



Education and Religion in Scotland: *à la recherche du temps perdu*

Pignatelli Frank

Pour citer cet article

Pignatelli Frank, « Education and Religion in Scotland: *à la recherche du temps perdu* », *Cycnos*, vol. 13.2 (Éducation et religion dans les Îles Britanniques), 1996, mis en ligne en 2021.

<http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/publication/item/810>

Lien vers la notice <http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/publication/item/810>

Lien du document <http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/cycnos/810.pdf>

Cycnos, études anglophones

revue électronique éditée sur épi-Revel à Nice

ISSN 1765-3118

ISSN papier 0992-1893

AVERTISSEMENT

Les publications déposées sur la plate-forme épi-revel sont protégées par les dispositions générales du Code de la propriété intellectuelle. Conditions d'utilisation : respect du droit d'auteur et de la propriété intellectuelle.

L'accès aux références bibliographiques, au texte intégral, aux outils de recherche, au feuilletage de l'ensemble des revues est libre, cependant article, recension et autre contribution sont couvertes par le droit d'auteur et sont la propriété de leurs auteurs. Les utilisateurs doivent toujours associer à toute unité documentaire les éléments bibliographiques permettant de l'identifier correctement, notamment toujours faire mention du nom de l'auteur, du titre de l'article, de la revue et du site épi-revel. Ces mentions apparaissent sur la page de garde des documents sauvegardés ou imprimés par les utilisateurs. L'université Côte d'Azur est l'éditeur du portail épi-revel et à ce titre détient la propriété intellectuelle et les droits d'exploitation du site. L'exploitation du site à des fins commerciales ou publicitaires est interdite ainsi que toute diffusion massive du contenu ou modification des données sans l'accord des auteurs et de l'équipe d'épi-revel.

Le présent document a été numérisé à partir de la revue papier. Nous avons procédé à une reconnaissance automatique du texte sans correction manuelle ultérieure, ce qui peut générer des erreurs de transcription, de recherche ou de copie du texte associé au document.

EPI-REVEL

Revue électronique de l'Université Côte d'Azur

Education and Religion in Scotland :

à la recherche du temps perdu

Frank Pignatelli

Introductory comment

I have taken as my theme "Education and Religion in Scotland: à la recherche du temps perdu" not because of my love for Marcel Proust's work, which is undeniable. Rather my title sums up the difficulty which we in Scotland have in our naive nostalgia for a more stable past, perhaps for a past which never did exist. *En passant* it seems to me that the Churches in Scotland could perhaps learn from Proust the fallibility and weakness of conscious memory. In effect, my proposition is that the Churches in Scotland continue to hanker after the stable periods of the past, a past often idealised over time.

By way of background I should note that I make this contribution not as an observer and analyst of events but rather as a key participant in the development and management of religious education in Scotland over a period of two decades. As Director of Education for Strathclyde region until recently, I held responsibility for some 350,000 students in the school system, half of the total school population in Scotland. My comments reflect the challenges of managing a multi-denominational system where almost 30% of the schools were specifically Catholic while 70% were *non-denominational*. West central Scotland is unusual in this respect in that the average figure for Scotland is 15.3% Catholic schools overall in the primary sector and 16.2% Catholic schools overall in the secondary sector.

TABLE 1: Schools in Scotland

REGION	SCHOOLS	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
	ALL SCHOOLS	2368	419
SCOTLAND	NON-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS	2006 (84.7%)	351 (83.7%)
	ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS	362 (15.3%)	68 (16.2%)
	ALL SCHOOLS	894	179
STRATHCLYDE	NON-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS	644 (72%)	126 (70.2%)
	ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS	250 (28%)	53 (29.8%)

As chief policy adviser to the elected education committee for Strathclyde and as visiting Professor in Education at the University of Glasgow opportunities were afforded to me to have access to research and writing on the subject of religion in Scottish schools.

Education and Religion Historically

Education and religion have been linked in Scotland since AD563 when Columba landed in Iona. In that early period the Celtic Church established monasteries across Scotland originally for monks but gradually involving lay scholars. Roman Christianity spread over subsequent years and indeed the Roman Church was seen as the national church in Scotland from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. During this period cathedral schools, abbey schools, collegiate schools and parish schools were established throughout Scotland, many of them being taken over by burghs. By the end of the fifteenth century every principal town in Scotland had its grammar or burgh school.

Many of the religious institutions of Rome were destroyed during the height of the reformation in the mid sixteenth century, schools included. However, despite claims by many Roman Catholics that education was destroyed during this period the reformers had a huge interest in education. Indeed John Knox's First Book of Discipline published in 1560 laid the scheme of national education in Scotland and acted as a blueprint for the system which was eventually established by the 1872 Act.

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries considerable expansion took place in the provision of parish and burgh schools with the Church continuing to act as catalyst, supporter and monitor of the system. Indeed, until 1861, the Church retained the right of supervision which was extended to the religious orthodoxy of teachers.

From earliest times religious instruction was regarded as essential in all schools, a view which still holds fundamentally today in Scottish schools.

The nineteenth century saw the establishment of assembly schools and sessional schools thus strengthening the link between education and the Church in Scotland.

The terms of the 1872 *Education Act* which established a national system of public elementary schools and introduced compulsory education from five years to thirteen years permitted the transfer of denominational schools. Many schools accepted the transfer arrangements with the exception of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal schools which remained independent until the 1918 *Education Act*.

Again religious instruction was safeguarded and a conscience clause granted parents the authority to withdraw their children from any such instruction. Since 1872 various Acts have extended the provision of education. In all of these Acts the prime position of religion has been maintained.

Throughout Scottish history then the Church has retained its strong influence and has maintained and nurtured the very strong historical links between education and religion.

Education and Religion Today

The position of education and religion in modern times is somewhat more complex.

The two main religious groupings in Scotland are the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church. While there are problems of definition of membership with non-communicant members being added in some denominations and with Roman Catholics recording only adult mass attenders, we can still gain a fairly clear picture of the relative strength of religious groups within Scotland.

The most recent Scottish Church Census (1994) indicates that there are 715,000 members in the Church of Scotland of whom 400,000 are communicants. Roman Catholic membership, that is the adult weekly mass attendance, is recorded at 250,000. The Muslim religion is recorded as having 24,000 members, the Sikh religion as 10,000, the Hindu religion as 10,000 and the Jewish religion as 4,000. The religious context of Scotland is therefore predominantly one of Christianity.

Religious education has a pre-eminent place in Scottish education in principle and in statute and to varying degrees in practice. Religion remains the only compulsory subject in the curriculum in Scotland.

It is interesting to note that whereas parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious observance or instruction in Scottish schools by virtue of section 8 (1) of the *Education (Scotland) Act*, 1980, the numbers who do this are very small indeed.

Against the above background the churches in Scotland have come to feel that they have a fundamental right to be involved in the education of young people in Scottish schools.

Indeed, by statute, elected education committees which have the responsibility for managing the education service within geographical areas across Scotland have as members church representatives, a right not even extended to teachers or parents in the Scottish system. Thus the Church is heavily involved in the development and management of education in schools in Scotland.

Special Provisions for Denominational Schools

Mention should be made of the special provisions made for denominational schools in Scotland, such provisions having been taken up almost exclusively by Catholic schools.

Clearly, a number of the churches in Scotland were concerned to maintain their identity, focus and influence on education in 1872 when schools transferred to the national system. While guarantees were offered, some schools remained independent at that time, specifically Catholic and Episcopal schools.

The 1918 *Education (Scotland) Act* established a national system of elementary education by placing all schools under local authority ownership. In the interests of incorporating as many schools as possible a deal was made with the Catholic church under which it agreed to hand over its schools to the local authorities.

In return, the Catholic authorities received certain guarantees. First, the denominational character of the schools could not be changed by local authorities, even though they owned the schools.

Second, the Catholic church retained effective control of religious instruction in the transferred schools.

Third, and perhaps most important, guarantees were given that teachers appointed to Catholic schools had to be approved as to their religious beliefs and character by the Catholic authorities. Assuming that there were enough Catholic applicants, this allowed the Catholic church to ensure that only Catholic teachers worked in Catholic schools.

Since 1918, Catholic education in Scotland has been fully funded for both recurrent costs (for example, teachers' salaries) and capital costs (for example, school buildings). Thus the 1918 Act offered major advantages to the Catholic population in Scotland, advantages which still exist to this day.

In the region for which I held responsibility I managed all 1,500 schools (special, nursery, primary and secondary), maintaining them, developing the curriculum, appointing staff and so on.

In relation to the 300 Catholic schools I was obliged, by statute, to appoint only those teachers "approved as regards their religious belief and character by representatives of the (Catholic) church [...]" (section 21(2)(i) of the *Education (Scotland) Act*, 1980).

And in relation to the curriculum, the education authority had a right, never exercised, to appoint a supervisor of religious education in each school, if so requested by the Catholic church. This supervisor, "a person approved as regards religious belief and character [...]" was to be appointed to "[...] report to the education authority as to the efficiency of the religious instruction given in such school [...]" and was to "[...] be entitled to enter the school at all times set apart for religious instruction or observance" (section 21(3) of the *Education (Scotland) Act*, 1980).

Clearly, over the years since 1918 these guarantees and safeguards have served the Catholic church well. However, increasing problems have arisen of late as a result of a more empowered and challenging laity which has taken to questioning the special provisions for Catholic schools. A degree of resentment has built up within the education service in relation to Catholic schools. Specific challenges have been mounted to these special provisions particularly where the Catholic church has been seen to exercise its right of approval of teachers in what the public consider to be insensitive ways.

In addition, given the popularity of Catholic schools particularly for certain ethnic groups within Scotland such as the Muslim community, pressure has come to bear on the Catholic system. In one Catholic primary school in the Glasgow area some 80% of the pupils are non-Catholic. This has given rise to attempts by the Catholic church to restrict the entry of such non-Catholic pupils to Catholic schools. However, given that section 9 of the *Education (Scotland) Act*, 1980 requires that "every public school and every grant aided school shall be open to pupils of all denominations [...]" difficulties have arisen. The Catholic church's view that the religious dimension should permeate the curriculum makes it somewhat difficult for parents to withdraw their children from "any instruction in religious subjects

and [...] any religious observance in any such school [...]” (Section 9 of the *Education (Scotland) Act*, 1980)

Position of Churches

Decline in Influence

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland addressed the 1996 General Assembly on the issue of the decline in the influence of the Church in Scotland with the words: “The Church’s determination to continue to behave as if it is still a force in the land invites mockery” and “The Church is out of touch with the young.”

Almost every report to the General Assembly in 1996 bore the same tone: a desperate recognition of the decline in influence of the Church in Scotland.

This decline in influence is borne out by the dramatic decline in church attendance across Scotland.

Statistical Decline

The Scottish Church Census (1994), published in September 1995 records the following alarming statistics:

- a fall of 85,000 in church attendance since 1985, the equivalent of losing one congregation every week;
- an 18% drop in attendance for the Church of Scotland;
- a 14% drop in attendance for the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland;
- a 23% drop in attendance for other Presbyterians;
- a 14% drop in attendance for Baptists;
- a 34% drop in attendance by children below the age of nine;
- a 48% drop in attendance by young people between the ages of 10 and 19;
- between 1980 and 1993 a decline of 47% in attendance at Sunday Schools in Scotland;
- long term predictions of a continuing decline in attendance as indicated by the figures below:

Church of Scotland	(members)	(communicants)
1995	715,000	400,000
2010	450,000	250,000
Roman Catholic		
1995	250,000	
2010	208,000	

This statistical decline in Church attendance has been a major source of concern to the Churches over the years. Of particular concern is the dramatic predicted decline in attendance for the Church of Scotland whereby by the

year 2010 the Church of Scotland, the national Church in Scotland, is predicted to have 250,000 communicants as against the predicted attendance at the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland of 208,000.

Much of the blame for this decline in church-going has been laid at the doors of schools in Scotland. There appears to be a belief that if schools were more rigorous in promoting religious education and religious instruction this decline would not take place. This view fails to acknowledge the prevailing attitudes and values arising from a more pluralist society in which young people are more critical and more challenging than hitherto.

Changes in Society

At the meeting of the General Assembly held in 1996 a major discussion took place in relation to the downgrading of Christianity in society.

A Mori poll conducted on behalf of the British Humanist Society in 1995 concluded that "the authority of the Church has gone". There is little doubt that this position has been reached as a result of a whole succession of scandals in the Church, infringements of celibacy within the Catholic Church, child and sex abuse scandals, the conflict of private and public values and, most recently in the Catholic church a challenge mounted by a group of parish priests against the authority of their own Bishop.

The former Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at Edinburgh University, David Wright, commenting on the decision of a Scottish regional council to advise school chaplains that in talking to students they should be careful to stress that they are presenting their own personal beliefs, described this as "a kind of privatisation of Christian belief".

The Bishop of Leicester, Tom Butler, commenting on changes in society has indicated: "Liberal attitudes to religion have produced a generation of children who believe in blue pyramids, crystals and the power of astrology".

Given all of the above circumstances, it is no longer acceptable, in a largely secular and multi-cultural society, to expect publicly-funded schools to undertake a proselytising role which appears to be the wish of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland.

Changes in Young People

The European Values Survey "Young People and Values in Post Modern Europe", based on a study of between 1,000 and 4,000 young people in each of 12 countries offers a useful, albeit depressing, view of the changes in attitudes of young people over the period 1982 to 1992.

The study reports:

- an increase in individualism;
- a more permissive personal morality in young people;

- a situation where freedom has become a more central value than equality;
- more commitment to ethically orientated groups and movements such as human rights, ecology, peace, women's issues and emancipation;
- more tolerance towards marginalised groups;
- an increasingly unchurched generation of young people with less interest than ever before in the teaching of the churches.

Finally the survey places religious faith at the bottom of a list of qualities which play a major role in young people's lives.

Francis and Greer's research "Catholic Schools and Adolescent Religiosity in Northern Ireland — Shaping Moral Values" points to the rejection by a large number of young people of the moral absolutes of traditional Roman Catholic teaching. This study, which was replicated by the author in west central Scotland, revealed disturbing trends in relation to the attitude of young people. Under the heading of behaviour which was considered "usually excusable," the undernoted figures were recorded.

TABLE 2

Usually Excusable	Northern Ireland	Scotland
	[Percentage of group interviewed]	
Gambling	34	49
Drinking alcohol	55	54
Drunkenness	14	17
Sex before marriage	17	23
Artificial birth control	16	39
Divorce	10	28

Finally in research conducted on behalf of the Church of Scotland by the University of Dundee in 1996 only 50% of those interviewed believed in the existence of God.

These changes in the attitudes of young people go some way to explaining the difficulties which the Churches face in maintaining their influence as we approach the new Millenium.

Changes in Education

Recent educational reforms in Scotland have done little to reinforce the position of religion in schools in Scotland. Market models of education, stressing the utilitarian nature of the education process, have done little to support religion in schools. Indeed many parents, conscious of the increasingly competitive nature of society, have indicated that they would rather have more academic provision than religious education for their children.

In addition the development of religious education programmes based on specialisms have, paradoxically, weakened the position of the churches in

Scotland. Murdoch, in an article in the *Law Society of Scotland Journal* (July 1989) entitled "Religion, Education and the Law" states:

Paradoxically, as the provision of religious education has improved, with the appointment of specialist teachers and the availability of certificate examinations, this in turn has involved the subject in becoming more value-neutral in content and factual in approach, and as such may be considered both by parents and by Churches as more secular in nature and possibly posing more of a threat to any Christian faith a child may have.

At the 1996 meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland concern was expressed regarding the curricular policies being pursued by schools. One speaker felt that these policies ensured that "the supremacy of Christ is being ignored." Quite clearly he did not realise that it is not the role of curriculum designers to uphold or deny the supremacy of Christ. Their job is to ensure that young people learn about the Christian aspect of life, the centrality of Christianity within the Scottish culture and the existence of other religious beliefs. Indeed the major dilemma facing schools in this context is that they do not exist to restore what society has chosen to disregard.

Demography

Shifts in the population in Scotland combined with the decline in the birth rate have led to an over provision of school places across Scotland. The phenomenon of declining rolls has been a particular problem for Catholic schools and has offered a legitimate pretext to politicians to raise the issue of the integration of Catholic and non-denominational schools. To date however little movement has been possible given the Catholic Church's determination to maintain a separate and distinct Catholic education system in Scotland.

Responses of Churches

In the face of these pressures for change and against a background of a decline in their influence, the Churches have responded in a number of ways.

Appeals to Traditional Supporters

The Church of Scotland and indeed the Catholic Church in Scotland have attempted to appeal to their traditional supporters, bemoaning the decline in influence of the Churches and the pressures upon them. Such appeals have tended to be emotional with arguments by assertion predominating; as such they have had limited support.

As an example of the lack of success of such appeals to traditional supporters the position of the Catholic Church in a local area of Strathclyde is worth consideration. As a result of dramatic roll decline in a secondary school in the local area a proposal was put forward by the regional council to close the Catholic school in the area. Following local discussions it was agreed that the pupils could be accommodated in the nearby non-denominational school with major safeguards put in place to ensure the Catholic education of the Catholic pupils. This solution was rejected by the Catholic church who

insisted that the young people travel more than 20 miles to the nearest Catholic school.

The majority of parents decided that their children's education would be better served by their enrolling in the local non-denominational school without the benefit of the guarantees which had been offered to and rejected by the Catholic church in the area. Such an example demonstrates the failure of the Churches to develop new models to accommodate the new context in which they are operating.

Political and Legislative Initiatives

Major influence has been brought to bear on national politicians to ensure that religion maintains a very strong place within the education system in Scotland. In particular the Catholic church in Scotland has been highly successful in influencing not only local politicians but national politicians.

The Churches in Scotland have also succeeded in ensuring that their position is maintained and indeed strengthened through the legislative process. Recent legislative changes have seen church representatives remain, by statute, as members of the education committees of the new councils in Scotland. Further strengthening of the Catholic church's position has taken place as a result of a new provision which sees referral of proposed closures of Catholic schools to the Secretary of State for determination. Finally the approval of teachers by the Catholic Church has been maintained and strengthened as a result of a very high profile case involving a senior Catholic member of staff whose approval was refused on her applying for a further promoted post.

National Development Programmes

In the context of national development programmes of religious and moral education in Scotland, the Catholic Church has been able to develop specifically Catholic guidelines for Catholic schools. Within the national programme three key attainment targets are explored, Christianity, Other World Religions and Personal Search. These targets have been developed specifically in relation to the Catholic faith and clearly will lead to a strengthening of the Roman Catholic sector.

In addition the Catholic church in Scotland has launched a national programme on "Faith and Learning," unashamedly committing itself to the faith development of all young people. The programme makes clear that the Christian message should animate the Catholic school community in programmes of faith development, in the infusion of secular teaching with religious awareness and understanding and in the shaping of school communities which sustain and nurture faith.

Conclusion

Historically the Church in Scotland has had a hugely significant influence on education. Over recent years attempts have been made to maintain this influence against the background of a major shift in values in

contemporary society and in the face of an increasingly sceptical and challenging educational community.

Evidence suggests that the strong public commitment to explicit faith development as a key strategy in Catholic schools in Scotland, linked to the strongly supportive legislative position enjoyed by the Catholic church, has led to a much less dramatic decline in church attendance in the Catholic sector in Scotland. Overall however, the position appears to be a decline in the influence of the Church generally in Scotland.

