PETITION.

To the Honourable the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia:—

The humble petition of the undersigned Catholic residents of the City of Victoria, showeth:—

1. That, inasmuch as the so-called unsectarian school system is a flagrant violation of the liberty of conscience, the Catholic portion of this community have but reluctantly submitted to a general system of taxation, a portion of which is set apart for the benefit of the so-called unsectarian schools. But now that it is intended to levy a special school tax, your Petitioners view with mistrust and alarm a measure which they deprecate as both unjust and oppressive.

2. A system of education can never be unsectarian. If it excludes the profession of Christianity, it is anti-christian; if it does not comprise the belief in God, it is godless and atheistic; if it includes the reading of the Protestant version of the Bible, it is Protestant. Consequently, your Petitioners cannot in conscience send their children to the so-called unsectarian schools, wherever they have schools of their own.

3. It is, therefore, an act of injustice to exact money from Catholics for the support of schools from which they derive no benefit; and it is an act of oppression to compel them, though indirectly, to countenance an educational system which they abhor.

4. The experience of other countries tends to prove that unsectarian schools are the chief propagators of religious scepticism, unbelief, and infidelity. Where there is no religion, there can be no conscience; where there is no conscience, there can be no morality; where there is no morality, secular learning is but an additional tool for the commission of crime; and thus a godless system of schools saps the very foundation of even civil society.

5. While we would cheerfully subscribe to a school system which would provide for the education of the children of the poor, we cannot endorse the present arrangement, by which wealthy citizens, whose first and foremost duty it is to pay for the education of their own children, are suffered to use, without either shame or remorse, the public moneys extorted from us and from the poor. The State ought not to provide for the instruction of the rich, without first providing for that of the destitute, and it is a notorious fact that many of the latter are growing up in ignorance and wickedness.

6. By disclaiming the monoply of education, and by leaving the instruction of the youth to the competition of private schools and teachers, the State will both raise higher the present standard of instruction and prevent the useless squandering of a great portion of the public revenue.

7. The unsectarian school system being both unjust and oppressive, and the Catholic portion of this City being at great expense for the maintenance of their own schools, your Petitioners humbly pray that they may not be included in the School Tax Act which is or which will soon be before the consideration of the House.

(Signed) CHARLES J. SEGHERS,
Bishop of Vancouver Island,
And 63 others.

Victoria, April 26th, 1876.