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T A S M A N I A.

STATE AID COMMUTATION BILL.

LETTER FROM VERY REV. W. J. DUNNE.

Presented by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed,
August 14, 1868.



Macquarie-street, Hobart Town, 13th August, 1868.

SIR,

I HAVE learned with great concern that a measure is now before Parliament, entitled "A Bill for the Commutation of the Sum of £15,000 reserved by *The Constitutional Act* for Public Worship in Tasmania," which, if allowed to pass into Law, will prove of material and immediate injury to the Religious Body in whose name, and on whose behalf, I have now the honor to address you.

When, during the last Session of Parliament, the Hon. Member for Westbury introduced a Bill for the Abolition, with the sole reserve of all the then existing interests, of State Aid to Religion, the Catholics of the Colony, as one man, vigorously protested against the measure in Petitions favourably received by both Houses of the Legislature, on the following grounds:—

- 1st. That the State Aid Distribution Act, passed after several years of excitement and agitation on the question, had been received by the Colony as an act of substantial justice to all Denominations, and had, ever since the re-distribution of the funds set apart for Public Worship, given general satisfaction to the Community at large.
- 2nd. That the object aimed at by the State in granting aid to Religion—viz., the maintenance of religious worship, public order, and morality—had been, as well as possible, attained under the State Aid Distribution Act. And,
- 3rd. That whilst, on the one hand, no one could allege any just ground of complaint against the said Act,—seeing that all Denominations who thought fit to do so could partake of its benefits,—on the other hand, "the abolition of State Aid to Religion would be fraught with most serious evils to religion, education, and morality under present circumstances in Tasmania."

What was then advanced—and, as I conceive, most justly and correctly advanced—against the abolition of State Aid to Religion, although the Bill proposed involved no immediate nor even ultimate sacrifice on the part of existing interests, holds with nearly equal force against the Commutation Bill now before the Legislature.

In proof of this, I may be permitted to point out the immense disproportion, taking the numbers belonging to each Religious body into account, between the sum total of vested rights appertaining to the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, and the Church of Rome, respectively; viz.—

<i>Religious Body.</i>	<i>By Population Census, 1861.</i>	<i>No of Clergymen on the Schedule at the time of the passing of State Aid Dis- tribution Bill.</i>	<i>No. of Clergymen on the Schedule at present, as re- duced by Death, departure from the Colony, or Pension.</i>
Members of Church of England ...	49,233	30	21
Members of Church of Scotland ...	6618	10	8
Members of Church of Rome	19,454	4	2

So that the Church of Scotland, not numbering one-third of the Church of Rome, has at the present moment *eight* Clergymen on the Schedule to the *two* Catholic Priests named therein; and the Church of England has *twenty-one* scheduled Clergymen for her 49,233 members, whereas for her 19,454 members the Church of Rome has only *two* scheduled Clergymen.

It may not be out of place to recall to mind the fact that, before the State Aid Distribution Act gave our Body its just share in the annual reserve for Public Worship, the various Churches received aid from the State in the following ratios:—

	<i>Rate per Head per Annum.</i>
Church of Scotland	8s. 8d.
Church of England	3s. 11d.
Church of Rome	2s. 1d.

Whilst, then, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland will both, under the new scheme, not only not lose any substantial sum immediately, but will each of them to some extent be positively a gainer so long as their respective scheduled Clergymen survive or remain in the Colony, the Church of Rome will at once be deprived of more than half of the sum now allotted to it yearly.

Thus the two Churches of England and of Scotland, which have always been liberally endowed, and which up to the passing of the State Aid Distribution Act in 1862 were in receipt of more than the share of the public funds their numbers entitled them to, would, under the Commutation Bill, not only have the benefits of a permanent provision, such as it is, but would be positively and actually gainers at the present time; whilst the Church of Rome, which up to the year 1862 had confessedly not received its fair share of the annual reserve, would at a moment's notice find itself deprived of considerably more than one-half of the resources accruing to it from the State. It would moreover find itself unable to continue such arrangements as, on the faith of the State Aid Distribution Act, it has now made. Finally, owing to the sudden and, in comparison with the other Churches, disproportionate withdrawal of State Aid, it would be rendered incapable of providing in any adequate way for the spiritual requirements of upwards of Twenty thousand of the inhabitants of the Colony.

How heavily such a state of things would weigh on the Catholic Body—the poorest as a community of all the Denominations in the Colony—will readily be understood. And, remembering how that body will accept the ministrations of none but the ordained Clergymen of the Church in which they were born and reared, and how great and well known is the influence their Priests have over them, permit me to ask, would it be wise or politic for the State to pass such measures as, by a sudden withdrawal of more than half its assistance, would necessarily be attended with immense detriment to religion and morality, and possibly even to public order, were great subjects of excitement to arise in our midst?

All these facts considered, I do trust that the Executive will not consent to the passing of any measure which will not include in its provisions, for a reasonable time at least, all existing interests, nor submit for the Royal Assent any measure except such as shall be not only in letter but in spirit strictly and impartially just to all Denominations, until the sense of the Country at large will have been taken and fully expressed on a question which at the present juncture of affairs is of such vast importance both to Church and State.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

WILLIAM J. DUNNE, *Vicar-General.*

The Honorable the Colonial Secretary.