

impossibility. The proposals outlined above are, in effect, an invitation to the Civil Government to set up a Bureau of Religious Teaching—to found, establish, and endow a new State creed as the official religion of the public schools, and to make good, at the expense of the general taxpayer, the failure of the clergy of some denominations to adequately discharge their duty of the religious instruction of youth.

4. Our objection to the proposed lessons is strengthened by the following facts:—(a) They were drawn up as a compromise by a heterogeneous assembly of representatives of various Reformed denominations, who, while unanimous in rejecting Catholic principles of Biblical interpretation, differed profoundly among themselves upon the most fundamental truths of the Christian religion. (b) The Scripture lessons were taken from the Protestant Authorised Version of the Bible, and the incorrect Protestant form of the Lord's Prayer is set down for the daily use of the pupils. (c) The basic dogma of Christianity—that of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth—is outlawed from the New Testament narrative, and the Christ that is presented to the mental eye of the little ones is not the God-Man of Holy Writ but the Christ of the Unitarian. (d) Protestant hymns form part of the scheme; Protestant teaching is suggested throughout the Scripture lessons by the free use of unauthorised headings, capital letters, italics, etc.; and it has been truly observed that, "in what is omitted, as well as in the general tone of what is expressed, the lessons are made as Protestant as they could well be made in the circumstances."

6. It would be obviously impossible for the teachers—of various creeds and of no creed—to whom it is proposed to entrust these lessons to do such watchful and continuous violence to their convictions as to avoid coloring their "literary, historical, and ethical" explanations with their own beliefs or unbelief. In a great number of cases they would, no doubt, consciously or unconsciously, derive from the lessons conclusions prejudicial to the faith of Catholic children. And cases might readily occur in which teachers would foster scepticism or unbelief. In a word, the projected scheme of Scriptural instruction would, under the specious appearance of relieving the consciences of a section of the Protestant clergy, aggravate the double financial burden which we Catholics now bear, by adding the greater grievance of compelling us to pay for the conversion of the State schools into Protestant Sunday schools.

VI. A conscience clause for pupils and teachers is offered as an offset to the proposed Protestantising of the public schools. But a conscience clause, if seriously intended by its framers as a protective measure for dissidents, should, on principle, exclude all children from Scriptural or other religious instruction except those whose parents positively signify a wish that they should attend. But (1) by what we understand to be the terms of the proposed or suggested conscience clause, Catholic children, in order to avoid proselytism, would be compelled to go to school armed with written protests against religious instruction. (2) At least one State of the Australian Commonwealth—namely, Victoria—furnishes (as the late Royal Commission's report abundantly shows) plentiful evidence of the flagrant manner in which the religious rights of minorities may be violated with impunity in public schools, despite the provisions of Acts of Parliament and the pretended protection of this form of conscience clause. (3) Even a scrupulous observance of an ideal conscience clause by teachers would still leave Catholic children exposed to a serious measure of moral pressure or compulsion to remain for Protestant religious instruction—namely, to the jeers and insults of their companions and to the other forms of social martyrdom which children know so well how to inflict on those whom they deem foreign to their modes of thought and action. Catholic pupils in State schools would, in a word, be placed between these two alternatives—proselytism, or penalties to which no children should be exposed. (4) For teachers a conscience clause would in many cases inflict a grave

degree of compulsion upon conscience or feeling. It would, moreover, inevitably lead to the general imposition of a religious test in the matter of appointments to schools.

VII. It is proposed to submit the suggested alterations in our State school system to a referendum of the electors of the Colony. We, for our part, hold to the sound principle of statesmanship that no question should be submitted to the referendum that affects the rights of conscience of minorities. These remain for ever sacred and inviolable. But if this question be ever submitted to the voice of the electors of New Zealand, we should look with confidence to the result, feeling sure that our fellow-colonists would approach it, as the people of South Australia did in 1896, in a spirit of justice, and with a firm and unalterable determination to respect the rights of conscience which a minority, however small, can never sacrifice. But the issue should be placed fairly and honestly before the electors. And the first issue to be determined is, Whether our State school system of education is to be secular or not? The form of ballot paper contained in last year's abortive Bill was suggested by the framers of the Bible-in-schools project. It was vague and reticent to the last degree. (1) It gave no information whatever regarding the nature and source of the Scriptural and other religious instruction proposed to be introduced, or (2) regarding the nature of the explanations thereof which it was intended to give. (3) Worst of all, the terms of reference were so worded as to suggest that the new scheme would be simply something added, by way of extension, to the present system of State instruction, and not—as it would really be—an alteration of the most radical kind in our Education Act. It is difficult to avoid the conviction that the form of ballot paper to which we allude was deliberately intended to confuse the electors of the Colony, and to snatch a victory by a ruse de guerre rather than by a straightforward appeal to the country on a clear-cut and definite issue.

VIII. Much as we deplore the hard secularism of the present Education Act, we would rather see it retained in its integrity until modifications are forthcoming which would confer a substantial benefit on the rising generation without endangering the faith and exasperating the feelings of a large class of children who frequent our public schools.

Given at Wellington on the 20th day of April, 1904.

✠ FRANCIS REDWOOD, S.M.,
Archbishop of Wellington.

✠ JOHN JOSEPH GRIMES, S.M.,
Bishop of Christchurch.

✠ MICHAEL VERDON,
Bishop of Dunedin.

✠ GEO. M. LENIHAN,
Bishop of Auckland.

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