

NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL SYSTEM

CONDEMNED BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY

The Archbishop of Sydney took occasion at the opening of the fair at the Bible Hall on April 23 to fulfil what he considered a duty 'of fraternal assistance to Catholics, especially those of New Zealand and Victoria,' with regard to the agitation promoted by people outside the Catholic Church 'to lay hold upon the public schools of New Zealand and Victoria, and teach a State religion or some kind of a compromise between the various forms of religious dissent (says the *Catholic Press*).

At the same time, his Grace dealt with the appeal made by the Bible in State schools agitators to the example of New South Wales in regard to this question. 'These people,' he said, 'point to the system followed in the public schools of this State, and say that it proves that what they want is for the public good, and that it works well.'

'I am not speaking to Catholics, but to the people of the country,' his Grace went on. 'I am speaking to Australians in general, and in reply to the assertion that this system of having Scripture lessons read by or given by the teacher, I say that it is most objectionable to Catholics, that it is in itself unstatesmanlike, and that from a religious point of view it is nothing better than a delusion, a mockery, and a snare. Let me at the outset disavow that I am actuated in the least by a controversial spirit. At the same time, allow me to draw attention to the position we Catholics are placed in: If we are silent our silence is taken as praise; if, on the other hand, we keep on complaining about the public schools system, we are told that people are tired of our complaints, that the public is satisfied with the State schools system, and that we are an unreasonable, intractable, recalcitrant minority.'

'What has been our policy therefore? Now and again on given occasions we have emphatically protested against the system of having Bible or Scripture lessons given by a teacher who may or may not have any religion as altogether unsuitable for Catholics. We have gone into the history of this system also, and we have shown that it is not at all to the credit of Australia to have taken it up. At the Education Conference, convened in 1904, I think, by the then Minister of Education, Mr. Perry, the late Cardinal spoke to this effect. So did others, including myself.'

'At the last Catholic Congress, held in Sydney, I devoted considerable time showing that these Scripture lessons given in the public schools had been garbled, and did not present the Gospel truth fairly to the children of New South Wales, even on most important points. I quoted from the lessons themselves, and dealing with the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, I pointed out not only was the text taken from the Protestant Authorised Version, but when they came to a part they could not garble, they simply omitted it, and put in a paraphrase. Thus they got through the whole mystery of the Incarnation, which is the foundation of Christianity. The angel's words to the Blessed Virgin and her replies were put in a few words enclosed in a parenthesis. I asked, what right had anyone under God to interfere with the Word of God? We have not been altogether silent, but our legislation that our Catholic children, when they are compelled to attend public schools, should not be present at these lessons continues. Catholic parents would fail in their duty if they did not see that their children were absent from these lessons. Therefore, it is false for anyone to say that the Catholics of New South Wales are content with the present system of Bible lessons and religious instruction imparted in the name of secular instruction.'

'I am not giving a religious instruction on the Bible. It is too sacred, and I would not handle it outside the Church; God's word should be received with reverence and treated with reverence, and it is a standing rule with the Catholic Church that nobody dare

publish an edition of the Bible on his own account unless it has been previously revised by the Bishop. And this publication with us is never without certain notes throwing light on ambiguous passages, also eliminating the danger of misinterpreting certain passages that are frequently misinterpreted. Subject to these limitations the Church recommends the reading of the Bible, and enjoins upon every priest to spend between an hour and a-half and two hours daily reading the Bible.'

The Archbishop said that it was most un-Catholic to have a teacher, who might or might not be religious, to instruct the children from the text of the Bible. 'There are so many religious divisions,' he added, 'and outside the Catholic Church there is no unity of belief. Hence, it is an unsound principle to have religious teaching that does not secure unity, which is essential to religion.'

The Archbishop went on to point out that the Scripture lessons used in the public schools were passed by Archbishop Whately of Dublin, 'the greatest proselytiser in Ireland,' whose writings showed that he did not believe that Jesus Christ was God. 'It was said that the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin approved of those lessons, Archbishop Kelly continued: 'That was untrue. The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin was one of the seven commissioners. There was another Catholic of the milk-and-water kind amongst them, but he did not attend any of the conferences. The Catholic Bishops did not approve of the lessons, and a counter report was sent to the Holy See by the Archbishop of Tuam, who pointed out 22 passages which were misrepresentations of Scripture, and which were opposed to Catholic doctrine.' After referring to the garbling of the lesson dealing with the mystery of the Incarnation, his Grace, who said he spoke cuttingly, and he wished he could cut the Australian people to the hearts, dwelt on the fact that too often this subject was dismissed with the remark that it was 'only a matter of religion, of sectarianism.' Then he added: 'The people of Australia leave this great fact of the Incarnation to be dealt with in any way the author of the lesson likes, and they do so because they have lost the true spirit of Christianity.'

'Yes,' he went on, 'we Catholics of New South Wales have objected to this system; we have stated the grounds of our objection; the Church has made laws binding Catholic parents in the matter; Archbishop Vaughan expressed himself so forcibly on the question that even to-day the repetition of his words vexes the people of Australia; and the late Cardinal was no less emphatic, and my words could not be stronger outside of the spirit of controversy and bitterness.'

'Non-Catholics, in friendly conversation, have urged on me that it would be better for the children to have some instruction from the Scriptures than to have no instruction at all. I will repeat to-day what I said in this connection soon after I came to Australia: "Bread is good; but bread may be poisoned, and even though you were hungry I would not recommend you to eat poisoned bread. Religion is necessary, but if you do not get true religion it is better for you to be without it."

'Leaving to others all the liberty of citizenship we Catholics claim for ourselves the right of holding to our conscientious convictions. We believe there is but one true Church, but one truth, and whatever would vitiate truth we repudiate. So it would be better for us to cut off our right hands than be participators in the present system of Bible instruction that obtains in the public schools of New South Wales.'

'At the Education Conference of which I have spoken one of the clergymen belonging to a non-Catholic denomination took certain words of mine which vindicated the public school system from being godless—I said it could not be called a godless system—and he said: "We must nail Archbishop Kelly to that." So they may,' his Grace remarked. 'But a system, like an individual, may be un-Christian without being godless—I never uttered this before—and we have the testimony of our most intelligent public men that our system of public education is un-Christian, amongst others that