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The Contribution of “A Sister of Notre Dame” and the “Nun of Calabar” to Montessori Education in Scotland, Nigeria and Beyond

Il contributo di “Una Suora di Notre Dame” e della “Suora di Calabar” all'educazione montessoriana in Scozia, Nigeria e oltre

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Abstract. Although the English Montessori Movement was declining, two educators, trained in the Method in England in the 1920s, contributed significantly to the continuity of Montessori education. “A Sister of Notre Dame”, was the anonymous author of *A Scottish Montessori School*, published in 1932. The “Nun of Calabar”, established Montessori schools between 1926 and 1934 in Nigeria. Their work is placed within the political, social, and cultural context of the time.

Keywords: Montessori, Catholic, missionary, Nigeria, Scotland.

Riassunto. Sebbene il movimento inglese Montessori fosse in declino, due educatrici, formate in quel Metodo in Inghilterra nel corso degli anni '20 del Novecento, contribuiscono in modo significativo alla continuità dell'educazione montessoriana. “A Sister of Notre Dame” fu l'anonima autrice di *A Scottish Montessori School*, pubblicato nel 1932. La “Nun of Calabar” fondò scuole Montessori tra il 1926 e il 1934 in Nigeria. Il loro lavoro si colloca pienamente nel contesto politico, sociale e culturale di quell'epoca.

Parole chiave: Montessori, Cattolicesimo, missioni, Nigeria, Scozia.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to contribute to recent scholarship, uncovering a hidden history of Montessori education, in English-speaking countries (De Giorgi 2018; Whitehead et al. 2018; Williams 2015). It explores the work of two English educators who contributed to the continued vitality of Montessori education from 1919 until today. “A Sister of Notre Dame”, was the anonymous author of *A Scottish Montessori School*¹ published in 1932, recently identified

¹ Referred to in future as SMS.

as Sister Thérèse de St. Bernard Crockett SND (1880-1970)². Born in England, she joined the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1898³. She served as a teacher and headmistress at the practice school of Dowanhill Teacher Training College, Glasgow, Scotland, the school described in her book. The “Nun of Calabar” was a name used for Mother Mary Charles Magdalene Walker RSC (1881-1966) in Calabar, Southern Nigeria. This article uses her more usual form of address in Nigeria, Sister Magdalene (Okure 2016, 12). An English woman, she migrated to Ireland in 1901 to join the Irish Sisters of Charity⁴. Between 1924 and 1934, she was a Missionary in Calabar, establishing Montessori schools, including a practice school. With four directresses, she founded the second congregation of indigenous African women, the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus⁵. They use Montessori education today. She wrote about her use of the Montessori Method in an article entitled “Education of Girls in Southern Nigeria”, published in *International Review of Mission* in 1928. Writings of the two educators provide rich sources on the implementation of the Method. There are also visitors’ accounts. Sister Thérèse’s book contains 57 photographs and six have been found for Sister Magdalene.

Exploration of little-known work of Montessori educators reflects a recent international trend in history of education. Kay Whitehead’s 2010 pioneering research on the work of Australian Montessorian, Lillian De Lissa (1885-1967) demonstrated the significance of placing a Montessorian educator in a transnational context; an approach adopted in this article. It is one which has thrown new light on Montessori education in Australia (Whitehead et al. 2018), Spain (Moretti et al. 2018), Austria (Trabalzini 2018), Switzerland (Sahfield and Vanini 2018), England, Ireland (De Giorgi 2018) and the United States (Guteck and Guteck 2020). Marion O’Donnell referred to Catholic women religious, “responsible for introducing Montessori education to many remote places as well as teacher training” (O’Donnell 2007, 81). Catholic teaching sisters trained at the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary Convent in Rome (Rocca 2018). One participant in the 1911 course was the headmistress

of Mother Cabrini’s School in London, Italian Mother Domenica Bianchi MSC. From 1912, she applied the techniques (Williams 2019, 299-300). From 1920, Mother Isabel Eugenie RA and Mother Elizabeth Dease RA developed Montessori education and training at the Assumption convent in Kensington, London (De Giorgi 2018, 62-3). This study adds to the picture by exploring individuals working in Scotland and Nigeria.

The historiography of Montessori education in both nations is limited. Scotland is mentioned in studies of England (Cohen 1974; Brehony 1994; Cunningham 2000). William Boyd, of the University of Glasgow, was critical of Montessori education in works, including his 1914 *From Locke to Montessori*. It gained support in Scotland, nevertheless. Dowanhill School adopted Montessori practice during World War One. A Montessori Society was founded in Glasgow in 1919. Australian Muriel Matters lectured at Dundee Training College in 1922 (Whitehead et al. 2018, 192). In 1925, Jessie White referred to a Montessori demonstration school in Edinburgh (White 1925). This is probably the one featured in a film, produced by Edinburgh Education Authority, for the 1925 World Educational Congress held there⁶. In 1938, the city hosted the Seventh International Montessori Congress. *The Scotsman* of Monday August 1, 1938 cited Mr Borlase Matthews, Chairman of the Montessori Society of Great Britain, as reporting to the Congress, “that thanks to the energy of the Edinburgh members, their branch was one of the strongest in the country”⁷. There is, however, little detail on Montessorian practice in schools in histories of education of Scotland.

Nigeria was a British colony from the mid-nineteenth century until 1960. Christian mission schools were the main providers of education in the South, but not in the Muslim north. Anglican missionary, Roland Allen (1868-1947), an early advocate of using Montessori principles in missionary work, set out his ideas in “The Montessori Method and Missionary Methods”, in *International Review of Mission* in 1913. The 1922 Phelps-Stokes Report on African education by Jesse Jones made no reference to Montessori education in Nigeria. Biographies of Sister Magdalene identify her use of the Method from 1926 (Cooke 1980; Okure 2016). In 1929, Montessori wrote of use “in Africa from Egypt to Morocco in the North to Cape Town in the South” (Montessori 1929, ii). She was invited to speak in Mombasa, Kenya in 1947

² Identified by the SND Provincial Archive, 4 Lancaster Court, Lancaster Lane, Parbold, WN8 7HS, UK. Referred to in future as Sister Thérèse.

³ Founded by Saint Julie Billiart (1751-1816), in Amiens, France in 1804, the mother house moved to Namur Belgium in 1809. Bland, J. 1967. “Notre Dame of Namur, Sisters of”. In *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 10: 529-530.

⁴ Founded by Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858) in Ireland in 1815. Hezkin, T. A. 1967. “Irish Sisters of Charity”. In *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 3: 473.

⁵ hhcjgeneralate – Nigeria Accessed March 30, 2021; Rizzoli, F. 1974. “Ancelle del Bambino Gesù”, in *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* 1: 547.

⁶ Edinburgh Education Authority. 1925. Men and Women of Tomorrow: Some of the Work of the Edinburgh Education Authority. National Library of Scotland, <https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0417> Accessed August 7, 2020.

⁷ Religious of the Assumption Archive, 20 Kensington Square, London, W8 5HH, UK.

(De Giorgi 2013, 95). Prior to her death in 1952, she was hoping to visit Africa. E. M. Standing's *Montessori Revolution* contains a photograph of a pupil using Montessori equipment for long division in Nigeria but gives no details (Standing 1970, 137). Anene Ejikeme mentions Montessori equipment in her article on the Holy Rosary Sisters in Ontisha (Ejikeme 2011). Montessori education does not feature in the growing body of scholarship on history of education in Nigeria or the extensive literature on colonial education in Africa. This study adds to recent scholarship, demonstrating the complexities of the provision (Ejikeme 2011; Swartz et al. 2018).

Sisters Thérèse and Magdalene encountered Montessori education in England in 1923. The former at Montessori's London course. The latter, informally, at the Assumption Convent, Kensington. The historiography of Montessori education in England has focussed on the decade following the 1912 publication of the English translation of *The Montessori Method* (Brehony 1994; Cohen 1974; Cunningham 2000). It became “the most vital issue in English education” (Cohen 1974, 51). From the 1920s, the movement went into decline. Little attention has been given, however, to Britain and Ireland, as important centres for Montessori training in the inter-war period. The Method was abandoned in the United States during the 1920s, in Germany in 1933, and in other European nations which came under Nazi rule. Montessori had a complex relationship with the Italian Fascist government, which supported her method from 1924 but in 1934 closed all Montessori schools (Kramer 1976; Leenders 2018). Montessori left Spain in the 1936 Civil War. In England, she continued the biennial three-month teacher training courses, which had commenced in 1919, offering parallel courses in Dublin from 1933. They resumed in 1946. The International Montessori Congress was held in Oxford in 1934, Edinburgh in 1938 and London in 1951. Austrian Lili Roubiczek (1898-1966), who established the Method in Austria, trained in London in 1921 (Trabalzini 2018, 153). This article shows the impact of the work of two more London-trained teachers.

The contribution of each sister will be placed in the context of “political, social and cultural conditions which underlie developments in educational practice” (Cunningham 2000, 203). The impact of the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act is significant for Sister Thérèse. It marked a turning point in Catholic education in Scotland (McKinney et al. 2019). Sister Magdalene introduced Montessori practice shortly after the 1925 White Paper, “Education Policy in British Tropical Africa”, amid discussions on the best education for Africans (Omolewa 2006). As both educators were Catholic

women religious, religion was a significant cultural factor. Montessori's understanding of the child's spiritual nature was and continues to be scrutinised (De Serio 2018). Catholic clergy and hierarchy in Europe gave a mixed reception to the Method. In Italy, it lost initial support following critical articles in *Civiltà Cattolica* in 1910 and 1911 (De Giorgi 2013, 39). The Method was, however, given a warm reception by the clergy of Catalonia at their Liturgical Conference in 1915 (Montessori 1965, 26-7).

An important question in England, was the matter of original sin (De Giorgi 2019). Edmund Holmes, a leading figure in the early English Montessori movement, hailed the freedom of Montessori education as rooted in dismissal of original sin. He assumed, wrongly, that this doctrine informed Christian pedagogies of fear, using harsh punishments, but was abandoned by those using nurturing, child-centred pedagogies. The Association of Convent Schools, of which the Religious of the Assumption and Notre Dame Sisters were active members, arranged for Montessori to give a lecture on these issues in June 1921. 100 Sisters attended at a Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ)⁸ convent (De Giorgi 2019, 23). Cardinal Bourne of Westminster became interested in the developments. On June 21, 1921, he was reassured by a visit to the Kensington school and a meeting with Montessori (De Giorgi 2019). Bourne was keen for all teaching Sisters to gain recognised teaching qualifications. The convent setting was accessible and attractive to Catholic women religious in Britain and Ireland, some still semi-enclosed. The training of several months required less time and money than traditional teacher training. In the years that followed sisters attended courses on Montessori education, including lectures by Montessori, held at the Assumption.

The English situation contrasted with that in Ireland. Timothy Corcoran SJ, Professor of Education and adviser to the new Irish government, opposed Montessori's approach in influential articles in 1924 (De Giorgi 2018, 65-7). Responding to Corcoran in the *Irish Monthly*, Gerald Dease, an Irish Education Commissioner, referred to a “Dominican Professor of Philosophy”, who regarded Montessori's “philosophy as perfectly sound and according to Saint Thomas” (Dease 1924, 466)⁹. The English Dominican journal *Blackfriars* published articles on this theme (Standing 1936; Rice 1937). Opposition on

⁸ Founded in England in 1846 by Philadelphia-born Cornelia Connelly. McCarthy, M. C. 1967. “Holy Child Jesus, Society of the”. In *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 7: 60-61.

⁹ Dease was the brother of Mother Elizabeth. The “Dominican Professor” was almost certainly Vincent McNabb OP, a well-known public intellectual. The Assumption Annals list him as giving lectures at the Assumption 1920-23.

philosophical grounds came rather from the Froebelians, (Cunningham 2000, 215).

Consideration of the implementation of the Method by Sisters Thérèse and Magdalene provides an opportunity to relate empirical data, to these and other criticisms. One, was the failure to develop the potential for early cognitive development. Theoretical insights have been provided by recent scholarship re-visiting Montessori's approach to sense education, concept formation and the development of intellectual virtues and agency (Colgan 2016; Frierson 2019). Additional contemporary criticisms, relating to classroom practice, included the cost of equipment and lack of order in the classroom. Lack of prior training and experience of Montessori teachers is also important. Catherine Pomeroy Collins, who trained with Montessori in Rome in 1930, told Rita Kamer that, like herself, "many of the people she [Montessori] trained did not have sufficient training before that" (Kramer 1976, 317). Three sections follow this introduction. A study of the work of each educator considers their contributions in establishing successful Montessori schools and contributing to wider mobilisation of the Method. This includes dissemination of ideas; geographical movement of people and resources and enabling teachers to develop dispositions needed for Montessorian educational practice (Williams 2015). The conclusion compares the educators' contributions to Montessori education, identifying the distinctiveness of each.

‘A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME’
ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL MONTESSORI
SCHOOL

As a teacher and headmistress, Sister Thérèse played a leading role in establishing a school that ‘rapidly acquired a reputation for the excellent results of the Method’ (SMS, xix). Initially, however, she had been reluctant to adopt the Method. An experienced teacher, she had “for many years had great success with other methods and had always been most averse to the new system” (SMS, xv). She was won over by the standards achieved by her headmistress, Sister Teresa Magdalene Bonney, who read the *Montessori Method* and applied it with the youngest class of 40 pupils. It was not unusual for teachers to adopt the Method after reading Montessori's book. This was the case with Martha Simpson in Australia (Whitehead et al. 2018, 183). Sister Teresa's class produced “a quality of work which more formal methods failed to achieve” (Linscott 1966, 152). Observing these results, Sister Thérèse studied *The Advanced Method*, published in 1917, adopting it when she took

over the class (SMS, xv). By 1919, it was used throughout the school. In 1923, Sister Thérèse gained a diploma at the three-month Montessori training course in London. The school was recognised by Montessori in November 1924. Sister Thérèse became headmistress in 1926, continuing until her retirement in 1945.

Teacher initiative was part of the Notre Dame tradition. Mary Linscott points out that “there was no one Notre Dame pattern” (Linscott 1966, 41). Rather “the individual must use the training she had received and find the techniques that suited her best” (Linscott 1966, 41). Sisters Teresa and Thérèse were representative of the culture of innovation at Dowanhill Notre Dame community. Sister Monica Taylor (1877-1968), head of the Teacher Training College Science Department, was a well-regarded scientific researcher. In 1917, she was awarded a DSc by the University of Glasgow. Sister Marie Hilda Marley (1876-1951), a child psychologist, opened a child guidance clinic, at Dowanhill in 1931, which gained an international reputation.

The congregation also had the support of the Church, the civil authorities and Maria Montessori. It was recognised internationally as, “arguably the most professional teaching congregation in the world” (Kehoe 2019, 62). The high standards of their Liverpool training college were well known in Scotland. The Sisters had been invited to Scotland by Archbishop Eyre (1817-1902) to train teachers to raise standards in Catholic Schools. Dowanhill College, which opened in 1895, demonstrated their expertise. Relationships with the Scottish civil authorities were therefore good (Linscott 1966, 134-5). Under the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act, all voluntary Catholic schools in Scotland could enter the state-funded school system, whilst retaining their denominational status. The funding was significant in developing Dowanhill as a Montessori approved school. Initially, the sisters had made their own equipment (Linscott 1966, 152). The photographs in the book show the authorised Montessori equipment.

The Sisters at Dowanhill also had a good working relationship with Montessori. In 1923, Sister Thérèse made a good impression. In her letter approving the school, dated November 24, 1924, Montessori wrote, “I remember so well the earnest attention with which she followed my Course of Method in London”¹⁰. Prior to approval as a Montessori School, there was an inspection of several weeks by Signorina Maria Fanello, Inspector of Neapolitan Montessori Schools. Sister Thérèse prepared the staff. After the 1923 Montessori course in London, she “returned eager to impart

¹⁰ SND Provincial Archive

to the other members all the new ideas and suggestions she had received” (SMS, xvi). She also set an example as a directress. Montessori’s letter noted that Inspector Fancello had reported: “Worthy of special note is the spontaneity of the children in Sister Thérèse’s Casa dei Bambini with its admirably prepared environment”. She also noted “her strong silent work with the little ones”. The relationship with Montessori and her associates was mutually supportive. Signorina Fancello spent the evenings “giving the staff much valuable advice and assistance” (SMS, xvi). She took samples of resources made by the staff including, “numerous samples of the cards prepared in Religious Instruction, Nature Study, English, Geography, History and many other subjects” (SMS, xvi). The staff did not train for all aspects of the curriculum. Dalcroze Eurythmics was used in music and rhythm classes, as in other Montessori schools (Whitehead et al. 2018, 194). Miss Constance Hook LRAM Dalcroze Diploma taught this from 1922 (SMS, 123). A good working relationship with Montessori continued. Sister Loyola of the Sacred Heart Keenan (1899-1983) attended the London training in 1925 and became friends with Maria and Mario Montessori¹¹.

The cognitive benefits of the method became evident in the increased numbers progressing to Notre Dame High School. “Each succeeding year about forty pupils, having passed the necessary examination, have been transferred to the Secondary Department” (SMS, xix). This was important for subsequent progression to teacher training, to address the objectives of the authorities. Whilst academic attainment was important to the Sisters, their tradition centred on educating “the whole child: heart, hand and head” (Linscott 1966, 30). In the preface, Notre Dame Training College Principal, Sister Aimée du Saint-Sacrement O’Keefe, describes skills and intellectual and moral virtues observed in pupils:

facility and dexterity in intellectual and manual pursuits due to the co-ordination in sense training in their early years: they show powers of concentration, of self-dependence and of initiative due to the individual work of those early years: above all they shew in a marked degree that moral self-control, that high standard of spiritual values which they began to practice and appreciate from the dawn of reason (Principal 1932, xiv).

The book explains how the Method achieved this. A chapter is devoted to each of the following: writing and reading, arithmetic, English, grammar, metrics, geometry and design, geography, history, nature study, music, rhythm, and handiwork. The sisters also valued the free-

dom of Montessori’s approach. Sister Aimée considered Montessori’s theory of freedom in education as, “one of the outstanding merits of her system” (Principal 1932, xii). This not only developed the self-dependence and initiative required for children to be agents of their own learning but also made school enjoyable. The pupils at Downhill came to “look upon work as a pleasure rather than a hardship” (Principal 1932, xiv). It was a means to address Saint Julie’s counsel that “unless you can have the goodwill of the child you can do nothing for her education” (Sister 1922, 50).

Chapter 2, “The Training of the Child” describes how the care of the person was taught, including a seven-step guide to demonstrating use of the large button frame (SMS, 8). Guidance on the exercises of practical life include the organisation of the rotation of responsibilities, such as dusting and flower arranging, illustrated with a photograph. The chapter on sensory apparatus explains the use of each piece. It is illustrated with photographs of children using the pink tower, geometrical insets, and the movable alphabet. The book also gives details of resources used to supplement the Montessori resources. These included book series used for class libraries such as “the Oxford Press series of readers, remarkable for variety and cheapness” (SMS, 26). Individual work cards were produced. The system of record keeping is also described. Each of the younger children had a card to record their own progress, which was checked by the teacher, whilst senior pupils kept own book (SMS, 127).

CONTRIBUTING TO THE WIDER MOBILISATION OF THE METHOD

The book also provides insights into how the many students who completed teaching practice at Downhill were trained. The role of the directress is introduced in the preface and addressed in the first chapter. Sister Aimée, in keeping with Saint Julie’s emphasis on the importance of teacher example, sets out the virtues of a teacher. “Self-control, discrimination, alertness, patience, and never-failing faith, hope and charity are for her not merely assets, but essential qualities” (SMS, xiii). The chapter explains the twofold role of the directress, “according to Doctor Montessori”. It devotes two pages to preparing the environment and three to guiding the child’s activities (SMS, 1-6). The demands made on the teacher confirm the observations of Spanish Father Antonio Casulleras, an early supporter of Montessorian education. In 1917, he noted, “this system requires much knowledge and virtue on the part of the teacher”

¹¹ Biographical Notes, SND Provincial Archive.

(Moretti et al. 2018, 114). Gerald Dease, who visited several times, observed enthusiastic teachers and teaching students, writing that they “said to me that they could not understand how they ever learnt anything under the old system in comparison with that which they are now practicing” (Dease 1924, 467). Like those who studied at Gypsy Hill, many Dowanhill teaching students took their Montessori classroom experience to their schools. Teachers who left did likewise. Sister Loyola became head of St Thomas Riddrie Primary School in Glasgow, in 1929, remaining until 1954. She was awarded the MBE for her innovative educational work in Scotland.

A valuable handbook for classroom practice, Sister Thérèse’s book also gave teachers unable to visit or attend Montessori’s London courses access to the Method. Father Casuelleras observed that few teachers would “know how to interpret” the Montessori Method (Moretti et al. 2018, 114). Explanations are cross referenced to the page in the relevant publication by Montessori. The language and photographs make it accessible to a wide audience. Visual sources were important in promoting Montessori education (Comas et al. 2012). Sister Thérèse arranged the photographs herself, having attended courses at the Glasgow School of Art between 1915 and 1916¹². The stated purpose of the book, however, was to address the questions of the many visitors, attracted by the excellent results (SMS, xix). These included writers whose accounts support that given in the book. They addressed common misconceptions of the Method. Dease was impressed by the pupils’ cognitive development. In 1924, he wrote that “it certainly was a revelation of what small children were capable of under rational tuition” (Dease 1924, 467). The journalist Mungolia described classroom practice including the use of beaded wires to understand “ten squared”¹³. He also wrote of the freedom granted to children and that the classes he observed demonstrated “a refutation of the supposed want of discipline reigning in a Montessori Schoolroom”.

Dowanhill also contributed to global mobilisation of the Method. Linscott describes the work at Dowanhill School as “the experiment which most influenced the congregation” (Linscott 1966, 152). In Kroonstad, South Africa, they established a Montessori nursery for children of European and Afrikaner origins as early as 1920. (Linscott 1966, 219). The Superior General in Namur encouraged sisters from Belgium and the United States to visit Dowanhill in the early 1920s (Linscott 1966, 152). The Belgian Sisters developed an approach

that might be described as “Montessori influenced”, transforming their *écoles gardiennes* (Linscott 1966, 153). They also wrote a pamphlet, *L’éducation des tout petits*, and gave demonstrations and talks. Sisters who visited from Cincinnati, USA, established the Summit Montessori School in 1925 (Connelly 2013, 25). The next generation of Sisters played an important role in the Montessori revival in the United States, from the 1960s. Sister Christina Marie Trudeau SND trained teachers at Seattle University and at Universities in Honolulu, Japan, India, The Philippines, and Tahiti¹⁴.

Sister Thérèse continued as the headmistress until her retirement in 1945. Dowanhill College practice school closed in 1958 due to insufficient trained directresses¹⁵. The congregation still has Montessori schools in the United States today.

THE “NUN OF CALABAR” ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Sister Magdalene introduced the Montessori Method in April 1926, at St Joseph’s School for girls in Calabar, where she was headmistress. In 1928, in an article for *International Review of Mission*, she wrote “I have adopted the Montessori system and have unbounded confidence in it” (Magdalene 1928, 510). Unlike Dowanhill, the school was not approved by Montessori. Like Sister Thérèse, Sister Magdalene was a successful, experienced teacher when she adopted the Method. She achieved honours in her education certificate and taught for 18 years before leaving Ireland in 1922. She also wrote a pamphlet on teaching catechism. There is no evidence that she used the Method in Ireland. Public interest grew there from 1913, when Edward Parnell Culverwell published *Montessori Principles and Practices*. A professor at Trinity College Dublin, he gave public lectures to promote Montessori education. The Sisters of Mercy established a Montessori school in 1920 in Waterford. Sister Magdalene may have learnt more on Montessori from Mabel Mary, and Kathleen Mary Dease, Sisters of Charity, and blood sisters of Mother Elizabeth Dease RA, Superior of the Assumption Convent, Kensington. Sister Magdalene stayed at the Assumption, from 4th July until early September 1923, to prepare for her journey to Nigeria (Cooke 1980, 67;72). This coincided with the concluding days of a Montessori London biennial train-

¹² Glasgow School of Art Archives <https://gsaarchives.net/collections/index.php/bernard-sister-therese> Accessed June 8, 2020.

¹³ Undated newspaper article, SND Provincial Archives.

¹⁴ Sr. Christina (Christina Marie) Trudeau, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur - California / East-West Province (sddenwest.org) Accessed December 18, 2020.

¹⁵ The archives team did not have details.

ing, attended by several Assumption sisters¹⁶. She would certainly have learnt of the training, seen the Assumption Montessori School, and had access to Montessori’s books.

Sister Magdalene found an opportunity for innovation, when she took over St Joseph’s, in January 1924. Standards declined after the founders, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, left in 1919. The local Bishop, and Superior of the mission, Joseph Shanahan CSSp. sought help from Irish congregations. Sister Magdalene and two other Irish Sisters of Charity volunteered. The latter changed their minds. The Holy See gave her permission to go alone, giving her the advantage of working independently. She found herself among Irish innovators, who later established new Irish congregations. Shanahan established the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary. Some diocesan priests, serving in Calabar, established Saint Patrick’s Missionary Society in 1932. Sister Magdalene’s first companion in Calabar, lay volunteer, Marie Martin, founded the Medical Missionaries of Mary in 1937. Alec Garden Fraser became a friend and supporter. In 1924, he co-founded Achimota College, an inter-denominational, co-educational institution, with Doctor James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey. African and European staff were treated as equals there. He was also involved in the New Ideals in Education Movement. He visited in 1927 and 1928.

Sister Magdalene quickly proved herself to Church and colonial authorities. She found Saint Joseph’s staffed with incompetent certified male teachers. She sacked them, resulting in the school being removed from the government grant-aided list. She trained pupil teachers and Saint Joseph’s grant aid was restored in September 1924. The colonial authorities were looking for ways to implement the English government’s 1924 White Paper. This supported “*adaptation* to the ‘needs’ of the tribal/rural community environment in the field of education, endorsed by the Phelps-Stokes Commissions on African Education” (Kallaway 2020, 14). Whilst the approach viewed the “needs” of Africans as limited to skills for rural work, it also reflected the emphasis of contemporary progressive education on the child and their immediate environment. It was to be delivered in the indigenous language. Parents, however, viewed western education as a means of economic advancement. Delivered in English in Catholic boys’ schools, it “accounted for much of their attraction and success” (Omenka 2004, 41). Sister Magdalene saw colonial education as an interim measure, a means to “prepare the African teachers who will in the future evolve an African sys-

tem of education” (Magdalene 1928, 507). In 1926, she introduced the Montessori Method to achieve this. The school was inspected the following year and awarded an A+ (Cooke 1980, 96). In 1927, Fraser described it as, “a quite splendid Montessori school and the quality of the work is first rate” (Okure 2016, 75). Some parents, who initially opposed the Method, were also convinced. In 1926, there were 200 pupils, including 22 boarders¹⁷. By 1928, the roll had risen to 300 with 60 boarders (Cooke 1980, 94). Bishop Shanahan saw that it was effective in training teachers. As in Scotland, there was a great need. Shanahan’s prime concern was to increase school provision for girls to educate suitable wives for Catholic young men educated at the schools for boys.

Sister Magdalene saw growth in pupil agency as crucial to the preparation of an indigenous teaching force and Catholic mothers. She wrote of “a form of training that will foster individual thought and independent action” (Magdalene 1928, 511). Montessori’s approach facilitated this. Fraser noted the results: “in quality of work, freedom and energy of spirit in initiative and common sense her girls would be hard to match” (Okure 2016, 76). He was also impressed with “the amount of responsibility and management they undertake effectively”. Writing in 1973, Margaret Green, of the Education Department, remembered that “combined with Sister Magdalene’s teaching her teachers and children as Christians was her gift for encouraging the full development of their personalities...”¹⁸. Like the Notre Dame Sisters, she favoured the balance of intellectual and manual work in the Montessori curriculum and the opportunities for training in health and hygiene, to counteract the “appalling death rate among infants and mothers due to dirt” (Magdalene 1928, 509). The freedom in a prepared environment of the Montessori classroom suited her approach to moral education and demonstrated that pupils were “capable of excelling in every virtue” (Magdalene 1928, 509). Sister Magdalene was explicit in linking moral education to Christianity, regarding morality and spirituality as inseparable and dependent on a loving personal relationship with God. She rejected approaches which taught, “a fault to be merely a fault against their teacher or the school rules”, believing that growth in moral virtues emerged from pupils’ experience as “children of their heavenly father” (Magdalene 1928, 514). This reflects Mary Aikenhead’s approach,

¹⁷ Sister M C Magdalene. “Nigeria: News from Sister M C Magdalene, Calabar”. *Holy Ghost Annals* March 1926, 45. Spiritan Heritage & Archives, Kimmage Manor, Whitehall Road, Dublin 12.

¹⁸ Memories of Miss Margaret Green, August 7, 1973, “Our Foundress” <http://handmaidsschool.com/our-foundress/> Accessed December 8, 2020.

¹⁶ Kensington Annals entry, 20th July 1923, “All the sisters who went in for the Montessori Exam passed”.

encapsulated in the RSC motto “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (The love of Christ urges us on) from 2 Corinthians 5:14¹⁹. The motto was the title of Sister Magdalene’s biography of her spiritual mother (Walker 1922).

She met the challenge of funding equipment and buildings assisted by friends in Ireland and England, as well as the authorities in Nigeria. Her former Superior, Mother Arsenius Bernard, sent Montessori equipment. Pupils are using it in contemporary photographs (Cooke 1980, cover; Okure 2016, 67). Mayfield, an SHCJ School and her alma mater, sent resources from 1925 (Cooke 1980, 122). The 1926 *Mayfield Review* carried an article with a photograph and appealed for funds, noting that “a little goes a long way out in Nigeria”²⁰. Her old school friend, Mary Atchison, was by then Mother Amadeus, Superior General of the SHCJ. She raised funds, when touring the United States, to pay for a new building to cater for the expansion of Saint Joseph’s. The Mission authorities also supported the fundraising. In 1926 the *Missionary Annals* of the Holy Ghost Fathers published an appeal by Sister Magdalene²¹. The school at Anua, opened in 1929, was funded by Fr. Biechy CSSp, founder of the Anua Mission. Sylvia Leith Ross, Secretary to the Board of Education, applied to the Phelps-Stokes Fund in New York for a grant (Cooke 1980, 95).

Implementing the new pedagogical methods with pupils was also a challenge. Sister Magdalene acknowledged that pupils “would more readily adapt to old brain-paralysing methods, sit packed in benches and repeat sing-song lessons after teacher” (Magdalene 1928, 510). Montessori education was introduced gradually, as at Downhill. Between 1924 and 1926, she worked with the pupil teachers, planning lessons thoroughly, in preparation for their role as directresses. They introduced the Method over the following two years. The trust she displayed with her pupils was also evident in her delegation to the directresses. In 1929, she sent a group to be responsible for the new school in Anua. They had worked closely with her for four years at St Joseph’s. At Anua, she supported them with monthly visits.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE WIDER MOBILISATION OF THE METHOD

Sister Magdalene trained many directresses at Saint Joseph’s. Her friends overseas funded bursaries to allow

some pupil teachers to board and continue their education. In 1926, there were seven²². By 1930, there were fifteen (Cooke 1980, 134). Mother Amadeus recognised the success of the training, observing that four “would, I consider, be remarkable in any country” (Cooke 1980, 134). Sylvia Leith Ross described the training of indigenous teachers as Sister Magdalene’s greatest achievement in the report to the Phelps-Stokes Fund (Cooke 1980, 94). Like Sister Aimée, Sister Magdalene emphasised the importance of teacher example, highlighting the virtues of humility and sincerity (Magdalene 1928, 507).

Visitors from other establishments, in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, saw the implementation of the Method at Saint Joseph’s. Those recorded in the school logbook include: Miss Wordsworth, newly appointed Principal of the Queen’s College Lagos; Miss Robinson from the Government College, Umuahia and Sister Mabel from the Gold Coast (Okure 2016, 74). As early as 1927, the Education Commissioner of Calabar province wrote of Sister Magdalene’s methods “being tentatively introduced in other establishments” (Okure 2016, 74). Members of the Catholic hierarchy saw the efficacy of the Method, promoting it for use in missionary education. In 1928, Shanahan sent three Irish Holy Rosary Sisters to train at Saint Joseph’s for three months. They brought Montessori equipment from Ireland (Ejikeme 2011, 225). They had completed their novitiate with the Cabra Dominican Sisters at Sion Hill, Dublin, who from 1933, hosted the Montessori’s Dublin training courses. In 1949, the college at Sion Hill gained the approval of the International Montessori Association (AMI – Association Montessori Internationale). Many sisters preparing for foreign missions gained Montessori diplomas there²³. In August 1929, the Method won the support of Monsignor Arthur Hinsley, the Holy See’s Apostolic Visitor to British Africa. During his visit he noted in his diary that St Joseph’s was, “a famous Montessori school, model for Africa”²⁴. In 1930, in England, he advised two White Sisters to complete Montessori training at the Assumption, in preparation for missionary work²⁵. When Sister Magdalene developed health problems, Shanahan invited the SHCJ Sisters to take over. He required them to be familiar with the Method. On January 18, 1930, he wrote advising Mother Amadeus to, “arrange that three sisters go to Calabar to get from Sister Magdalene a thorough grasp of her work and meth-

¹⁹ Dictionary of Irish Biography - Cambridge University Press

²⁰ “Praetoria: Sister Mary Charles Magdalene”. *Mayfield Review* 1926, 14. SHCJ Archives, 14-16 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6QB, England.

²¹ Sister M C Magdalene. 1926. “Girls of Calabar”. *Missionary Annals of the Holy Ghost Fathers* March 1926, 48-9. Spiritan Heritage & Archives.

²² Sister M C Magdalene. 1926. “Girls of Calabar”, 48.

²³ Interview with Sister Kathleen Moran OP, former Sion Hill student and staff member, September 24, 2020.

²⁴ “Diary of Cardinal Hinsley”, Diocese of Westminster Archives, 139/2C,111, 16a Abingdon Road, London W8 6AF.

²⁵ Kensington Annals entry, January 29, 1930.

od of work, chiefly the Montessori System. From three to six months would suffice” (Cooke, 1980, 131). Sister Magdalene initially hoped to stay and work with them but needed to move to a different climate to improve her health and left in 1934.

In her *International Review of Mission* article, Sister Magdalene promoted the Method to an international readership of policy makers, academics, and missionary educators. The focus of the article is the importance of educating African girls to prepare them for roles as teachers and mothers in a new African nation. She made her case well, setting her arguments in the context of contemporary debate on colonial education, citing an article from the *Times Educational Supplement* of the previous year (Magdalene 1928, 507). Whilst her outlook may have been forward looking, she nevertheless used contemporary colonial concepts, referring, for example, to “young civilizations” and “primitive simplicity” (Magdalene 1928, 505).

The Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, founded in 1931, by Sister Magdalene, continue to use the Montessori Method. The congregation is unique, among those that adopted the Method, as the four foundation members, Lucy Williams, Kathleen Basse, Agnes Ugoaru and Christiana Waturuocha, were Montessori directresses, who had experienced the Method as pupils. They were attracted to religious life, however, by observing their teacher’s loving relationship with God, reproduced in her relationships with others. Their constitutions describe this as:

the inspiration, which Mother Mary Charles Magdalen Walker, RSC, received from the Holy Spirit and handed down to us, is that of All-Embracing charity, which has its foundation in personal love for Christ and humanity (Mbonu 2018).

This loving relationship was central to her approach to moral education. The Montessori classroom environment suited this kind of approach. After the departure of their foundress, on January 1, 1934, the novices demonstrated the self-reliance she had hoped for in an African teaching force. During their novitiate, they were to be supported by SHCJ sisters. In a letter to Bishop Charles Heerey, Shanahan’s successor, dated January 10, 1934, they made clear that they expected to be an independent congregation of ‘real nuns’ in the long term, rather than affiliated to an English congregation:

Shall we after our training be able to work by ourselves and leave the Holy Child Nuns? We wish to be able to do that when we can. Therefore, will it please Your Lordship to explain things fully to us? Our aim is to be real nuns

and work freely for God. We shall give Your Lordship our future answer after you have explained things fully to us (Okure 2016, 108).

The Congregation became autonomous in 1959 and today has 779 professed sisters. There are 89 Handmaids’ schools in Nigeria and schools in five other African countries. Some have Montessori nurseries including Madonna Montessori Nursery and Primary School, Calabar and Prince of Peace Montessori Nursery and Primary School, Anua. Their Facebook pages have photographs showing pupils using Montessori equipment such as, the red and blue long stair today²⁶.

CONCLUSION

Sisters Thérèse and Magdalene made significant contributions to the continuity of Montessori education from the early twentieth century until our times. They demonstrated its effectiveness in schools, trained directresses, raised public awareness, and mobilised it geographically. They worked in different locations, served different communities and the prior education and training of directresses in their schools was different. Many similarities do, however, emerge from the two studies.

Both benefitted from a context in which secular and Church authorities were open to new educational practice to raise standards. They were also part of innovative communities. Both had access to Montessori literature, training, and experienced practitioners. They were also able to fund the necessary resources. Both sisters were qualified, experienced, and successful teachers when they encountered the Method. They saw ways to implement the Method and develop the cognitive benefits. Their work provides empirical evidence to support recent theoretical work on the potential of Montessori education to support pupils’ growth in intellectual virtues and agency (Colgan 2016; Frierson 2020). At Downhill and Saint Joseph’s, this led to higher standards in academic and practical subjects, resulting in increased participation by girls in secondary education. Both women also saw the Method as a vehicle for character development, which, coupled with academic attainment, prepared young women for new opportunities in changing societies. The practice of “freedom in a prepared environment” was central to this. They had the experience of classroom organisation and planning, identified by Catherine Pomeroy Collins (Kramer 1976, 317),

²⁶ Madonna Montessori Nur/Pri School - Home | Facebook Accessed March 31, 2021.

to enable them to implement this effectively. They did it gradually, leading by example.

Both contributed to the local and global mobilisation of Montessori education through teacher training. Their writings gave, and continue to give, practical insights into how to interpret Montessori education. Along with the accounts of visitors, they contributed to wider public understanding of Montessori education, by addressing misconceptions and introducing it to new audiences. Their impact on the longer-term continuity of the Method is also evident: that of Sister Thérèse in the 1960s revival in the United States and of Sister Magdalene in the establishment of Montessori education in Nigeria. Montessori's hope that her work be continued by a congregation of Sisters was realised, but not in the way she envisaged (Standing 1965, 116). For the Sisters of Notre Dame, the Method offered a new application of St Julie's principles, including gaining the child's goodwill and educating their heart, hand and head. The Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus brought their experience as Montessori pupils and directresses to the establishment of a new African Catholic educational tradition. Sisters Thérèse and Magdalene made distinct contributions in their writings relating educational principles to practice: Sister Thérèse in a practical handbook; Sister Magdalene in an academic article.

From the 1920s, the Montessori Movement in England went into decline. These two educators, however, demonstrate the significant contribution of teachers trained in England in the 1920s to the continuity of Montessori education. Investigation of the work of others is needed to identify the full significance of English educators in the continuity of Montessori education until our times.

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