

Ideology and Accommodation: The Thomas Report and Catholic secondary education in New Zealand



Jenny Collins

Massey University

Catholic education authorities have been described as 'the most vociferous critics' of the 1944 Thomas Report and its new 'common core' curriculum for New Zealand secondary schools. Yet the Catholic response was not a fixed one, rather it evolved as a result of extensive discussions and in the light of negotiations with the state. The issue to be highlighted in this paper is that faced with a major new state initiative in secondary education, a well organised but diverse minority group was able, after wide-ranging consultations among Catholic education groups and ensuing protracted discussions with Dr C. E. Beeby, the state Director of Education, to negotiate a curriculum that was acceptable to the Catholic education hierarchy.

Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licensed copy. Further copying and communication prohibited except on payment of fee per Copy or Communication and otherwise in accordance with the licence from CAL to ACER. For more information contact CAL on (02) 9394 7600 or info@copyright.com.au

Introduction

Commentators have described the New Zealand Catholic education authorities as the most vociferous critics¹ of the 1944 Thomas Report and its new common core curriculum for secondary schools. Yet to dismiss the Catholic response as a reactionary stance² fails to acknowledge a key factor which I wish to address in this paper: that the Catholic response was not a fixed one, rather it evolved as a result of extensive discussions within their educational community and in the light of negotiations with the state. The problem is that whilst many commentators mention Catholic opposition to the Thomas Report, they tend to over-generalise it as merely conservative. As a consequence they understate the complexities inherent within the Catholic position. But more significantly, earlier commentators also miss the opportunity to look at the way educational politics actually worked in this crucial instance. The issue to be highlighted in this paper is that faced with a major new state initiative in secondary education, a well organised but otherwise quite diverse minority group is finally able, after wide-ranging consultations among Catholic education groups, followed by confrontations between state educational authorities and the

Catholic hierarchy and the ensuing protracted discussions which reflected a willingness to compromise on both sides, to successfully negotiate an acceptable solution. Had this solution not been achieved, then the alternative may have been a separate curriculum for Catholic secondary schools.

Before examining the Catholic reactions to the Thomas Report, it is necessary for readers to understand the context and contents of the Thomas Report together with why both the Labour Government and C. E. Beeby, its Director of Education, were so committed to it. By 1935 the extension of free secondary schooling to all children and the raising of the compulsory school leaving age to fifteen were key features of the newly elected Labour Government's plans for the social and economic reconstruction of New Zealand life.³ The 1936 abolition of the Proficiency Examination which had limited entry to secondary education constituted the first step. A further opportunity came in 1942 with the movement of the university entrance examination from the third to the fourth year and the introduction of a system of accrediting. Dr C. E. Beeby, the Director-General of Education noted, however, that the new freedom ... though less than some had hoped for, was greater than many schools were prepared to use.⁴ At the same time the government wanted to assure the public that changes in educational policy would not disadvantage the needs of the academic minority of pupils.⁵

In November 1942, the complex problem of how to reorganise the curriculum of the secondary schools was referred to a consultative committee under the chairmanship of William Thomas, a former rector of Timaru Boys High School. Beeby prepared a long and careful memorandum for the first meeting of the committee which set the task in the context of government policy to maintain high academic standards for the scholarly but to ensure a full and realist education to fit the bulk of the population.⁶ The committee, recruited under Beeby's direction, was representative of a broad spectrum of parties interested in secondary education. There were, however, key omissions; there being no primary, intermediate or Maori members. Crucially the committee also failed to include a representative of the Catholic schools.

The Thomas Report, which was made available to the public in early 1944, was premised on the need for a careful compromise between the rights of the State and those of schools.⁷ It proposed a common core curriculum that would cater for the non-academically minded as well as providing for the interests of the intellectually bright minority.⁸ In contrast to the selective, separatist forms of secondary schooling adopted in England and Wales after 1944, the Thomas Committee favoured a comprehensive secondary system where students would study a common

core curriculum including art, music and physical education for their first two or three years. A School Certificate awarded on the basis of a Department controlled external examination, was expected to be attempted at the end of four years. English would be compulsory and students would select three or four other subjects from a wide range of subjects including practical ones.⁹

Reaction to the Thomas Report

Catholics were not alone in expressing disquiet over the implications of the Thomas Report. The Association of Heads of the Registered Secondary Schools of New Zealand expressed cautious approval of the curriculum's aim to meet the needs of the average pupil while raising questions about the suitability of History, Social Studies and General Science for the limited capabilities of some pupils. They noted that the Report had failed to take into account the inter-relation between Primary and Post-Primary curricula and that it lacked emphasis on Christian principles and truths.¹⁰ Some commentators thought that the Committee had assigned too much importance to craft subjects, fearing that foreign languages, as well as other academic subjects would soon become marginalised. The main objection to the compulsory core curriculum was that it would result in a levelling down effect for academic students.¹¹ William Anderson, the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, denounced the educational philosophy and practice underlying the Thomas Committee recommendations in a pamphlet called *The Flight from Reason in New Zealand Education*. He prophesied that only parents wealthy enough to send their children to Australia or England would be able to gain what had hitherto been the right of all, a grammar-school education.¹²

The initial Catholic response to the Thomas Committee report was marked by caution. At a meeting of Catholic Teachers at the Sacred Heart Convent in Remuera, Brother Borgia (Marist Brother and Headmaster of Sacred Heart College) thought that it savoured too much of theorists and enthusiasts, Bishop Liston saw some potential advantages in the new freedom offered to schools while Dr Terry, the Director of Catholic Education in the Auckland Diocese, complained about the tendencies and trends of present-day educational naturalism.¹³ The meeting re-recognised advantages in the raised leaving age, as well as freedoms offered by choice and treatments of topics in English and Social Studies.¹⁴ It identified potential difficulties in staffing and resourcing an expanded secondary system and suggested a central Catholic Training School to meet an anticipated demand for more qualified Catholic secondary teachers.¹⁵

By early 1944 the Catholic press began to identify a conflict of values between the proposed reforms and Catholic principles. *The New Zealand Tablet* called for Catholic educators to examine

not only how far (the reforms) will help in producing an educated democracy but how effective they are likely to be in preparing the younger generation for the grave responsibilities of the future, to carry on the sound traditions of the past, and to face with courage, intelligence and determination the developments to come.¹⁶

Serious ideological differences between the state sponsored reform process and the Catholic world view were articulated in a series of pamphlets published by the Auckland Catholic Teachers' Association. In one, J. C. Reid lamented the Thomas Committee's adoption of what he saw as Russian reforms just at the point when the Russians were abandoning them.¹⁷ In a second commentary Sister Dorothea Loughnan RSCJ, suggested that if the new scheme became compulsory, it would be the only gate to public positions and no Catholic could afford to let the Report go unchallenged.¹⁸ While she identified a number of good points in the Report including freedom for schools (though a limited freedom), the stressing of aesthetic education and opportunities to widen the field of history, she challenged the Report on three key points. First, she lamented the lack of a true core centred on religious values. Second, she challenged the implication that citizenship in a democracy could be taught by running a school along democratic lines, that is, by allowing the pupils who had no experience, a measure of self-government—a voice in the framing of the rules. The tendency to deprecate the principle of authority and the need for self-control formed the basis of her third objection, for without authority society would dissolve into anarchy.¹⁹

What we Catholics want is not only a well-informed, cultured mind, good taste, clever fingers, sharpened brains, but moral goodness, a sense of duty, a strong straight reliable will that will turn to good ends the aptitudes acquired at school ... It is the absence of religion, the complete ignoring of God and His rights that vitiates the whole syllabus.²⁰

The Catholic position as expressed here represented a long held belief that the influence of a secular state controlled curriculum would directly threaten the values implicit in the separate Catholic education system. In this they were not alone, evidence of this concern being expressed by other proponents of Christian values and truths.²¹

A further criticism of the Report was based on the effect of the reforms on academic standards, a view supported by a range of commentators.

A series of articles published in the *Zealandia* in 1944, argued that the new syllabus failed to put first things first and that it rejected without good grounds the traditional methods of training.²²

The literatures of old Europe were well named the Humanities: from them men caught the power to observe, to reflect, to feel deeply and nobly ... It is the privilege and duty of the English teacher gradually to introduce his pupils to the best, according to their capacity.²³

However, another commentator saw in the new freedoms an opportunity to devise a Catholic course of Social Studies:

If the schools are left really free to devise their own courses in Social Studies, a really valuable course could be drawn up by Catholic teachers ... The needs of pupils not academically minded have been properly catered for. They have been too much neglected in the past. On the other hand it is desirable that even the academic be obliged to acquire some proficiency in crafts and or music.²⁴

It is not so much the specific Catholic responses to the proposed reforms that are of interest here. As we have seen many Catholic concerns were shared by other sections of the education community. What is significant is the unique way Catholic educational politics worked in this instance. During 1944 an initially diverse minority group was able, through a process of internal consultation among its own educators, fuelled by a public media campaign, to come together to formulate many of their criticisms into specific objections against English, social studies, arithmetic, botany and physical education and the values of the new education which they saw as underpinning the proposed syllabus. At the heart of these expressed criticisms of specific curriculum proposals was the fear that a state imposed philosophy of education would supplant Catholic truth as the only core of the curriculum.²⁵ As Loughnan put it

If Catholic Schools are going to fall in with the requirements of the Report, as they must do to some extent if they are to compete in external examinations, will there be any real difference between Catholic and State schools given (the freedom given to State Schools) the daily period for religious knowledge?²⁶

The Education Department's publication of prescribed texts was seen as a particular threat to Catholic autonomy, a long step towards tyranny.²⁷ In the Catholic view textbooks for subjects like botany, physiology, geography and history needed to reflect the presence of God in the world.²⁸ A social studies textbook called *Man and his World* by Professor Mainwaring became the focus of considerable alarm as is evidenced in the following extract from an address by Archbishop Liston.

There is no mention of God in the creation of the world: somehow it just happened. No mention of the supreme book in the history of man, the Bible If parents allow the Education Department to impose this book on teachers and pupils our country will pay the penalty.²⁹

There was a measure of support for this concern with Departmental control of textbooks in newspapers such as *The Auckland Star*.

It would be interesting to know why the preface to the catalogue of text-books (in the Education Gazette) stated that except under the approval of the Director, books not on the list were not to be used as class books ... it was a simple transition, in the course of time to These books and no others shall be used.³⁰

By taking issue with the Thomas Committee recommendations, Catholic education authorities found themselves, making a detailed assessment of the state of Catholic education in New Zealand. In a series of meetings and conferences held in the four dioceses from late 1944 into 1945, Catholic secondary school teachers analysed the Thomas Report, examining its implications for Catholic secondary schools. For the first time since the 1877 Education Act had made elementary education free compulsory and secular, Catholics found themselves faced with the issues of how they might in the post war years organise and maintain a system that was distinctively and qualitatively different from state schools. Father Noel Gascoigne, the director of Catholic education in the Wellington diocese saw in the publication of the Report some opportunities, by making full use of the liberty given us, to maintain the high standards of the past, and ... like the Monasteries of old, to save true scholarship for our country.³¹

He felt that the time was right for Catholic education to consider its own system along the lines of the American and Scottish models.

The present Director of Education is an experimentalist, and, although our ideal in Education is quite different from his, he would not, in the opinion of the lecturers, oppose our setting up our own system. The standard of education in the State schools is being lowered, and we can capitalise on this.³²

By mid 1944, the Catholic hierarchy had narrowed the focus of its criticisms to two aspects of the Report: the values of new education and the lowering of academic standards. Firstly they argued that the new education values implied in the Report would signal an increase in secular values in secondary education and a consequent move away from traditional beliefs and disciplines fundamental to Catholic schools. Secondly they feared that the new curriculum would result in a lowering of academic standards and thus threaten the rights of academically able Catholic pupils to higher education and access to public service positions

which had been guaranteed via the public examination system. A memo from Gascoigne to the principals of the secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Wellington summed up the bishop's concerns.

(The Hierarchy) desire our schools to be shielded from the outlook of the New Education ... viz, the giving of such liberty to the pupil that he may be able to pursue whatever he feels an urge or impulse to do, the safeguarding of him from the discipline of hard work, the relegation of the classics to a place of inferior importance, and the rendering impossible of a truly academic education. They desire to safeguard the standards of scholarship of the past, if not to excel them, and they strive also to preserve the children of our schools from the insidious influence of text-books which flout Christian standards of thought and conduct.³³

A decision was made to begin work on a syllabus for a Catholic corresponding common core³⁴ including a suggested list of text-books for English, social studies, mathematics, science and physical education. Music and craft were to be omitted from the Catholic common core although teachers were asked to give their views upon what a voluntary syllabus might contain. Teachers of Latin and French were also asked to prepare a syllabus, textbooks and to indicate the amount of time that should be given per week to these important subjects.³⁵ The study of languages and Latin, in particular, reflected Catholic concerns with an area of learning that was deemed to be a necessary preparation for religious studies for clergy and religious life. Because the State seems adamant about biology³⁶ teachers were asked to consider how it might be framed within a science course.

Developing a separate curriculum

The justification for a separate Catholic curriculum was based on the Catholic objection to the Thomas Committee's compulsory core, its allocation of times to particular subjects and its control of the content of courses through prescribed text-books and reading lists. Gascoigne pointed out that in the past teachers had the guidance of the examination prescriptions but were largely left free to plan their courses as they saw fit. Now the fear was that this new control would allow the State to introduce ideas which were unacceptable in Catholic schools such as evolution in the sciences, naturalism in biology and social sciences, sex instruction and a history syllabus that was not taught from a Catholic viewpoint. He argued for the Church's right to teach and plan its curriculum without detailed direction and supervision by the State, a right he believed had been infringed by the introduction of the proposed new curriculum in post-primary education.³⁷

Nevertheless, the argument which the bishops eventually adopted as central to their criticism of the Thomas Report showed less preoccupation with providing an alternative curriculum and focussed more on ensuring the independence of the Catholic school system from State surveillance and control. They were primarily concerned to ensure freedom for their schools, a freedom which would ensure that their schools were not subject to social and intellectual influences inimical to Roman Catholicism.³⁸

Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister, concerned by the strength of Catholic opposition to the proposed curriculum reforms, invited Gascoigne to a meeting in early August 1944. Fraser was at pains to tell Gascoigne that he had not had a chance to read the Thomas Report due to his many duties as war-time Prime Minister and as a consequence had got out of touch with educational trends in the country. He welcomed an opportunity to hear the nature of Catholic opposition to the report.³⁹ As a consequence a meeting with the Catholic Hierarchy was planned for early September.

Present at the meeting on 6 September were Archbishop O'Shea, a number of Catholic bishops, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education. At the request of the Catholic delegation, the Director of Education, C. E. Beeby, was not invited, an omission that caused some difficulties later. The Prime Minister acknowledged that it had been a blunder not to have invited a Catholic representative to be part of the Consultative Committee and agreed to the appointment of Dr Noel Gascoigne to act as a representative of the interests of the Catholic hierarchy in its dealings with the Department.⁴⁰ In an atmosphere characterised by a spirit of constructive friendliness the Prime Minister reassured the bishops that schools such as (theirs) had a valuable part to play in the educational life of the country, and should be encouraged to keep their own traditions etc. and go their own way.⁴¹ The Bishops in their turn told the Prime Minister:

We did not wish our schools to stand isolated—that we were anxious to co-operate fully with the Department and fit in the general framework ... in a special way they insisted on having full recognition for their Syllabus—it would be submitted to the Department and be agreed upon and approved—on examinations and accrediting being on the basis of this approved Syllabus and the work done, and on Certificates carrying the same value as those of other schools.⁴²

The subsequent discussions between the Catholic education authorities and the Education Department brought about an association between two men who were to have an important influence on subsequent developments

in Catholic education, Dr Noel Gascoigne, priest and Director of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese and Dr C. E. Beeby, the Director of Education. The relationship between Beeby and Gascoigne was extremely important and will be considered in some detail. Suffice it to say at this point that the two men—one a Catholic priest and the other seen by the Catholic authorities to be a liberal secularist—achieved a working relationship and considerable respect for each other's viewpoint. This understanding was reached despite the strongest reservations on the part of the bishops and initially Gascoigne himself, reservations which stemmed from the perception that Beeby was the personification of the Department with its new education and its philosophy of secularism.

Negotiating with the Department

The progress of the negotiations between the Catholic hierarchy and the Ministry of Education is revealed in an exchange of reports and personal letters between Gascoigne and Bishop Patrick Lyons who acted as advisor to Gascoigne in his dealings with the Education Department. This correspondence throws light on the sensitivity with which the Catholic educational authorities approached any discussion with the state regarding their schools.⁴³ Lyons (1903–1967) was deeply conservative on matters affecting doctrinal orthodoxy and church order. O'Reilly suggests that he viewed the policy of secular education with considerable suspicion. In this respect he represented a return to the doctrinaire opposition to secular education typified by Bishop Patrick Moran. Whereas Moran had opposed the 1877 Education Act in New Zealand on the grounds that secularists and agnostics had joined forces to create a system of schools which were anti-religious and anti-Catholic, subsequent Catholic leaders such as Bishop Cleary had shown themselves more willing to acknowledge the practical difficulties within which the 1877 Act had been framed.⁴⁴

Gascoigne represented a moderate conservative Catholic position. As the result of his contact with European developments in educational thought in the 1930s and his later experience in the United States as a Fulbright Scholar, he brought a wider experience of international trends in education to negotiations regarding Catholic schools.⁴⁵ In contrast to Dr Terry's public and frequently provocative claims that the new education policy represented state imposed rank, poisonous heresy from the Catholic point of view ... totalitarian regimentation and State control of every department of national life,⁴⁶ and the bishops' insistence on the autonomy of Catholic education, Gascoigne presented a more conciliatory approach that promoted acceptance of the Catholic position and better relations with the Department of Education.

The 1944 Conference on Education

The government chose to confront criticisms of the Thomas Report by holding a national education conference in late October 1944. Any doubt about the status of the Thomas Report would have been eliminated once Mason announced the Government's intention to translate the Committee's recommendation into legislation in 1945.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, both Mason and Beeby were aware of the need to manage the introduction of the Thomas recommendations skilfully in order not to alienate the post-primary sector. With this in mind Mason declared that post-primary teachers should feel free to work out their own solutions.⁴⁸

Catholic delegates to the conference included Father Cyril Callaghan SM and Gascoigne. To Gascoigne's disappointment

The atmosphere was heavily charged against any criticism ... Those in favour of the Report were there in their force, from the opening speech in its defence by the head of the Consultative Committee to the end. There was very effective quashing of any attempt to bring out its shortcomings. Fr Callaghan spoke for 15 minutes immediately following Mr Thomas ... I pay tribute to his efforts, doubly so for he spoke, I repeat, in an atmosphere that called for high courage ...⁴⁹

Any support Catholic delegates may have expected for their call for freedom to work out their own curriculum solutions failed to materialise in the public forum of the conference as Gascoigne wryly noted in his report to the bishops: 'Several spoke in private afterwards of the soundness of the Catholic criticism. It is a thousand pities that they had not the courage to back us up in the public arena'.⁵⁰

The Catholic hierarchy's criticism of state incursions into the jealously guarded autonomy of Catholic secondary education should not be seen as a rejection of the increasing influence of the state in the overall life of the country. Privately, at least, the bishops supported the welfare state. Delegates to the conference were instructed to support the Government's proposal to establish kindergartens, nursery schools, youth services, vocational guidance centres and other subsidiary educational facilities. Nevertheless, the bishops wanted to ensure a proper measure of control so that children were deprived neither of maternal care and Christian training nor subjected to un-Christian influences.⁵¹ In other words, state assistance was acceptable but state surveillance was not, particularly where it interfered with a bishop's right to supervise and control orthodox Catholic teaching.⁵²

Despite his frustration at the bitter atmosphere of the Conference, the wave of anti-Catholicism again rampant, and suggestions that Catholics were out for their own syllabus, Gascoigne acknowledged the

Chairperson's scrupulous fairness to the Catholic delegates and was assured by Mason that his contentions would be taken note of. Gascoigne utilised lessons from the splendidly run format to organise a National Conference of Catholic Teachers in January 1945, which met to discuss an alternative compulsory core curriculum for Catholic secondary schools.⁵³ At this point the correspondence between Gascoigne and Bishop Lyons reveals a small but significant shift in the anti-reform rhetoric and the beginnings of some accommodation with the proposed new curriculum. This is evident in suggestions that schemes of study that kept close to the Departmental drafting of the New Education Regulations might be more successful in achieving the desired ends than a proposal for a new curriculum.⁵⁴

Achieving a compromise

Gascoigne met with Beeby in early May 1945, sending him a summary of the proposals made by Catholic teachers conferences in the four centres and a separate private letter which outlined the Catholic case for a separate syllabus.⁵⁵ At the beginning of their discussion, Gascoigne raised a number of issues: pre-school education, registration of small schools, bus transportation, boarding allowances, school building permits, the place and importance of physical education, housecraft and clothing, general science, Greek, chemistry social studies and School Certificate history. The meeting was characterised by the most friendly feeling.⁵⁶ In an extended cricket metaphor that set the tone for their relationship, Beeby agreed to a number of key Catholic demands, noting,

You have scored what in your paper you claimed was number one priority—the elimination of sex instruction and that for EVERY (emphasis in original) school in New Zealand. It is true you did not score your second priority—arithmetic as a separate option, but I have told you my policy, and you can see I have not entirely by-passed the Catholic thesis. You have gained your third priority, the further reduction in the common core, by the reduction of Physical Education to 1.5 units. You have scored re the extension of the time to notify me re Options. We have met you as regards Church Music: we have altered the three languages syllabuses: we have introduced questions in English Literature: We have satisfied your science masters re Optional Maths.⁵⁷

In regard to the proposal for a separate scheme of study for Catholic schools, Beeby assured Gascoigne that he would never tolerate any attempt to force a non-Catholic or anti-Catholic philosophy on Catholic schools and that his sole criticism was that we had aped the State system too much and not Catholicised our schools as we might.⁵⁸

It was obvious from this meeting that the Department was prepared to compromise over a range of curriculum issues. Significantly, however, the meeting between Gascoigne and Beeby revealed a fundamental shift in the position of the Catholic educational authorities in relation to the proposed curriculum reform. While the bishops had made it clear that their first aim was to safeguard the pupils in their schools from any threat of their being influenced by the current philosophy of today⁵⁹ yet they also wished to protect the general standard of education in Catholic schools. Historically, state examinations had provided the chief means by which 'we have in the past demonstrated our equality (at least) with the state schools'.⁶⁰ Gascoigne admitted to Beeby that Catholic pupils needed to sit state exams otherwise they would be penalised in the employment market. It followed, therefore, that 'our syllabus must be very like the State one.'⁶¹ This was a clear acknowledgement that there were few options regarding an alternative curriculum and examination system that could be entertained. The problem was, as Sister Dorothea Loughnan had earlier predicted, that the Thomas curriculum and the new School Certificate were likely to be the only gate to public positions⁶² and the bishops wanted to do nothing that would prevent the educational and economic advancement of their pupils. It was increasingly apparent that their two aims were in conflict and as O'Reilly points out, the hierarchy was forced to modify the first in favour of the second.⁶³

Thus the restrictions on Catholic freedom came, not so much from state education authorities imposing a new curriculum on Catholic schools but from the purposes Catholic educational authorities hoped to realise through their schools. As a consequence it became impossible for bishops to disregard the Thomas Report by adopting a different curriculum or by establishing separate examinations for their schools. Instead, as O'Reilly argued,

They were compelled to take issue with the Thomas Report and through negotiation seek either, as in the case of sex instruction to have the curriculum changed, or in other matters, to ensure that the Department's Regulations were phrased in such a way that they could give effect to exemptions obtained for their schools.⁶⁴

Ironically, by seeking to satisfy the different expectations of the Department of Education, of parents and of employers, the bishops eventually found that it was practically impossible to diverge widely from Departmental standards and they had to accept in practice a reduction of the theoretical freedoms for which they had argued so vehemently. An added complication resulted from Catholic requests for practical exemptions from aspects of core and optional subjects. While the Thomas

Report emphasised the freedom of the individual teacher from unnecessary restrictions, Gascoigne's request to Beeby for the guarantee of a regulation 'giving us that liberty spoken of time and time again in the Report'⁶⁵ in effect, asked the Department to restrict the very freedom recommended by the Thomas Committee in order that Catholic schools should continue with business as usual. Beeby noted the irony:

Can you see my dilemma? It is repugnant to me that I should debar you from so doing, and yet he who is asked to give you the right to do it (and I am being so asked) must by implication have assigned to him by the petitioners (yourselves) the power NOT to give it to you! Do you see that in reality I am wanting to give you greater freedom of action than even you want.⁶⁶

A matter of politics

In his role as liaison between the Catholic hierarchy and the Education Department Gascoigne was subject to the authority and counsel of the bishops. He had a close relationship with Lyons (as the correspondence reveals) and on more than one occasion called on him directly for advice on how to proceed. In his letters, he reported back to the bishops on the content and context of the discussions regarding the proposed curriculum reforms. At the same time he found himself having to represent the views of the Education Department back to the hierarchy and justify actions that he had taken and accommodations he found necessary to make in the context of the negotiations.

Despite Beeby's reassurances that there were no threats to Catholic freedom, the bishops were determined to ensure that references to liberty were included in the Education Regulations that would give legal force to the Thomas recommendations. When no such inclusion seemed to be forthcoming, they asked Gascoigne to meet with Beeby in early August 1945 to gain his reassurance on the matter. Gascoigne found himself in a difficult position. On the one hand he had the bishops' reminder to him that their meeting with Fraser in September 1944 had guaranteed them freedom for their schools (a meeting that Beeby was not invited to). On the other hand it was clear (as a result of the informal nature of the May discussion held between Beeby and Gascoigne) that there were no minutes of the decision⁶⁷ and Beeby seemed to have forgotten his agreement to include a reference to freedom in the Regulations. So Gascoigne found himself explaining the Catholic position to Beeby all over again and encountering the same response that under no circumstances would he (Beeby) ever stand for the forcing of an anti-Catholic philosophy in Catholic schools.⁶⁸ It was a delicate position as Gascoigne explained to the bishops later:

I did mention in my first negotiations the fact that this had been discussed by the Hierarchy and that the Ministers had seen its reasonableness ... but I went no further ... for two reasons, one a technical point the other a psychological point The Technical point—I have consulted your Lordships memo ... and I find these words Freedom—Here again the P.M. and Minister of Ed cordially agreed to our request but there is no mention of a regulation to that effect The psychological point: ... the Director was not present at the meeting ... your Lordship will recall that it was the express wish of the Hierarchy that Dr Beeby should NOT be at that meeting ... for that reason I used great caution in saying what Ministers had granted straight out without consulting him as evidently by custom amounts to his right. I do not, unless I am forced, want to antagonise the Director.⁶⁹

The letter is a masterpiece of tact with Gascoigne justifying his decision not to insist on the freedom guaranteed at the 1944 meeting between the hierarchy and Fraser by reminding the Bishops of the tenuousness of the agreement, the absence of Beeby from that meeting (at their request) despite his right to be consulted in negotiations regarding education, and the importance of maintaining good relations with the Department. This careful handling of the sensitive relationship between the Department and the Catholic hierarchy was a hallmark of Gascoigne's style. Not surprisingly Gascoigne was greatly relieved to receive an advance copy of the Prescriptions and to be able to report that in no fewer than three places mention was made of liberty of treatment and method.⁷⁰

It may be argued that the Catholic education authorities took the hard road in their response to the curriculum reforms proposed by the Thomas Committee. They not only re-examined their whole theory and practice, challenging the ideological basis on which the reforms were premised, but they also successfully negotiated changes to specific curriculum specifications. By doing so, however, they discovered that they had to modify the very freedoms they cherished in order to achieve the desired purpose of enhancing educational and vocational opportunities for their students. This paper has challenged the premise that the Catholic response to the 1944 Thomas Report can be dismissed as conservative. It has outlined the diversity of views held by Catholic educators arguing that the Catholic position developed as a result of extensive discussions within the Catholic educational community and in the light of negotiations with the state. The protracted discussions over the proposed education reforms and the solutions that were negotiated illuminate the workings of educational politics and the ongoing complexities inherent in relations between the state and the Catholic education authorities. Negotiations between the Director of Catholic Education (Wellington) and the Director of the Education Department moved from confrontation to accommodation

as each revealed a willingness to compromise. That Gascoigne and Beeby reached such an accommodation is in no small part due to their ability to walk through the minefield of Catholic sensitivities to a resolution acceptable to both state and church authorities. Had this solution not been achieved, then the alternative may have been a separate curriculum for Catholic secondary schools. In a report to the bishops Gascoigne acknowledged the significance of Beeby's role.

I do believe that no Director of Education could have given the Catholic thesis a fairer hearing than he accorded ours The truth is that he listened to (and not merely listened to) but has acted upon our advice, and that, MORE THAN UPON THE COUNSEL OF ANY OTHER SECTION OF THE COMMUNITY (emphasis in original) There was a time when I was among his fiercest critics. But I spoke out of that most lamentable of all sources—ignorance.⁷¹

NOTES

1. Gregory Lee and Howard Lee, 'Making Milner Matter: Some Comparisons between Milner (1933–1936), Thomas (1944), and Subsequent New Zealand Secondary School Curricula Reports and Development' (paper presented at the NZARE, Massey University, 2002).
2. Kevin O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report,' *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 12 (1977).
3. C. Whitehead, 'The Thomas Report: A Study in Educational Reform,' *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, no. 9 (1974).
4. 'Report of the Minister for Education,' (1957).
5. R. Openshaw, G. Lee, and H. Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History* (Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1993).
6. Noeline Alcorn, *To the Fullest Extent of His Powers: Beeby's Life in Education* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999).
7. *Ibid.*
8. *The Post-Primary School Curriculum: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Minister of Education in November, 1942*, (Wellington: New Zealand Department of Education, 1944).
9. *Ibid.*
10. 'The Post-Primary Curriculum: Letter and Memorandum to the Minister of Education,' (Association of Heads of Registered Secondary Schools of New Zealand, 1944).
11. Lee and Lee, 'Making Milner Matter: Some Comparisons between Milner (1933–1936), Thomas (1944), and Subsequent New Zealand Secondary School Curricula Reports and Developments'.
12. William Anderson, *The Flight from Reason in New Zealand Education*, (Auckland: Catholic Teachers' Association, 1944).
13. 'Precis of Proceedings at a Meeting of Catholic Secondary School at Sacred Heart Convent, Remuera,' (Auckland: 1943).
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Loc. cit.*, 26 Jan, 1944, p.7.

17. J. C. Reid, *Educational Change in Soviet Russia*, (Auckland: Catholic Teachers' Association, 1944).
18. Dorothea Loughnan, *A Criticism of the Report on Post-Primary Education*, (Auckland: Catholic Teachers' Association of Auckland, 1944).
19. *Ibid.*
20. Loughnan, 1944, p.12.
21. 'Memorandum to the Minister of Education.'
22. *Zealandia*, 21 Sep. 1944, p.5, Auckland Catholic Diocesan Archives (hereafter ACDA).
23. *Ibid.*
24. D. J. C. Notes on the Post-Primary Curriculum, 4 Jul. 1944, Christchurch Catholic Diocesan Archives (hereafter CCDA).
25. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
26. Loughnan, 1944, p.17.
27. Loughnan, 'A Criticism of the Report on Post-Primary Education.'
28. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
29. *Zealandia*, 3 Aug. 1944.
30. *The Auckland Star*, 2 Aug. 1944, p.6.
31. Auckland Catholic Secondary Teachers' Conference, 10 May 1944, p.1 CCDA.
32. *Ibid.*, p.2.
33. Gascoigne to Wellington Principals, 3 Aug. 1944, p.1, CCDA.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p.2.
36. *Ibid.*, p.2.
37. Gascoigne to Liston, 10 Jul. 1944, pp.1-2, CCDA.
38. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
39. Gascoigne to Lyons 20 Aug, 1944, p.1, CCDA.
40. Precis of meeting with Prime Minister, 6 Sep. 1944, p.1, CCDA.
41. *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.
42. *Ibid.*, p.2.
43. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, After studying philosophy and theology at Mosgiel, Gascoigne went to Rome and was ordained there in 1935. He attended Angelicum University and gained a doctorate in theology in 1936 on the significance of Modern Developments in Psychology for Religious Instruction. He spent three years at Oxford where he gained a diploma in Education, visited Germany and returned to New Zealand just prior to the outbreak of war. Later he spent time in the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship. He then returned to parish life in New Zealand before his appointment as Director of Education for the Wellington Archdiocese.
46. *Auckland Star* 14 Jul. 1944, p.2, Dr Terry was the Director of Catholic Education for the Auckland diocese.
47. Lee and Lee, 'Making Milner Matter: Some Comparisons between Milner (1933-1936), Thomas (1944), and Subsequent New Zealand Secondary School Curricula Reports and Developments'.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Gascoigne to Bishops, Oct. 1944, p.4, CCDA.
50. *Ibid.*, It is clear from the correspondence that Gascoigne expected support for the Catholic position at the Education Conference, 'The private schools await

our lead' (Gascoigne to Liston, 10 Jul. 1944, p.4.). In addition a number of individual principals had outlined their concerns in private correspondence to Father Cyril Callaghan before the Conference including C. J. Richards, the Headmaster of Christ's College, who suggested that 'where schools wish to depart for certain forms from the unity laid down for the Common Core, they should have the right to submit to the Department for approval their proposed course' (R. J. Richards to C. J. Callaghan 27 Sep. 1944, Marist Archives Wellington, hereafter MAW). Hatt Insull, the Headmaster of Cathedral Grammar Christchurch, reported that inspectors had told him that he would be unable to teach Divinity to Higher Leaving Certificate candidates as part of the core while indicating that there was 'no common agreement about what should be taught' (H. A. H. Insull to C. J. Callaghan, 26 Sep. 1944, MAW). E. M. North, the Principal of Wellington Girls' College, prophesied that social studies would 'lessen considerably what remains of the soundness of education in New Zealand' suggesting that 'the chief hope for education is ... that someone outside the system will arise, and demand that the wreckers be cast out' (E. M. North to Father Callaghan, 2 Sep. 1944, MAW).

51. Instructions to delegates, Oct. 1944, p.1, CCDA.
52. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
53. Gascoigne to Bishops, 13 May 1945, pp.4-7, CCDA.
54. Gascoigne to Lyons, 14 May 1945, p.2, CCDA.
55. Gascoigne to Bishops, 13 May 1945, p.1, CCDA.
56. *Ibid.*, p.4.
57. *Ibid.*, p.4.
58. *Ibid.*, p.5.
59. Gascoigne to Lyons, 7 Jul. 1945, p.2, CCDA.
60. Gascoigne to Liston, 10 Jul. 1944, p.3, CCDA.
61. Gascoigne to Lyons, 13 May 1945, pp.5-6, CCDA.
62. Loughnan, 'A Criticism of the Report on Post-Primary Education.'
63. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report.'
64. O'Reilly, 1977, p.127.
65. Gascoigne to Bishops, 5 May 1945, p.5, CCDA.
66. *Ibid.*, p.6.
67. Beeby commented later that he 'had complete trust in (Gascoigne's) integrity' and that 'we often did not bother to confirm in writing some of the less vital agreements' (Beeby to O'Reilly, 28 Mar. 1975, CCDA).
68. Gascoigne to Liston, 11 Jul. 1945, p.1, CCDA.
69. *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.
70. Gascoigne to Bishops, 2 Nov, 1945, p.1, CCDA.
71. Gascoigne to Bishops, 13 May 1945, p.9, CCDA.