

# EDITORIAL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

London *Times*, 16 August 1838

Among the varied means whereby the enemies of our national hierarchy are endeavouring to discredit and destroy it, the attempt to establish throughout the country such a system of general education (divorced from religion) as shall tend to alienate the church attachments of the poor is undoubtedly the most insidious and formidable of all. Only let the time come from when the Adversary can plausibly declare that the Church of England is no longer the church of the people, and from that hour her doom is sealed.

Apart from the scriptural obligation imposed upon all governments to maintain in their corporate character a public and constitutional testimony in favour of Christian truth, the expedience of upholding a state church, viewed as a civil question, must rest to a great extent upon the fitness of that church to meet the spiritual necessities and promote the moral improvement of the poor. Nor is this opinion in the smallest degree inconsistent with our habitual defence of the ecclesiastical establishment across the Channel; for, although a vast proportion of the lower Irish belong confessedly to a different communion, yet, as the overwhelming majority of this united realm (whereof Ireland is only a fragment) are agreed that the Protestant faith alone is conducive to the common weal and, further, that the episcopal reformed religion in that country, especially when now abandoning its mistaken delicacy in having so long addressed itself exclusively to its own members, is eminently fitted to engage the confidence and improve the character of the population at large, it thus appears that the Irish Church, diffusing as it does an extensive under-current of beneficial influences which, as a counter-active to priestly tyranny, even Popish multitudes would be grieved to lose, is defensible on all those grounds of expediency whereby the abstract arguments in favour of such establishments are rendered absolutely invulnerable.

But to return from this digression, occasioned by our anxiety to save certain cavillers a world of trouble, the consciousness that a general indifference to Christian principle is essential to the overthrow of the Church, coupled with the shallow fallacy that her existence is incompatible with the diffusion of knowledge, constitute the basis of all those heterogeneous movements now so common among her enemies, for the purpose of establishing a system of national education from which the influence and inculcation of sound religion shall be rigorously excluded.

In this unhallowed enterprise parties professing the most opposite and discordant opinions are united as one man. "The Central Society of Education," which concentrates and directs these hostile forces, is numerous, active, and influential. Comprising among its supporters not only a considerable number of the looser members of the Church, but even some high official authorities, such as Lord Denman,<sup>1</sup> who we are bound to suppose are mis-led by its pretensions, it is rapidly covering the country with tracts of the most obnoxious character, as a preparatory process for the ultimate realization of its designs. Next session of Parliament this faction, it is understood, will direct all their energies to the accomplishment of their darling object; and unless the friends of the Church bestir themselves in time, it is impossible to say what the issue may be.

Meanwhile, it gives us much pleasure to see that they are by no means asleep, nor insensible to the demands of the crisis. About four months ago we intimated the formation of a new society, designated the "Lay Union for the Defence of the Established Church." It is, as we then stated, under the management of a large committee of noblemen and gentlemen of the highest character and station. In the interim, their plans of procedure have been judiciously matured; and with the view of counter-acting the pernicious educational nostrums to which we have alluded and of refuting the calumny that the Church is hostile to popular instruction when combined with moral and religious training, their first act has been to draw up an admirable address on the subject of the education of the poor, which we insert entire in another column, and which we earnestly recommend to the attentive perusal of our readers. Let every word of it be deeply pondered by every member and well-wisher of our venerable Church. It is a sober and dispassionate document, addressed, not to the prejudices of the people, but to their reason and to their best feelings. We rejoice in this defensive movement, and earnestly trust it will

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas (1779–1854), Baron Denman, Whig M.P. for Wareham (1818–1820) and Nottingham (1820–1826, 1830–1832), Attorney General (1830–1832), and Lord Chief Justice of England (1832–1850)

be successful. Indeed, when we bear in mind the correspondent zeal which we recently had occasion to notice in regard to the metropolitan commercial schools, we cannot doubt that by such seasonable and united efforts, the Church, under the blessing of God, will be borne triumphantly through all her trials and her enemies left to bite the dust, tolerated, forgiven, and blest.

*The Times* (16 August 1838):4.