

## 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.)

## III.—MISQUOTATIONS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS.

To his sister the young cleric writes in part as follows: ' . . . I am deeply convinced that the religious education given in schools is so thin, so worthless in comparison with their being educated at all, that, though I desire to have it, I cannot lay much stress upon it. The education which I care for is that which strengthens the character, not that which teaches. And all my experience tends to this, that the education which strengthens the character is, as our schools are constituted, *not* the religious but the secular. . . . I am not sure that, if I were a clergyman in a living, I should not try to set the example of setting up secular schools in my parish. I prefer the other plan, not because I think it better in itself, but because I think the clergy will work it better. But on the whole, the establishment of secular schools would not diminish the religious teaching one iota. You would have the Friday school instead of the present Sunday school, and you may depend upon it, the Friday school would do quite as much as the present week-day school in religious teaching. In a *very* great number of parishes the clergyman would give up the whole of Friday to that work alone, and his regular work so spent would outweigh that of a good many schoolmasters. . . . You are mistaken, too, in supposing that anyone would be so silly as to require a promise from a schoolmaster not to touch on religious subjects. A secular system would not involve anything of that kind. It would simply be an understood thing that religious teaching was not his business. He would not be allowed to put a religious lesson on the time-table, but he would make no promise never to speak of such subjects. . . . Secular schools in England would not be irreligious. I am by no means sure that, on the whole, they would not be more religious (in the ordinary sense of that word) than the denominational. And denominational schools, on the whole, will not be very religious; not, to tell the truth, so religious as I should wish them. I *respect* the feeling which makes England shrink from secular schools; but I cannot reverence what is so mere a sentiment. The sight of a secular system working side by side of the correlative religious system should dispel the whole feeling in a year. . . .'

Let us now briefly summarise the salient points of Dr. Temple's letter to his sister:—

(a) The writer strongly complains that the 'religious education' given in the denominational schools, as 'constituted' at that time, was 'so thin' and 'so worthless,' that it could hardly be called education at all, and failed to strengthen the character.

(b) Dr. Temple declared: 'I desire to have it' ('religious education').

(c) Referring to his idea of 'secular schools,' he says: 'I prefer the other plan' (the denominational system of his day, with all its alleged defects) 'not because I think it better in itself, but because I think the clergy will work it better.'

(d) 'I am not sure,' says he, 'that, if I were a clergyman in a living, I should not try to set the example of setting up secular schools in my parish.' His idea of 'secular schools' is made perfectly clear from what follows. (1) There would not be 'one iota'

less 'religious teaching' in his 'secular schools' than there was in the denominational schools whose 'religious education' he found so 'thin' and 'worthless.' (2) Every Friday in the 'secular schools' would be devoted to religion: it would take the place of 'the present Sunday school,' and would 'do quite as much' for 'religious teaching' as 'the present week-day school.' Nay, 'in a *very* great number of parishes the clergyman would give up the whole of Friday' to the work of religion in the 'secular schools.' (3) There would be no time-table religious lesson for the teacher in the 'secular schools;' it would be 'understood' that he was under no obligation to teach religion; but it would be 'silly' to bind him not 'to touch on religious subjects.' (4) The reasons why Dr. Temple proposes this Friday-religious 'secular' system are: the 'thin' and 'worthless' 'religious education' given in the five-day-religious and denominational schools of his time; and his fear that, in the future as at that present time, the 'denominational schools, on the whole, will not be very religious—not, to tell the truth, so religious as I should wish them.'

Here, in fair, set terms, we find Dr. Temple proposing a scheme of so-called 'secular schools,' which were to be, on each recurrent Friday, denominational 'Sunday' schools; and in which, on the remaining working days, the teachers were to be free to impart as much religious teaching as they cared, although without time-table religious lessons. And the whole and sole purpose of these suggested 'secular schools' was to remedy the defective 'religious education' of the denominational schools of the time—which were not (and did not in the future promise to be) as 'religious' as Dr. Temple wished them to be.

The opportunities for religious instruction and religious worship, provided for in Dr. Temple's letter of 1856, surpass the demands of the Bible-in-schools organisations in Australia and New Zealand. Yet this is the very letter which the *Evening Post* lays before its readers as clear 'proof' that 'Archbishop Temple' found nothing unfriendly to religion, nothing negatively atheistic, in the ejection of God and religion from the schools; this is the 'authority' with which the *Wellington daily* 'fortifies' itself in its advocacy of that 'secular system,' which, 'more than thirty years' ago, drove out religious worship, religious teaching, and every religious influence by law, from their olden place of honor in public instruction! Such a system is in rank antagonism to the scheme of so-called 'secular schools' as suggested in Dr. Temple's letter. Nay, at that time, the legalised expulsion of religion from the schools was not contemplated by any religious or political organisation in England. A very casual acquaintance with the last fifty or sixty years of England's educational history suffices to show that in that country, the terms 'secular school,' 'secular system,' and 'secular solution,' are, even to this hour, commonly applied to schemes of education which include a very appreciable—and at times a really extensive—amount of religion. And it is no more to the credit of the *Evening Post* than to that of Professor Mackenzie to take a controversial advantage of their readers' unacquaintance with the sense in which the terms 'secular system,' 'secular solution,' etc., are used by the English 'authorities' whom they quote.

Moreover, in that same year (1856) in which he wrote the above-quoted letter to his sister, Dr. Temple sent a contribution on education to 'Oxford Essays.' In the course of his Essay, he laid down the following scheme for religious education: 'Let the subscribers (who would include the more representative of the parents) be empowered to elect on the Managing Committee a minister of religion to take charge of the religious teaching. On default of such express elections, let that office, and the corresponding seat on the Committee, go to the clergyman of the parish. If there were sufficient population in the parish, different denominations would have, as now, different schools. . . .' (quoted in *Memoirs*, vol. I., p. 123).

*Dr. Temple at Rugby.*—Dr. Temple was headmaster of Rugby, 1858-1869. From his *Memoirs* (vol. II., p. 643) we learn that his experiences at that great English school 'changed his view' in regard to his

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