



Teaching in Catholic Schools from the Perspectives of Lay Teachers, 1940-1980

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This paper seeks to address a gap in the literature regarding lay teachers and their role and status within Catholic schools, studies have been carried out investigating this from the perspective of teaching religious and the Catholic Church but have yet to fully investigate this from the lay teachers' perspectives themselves. The period 1940-1980 was chosen over many other periods of time not merely because this was an era of great change within the Catholic Church which impacted Catholic education globally, particularly with the occurrence of the Second Vatican Council; but also, because the opportunity to interview teachers from this era will not be available for much longer. Lay teachers from Adelaide, South Australia, were interviewed to learn about their perspectives on teaching in Catholic schools. The interviews were analysed using open coding and axial coding. It is hoped that in understanding the perspectives of these teachers, researchers and educators will gain a deeper knowledge of the role and status of the lay teacher in Catholic education from 1940 to 1980, broadening the context of the Catholic education system in order to enable a greater understanding of the system as it stands today.

Introduction

Although there have been studies on the perspectives of the teaching religious and of the Catholic Church on the role and status of lay teachers in Catholic schools, studies have yet to fully investigate the perspectives of lay teachers on themselves. The era 1940-1980 has been chosen as a particularly rich period to focus on. This was an era of great change within the Catholic Church which impacted global Catholic education significantly. The Second

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Vatican Council, from late 1962 through to 1965, heralded a change to the traditional Catholic mind-set and religious practices. Huge numbers of religious left the orders and a reduction in the number of vocations to religious life led to a smaller pool from which to employ teachers for Catholic schools; the lay teacher became a necessity to keep Catholic schools running. A number of teachers in Adelaide, South Australia, who were employed in Catholic schools during the period 1940-1980, have been interviewed to ascertain their perspectives on teaching within a Catholic school. The interviews were analysed using open coding and axial coding. The results will lead to a deeper knowledge of the role and status of the lay teacher in Catholic education from 1940 to 1980, this in turn will broaden the context of the Catholic education system which will enable a broader understanding of the system as it stands today.

Background

A trend in recent years in the study of Catholic education, both internationally and nationally, is to conceptualize it within the parameters of 'faith-based' schooling. The history of such schooling in much of the Western world from the middle of the 1800s to the present day is one of Christian-based schools being gradually replaced by state-run ones. Nevertheless, Christian-based schools continued to constitute a relatively strong minority group, with various religious denominations receiving various terms of support, including financial assistance, from the state though sometimes not without controversy, and even conflict. The nature of the campaigns undertaken was the focus of interest for many researchers in the first half of the 20th century. By the 1960s, however, academic interest in Christian schooling waned, influenced partly by the analyses of sociologists of religion who generally thought that such educational provision would soon disappear because, as they saw it, the world was in the grip of an irreversible process of secularization (Bruce, 2003, p. 42). As such, religion was being subtly ignored as unimportant in the academic and media worlds. Recently, however, it has become apparent that the gradual retreat of religion from public space in many European countries has not become a reality, with religion being very much

at the forefront of debate and activity. This, as Jackson (2007) put it, is partly due to the global attention it has received as a result of events of 11 September 2001. Equally, he recognised that positive events involving religion have had “an impact on public consciousness in relation to issues within civil society” (Jackson 2007, p. 27).

It is against such a background that the renewed focus on religious-based schooling, now more usually referred to as ‘faith-based’ schooling, needs to be considered. One area of interest has been the expansion of ‘fundamental’ Christian schools. Minority non-Christian schools have also received much attention, in part because they are viewed as somewhat exotic in terms of what they see as being non-negotiable in a number of areas, including school dress, pedagogical approaches and curriculum content. Equally, the resilience and growth of schools and school systems provided by the ‘traditional’, ‘mainline’ Christian churches merit scholarly investigation.

What characterises faith-based schools is that they “reflect a particular religious worldview in the way they are organised, in what they teach, and in the integration of faith and learning” (Sullivan 2006, p. 937). The media has become especially interested in the phenomenon. Concurrently, there have been calls for a renewed scholarly emphasis on a wide variety of contemporary issues in the field, including those of a curricular, pedagogical, management and leadership nature (Lawton & Cairns 2005; Luckcock 2007; Shah 2006), while not overlooking a number of related scholarly works that have appeared over the last two decades. For example, amongst the seminal works that have resulted in the case of Catholic schooling (the oldest tradition in Christian schooling) are those of Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) on the US, Grace (2002) on England, and Sweetman (2002) on New Zealand. However, they need to be accompanied by studies where the focus is very much on memories of the past in order to provide an understanding of the broader contexts out of which the current situation has emerged. Such studies, as Weisse (2007, p. 9) has put it, can then be drawn upon to facilitate dialogue aimed at preventing

conflict and supporting peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious society.

The latter argument holds for Australia, as for elsewhere. While a range of issues on Catholic education within the country need to be investigated, that of lay teachers in Catholic schools for the period 1940-80 is a particularly rich area upon which to focus. This was an era of great change within the Catholic Church which impacted significantly on Catholic education across the world, including Australia. The middle of this period, the 1960s, was characterised not only by challenges to the traditional Catholic mind-set and religious practices arising from the activities of the Second Vatican Council, but also by a major reduction in vocations to religious life and, consequently, a major reduction in teaching religious in Catholic schools. The period also includes the year 1973, which ushered in 'the Whitlam era' in Australia, with promises of massive Federal Government aid to education, including Catholic schools, a necessity at a time when Catholic schools were increasingly being staffed by lay teachers. To focus on the period 1940-80 is not to dismiss previous or subsequent periods as unworthy of attention, these periods merit major projects in themselves. However, there is an urgency to capture the memories of the teachers from this era while it is still possible.

The Catholic community in Australia was successful in maintaining and developing a substantial education sector independent of state education systems from the advent of legislation on education in all states in the latter half of the 19th century (O'Donoghue 2001, pp. 19-21). Since the early decades of that century the teachers who worked in the Catholic education sector were categorised into the 'teaching religious' (members of religious teaching orders of priests, brothers and nuns), who constituted the great majority, and the lay teachers who led what the Church viewed as the 'ordinary' unconsecrated life of being married, or single (O'Donoghue 2001, pp. 101-112). Relatively little is known about the perspectives and activities of those in the latter category. This project will make one contribution to the deficit by studying the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools in Adelaide during the period 1940-80.

Some scholarly works have emerged on teachers and teaching in Catholic schools in Australia but their main focus has been on the teaching religious (Kyle 1986; McGrath 1991; Prentice & Theobald 1991). Burley (1997, 2001) opened up the complexity of the area by drawing attention to the various categories of Catholic teachers; female teachers in Catholic schools included, for example, ‘choir nuns’, ‘lay nuns’ and ‘lay teachers’. The work of both ‘types’ of nuns as teachers in Australian schools has been examined by O’Brien (2005) and Jack (2000, 2003); and Scott (2000) and Hamilton (2000) have begun the work of investigating male teaching religious. Such contributions, while extremely valuable, also highlight the need for a much greater research project regarding the experience of what it meant to be a teacher in a Catholic school, a point also made forcefully by Hellinckx, Depaepe, and Simon (2009) in relation to the situation internationally. This is not to overlook the extensive number of histories on Catholic educational institutions undertaken in various Australian states. These are admirable attempts to provide some record of the activities of the teaching religious. In general, however, they tend to be hagiographic, presenting the work of the religious orders as divinely inspired Catholic altruism whilst ignoring the more secular perspective which would view their undertakings as the result of a complex interaction of political, social and economic forces. Furthermore, they tend to completely ignore the lay teachers who taught in Catholic schools. Thus, they perpetuate a practice of the Catholic Church in previous decades of viewing lay people in general as being of a lesser status than the *virtuoso*, those who were priests, brothers and nuns (O’Donoghue & Burley 2008; O’Donoghue & Potts 2004).

A major consequence of the dominance of the latter view in the past was that lay teachers tended to be employed in Catholic schools in Australia only when no teaching religious were available and they were excluded from school policy development. The teaching religious promoted the notion that lay teachers were of inferior rank. In particular, there was no consideration of the possibility that married life, or living as a single person outside of religious life,

might enhance one's qualities as a teacher and a school manager. However, while these and related lenses through which the Catholic Hierarchy and the religious orders viewed the lay teachers are reasonably well understood (O'Donoghue 2004), there are scarcely any studies on how the lay teachers viewed themselves.

Flynn (1993), in the only study that seems to be available regarding Australian lay teachers' perspectives on teaching in Catholic schools, asked teachers, "What have you come to appreciate and value about the Catholic school in which you are currently teaching?" (p.119) and found that overall teachers valued the strength of the community and the relational environment, i.e. the culture of the school, the most. He asked them what caused them the most concern and anxiety, top of the list were teachers' issues (regarding low pay, low status, being time poor, the school not being "Catholic" enough, loss of good teachers and the work load). School problems, youth issues, religious factors, religious education issues, economic problems of the school, family issues, C.E.O. problems, faith issues and society were also mentioned ranked in the order given. However, neglected in this study are the perspectives of the teachers on themselves as lay teachers in a Catholic school, perhaps as this research was undertaken at a time when the vast majority of teachers were lay persons.

Cardinal Pell (2007) has stated that "there is always value in knowing what... teachers... think of Catholic schools and why." (p.829). On this, O'Donoghue and Burley (2008) argue that a study on teachers of the past "still has the potential to challenge our thinking about teaching and the lives of teachers." (p.188). Warren (1989) also has stated:

If we understand teachers and schools in more intimate detail, we shall have more complete and compelling histories, and we ought to be able to ask more informed questions about the educational process, identify contextual influences more confidently, and sift more carefully for effects. We shall probably also have more heated debate or at least more earnest conversation among scholars, teachers and policymakers. (p. 389)

The study reported in this paper aimed to contribute to a deeper knowledge of the history of the role and status of the lay teacher in Catholic education, and thus contribute to the growing knowledge-base on the history of the lives of teachers of all types both nationally and internationally.

Research Approach

This project concentrated on the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools in Adelaide, South Australia, during the period 1940-80. It was during the middle of this period that major reforms took place within the Catholic Church (the Church) internationally (Hornsby-Smith 2000). These led to changes in the composition of the Catholic teaching force in many countries, including Australia. A major consequence is that nowadays young people being educated in Catholic schools in Australia are usually taught by lay teachers, the principals in their schools are lay women and men, and lay people predominate on their school boards. Equally, the presence of members of religious orders of nuns, religious brothers and priests as teachers and administrators in the schools, is minimal (O'Donoghue 2004, pp. 123-146). Yet, when many of the parents of those currently attending Catholic schools were themselves in schools the Catholic teaching force was dominated by the teaching religious. The turning point was the mid-1960s and the opening up of the Church to the modern world as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). This coincided with large numbers leaving the orders, a major drop off in new recruits and a consequent need to employ ever-greater numbers of lay teachers (Grace 2002).

The impact of the change on the lay teachers in Australian Catholic schools has not been the subject of much research. Certainly there has been some work on the official perspective of the Church and of the teaching religious on the role and status of the lay teacher both before and after the Second Vatican Council (O'Donoghue 2004, pp. 123-146). This work, however, has not been complemented by research projects aimed at investigating the lay teachers' own perspectives on their lives in the last years of the heyday of the teaching religious and the early years when they were

being rapidly replaced, how the lay teachers carried out their work in light of those perspectives, and the relationship between their perspectives and the wider socio-historical structure. In seeking to address this deficit, the investigation is influenced by a belief that in order to understand the present situation one must look to how we got here, including investigating the perspectives of those that paved the way.

The aim of this study was to generate theory about the perspectives of lay school teachers on teaching in Catholic schools in Adelaide, South Australia, between the years 1940 and 1980. This requires a method of investigation that allows for the interpretation of social phenomena, therefore the study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism has the view that the individual and society are inseparable entities and, as such, in order to generate an understanding of the individual there needs to be an understanding of the society in which they live. O'Donoghue (2007) suggests also that the society in which an individual is a member can only be understood when there is an understanding of the individual. Therefore, interpretivist research is involved with investigating the everyday activity of individuals and society, the interactions between individuals and the negotiation of meaning in these interactions. In particular, the principal research questions, in which the concept of 'perspective' is central, are derived from 'symbolic interactionism', a social theory which constitutes an appropriate theoretical framework for projects aimed at generating rich data of the type sought here. This long-established research tradition, which has been prominent at least during two periods in the last one hundred years (Ritzer 1994), has over the last twenty years been reinstated once again as a central position within contemporary social theory (Charon 2001; O'Donoghue 2007; Prus 1996).

While it has taken on various nuances, symbolic interactionism is still underpinned by three central principles made explicit by Blumer (1969):

1. Human beings act toward ‘things’ on the basis of the meanings that the ‘things’ have for them;
2. This attribution of meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous process. The symbols are gestures, signs, language and anything else that may convey meanings;
3. The meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. (Blumer 1969, p. 2)

It is on the basis of actions taken in accordance with these principles that ‘perspectives’ or ‘frameworks through which people make sense of the world’, are formed.

Blumer’s principles of symbolic interactionism were fundamental in arriving at the three major research questions that shaped the study. His concept of ‘perspectives’ is central to the first research question, namely, what were the ‘perspectives’ of lay teachers in Catholic schools in Adelaide during the period 1940-80 regarding what it meant to be a teacher? Also, his principle that human beings act toward ‘things’ on the basis of the meanings that the ‘things’ have for them, is central to the second research question, namely, how did the lay teachers carry out their work in light of those perspectives? ‘Things’ covers a range of phenomena, from the concrete (people, material objects and institutions) to the abstract, which includes the situations in which people find themselves and the principles that guide human life. The third research question, namely, what was the relationship between the perspectives of the lay teachers and the wider socio-historical structure? is based on the notion that such conditions as “time, space, culture, economic status, technological status, career history and individual biography” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 103) can act to either facilitate, or constrain the action/interactional strategies taken within a specific context by an individual or a group. Coupled with this is the assumption within symbolic interactionism that where these conditions do act to facilitate action/interactional strategies they have to be managed by the individual or group.

It is recognised that this is not the only valid approach to engaging in research on the substantive area of interest here. Rather, the position taken is that it has a very significant part to play alongside other approaches. In particular, it can lead to the development of the micro-perspectives necessary for those interested in investigating the area through research projects based on other frameworks, including structuralism, feminist theory and critical theory.

As the study was undertaken within the theoretical perspective of social interactionism, a large number of participants was not a necessary prerequisite to generate theory and maintain the study's value (O'Donoghue 2007). The participants were lay teachers in Adelaide who taught in Catholic schools in the period 1940-1980. In total, nine individuals who were lay teachers during the period were interviewed. The interviewer's access to personnel, printed sources and archival material through the Catholic Education Offices facilitated their identification. While seven of the participants were Catholics, two non-Catholics were also deliberately selected. Between them all they had taught both in schools for relatively well-off section of the Catholic population as those for the less well-off.

The choice of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method had provided some scaffolding to each interview. This allowed for some flexibility, with the participants being able to pursue topics and themes of interest to themselves. Finally, grounded theory approaches to data analysis were adopted.

Three themes were generated from the data collected in the study. These themes are as follows:

1. Matters relating to Lay Teachers within schools;
2. Matters relating to Teaching Religious within schools; and
3. Matters relating to the running of the Schools.

Each of the three themes is now considered in turn.

Theme One: Lay Teachers within schools

The first theme generated relates to the matters surrounding becoming and being a lay member of staff including recruitment, career, autonomy, having a voice and financial issues.

Recruitment of Lay Teachers

There were three categories into which lay teachers fell in regard to their recruitment to Catholic Schools:

- ***Applied.*** Some lay teachers applied for a job. On this, one participant stated: “Mercy School A is the only job that I have applied for.” Another participant recalled as follows: “So I went into the Catholic Education Office then here and said, ‘I’ve got these qualifications’ ... so I think I was offered eight jobs, nine jobs, pick a job sort of thing”.
- ***Approached schools.*** Other teachers approached a school directly. One teacher recalled his experience in this regard: “I walked up to the school and I spied a guy in his clerical garb... and I just told him my situation and he asked me to wait for a few minutes and then he came back and said, ‘Well I’ll just get rid of a guy, you can start on Monday”.
- ***Approached by school.*** Most commonly, teachers were approached by a school to offer them the role. Regarding this, one recalled being contacted by a principal who was a nun: “She phoned me and said, ‘I think you’re not happy where you are. Would you [work for us]”’. Another participant recalled her first job offer, stating: “I was invited by the Mother Prioress to meet with her ... and when I got there... after a bit of argy-bargy invited me to teach at [her school]”.

Some recollections make it clear that there was an air of desperation around their appointment, particularly post-Vatican II, when numbers of religious dwindled. One stated: “Sister Bernard ... rang

me at three o'clock in the morning in Italy to ask me if I would go and teach..." Such situations, it seems, arose particularly in relation to the teaching of specific subjects: "I ran into a friend and she said, 'Oh my God, we need someone to teach Italian and French to Year 9s and 10s'." Another stated: "The science teacher was really important and so was the maths person because there weren't any nuns who could do that". Another yet again recalled: "I think they realised at Dominican School A that at that time, they had big academic gaps. And they were really pleased to have people to fill them".

Participants also noted that the schools were so desperate for teachers they could demand their own terms of employment. On this one commented: "I said I'd only be able to do it if I can work from 9 'til 10:30 in the morning ... they changed the timetable for me". In similar vein, another stated: "I said, 'If I'm going to do it, I'll do it for two whole mornings'. They were very happy for that and that's what I did 'til 1979".

Career aspirations

Lay teachers fell into two categories regarding career, many chose teaching because there were jobs available. Others, however, said that they had had some had aspirations "to get to the top". Typical comments on this were that "there were some interested in teaching as a career and that others just needed that job" and that "I absolutely knew from the very first day I did prac teaching, I was going to be a principal".

Autonomy

It was recalled that male and female religious orders differed in the autonomy they allowed lay teachers.

- ***Female Autonomy.*** Lay teachers employed in schools run by female religious orders perceived themselves as being "respected" and "trusted" and said that they were given full autonomy over all aspects of teaching. This included

freedom in curriculum planning and delivery, in relation to acquiring resources, and in the organization of excursions. On this, one stated: “I had absolute freedom in choosing the books”. Another recalled: “You had this autonomy which to me represented respect”. Another yet again stated: “We had a tremendous amount of freedom within the formulating of programs and going out on excursions”. One even went so far as to state: “the freedom for us to be creative as teachers... was absolutely incredible”.

- **Male Authority.** The participants who taught in schools run by male religious orders felt that they did not have full autonomy and said that they perceived the religious staff in charge as “authoritarian”. A typical comment on that was as follows: “I had a bit of trouble in fact in some cases because what they wanted to teach wasn’t exactly what I wanted to teach.” Another stated: “I asked the Principal could I have a particular priest come in and speak to the boys about his trip to China ... ‘Oh no, no. You can’t do that’. Well, eventually the Principal let him come but he came into the room himself just to make sure everything would be OK”.

The Voice of the Lay Teacher

Pre-Vatican II, lay teachers did not recall having staff meetings where they were able to voice their opinions on the running of the school: “I had no sense of things being consultative and I had no sense of actually having a voice...”. Post-Vatican II, and particularly in schools run by female religious orders, however, lay teachers said they had a voice and that they were listened to. Staff meetings became a regular occurrence as well as informal ‘chats’ allowing lay teachers to have a voice: “Certainly at staff meetings we were given the chance to put in our two bobs’ worth, absolutely. Sister Bernard used to call you in for little talks...”.

Pay/Superannuation/Trade Unions

It was well known that teachers at Catholic schools were paid lower salaries than their counterparts in other schools. The religious themselves were not receiving a salary and, as the numbers of lay teachers rose, paying lay teachers became an increasing expense for the order. However, some religious orders, it was recalled, tried to respond positively: “When equal pay started to come in, they... started incrementally to pay equal pay with men... that was quite advanced because not all the private schools paid equal pay immediately”. Also, unions were established to lobby for payment regulation: “I was involved in setting up... the Public School Teachers Union... persuading ... Catholic schools to sort of embrace a more regulated system of payment and so on”.

As lay teachers became more common in Catholic schools the question of superannuation cropped up. At first, lay teachers were unsure about the morality of asking the religious orders to contribute to a superannuation fund: “One lay staff member mentioned that we should have some sort of superannuation ... I couldn’t be in that because the Sisters worked for nothing. It wasn’t right that they should have to put in money for our superannuation.” However, as lay teachers took on roles of authority within Catholic schools, they began to receive contributions to their superannuation fund.

Theme Two: The teaching religious within the schools

All participants had perspectives on the teaching religious within the schools, including particular perspectives on the religious order to which they belonged and their roles as principals of the schools. Recruiting pupils to the religious life was mentioned, as was the sexual abuse scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church in recent times.

Teaching Religious as Principals

Before Vatican II concluded, Catholic schools run by a religious order usually had the Superior of that order as the principal of each school. This, as some lay teachers saw it, was sometimes to the detriment of the school and its students: “A nun who was living in the past and who just had no idea at all about how a school was run, was often in charge. As a result, the education product was not being delivered”. The Superiors were seen as often having been authoritarian and as having had no consultation with any teachers regardless of whether they were lay or religious: “They were authoritarian, they definitely were. The decisions were just made by the Superior or by the principal who often was the Superior”.

After the conclusion of Vatican II, there was a slow movement of religious away from the top roles. Towards the latter end of the period researched, lay teachers necessarily began to take on the role of principal but not, as some recall, before a last-ditch attempt was made to keep teaching religious at the top: “Brother Keith was the head honcho and there was no doubt about that. A lay person had challenged him for the principalship. Brother Keith’s response when he got the job was simply to remove him”. Sometimes, it was argued, what took place was regardless of whether it was in the best interest of the school, “They were too young to be principals; they had no skills base but they were effectively all that was left”. And even after the principal’s role went to a lay person, in many schools, it was held that religious still had a say in the running of the school.

The Religious Order

- ***“Leaving in Doves”***. The crucial factor in the need to recruit additional lay teachers in Catholic schools was the falling number of religious. Some religious were now finding occupations other than teaching: “After the Vatican Council everybody was asked to discern what their particular gift was and to follow their particular gift in ministry and so a whole lot of people who had entered – with their religious vocation but not necessarily a vocation

to teach – then began to discern madly what they would like to do and a lot of them went into some sort of social work or parish work”. A large number of religious also left their orders completely, thus diminishing the pool from which to recruit teachers. Lay teachers were aware of this and made comments on it like the following: “And of course the religious were moving out in spades at that stage”, and “The religious were starting to disappear. In knowing a number of them though, many of them would say to me that they never recognised that or thought of it as a problem”. Accordingly, it was argued, if one was willing to work in a Catholic school alongside the religious, that “was a time when I could get into any Catholic school”.

- ***Different Order, Different Approach.*** Lay teachers perceived their religious colleagues differently depending on which religious order was running the school.
 - **Pre-Vatican II.** Prior to the changes initiated by Vatican II, religious orders were seen as to be authoritarian. Lay teachers were led to believe that, they were only employed to teach and should not have a say in the running of the school. Also, at this time, members of religious orders were not allowed to socialise. This meant that lay teachers did not tend to form a bond with their religious colleagues; “Well, the Brother Principal set the agenda but it was the 1970s. I don’t know that it would have been any different in any other school”; “We just were in and out, in and out to do what we had to do”; and “I had no sense of things being consultative and I had no sense of actually having a voice...”.
 - **Post-Vatican II.** As changes began to filter through, post-Vatican II, three types of orders running schools were perceived as having emerged:

- *Approachable/Authoritarian* - The first type was an order that was perceived as approachable whilst maintaining authority. These were male orders such as the Dominican Fathers: “I have to say that the head at the time I respected and admired and I liked what he did and he was ‘up here’ you know... so he was a leader”; “I mean the headmaster was terrific but he was the headmaster. He’d set his vision. He also had gravitas”; “The Fathers would invite my husband down for tea because he was inconvenienced because I wasn’t there. Oh, it was great, great hospitality, great social interaction”; and the Christian Brothers, who had “good [interaction] between Brothers and staff...” while also being perceived as being authoritarian.
- *Consultative* - The second type of religious order was that perceived as having been very open and taking a much more consultative approach with their lay teachers. These were the Dominican nuns in particular, who were seen as “well-educated”, “broad-minded” and “friendly” and gave plenty of opportunity for lay teachers to have their voice heard both formally and informally. On this it was stated: “We were listened to at staff meetings. I would say that we had input formally to a limited extent, but informally, I think she was very wise and took on board all sorts things”; “...there were staff meetings and coffee mornings”.
- *Authoritarian/Consultative* - The third type of religious order, according to participants, was one that sat in between the two types described above, namely, authoritarian but beginning to

give lay teachers a voice, though not without meeting some resistance. The Jesuits were seen as falling into this type. The view was that they were “left wing” and “individualists”, who bred lawyers, “were very strong in the arts – in English, history, in languages”. Their pupils achieved great academic success: “their results are always fantastic”. The principals were recalled as having taken a hands-on approach to the running of their schools: “he was around and he came into classes and observed lessons”. Staff meetings “became more common later as there were more lay teachers”.

Lay teachers also perceived the Jesuits as allowing them freedom to develop their own curriculum but not without some controversy at times: “I had a bit of trouble. What they wanted to teach wasn’t exactly what I wanted to teach”. These men who had not had much, if any, interaction with females, until recently, were also perceived as maintaining an awkwardness when it came to dealing with female matters such as pregnancy. On this, one female lay teacher commented as follows: “The principal never mentioned it. I’m getting bigger and bigger and bigger, very fecund, probably the result of carnal relations and he was a Brother and wouldn’t talk about it and I thought: ‘If you’re not going to talk about it, I’m not going to either.’ So, I never mentioned it to him, I just kept coming in and out, in and out and those were the days when you were supposed to leave about six weeks before the baby was due. No. Nah, nah. I’ll do if he tells me I have to do but I’m enjoying this so I’m in and out, in and out. Anyway, I had Harold in

the first week of the May holidays and I went back at the end of the holidays”.

- ***The Lay Principal and Teaching Religious.*** Perhaps as a reflection of the religious wanting to push against the changes that were inevitably occurring as a result of Vatican II, relationships between lay principals and the religious, it was recalled, were often rocky. Also, many religious left schools when a lay person became a principal. One former lay principal recalled the response of a former religious principal as follows: “Carl and I, male and female, running the school and it was obvious we were there for a while. So, it was going to be our way or the highway and it was the highway”.
- ***Freedom Post-Vatican II.*** Those participants who recalled a time before the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965, perhaps during their own schooling or when they themselves were teaching, were aware of a noticeable difference in the amount of freedom the members of religious orders came to have from then onwards. Two types of changes perceived in this regard were physical freedoms and social freedoms.
 - **Physical Freedoms.** Physical freedoms manifested themselves in changes such as those noted by a participant who stated: “After all the changes, they began letting the Sisters go home in turn to see their families. Sisters were allowed to live outside the convent in ordinary houses. They nearly all had their own cars and they stopped wearing the habit”.
 - **Social Freedoms.** Social freedoms, it was recalled, manifested themselves in the members of religious orders’ relationships with each other, with lay teachers and with pupils. Prior to Vatican II, relationships between members of a religious orders and any person (including members of the same order) were discouraged. After Vatican II, personal relationships

were allowed to develop. On this, the relationships that developed between religious and lay teachers and pupils were perceived as very positive. However, the relationships that developed between members of the religious orders themselves were perceived to have been strained: “Yes, there was some socializing with Brothers but that was after you knew them. A couple of the principals I had with Christian Brothers were not like that at all. They wouldn’t socialise until they were approached in a different way and some of the early ones, for example, in the early 1970s were telling me that they wouldn’t even read a newspaper.” In a similar vein, one commented: “When I was with Christian Brothers, frequently if we had evening meetings, I would stay and have dinner with them. They were very gracious that way and with the De La Salle Brothers it was the same, but what absolutely surprised me was that as a group of men they were dysfunctional. When they sat down to dinner, for example, they would slag off at each other across the table”. On this, one participant concluded as follows: “They were in the one community and they fought like cat and dog. It was like an absolute hell hole down in the convent dining room at night”.

- **Charity.** Charity was always, it was recalled, a notable part of life in a Catholic school. It was reflected in being part of the curriculum of schools as a ‘community service’ that pupils undertook: “A great range of religious activities went on. Like a van that went around the park there feeding the destitute and all that type of thing”. Also, it was perceived as something informal that went on regularly: “We had processions of people coming into the grounds. Sometimes you looked and thought ‘Bloody hell, who are these people?’ receiving handouts or comfort or whatever from the nuns.”

- **Recruitment of pupils to the religious life.** Catholic schools had always been perceived as a venue in which it was possible to recruit more members to a religious order and participants knew of those who had been recruited in this way before Vatican II. As one of them stated: “When he was about 12 years of age, a visiting Brother said that to be a Brother was the only way we could save your soul and he said that’s why he became a Brother”. At the same time, most said that they did not witness any blatant recruitment of pupils.
- **Sexual Abuse.** The sexual abuse scandal that has recently rocked the Catholic Church had, they claimed, affected participants’ memories of the relationship they had with the religious with whom they worked. Typical comments on this were as follows: “Yeah, they were a great group which made it all the more horrifying when you found out what some of them had been doing”; “It’s actually quite sad because there were a number of the staff who have subsequently been charged with sexual abuse which is really disturbing”; and “So when you think back to what the relationship was like, it gets coloured by the fact that some of these people were – and so that’s been really confronting”.

Theme Three: School

The third theme relates to issues regarding the school at which a lay teacher taught. A number of themes were generated on this. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

Ethos

Effectiveness of Catholic schools is one of the most researched areas of Catholic education; the ethos (or ‘feel’) of a Catholic school is seen as being a contributing factor to its effectiveness. Participants spoke in similar vein. They said that they viewed their

schools as being “happy”, “caring”, and “peaceful”, and as having strong discipline: “The parents always said, ‘We’ll send them to the Sisters, they’ll straighten them out’”. Nevertheless, corporal punishment, it was said was employed: “I knew, because the boys would tell me so-and-so had just hit them”. Lay teachers said they either accepted it, on the grounds that “it was the times”; or said they attempted to stop it from occurring: “I did say once I think it was to the principal, I said ‘Look, it’s just not necessary. You don’t need to do this. I know I’ve got senior classes but I have taught at a high school, and a very rough high school and I know that there are other ways’”. Paradoxically, it was also stated that pupils were taught to respect others and treat people as they wanted to be treated themselves. On this, one participant commented as follows: “There were many talks at assembly how they were to regard children with disabilities, namely, as people, and to treat them with respect”. Also, in recollecting her own Catholic schooling, one participant stated: “We were told we had to respect our teacher and there was no mucking around in her classes. We’d get into a lot of trouble if we weren’t polite to these teachers”.

Curriculum

It has been mentioned that lay teachers usually found they had autonomy in the development and deliverance of their subject specialties. There are three subjects that lay teachers discussed in more detail, namely, religious education, sex education, and sports.

- ***Religious Education.*** Of those lay teachers who taught religion, those who were employed in this capacity towards the latter half of the period investigated were required to get an accreditation in teaching religion. Lay teachers stated that they responded very positively to this: “I thought that was impressive, that everyone had to be not just a Catholic but you had to be qualified”. They also claimed that as the teaching religious left schools the religious aspect to the curriculum became stronger, perhaps as an attempt to maintain the ‘religiousness’ of the now, ‘religious-less’ school. It was also recalled that

religious principals did not always employ teachers of the Catholic faith. On this, the Dominican nuns were seen as having been very open, putting priority on choosing the best teachers regardless of their faith. Also, it was stated that non-Catholic teachers sometimes taught religion.

- ***Sex Education.*** Sex Education was very restricted pre-Vatican II. Girls and boys were kept separate in high schools and were told to maintain that separation. What sex education took place was summarised as follows: “In the mid-1950s there was sex education. The school chaplain used to come in and say things like ‘Girls you must never sit on a boy’s lap’. And we had no idea why, mind you”. As increased freedoms came with the conclusion of Vatican II the Dominican nuns in particular were seen to have “moved with the times”. Now, they insisted that sex education was to be a topic for lay teachers to tackle. One lay teacher recalled the requirement of her in this regard as follows: “I was approached by the mother superior to go in and do a couple of sessions with the upper secondary school girls, talking to them about boys and where they could get help for sex education. I mean, we didn’t go into the nitty gritty of it, but the girls could ask us anything they liked. There were no nuns in the room”.
- ***Sports.*** In Catholic boys’ schools playing sports was a significant part of school life but not, it was recalled, to the detriment of academia: “The school was male dominant, sports orientated but with the headmaster having a very strong academic and culture aesthete whilst he was pushing the first 18 football team”. Lay teachers also perceived that there was an expectation from male religious that one would participate in extra-curricular sporting activities.

Facilities

Lay teachers noted that Catholic schools, in the earlier part of the era researched, had very basic facilities. The themes highlighted in

this regard were centred on the staff room and on resources for teaching.

- **Staff Room.** Catholic schools were often located near the living quarters of the religious. Therefore, there was usually no requirement for the teaching religious to have a staff room at the school. This meant that the first lay teachers employed in Catholic schools had no room to which they could retire to get away from their pupils. On this, one participant recalled the lay teachers having to use the school library as their retreat area: “At recess time, the nuns in the convent would bring in morning tea for both Miss Wilkins and Madame Dubois. But they didn’t have a staff room”. Nevertheless, there was agreement that as the number of lay teachers grew, all schools provided them a staff room.
- **Resources.** Lay teachers starting out in Catholic schools found the resources limited: “The conditions in the place when I got there were absolutely primitive”. They held that they had to create or buy what was required. This brought some of them, they held, into conflict with the teaching religious. Regular comments on this were as follows: “I had to fight pretty much all the way to get better facilities and so on”; “We used to mainly have to manufacture our own notes. There wasn’t much in the way of helpful books”; and “you mostly prepared the materials yourself”.

Recruitment of pupils

As Catholic schools are mainly funded by school fees it was important to keep enrolment numbers high, particularly as the number of paid, lay teachers increased. Schools responded to dwindling numbers in two ways:

- **Promotion.** One method of actively responding to dwindling numbers, it was stated, was to actively promote the school. On this, one teacher stated: “Part of our duty as Year 8 teachers was to go and visit these schools towards

the end of Year 6 and early in Year 7 to tell them how wonderful we were and to put forth our spiel so that we always had clientele”.

- **Adaptation.** The second method of actively responding to dwindling numbers, it was recalled, was to open up the schools to new clientele. In one participant’s recollections, this involved opening up an all-boys’ school to girls and also having younger class groups than previously by “starting the school at Grade 1 and adding a pre-school before that and bringing in girls right from the very start”.

Conclusion

This project has been offered as an attempt to fill a lacuna regarding the perspectives of lay teachers who taught in Catholic schools in Adelaide immediately before and during the era of great change within the Catholic Church, namely 1940-1980. Hopefully this will stimulate further studies into the perspectives of lay teachers in Catholic schools both in other geographical areas and in other eras, including the present one. It is only a small segment of the research that needs to be undertaken if a full picture of what it is like to be a lay teacher in a Catholic school, both in the present and the past is to be generated.

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