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THE INJUSTICE OF SUBSIDISING  
ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ONLY

By D.B. Knox



THE PROTESTANT FAITH



The Federal Government has announced that from the beginning of next year it will no longer give any financial assistance to certain church and independent schools, while at the same time it will greatly increase grants to others. Examination of the list of schools shows that over 100 protestant and other schools are to have their grants completely cut off, while only very few Roman Catholic schools are in this situation. On the other hand the schools which are to receive greatly increased state aid are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. The Government decision, therefore, amounts to this - that it is using Government money to support Roman Catholic schools, almost exclusively.

An examination of the history of education in Australia will show how unjust is the Government's decision. The history goes back almost 150 years. In the early days the Church of England promised schooling, providing schools and schoolmasters throughout the colony. In 1836 Governor Bourke planned to introduce a national school system; the basic principle was one of combined secular education for all children but with separate religious instruction undertaken by the ministers of the different denominations. This scheme was warmly supported at the time by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Australia, Bishop Polding, who wrote a letter to the "Australasian" newspaper under the pen-name of Catholicus Ipse, part of which was as follows:

"I can readily conceive that the conversation on religious subjects which will take place, sometimes even among boys, will clear away many of the prejudices which were heretofore deemed sacred; that it will not be easy to poison the friendships that have been formed at school ..... True religion enshrouds not herself in prejudices, these she regards as habiliments degrading to her beauty". (Quoted Corrigan "Catholic Education in N.S.W." - p.17).

Thus, Bishop Polding, the leader of the Roman Catholic communion in Australia at the time of Governor Bourke, commended the state school system in which all children were educated together with provision for separate religious indoctrination, and he disapproved of segregating children according to their religious persuasions in different schools. He saw a unified

school system as an invaluable means of uniting the community and breaking down the prejudices which segregate lives. In 1880 this system, suggested by Governor Bourke and commended by Bishop Polding was adopted in N.S.W., and has become general throughout Australia. As a consequence of this government decision, the protestant churches allowed their numerous schools to close, and encouraged their children to attend the state school system, and the protestant clergy gave a great deal of time (all unpaid) to teach week by week in the state school system. This has continued right up to the present. However, by the time Bourke's scheme was adopted in N.S.W. in 1880, the local Roman Catholic church had changed its mind completely from the views of Bishop Polding. This change was a result of a directive from the Vatican. For, in 1864, in the notorious Syllabus of Errors, paragraph 48, Pope Pius IX condemned public school systems and committed the Roman Catholic Church to the parochial school system, so that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Archbishop Vaughan, following the papal directive, condemned the public schools in extravagant language, describing them as "seed plots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness being calculated to debase the standard of human excellence and to corrupt the political, social and individual lives of future citizens." As a result of the new Roman Catholic position Roman Catholic children were compelled by their bishops to attend parochial schools which the Roman Catholic Church maintained and expanded in spite of the new government school policy. This was plainly for the purpose of separating Roman Catholic children from their protestant companions, so that they might be instructed in the Roman Catholic system. Parents were given then, and are given now, no alternative for their own decision. Roman Catholic Canon Law, in for example Canon 1374, states "Catholic children shall not attend neutral, non-catholic nor mixed schools" i.e., no schools open to catholics and non-catholics alike. Roman Catholics sometimes argue that parents should have the choice of where they send their children but their own church does not give them that choice. For parents to disregard the Canon Law without the bishop's permission, is said to involve them in mortal sin, which condemns to death. As a consequence of this Vatican directive



the Roman Catholic church is no longer able to follow the wise counsel of its first bishop, Bishop Poulding, but must follow the directive of the Vatican and maintain schools in every parish. The Vatican directive is plainly for the purpose of indoctrinating children in Roman Catholic theology. The Roman Catholic church maintained their schools in opposition to the Government policy and without regard to educational standards. Now they are to be subsidised to bring them up to standard, while protestants and others who concentrated their efforts on co-operating with the Government schools, are to pay, without any help to their own schools, or assistance to re-start their schools.

For many years Roman Catholic clergy never entered the state schools to teach, in the way that protestant clergy did. It is only in recent years that this policy has been reversed. Had the protestant churches maintained an opposition to the state schools system as the Roman church did they also would have many parochial schools at present all eligible to receive Government subsidies, now that the Government has changed its policy and is giving handsome grants to church schools. But for almost 100 years the protestant churches have co-operated with the Government in supporting the state school system in sending their children there, and their clergy teaching religion there, free of charge. It is, therefore, grossly unjust that they should be rewarded, now that the Government has changed its policy with receiving no money at all, even to run such schools as they have been able to maintain, let alone money to start new ones up again but that all money should be going to schools which were maintained in spite of the Government policy as the result of a directive which emanated outside Australia, in the Vatican. As the result of cutting off the grants to protestant schools, more than one is likely to have to close.

There is no doubt that it is not in the best interests of education that there should be small non-viable schools competing with one another in areas of sparse population. The Government alone is able to maintain a universal coverage providing education for every child where-ever he may live. The Government's change of policy is not the result of an enquiry

into educational policy, nor indeed the result of an election mandate. Yet if the Government is now changing its policy so as to support a second system of education in areas of denser population it is most unjust that this support should go to one denomination only, one which happens to be in a position to receive it because it has not co-operated with the Government's former policy for 100 years.

Now that the Government has decided to support a second school system, the only fair way is to make a grant to each child in such schools, and at the same time to provide money to enable denominations and other groups which have co-operated with the Government in the past, to re-start their schools.

It is justice which commends a Government.

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