

GOD OR NO-GOD IN THE SCHOOLS?

THE DISCUSSION: A CRITICAL SUMMARY

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PART III.

'THOSE THAT FLY MAY FIGHT AGAIN.'

II.—THE 'EVENING POST'S' 'DEFENCE' OF THE SECULAR SYSTEM

(Continued from last issue.)

Here, again, we get back to the same considerations as before:—

1. *The New Zealand Education Act nowhere provides that the system of public instruction shall be 'undenominational.'* (The 'undenominational' theory is merely an inference of those supporters of the secular system who have yet to learn the meaning of the terms 'denominational' and 'undenominational').

2. *The New Zealand law merely provides that the teaching in the public schools shall be 'entirely' connected with the 'present world' and the 'present life only'—as set forth above.*

3. *It would, therefore, appear to be no violation of the letter of the law to impart to pupils any denominational view of life—of its origin, duties, and destiny—with the following provisos only: (a) that such denominational view of life shall 'entirely' exclude the spiritual and supernatural; and (b) that it shall not transcend the powers of matter, and shall limit itself to the interests of this present world only.* Here (as in the previous cases considered) the law apparently leaves the door wide open to the propaganda of any and every form of materialistic denominationalism that the state of public feeling, at any particular period, may render it 'good policy' to impart to children in the public schools.

IV.—The 'Prediction' Fallacy.

The 'prediction' fallacy consists in dark forebodings (1) in regard to the dissensions that would follow the re-introduction of religion into the schools, and (2) in regard to the breaking-up of the present system of public instruction.

Reply: (a) In discussion, prediction has, proverbially, a rather 'slumpy' argumentative value. Indeed, George Eliot somewhere describes it as 'the most gratuitous form of human error.' (b) Neither of these predictions has anything to do with the justification of our secular system, from the Christian view-point of life, and of its duties and destiny. They are, therefore, beside the present issue. (c) The scared prediction as to the 'fierce resentment and never-ending controversy' that would follow the re-introduction of religion into education has been amply met on pages 9-10, 31 of the present publication. To the matter there set forth, *there has been no reply.* (d) There are, on Continental Europe, two countries which grew weary of the fad of pure, legalised secularism in the schools, and restored religion to its old and prescriptive place in State-aided public instruction. These are Holland and Belgium. Holland is well described by the rationalist historian Lecky as 'a country where Evangelical Protestantism is, perhaps, more fervent and more powerful than in any other part of the Continent.' In 1857 a system of 'secular national education' was established there. The schools were denounced as 'atheistical,' 'without prayer, without Bible, without faith.' The Dutch Protestant majority then did what the Catholic minority in Australia and New Zealand have been doing for a generation. By 1888 they had (says Lecky, p. 72) 'no less than 480 Bible schools supported by voluntary gifts, with 11,000 teachers and 79,000 pupils. These schools had an annual income of three millions of florins; they had a subscribed capital of 16 millions of florins, or about £1,340,000.' In the battle for religious education (says the same author), 'the Evangelical Protestants were supported by the Catholics.' The result of this happy union of the friends of true education resulted in the continuation of the purely

secular system for those who desire it; but, side by side with this, the Evangelical and Catholic schools were brought into the State scheme, and supported by public funds, 'on a system much like that which exists in England, and which has been very generally accepted.' In Belgium religion was (as in New Zealand) banished from the schools by the *loi de malheur* (law of misfortune) in 1878. With the fall of the secularist party, in 1884, religion ceased to be penalised, by law, in the schools. The new Catholic Government 'took the primary schools from State control, and placed them under the communes, leaving each commune to decide whether or not religious instruction should be given; the State subsidised these schools, on condition that they would accept the State programme, and would submit to State inspection.' Denominational schools 'are eligible for subsidies from the State, the province, and the municipality or commune—one or more of them. The Church is empowered to supervise and arrange for or provide religious instruction in the schools. If the communal schools do not give it, the clergy may, either by themselves or their lay nominees.' We are not now discussing the merits or demerits of any particular scheme of religious education. We are merely placing before the *Evening Post* two concrete instances of the national restoration of religion to its place in the schools, and letting that paper reconcile these facts with its dolorous prophecy, as best it may. The *Post* has the whole burden of proof upon its shoulders. It is for it to show—if it can—(1) that (and just how) the re-inclusion of religion burst up and destroyed the school system in Holland and Belgium; (2) what, precisely, were the volcanic educational evils resulting therefrom; and (3) just how and why a restoration, that was so easily and speedily effected in those two countries, should be deemed wildly impracticable or wholly impossible in New Zealand. An ounce of hard fact is worth more than a ton of mere, unsupported, predictive assertion, such as that which the *Evening Post* advances—for lack of better 'argument.' (4) Moreover (as has been shown already), in Holland and Belgium, as well as in France, religion was driven out of its prescriptive place in the school-preparation for life, precisely because legislative majorities in those countries did not believe in God or religion or a future life or immortal human souls. In this, they were at least consistent. It is for the *Evening Post* to justify—if it can—on a Christian view of life, and of its duties and destiny, that same purely secular system which Continental and other unbelievers defend on an atheistic and anti-Christian view of life and of its duties and its destiny. In every discussion on this subject between Christians, all lines of argument converge upon this deadly riddle—which (thus far) the *Evening Post*, and the other Christians who share its views, either dare not, or cannot, read. And if any reader deems that this is 'wearisome reiteration,' the present writer's true and sufficient apology is this: that this issue lies at the root of the whole discussion, and that the *Evening Post* not alone avoided it 'to the best of its ability,' but likewise persistently endeavored to obscure it by the cloud of irrelevant contentions and personalities which are, here and later on, under consideration.

V.—The 'Authority' Fallacy.

Having declined to get down to the underlying principles and life-views involved in our secular system, the *Evening Post* 'fortifies' itself by an appeal to the 'authority' of Gladstone, Archbishop Temple, and Dr. Parker (of the City Temple, London). No references, by the way, were given to the quotations with which it credited its 'authorities.' Gladstone (says the *Post*) was not an atheist; Temple was not an atheist; Parker was not an atheist. But Gladstone, Temple, and Parker were all stout upholders of the secular system. Therefore the supporters of the secular system are not all atheists, nor is the system atheistic.

Reply: (1) Here, again, we have the *Post's* familiar resort of denying what was not asserted. (2) Here, too, we find that paper distinctly and improperly suggesting that I made out the Christian supporters of the secular system to be, one and all, really atheists in disguise. And this, in spite of my plain and repeated

* Bishop Cleary's latest work, of which the above is an instalment, is procurable at all Catholic booksellers.