

**O Corcora, Colm, 2003, *The Nature of a Catholic School: Perceptions of Teaching Staff in the Cork Area.***

## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

This dissertation is devoted to an exploration of the perceptions of a sample of lay teachers in the Cork area regarding the distinctive nature of the Catholic school. It has its genesis in the belief that the Catholic school in Ireland has reached a critical moment and also in the conviction that lay teachers have become the principal custodians of the beliefs, assumptions, traditions, aspirations and values of such a school.

At the outset, an explanation of the relevance of this research, within the context of the current educational setting, is presented. It provides the reader with an historical perspective on the emergence of the Catholic school in general, and on the schools from which the sample was drawn, in particular.

The literature review has a dual purpose. Firstly, it analyses the literature that has emanated from the Vatican since 1965 concerning the Catholic school, thus providing a theoretical framework or benchmark from which a comparison of the perceptions and attitudes of the target group can be made. Secondly, it examines the theories, reflections and findings of leading commentators such as Bryk, McLaughlin, Groome, Dominuco and others in order to provide the reader with some insights into how the ideals outlined in Vatican documents are being interpreted.

A rationale for a suitable research method is then provided. This enquiry relies on a multi — method approach using a combination of the questionnaire and the semi — structured interview. This is followed by an analysis of the findings.

Finally, conclusions are drawn about the extent to which the target group advances or hinders the promotion of the ideals of a Catholic school. Reflecting on the findings of this limited empirical study, some recommendations are suggested to ensure that lay teachers will connect at a deeper, personal level with the values underpinning such a school.