

DEAN FITCHETT'S 'REPLY' TO BISHOP CLEARY

The following letter from his Lordship Bishop Cleary appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of July 9:—

'Sir,—Owing to absence from home, and other circumstances my perusal of Dean Fitchett's "reply," and my rejoinder thereto have been greatly delayed.

'Catholics are firm believers in Biblical and religious instruction in the schools. They would gladly co-operate in any fair all-round scheme to give effect thereto. Unfortunately, the Bible-in-Schools League officially demands "the system of religious instruction" in operation in New South Wales and certain other States of Australia. There are five oft-stated features of that system to which Catholics and great numbers of Protestants (including many Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc.) object on specific grounds of religion and conscience. If there is one man in New Zealand who could justify, on moral grounds, these controverted proposals of the League, it is the learned Dean Fitchett, of Dunedin. He has not done so. Evasion of the issues involved is the outstanding feature of his "reply" to me, from beginning to end.

'1. In my Dunedin lecture I proved that, under the "Australian" system, demanded by the League, the Government imparts (through the teachers) what is, in law and fact, "religious instruction," and "general religious teaching." In other words, the Government there (through the teachers), "teaches religion" as a regular part of the class-work of the public schools. This I proved (a) by quoting the text of the laws of several States; (b) by citing departmental regulations and instructions; (c) official reports and other official documents of various Departments of Public Instruction; (d) the contents of various State manuals of "religious instruction"—giving samples of the religious doctrines and incidents contained therein, as well as of the prayers and religious devotions (in sectarian forms) in which they abound; (e) the decisive testimony of Prime Ministers, high departmental officials, inspectors, and public school teachers—chiefly from the League's own official publication, *Opinions of Experts*; and (f) specific quotations from other League publications, and declarations of League officials and newspapers—especially the overwhelming evidence contained in the League's official pamphlet, *Notes on the Australian System*, by Rev. A. Don. (g) I, furthermore, pointed out that the League's conscience clause is, in itself, sufficient evidence of the League's inner conviction that, under the "Australian" system, which it demands, the Government (through the teachers) teaches religion in the schools. (h) I quoted the text of the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith* which denies to the Government the right to teach religion or administer the Word. I pointed out that this is the common Christian teaching. (i) I cited texts of Scripture in which the Almighty imposed upon parents and the Church the duty of the religious instruction and training of children; and (j), for the hundredth time, I challenged the League to produce any Scripture text or Scripture principle which gives this right of "religious instruction" to, or imposes it as a duty upon, the Government.

The obvious reply to this overwhelmingly documented case would have run along one or other of the following lines:—

'(a) Accept my oft-repeated challenge to quote the text of the laws (if any) which declare that the Government Biblical lessons in New South Wales, Queensland, etc., shall on no account be imparted as "religion," but (as alleged) merely as "literature." This has been carefully avoided in the learned Dean's "reply."

'Or (b) Examine in detail the seven classes of evidence adduced by me showing that, in New South Wales, etc., the Government (through the teachers) teaches religion; and prove that the wording, or the purport and effect, of that mass of legal, official, and League testimony was substantially misrepresented by me. Both these courses have been studiously avoided in the Dean's "reply." In these two connections my

case against the League stands unassailed simply because it is unassailable.

'Or (c) Cite the oft-called-for Scripture texts or principles which give to the Government the right, or impose upon it the duty, of religious instruction of children. This has also been carefully avoided in the "reply."

'The Dean's "reply," in these connections, is a mere, unproven assertion that the Government in New South Wales, etc., does not "teach religion" in the State Scripture classes, but merely "literature." Against his unsupported assertion, we have the great mass of conclusive legal, official, and League evidence mentioned above, to which I hope to refer in some detail in another communication. That evidence stands in unchallenged possession. The Dean's only course is either to refute it or (as he has promised) to resign from the League.

'2. In my Dunedin lecture I pointed out—(a) That the "Australian" Government Scripture lessons, prayers, etc., are taken wholly or mainly from a sectarian version of the Bible, and explained on the sectarian principle known as "private judgment." (b) I specified (and am again prepared to specify) the various ways in which the New Testament especially, is garbled and mutilated along sectarian lines in the Government manuals of "religious instruction" of Queensland and New South Wales. (c) I showed how (among other things) the Virgin Birth of Christ was flung aside by the New Zealand Bible-in-Schools Party in 1904. (d) I pointed out how the League's present proposals would put it in the power of the Government to mutilate the Bible along sectarian lines at the public cost, and how, in any case, these proposals would result in a sectional State religion being established in the public schools, and forced upon the pockets of conscientious objectors. If the League wants to teach the League Bible, or portions of it selected to suit its particular views, to League children, on League principles, let it do so itself at its own cost. We have yet to learn how anyone can morally justify forcing objecting taxpayers or teachers to endow or impart such sectional teaching, in violation of the dictates of their conscience.

'3. (a) By copious references (which I am prepared to give in detail) I showed that the League proposes to coerce conscientiously objecting teachers, under dire penalties, to impart its scheme of "religious instruction" and "general religious teaching," as it is termed in law. (b) I quoted specific testimony, showing that large numbers of believing teachers are opposed on grounds of religion and conscience, to the League's scheme of Government Scripture lessons. (c) I quoted the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith*, and two famous Anglican churchmen, to show that a teacher, acting against his religious conscience, would violate the moral law, and that anyone luring or forcing a teacher to do so, would (materially at least) sin even more grievously. The soundness of this universal Christian moral principle has not been questioned. (d) In regard to its present application: It is obviously no "reply" to suggest that it is a reflection on the Rev. John Doe or the Right Rev. Richard Roe. It is for them to examine their consciences and ascertain whether they are herein wittingly or unwittingly acting in opposition to their professed principles. It is no justification of the proposed coercion of the consciences of teachers to assert that, under the "Australian" system demanded by the League, they do not teach the Government Scripture lessons as "religion," but only as "literature." For (1) the mass of legal, official, and League testimony, already mentioned, declares that the teachers do, and must, impart "religious teaching"; (2) even if they did not, this circumstance would not in the least disprove the conscientious objection of large bodies of New Zealand teachers to the League's scheme of Government Biblical instruction; (3) the Bible-in-Schools party, by giving the teachers a conscience clause in 1904, thereby in effect acknowledged that the teachers were then, as they are now, to be the Government's deputies as teachers of religion. (4) In view of the evidence already cited, the assertion that the teacher is to treat the Bible lessons (including the Lord's Prayer, etc.) merely as "litera-



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