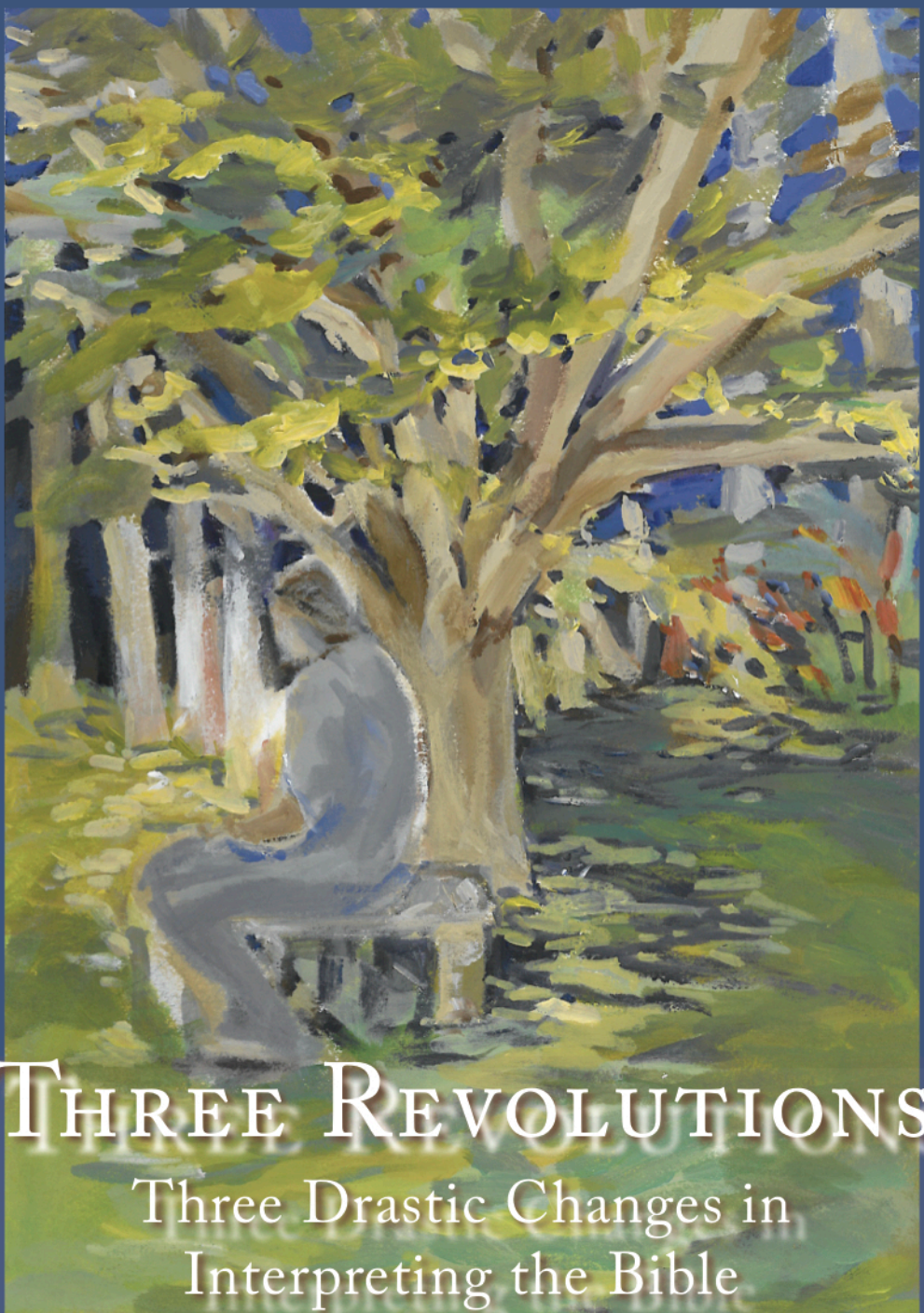


Three Revolutions

Three Drastic Changes in Interpreting the Bible

Robert Crotty

Three Revolutions

Robert Crotty

Text copyright © 2012 remains with the author.

All rights reserved. Except for any fair dealing permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this book may be reproduced by any means without prior permission. Inquiries should be made to the publisher.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry (pbk)

Author:	Crotty, Robert B.
Title:	Three revolutions : three drastic changes in interpreting the bible / Robert Brian Crotty.
ISBN:	9781921817496 (ebook : Kindle, etc.)
Notes:	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Subjects:	Bible--History of doctrines. Bible as literature. Bible--Criticism, Textual.
Dewey Number:	220.5

Cover design by Astrid Sengkey
Original artwork by Yvonne Ashby



An imprint of the ATF Ltd
PO Box 504
Hindmarsh, SA 5007
ABN 90 116 359 963
www.atfpress.com

Three Revolutions

Three Drastic Changes in interpreting the bible

Robert Crotty

ATF THEOLOGY

Adelaide
2012

I dedicate this book
to my granddaughter, Matilda.
She has brought joy
and light into my world.
May she bring much joy
and light into the world of others.

CONTENTS

List of Figures ix
Introduction xi

Part 1: As Things Were: Before the Revolutions

1. Beginnings 3
2. Taking Religion Seriously 13

Part 2: The First Revolution

3. The First Revolution begins 21
4. Studying the Hebrew Scriptures: Australia 39
5. Studying the Christian Scriptures: Australia 49
6. Leaving Australia 71
7. Studying the Hebrew Scriptures: Rome 77
8. Studying the Christian Scriptures: Rome 99

Part 3: The Second Revolution

9. Studying the Hebrew Scriptures: Jerusalem 111
10. Studying the Christian Scriptures: Jerusalem 119
11. Return to Australia 131

Part 4: The Third Revolution

12. Studying Religion and Religions 147
13. A Diversion: Back to History 163

14. 'Israel', Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures 187
15. 'Jesus', Christianity and the Christian Scriptures 197

Conclusion 221
Index 231

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Historical-critical outline of the gospel sources p 26
Figure 2. Qumran and the Dead Sea area p 55
Figure 3. The layout of the Qumran ruins according to De Vaux p 60
Figure 4. The supposed path of the Exodus following the biblical text p 84
Figure 5. Sites in Canaan referred to in the texts regarding Settlement p 90
Figure 6. The location of Nag Hammadi p 122
Figure 7. Palestine in the first century CE p 182

INTRODUCTION

For Roman Catholics and others the Second Vatican Council came somewhat as a surprise. There were wise Catholic scholars who, for a long time, had said adamantly that there would never be another Ecumenical Council after the First Vatican Council had ended in 1880. With the infallibility of the Pope declared at that First Vatican Council, why would another be needed? Could another Council say anything that an infallible Pope could not say more clearly and with more authority? Despite all that, the Second Vatican Council was convened in 1961.

At that stage I was studying theology within an Australian religious order. With avid curiosity, I followed every moment of the convocation, preparation and the opening days of the Council. This was to be a New Pentecost, Pope John XXIII had said. I expected it would be. Then, I went to Rome in order to further my studies in 1963 and was in the very hotspot of Council politics. I lived in a monastery where some thirty of the Council Fathers were lodged. I met with them and came to know some of them well, heard the inside stories about what was really taking place inside St Peter's Basilica, the meeting place for the Council. At first I could hardly believe what I heard about the differences of opinion and the squabbles.

I would leave Rome at the end of 1966, a very different person to the one who had arrived over three years earlier. I was by then desperately determined that the Council decrees would change the life of the Catholic Church in Australia. In particular, I would claim that the study and interpretation of the Bible was at the very crux of future change. I felt obligated to spread the word of change and newness.

This is the story of my life, including how it changed during the years of the Council, most of which I spent in Rome and Jerusalem. It includes

my later disappointment when it became obvious that the Council's influence was being dumbed down. However, the story will centre on my study of the Bible during tumultuous years of change in the Catholic Church.

It is a fact that since the age of seventeen I have been studying the Christian Bible, which consists of the collections of both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. For a considerable part of this time-span of some sixty years, I have been a student of some sort, continually enrolled in one or other course; for the rest I have been a researcher and tertiary lecturer as well as a husband, father and grandfather.

Looking back at my life from the vantage point of rather more than the biblical three-score-and-ten years, I regard with considerable interest the chequered journey that I have travelled while interpreting the texts contained in the Christian Bible. Since the journey still interests me as the main participant, it may interest others. I am not particularly anxious to 'convert' anyone to a particular way of thinking about the Bible or, indeed, any particular perspective on life and events. I am content simply to tell my tale.

It might have been expected that, following my quite early initiation into the study of the Bible, I would have progressed in a straight line with an ever gradually deepening understanding of it as, over many years, I became more competent in the biblical languages and achieved a greater facility in handling and explaining texts. That was not in fact the case.

Instead, I am now able to see that my understanding of the biblical texts has advanced much more erratically by a series of quite drastic revolutions, which affected me very personally but which actually duplicated wider revolutions taking place in the (mainly Catholic) ecclesiastical world outside me. These revolutions have been life-changing, challenging and usually quite painful. This book is a chronicle of three revolutions, which have affected my thinking on biblical interpretation over so many years, together with an attempt to explain them.

In recording these revolutions in this book, I do not think for one moment that my path has been unique. What I underwent has been common to many others, both within the Roman Catholic tradition and in other Christian traditions. Nor was the trajectory of my path inevitable. It seems to me that there were certainly some other biblical interpreters, some quite close to me, who voluntarily avoided these revolutionary changes at one point or another, claiming that the changes were deviant or that to follow such a path would be hazardous. Who knows, perhaps they were correct?

I chose to allow myself to be carried onwards on a succession of tides that brought change to my life and my relationships.

Each revolution caught me up and forced me to make life-changing decisions. I still think this was the better strategy.

The Structure of Revolutions

The very language I have been just using about revolutions and revolutionary change evokes the academic work done on how progress takes place in the natural sciences by Thomas Kuhn in a book written in 1962 and with a revised edition in 1970, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In Kuhn's vocabulary, the word 'revolution' should be accompanied by 'paradigm', 'paradigm shift' and 'normal science', all of which require some explanation. Kuhn may not have invented the terminology but he certainly gave it currency.

The similarity of language is not by chance. I first read Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in the early 1970s and it explained a great deal for me not only about the study of science and scientific change but more particularly about religion (which Kuhn presumably never initially expected). In fact, Kuhn's thought swept me off my feet. As I read his text, I felt scales falling from my eyes; I understood much that had previously been opaque.

Kuhn wrote of natural scientists, such as physicists or astronomers, establishing a 'paradigm' and working together as an academic community within that paradigm. A paradigm, according to Kuhn, is the plan that an academic group adopts in order to solve a problem, using acceptable methods, standards and generalisations. One commentator has written:

> A paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject matter within a science. It serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, how they should be asked, and what rules should be followed in interpreting the answers obtained. The paradigm is the broadest unit of consensus within a science and serves to differentiate one scientific community (or sub-community) from another. It subsumes, defines and interrelates the exemplars, theories, methods and instruments that exist within it.[1]

1. George Ritzer (sec ed 1980), *Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science*, Allyn and Bacon: Boston Mass.

Kuhn's paradigm is something like a pair of glasses which forces scientists to see reality only in certain ways and from a certain perspective when they wear those glasses.

How does a science, such as physics or astronomy, make progress according to Kuhn? His explanation was novel. He claimed that science advances not by a logical and progressive development of thought and practice (as most people thought and probably still think) but by a scientific revolution or a 'paradigm shift'. There is a scientific revolution when one paradigm is replaced by another. There have been such scientific revolutions at the onset of the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern periods. In physics, final causality, the search for purpose in the universe, was replaced by mechanism, the Newtonian search for cause and effect; mechanism was subsequently replaced by quantum-mechanical randomness. And so it goes on.

Once a paradigm has taken its hold of a scientific community it is difficult to displace. It establishes what Kuhn called 'normal science' where all the assumptions and methods of the paradigm are taken for granted, and scientists proceed happily with their business of solving what they perceive to be problems. Scientists are usually comfortable within the 'normal science' in which they have been trained. Using the metaphor of a pair of glasses above, scientists actually want to use the same pair of glasses as their companion scientists; they have grown accustomed to them; they actually like the glasses.

A number of commentators, even in the early days of Kuhn's popularity, remarked that a paradigm shift in the natural sciences is something like a religious conversion. The paradigm shift usually does not happen of a sudden; it is rarely a purely intellectual affair; it can even be a very upsetting experience and is brought about only because there are increasing anomalies, observations or measurements that do not fit in with the paradigm, in the practice of 'normal science'. When sufficient anomalies occur, the normal science undergoes drastic change and adopts a new 'normal science'. This process does not happen in a necessarily logical manner.

This process can be indicated by a flow chart:

Paradigm A ('Normal Science')

➔Anomalies

➔Crisis

➔Revolution

➔Paradigm B (new 'Normal Science')

Thus, the astronomer Claudius Ptolemy, born around 90 CE, used instruments and measurements to work out the lay of the Earth relative to other bodies in the solar system. He concluded that the Earth is a perfect, static sphere. The other bodies (sun, moon, planets) orbit around the earth on concentric spherical shells of invisible crystal. He decided that there were eight of these shells. This was a revolution in astronomy. A new paradigm had been born and there was a new understanding of the solar system. However, this model of the solar system threw up anomalies. The bodies did not always move according to its pattern. Ptolemy explained the irregularities by epicycles or revolving spheres set into the shells. But that did not explain all the anomalies. So Ptolemy added 'eccentricity' to the mix, the observation that the Earth is not at the exact centre of all the shells.

After Ptolemy, as anomalies continued to raise their heads, later astronomers had to add more epicycles and varying eccentricities until the model became encumbered with some eighty shells and epicycles. Then, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) proposed an entirely new model, a new revolution, by which the planets orbit the Sun and not vice-versa. The anomalies disappeared. There was a new paradigm and a new normal science within which researchers could move forward.

As I said, even in the 1970s I saw the possibility of applying Kuhn's insights to the study of religion and specifically to the religious insiders' study of their own religion. It seemed to me that Kuhn's theory could explain what had happened to me, as an academic involved with the study of the Bible, in the same way as it could explain what happened to scientists who saw that science in their day had changed dramatically and taken a new path. Progress in my own study of the Bible, I felt sure, had come about by a series of revolutions, brought about by the accumulation of anomalies within the academic study of religion, and not by a neat progression of logical thought.

This book will detail three successive revolutions that have overtaken me in my study of the biblical literature up to the present day. There have been some people along the way who have condemned me for what I have said and written about the Bible, particularly, they would say, after I had been given significant opportunities to study it at depth. I do not intend this book to be an apology for any of that. It is simply an explanation as to how I have reached the mindset that I have today.

Have I come to the end of this intellectual journey and this exciting adventure? There can be no reason to think that a final revolution has taken place in my own experience or that what is generally accepted today about the study of the Bible among many of my academic peers is the best answer.

Perhaps there is yet another revolution ahead of which I am only vaguely aware at the moment. In my younger days, I never dreamt that I would believe what I believe today. I still find anomalies in the study of the Bible. Perhaps they will accumulate and bring about yet another revolution in my lifetime. If so, I hope to have the courage to allow myself to be carried to yet another place. Or perhaps I may have run out of time for any further revolution.

Before beginning my narrative, I need first define this particular area of study that has so engrossed me for so long a time: the Christian Bible that consists of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures.

The Hebrew Scriptures

The object of my study over these many years has been, in the first place, the Hebrew Scriptures or what Christians have come to call the Old Testament.[2] It contains, in its present layout, three major sections. The first section is usually called the Torah (its Hebrew title and usually translated as 'Law') or the Pentateuch (which means 'five scrolls' or a 'five-part book' in Greek), the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Num-

2. The term 'Old' Testament (Latin, *testamentum*, 'covenant or treaty') was intended to imply that that the covenant or treaty between God and the Jews had been abrogated and that a 'new' covenant had been put in place. The books relating to the two covenants came to be known as the Old Testament and the New Testament. The religious doctrine inherent in this thinking is called supersessionism; Christianity is said to have superseded or displaced Judaism. While this may be acceptable terminology when some believing Christians talk between themselves, it is unacceptable in academic writing. In fact, many believing Christians are beginning to rethink the long-standing usage.

bers and Deuteronomy. The other sections of the Hebrew Scriptures are: Nevi'im (the Prophets) and Kethuvim (the Writings). Sometimes Torah or Law has been used traditionally to designate the whole corpus of writings; at other times the term denotes only the first five books. However, using 'Law' to describe these five books is rather misleading. There is as much narrative as law in them. A better translation would be 'Teaching' or 'Instruction'.

The second section of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Nevi'im or Prophets, include the following books: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve Prophets. Not all of these would make up what we commonly understand as 'prophetic' books.

The third section of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Kethuvim or Writings include the following books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

But not all lists of the individual books making up the Hebrew Scriptures are the same. For example, the Catholic Church has its own list of those sacred books which it considers to be inspired by God. The final decision on which books were to be included in the list was only declared by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546. Trent decided that there were 73 books in the Catholic Bible, neither more nor less: 46 in the Hebrew Scriptures and 27 in the Christian Scriptures. This collection of sacred books is known as the *canon* or 'rule, measure', those books which have a regulating or ruling value for faith and morality.

Of the 46 books accepted into the Hebrew Scriptures there were several over which there had been longstanding debate in the early Christian Church. These were Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and parts of Esther and Daniel. They were called 'deuterocanonical' to distinguish them from those books over which there had never been any debate, known as the 'protocanonical' books. The distinction between 'proto (first)' and 'deutero (second)' referred only to whether serious debate had taken place; both groups of books were regarded as equally sacred by the Council of Trent.

However, the Jews had recognised over time a smaller collection for their Hebrew Bible. By the end of the second century CE they had come to accept only what Christians would later call the 'protocanonical' books, mentioned above. The Protestant churches also produced a different canon for the Hebrew books. When Martin Luther broke away from the Church in the sixteenth century he placed great emphasis on the Bible. However,

he preferred the Jewish canon and placed the deuterocanonical books in an appendix as 'books which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures and yet are useful and good for reading'. Protestant Bibles eventually excluded these deuterocanonical books, although today they are usually once again included in a separate section and regarded as important by Protestant scholars at least for the academic study of early Christianity.

That covers broadly the scope of the Hebrew Scriptures; the Christian Scriptures had a similar history.

The Christian Scriptures

After much debate, at times quite acrimonious, the Christian Scriptures had been gathered into a definitive collection by the end of the fourth century CE, twenty-seven books in all. These were: the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles also attributed to Luke; fourteen letters of Paul, although there was always doubt about his authorship of at least one of them (the Letter to the Hebrews), and today there is general agreement that some others are not by his hand; the Catholic letters, so-called because they were presumed to be not addressed to particular communities but to the universal (*catholica)* church —the letter of James, two letters of Peter, three letters of John, one letter of Jude; finally, the book of Revelation.

Most Christians accept these same twenty-seven books as forming the Christian Scriptures.[3] We have seen that there is no Christian unanimity about the Hebrew Scriptures, with Catholics having the extra deuterocanonical books included, while Protestant Bibles place them in an appendix and call them 'The Apocrypha (hidden (books)'. This is always confusing since Catholics use the term Apocrypha to describe certain books which were never accepted by any Church as belonging to the Sacred Scriptures proper, such as the Gospel of Thomas.[4]

These two collections, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, together comprising the Bible of the Christian Church, have been the subject of most of my study for over fifty years. They have been tumultuous years and, as I have intimated, years during which I have been overtaken by three drastic revolutions.

3. Some of the smaller Eastern Churches either remove certain books or add some.
4. The *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible lists them as 'apocryphal/deuterocanonical'!

I hope that the story of these revolutions, insofar as they affected me over so many years, will be helpful and instructive to some readers, perhaps even at times entertaining.

Note

Thomas Kuhn wrote *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago) in 1962. It aroused enormous interest in the areas of history of science and sociology of science. After adding a postscript to answer his many critics, he published a second edition in 1970. Kuhn was dealing with development taking place within the natural sciences. Soon, others applied his ideas to the social sciences, law, art and many other areas of human endeavour. I (and others) have applied his thinking to religion.

PART 1:
AS THINGS WERE—BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONS

Chapter 1
BEGINNINGS

Born in 1937, I was brought up in a Roman Catholic home in Melbourne during the 1940s and 1950s. In those days, Roman Catholics in Australia were a very tribal group. For the most part their ethnic roots were in southern Ireland, Eire. My grandparents on my father's side had come from a small community in County Clare. We knew those people who belonged to our tribe, who were sympathetic to us; we also knew the 'other'. A few discreet questions (what school did you go to? Where were you married? Is your surname English or Irish?) would usually determine religious allegiance. As a boy, I was able to distinguish among shopkeepers, neighbours and play-friends those who were Catholic and those who were not. Being Catholic or non-Catholic was a primary distinguishing characteristic, certainly more important than the demographics of gender or ethnic origin. Those who were not Catholics were usually lumped under the general designation of 'Protestants', although I did know some non-Catholics who were Jews.

Knowing Jews was unusual and due to the fact that my mother, before her marriage and having children, had been employed by a Jew whom she admired greatly. She sent her ex-employer a Jewish New Year card every September and I used to look with wonder at its Hebrew script. He reciprocated with a Christmas card and present to her. While I knew from my parents that there were individually good non-Catholics, I also became convinced by my religious education that the Non-Catholic Group, as a whole, had gone astray from the path of truth and correct action. They were self-deceived and they were, at least as a Non-Catholic Group, against all that Catholicism, Truth and Right Action stood for.

Church and School

The tribal centre for us Catholics was the suburban parish church. Many of the parish priests in the Melbourne of the 1940s and 1950s were Irish, the surplus of a never-ending supply of priests who would be sent out yearly from Eire to the English-speaking world. Just as there were not sufficient farms for the multiple sons of large Irish families to work, so there were not sufficient Irish parishes to occupy the never-ending stream of newly-ordained Catholic clergy.

On Sunday, all Catholics were obliged to attend Mass at the suburban parish church. All the ritual action was performed by the priest in a brogue-laced Latin. Few of the attendees had any idea of what was symbolised by the Latin ritual and language, apart from the fact that it was a mysterious and fearful event. It was on this mainly social Sunday occasion and within the parameters of the Catholic school that most of my early social relationships were formed.

In those days, all Catholic children belonging to practising Catholics went to a Catholic school as I did, usually a parish school run by one of the religious orders of nuns for primary education and a more central secondary school run by male religious for boys (such as the Christian Brothers) or nuns for girls. This was not by choice; Roman Catholics in Australia were at that time strictly required, by local church law, to send their children to a Catholic school, if it was physically possible, under threat of mortal sin and eternal damnation. The religious orders made what could only be described as valiant efforts to provide this relatively cheap education to ever growing numbers. In retrospect, however, particularly the male religious teaching orders became havens for a minority of misfits, although the female religious orders were not exempt from this problem. There were certainly honourable and exemplary exceptions in both male and female religious orders who were not social misfits.

Co-education was unknown in Catholic secondary schools. Any relationships between boys and girls had to be forged outside the secondary school boundaries. There was, both in the social life associated with the local church and in the school, a determined attempt to forestall in the bud 'mixed marriages', a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. Such marriages were considered to be headed inevitably for disaster. Since friendship might lead to marriage, non-Catholic friendships even for younger Catholics were seen as less desirable.