

‘They must have their children educated some way’: the education of Catholics in eighteenth-century Scotland

Clotilde Prunier

► **To cite this version:**

Clotilde Prunier. ‘They must have their children educated some way’: the education of Catholics in eighteenth-century Scotland. *The Innes Review*, 2009, 60 (1), pp.22-40. 10.3366/E0020157X09000407 . hal-02315754

HAL Id: hal-02315754

<https://hal-univ-paris10.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02315754>

Submitted on 14 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Clotilde Prunier

‘They must have their children educated some way’: the education of Catholics in eighteenth-century Scotland

Abstract: This paper examines the provision of schooling to Catholics in eighteenth-century Scotland. In the first half of the century, schools established in the Highlands by the SSPCK mainly served a religious purpose, because Protestants were convinced that education was both a preservative against and an antidote to popery. As for the Catholic Church in Scotland, it concentrated its efforts on providing education to those boys intended for the priesthood. However, as the century wore on, there was a clear shift in the attitude of Scottish Catholics towards education. This paper presents evidence which suggests that Catholics came to regard education as an asset rather than as a threat, and that the changing perception of the uses of education mirrors the evolution of the standing of Scottish Catholics in British society.

Key words: education; Catholics; eighteenth century; Scotland; SSPCK.

While Scottish education has attracted a fair share of scholarly attention, the provision of schooling to Catholic children in the eighteenth century has mostly been neglected, as indeed have other aspects of eighteenth-century Scottish Catholicism until recently, though an array of primary sources has been printed in J. F. S. Gordon’s *The Catholic Church in Scotland, from the Suppression of the Hierarchy to the Present Time* (1874) and W. Forbes Leith’s *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics during the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (1909), as well as in various volumes of *The Innes Review*.¹ Not much can be found on education in Forbes

¹ My grateful thanks are due to Dr Christopher Page and two anonymous readers for their suggestions and comments on an earlier draft. J. F. S. Gordon, *The Catholic Church in Scotland, from the Suppression of the Hierarchy to the Present Time* (Aberdeen, 1874); William Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics during the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols (London, 1909). For eighteenth-century primary sources printed in *The Innes Review*, see Roderick MacDonald, ‘The Highland District in 1764’, *IR* 15 (1964), 140–50; Noel Macdonald Wilby, ‘The “Encrease of Popery” in the Highlands 1714–1747’, *IR* 17 (1966), 91–115; David McRoberts, ‘Ambula Coram Deo. The journal of Bishop Geddes for the year 1790. Part One’, *IR* 6 (1955), 46–68; W. J. Anderson, ‘Ambula Coram Deo. The journal of Bishop Geddes for the year 1790. Part Second’, *IR* 6 (1955), 131–43. For eighteenth-century seminaries, see W. J. Anderson, ‘Abbé Paul MacPherson’s History of the Scots College, Rome’, *IR* 12 (1961), 3–172, and his ‘The College for the Lowland District of Scotland at Scalán and Aquhorties: Registers and documents’, *IR* 14 (1963), 89–212.

Leith's *Memoirs*, though what little there is gives a just notion of the difficulty involved in providing schooling for Catholic children in the eighteenth century.² Christine Johnson's *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789–1829* (1983) deals at greater length with education, as one might expect since it was first meant as a study of the Lowland seminary at Aquhorties.³ However, it focuses on those schools which catered for the needs of boys intended for the priesthood. Johnson's pioneering monograph has ushered in a new era in eighteenth-century Scottish Catholic studies with the publication of works which

avoid the pitfalls of Catholic recusant history – antiquarianism, partisanship, and a lack of any critical perspective – which only serve to justify the marginalisation of the subject on the part of academic historians.⁴

Such are, for instance, James McMillan's contribution to our better understanding of the Jansenist controversy which raged in the 1730s, Mark Goldie's articles on the Scottish Catholic Enlightenment and Daniel Szechi's assessment of the Mission's effectiveness in withstanding the attacks launched upon it by Kirk and State.⁵ Education was definitely part of the initial scheme to check the Catholic Church and it is my contention in this paper that the changing perception of the uses of education mirrors the evolution of the standing of Scottish Catholics in British society.

Scottish Reformers regarded education as one of the central props of the Church of Scotland. That was in keeping with the views of all Protestant churches, which considered literacy as essential to religion, enabling as it did all believers to read the Bible. However, Scotland's

² For instance, Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, ii, 239 ('Difficulties about education'); ii, 275 ('Obstacles to Catholic education'); ii, 295 ('Catholic schools in danger').

³ Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789–1829* (Edinburgh, 1983), 3: 'This book was originally intended as a study of the history of the college at Aquhorties. I discovered, however, that there is no adequate history of the Scottish Mission between 1789 and 1829 against which such a study could be placed.'

⁴ James F. McMillan, 'Mission accomplished? The Catholic underground', in *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, ed. T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (East Linton, 1999), 90–105, at 91.

⁵ James F. McMillan, 'The root of all evil? Money and the Scottish Catholic Mission in the eighteenth century', *Studies in Church History* 24 (1987), 267–82; his 'Jansenists and anti-Jansenists in eighteenth-century Scotland: the *Unigenitus* quarrels on the Scottish Catholic Mission', *IR* 39 (1988), 12–45, and other articles published in this journal; Mark Goldie, 'Common sense philosophy and Catholic theology in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 302 (1992), 281–320, and his 'The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), 20–62; Daniel Szechi, 'Defending the true faith: Kirk, State and Catholic missionaries in Scotland 1653–1755', *Catholic Historical Review* 82 (1996), 397–411.

specificity lay in its reliance on universal schooling to achieve this end, as was manifest in the *First Book of Discipline*. The Reformers' plan was partially realised with the foundation of parochial schools in the seventeenth century.

The Protestants' firm belief that schooling was vital was strengthened by Locke's theories, which enhanced the power of education and therefore the need to begin instructing children at the earliest possible age. Scottish Protestants were convinced that education made the man. It induced them to set up a national network of schools and awoke them to the danger, as they saw it, of children being educated in Catholic schools. The 'Act for Preventing the Growth of Popery' passed in 1700 forbade all teaching by Catholics. When, almost eighty years later, the British parliament attempted to repeal the Scottish penal laws, the argument that allowing Catholics to open schools was tantamount to empowering them to subvert the whole nation was very often used by opponents of the Relief measure. *The Repeal*, an anonymous poem published in 1778, asserted this much:

if not check'd in teaching public schools,
We may all be or crown'd or cap'd for fools . . . ;
For who so fit to poison youthful breasts
As Jesuits, these worst of Romish priests?⁶

Education was both a preservative against and an antidote to popery. Just as Catholic teachers were seen as a potential threat, Protestant schools were presented as a means of consolidating the Church of Scotland and of winning over Catholics. Accordingly, Highland ministers petitioning for a school would often insist that such an establishment was all the more necessary because there were Catholics living either in their parishes or in the vicinity – it was to be a bulwark against priests making proselytes among Protestants and might be instrumental in converting Catholic pupils. The minister of Glass expressed a commonly held belief when he claimed in his return to Webster's Census that 'there is an absolute Necessity for a Society School in the Head of this parish . . . for in that part of Cabrach a popish priest resides and stately has publick Worship'.⁷ In his report to the General Assembly in 1765, John Walker

⁶ *The Repeal, an Occasional Poem* ([Edinburgh], c. 1778), 13–14.

⁷ Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland [hereafter NAS], RH15/105/9, William Ross Additional Papers Webster's Census Returns, Alex Chalmers, Parish of Glass, Presbytery of Strathbogie, 15 May 1755. Royal Bounty missionaries also set forth this idea in their annual reports. See, for instance, NAS, CH1/2/118, Royal Bounty Papers, State of the Mission of Fort Augustus, 11 October 1774, fol. 305. In its section 'for the schooles', the *First Book of Discipline* already stressed 'the necessitie of schooles' if the Church was 'to abide in some puritie in the posteritie following'. Obviously, a major aim at the time was to train a Reformed ministry, but it was part of a larger scheme to prevent any relapse

asserted that catechists seemed ‘in several parts of the highlands, to be less useful than schoolmasters’. He further insisted that the ‘increase of Popery’ in the Highlands was partly owing to a lack of schools, adducing various examples such as that of Canna and Egg:

There have been nine converts to Popery in these islands during the last two years; and having had no school in them for a long time, the inhabitants are thrown back into that state of ignorance, which exposes them to be perverted by a Romish priest, who frequently resides among them.⁸

Thus, Protestants still insisted in the eighteenth century that the Church of Rome subsisted only because of its members’ ignorance, which was why priests were reluctant to have Catholic children taught and, more generally, to let their flocks discuss controversial points of doctrine with their Protestant acquaintances.

George Campbell, for instance, while supporting the repeal of the penal laws, expounded what he held to be ‘the proper and Christian Expedients for promoting religious Knowledge and repressing Error’ and fell back on this explanation to account for the survival of the Catholic Church:

What was nourished by ignorance, and could have been nourished by it only, must be hurt by knowledge. No wonder that popery should dread enquiry, should admit no competition, should not give so much as a hearing to an adversary wherever she can avoid it Error screens herself in darkness, being conscious, that in regard to her, to be seen is to be hated Where there is gross ignorance, there are also no doubt barbarity and superstition. And wherever they are, the absurdities of popery are better suited to the taste of the people, than the doctrines of a more rational religion.⁹

In the early eighteenth century, the Highlands were a thorn in the flesh of both Church and State, as the region represented a persistent centre of resistance to their respective powers. As far as the Church of Scotland was concerned, the inability to stem the opposition of Catholics and Episcopalians alike was explained by an insufficient number of ministers, rendered even more grievous by the vast extent of parishes which precluded such established clergy as there were from serving all

into Catholicism thanks to the education of the people. *The First Book of Discipline*, ed. James K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972), 129.

⁸ ‘Dr John Walker’s report to the Assembly 1765, concerning the state of the highlands and islands’, *Scots Magazine* 28 (1766), Appendix, 680–8, at 683, 685.

⁹ George Campbell, *An Address to the People of Scotland, upon the Alarms that have been raised in regard to Popery* (Edinburgh, 1779), 52–3.

their parishioners efficiently. Presbyterians also adduced the inadequate provision of education. The size of Highland parishes meant that the greater part of the population could not avail themselves of the parochial schools, if they existed, which was not always the case.

In the light of the confidence Presbyterians placed in education, it comes as no surprise that they relied on schools to put the Church of Scotland on a proper footing in the Highlands. According to Protestants, education was undoubtedly the means of emancipating Catholics because it was bound to free them from their dependence on their priests. More often than not, Catholicism was presented as a 'spiritual tyranny founded in ignorance',¹⁰ a bondage from which knowledge alone could deliver its deluded followers.

Shortly after the SSPCK was created, a memorial was addressed to its secretary suggesting that Catholics should be compelled to attend charity schools and that priests be banished from the Highlands,

it being certain that many papists would gladly have their Children educated at the Society's Schools were it not for those priests, who have their proselytes as much at their devotion *quo ad spiritualia*, as the Gentlemen have their dependents *quo ad corporalia*.¹¹

Possibly the most (in)famous such attempt was that of Colin MacDonald of Boisdale in South Uist who did 'all in his power to encourage the Protestant religion' by compelling Catholic children to attend the Protestant schoolmaster he had hired and by attempting to prevent any communication between his Catholic tenants and their priest.¹²

Education in Protestant schools, then, would eventually wean Catholics from their priests and allow them to exercise their private judgement in spiritual but also, hopefully, in political matters. It was generally assumed that Jacobitism was rampant among Scottish Catholics. That the bulk of Jacobites were in fact Protestants, as Murray Pittock has shown conclusively,¹³ seems immaterial in view of the deeply ingrained association of Catholicism with Jacobitism among the public

¹⁰ NAS, GD95/3/2, SSPCK Inland Letter Book 1794–1805, The Secretary to Rev. George Brown, 19 July 1798, 245.

¹¹ NAS, GD95/10/65, Memorial for the Secretary of the SSPCK, 10 June 1707.

¹² NAS, E728/39/2, Memorial for Colin MacDonald of Boisdale to the Commissioners for the Annexed Estates, 13 March 1771.

¹³ Murray Pittock, *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans* (Edinburgh, 1996), 30: 'The propagandistic identification of Jacobitism with Catholicism (in fact, the majority of Jacobites were nonjurant Anglicans and Episcopalians – the Catholic Church grew increasingly lukewarm as the century progressed) almost certainly arose in part from the anti-Catholic hysteria surrounding James VII and II.' Another myth Pittock convincingly debunks is that Jacobitism was an almost exclusively Highland phenomenon. On Jacobitism, see also Daniel Szechi, *The Jacobites, Britain and Europe, 1688–1788*

who pinned their hopes on education, alongside more coercive measures, to overcome this threat to the Protestant succession and hence to political stability. More often than not, a third element was linked to ‘popery’ and ‘disaffection’ – Gaelic. Many writers insisted that no good could come from the Highlands as long as their inhabitants spoke that language. The author of an account of the SSPCK printed in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1739 asserted that most Highlanders were

subject to the Will and Command of their Popish disaffected Chieftains, who have always opposed the propagating Christian Knowledge, and the *English* Tongue, that they might with the less Difficulty keep their miserable Vassals in a slavish Dependance.

That author praised the SSPCK for its efforts in ‘civilising’ Highlanders and boasted that thanks to Society schools, there was ‘reason to apprehend, that in a few Years, Ignorance, Popery, and the *Irish* Language will be utterly extirpated; and in their stead, Virtue, Loyalty and Industry will take Place’.¹⁴

The success of this undertaking was contingent upon the Catholic parents’ willingness to have their children educated and, more precisely, on their accepting to send them to Protestant schools.

It has been suggested that, in the mid-eighteenth century, there were about 30,000 Scottish Catholics, accounting for merely 3% of the population, a figure which possibly dropped to 1.6% by the early 1790s before the massive immigration of Irish Catholics came to swell their numbers.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, national figures give a distorted image of the real situation of Catholics in Scotland because most of them were settled in areas where they formed tightly knit communities and, in some cases, altogether outnumbered Protestants. In the eighteenth century, the bulk of Scottish Catholics lived in the north east and in the eastern and western Highlands. Missions were also established in towns such as

(Manchester, 1993) and his ‘Elite culture and the decline of Scottish Jacobitism 1716–1745’, *Past and Present* 173 (2001), 90–128.

¹⁴ ‘Of Civilising the Islands of *Scotland*’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 9 (June 1739), 286–8, at 286, 287. On Gaelic and its treatment at the hands of the Church of Scotland and the SSPCK, see Victor E. Durkacz, ‘The source of the language problem in Scottish education, 1688–1709’, *Scottish Historical Review* 57 (1978), 28–39; his ‘The Church of Scotland’s eighteenth-century attitudes to Gaelic preaching’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 13 (1981), 145–58; and his *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), 45–153; Charles W. J. Withers, ‘Education and Anglicisation: the policy of the SSPCK towards Gaelic in education, 1709–1825’ *Scottish Studies* 26 (1982), 37–56, and his *Gaelic Scotland. The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), 110–74.

¹⁵ James Darragh, ‘The Catholic population of Scotland since the year 1680’, *IR* 4 (1953), 49–59, at 51, 58; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 50.

Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dumfries and Crieff. Whether they lived in urban or rural settings, Catholics belonged for the most part to the lower ranks of society. By the end of the century, there were very few gentry left among them and the earl of Traquair and his family were the only nobility still adhering to the faith.¹⁶

In the first half of the eighteenth century, there were limited opportunities for any Catholics who wished to have their children taught. The more prosperous, that is to say the Catholic gentry, often had recourse to private tutors, usually appointed on the advice of a priest, in spite of the penal laws, or had their sons taken in at Scalán, the Lowland seminary, founded in the early 1710s. Originally intended as a senior seminary that would enable boys to be trained for the priesthood without leaving Scotland, it mainly served as a junior seminary preparing potential priests before they entered one of the Scots Colleges abroad. There does not seem to have ever been more than a dozen boys training to be priests at Scalán and even that is a very optimistic figure.¹⁷ They might also send their children to England,¹⁸ or ‘over the water’ to a Catholic school on the continent. As Johnson points out, when Archbishop Beaton left some property to the Scots College, Paris, he made it clear in his will that he intended the college to provide education not only to prospective priests but also to

some of the Children of the Catholic nobility and gentry . . . being deprived of the means of receiving a suitable education in their own Country by the Change of Religion which had then taken place.¹⁹

Others, such as John MacDonald of Glenaladale, went to study with the Scottish Benedictine monks at Regensburg in Germany.²⁰ But quite obviously, the gentry was not representative of the Scottish Catholic

¹⁶ The number of Scottish Catholic gentry was depleted through apostasy but also through emigration to North America.

¹⁷ On Scalán, see the primary sources published in *IR* mentioned in n. 1. Some of these were reprinted in John Watts, *Scalán: The Forbidden College, 1716–1799* (East Linton, 1999).

¹⁸ There were a few Scottish Catholic girls sent to the Bar Convent, York, as is clear from a number of letters still extant in the Scottish Catholic Archives [hereafter SCA]; for instance BL/3/399/3, Ann Aspinall to John Geddes, 26 April 1784; BL/3/454/5, Ann Maxwell to John Geddes, 25 October 1785, with the rates of the school, and BL/4/2/7, Isabella Chalmers to George Hay, 2 February 1789. See also William James Anderson, ‘Some notes on Catholic education for Scottish children in pre-Emancipation days’, *IR* 14 (1963), 38–45.

¹⁹ Quoted in Johnson, *Developments*, 53.

²⁰ MacDonald went to Regensburg in 1756: *Records of the Scots Colleges at Douai, Rome, Madrid, Valladolid and Ratisbon*, ed. William Forbes Leith, New Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1906), 252.

community as a whole and for the bulk of Scottish Catholics, these were not options that they could contemplate – most schooling at their disposal throughout the century was run by Protestants.

Still, in the first half of the century, there existed some Catholic schools, mainly in the Highlands and in the north east. ‘A State of Popery’ drafted in 1736 lamented that ‘Popish schools are publickly resorted to’ and mentioned Catholic masters and mistresses officiating in various parts of the country.²¹ Most of them seem to have provided very basic instruction. There were exceptions, however, such as the two schools on the island of South Uist which the presbytery complained of repeatedly in the 1720s because ‘Protestant children are sent’ there ‘to learn Latine’ since the only alternative was the SSPCK school whose master was not allowed to teach that language.²²

The Catholic clergy were just as persuaded of the hazards inherent in attending heretic schools, as they called them, as Protestants were wary of Catholic education. The sixth title of Bishop Nicolson’s ‘Statuta Missionis’ (1700) forbade parents to have their children taught in Protestant schools. Moreover, the ‘Statuta’ urged priests to try their utmost to open schools, in particular in the Highlands.²³ Nevertheless, schools were not very high on the bishops’ agenda. To be sure, now and then they reminded priests that they ought to warn their flocks against Protestant schools, but the interdiction was never strictly enforced. There were various reasons for this ambivalent attitude, the weightiest one being the precarious situation of Catholics in Scotland. Since the Church of Rome was outlawed, it was potentially dangerous to set up schools and the Scottish Catholic Mission, in sore need of funds, could spare very little money for the education of the faithful.

Both Protestants and Catholics gave pride of place to religious instruction (rather than profane knowledge) but the fundamental distinction was that to Protestants literacy was part and parcel of religious instruction while it certainly was not to Catholics. The universal provision of education was not a priority for the Scottish Mission because literacy was not regarded as essential to the preservation of the faith. Indeed, in the *Sincere Christian*, the catechism he published in 1781, Bishop Hay denied the Protestant view that the written word alone was ‘a plain and easy rule’ and further maintained that not only the illiterate but also those who, ‘though they have learned to read, have neither judgment nor capacity to understand what they do read’ could always be taught the rudiments

²¹ NAS, CH1/5/119, A State of Popery in Scotland containing an Hint of the Reasons of it’s continuance there, Places where, and proposing some Remedies for removing these Evils 1736, 36.

²² NAS, GD95/1/3, Minutes of (SSPCK) General Meetings, 1 June 1727.

²³ SCA, SM/3/2/1, Statuta Missionis, 1700.

‘by the living voice’ of their pastors.²⁴ Yet, it was crucial for the survival of the Church in Scotland that some sort of schooling should be provided to boys intended for the priesthood before they entered a seminary.

Until the Forty-Five, there were a few Catholic schools which served this purpose, such as those on South Uist, which goes a long way towards explaining why Latin was taught there as proficiency in that language was a *sine qua non* to enter any of the Scots Colleges.

After Culloden, all Catholic schools were disbanded, and the situation of the Catholic Church deteriorated. In 1749, George James Gordon informed the Scots Agent at Rome, Peter Grant, that the Scottish Mission had ‘the greatest difficulty imaginable to find proper persons for foreign Shops’, that is to say Scots Colleges abroad. He adduced the poverty of priests which discouraged parents, the role of religious orders in siphoning off the better pupils, the rise of incredulity, but also the ‘want of Catholic schools’ which meant that young boys had to be educated in public schools in which

besides the insignificancy of what they learn in them, they are in great hasard of being corrupted by their Masters and Comerades, who strive to instill their own errors, and prejudices against the faith into their tender and weak minds.²⁵

The seminary at Scalán was affected only momentarily in the aftermath of the Forty-Five. It provided education to prospective priests and to sons of the gentry. Though some bishops were averse to taking in lay boarders, they sometimes did: first, for financial reasons since the Mission was in dire straits and welcomed what sums of money parents paid to have their sons at Scalán; and secondly, to try and ensure the standing of the Church among the Scottish gentry as it was feared those boys would be ‘perverted’ in public schools and would later bring up their own children as Protestants. As late as 1795, Bishop Hay wrote to his coadjutor Bishop Geddes:

both Blairfindy & Tombrecochy were very pressing to have their Sons taken in to this house as boarders; As there is no possibility of getting a proper Education elsewhere, and as their being brought up with a proper sense of Religion in people of their State in the World, is of no small consequence to Religion, I could not well refuse them, especially as they willingly agreed to pay £8 a year for board & keep them in cloths during the time they stay.²⁶

²⁴ *Works of the Right Rev. Bishop Hay of Edinburgh*, ed. Bishop Strain, 5 vols (Edinburgh, 1871), i, 158–9.

²⁵ SCA, BL/3/93/8, George James Gordon to Peter Grant, 2 September 1749.

²⁶ SCA, BL/4/98/4, George Hay to John Geddes, 18 August 1795.

The same went for Aquhorties, as Christine Johnson has shown.²⁷ Conversely, some Catholic clergy frowned on those gentry who did not balk at having their sons admitted to Protestant schools or universities. While they usually put a brave face on more humble Catholics having their children taught in Protestant schools, some priests resented very much the gentry doing the same because they felt that the latter had an essential role to play in the survival, not to mention the strengthening, of the Scottish Mission. On the other hand, since the 1700 Act for Preventing the Growth of Popery, the gentry had most to lose by keeping firm in the faith so that it was feared the temptation to renounce it and enhance their prospects would be harder for them to resist if they attended Protestant schools. When in 1748, McNeil of Barra and MacDonald of Boisdale sent their sons to be taught at Aberdeen University, the local priest wrote to the vicar apostolic: ‘Neither of those two gentlemen, the fathers, have the principal concern much at heart... He [Boisdale] is one of those that think it mean to mind Religion.’²⁸ It is worth noting that these two families, formerly strongly associated with Jacobitism, both apostasised in the second half of the century.

After the Forty-Five, most Catholics had no choice but to go to Protestant schools if they wished to receive instruction, which made it all the more difficult for priests to insist on a rigorous application of the ‘Statuta’, as George James Gordon hinted in his letter to the Scots Agent:

as the Parents are sometimes not sensible of the danger, they cannot be prevailed upon by their Pastors, not to expose them to it: alledging they must have their Children educated some way, and must use the Schools they have since they have none of Cath^{ks}, which the Laws, now stricter than before, do not permit.²⁹

A case in point was the crisis which agitated the mission of Glenlivet in the late 1750s. The vicar apostolic, Alexander Smith, ordered the local priest to demand that parents withdraw their children from the SSPCK school because the master compelled Catholics to learn the Shorter Catechism. In spite of repeated attempts, the priest failed to convince his hearers to yield to his entreaties. While Bishop Smith remonstrated against those parents who, according to him, committed ‘spiritual murder’ by ‘giving up their innocent lambs to ravenous wolves’,³⁰ both the master of the seminary at Scalan and George James Gordon wrote long letters

²⁷ Johnson, *Developments*, 208–11.

²⁸ SCA, BL/3/90/14, George James Gordon to Alexander Smith, 21 February 1748.

²⁹ SCA, BL/3/93/8, Gordon to Grant, 2 September 1749.

³⁰ SCA, SM/13/1, Danger of heretick schools. See SCA, BL/3/130/15, Bishop Smith, 1757.

to him to try and bring him round to their own opinion, that is to say that ‘what was learnt by constraint and with pain and fatigue from a very obscure book, by creatures that scarcely understood the language, made no impression on their minds’.³¹ William Duthie, the Scalán master, wrote to Bishop Grant: ‘you may easily imagine what scoffs & insults must be born that ignorance is the mother of devotion with us’ and warned that if Bishop Smith’s injunction was ‘literally obeyed, all knowledge is shut up’.³² Both priests pragmatically noted in their letters that though, to be sure, the ‘infected shop’ – that is, the SSPCK school – was intended to ‘pervert’ Catholics, it had completely missed its aim at Glenlivet. To his great annoyance,³³ they reminded Bishop Smith that Glenlivet was not an isolated case – it was already common practice in Bishop Gordon’s days for priests to allow Catholic children to attend SSPCK schools as long as they neither learnt the Shorter Catechism nor attended Protestant services. It was felt that in such circumstances pupils could reap the benefit of education without putting their religion at risk. The directors of the SSPCK seemed to vindicate their opinion. In 1727, they expressed their dismay at the unexpected turn of events in Barra:

the teaching of Children of papists at the Societies Schools, when they are not allowed by their parents to Learn our Churches Catechism by heart and other Books against popery, nor to attend prayers in the School, nor go to Church has had no good effect; But puts them in the better Capacitie to be taught by the priests, Jesuites and other Emissaries of the Church of Rome, the damnable Errors of that Idolatrous Church.³⁴

Half a century later, they were still left to wonder what the use of their schools was on this island and more generally in the Popish Bounds.³⁵

Even Smith granted, though grudgingly, that very young children might not be in danger and therefore should be able to go to these schools. On the other hand, he asserted that what made things different in Glenlivet was the fact that the SSPCK teacher there was ‘more bigoted, rigid, violent, & inflexible than any where else’.³⁶ This is a very telling argument as it clearly points to the crucial role of the teacher. He could either insist that his pupils go to Protestant services

³¹ SCA, BL/3/128/17, George James Gordon to Alexander Smith, 7 December 1757.

³² SCA, BL/3/131/10, William Duthie to Mr Grant, 14 April 1758.

³³ SCA, BL/3/130/15, Bishop Smith, 1757: ‘’tis a sad Matter that we should be so familiarized with the Evil as to have less horror at it, & too little fear of the Danger’.

³⁴ NAS, GD95/1/3, Minutes of (SSPCK) General Meetings, 2 November 1727.

³⁵ See NAS, GD95/2/9, Minutes of (SSPCK) Directors’ Meetings, 1 August 1782, 442.

³⁶ SCA, BL/3/130/15, Bishop Smith, 1757.

and read the Shorter Catechism or reach a *modus vivendi* with Catholic parents. A close examination of Catholic correspondence and of SSPCK and Royal Bounty papers seems to indicate that, more often than not, the SSPCK schoolmasters and parents reached some kind of agreement which exempted children from learning the Shorter Catechism in return for their attendance at the school. Schoolmasters depended in part on school fees to earn a living. In predominantly Catholic areas, they could not well afford to deprive themselves of a significant part of their potential income.³⁷ Indeed, though some conflicts were reported,³⁸ they were extremely rare and always arose from the schoolmaster's 'inflexible' attempt at converting pupils. It is worth noting that, in the early 1750s, the SSPCK contemplated forbidding all their schoolmasters to teach writing and arithmetic to those Catholic children who did not attend Protestant services.³⁹ However, that plan was never executed. On the other hand, there are instances of 'negotiations' between the Mission and either individual masters or directors of the SSPCK, of which the most famous was that carried out by John Geddes with John Kemp, the secretary to the Society, in the early 1790s as a consequence of yet another conflict in Glenlivet.⁴⁰ It is hard to escape the conclusion that in the absence of Catholic schools, children attended Protestant ones with the concurrence of their priests provided that some – often tacit – agreement had been reached about the religious part of the curriculum.⁴¹

This *modus vivendi* testified to the eagerness of Catholics to have their children taught, but also to their growing awareness of the social potential of schooling. While the Catholic clergy had not endeavoured to open schools in the aftermath of the Forty-Five, there was a schoolmaster

³⁷ Further, some priests 'endeavoured to gain the goodwill of the Protestant schoolmasters and gave them a trifle of money not to plague the Catholic Children about Religion' according to Bishop Gordon's report of 1703. Quoted in Johnson, *Developments*, 82.

³⁸ For instance in Corgarff in the early 1760s: NAS, CH2/8/3, Presbytery of Alford Minutes, 1 April 1761, 404 and CH1/2/103, Royal Bounty Papers, William Copland, State of Popery in Curgarff, 14 May 1762, fol. 175.

³⁹ There had been a precedent in Glenlivet in the late 1730s. In 1742, the ban was lifted after Catholic gentlemen petitioned the SSPCK and 'oblige[d] themselves for the good behaviour of their Children, and their obedience to the Laws and Regulations of the said Society': NAS, CH2/6/3, Presbytery of Aberlour Minutes, 12 January 1742, 99.

⁴⁰ George Hay's letter to John Geddes makes it quite clear that the situation arose from a change of schoolmaster. While there was no problem whatsoever with the previous one, his successor compelled his pupils to learn the Protestant catechism: SCA, BL/4/28/1, George Hay to John Geddes, 3 January 1790.

⁴¹ Johnson (*Developments*, 226) reaches the same conclusion: 'Obviously very few Catholic children were able to attend Catholic schools. Evidence from Catholic sources, however, suggests, not only that the vast majority of Catholic children were educated in parish, or charity, schools run by Protestants, but that these schools had the active support of the Catholic clergy.'

among the South Uist emigrants to St John Island in 1772. MacDonald of Glenaladale, the man behind the emigration scheme, had written to Bishop Hay, asking him to recommend ‘a good sober Catholic lad versed in arithmetick, book-keeping & having a good hand, fit for a schoolmaster’.⁴² This seems to have set a pattern for most emigration schemes to come. In the later decades of the eighteenth century, it was still difficult to establish Catholic schools in Scotland so that the Scottish Mission relied on Protestant ones. That had been *de facto* the case ever since the penal laws were strictly enforced as even those boys who were eventually admitted at Scalán had first to learn the 3 Rs and the Latin rudiments. Indeed, except for those few whose parents could afford to hire a private tutor, boys attended their local (Protestant) school before entering Scalán.⁴³ In September 1776, for instance, Bishop Grant wrote to Bishop Hay about a couple of boys he intended to take into Scalán. They were both at school. What was new was that it became part of a deliberate plan on the Catholic clergy’s part. Already in the 1760s, Bishop Hugh MacDonald used the parochial school at Fochabers as a substitute for the Highland seminary. Boys intended for the priesthood were taught at this school and then further instructed by the local priests. John Geddes, who as a child had enrolled at the parochial school of Rathven, asserted that on education depended

the having in a short time good or bad pastors, good or bad judges, magistrates, officers: in a word the prosperity or decline of a state, the salvation or damnation of numberless souls.⁴⁴

In his ‘Observations on the duties of a Catholic Missionary in Scotland’, he wished that there were a Catholic schoolmaster in every mission but submitted that, failing that,

it might even be proper to cultivate the acquaintance of a Protestant schoolmaster, if he were a man of good sense, and moderation, as by these means some ill might be prevented, and some good procured.⁴⁵

⁴² SCA, BL/3/233/20, John McDonald to George Hay, 18 December 1771.

⁴³ One notable exception was Paul McPherson: ‘A protestant Schoolmaster was in the country; but he was of the worst presbyterian leaven; and in consequence extremely inimical to Catholics. My Father who was remarkably attached to the Catholic Faith, and very attentive in preserving his children from every appearance of danger in that way, often said that he would rather have me remain all my lifetime in the grossest ignorance than frequent such a school.’ SCA, P-PM1/1, Paul Macpherson’s Autobiography, 5.

⁴⁴ SCA, John Geddes, Miscellaneous Thoughts on Education, and on the manner of teaching the Belles Lettres.

⁴⁵ SCA, John Geddes, Observations on the duties of a Catholic Missionary in Scotland. Education was a constant preoccupation with John Geddes. See also his essay ‘On

A few years before the bishop dictated his 'Observations', James Robertson had sought advice from him on his school project which he expounded at length in a letter written in 1786:

suppose a parcel of boys in a free boarding house (for it is the poor that need this most) I would give them a discreet intelligent person for Preceptor at home, but would send them notwithstanding to the public school of the place . . . The Preceptor disburthen'd in many things, would employ himself in teaching them the love of virtue & the knowledge of Religion for this he would have sufficient time morning, noon, & evening when they are not in the School, & on Sundays & vacant days. There can be little or no danger in making them frequent public schools to learn reading, writing, &c as scarce one of these masters interfere with their scholars in any thing else . . . My heart bleeds for my poor Youth; my mission is lost without this remedy being quickly applied; but with it, nothing can hurt us.⁴⁶

This project unmistakably points to two crucial developments in the later eighteenth century: first, the growing secularisation of the education received in parochial schools; and secondly, the Catholics' realisation that education was an asset rather than a threat to the Catholic Church in Scotland in the face of the massive emigration to North America of the more prosperous members of the community. That was the overriding idea in John MacDonald of Glenaladale's letters in the 1780s. He constantly emphasised the social potential of education, in particular for Catholics, situated as they were on the margins of society. He deprecated the lack of discernment which had resulted in the vulnerable position of Catholics in British society:

They never had any concerted System, as they might have had, for extending and promoting their general Interest by a suitable Education of their Children to the growing Arts of agriculture, manufacture and commerce, which Surely would have established some of them as respectably as those of landed Property, and rendered them too important & useful a body of the Community to be harrassed by the Execution of penal laws.⁴⁷

That had been a fateful mistake, according to MacDonald. His letters indicated that he had no doubt about the fact that the condition of the Scottish Mission would have improved dramatically had the Catholic

the Nature, Usefulness and means of acquiring Learning': Salamanca, Real Colegio de Escoceses.

⁴⁶ SCA, BL/3/486/5, James Robertson to John Geddes, 29 August 1786.

⁴⁷ SCA, BL/3/451/11, John MacDonald of Glenaladale to John Geddes, 12 September 1785.

community been more far-sighted. It is worth noting that on at least two occasions he contrasted the Quakers favourably with the Catholics. In 1782, for instance, he wrote:

To bring up the lower class to an Inclination temper habite &
Industry for Business is I should think likely to do much good
– By these Means the Quakers have come to be of Considerable
Influence from their general Honesty plainness & Industry.⁴⁸

In that letter, he expatiated upon the failed attempt at granting relief to Scottish Catholics in the late 1770s. His considerations on the need for Catholics to be ‘bred up to handicraft’ were directly linked to his conviction that the successful integration of Catholics into British society could only be effected through social emancipation, which was to be the result of widespread education, rather than political emancipation, that is to say repeal of the penal laws.

Very much in keeping with the general trend in late eighteenth-century Scotland, MacDonald made it clear that what he had in mind was not ‘Classical Education and Philosophising’ but what was usually referred to as ‘useful knowledge’. The education he advocated was geared to business rather than literary culture. However, he stated that the education fit for Catholics should not only ‘form their minds for their business’ but also ‘impress a hearty affection for Religion’.⁴⁹ Once again, that was in line with what Protestant authors proposed, the major difference being, obviously, that the religion MacDonald alluded to was Catholicism, which he hoped would be strengthened in the process.

In such a context, Protestant schools could only be a stopgap solution. In spite of the Relief controversy, Catholics soon felt confident enough to try and establish schools. Though the attempts were at first quite timid, an increasing number of schools was opened. There were Catholic schools in Glenlivet, Strathglass, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, for instance. Still, there was some sense of emergency as it was suspected that by the end of the eighteenth century parents had become used to sending their children to Protestant schools, either because they had no other choice or, for those urban Catholics in better circumstances, because they felt it was the thing to do. When in 1790 John Geddes suggested to James Torrie, then at Aberdeen, that he come to teach in the Catholic school at Edinburgh, the schoolmaster answered:

I cannot help fearing lest I should only have the children of the poorer sort of Catholics because I apprehend that the more wealthy

⁴⁸ SCA, BL/3/364/3, John MacDonald of Glenaladale to John Geddes, 2 July 1782.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

would not so far deviate *de la mode* as to entrust theirs to anyone that was not in the number of the most celebrated Teachers.⁵⁰

When Scottish Catholics were eventually granted partial relief in 1793, the draft of the Bill explicitly debarred Catholics from teaching, which elicited this comment from Bishop Hay: ‘the Exception about teaching is rather inconvenient, but I hope it has been since amended.’⁵¹ Though it was not, it did not hinder Catholics from settling schools.

While Scottish Catholics had gradually recognised the social importance of education, there were growing fears among their clergy that they might lose their *esprit de corps*. In 1797, the priest at Auchinhalrig addressed his flock at length about the school he intended to open there. He first asserted – wrongly – that the 1793 Relief Act allowed Catholics to do such a thing, then reminded parents of their duty ‘to procure the necessary instruction’ for their children. He

own’d that care in general is taken to send your children to the Schools establish’d in the country, where some of the parts of education useful in the world are procured them

but added: ‘who does not see that one essential part, viz. solid catholic principles must be there entirely neglected?’ He contended that the benefits of separate schools were not only religious:

even respecting the useful education for the world, were the talents of the teachers of the common Schools ever so great, the number of scholars under one teacher is usually such that ’tis impossible that all can receive the due attention. – A Catholic School would ’tis hop’d in a great measure remedy these inconveniences.

This he further insisted on when he set forth the advantages of settling the school at Auchinhalrig:

Our School will there be near the Society School, which may excite a degree of emulation in the respective Teachers, to the advantage of all concerned; and the girls will have ready access to the sewing school there establish’d, along with their instruction in the Cath: school.⁵²

This last remark points to the fact that, contrary to what was often alleged, the Catholic clergy were not intrinsically obscurantist. They

⁵⁰ SCA, BL/4/39/1, James Torrie to John Geddes, 11 November 1790.

⁵¹ SCA, BL/4/74/2, George Hay to John Geddes, 22 May 1793.

⁵² SCA, IM/5/4, Rev. George Mathison, Address to the Catholics of Belly parish concerning the establishment of a Catholic school in that parish, 5 November 1797.

were not opposed to education *per se* but rather to its use as a tool against the Church of Rome, hence their endeavours to ensure their flocks could avail themselves of the benefits of education without paying the religious price demanded (by the SSPCK among others), namely their renouncing of the Catholic faith, be it only by attending Protestant services publicly. Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, the nefarious effects which might attend the enrolling of Catholic children in Protestant schools were ever present in the clergy's minds. In 1811 still, William Wallace, the priest at Bankhead, asked of Bishop Cameron: 'Can a good Catholic send his son to the East India Company's Seminary at Woolwich? and if he can, what precautions are to be taken?'⁵³

Another significant reason for George Mathison's choice of Auchinhalrig was that it was

near the Clergyman, who can thus more easily watch over the School, and inspect it frequently; that justice may be done to the Children; and the Teacher by having easy access to the Clergyman may be improved when necessary.⁵⁴

His insistence on the indispensable cooperation between the master and the priest was reminiscent of the earlier Presbyterian attitude. Nevertheless, in the late eighteenth century, a number of Presbyterian clergy gradually came to regard the spheres of action of clergy and teachers as separate:

literary qualifications constitute the sum of the requisites of [a teacher] in the opinion of the inhabitants in general, and in that of the clergy. The office is in general contemplated as equally distinct from religion, with any other occupation.⁵⁵

Teachers were primarily entrusted with the preservation of the social *status quo*. This trend grew even more perceptible in the aftermath of the French Revolution, in particular in the context of the massive immigration of supposedly volatile poor Irish Catholics into south-west Scotland. If troubles were to be avoided and order preserved, it was of paramount importance that Irish Catholics should be taught; both Catholic clergy and

⁵³ SCA, BL/4/383/3, William Wallace to Alexander Cameron, 3 May 1811.

⁵⁴ SCA, IM/5/4, Mathison, Address to the Catholics of Belly parish, 5 November 1797.

⁵⁵ Patrick Butter further lamented: 'many [ministers] are not ashamed of openly avowing, and say distinctly, that the business of the schoolmaster, of whatever description, is entirely limited to the mechanical instruction of the young, in the knowledge of letters'. NAS, GD95/9/3, Patrick Butter, Journal of a Visit to the Schools of the SSPCK 1824, 59–60, 72. On this change in attitude, see Clotilde Prunier, 'L'Éducation et le Livre: controverses religieuses en Écosse au XVIII^e siècle', *Bulletin de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* 50 (2000), 67–79.

well-to-do Protestant inhabitants of Paisley and Glasgow, for instance, saw to it that they were provided with some sort of schooling.⁵⁶

The situation prevailing in France favoured the integration of Catholics into British society. French clergy fleeing the country were welcomed in Britain and some of them, such as Mister Bricon at Aberdeen, earned a living as teachers. More generally, the Revolution was construed as anti-Christian and as a result the Church of Scotland and Scottish Catholic clergy were unanimous in their condemnation of it.

In spite of their gradual integration into British society, further enhanced by the 1793 Relief Act, the Scottish Mission felt it necessary to increase specifically Catholic means of education. Though they aspired to be full members of the British community, they refused to be amalgamated and strove to retain their religious identity. As years went on, the absolute necessity of separate schooling became more evident to Catholic clergy. In 1803, Aeneas Chisholm lamented his brother's backwardness in turning the Highland seminary at Lismore into a Catholic academy where prospective priests and sons of the gentry alike could get high-quality education:

we have not a proper catholic school in all Scotland the few Gentry we have, and the Gentlemen farmers who can afford it are obliged to send their children to the great towns where they first ruin their morals and then their Religion in which perhaps they were never properly founded, & then turn out the scandal of that very profession which once they carried on their foreheads... –I have been preaching to him for more than a year back to begin immediately to enlarge his buildings there; to have a look out for proper Professors in various branches; and to be ready to receive all who might offer themselves for a moderate compensation – & to feed, lead & school them – by which plan if properly degested [*sic*] and steadily followed Religion would gain ground and the Seminary would turn richer... My Brother hears me on this Subject, but has taken no steps as yet to put it in execution – the saving of the penny is the order of the day – but saving it some times, is really spending it.⁵⁷

Almost twenty years later, the need for such wide-ranging education was still insisted on by Alexander Badenoch when he wrote to James Kyle, thus underlining the fact that the education provided to priests

⁵⁶ For a discussion of Catholic schools in south-west Scotland, see Johnson, *Developments*, 222–4.

⁵⁷ SCA, BL/4/200/9, Aeneas Chisholm to Alexander Cameron, 26 February 1803. His brother, John, was the vicar apostolic for the Highland District.

had to be suited to, and was therefore dependent on, the society they lived in:

The times and the growing prosperity of our Church require a very different education from that which was given to us (*qui ne sommes que de vieux rustres*) who were destined to be the ministers of an obscure church in a state of persecution.⁵⁸

This was not restricted to the education of the clergy and of the gentry. By the 1820s, the Scottish Mission firmly believed that its prosperity lay in the education of all its members, but it had much rather it was provided in Catholic schools. This was manifest in Bishop Cameron's answer to Principal Baird's invitation to participate in his 'Plan for promoting increased means of Education and Religious Instruction' in 1824. Whereas Principal Baird asked the bishop to support the General Assembly schools, pledging that 'no attempt shall be made by the Schoolmasters for the proselytism of the Children',⁵⁹ Bishop Cameron politely refused to comply:

though I put every reliance upon you personally, still I fear that experience will not tend to encourage either Catholic Parents, or Catholic Pastors to patronise these Schools, or to send children to them.⁶⁰

The exchange of letters between Principal Baird and Bishop Cameron testified to the shift in attitudes towards education in both communities. Protestants, who used to be persuaded that education would eventually bring Catholics over, now advocated Christian (that is to say non-denominational) education to win the fight against irreligion. On the other hand the Catholic clergy, who might at first have appeared indifferent to the education of their flocks, now put a high premium on it, goaded on by the laity. Over the century, both clergy and laity had grown confident that education was the key not only to the socio-economic but also to the political and religious status of Catholics in Great Britain.

CLOTILDE PRUNIER TEACHES BRITISH HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY
PAUL-VALÉRY, MONTPELLIER 3.

⁵⁸ SCA, BL/5/109/7, Alexander Badenoch to James Kyle, 31 January 1822.

⁵⁹ SCA, BL/5/126/12 (1) to Alexander Cameron, 12 April 1823.

⁶⁰ SCA, BL/5/126/12 (2) draught of Alexander Cameron's answer to Principal Baird.