

Box
80 A

N.S.W. SCHOOLS

by
D. B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

MOORE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 2042 00092126 6

The Federal Government's offer of money for equipping science blocks in private schools and the State Government's proposals to make grants to the parents of pupils at private schools, forces us all to consider the question, do we want a denominational system of education? This used to be the system in New South Wales, when the denominations conducted schools with the aid of Government subsidies. However, in 1880 the subsidies were withdrawn and Government money spent on Government schools which has enabled our fine State school system of education to be built up. At the same time the Government not only provided a general religious teaching within the school curriculum, but also made time available to the denominations to enable them to teach their children in the school buildings.

Of course, in any free community it is impossible to prevent private schools coming

into existence based on the payment of fees, and so supplementing the state schools based on the payment of taxes. This is because there will be those who have more money than others and who wish to spend some of it educating their children in separate schools. However, people who send their children to private schools ought not to desire to contract out of their duty of paying taxes for the common state system; unless we reverse our community decision and go back to the system of denominational schools. This is the question we must now face for Sir Robert Menzies' and Mr. Renshaw's decision to give aid to denominational schools, although obviously prompted by vote catching and so rightly classed as a bribe, forces us to consider the question again - do we want denominational schools? that is to say, schools run by the denominations in each township. Roman Catholics have no option but to say yes to this question because the Vatican has decided the matter for them. Thus

Canon 1374 of the Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law orders that "Catholic children shall not attend non Catholic or undenominational schools, nor schools that are mixed, that is to say open also to non Catholics. The Bishop of the diocese alone has the right, in harmony with the instructions of the Vatican, to decide under what circumstances and with what safeguards against perversion attendance at such schools by Catholic children may be tolerated". Roman Catholics are taught that disobedience to any of these canons is a mortal sin and that one act of disobedience to these vatican rules, unless repented of in the sacrament of penance, sends the Roman Catholic to hell. So it is taught. Consequently, in view of this direction from the Vatican, Australian Roman Catholics have no option but to support a denominational school system whether or not they believe it to be in the interests of their own children or of Australia as a whole.

Naturally they are anxious that other Australians should help in the heavy financial burden that such a denominational system imposes, and opportunist politicians are anxious to devise ways by which they may win the Roman Catholic minority vote without losing the support of the protestant majority vote. That is why these devious schemes of science aid to schools or grants to parents of private school children have been adopted rather than the straightforward method of subsidy to the school itself. But it comes to the same thing as in the end the school gets the money.

Mr. Renshaw's scheme would be satisfactory if all parents with school children were subsidized and not merely parents who send their children to private schools. It is this discrimination which turns the action of the State Government into State aid to Roman Catholic schools.

If we consider the question free from outside pressure I think we will conclude that the denominational school system is not the best for Australia which has such large areas of sparse population, but rather our present system of State schools, remembering that the denominations are free to teach religion within these schools. If this is our conclusion, we must resist any attempt to subsidize the denominational system out of the taxes, whether the aid is direct State aid or indirect. And we must continue to resist it. The rule is simple. No State aid, either direct or indirect should be given while we maintain our present system of State education. The matter is complicated by the fact that some of the Protestant churches conduct schools, but it should be recognized that these schools are not really part of a denominational school system for there is no attempt to extend them to every parish, but they are simply independ-

ent fee paying schools for those who can afford them and which happen to be conducted by one or other of the protestant denominations. They could be as easily conducted by a body of private citizens, as many of such schools in fact are. It is quite wrong that the community should subsidize from the taxes schools available only to the well to do.

Since, as I have said, it is impossible to suppress such independent schools in a free community, their one virtue is their independence of government control, and this is a further reason why private schools should not receive State aid, for even if it is indirect aid it takes away their independence of the State educational system and the element of competition and emulation which they consequently introduce to the mutual benefit of both systems. If, however, they come to depend upon State money even in a small way they have lost their

independent power of action
over against the State.

It is of course right to be anxious that our children should receive an education based firmly on Christian truth; but in our community which is predominantly Christian there is no reason to doubt that we should be able to ensure a Christian basis for our State educational system. Our efforts should be directed in this direction rather than towards the rebuilding of a denominational school system, for the re-establishment of such a system would undoubtedly lead to an increasing secularisation of the State system.

The Christian churches should direct their attention to ensuring that the general religious instruction in our schools is Christian in its basis, and not non-Christian in basis as was proposed in the recent syllabus of the Minister for Education. And at the same time they should

endeavour to improve the quality of the teaching given during the special religious instruction classes. This will mean paid and trained teachers in addition to the clergy, and if there is any money available from the Government it should be given at this point, namely to improve the religious instruction in the Government's own State schools rather than to subsidize denominational schools over against the State system. But after all the real duty for educating children rests on the parents, and no Government nor denomination can take it from them. This is where the Roman Catholic Church is in error; for although some of its spokesmen rightly stress that the parents have the final duty of educating their children, in fact as we have seen the Vatican does not give parents any choice in the matter, they must send their children to the parochial school. Nevertheless, by nature, parents have the obligation of educating their

children to take their place in society in the same way as parents have the obligation of feeding, clothing and housing their children. The State and the Church may assist in both areas but the final duty and obligation rests on the parents who brought the children into the world to educate them, and this means not only to educate them in secular subjects but also in religion. The Christian parent has the responsibility of ensuring that his children are educated in Christianity; he cannot delegate this responsibility entirely to the Sunday School or to the denominational school or to religious instruction in the State schools. Here is an area where all of us need to examine ourselves and take stock. We provide our children with food and clothing but are we providing them with the knowledge of God. The father, the head of the home, is finally responsible for this, and he himself should lead the family in daily worship and endeavour to equip himself to

teach his children about God and judgment and salvation and heaven. After all, there is no more manly attitude than to acknowledge the sovereign Lordship of God and to obey and trust the Saviour. Christian parents and particularly Christian fathers are duty bound to see that the children in their home are brought up in the knowledge of the Christian way or as St. Paul puts it "in the fear and nurture of the Lord".

"THE PROTESTANT FAITH"

IS BROADCAST

EVERY SECOND SUNDAY

AT 9.15 P.M.

OVER 2CH

11 October 1964

Copies of these fortnightly
broadcasts may be obtained
(£1 per year posted) by
writing to "The Protestant
Faith", C/- 20H, York Street
Sydney.