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THE PLENARY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

The following extract from the pastoral letter of the Roman Catholic Archbishops and Bishop of Australasia contains the views of the Church of Rome on the present system of State education:—

In godless schools all subjects have their teachers, their hours, their text-books, and their maturely digested systems of instruction; all are provided for, regardless of trouble or expense; all are thought for, and well thought for; all—except what the Founder of Christianity calls the “*one thing necessary*.” We have no quarrel with the methods which are ordinarily adopted in Australian State schools, for the teaching of arithmetic, geography, and grammar; we believe they are as good—often better—than in far older and more pretentious parts of the world. But, we say, it is a rank rebellion against God to take the young generations, the future men and women of the country, to keep them in schools all the waking hours of their day for the whole term of their childhood, and during that time to rigidly exclude from them all knowledge of the Supreme Being. A respect for their teacher is impressed on the children’s minds; an affection and a loyalty to their country are inculcated through every page of their earliest history; an esteem for the mother country, and a sisterly affection for the surrounding colonies are, through their reading and other text-books, unceasingly instilled into their hearts. This is of course right and just. But from the whole of this training—covering as it does the principal years of a child’s life—to exclude all mention of God, all recognition of His supremacy, and all instruction as to their duties towards Him, is disloyalty to the Creator and dishonesty to the child. The Catholic Church cannot for one single hour be accessory to such a wrong. Hence she has ever, and all over the world, raised her voice loudly against all such sapless systems of education. No plan which clever statesman could devise to overcome her opposition, has been omitted. It was sought to separate the laity from the priesthood in this resistance, but in vain; her clergy never cease to warn parents of their duty in this matter; and, to their praise be it recorded, her laity have unswervingly answered her “to whom would we go? thou hast the word of eternal life.” Huge bribes have been placed ready to their hand; palatial school buildings have been, everywhere, erected by the State; scholarships and other large money prizes have been lavishly offered; but the reply of the Catholic of to day has been all through as that of the Hebrew children long ago—“Thy gods, O King, we will not worship, and before the golden statue we will not bow down.” It has been hoped to weary out the faith of the Church and the funds of the people; and statesmen have said—“It may be a matter of time, but the Catholics will have to succumb as well as the rest.” But in no place have they so succumbed; and, least of all, perhaps, here in Australasia.

Within the last ten or fifteen years State aids have been withdrawn from all Christian education in these colonies. The general feeling at the time was that its days were numbered. Some said that it was foolish of the Catholics to contemplate keeping up a

system for themselves; some, that it was despotic of the clergy to "force" the laity into the manifold self-impoverishment it would entail. Others believed that the mass of Roman Catholics might be willing enough to have Catholic schools as long as they were not compelled to support them out of their own private means. "For a while," such people said, "they will not complain; but by degrees, and with one excuse or another, the calls for funds will be grumbled at, and finally not responded to, and the schools will imperceptibly disappear." "It is better," they added, "that the change should thus come unnoticeably, and through the falling away of the Catholics themselves, than through anything which would seem to savour of persecution." Men who love to find fault with the priests asserted that the zeal of these latter for religious education would be fervent as long as supplies came in readily and the organization worked without much trouble; but, in the end—either through the unbusiness habits of the priests, or their apathy, or their selfishness—such grumblers fully anticipated the early collapse of the Catholic schools. All human likelihood appeared to support these foreboders of evil.

There were, it is true, a few, even in the hostile ranks, who, like Gamaliel (Acts v. 34), had read history, and they warned their fellow-senators, saying:—"Refrain from these men and let them alone, for if this counsel or this work is of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it, lest perhaps you be found even to work against God." The circumstances of Catholicity at the time these words were spoken were very similar to those in which the Australasian Church has been latterly ~~struggling~~ ^{regarding} the education of her children. Like the first Christians we also have gladly taken up the gage thrown down by the "doctor of the law," and we appeal with confidence to all honourable men for judgment on the victory. God has been largely helpful of His Church during her present struggle. Be yourselves the witnesses of that help, and the ~~miracles of the con-~~ ^{trast.} Is she losing ground in her to-day's good fight for Christian education? Are her schools diminishing in number or falling off in efficiency? Can you not—each for his own locality—fully testify that within no period of Australasian history have Catholic educational establishments so multiplied themselves as they have been doing within the last fifteen years? And to whom is this due? We answer, almost solely to supernatural sources. What an encouragement this experience must be for all of us. What a conviction must it bring to the heart of every Catholic that God is with us. Truly, at this moment does this Catholic Church of Australasia—especially in this matter of Christian schools—stand alone in this southern world. Truly, also, does she address herself to her children in the inspired words of the Prince of the Apostles (Acts iii., 1 Cor. i. 23), "Gold and silver we have not," rich scholarships and stately halls we cannot offer you, "but what we have we give, the name of Jesus Christ, a stumbling-block to the Jews, and a folly to the infidels; but unto them who are called, the power and the wisdom of God."

Having set before you the fatal shortcomings of the God-excluding systems of education, the firmness with which the Church, both clergy and laity, has ever rejected them, and the special, almost miraculous, manner in which the Almighty has blessed your efforts for religious schools here in Australia, we

invite you to join with us in thanking that God who has so specially fostered our feeble efforts. Such thanks will best take the form of an unswerving loyalty in future.

There have been, and there will, we are told, to the end, be Catholics, who, having opportunities of sending their children to Christian schools, compel them nevertheless to frequent those in which Christ is not recognised. Some do so to curry favour with those in high places, others for the sake of some scholarship, or other petty lucre to be gained. It is the old bartering of Judas with those in high stations at his time (Matt. xxvi. 14, 15), "What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they appointed to him thirty pieces of silver." Thus is the innocent child's soul, the cost of the Just One's blood, peddled away for a worldly woman's vanity or a greedy man's pelf. You must not be scandalized or discouraged by such examples. The Church has every year to write of some of her children what St. Paul did of one of his disciples (2 Tim. iv. 9), "Demas hath left me, loving this world." No doubt poor Demas gave some excuses to his master, the Apostle, to his companion, St. Luke (Colos. iv. 14, Phemon i. 24), and to his fellow Catholics. Probably he thought he was blindfolding man and God by his speech. But the Word of God chronicles all so briefly "Demas hath left me, loving this world."

Almost as dangerous as the example of vain Catholics is the specious reasoning of the supporters of godless education. This reasoning, as reasoning, is easily answered; as a shadowy make-believe covering, under which men mean to do as they wish, it is, of course, a cloud, on which no impression can be made. Their arguments are reducible to two classes. They say that the arithmetical tables, the parts of speech, the areas of the continents and oceans, Hullah's scale, and Howard's gymnastics have no relation whatever to religion, and to introduce it into their study is almost the same as to bring it into the purchase of merchandise or the making of a watch. This very common language is a throwing dust in the eyes of Catholics. We do not want to bring religion into the table-book, or the inflections of the parts of speech; neither do we attempt any such folly in Catholic schools. But, while this exclusion of a specific religious element from a number of subjects, taken separately and as such, is in a certain sense admissible, [the closely consecutive union of them, to the debarring all recognition of God, is to a Catholic intolerable. Let us take these materialists on their own ground. It is not necessary that a school child should eat or drink during an arithmetic or grammar lesson. If, however, you unite lesson to lesson, and study to study, to the exclusion of a just time for food and drink and sleep, you quickly extinguish the life of the body. So also, we say, if, by a similarly linked union of those secular classes, you shut out all opportunity of learning religion, you kill the life of the soul.

It will be said—"There are the mornings and evenings, and the Sundays, for the worship of God; and there are the parents and the clergymen to teach and conduct that worship." Such an answer can deceive no

practical person. A school child's morning and evening are almost valueless save for meal time. They are, in a double sense, the twilight of the child's day—moments of transition only. The earlier hour is spent in breakfast, and in the preparation for and the walk to school. The interval between school and sleep time is occupied in needful recreation and reflection; perhaps also in some absorbing or compulsory school work for the coming day. What chance has the knowledge or service of the Creator in such circumstances? There is, finally, the secularist says, the hour of Sunday-school. Yes, but what State school teacher would be satisfied with that sole hour, for the imparting to a child a fair acquaintance with any one secular subject? And can the Catholic Church accept as sufficient time for training in religion what a schoolmaster would reject as totally inadequate for instruction in grammar or geography? Unhappily there is no gainsaying the fact that, where the secular system has its way, the child is taught to give more study to the probable derivation of a noun or the analysis of a sentence than to the knowledge of Christ or of His law. What a shameful conclusion for Christian fathers and mothers to have to come to!

And, yet, these are not the worst features of this evil. Not only is the whole school time of the child thus craftily monopolized by secular lessons, but all his powers of appreciation are enlisted in their sole behalf. The entire machinery of a healthy and intelligently managed school, its encouragements and its penalties, and the seething and leavening which permeate it, seize on the boy or girl, and charge him or her totally with its spirit. Then there is the eagerness created by constant competition, the stimulus given by the respect of one's schoolmates, the looking forward to examinations, passes, prizes, and to the publication of "pass" and prize lists.

All these powerful agencies, in a purely secular system, combine in excluding and ignoring every thought of God. What wonder if, to a child so circumstanced, God is nothing—or, at least, nothing to be immediately concerned about? Place a boy or girl in these surroundings; steep one of them in this atmosphere, not for one or two, but for all their years from five to fifteen; accustom them, during that long time, to do all their working, all their important thinking, without a notion of God; keep before them, from lisping infancy to the threshold of manhood or womanhood, God-excluding knowledge as the one interest of their lives; and, finally, encircle them for all those years with companions who are being similarly trained, and can you wonder if the result is practical infidelity? What power—we ask common-sense men—can the occasional prayer of a tired child or the little Sunday-school hymn have to affect the current we have been describing? We believe that before long our fellow-colonists of other creeds will open their eyes to the terrible void in public instruction, caused by the present absence of religion. An immense number of them are earnest in their desire for the solid good of the young generation, and for the honour and prosperity of Australasia. They cannot expect either the one or the other from systems of education which shut out the Almighty from the whole school life of the child.

whole school life of the child. But, however it may be with others, you and we owe it to our God and our Judge, to be unwavering on this point. We endeavour, as it is our duty, to speak to you about this important matter in no uncertain accents. You—except the very few Demases—will, we know, do your duty to your little ones and their Redeemer.

One point more, and we shall pass on for the present from this subject of primary education. The excluders of God from the school-training of His children say—some of them probably in sincerity—“We would be glad to infuse into our educational system the spirit and practice of religion; but where there are so many denominations, where there is so much disagreement as to what really is the true religion this is impossible.” “Let the Churches,” says Lord Houghton, when recently lecturing in support of secularism, “settle among themselves what religion they wish taught, and let us know; in the meantime we shall instruct the children in reading, writing, and arithmetic.” This flippant language goes down with those who welcome any insolence to Christianity. It is unworthy of a logician or a statesman. If the nation or its department of public instruction were asked to teach religion, that is, to provide, train, and pay teachers thereof, there might be some appearance of reason in the remonstrance. Even then it might be required of it to take from the heads of recognised religious communities a nomination of fit instructors, and to furnish competent remuneration for the same. But the State is not, in our case, expected to teach religion. Not one word of what we have been saying, not a line of any contemporary Catholic writer, can be adduced to show that this is demanded by the Roman Catholic Church. What we do require is, ~~that the bill, as it is now being, we are~~ specially concerned, be left to their natural guardians, their parents, and that ~~the~~ latter, as they are bound to provide nurture for the children's bodies, be allowed also to select and furnish that of their souls. Permit these rightful custodians of the young to ~~say in what class of school they wish them~~ brought up. But do not add—“If you elect to educate them in schools of their own faith, or, indeed, if you place them in establishments where God, His Christ, or His law is in any form mentioned, I shall not pay for their instruction in secular subjects. No matter how well they are being taught arithmetic and grammar; no matter what examination you might allow me to make of them; no matter what tests you let me use as regards the capability of their teachers; no matter, in a word, what satisfaction you give me in dealing with them; as long as you keep them in a school where religion is once mentioned to them the live-long day—I shall not pay for their education in any branch of schooling, however secular. Take them from that school of God, and send them to one where they will never hear His name, and I shall gladly pay for almost every species of instruction that your soul can crave for them. Send them where the intellect that He gave shall be trained to nearly everything except the recognition of Him. Let them attend schools where the law of sentences and of numbers are anxiously studied for hours every day, but where all allusion to His name is strictly shut out. Send them where the Plantagenets will be their heroes of history, Shakespeare's apothegms their rules of conduct, but where Christ and His Gospel will never be, even remotely, introduced to them; and I shall send to the father of the family

and I shall send to the four quarters of the world for professors to teach them. Passage money, yearly salary, capitation money, all shall be at my expense, and all shall be promptly and prodigally disbursed." How base a speech for a nineteenth-century Government to make! What recreant language for Christened men to use! Yet these are the words and the votes in the Australasian Assemblies of to-day.

On Catholic intermediate education we can afford to be very brief. No words of ours could speak more plainly or more strongly in connection with it than the splendid Colleges now at work in most of the leading cities of our colonies. The creating of such establishments by the clergy and laity in this early infancy of our Australasian Church, and under circumstances where so many other grave wants were staring them in the face, is ample evidence of the value in which they are held by all our earnest Catholics.

We exhort you to keep alive your zeal in this important section of Christian education. We trust that these schools for secondary, or, as it were, "intermediate" between primary and University instruction, will be multiplied until every town of reasonable size is able to place these advantages at the doors of its children. Your Catholic primary school system, for the perfection of which you are making such exertions, is but half complete as long as its children find no kindred atmosphere to pass on to when they leave its protection. We therefore exhort the clergy and laity to still more zeal in the developing and strengthening of Christian intermediate education. God, who has so miraculously blessed the Girls' High Schools, under the various religious communities throughout Australasia, and brought them to a perfection rarely attained even in Europe, will aid you in a like manner and crown your similar efforts with a similar fruit.

The principles already laid down in regard to the primary schools must hold with equal force in the matter of intermediate and University education. All the Australian prelates are most earnest in their desire to see the Catholic youth of these great colonies not only instructed in their religion but perfected in every highest branch of science, for we are convinced that the world holds nothing more precious or more beautiful than the cultivated intellect of man, enlightened by faith. Some scientists indeed in our own days have made it their aim to set science in opposition to Divine faith; but such a purpose cannot be attained except by the travesty of science or the travesty of faith. It is only science falsely so called that can turn us away from God; for God is the source of all truth, and the earnest pursuit of science cannot fail to lead us to Him. The higher the branches of science are the more closely should they be connected with the supreme truth, and the more necessary must it become that they should be enlightened and quickened by religion. In many respects the University system is as yet only in its infancy in these colonies. We hope that through the enlightened policy of our statesmen its honours and emoluments and every advantage shall be thrown open alike to all, and that our

Catholic youth, without any sacrifice of religious principle, may be found on a footing of equality with their fellow-citizens of every denomination. We trust, moreover, that the University arrangements, which hitherto have proved far from satisfactory, may be carefully amended, and that our Catholic young men may no longer be compelled to look to other countries for that higher education which is denied them in these colonies, or to seek elsewhere for those pure fountains of knowledge which an unwise University system shall have closed against them at their own doors.

On the subject of the early employment of children the Pastoral says :—

When your children leave school do not permit the spirit and habits there acquired to perish. The years which intervene between the end of school-time and the first dawn of manhood or womanhood are the most important of all one's life. It is then that tastes begin to develop themselves, passions have then to learn whether they are to be the rulers or the ruled; comradeships and associations begin to be formed; habits settle themselves on the heart and the mind; and the spirit, which is to govern the soul during after-life, enthrones itself firmly therein. And yet it is that at this very period that young girls and young boys are most left to themselves. Would to God it was only "to themselves!" Alas, in how many instances are they left to the first unsuitable companions that seize on them, to irregular hours, and to still more irregular habits! The discipline of school life and the respect for authority which it creates soon give way to a time of uncontrol and irresponsibility; the wishes of parents are disrespected; the inculcations of religion and morality are set aside; and often the very laws of the State are outraged, till at last the innocent and promising Catholic school child of a couple of years ago, the centre of parents' and teachers' love and hopes, becomes the settled-down outcast of society. To whom is this sad result—this great disappointment—to be imputed? To the parents, and to the parents alone. After leaving school, the boy or girl, but especially the former, should be immediately bound to some trade or profession. Let every care be taken to make sure that the occupation selected is healthy and suitable, and that the persons into the company of whom the young person is necessarily brought are virtuous and improving. These points being ascertained, let there be no mistaken kindness; no time allowed for habits of indecision, unsteadiness, or laziness to take possession of the child. Set him at once on the path of industry and honest occupation, and you will do well by yourselves and by society, and, best of all, by your young beginner. Through undefinedness of training and of purpose very many of our people neglect to place their children in the ranks of skilled labour. Hence, in after years, you find Catholics abundant in the police force, in the navy camps, in the labour gangs of large contractors, in the charge of public-houses, on the wharfs and on the cabstands, dammaking or fencing in the far interior, or timber-getting by the fever-stricken estuaries along the northern coast. In fact, you find those poor fellows wherever the hours are long, the climate merciless, the labour unskilled, the comforts few, and the remuneration small. Why is all this the case? D.

all this the case? Because their parents brought them up to nothing better. Dearly beloved, open your eyes to this mistake. No enemy could do you more injury than, by this listlessness and shortsightedness, you are thus doing to yourselves, and to those whom you love more dearly still, your own children. Those of you, who are already working on new railway constructions, avoid those curses of large public works, gambling and intemperance. Save your earnings for a couple of years, get homesteads, and make to yourselves some provision and resting-place for the evening of your life. Bring yourselves within the influence and comfort of religion. God never meant the Irish Catholic to be the wanderer that he is over the face of the earth.
