

Don Bosco, trade union patron in Scotland: *how the scottish catholic teachers' guild took Don Bosco as their patron*

*William J. DICKSON**

Scotland and Catholics

Scotland became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, through the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and by the Treaty of Union that united the Parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707. Both measures were aimed at excluding Catholics from the crown and political power and education. After almost completely disappearing from public life in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Catholics in Scotland became a rapidly increasing minority in an expanding population in the years after the Irish Famine, rising from 146,000 or 5% of the population in 1851, to 10% in 1901, and to practically 15% or 748,000 by 1951 largely as a result of immigration from Ireland and natural increase and in what was perhaps more significant than the overall percentage, were heavily concentrated in the Central Industrial belt between Glasgow and Edinburgh.¹

Catholic Elementary Education

From the introduction of compulsory elementary education in 1872, the Catholic Community had to find the resources to build and staff schools of a sufficient standard to attract those government grants that were available to them so that from 1875 to 1885 the number of Catholic parochial schools rose from 93 to 150 and by 1894 had risen to 180 with accommodation for 60,000 children.²

Clearly staffing these schools with properly qualified Catholic teachers required a huge effort and the opening of the Dowanhill Teachers Training College by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1894 offered real hope for the development of a well-trained body of Catholic Women Teachers, as the Sisters already had at Mount Pleasant College in Liverpool since 1854.³

But the structure of the parish schools where each parish priest was effectively the employer and the manager naturally led to tensions and the teachers looking to assure themselves of their rights as employees. By 1890 there was already West of Scotland Catholic Teachers Association, which in a document dated 4th March 1891 set out their aims: 'to obtain a reasonable security of tenure of office for Teachers in Catholic schools and to foster a thorough 'esprit de corps' which cannot fail to be of considerable advantage in promoting the best interests of the teachers themselves and the schools in their charge.'⁴

* Salesiano, studioso della storia salesiana (Gran Bretagna).

¹ Darragh J, Catholic Population of Scotland, Innes Review, IV, 1 (1953) in TA Fitzpatrick, Catholic Secondary Education in the South West of Scotland before 1972. (Aberdeen University Press, 1986) p.13.

² Ibid. p.32.

³ T A Fitzpatrick ibid. p.32

⁴ Glasgow Ardiocesan Archive ED28/4

To become a member teachers had to be qualified and pay an annual subscription of 2/6d for ladies and 3/6d for gentlemen' which at that time was a considerable sum, given the average annual salary of a woman Head teacher was only £120 per annum.⁵

The Scottish Education Act 1918

Despite all this effort by the end of the First World War the Catholic Schools were in extreme difficulty, the growth of the Catholic population was unmatched by the numbers of qualified teachers, and classes of one hundred pupils with one teacher were commonplace. Despite this high levels of literacy and numeracy were achieved and teachers were highly regarded because of their closeness to the local community and their responsibility for the religious education of their pupils...'somehow school and church were the same thing'.⁶

In such conditions of penury, poor buildings and teaching equipment huge classes to cope with and many unqualified teachers...the teachers of those days hankered after a professional consciousness and to better their conditions and status by binding themselves together in associations to achieve their purposes...at one time three organisations often at cross-purposes were functioning at the same time....Gradually the futility of these uncoordinated efforts was realised and the result was the gradual formation of the Scottish Catholic Federation comprised mainly of teachers of Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. This more or less national organisation was granted representation on the Scottish Catholic Education Council and was recognised by the Scottish Education Department.⁷

The Education Act Scotland 1918, transformed the situation of Catholic Schools and teachers bringing them in from an impossible financial crisis to becoming a significant part of the State System of Education, where all the costs were covered by the Government and every teacher received the official state salary. In fact the transition period brought a significant crisis for the Teachers Associations. One group of teachers wanted to enter the Educational Institute of Scotland to assert their rights to equal pay and conditions but others felt that the hard won place of teachers in the Catholic community might be lost, leading to the founding of the Catholic Teachers Federation which absorbed all the various groups and ultimately joined the main National Teachers Association, the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Foundation of the Catholic Teachers Guild

In the aftermath of these early post-war struggles a fascinating new development was the emergence of the Scottish Catholic Teachers Guild, which undertook to develop the 'esprit de corps' into a deeper vocational self- understanding and look to the content and quality of religious education in primary schools and promote the cultural and social development of Catholic Teachers but which was not directly involved in labour disputes. Since the 1918 Education Act allowed for all the Catholic Schools to become part of the State System, with suitable guarantees of the distinctive religious ethos and education of the schools, it also meant that the Scottish Education Department became the Teachers Employer, not the Church.

⁵ Glasgow Archdiocesan Archive ED 28/4

⁶ TA Fitzpatrick *ibid.*

⁷ T A Fitzpatrick *ibid.* p. 199.

Another significant factor was the professionalization of the Teaching Profession. In 1920 a National Committee for the Training of Teachers was instituted which through its Provincial Committees would supervise the two Catholic Colleges. In 1924 graduation at University was required for all male teachers, primary and secondary, with the exception of specialists in Art, Music, Physical and Technical Education and for women the Junior Student system was abolished and the Higher Leaving Certificate was a compulsory requirement for entry into the teaching profession.⁸

‘As conditions in the schools improved, it began to be felt that although the professional and material interests of teachers were being looked after, something else was needed. By the early 1930’s the Catholic schools were staffed by an ever-increasing number of young men and women, well qualified academically and professionally but having no association with their Catholic colleagues other than through the EIS. Some other organisation it was felt, was needed to cater for their religious, cultural and social activities and to weld them together as a professional body. W.S Moore, FE Davies and other leaders of the moribund Federation realising that there were many purely Catholic educational problems with which the EIS could not deal enlisted the aid of Dr P. G.McGlynn, then a member of staff of the Humanities Department of Glasgow University and Rev Dr W. E. Brown, chaplain to the Catholic Students of the university and former lecturer in the History department. The idea of a Guild for Teachers on the model of the medieval vocational guilds began to take shape. The project had to be regularised by the official dissolution of the Federation and the approval of the Hierarch obtained’.⁹

On September 16th 1934 a meeting was called by Archbishop Mackintosh of Glasgow in the City Hall. A personal invitation to attend was issued to every Catholic teacher in the Archdiocese and 2,000 attended. The Guild of Catholic Teachers was formed with a membership in 1934-5 of 2,300 almost 100% of Catholic teachers in the Archdiocese and chose as its patron the recently canonised St John Bosco.¹⁰

Don Bosco as Patron of the Teachers Guild.

As its president was Dr Patrick McGlynn, one of the few Catholic lecturers at Glasgow University. He, it was, who promoted the figure of Don Bosco as the model for Catholic Teachers in the West of Scotland. He promoted a knowledge of Don Bosco using Fr A. Auffray’s Biography and managed to persuade the charismatic Canon Thomas Taylor, the founder of the most important Marian Shrine in Scotland at Carfin, to agree to the erection and dedication of the Statue of Don Bosco in the Grotto and probably wrote the words to a Hymn which was sung by every Catholic School child in the West of Scotland for the next 50 years. ‘*Thou who did befriend the friendless*’ is an anthem for the teachers of an immigrant working class community struggling to educate their children and themselves.

Dr McGlynn outlined the process by which the Guild had adopted Don Bosco as their patron in a pamphlet published by the Scottish Catholic. Glasgow Observer newspaper.

⁸ T A Fitzpatrick: Catholic Secondary Education in the South West of Scotland before 1972 (Aberdeen University Press, 1986) p 55/

⁹ TA Fitzpatrick, *ibid* p. 199.

¹⁰ TA Fitzpatrick *ibid* p.200.

The inauguration of the Guild was an attempt to re-unite the Catholic Teachers who had become extremely divided over the question of whether to merge their association with the Educational Institute of Scotland, the prevailing Scottish Teachers Professional Association.

Dr McGlynn in his lecture, in a section called A Mystery, wrote, '*On Easter Sunday 1934 Don Bosco was canonised, on the anniversary day, April 1st (1935) his statue was set up in the Grotto (at Carfin). Last Sunday it was unveiled. How it all happened it would be difficult to explain.*'

This spectacular celebration of the unveiling of Don Bosco's statue served two purposes, it marked the presentation of Don Bosco as a new saint, in the Church, calculated to appeal to a new generation not only of young people but to those most involved with them, their Catholic Teachers. It was also aimed at consolidating the new Catholic Teachers Guild which had arisen from the ashes of the two previous organisations the Catholic Teachers Association and the Federation. Dr McGlynn saw this as a heaven sent opportunity which had to be grasped and his account of the genesis of the celebration are intriguing.

There are no Salesians in Scotland. Though the Provincial Fr Tozzi paid a visit to the Grotto some years ago, the writer did not see him. Other shrines had been proposed for erection. An offering had been made for the statue of St Vincent, father of the Sister of Charity and of Society of St Vincent de Paul. There was also the promise of a statue of Blessed John Ogilvie, martyred at Glasgow Cross and Scotland's first Beatus since the days of Margaret, Scotland's Pearl.

How then did the newest saint in the Calendar, in these parts an unknown Italian, find his way to Carfin? It is perhaps as mysterious as is the choice made of him as the patron of the Guild of Catholic Teachers, instead of the great St Thomas Aquinas – the first proposal of many at its inception. Besides there was no donor. Subscriptions came in slowly and in small amounts. They are not even yet complete.

Evidently, continued Dr McGlynn, this did not suit Don Bosco. One fine day the missionary shrine receded into the distance. Within a month a vastly more imposing one on the same spot quite rivalling that of Francis and Therese sprang into being. At the head of a triple flight of stairs above the ruins of the mosaic sanctuary, Don Bosco stands, the Venerable Dominic Savio on one side and Cardinal Cagliari as a boy on the other.

The pilgrims were to be boys and on Sunday the boys were Scouts, a background such as the Saint himself would have dearly loved. But at his feet ...were the two thousand who greeted the Saint last Sunday. Was that why this man whose name was John and who was sent from God chose the Carfin Grotto to be what Fr Tozzi publically declared it on Sunday to be –his national shrine?

Behind the relic of Don Bosco walked Dr Brown with the escort of priests. When the circuit of the grounds had been completed the statue already had its setting of Scouts. The Nazareth stairway was lined with councillors of the CYMS. In front were five hundred members of Don Bosco's own Guild. Beyond in their hundreds to right and to left were the Boys Don Bosco loved.

Fr Tozzi unveiled the statue and Fr Cianciarone gave the address.'

The clear message of this very public act was to proclaim Don Bosco, not just as the patron of Boys but perhaps, much more significantly to promote him as a patron and inspirer of their teachers.

The celebrations continued next day in the McLennan Galleries in Glasgow with 500 members of the Guild present when Fr Tozzi SC delivered a brilliant address on the 'Life and Spirit of Don Bosco'.

Here we can see the focus that Dr McGlynn wanted to give to the new Guild. Instead of aiming at improving working conditions, this focussed on the inspiring teachers in their vocation. His account continued:

It was more than just a lecture. It was an eloquent exposition of the methods pursued by St John Bosco in the education of youth and to an audience of teachers it was a carefully prepared plan which must be of immeasurable assistance to them in the pursuit of their important calling. Fr Tozzi's talk laid before the audience the method pursued by the Saint in dealing not only with his pupils but with teachers and was itself a typical example of Don Bosco's method of leading by suggestion instead of driving. It is certain that every teacher present left the meeting imbued with a greater zeal for the work of teaching the young and secret vow to apply the methods typified by the wealth of anecdote applied by Fr Tozzi during his address.

Dr McGlynn had obviously prompted Fr Enea Tozzi, the Salesian Provincial to focus his address on the teaching methodology of Don Bosco, setting its historical context of working among poor youngsters which the teachers present could identify with.

Don Bosco the Teacher.

Referring to St John Bosco's childhood, Fr Tozzi showed how the saint had always been inspired to bring souls nearer to God by instructing his companions in the truths of their holy religion of which they had but scant knowledge because of a lack of teachers. He showed too that Don Bosco did everything in his power to attract the young people of Turin to him firstly in his early days by performing acrobatic and conjuring tricks for them and then as he grew older by entering into their games and remaining at heart a boy himself.

Even from his earliest days he used to write his own text books which when he was preparing them he read to his mother to whom he used to say, Mama Margaret, stop me when you do not understand. Suddenly in the middle of his reading she would stop him and say that she did not understand. He would then alter the statement and rewrite it in the very simplest language until it could be understood by all without difficulty.

Then in dealing with his pupils he always had an interest not only in a class of boys but in each individual and on innumerable occasions showed this by the course he pursued subsequently....On another occasion he recognised latent artistic talent in a child and had him study art. In later years the boy was the one who painted Don Bosco's picture.

It was this quiet manner and great gift of discernment which helped to make him such a success not only with his pupils but also with his masters (teachers).

With his pupils he used what he called the preventive system. He believed by keeping his pupils interested in good they would never turn to evil and by making school tasks like interesting games by his own peculiar ways he always found his boys willing to learn.

In the case of masters the same spirit of Christian charity was always manifest. Seldom if ever was he known to give a direct order. He would advise and give his opinion and then ask the person to try his way and let him know if it succeeded. To illustrate this charitable trait which was outstanding in every word and action of the saint, Fr Tozzi read a letter written by St John Bosco to Father Joseph Bertello, Prefect of Studies at the Mother House in Turin. Bertello was a brilliant scholar but a stern character who was having some difficulty with his pupils. It was typical that in trying to mould him into his own style should write in the following terms without a word of reproach, a letter which instances the extraordinary charity of the man:-

My dearest Bertello,

I am going to do what I can to awaken a love for study among your pupils. On your side do all in your power to cooperate with me.

1. Look upon them as your brothers; affection, loving patience, reverence – these are the keys to their heart.

2. Make them study what they are capable of- nothing more. Make them read and understand the text. Avoid wandering from the subject.

3. Keep asking them questions. Invite them to explain the text themselves, then to read it again- to read the text, then once more explain it.

4 Always give them encouragement never humble them. Praise when you can without ever showing contempt or scorn. Never manifest displeasure except when you use it as a punishment.

Try to practice this and let me know how it works. I will pray for you and yours

Believe me in Jesus Christ, Your faithful friend

Sac Giov. Bosco

Turin April 9th 1875

Deep rooted Charity.

He was continued the speaker, a living example of educative love and had a most extraordinary power over the boys with whom he came into contact. He never had any trouble in dealing with them and led them to do good for its own sake. He attracted them by all sorts of amusements in which he took part himself. And thus were established his Festive Oratories, his idea being that the spirit of joy should permeate his boys and that they should be led to good by showing them that religion did not mean the sacrificing of joy and amusement. Another and perhaps the greatest secret of his success was to keep the boys always occupied in a way suitable to their talents. . He always watched just what his individual pupil was suited for and worked accordingly and taught others to do the same. This is evidenced by the advice he gave to the Venerable Dominic Savio. Each child he said

required separate treatment. Teachers were just like tailors and the children were the cloth which was to be cut to suit each individual case.

Don Bosco's method was based wholly on charity of which St Paul says, Charity is patient is kind, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Hence continued Father Tozzi only a Christian can apply the Preventive System with success. Reason and Religion were the means by which the educator ought constantly to apply which he ought to teach and which he himself ought to practice if he wished to be obeyed and to attain his end....

Mussolini in a ministerial ordinance Nov 11 1925 gave all the teachers of Italy Don Bosco as an admirable model to be imitated and the actual syllabus of the training colleges of the whole nation places the Method of education of Don Bosco among the classic works of pedagogy.

Religion the knowledge of God and the Catholic Faith formed the main part of the curriculum of his classes and while that was very necessary then, it was even more so now when paganism was being spread by every means possible but particularly by the anti-religious press of Russia and other countries. Religion could not be divorced from education and although teachers had of necessity to look at such material things as salaries and pensions it must never be forgotten that the spiritual side of the work- the 'da mihi animas'- was the most important part.

Clearly Fr Tozzi had been briefed on the importance of emphasising the Religious dimension of being a teacher and its vocational rather than its material aspects.

Tozzi's Conclusion

Don Bosco was one who had a happy knack of getting his own way by various ingenious methods, went on the lecturer, and to demonstrate this he recounted yet another story of the great apostle of the young. Just after 1870 at a time when it was not permitted to shout Long live the Pope! Don Bosco wanted to impress loyalty to the Vicar of Christ on the minds of his boys and teachers and he did this with quiet ingenuity. He lined up a number of the boys in the campus before the college and played a game of follow the leader with them. After a time he made the boys stop dead and to the great delight of the others who were looking from the windows of the college the words: Long live the Pope were traced out in human letters before them. Don Bosco had done as he desired.

I ask you teachers concluded Fr Tozzi to follow the leader and he will also march your children to give glory to God. Follow Don Bosco in order that in the souls of your pupils God may ever reign.¹¹

This rousing address to the Catholic Teachers in 1935 clearly delineates Don Bosco as a model for teachers. His letter to don Bertello, seen by the early Salesians as one of the few university educated early Salesians, shows Don Bosco as an adviser to other professionals. This unusual view of Don Bosco was clearly adapted to the Scottish situation where the

¹¹ Glasgow |Observer April 20th 1935.

prevailing model of education was very different from that currently used in Italy. In Scotland the traditional use of the ‘Loghgelly Tawse’ or ‘leather belt’ for corporal punishment administered in the classroom on the hand of pupils of both sexes, was the normal method of instilling classroom discipline¹². The model of education that was proposed by Fr Tozzi and approved by the Guild of Catholic Teachers was clearly a very different one, based on Reason, and Religion.

With his direct appeal to the Religious motivation of Catholic Teachers and the careful guiding and pursuit of children’s interest and enthusiasm, Fr Tozzi demonstrated a deep understanding of Don Bosco’s preventive system and how it might appeal to a very different constituency from that of the Salesians themselves or those working within a Salesian school or Oratory. Here Fr Tozzi shows himself a master of adapting Don Bosco’s Preventive system to a different situation of lay teachers with their own traditions and situation but to whom Don Bosco could act as an inspiration in dealing with the largely poor Catholic children that came to their schools.

Dr McGlynn himself had clearly read ‘La Pedagogie d’un Saint’ by the French Salesian, Fr A Auffray and had published an account of these ideas in the Glasgow Observer in March 1936 had had also been responsible for persuading Canon Taylor to support the adoption of Don Bosco as the Guild’s Patron by taking him by air to Turin on their way to Rome so that Canon Taylor could see St John Bosco’s work at first hand at the Mother House of the Salesians at Valdocco where they were very well received. To this end he published the account that Canon Taylor had written of their pilgrimage to Turin and Rome made by the Scottish Catholic Teachers in 1935 as part of the Holy Year celebrations.

The Don Bosco Hymn

One of the abiding relics of the Guild is the Hymn to St John Bosco specially written for the Guild and first sung at the celebration we have just recalled. It is worth quoting in full:

Hymn to St John Bosco

***Thou who didst befriend the friendless, toiling here with heart so brave,
By thy love and labour endless True to God shall ever be.***

Refrain

***St John Bosco, guard and guide us, we our hearts now pledge to thee,
Grant that we whatever betide us true to God shall ever be.***

¹² The use of corporal punishment in Scottish Schools was all pervasive until the 1970’s when a series of legal judgements made its use unlawful.

*Our imperfect work perfecting, set our souls aflame with fire
All our thoughts and acts directing, that they may to God aspire.*

*For the young thy life was given, thou the poor didst hold most dear,
Now when thou are throned in heaven, help and bless thy children here.*

*Grant that we may sin defying, with the strength that Faith can bring
Bravely living, bravely dying, win the fight for Christ our King*

*Oft like thee at Mary's altar, let us crave her loving care
That our will may never falter |Help of Christians hear our prayer.*

Extra verse for Boys

Unto boys thou wert a father, Loving teacher, loyal friend

Grant that we may round thee gather at our earthly journey's end.¹³

While the language is consciously somewhat antique, yet the sentiments clearly echo the specific situation that Scottish Catholic Teachers found themselves in, with the prospect of the Communist and Nazi dictatorships already threatening the peace and liberty of the world. In his Presidential Address Dr McGlynn specifically addressed this issue:

‘In Germany with Catholic Elementary Schools with a child population of seven hundred and eighty thousand and staffed by over sixteen thousand teachers, two thousand of them being religious. Not one of these schools is left.’

‘Every day every week every month of our freedom from such direct oppression is a God given opportunity for us to prepare both ourselves and our children for the trials which are to come...Our children are stepping out into the world to-day have in many cases a terrible ordeal to face. They have a right to all the help that can be given....’

The sense of the sacred responsibilities of teachers is one that the Guild President chose to emphasise and the need for a Heavenly patron and protector.¹⁴

The guild had a considerable impact on the social and cultural development of the Scottish Catholic Teachers. As well as Drama, Sports and other recreational activities, the guild pursued a range of study groups to examine, the recent Papal Encyclical on the Christian

¹³ Glasgow Observer, Carfin Grotto notes, April 20, 1935. P.3.

¹⁴ Dr P McGlynn: Don Bosco's Catholic Teachers Guild, Presidential Address 1939. P.7

Education of Youth, Scholastic Philosophy, Plain Chant, history text books the use and misuse of films and to compile a book list for school libraries.¹⁵

Despite the War time pressures in 1947 the membership was at the high level of 2,100 teachers in the Archdiocese of Glasgow, the first of a series of National Congresses took place in Edinburgh in that year addressed by Mr Frank Sheed. 1947 also witnessed the first number of the Don Bosco Journal which continued to appear at first on a quarterly and then twice yearly basis till November 1966.¹⁶

In the 25 years after the War, the Guild declined with the gradual emergence of a much wider Catholic educated Middle Class, with the reorganisation of the Archdiocese of Glasgow into three new dioceses and the change in outlook that came with the advent of the Second Vatican Council and a Scottish Catholic community becoming more part of the Scottish main-stream society.

¹⁵ T A Fitzpatrick: Catholic Secondary Education, p. 200.

¹⁶ T A Fitzpatrick: Catholic Secondary Education, p.200.