

this: In point of fact there would be a few cases throughout the country in which it would be known that it would be unwise and utterly inconsistent to ask the teachers to conduct Bible-reading. I take it that in those cases the Committee would, under all the circumstances, say there should be no Bible-reading. But, all other things being equal, the Committee would, I presume, permit Bible-reading in the school, and I would leave the rest with the teacher.

518. Supposing the Committee did not agree?—It means going by the majority.

519. Then, if the majority carried it against a minority, would not the minority be treated with injustice; would not that be the same as at present?—I think not; because, however anxious the community or the Committee may be, the Bible is a proscribed book, and cannot be introduced.

520. You consider religious teaching a necessary branch of education?—I do.

521. I think, before the present Act came into operation, you had some very efficient schools belonging to your body?—I believe so. I know there were in Canterbury.

522. Well, from your experience of people who were then scholars and are now members of your flock, do you consider they are better educated, as far as religion is concerned, than those of the same age now attending the public schools?—Of course, the public system has only been in vogue a few years, and one cannot compare them.

523. Then you are not in a position to say?—No.

524. I gather from your evidence that the teaching in Sunday-school only is not sufficient to religiously educate children?—I did not quite wish to convey that, although I think it is not sufficient. But there are a great many children who are compelled to attend the day-schools—the system being compulsory—who are not gathered into our Sunday-schools. In Wellington some of the ministers have compared notes, and we find there are many children who do not attend any Sunday-school, and of course we cannot compel them.

525. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] Are you aware that under the present Act Committees can order Bible-reading, with the consent of the teacher, before school hours?—I am quite aware of that.

526. What is the objection to it, then?—It is found wholly impracticable. The present hour fixed by the teacher and Committee for opening the school is found to be sufficiently early, at any rate, to get the children present. To ask them to come half an hour earlier is placing the whole matter of religious instruction at such a serious disability and disadvantage that it is entirely unworkable.

527. The addition of time would be found unpalatable to the children?—Yes; and it is impracticable, I think.

528. I presume the Wednesday-afternoon instruction you suggest would be dogmatic instruction?—Assuredly, if we agree as to what the word means. I mean religious instruction something over and above the mere reading of the Bible—that is, the Bible explained as well as read.

529. The reading in the public schools of the Bible you mean to be without note or comment?—Yes.

530. And the instruction on Wednesday afternoons should be illustrated by explanations by those who could afford it?—Yes; I do not prescribe what should be done, however, during that time. I suggest Wednesday afternoon to be set free entirely, so far as the Act is concerned.

531. Do you hold that the objection of the Catholics to the present system is of a more radical character than the objections which exist among other denominations?—I am scarcely prepared to answer that question.

532. Do you not think it is founded on stronger reasons of conscience as against Protestants?—I believe it is.

533. If to the present system Bible-reading was added, would it not increase their dislike to the system?—No; I think not. At any rate, I think logically and consistently it would not, inasmuch as I judge—simply from what I read and hear—that they condemn the system as a godless system of education, and then they could no longer apply an epithet of that kind. At the same time, I should have no hope of making the public system acceptable to the Roman Catholic citizens of the colony.

534. Do you think if their children were no longer attending the public schools the way would be paved for a more cordial co-operation among the other religious bodies?—Possibly it would.

535. Do you not think that the numbers of the Catholics justify an interference in their favour which does not exist in the case of objectors from their fewness?—No; I do not think so. I could not put it on the ground of numbers at all.

536. Not even as a matter of expediency?—No.

537. There are other bodies whose numbers are very few? I may name them. There are the Jews, and there are what is termed the Freethought people. Their numbers, compared with those of other bodies, are so few; and would you think that they would become immediately entitled to the same rights of separate provision for their own children that might be granted the Catholics simply on the ground of numbers?—I think they would be entitled assuredly, and that it would be accorded to them as it was accorded under the Nelson system, as I understand it.

538. That would be purely a denominational system?—No. I believe, on the other hand, it would not imperil the present system of education. We should have the great central system, with a few of these adjuncts and subsidiary education bodies attached. Except in the case of the Catholics, I do not anticipate myself that there would be many other schools of importance either as to number or size.

539. That, you think, would be the practical outcome?—Yes.

540. You are aware, possibly, that the Catholics exercise a deal of self-denial in providing schools of their own—that their body must do it. I am not aware of it. I am told so.

541. Their providing schools must be attended with a certain heavy expense?—Yes.

542. Are you aware that any other body do that?—I am not.

543. Then, is it a matter of fair inference that they do not hold the matter as of so much importance as the Catholics do?—I presume it is.