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English Catholics and the Education of the Poor, 1847-1902, by Eric G. Tenbus; pp. viii + 209. London and Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2010, £60.00, \$99.00.

“Give me a child at seven,” the Jesuits are supposed to have claimed, “and he is mine for life.” Central to Victorian Catholic politics was the struggle to ensure that the English system of state-funded primary school education would meet the needs of the Catholic poor. The growth in state-funded Catholic schools that took place in England and Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century helped shape generations of Catholic schoolchildren. According to English Catholics and the Education of the Poor, increasing engagement with the political system also changed the nature of the English Catholic community, turning it from a weak and divided grouping into a formidable political lobby. Thanks to Eric G. Tenbus’s careful research into the Wiseman, Henry Edward Manning, Herbert Vaughan, W. E. Gladstone, and other manuscript collections, thorough examination of the English Catholic bishops’ pastoral letters, and analysis of debates over education that appeared in the Victorian periodical press, we now have a serious, scholarly account of this important chapter in the history of Catholic education and politics.

English Catholics and the Education of the Poor traces the complicated story of English Catholic political participation in the Victorian education question. It begins with the entrance of Catholic schools into the state grant system in 1847, examines the controversy surrounding Forster’s Education Act of 1870, and charts Catholic involvement in the debates which culminated in the Balfour Education Bill of 1902. In so doing, it fills a glaring gap in the historiography and makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the English Catholic political scene during the half century of increasing denominational visibility that followed the restoration of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Tenbus’s volume does more than simply chronicle the ups and downs of the Catholic education political lobby and its constituents. It also suggests that the way this particular political question was handled changed the nature of the community. Drawing on the work of John Bossy, Kester Aspden, and myself, Tenbus accepts arguments that the English Catholic community became more cohesive and confident, even militant, over the course of the nineteenth century; but he sets out to prove that it was above all the education question which made it so. Where I have argued that a distinctively English Catholic piety held an otherwise diverse community together despite divisions of class, ethnicity, and political outlook, Tenbus declares that “no other issue but education could have possibly served to bring together Catholics, rich and poor, cradle and convert, liberal and ultramontane, English and Irish” in the second half of the nineteenth century (6-7).

As Tenbus points out, the two arguments are not mutually exclusive. Traditional English Catholic piety, most closely associated with Richard Challoner’s prayer book The Garden of the Soul (1775), sought to provide, through successive editions, for the spiritual needs of those who “living in the world, aspire to devotion.” From an English Catholic perspective, the whole point of a denominational education was to train hearts as well as heads, to raise children as good Catholics who, as Robert Cornthwaite put it in a pastoral letter in 1869, would be fit for citizenship both “on earth and in heaven” (qtd. in Tenbus 23). Tenbus

acknowledges that devotional practices may have “led to a new spiritual identity, one marked by greater homogeneity that helped break ethnic and socio-economic barriers between English Catholics” but suggests that “part of that new Catholic identity” also came “from the increasingly assertive and self-confident, some might even say aggressive, position on education that dominated the writings and agendas of the hierarchy and the Catholic press in the last half of the century.” Tenbus’s work seeks in effect to bridge the gap between the cohesive devotional community I imagined and the defensively strident “fortress Church” presented by Aspden (source). It may be, as Tenbus puts it, that “neither argument reaches fulfilment without the complementary effects of the other” (8).

Tenbus argues that it was above all through the nitty-gritty of political lobbying for a cause of concern to all Catholics living in England – the cause of state-funded elementary Catholic education – that the community was gradually brought to the (albeit short-lived) point of “nearly complete unity on education” in 1902 (153). The point is well taken, but Tenbus’s research, which is largely restricted to public debates and episcopal records, sheds considerably more light on the thinking of the ecclesiastical hierarchy than on the religious teaching orders or parish priests, let alone the laity. It was not until Vaughan, an Old Catholic, succeeded Manning as archbishop of Westminster that real progress on Catholic schools was made, partly because the Irish party was by then split between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites and the question of Home Rule temporarily shelved; and partly because James Gascoyne-Cecil’s Conservative administration, though it spouted anti-Catholic rhetoric and disdained the Irish, had good relations with Vaughan and was supported by conservative English Catholics.

It was “the half-century struggle for the schools,” Tenbus concludes, which “altered Catholic identity, leaving it worlds removed from its quiescent past and energized, yet intermittently fractious, for the educational warfare that was to come in the twentieth century” (155). Tenbus is surely right that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the question of Catholic schools had come to matter to virtually all Catholics living in England and Wales. By the twentieth century, schools had come to seem as important as home or church as a place to learn how to pray, make the sign of the cross, prepare for First Communion, and otherwise practise one’s faith as a Catholic. Tenbus makes a powerful case for the impact which lobbying for Catholic schools had on an increasingly politically sophisticated ecclesiastical hierarchy. Whether the archbishop of Westminster and his bishops can be equated with the English Catholic community in quite such a straightforward way, however, seems rather more open to question.

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Queries:

1. Para 1, sentence 1 beginning "'Give me'": could you please provide a source, with relevant citation, for the quotation "Give me a child at seven"?
2. Para 1, sentence 5 beginning "Thanks to Eric": could you please provide the first name for "Wiseman"?
3. Also, are the "pastoral letters" a specific publication or a general category? Your response will help us determine whether or not to capitalize the term and to include date of publication.
4. Para 4, sentence 2 beginning "Traditional English": could you please provide a source and page number for the quotation "living . . . devotion"? Also, could you please confirm the year of publication for The Garden of the Soul?
5. Para 4, sentence 5 beginning "Tenbus's work seeks": could you please provide the source (citation) for "fortress church"?
6. Para 5, sentence 3 beginning "It was not until Vaughn": could you please clarify: 1) Whether the succession and progress you describe here are Tenbus's assertions, or your counter-claims; and 2) how this point is relevant to the preceding discussion.
7. Could you please provide a contributor's note listing your position, affiliation, publication(s), and current projects? This should be approximately 50-60 words.
8. IU Press has recently requested that we include email addresses in reviewers' contributor notes. If you feel comfortable including yours, could you please indicate which email address you prefer to use?