

State Aid for Non-State Schools

Some points worth considering

by

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FOREWORD

I have written this brief document because I believe that State Aid introduces a bad, undemocratic principle — favoured treatment for one section of the community at the expense of all the rest.

This is the type of thinking which leads to totalitarianism—whether fascism, communism, or ecclesiasticism, as in Spain to-day. It is completely incompatible with the truly Australian way of life.

My first comments deal with State Aid and the Church. This is placed first, because some knowledge of the motives from which claims for State Aid arise is essential if the agitation is to be understood.

I cannot close this foreword without drawing attention to the smear campaign which some State Aiders are conducting against their opponents. I write regardless of the falsity of their charges; they are accusing respectable men of being Communists. This is McCarthyism, and it is serious because not only are honourable men harmed thereby, but also because the real Communists are thus provided gratis with a respectable front.

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STATE AID AND THE CHURCH

Catholic doctrine teaches that the Church is the mystical body of Christ and that all human believers are members of that body. Just as the members of our earthly body differ amongst themselves — the arm is different from the leg, the eye, the ear, both in appearance and function — so the earthly members of Christ's body differ amongst themselves.

But what is the Church, whose members we claim to be? Is it the visible organisation with its centre at Rome — or at Canterbury or Geneva or Constantinople — or is it that mystical body of true believers whose identity is known only to God?

The Roman Catholic Church, with which we are concerned in these notes, has until recently adhered to the view that the Church is that visible organisation whose centre is at Rome. It has held to the Augustinian view of the "City of God" which is besieged by the rest of the world: the Muslims have a similar concept when they divide the world into two communities, the Dar'ul-Islam (corresponding to the Church) and the Dar'ul-Harb (the house of the sword — those whose ultimate fate is destruction). It is on this ancient concept of the beleaguered City of God that the theory of maintaining independent schools is based: if the Church is under attack she must train her future soldiers in security from outside contamination so that they will fight loyally and bravely for her when the time arrives. Their foes are those outside the bounds of the visible Church — those Christians who are not Roman Catholics and those who are not Christians at all.

Pope John XXIII represented a progressive element in the Roman Catholic Church which rejected to a considerable extent this view of the Church as a besieged city; he went back to the earlier concept of the Church as a missionary undertaking whose task is to mix with the world outside the Church's own confines and thus bring them to Christ. The progressives were influenced by the fact that outside the Roman Catholic communion exist most of the great Christian scholars — Anglican and Protestant — and many of the world's most conspicuous Christians.

Any definition of the Church which left people of these types outside cannot be a true definition, and so the progressives tried to get back to the earlier concept of the Church whereby those at present outside could be included in the body of Christ in so far as they and the Roman Catholic Church are on common ground. The keynote of the progressive is to emphasise the mixing of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Orthodox, Protestants on

the common ground of faith in Christ and of their common objective — to win the world for Christ — and to pray that in the language of St. John's Gospel, "they may all be one". (John 17). This objective of the Pope and the progressives is completely irreconcilable with the concept of making the Roman Catholic Church an exclusive society, a city surrounded by enemies. The Roman Catholic Church's mission, according to the progressives, is to go into the world and to let her light so shine before men that those separated from her may be drawn to her and thus there shall be one Fold and one Shepherd.

Unfortunately, in Australia, as in the U.S.A., the progressive movement has not made much progress amongst Roman Catholics. This is partly due to the strange fact that our religious thinking, Anglican and Protestant as well as Roman, is a generation behind the times, and partly due to the fact that the membership of the Church is still largely dominated by the fanatical Protestant-hating Southern Irish tradition from which she drew her strength in the early days of the colony. This is the retrogressive element which is disrupting the political life of the community by its clamour for State Aid and its offer of electoral support to those politicians, both Liberal and Labour, who are sufficiently unprincipled and ignorant to champion their views.

The retrogressive theory of the Church and its place in society finds its clearest expression in the Syllabus of Errors, a collection of 84 propositions each of which Pope Pius IX, one of the most reactionary popes, condemned in 1864, a condemnation which was renewed in 1944. The Syllabus should be carefully studied by all who believe in the public subsidy of Church schools: it will illustrate for them the background of teaching in those schools where the progressive element has no power. Children indoctrinated with the principles of the Syllabus will find the exercise of a free secular democracy difficult, and when they become adult members of the Church will help to perpetuate its unhappy divisions.

STATE AID AND THE TAXPAYER

You perhaps own your own home, or hope to purchase one. You will pay rates to your municipal council and land-tax to the Government. Your rates are the main source of revenue for your local council; this means that every public undertaking in which the council is involved will be paid for, to a large extent, by the rates you have contributed. There is only a limited area in each municipality, which means that there is a limit to the land

which can be rated; but Church properties do not pay rates, so if some acres of land in your area are occupied by Church schools, convents, halls, etc., the rates which are needed to pay for the cost of administering the whole locality must be met by the ratepayers — the little people with their cottages — alone. The Church properties have the use of the services provided by the local councils although they contribute nothing. This free supply of services represents a considerable subsidy of Church, and particularly Church school, property.

STATE AID AND THE CHILD

State Aid, so far as the Roman Catholic child is concerned, is a form of compulsory apartheid. The child's choice of friends is restricted to a minority group of co-religionists — the good footballer cannot mix with good footballers of other creeds except as members of rival teams, the good chess player is denied the daily contact of his fellows unless they are of his own religious faith. This form of exclusionism is bad for the child socially — it gives him a sense of spiritual snobbery; he feels like the Pharisee in the temple who praised God that he was not like other men. Thus not only are the child's special skills possibly hindered but an enforced spiritual apartheid prevents him becoming fully an Australian amongst other Australians of different creeds.

STATE AID AND THE STATE

State Aid for non-State schools implies the diversion of monies compulsorily levied as taxes from the whole community for the advancement of the private sectarian views of a minority. It is sectarianism of the worst kind, and it would still be utterly indefensible if it were aimed at promulgating the private sectarian views of the majority. State monies must be used exclusively for State ends; this doesn't exclude State grants to hospitals run by religious orders, etc., as these hospitals care for the bodies of the members of the State and do not try to indoctrinate them, whereas the main objective of the schools is to indoctrinate children in views which the rest of the State reject in whole or in part.

Meanwhile the State Aid controversy could easily divide this small nation of ours fatally at a time when we are faced by the threat of Communism both internally and externally.

STATE AID AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

If a decision were reached to grant State Aid to non-State schools consideration would have to be given to the problem of the Anglican Church, which yielded up its system of Church schools at the State's request, in the interests of national unity. If national unity in education were to prove impossible to obtain, as evidenced by persistent demands for State Aid for non-State sectarian schools, then the Anglican Church is surely morally entitled not only to receive back the modern counterparts of the schools she once yielded up but also other schools to compensate her for the long years during which, out of deference to the wishes of the State, she refrained from developing her private schools. The sum involved is so great that the State could never afford to meet it, but nonetheless it would be morally obliged to attempt to do so were it to offer State Aid to the Roman Catholic schools. State Aid, without adequate compensation of the Church of England and the Protestant Churches, would, in effect, be the reward given to the Roman Catholic Church for refusing to give up its private school system in the interests of the nation.

In any case, even if the money were available, it seems very unlikely that the Anglican and Protestant Churches would ever be able to start their own schools on an adequate parochial scale through lack of trained teachers and the difficulty of finding suitable sites and erecting buildings upon them.

STATE AID AND THE SMALLER CHURCHES

The Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches alone have a membership sufficiently large to enable them to open schools wherever they please, for it is on the size of membership that the numbers of available potential pupils depend. Elsewhere we shall see why the Anglican Church has so far excluded itself from the concept of "a school in every parish"; it is enough to say here that these two big Churches alone are able to benefit from any form of direct State Aid. The other smaller Churches simply do not possess enough potential students concentrated in each district.

But if State Aid were to be introduced the members of these smaller bodies would still be taxed at the rate required to meet the subsidy on schools belonging to other Churches with whose beliefs they may strongly disagree, whilst they could never hope to benefit from these increased taxes themselves.

STATE AID AND THE CONSTITUTION

There is no clause in the Constitution which definitely proclaims the complete separation of Church and State or which specifically forbids State Aid.

Similarly, there is no clause in the Constitution which gives any support to the claims for State Aid.

Yet the Constitution was written at a time when feeling on this subject was high and it was stated a few years ago by a former Federal Attorney-General that State Aid would be ruled unconstitutional if the matter were to be contested before the courts. The Australian Constitution is closely related to the Constitution of the U.S.A., and a recent U.S. decision ruled against State Aid. The matter of State Aid should be referred to a referendum or else tested before the High Court and the Privy Council: decision by a referendum would be more generally acceptable to the Australian people, but as the campaign would become emotional and sectarian, gravely dividing the nation and setting back rapprochement between the Churches, it would probably be better to have the question finally settled in the calm atmosphere of the courts.

STATE AID AND THE OVERCROWDED STATE SCHOOLS

The State Aid agitators claim that the Church schools take a considerable burden off the State school system, and advance this as an argument in favour of State Aid for non-State schools. The argument is fallacious, for it is obviously far more efficient to run all schools as elements in a State school system rather than as the private institutions of various Churches and other bodies. The overhead in these fragmented systems is vast and highly inefficient.

The accuracy of their claim was largely disproved by the Goulburn fiasco, where the Government schools did succeed in coping with the unexpected influx far better than was expected; in fact, if the agitators who arranged the Goulburn experiment had not called it off they would have found that the State Education Department was quite capable of meeting the demands on a permanent basis. The evidence of this was so compelling that another similar experiment planned to take place at Albury to succeed the Goulburn fiasco was abandoned.

STATE AID AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE STATE SYSTEM

It is quite clear that if the Roman Catholic Church should succeed in obtaining State Aid for its schools the other Churches will follow suit. We can expect a large number of competing schools, all understaffed with inadequately trained teachers, springing up wherever possible. The State schools may be largely denuded of pupils and the excellent system of State education will end by becoming fragmented, to the enormous detriment of national unity and religious tolerance.

All these schools will need Government help if they are to survive, and the end result will be less money for the State schools.

In any case, lack of staff must result in a general fall in teaching standards which will in a few years' time be reflected in the quality of students proceeding to the Universities on whose research the security and prosperity of this nation largely depends.

STATE AID AND THE COMMUNISTS

Proponents of State Aid claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the inveterate foe of Communism, and this could be quite true: but this claim does not mean that Communism's most inveterate foe possesses the most efficient defences against Communism. The claim can best be tested by considering those countries in which the Church of Rome was formerly strongest and controlled the educational system. Before the rise of Communism the Roman Catholic Church was dominant over most of Europe and America (except North America). Nowadays many of the staunchest Roman Catholic countries have become Communist, partly by force of Russian arms, but partly because of a large indigenous Communist party. The size of the native Communist parties in Hungary, Austria, Poland and the Baltic countries and East Germany is an interesting commentary on the failure of Roman Catholic education to provide an intellectual answer to the attractions of Communism. To this fact must be added the very strong Communist parties in Belgium, France and Italy — the latter two were only saved from going Communist by an incredible chance and a large expenditure of U.S. dollars at the end of World War II — and throughout South and Central America, which the Roman Catholic Church officials admit to have become "de-Christianised". Spain nearly became Communist in

the Civil War of 1936 and probably will do so when Franco dies.

On the other hand those countries which do not possess a Roman Catholic system of education — the British Commonwealth of Nations, the U.S.A., the Scandinavian countries, Israel and many of the Muslim countries have shown themselves well able to resist Communism on the intellectual plane.

The defeat of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1952 through the efforts of a strongly left-wing Socialist party and various vague semi-intellectual types left the Communist Party a legal organisation and, as such, capable of running its own schools. In fact it did so run a school for some time in Liverpool Street, Sydney, and rumours are afloat of ambitious plans for the future. The Communist "University" at Minto has also had its place in the news. These schools all belong to an organisation which is every bit as legally safeguarded as the Christian Churches, and if aid should be given to private schools the Communists would be completely justified in claiming their share.

STATE AID AND THE UNIVERSITIES

If the principle of State Aid for non-State schools be granted, logic would naturally lead to the principle being extended to Universities. The sectarian University is a contradiction in terms, for the essence of a University is the spirit of free-enquiry whereas the sectarian University is an institution founded on the basis of certain dogmatic beliefs. Some years ago there was a move for a Roman Catholic University in New South Wales, and since then there has been a constant stream of propaganda attacking the secular University of Sydney on moral grounds, sometimes using unsuspecting Anglican or Protestant clergy as spokesmen.

Obviously the position is being built up to the point where a considerable body of uninformed laymen will believe in the moral delinquency of the secular State Universities and will be prepared to tolerate the establishment of religious Universities. Needless to say this propaganda attacking the moral standards of the Universities is misleading — the most flourishing societies at these Universities include the religious societies, and the University of Sydney has established Biblical Studies courses which treat the biblical basis of religion in a completely non-dogmatic spirit of free enquiry.

STATE AID AND YOUR CONSCIENCE

The question of State Aid has never been put to a referendum for an obvious reason. At least 70% of the population of Australia are not Roman Catholics, and even the Roman Catholic Church is not monolithic on this subject — many Roman Catholics believe that State Aid involves Government control, in whole or in part, and they consider that any temporal power which limits the freedom of the Church must be opposed. "He that pays the piper calls the tune", however, and there is quite a probability that if State Aid to Church schools be given the State will later demand some privilege in return which the free conscience of the Church would otherwise reject.

At the same time, proponents of State Aid advance the claim that it is a matter of conscience for them that they should be free to educate their children according to the doctrines of their Church, and claim that Church schools alone enable children to be educated in a "Catholic atmosphere". At the same time they claim that as they are already taxed to help to pay for a State education system they cannot afford to maintain a Church one as well, and so, if they are to be given freedom of conscience in this matter, a proportion of the monies collected by the State for educational purposes should be paid to them.

On the surface this sounds a very fair request and the writer supported it formerly, but investigation shows that it cannot reasonably be sustained. The laws of Australia provide that all taxpayers pay money, part of which is used for the expenses of the State educational system — that is an integral part of Australian life, and all who choose to live in Australia show by that choice that they accept their responsibilities in that regard. The State has its responsibilities to those who do not wish to send their children to denominational schools and these responsibilities imply that there shall be a good State system available for the education of all Australian children throughout the country. This is an enormously expensive undertaking and it is unlikely that when the cost of it is met, as a first priority, enough money will be left in the Treasury to enable the State to subsidise those who deliberately bypass the excellent free State system and seek to establish their own rival system. Those who do not support the State Aid programme have every right to claim that their consciences do not allow them to condone the use of public funds for the support of a private educational system whose main objective is to teach particular dogmas which the majority of the taxpayers and the community at large reject.

The claim that it is a matter of conscience for Roman Catholics to send their children to Church schools should be considered in the light of the Goulburn incident. Here the Roman Catholic school authorities, in an attempt to force the State Labour Government to yield to their demands for State Aid, suddenly closed all their schools and thus forced those Roman Catholic parents who wished their children to continue to receive education — particularly Leaving Certificate candidates whose exams were only a few months off — to attend State schools. The lesson for the Australian taxpayer was obvious — the claim that it is a matter of conscience for Roman Catholic parents to send their children to Roman Catholic schools is false since the Church, instead of forcing the Roman Catholic school authorities to reopen their schools immediately, condoned the attendance of Roman Catholic children at State schools.

It must be added that the Heffron Government showed admirable firmness in the matter; it did not yield one inch to this coercion, but rather took steps to help the State Education Department to deal with the considerable influx of Roman Catholic children. The Department rose efficiently to the unexpected situation, and the Goulburn episode ended in a fiasco, the Church schools reopening without gaining any objective. The Goulburn episode showed two things:—

- (a) Roman Catholic children can attend State schools without the Roman Catholic Church claiming that it is against the Roman Catholic conscience.
- (b) The Church schools were financially able to re-open without State Aid.

STATE AID AND ITS PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORTERS

It is a noteworthy fact that the Parliamentary supporters of State Aid are often men formerly distinguished by a strong aversion for Roman Catholicism and at variance with those who looked for a rapprochement among the Churches. One is inclined to wonder about the real reason for this simultaneous complete volte-face on State Aid.

STATE AID — THE REAL REASON

State Aid protagonists claim that they wish their children to be brought up in the religious atmosphere of their choice and correctly declare that this is part of the Four Freedoms. But they

incorrectly claim that in order to do this they must have Church schools partly maintained, at least, by the State.

We have already shown (State Aid and **Your Conscience**) that this was proved by the Goulburn fiasco not to be a matter of conscience, and further proof is available in the Public Education Act, which provides that clergy of all faiths have the right to instruct children of their own respective faith for an hour per day in every State school in New South Wales. So there is already ample provision made for religious instruction apart from what is given at home or in church.

The State Aid protagonists are not satisfied with this provision, but continue to press for direct financial aid for the building of Church schools. As the Roman Catholic Church is said to be the largest owner of real estate in Australia outside the Government, and as Church property does not pay municipal rates or land tax, the observer wonders if State Aid is merely a device for increasing capital acquisitions through compulsory Government taxation of the whole community.

Schemes which provide for the granting of interest-free loans mean simply that the Church, which is able to avail itself of the offer, is given an interest-free loan wherewith to buy tax-free capital investments; but none of the smaller Churches is able to avail itself of this bonanza because (a) they do not possess enough pupils to make it possible to open their own schools; (b) they have mostly insufficient capital to provide security for the borrowing of large sums.