was extremely high, with 'two-thirds' of women and half of men having no formal teacher training following the introduction of the 1872 Act.[40] The women religious, though, had a significant amount of 'informal' convent-based and on-the-job training. What this meant for the lay female teachers, in particular, was that coping with anything beyond the elementary level was extremely difficult.[41] This, of course, was yet another consequence of the overall poor financial condition of Scotland's Catholics.

The recruitment of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur was a deliberate attempt to legitimise the Catholic system in Scotland. A professional and much-respected international congregation of teachers and teacher-trainers, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur reshaped Catholic teaching in Scotland and their arrival signalled a 'deepening mutual understanding and collaboration between the Catholic Church and the State'.[42] They boosted teaching standards by making training available locally, whilst also enhancing the authority of the Scottish Education Department. Senior figures like Sir Henry Craik, the Department's secretary, welcomed them since their presence countered the growing authority of the univer-

sities over teacher training.[43] Although they only arrived in Glasgow in 1894, their connection with education in Scotland went back a number of years. Records show that by 1887 roughly 330 of the 1300 young women, who trained at their Mount Pleasant teacher training college in Liverpool, were from Scotland, and of these 60 became sisters themselves, with 30 choosing the Notre Dame congregation.[44] After arriving in Glasgow, the new superior, Sr Mary of St Wilfred, received a friendly good luck note from those sisters she had left in Liverpool:

> O weel for thee in usquebaugh
> To pledge you Dowanside
> And auld Mount Pleasant greeted sair
> She wasna by thy side –
> But sin we canna gang to thee
> We send this glass o' wine
> Wi wishes true and triple cheer
> To ane wha for herself is dear
> And for the Auld lang syne.
> *
> We hope indeed that a' the nuns
> That lo'ed thee mony years
> May drink thy right guid health in tea
> A-sitting on their chairs
> But sin the Mither's cross the Tweed
> They needs maun bide a wee –
> Yet still their hearts can rin awa
> Wi wishes true frae ane and a'
> And a glass o'wine to thee.[45]

Many of the women who trained in Liverpool returned to Scotland and ended up teaching all over as Map 1.1 reveals. The Aspinwall list includes the names of 321 women, who were trained by the Sisters of Notre Dame at Mount Pleasant, and who taught, at some point in their careers, at Catholic schools in Scotland. The vast majority (197) taught in Glasgow schools, but the list reveals that there were many others who travelled further afield to places like Barra, Beauly, Castle Douglas, Kingussie, Tomintoul, Bute, Orkney, Aberdeen, Gourock, Peebles and Dufftown.[46]



Map 1.1 Locations of female teachers trained by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Liverpool (Many thanks to John Bennet for constructing this map from the names included in the Aspinwall list.)

Since the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were a congregation of professional teachers, pedagogy was an integral part of each member's religious development. Importantly, their overarching ethos was that 'Human beings (including women) should be encouraged to develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities to the full' and so their trainees—lay and religious—were encouraged to develop an intellectual capacity that those who did not train with them found difficult to do. The knock-on effects were significant since they, as teachers in their own right, were able to pass on a higher level of knowledge and encourage a

greater degree of creativity in their students than most of their contemporaries.[47] In Glasgow, this tradition helped to embed intellectual skills, and for sisters and their pupils with special abilities, the community offered unprecedented support. Two prominent examples were Sr. Monica Taylor, the niece of an industrial chemist, who retired as an internationally renowned biologist, and Sr Marie Hilda, a convent-educated Australian native, who was widely recognised as a pioneer of child guidance.[48] Neither would have achieved what they did had they not had the support of their congregation, which was unusual for a religious community since the common practice was to promote strict equality among the sisters to ensure that no one stood out from the rest, regardless of any special abilities one might possess. In Liverpool, the community's archives is a folder about Taylor and in it is an interesting account of how science experiments were brought to the convent. Taylor's uncle, who initially dismissed her desire to obtain a B.Sc. because of her sex, changed his mind and decided to do what he could to help the sisters' pupils to learn about science so that they would be in a better position to teach it. A former pupil offered the following memory:

> One Saturday in the year 1891, lorries came to the convent with a great deal of scientific apparatus from the chemist's own laboratory. On seeing this the sisters quickly prepared the 'new room' with long tables suitable for demonstrations…. When the chemist and his assistant arrived he demonstrated the experiments described in the text books the children were using … the children were thrilled with these experiments, never having seen anything like it before, and therefore taking a keen interest.[49]

Apart from cultivating the intellectual potential of the women who trained with the sisters in Glasgow, Dowanhill provided an unprecedented advantage for enhancing the democratic ideal: its principal, Sr Mary of St Wilfred (Mary Adela Lescher), was female, and under her direction the congregation's influence and reach spread quickly. When Dowanhill opened in 1894, there were just 22 students, but by 1900, there were over 80 and teaching had been transformed 'from a last resort into a positive career choice'.[50] The last frontier, of course, was university and here, too, the sisters were successful in making headway. Having first

secured a link with the University of Glasgow, the Sisters of Notre Dame sent many of their students there for classes, and a number also went on to obtain degrees. Women such as Eleanor Smith (M.A.), Katheleen Nolan (B.Sc.), Isabella Robertson (M.A.), Ealeanor Kelly (B.Sc.), Kathleen Walsh (M.A.), Gertrude Cheadle (M.A.) and Janet Lomax (M.A.) were some of the many women who obtained degrees, mostly from the University of Glasgow, after having studied first at Dowanhill. Janet Lomax, whose honours were in Latin and French, would have received a 'valuable scholarship' had it not been for the exclusion of Catholics.[51] This access to higher education enabled women to develop their intellectual potential whilst solidifying a Scottish Catholic middle class.

Conclusion

Over the course of the nineteenth century, women made a major contribution to Catholic life and identity in Scotland because of the educational paths they pursued, but we still know too little about them and about the women, both lay and religious, who made this possible. Much of the credit for improving the education on offer to Catholic children, but especially to girls and young women, needs to go to the communities of women religious whose vocation enabled them to dedicate their lives to improving the educational prospects of a group of children whose families were more largely unfamiliar with schooling. It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that their influence began to be widely felt as the 'cohorts of well-educated, middle-class female teachers capable to improving the intellectual capacity' they had trained spread throughout the system.[52]

Notes

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