

Quietly Contesting the Hegemony of the Catholic Clergy in Secondary Schooling in Ireland: The Case of the Catholic Lay Secondary Schools from Independence in 1922 to the early 1970s

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Abstract: From the time of Irish independence in 1922 until the mid-1960s, a cohort of small, lay-run Catholic secondary schools operated in Ireland. They functioned to fill a gap that had existed in the network of Catholic clergy- and religious order-run secondary schools and catered for the minority of the population attending the majority of the secondary schools in the country. The (Catholic) Church authorities, who monopolised secondary school education and resented the intrusion of other parties into what they considered to be their sacred domain in this regard, only tolerated the establishment of lay-run schools in districts where it was not anxious to provide schools itself. This indicated the preference of the Church for educating the better-off in Irish society as the districts in question were mostly very deprived economically. The paper details the origins, growth and development of the lay-owned Catholic secondary schools. The attitude of the Church to their existence is then considered. The third part of the paper focuses on a particular set of lay schools established amongst what had been, for a long time, one of the most neglected areas in Ireland in terms of secondary school provision by the Catholic Church, namely, the Irish-speaking districts in the remote and impoverished areas in the north-west, west, south-west and south of the country, which were officially called the Gaeltacht districts.

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1. Introduction

The Catholic Church has been one of the largest providers of non-state faith-based education for centuries. Throughout much of the last two hundred years its schools in many countries were staffed by both teaching religious (priests, religious brothers and nuns) and lay teachers, albeit in different ratios at different times. The teaching religious were, in the main, members of Catholic religious orders.

As the nineteenth century progressed the number of lay teachers relative to the number of teaching religious declined internationally, partly due to the great expansion in the number of religious orders involved in education. This expansion meant that the orders, whose members in many Catholic schools constituted a large unpaid workforce, had less need to employ lay teachers than previously. Furthermore, since the orders had vastly greater human and material resources at their disposal than had most individual lay people, many of those who had established Catholic lay schools often had to close them as they could not compete with those run by the religious. One consequence was that many former Catholic lay teachers found they could only continue to work as teachers through gaining employment in newly-established, or expanding, state school systems. An outcome of the scenario outlined so far for the period from the late 1800s to the early 1970s, was that in many countries the teaching religious were the dominant influence on those attending Catholic schools.

Ireland was no exception to this general trend. What appears to have been unusual, however, is that between the 1920s and the 1970s it had a small, yet prominent number of Catholic secondary schools run by lay people. The writing of the present paper was stimulated first by a realization that this appears not to have the case anywhere else in the English-speaking world, secondly, by a desire that highlighting this might provoke others to explore if the experience detailed was replicated outside of that world, and thirdly by a hope that, if they do so, it might be possible to calibrate the extent to which what they report can be compared and contrasted with the situation in Ireland.

The paper opens with a brief overview of the origins, growth and development of the lay-owned Catholic secondary schools in independent Ireland. It is followed by a consideration of the attitude of the Catholic Church to their existence and to the fact that, in certain instances, it opposed their establishment if it deemed they might offer competition to already existing schools run by priests, religious brothers and nuns. This opposition meant that, in the main, lay-run Catholic secondary schools were established largely only in areas where no secondary schools already existed. The third part of the paper considers a particular set of these schools established amongst what had been, for a long time, one of the most neglected areas in Ireland in terms of secondary school provision by the Catholic Church, namely, the Irish-speaking districts in the remote and impoverished areas in the north-west, west, south-west and south of the country, that were officially entitled the Gaeltacht districts

2. Origins, Growth and Development

A state-sponsored national (primary) school system, overseen by a board of commissioners, was established in Ireland 1831. Despite the great controversies

that occurred at the official level, this almost totally religious-managed system was well established by the late 1870s, and by the end of the century primary school education was available to the vast majority of children in the country. Secondary school education, which was conducted in private and largely religious-run fee-paying institutions, was, by contrast, very much a middle class preserve for a small minority.

Some authorities consider that the existence of a very small number of lay secondary schools in Ireland in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was due to a revival both of an earlier tradition of hedge schools (referring to lowly, unofficial and/or poor schools (Kelly & Hegarty, 2016), and of classical or superior schools that came into existence when education institutions run by the Catholic Church were suppressed under the Penal Laws of 1700 to 1829 (O'Donoghue & Harford, 2011). Developments set in train following the passing of the Intermediate Education Act of 1878, however led to a surge in the growth and management of religious-run Catholic secondary schools such that, by the time of national independence in 1922 (Fahey, 1994), only a very limited number of lay-managed hedge schools and «superior schools» survived. Yet, within 13 years, a number of new small lay secondary schools had been founded. While the initial impetus was slow, a momentum developed gradually, albeit in a piecemeal rather than in a planned fashion, that led to the development of more of them.

While all of the lay secondary schools in the State in 1922, were officially classified as being non-denominational, amongst them were a few small schools that had been established by people associated with one or other of the Protestant denominations in the country, but which were not officially connected to any of them. The great majority of the lay schools, however, were, de facto, Catholic schools (O'Malley, 2004). This was because their lay founders were «conventional» Catholics committed to transmitting the religious culture in which they themselves had grown up. To this end, their schools were, in the main, infused with a religious ethos in so far as Catholic religious emblems were displayed on the classroom walls, Catholic doctrine was taught during religious education classes, and prayers were said at various times throughout the school day. At the same time, it was not unknown for a small number of students from other religious denominations to attend some of the lay secondary schools and to receive religious instruction either there, or out of school, from ministers of their own religion.

The proprietors of the lay secondary schools followed the practice of the authorities of the schools run by the clergy and the religious orders of advertising their successes in the State examinations. Furthermore, they adhered to the practice adopted by the other secondary schools in the country in that a typical school-week was of five-and-a-half days' duration, until it was reduced to five days in the 1960s. During this period, the standard curriculum laid down by the Department of Education was taught. As part of the new State's nation-building project, all students were taught the Irish language, and a strong Gaelic culture ethos permeated the teaching of most of the other subjects provided.

Overall, growth up to 1962 was as follows: in 1939-40 there were 17 lay secondary schools, by 1955-56, the number had reached 48, and by 1961-62, it had reached 57. The schools were officially recognised by the Irish Department of

Education for payment of capitation grants for each pupil enrolled. The amounts in question were paid to the authorities of all secondary schools in the nation. Furthermore, appropriately qualified teachers were eligible for the payment of an incremental salary. No secondary schools, however, whether run by the churches or by lay people, were in receipt of State finances for buying premises, for building works, or for maintenance. Accordingly, while those who established the lay schools were able to provide themselves with a living from the enterprise, they were, by-and-large, not engaged in a very profitable venture.

Like all secondary schools in the State also, lay schools could not be established without the permission of the Department of Education. Suitable premises with proper equipment, lighting and heating had to be provided, staff had to possess officially prescribed academic and teacher-preparation qualifications, and a minimum of 12 pupils had to be enrolled in the first year of a school's existence. Furthermore, before one could open a new school, a convincing case had to be made that there was a distinct need for it in the district in which it was to be located.

A number of lay secondary schools failed shortly after opening because of failure to meet the Department's requirements. Furthermore, while there was no official Department of Education regulation requiring clerical agreement, «the approval of the bishop of the diocese immediately became the sine qua non factor which, if speedily granted, greatly facilitated the opening of lay schools» (O'Malley, 2004, p. 2). Most of the lay schools that proved to be viable consisted of a small number located in Dublin and others located in small towns and villages where no secondary school provision was made by religious orders. Specifically, regarding the latter, attendance at religious-run schools in larger centres was uninviting for many potential students living in rural areas at the time due to the nation's poor public transport system, parents' lack of cars, and the high cost of attending a boarding school relative to the average income of small farmers, labourers, tradespeople, and small business people. As a result, it is not surprising that parents gave moral and sometimes material support to the founders of the lay secondary schools.

None of the founders of the lay secondary schools located them in new purpose-built buildings. A number did, however, conduct their work in schools that had been purpose-built in a different era. For example, Mr Sean Hamilton's school in Bandon, County Cork, was located in the former Bandon Grammar School, while Miss Jane Agnes McKenna's school in Tarbert, County Kerry, was located in a former Erasmus-Smith school. These, however, were exceptions. The more normal practice was for the proprietor to rent a building or buy a house, and to then render it suitable through providing basic schoolroom furniture and equipment. Some schools were also located in premises housing libraries, and there were even cases of schools being conducted in what had at one time been police barracks. Sometimes local clergy provided rooms. There were also cases of schools being located in rooms over shops and in parish halls. At least one school was located in a railway station building, another in a former hotel, another yet again in a doctor's dispensary, and one was even located in a cinema (O'Malley, 2011, p. 8). In some instances, also, a school and home were combined in the one building.

The foundation of the lay secondary schools cannot be viewed as having been a movement that was driven by a homogenous group of people who shared

a set of common aims. Rather, their founders constituted a diverse group, some of whom claimed they had been inspired by parents who had been dedicated school teachers. A motivating force for others was knowing that establishing a school might provide them with the opportunity to invest their small savings, inheritances, or financial support provided by their families, in an enterprise that had the possibility of providing them with a steady income. Making such an investment was a particularly attractive venture for experienced teachers who had been able to gain employment for a number of years, often only on a year-by-year basis, in religious-run schools and, even then, only by moving around the country from school to school.

In a small number of cases, another motivating force yet again was the desire to be involved centrally in the nationalist project of the early decades of independent Ireland. On this, some came to believe they could play a particularly prominent role in helping to revive the Irish language if they ran a school of their own. Amongst those in question who founded lay secondary schools and who will be considered in the final section of this chapter, were individuals who were members of the Gaelic League, while others were active in the Gaelic Athletic Organisation.

3. The Role of the Catholic Church and the Lay Secondary Schools

A number of historians of education have claimed that the Catholic Church in Ireland was unrelenting in its opposition to lay education enterprises (Tittley, 1983). Others, however, have modified this thesis, noting that some bishops gave their support to the opening of lay secondary schools, albeit only when they were located in districts where there was already very little, if no, provision being made by the Church. One such district was in West Munster. Here a cluster of schools sprung up, all of which were supported by the local parish priests. In fact, some of them even allowed their names to be associated with particular schools in advertisements aimed at obtaining student enrolments.

Bishop Jeremiah Newman of Limerick, and in whose diocese, they were located, was particularly supportive of this cluster of West Munster schools. On these, he commented as follows in 1986:

For some reason or another, County Limerick sprouted a whole bunch of lay secondary schools, as they were called, schools that were independent of both diocese and religious orders but which usually had the courageous support of some cleric with vision (Scoil Mhuire, 1968, p. 2).

He followed up with a specific congratulatory message to his alma mater, Scoil Mhuire, Dromcollogher, which was one of the schools in question.

On the other hand, between the 1920s and the 1960s, there were bishops who were quick to condemn any teacher who attempted to establish a lay school if it was deemed to be a threat to existing religious-managed schools (O'Connor, 1986). On this, Seán O'Connor, a former Secretary of the Department of Education, and thus the most senior public servant within the institution, commented as follows:

They [the bishops in question] secured the cooperation of the Department of Education in maintaining their interests in this regard. For many years any lay person seeking to establish a secondary school for Catholic pupils was required to submit evidence that he or she had the support of the Catholic bishop of the diocese (O'Connor, 1986, p. 21).

Nevertheless, there was no common view within the Catholic Church in Ireland on the matter. Indeed, even local clergy and their bishops were sometimes not of one mind on it.

Some opposition was mounted by principals of national (primary) schools, who feared that the establishment of a secondary school in the vicinity of their own school would reduce the number of pupils registered on their roll books. This can be understood when one appreciates that while the great majority of primary school graduates did not proceed to a secondary school or to a vocational school once they reached 14 years of age (which was the school leaving age), those who did were usually only 12 or 13 years of age. Alongside this pattern was another one, namely, that of those who did not proceed to a secondary school or to a vocational school, but who remained on at primary school until they reached 14 years of age, and in some cases even until they had reached 15 or 16 years of age. As a result, a number of primary schools were able to «keep up their numbers», to use the parlance of the day, and thus maintain the number of teachers employed in a primary school.

By 1960, 42 lay-run secondary schools, with an enrolment of 2,606 pupils, were in operation. This enrolment figure constituted 3.39% of the total of 76,843 pupils registered in Irish secondary schools in 1961, while the number of lay schools constituted 8% of the total of the nation's 526 recognised secondary schools (Department of Education, 1960). Out of these 42 schools, 12 were all-boys schools, four were all-girls schools, and the remaining 26 were co-educational schools. Specifically, regarding the latter group of schools, namely, those enrolling both boys and girls, it is apposite to mention at this point that they helped to popularise co-education at a time when the Catholic Church was still condemning it in some parts of the country as well as overseas.

For the most part, the lay schools were unable to benefit from the increased participation rates in post-primary school education in Ireland from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, that followed the introduction of free second-level education in 1967. For example, in the case of the large cluster of schools in West Munster already noted, only three were still open in 1998 (Department of Education, 1998). The problem was that the majority of the lay schools were too small to accommodate the large number of students now entering secondary schools and the owners were not in a position financially to provide the funds that would have been necessary to complement the capital expenditure grants available from the State for the expansion of existing schools. In particular, the State took the line that schools with less than 150 enrolled pupils could no longer be deemed to be appropriate for the provision of secondary schooling as they could not offer a wide range of school subjects. Accordingly, those who owned some lay schools, having decided that they had no future in the field, arranged for their students to be transferred into other newly-enlarged schools and then they closed, while others became involved in amalgamations.

4. Gaeltacht Lay Secondary Schools

A specific trait that distinguished some lay schools was the dedication of their founders to promoting the use of the Irish language. This was reflected in the fact that a sizeable number of them were «A» schools, namely, schools located in the dominant English-speaking parts of the country and in which Irish was the sole language of instruction. In this regard, lay school founders such as Catherine Woulfe (Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick), Josephine Savage (Dromcollogher, Co. Kimerick), Liam McCarthy (Arklow, Co. Wicklow), and Máirín Melody (Ahasaragh, Co. Galway) were committed to the ideals of the Gaelic League and sought to implement its aims through their schools.

A tribute to Nora Savage, founder of the Dromcollcogher lay secondary school (1936-2002), which was given by a younger colleague, illustrates the mindset and interests of the lay school principals under consideration. In it, he stated:

Siobhán Bean Uí Shabháin had a great interest in the Irish language, in folklore and in Gaelic culture. I was amazed at how much knowledge she had about the folklore and traditional stories of West Limerick. I heard from her old words and sayings in Irish that I had never heard previously. She used to buy every book written in Irish as soon as it was published and she had built up a large collection of them. She loved to attend lectures about Irish and related events (Uí Chatháin, 1986, p. 19).

Also, the writer and Irish language activist, Nollaig Ó Gadhra, who attended Mrs Savage's school from 1957 to 1960, has stated that while attending Scoil Mhuire, he and his peers learned and acquired a fluency in Irish that enabled them to appreciate the language as representing more than a just an academic field of study (Ó Gadhra, 1986). Rather, his point was that it provided himself and his peers with a sense of patriotism.

Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyfeale (1937-66) in Co. Limerick, was another «A» school. Its foundress, Ms. Catherine Woulfe (1890-1989), insisted that her students speak Irish in the playground at break time, and she always addressed them in Irish. Furthermore, when interviewing newly qualified teachers for vacant positions in her school, one of her first questions was aimed at determining if they were sufficiently fluent to teach school subjects through Irish (O'Malley, 2011). Sean Hamilton, co-founder of the Hamilton High School in Bandon, adopted the same approach (O'Malley, 2011), as did Liam McCarthy, who founded St Patrick's Secondary School in Arklow in 1941 (O Cearbhaill, 1989). Similar accounts of enthusiasm for promoting the language have been given in relation to Nora Hawkes who owned the school at Askeaton, Co. Limerick, to Séamus Ó Maoileoin, founder of Meánscoil Tomás Dáibhís in Tyrellspass, Co. Westmeath, and to Máirín Melody, founder of Scoil Naomh Chúan for girls in Ahascragh, Co. Galway (O'Malley, 2011).

Five lay secondary schools were also established in Irish-speaking districts, in the decades following independence. While Irish was once the most common language spoken in Ireland, by 1900 the areas in which native speakers of Irish were located contracted to such an extent that they became clearly identifiable from

the majority English-speaking parts. All of them were located in remote districts with marginal land in the north-west, west, south-west and south of the country. Their populations were amongst the poorest in the State and the rates of emigration there were the highest in the State.

In the mid-1920s, the new Irish Free State outlined the broad parameters of the boundaries of these areas under the title of «the Gaeltacht». It also eulogized the people of these areas, maintaining they were pious, heroic and holders of the characteristics of an invented ancient Irish race. Yet, successive governments did very little to try to regenerate the Gaeltacht or to ensure Gaeltacht children would enjoy equality of education opportunity.

It was left to lay Catholics to establish secondary schools in Gaeltacht districts up until the advent of massive State provision of secondary school education following the introduction of free, State-financed, second level education in 1967. Two of these schools were established in remote County Mayo and one each in not quite so remote districts in County Waterford, one in County Kerry, and one in County Cork. The first of the schools established in County Mayo was Scoil Damhnait, which was opened in Achill Sound in 1948 (Waldron, 2002). It was located in the disused and abandoned terminal building of the Achill railway line and locally cut turf was used as fuel to provide heating. Further, an old courthouse across the road was used as a classroom for those enrolled in their final year.

One of Mac Suibhne's first initiatives was to purchase a minibus to collect girls and boys every morning from various parts of Achill Island, including Dooniver, Dookinella and Duagh, and also from areas east of Achill, including Mulranny. Initially, as principal and manager of the school, he found it difficult to retain teachers on account of the geographical isolation of Achill. To address the problem, he paid those he employed a sum of money greater than the regular annual school salary as an inducement to stay.

The other lay secondary school established in a Gaeltacht district in County Mayo was Scoil Naomh Chomáin in the north-west of the county (O'Malley, 2011). This was a sparsely populated and economically deprived area and, generally, emigration seems to have been accepted as being the reality that awaited most young people growing up there. The nearest secondary school was in Belmullet, 16 miles away, while the prospect of becoming a boarding school student in the further-distant all-boys' St Muredach's Diocesan College, in Ballina, and in Crossmolina girls convent, was not a realistic option for consideration by most parents in the area, given their limited financial resources.

By 1954, attention was being drawn by Irish language activists to government neglect of the physical, economic and social infrastructure of the district. This included the dilapidated road network that served what was to eventually become Scoil Náomh Chomáin. Soon, parents were seeking the establishment of a secondary school. On this, they had the support of a Fr. Diamond, the parish priest in the local Coranboy (Corrán Buí) parish.

The previous year, 1953, a national organisation, Gael Linn, had been founded in Dublin. Its aim was to foster and promote the Irish language as a living language throughout Ireland, and as an expression of identity, both within the Gaeltacht districts and across the nation more widely. In 1959, Mr. Dónal Ó Móráin, the chairman of

the organisation, and the secretary, Roibeárd Mac Góráin, visited Ceathrú Thadhg to seek the support of both Fr. Diamond and the local Catholic bishop of Killala, Dr. O'Boyle, for the establishment of a secondary school. The eventual agreement was that Fr. Diamond would have access to the school to teach religion through the medium of Irish and that he would also be a member of the school organising committee. The premises chosen to house the school was a former police barracks in Rossport; it was deemed to be appropriate as long as some repair work was undertaken.

Since they had not been granted official recognition by the Department of Education, the teachers in Scoil Náomh Chomáin were not in receipt of an incremental salary. Rather, they had to depend for their livelihood on the fees paid by the pupils, complemented by subsidies from Gael Linn. Dónal Ó Móráin has stated that its funds kept the school going in spite of a lack of support from the local bishop; «He [the Bishop of Killala] did not grant us his blessing [approval] but Gael-Linn had ample funds» (O'Malley, 2011, p. 229).

A number of Gael Linn activists also taught in the school on a temporary basis in order to ensure its survival. One of these, Micheál Ó Séighin, who was a graduate of University College Galway, expressed as follows an awareness he had at the time of what he saw as the problems facing the school: «I said that I would come for two years. I offered to come for two years to provide some stability» (O'Malley, 2011, p. 229). The eventual outcome of Ó Seighin's arrival at the school to teach for two years was that he became a permanent member of the staff and went on to spend 40 years teaching there, retiring only in 2001.

In his early years at Scoil Náomh Chomáin, Ó Dubhthaigh taught Irish, commerce, mathematics and Latin, all through the medium of Irish. An arrangement was made with a Mr. Seán Ó Máoilchaoin, who had a degree in agricultural science, and who worked nearby at Glenamoy agricultural research station, to teach agricultural science to the boys. Chaitlín Bean Uí Ír, whose husband also worked in Glenamoy, taught domestic science to the girls.

The decision to open a lay secondary school in the Ring Gaeltacht, in Co. Waterford, in 1959, was motivated by a desire on the part of some local people to preserve Irish as the spoken language of the area (O'Malley, 2011). Over previous decades, spoken Irish had gradually disappeared in other parts of the county where once it had been strong, including by the coast at Ardmore, and inland in the Sliabh gCua and Mágh Deilge regions, as well as just over the county boundaries in Sliabh Rua, Co. Kilkenny, Ballymacoda, Co. Cork, and Newcastle, Co. Tipperary. Irish language enthusiasts in Ring and adjacent Old Parish, where spoken Irish was still prominent amongst a sizeable proportion of the population, began to fear that if those young people who sought and were able to avail of a secondary school education continued to travel to schools in the relatively nearby towns of Dungarvan and Youghal, then Irish as a living language amongst the community might die out. Accordingly, on 15 August 1959, Méanscoil San Niocláis was opened.

Because of the absence of suitable textbooks in the Irish language to teach such subjects as geography, agricultural science and accountancy, Nioclás Mac Craith, the first principal of the school, and other staff members, wrote and produced their own during after-school hours. Also, an arrangement was arrived at with

County Waterford Vocational Education Committee to supply teachers who could teach domestic science through the medium of Irish. Local taxis transported small numbers of pupils from outlying areas, including Ardmore, which was 12 miles distant, Clashmore, which was 15 miles distant, and AGLISH, which was 20 miles distant. The hope was that by drawing pupils from such outlying regions the 'Ring and Old Parish Gaeltacht' district could be extended to reincorporate areas where spoken Irish had survived up to the late 1940s. To this end, Mac Craith and colleagues were also realistic in their approach, encouraging pupils who did not have fluency in Irish to achieve competence in the language in the early months of their school enrolment through the adoption of a bilingual approach to teaching, rather than expecting the same fluency of them as was possessed by their peers who lived in Ring and Old Parish, and who had attended the all-Irish medium Gaeltacht primary schools there.

A lay secondary school was also established in Castlegregory in County Kerry, in 1961, by Mrs. Síle Mulcahy and her husband, Áidán (O'Malley, 2011). They were both very conscious of the precarious state of the Irish language in the nearby Cloghán district. In setting up their school they sought to reverse the state of decline in the spoken language there and to foster the Irish language and culture amongst younger generations of students. They rented a local hall to house the school and the manager of a school in Tipperrary Town which was closing down, gave them their school furniture for free.

A minibus was purchased to transport students to and from school each day, the charge being 2 shillings and 6 pence per week per person to cover costs. Students became active participants in national Gaelic cultural events. When a priest, An tAthair Ó Laochda, was appointed as a curate to Cloghane, he began an Irish language revival campaign and generated a new enthusiasm for the traditional Gaelic culture of the area.

The final lay secondary school to be considered is Meán Scoil Mhuire, founded in the Béal Átha'n Ghaorthaidh Gaeltacht in County Cork, in 1959, by Mr. Fionnbarra Ó Murchú (O'Malley, 2011, p. 229). He arranged for mini-busses to bring students to school every day from surrounding districts. He also transported students in his own car from the district in which he lived.

By 1968, Meanscoil Mhuire had a total enrolment of 126 pupils. Amongst the extra-curricular activities of the students was taking part in Irish language plays, which were written and directed by their teachers. Other cultural activities included entering for, and winning awards in annual Gaelic cultural competitions of the communities and villages that promoted the use of the Irish language.

5. Conclusion

The introduction of «free second level education» in Ireland in 1967, heralded the rapid demise of the Catholic lay secondary schools across the country. The Department of Education considered that a minimum enrolment of 150 was what was required for a secondary school to be viable. Accordingly, most of the Catholic lay secondary schools were too small to benefit from State funding for expansion and their owners did not have the money to finance this themselves. Many were forced to close and today only a very small number of these schools remain.

The existence of the lay Catholic secondary schools for the period studied is indicative of a small yet interesting level of resistance to the hegemony of the clergy in education in Ireland at the time. For most of the nineteenth century, the Church had had to battle, first for official recognition and then to gain control over Catholic schools. Prior to independence, it had also made clear to the future leaders of the new state that it would not tolerate any interference with this control. The founders of the lay schools, however, found ways to surmount this situation by establishing secondary schools for those in whom the Church showed little interest, namely, the rural poor, including those from the minority Gaelic language tradition.

The owners of the lay secondary schools also played a small role in opening up the way to the eventual introduction of co-education amongst the majority of second-level schools in Ireland, something that for long had been resisted vehemently by the Church. Though the actual numbers of boys and girls availing of co-educational schooling in this way was very small when considered on a national basis, the increasing number coming to avail of it in rural Ireland helped people to come to realise that it was unlikely to eventuate in the dangers they had long been led to believe were inevitable.

The advent of the lay schools also constituted one of many developments that paved the way for a new approach to education that was to develop in Ireland from the middle of the 1960s, with the expansion of second-level schooling and the concurrent demise in the influence of the religious. Students, it is arguable, benefitted from being exposed to the broader attitudes that the founders and their colleagues had formed out of living lives that were more varied than those of their religious counterparts who were constrained by their religious vows. Those in the lay schools had also commenced engaged in meeting and interacting with the parents of their pupils on a daily basis long before this became the standard practice in the religious-run schools. To conclude, it is now apposite to restate our hope that others may engage in research in other countries that might shed some light on the extent, if any, to which what has been reported here, can be compared and contrasted with the situation in Ireland between the 1920s and the early 1960s.

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