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**ADDRESS**

OF THE

**ROMAN CATHOLICS**

TO THEIR

**FELLOW CITIZENS,**

OF THE

**CITY AND STATE OF NEW YORK.**

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**New-York.**

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## ADDRESS

*Of the Roman Catholics to their Fellow-Citizens of the City  
and State of New York.*

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### FELLOW CITIZENS:

We, the Roman Catholics of the city of New York, feeling that both our civil and religious rights are abridged and injuriously affected by the operation of the "Common School System," and by the construction which the Common Council have lately put on the laws authorising that system, beg leave to state our grievances, with the deep confidence in the justice of the American character, that if our complaints are well founded, you will assist us in obtaining the redress to which we are entitled—if they are not well founded, we are ready to abandon them.

We are Americans and American citizens. If some of us are foreigners, it is only by the accident of birth. As citizens, our ambition is to be Americans—and if we cannot be so by birth, we are so by choice and preference, which we deem an equal evidence of our affection and attachment to the Laws and Constitution of the country. But our children, for whose rights as well as our own, we contend in this matter, are Americans by nativity. So that we are like yourselves, either natives of the soil, or like your fathers from the Eastern World, having become Americans under the sanction of the Constitution, by the birthright of selection and preference.

We hold, therefore, the same ideas of our rights that you hold of yours. We wish not to diminish yours, but only to secure and enjoy our own. Neither have we the slightest suspicion that you would wish us to be deprived of any privilege which you

claim for yourselves. If, then, we have suffered by the operation of the "Common School System" in the city of New York, it is to be imputed rather to our own supineness, than to any wish, on your part, that we should be aggrieved.

The intention of the Legislature of this State, in appropriating public funds for the purposes of popular Schools, *must have been* (whatever construction the lawyers of the Common Council put upon it,) to diffuse the blessings of education among the people, without encroachment on the civil and religious rights of the citizens. It was, *it must have been*, to have planted in the minds of youth, principles of knowledge and virtue, which would secure to the State a future population of enlightened and virtuous, instead of ignorant and vicious members. This was certainly their general intention, and no other would have justified their bountiful appropriation of the public funds.

But in carrying out the measure, this patriotic and wise intention has been lost sight of—and in the city of New York at least, under the late arbitrary determination of the present Common Council, such intention of the Legislature is not only disregarded, but the high public ends to which it was directed, are manifestly being defeated.

Mere knowledge, according to the late decision, mere secular knowledge is what we are to understand by education, in the sense of the legislature of New York. But if you should allow the smallest ray of religion to enter the school-room, if you should teach the children that there is an eye which sees every wicked thought, that there is a God, a state of rewards and punishments beyond this life, then, according to the decision of the Common Council, you forfeit all claim to the bounty of the State, although your scholars should have become as learned as Newton, or wise as Socrates! Is then, we would ask you, fellow-citizens, a practical rejection of the Christian religion in all its forms, and without the substitution of any other, the basis on which you would form the principles and character of the future citizens of this great commonwealth? Are the meek lessons of religion and virtue, which pass from the mother's lips into the heart of her child, to be chilled and frozen by icy contact with a system of education thus interpreted?

Is enlightened villany so precious in the public eye, that science is to be cultivated whilst virtue is neglected, and religion, its only adequate groundwork, is formally and authoritatively proscribed? Is it your wish that vice should thus be elevated from its low and natural companionship with ignorance, and be married to knowledge imparted at the public expense?

We do not say that even the Common Council profess to require that the Christian religion should be excluded from the Common Schools:—They only contend that the inculcation of each or any of its doctrines would be sectarianism, and thus, lest sectarianism should be admitted, Christianity is substantially excluded. Christianity in this country is made up of the different creeds of the various denominations, and since all these creeds are proscribed, the Christian religion necessarily is banished from the halls of public education.

The objections which we have thus far stated, fellow-citizens, ought to appear to you, in our opinion, as strong to you as they do to us. For though we may differ in our definition of the religion of Christ, still we all generally profess to believe, to revere it, as the foundation of moral virtue and of social happiness. Now, we know of no fixed principle of infidelity, except the *negation* of the Christian religion. The adherents of this principle may differ on other points of scepticism, but in rejecting Christianity, they are united. Their confession of faith is a belief in the *negative* of Christianity; but they reject it, *in toto*; whilst the Common Council rejects it only in all its several parts, under the name of sectarianism.

It is manifest, therefore, that the Public School System, in the city of New York, is entirely favourable to the sectarianism of infidelity and opposed only to that of positive Christianity. And is it your wish, fellow-citizens—is it your wish more than ours, that infidelity should have a predominancy and advantages, in the public schools, which are denied to Christianity? Is it your wish that your children shall be brought up under a system of education, so called, which shall detach them from the Christian belief which you profess, whatever it may be, and prepare them for initiation into the mysteries of Fanny Wrightism, or any other scheme of infidelity which may come in their way? Are you willing that your children, educated at your expense,

shall be educated on a principle *antagonist* to the Christian religion?—that you shall have the toil and labor of cultivating the ground, and sowing the seed, in order that infidelity may reap the harvest.

With us, it is matter of surprise that conscientious persons, of all Christian denominations, have not been struck with this bad feature of the system, as understood by the Common Council. A new sectarianism antagonist to all *Christian* sects, has been generated in, not the common schools, as the State originally understood the term, but in the *public* schools of the public school society;—this new sectarianism is adopted by the Common Council of this city; and is supported, *to the exclusion of all others* at the public expense. Have the conscientious Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Lutherans and others, no scruples of conscience at seeing their children, and the children of their poor, brought up under this new sectarianism? It is not for us to say; but for ourselves we can speak: and we cannot be parties to such a system except by legal compulsion and against conscience.

Let us not be mistaken. We do not deny to infidels, for unbelief, any right to which any other citizen is entitled.

But we hold that the common school system, as it has been lately interpreted by the Common Council of the city, necessarily transfers to the interest of infidel sectarianism the advantages which are denied to Christian sectarianism of every kind.

Again, let us not be misunderstood. We are opposed to the admission of sectarianism of any and of every kind, whether Christian or anti-Christian, in the schools that are supported by the State.

But we hold also that, so far as the commonwealth is concerned in the character of her future citizens, even the least perfect religion of Christian sectarianism would be better than no religion at all. And we hold that, of all bad uses to which the public money can be perverted, among the worst would be the expending of it, in the shape of a bounty to education, for the spread and propagation of sectarian infidelity. Far be it from us to suppose that either the Legislature, Common Council or School Commissioners ever intended such perversion. We hold, nevertheless, that the consequence which

we have pointed out, and the apprehension of which is one of the reasons why we Roman Catholics cannot conscientiously participate in the benefits of these schools, is necessary and inevitable. The education which each denomination might, under proper restraints and vigilance, give to its *own poor*, has passed and become a monopoly in the hands of "The Public School Society of New York." That corporation is in high and almost exclusive standing with the Common Council. \*

\* NOTE.

"The Public School Society" was originally incorporated, for "the education of Poor Children, who do not belong to, or are not provided for, by any Religious Society." The purpose was humane, patriotic and benevolent. But alas! it has been most sadly departed from. One of the motives, indeed the principal one, which they set forth in their petition for a charter from the people and Legislature of the State, was in their own language, "the benefits which would result to society from the education of such children, BY IMPLANTING IN THEIR MINDS THE PRINCIPLES OF RELIGION AND MORALITY." This was in 1805. In 1808 they obtained a considerable appropriation of the public money, independent of the school fund;—and had themselves designated the "Free School Society of New York," with an extension of their powers reaching "all children who are proper objects of gratuitous education." In 1810, they obtained an act, (for they never slumbered,) putting the right of membership at a contribution of fifty dollars and providing for them another extra appropriation. Thus they continued from year to year, until they finally got themselves denominated "The Public School Society of New York" and from that time labelled *their* Schools as if they belonged to the community at large, "Public Schools." They are not certainly, in the ordinary sense of the terms, what they profess to be. They are merely called "Public Schools," but they belong to a private Corporation—who have crept up into high favor with the powers that be, and have assumed the exclusive right of monopolising the education of youth, and of receiving exclusively the public funds set apart for that benevolent and patriotic purpose.

But there is one circumstance which brands their exclusive pretension with the stamp of rare and peculiar arrogance. It is that they claim the Common School funds on the express ground of defeating the very end for which their Charter was obtained, viz "the benefits that would result to society from the education of (such) children, by implanting in their minds the principles of religion and morality." Now—in their apostasy from their first profession, they claim the merit of benefitting society by seeing that in *their* schools, no principle of religion and morality shall be implanted! The same body, under different names, obtaining a charter and high pecuniary privileges in consideration of their doing a certain good work; and yet coming out openly to claim exclusively the bounty granted for that purpose, on the ground that they and they alone, have taken the precaution that the good work shall not be performed in connexion with education. Not only will they not perform it themselves but they will not allow others to accomplish it. What would have been a benefit to society when they applied for a charter, would be a terrible injury now. And if by chance "the principles of religion and morality were implanted in the minds of children," there would result nothing but sectarianism, bickering and religious wars—and over and above the equilibrium of the American Constitution would be awfully disturbed;—the rights of conscience would be violated and disasters innumerable would be the result.

(**VIDE** the apprehensions of the lame and laboring Report put forth, in April, on behalf of the Public School system, as emanating from a committee of the Board of assistant Aldermen, against the petitions of the Roman Catholics, Scotch Presbyterians, and others, who have the misfortune to believe still that society would be benefited by having "principles of religion and morality implanted in the minds of children.")

Now, the education which is imparted on the principle of the schools of that society is, in our decided opinion, calculated from its defectiveness to disappoint the benevolent hope of legislative bounty, and to make bad and dangerous citizens. We all know that the belief of another world is, ultimately, at the base of all that is just and sacred in this. The love of God—the hope of future rewards—the dread of future punishment—one or all of these, constitute and must be the foundation of conscience in the breast of every man. Where neither of them exists, conscience is but an idle word. Religion is but the developement of these important truths, governing man by their internal influence on his passions and affections, regulating the order of his duties to God, to his country, to his neighbour and himself. If they have their full force, he will be a man of justice, probity and truth. And in proportion as such men are numerous in the commonwealth, in the same proportion will the State enjoy security and happiness from within—honor and high estimation from without.

Now, holding these truths as indisputable, we ask you, fellow-citizens, to say whether this, not common, but public, school system, as it is now administered, under the interpretation of the Common Council, is calculated to raise up for your successors in the State men of this description ; or, rather, whether it does not promise you men of a different and diametrically opposite character ? The Common Council makes it a condition, an essential one of those schools, that religion shall not be taught, for this would be sectarianism. And thus the intellect is cultivated, if you please, but the heart, and moral character are left to their natural depravity and wildness. This is not education ; and above all, this is not *the* education calculated to make good citizens.

Education cultivates all the faculties of the human soul, the **WILL**, as well as the understanding and memory.

The public school system not only does **NOT** cultivate the will (for this can hardly be done without the aid of religion,) but it almost emancipates the will, even in the tender age of childhood, in reference to the subject of religion itself. We have found in the hands of our children lessons setting forth, in sub-



stance, that, after all, *humane* feelings and actions are about the best religion.

In these schools, you give them knowledge, without the moderating principle which will direct its use, or prevent its being applied to the worst of purposes. What principle do you inculcate that will check the lie that is rising to their lips, or cause confusion on their brow when they have uttered it? None, Religion could accomplish this—but religion is excluded. If you tell them there is a God who will punish them, the Atheist father who thinks himself an honest man without God, and who thinks his own opinions good enough for his child, will appeal to the decision of the Common Council, and show that you violate the condition of the grant in favour of common schools, by speaking of God or any thing sectarian. What principles of self-restraint are inculcated in this spurious system of education, which leaves the *WILL* of the pupil to riot in the fierceness of untrained lusts. “Train up a child in the way in which he should walk, and when he is old, he will not depart from it,” is the maxim of one who judged of human nature with more than human penetration. But the Common Council has reversed it, and decided that the child will train up itself, provided you give it knowledge without religion.

Thus far, fellow-citizens, we have stated our objections to the present system of common school education, not as they affect us more than any other denomination of Christians.

We have stated them in view of the bearing which that system is likely to have on interests in which you are concerned as much as, or more than ourselves, viz: religion, morals, individual and social happiness, and the welfare of the State.

We believe it was the warning voice of the illustrious Washington, among the most solemn words of *the* patriot, breathed into the ear of his beloved country, to *beware* of the man who would inculcate morality *without religion*.

We now come to the statement of grievances which affect us in our civil and religious rights, as Roman Catholics.

Under the guarantee of liberty of conscience, we profess the religion which we believe to be true and pleasing to God.

We inherit it, (many of us) from our persecuted fathers, for we are the sons of martyrs in the cause of religious freedom.

Our conscience obliges us to transmit it to our children.

A brief experience of the public school system, in the city of New York, convinced us that we could not discharge our conscientious duty to our offspring if we allowed them to be brought up under the influence of the irreligious principles on which, these schools are conducted, and to some of which, we have already alluded. But besides these, there were other grounds of distrust and danger, which soon forced on us the conclusion that the benefits of public education were not for *us*. Besides the introduction of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment, with the prevailing theory that from these even children are to get their notions of religion, contrary to our principles, there were in the class books of those schools, false (as we believe) historical statements respecting the men and things of past times, calculated to fill the minds of our children with errors of fact, and at the same time to excite in them prejudice against the religion of their parents and guardians. These passages were not considered as sectarian, inasmuch as they had been selected as mere reading lessons, and were not in *favor* of any particular sect, but merely *against* the Catholics. We feel it is unjust that such passages should be taught at all, in schools to the support of which we are contributors, as well as others. But that such books should be put into the hands of *our own* children, and that in part at our own expense, was in our opinion, unjust, unnatural, and at all events, to us intolerable. Accordingly, through very great additional sacrifices, we have been obliged to provide schools under our churches and elsewhere in which to educate our children as our conscientious duty required. This we have done to the number of some thousands for several years past, during all which time we have been obliged to pay taxes—and we feel it unjust and oppressive that whilst we educate our children as well, we contend, as they would be at the Public Schools, we are denied our portion of the School Fund, simply because we, at the same time endeavor to train them up in principles of virtue and religion. This we feel to be unjust and unequal. For we pay taxes in pro-

portion to our numbers, as other citizens. We are supposed to be from one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand in the State.

And although most of us are poor, still the poorest man amongst us is obliged to pay taxes from the sweat of his brow, in the rent of his room or little tenement. Is it not then hard and unjust that such a man cannot have the benefit of education for his child without sacrificing the rights of his religion and conscience? He sends his child to a school under the protection of his church, in which these rights will be secure. But he has to support this school also. In Ireland he was compelled to support a church hostile to his religion, and here he is compelled to support schools in which his religion fares but little better, and to support his own school besides.

Is this state of things, fellow-citizens, and especially Americans, is this state of things worthy of *you*, worthy of your country, worthy of our just and glorious constitution? Put yourselves in the poor man's place, and say whether you would not despise him, if he did not labor by every lawful means to emancipate himself from this bondage. He has to pay double taxation for the education of his child, one to the misinterpreted law of the land, and another to his conscience. He sees his child going to school with perhaps only the fragment of a worn out book, thinly clad, and its bare feet on the frozen pavement; whereas, if he had his rights, he could improve the clothing, he could get better books, and have his child better taught, than it is possible in actual circumstances.

Nothing can be more false than some statements of our motives, which have been put forth against us.

It has been asserted that we seek our share of the School Fund for the support and advancement of our religion.

We beg to assure you, with respect, that we would scorn to support or advance our religion at any other than our own expense. But we are unwilling to pay taxes for the purpose of destroying our religion in the minds of our children. This points out the sole difference between what we seek, and what some narrow-minded or misinformed journals have accused us of seeking.

If the public schools could have been constituted on a principle which would have secured a perfect NEUTRALITY of influence on the subject of religion, then we should have no reason to complain. But this has not been done, and we respectfully submit that it is impossible. The cold indifference with which it is required that all Religions shall be treated in those schools—the scriptures without note or comment—the selection of passages as reading lessons, from Protestant and prejudiced authors, on points in which our creed is supposed to be involved—the comments of the teacher, of which the Commissioners cannot be cognizant,—the school libraries, stuffed with sectarian works against us—form against our religion a combination of influences, prejudicial, and to whose action it would be criminal in us to expose our children at such an age.

Such, fellow-citizens, is a statement of the reasons of our opposition to the public schools, and of the unjust and unequal grievances of which we complain.

You can judge of our rights by your own. You cannot be expected to know our religion ; many of you have, no doubt, strong prejudices against it, which we are fain to ascribe precisely to the circumstance of your not having had an opportunity to know it.

But notwithstanding your prejudices, and your disapproval of our faith, we have confidence in your high principles of justice, under the sanction of our common constitution, which secures equal religious and civil rights to all. Put yourselves in our situation, and say whether it is just, or equal, or constitutional, that whereas we are contributors to the public funds, we shall be excluded from our share of benefit in their expenditure, unless we submit to the arbitrary and irreligious conditions of the Common Council, and thereby violate our rights of conscience ?

Our religion is dear to us—for, in the hearts of many of us it is connected with the history of our fathers' sufferings, and our own. Education is dear to us, for the tyrants who wished to enslave our ancestors and us, made it criminal felony, for the schoolmaster to come among us, unless he were the avowed enemy of our creed.

We seek for nothing but what we conceive to be our rights,

and which can be granted without violating or abridging the privileges of any other denomination or individual breathing. They may be refused as they have been. If they should, neither shall we yet suffer our children to receive the anti-religious education of the public schools, nor shall we kiss the hand that fixes a blot on the Constitution, by oppressively denying our just claims.

What do we contend for? Simply that our children shall be educated apart from these influences. **WE CONTEND FOR LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE, AND FREEDOM OF EDUCATION.** We hold that the laws of nature, of religion, and the very Constitution of the country, secure to parents the right of superintending the education of their own children.

This right we contend for, but we have hitherto been obliged to exercise it under the unjust disadvantages of double taxation. If the State, considering our children as its own, grants money for their education, are we not entitled to our portion of it, when we perform the services which are required?

It appears not according to the decision of the Common Council, unless we send our children to schools in which our religious rights are to be violated, and our offspring qualified to pass over to the thickening ranks of infidelity. This shall not be—much as we dread ignorance, we dread this much more.

If justice were done us, we could increase the number of our teachers to a proportion corresponding with the number of children. We could improve our means of teaching—we could bring our children out of the damp basements of our churches, into pure air of better localities. In a word, give us our just proportion of the Common School Fund, and if we do not give as good an education *apart from religious instruction*, as is given in the public schools, to one third a larger number of children for the same money, we are willing to renounce our just claim. Let the proper authorities appoint any test of improvement, that shall be general, and we shall abide by it. Neither do we desire that any children shall attend our schools, except those of our own communion—although so far as *we* are concerned, they shall be open to all.

In a country like this, it is the interest of all to protect the

guaranteed rights of each. Should the professors of some weak or unpopular religion be oppressed to-day, the experiment may be repeated to-morrow on some other. Every successful attempt in that way, will embolden the spirit of encroachment, and diminish the power of resistance; and in such an event the monopolizers of education, after having discharged the office of public tutor, may find it convenient to assume that of public preacher. The transition will not be found difficult or unnatural from the idea of a common school, to that of a common religion, from which of course, in order to make it popular, all christian sectarianism will be carefully excluded.

Resist the beginnings, is a wise maxim in the preservation of rights.

Should the American people ever stand by, and tolerate the open and authoritative violation of their *Magna Charta*, then the Republic will have seen the end of its days of glory.

The friends of liberty, throughout the civilized world, will fold their hands in grief and despair. The tyrants of the earth will point to the flag which your fathers planted, and cry, ha! ha!

The Nations from afar will gaze upon it, and behold with astonishment its bright stars faded, and its stripes turned into Scorpions.

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*The above Address, was unanimously adopted at a general meeting of the Catholics of the City of New-York, in the School Room of St. James' Church, August 10th, 1840, having been submitted by*

† JOHN HUGHES, Bishop of Basileopolis, Coadjutor and Administrator of the Diocese of New-York. HUGH SWEENEY, THOMAS O'CONNOR, JAMES W. McKEON, GREGORY DILLON, J. W. WHITE, B. O'CONNOR, JAMES KELLY, JOHN McLOUGHLIN,	}	COMMITTEE.
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