



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (7 p.m.): I rise to offer my support for the men and women in the Catholic church who have dedicated their lives to the service of the community. One could be forgiven for assuming that these people are being specifically persecuted by the media. Let me say from the outset that I am not defending the actions of a small minority of the religious community that has been appropriately dealt with by the legal system.

My attention was particularly taken by a letter to the editor in this morning's Courier-Mail by Dean Gregory Jordan of Toowong, which made a very pertinent point. The letter tells the parable of three Catholic priests in adjoining Brisbane parishes. The first makes a public plea to axe the ban on marriage for priests. The second, sadly, goes to jail, and the third is escorted by his parishioners to Government House to receive an Order of Australia for his devotion to the education of youth and for his care of the disabled. The writer asked—

"Guess which of the three failed to make headlines in The Courier-Mail? No prize for guessing it was Fr Denis Power, OA, emeritus pastor of Sacred Heart, Rosalie."

His achievements were not worthy of attention by the press.

It is to try to correct this balance that I want to put on record my own personal debt of gratitude to the Catholic church and to those men and women of the cloth who were so much a part of my early life. I might say that it was the Josephite nuns who tried very hard to educate me at their convent in Quilpie and the Marist Brothers in Sydney who taught me many of the values that are fundamental to my beliefs today. The education structure built by these religious orders and, for that matter, those of other religions have enabled education to be made available throughout our nation. If it were not for the education resources provided by these religious orders, our education system would not have been able to cope. These nuns, brothers and priests dedicate their life to the church and to the education of our future citizens, and it is their personal sacrifices that have enabled education to be available to all.

These religious communities have been prepared to live in poverty, often in the most remote areas of the State. For the people of these remote areas, the availability of a boarding school education has been the only way for generations of children from the bush to gain an education. One has only to look at community leaders today to see the success of these education structures. Many of them are among the most prestigious education facilities in our community today, and their record of academic, sporting, commercial and social achievements is second to none. I hasten to add that I am not making these points in any way to denigrate the public school system, which is also excellent, as are the teaching staff in that sector. I would like to make the point, however, that the private schools, thanks to the sacrifices of the teachers, parents and the church communities, have removed a significant load from the State school sector.

I seem to recall that the private schools assume responsibility for 27% of the State's education task, with about 17% undertaken by the Catholic church. I have been able to establish that there are 80 Catholic secondary schools in this State and 193 Catholic primary schools. There are 18 other independent high schools, 43 independent primary schools and 81 independent combined primary and secondary schools. I should also add here that the same can be said about the wonderful job done by the nuns in our health system, and I point to the Mater Hospital in particular, where my family has had

some experience of the dedication and care of the Mercy nuns. It is a shining example of the church's contribution to our society.

The field of aged and special care is also an area in which other religious institutions and religious orders are providing loving care all over our State. There are 13 Catholic hospitals, excluding the Mater adult public hospital, and 22 Catholic nursing homes. It is in the light of these facts that I ask the community to keep the truly dreadful cases of recent times in proper perspective. It is all too easy to concentrate on the bad news and to overlook the magnificent job done by these men and women whose only reward in life is to serve their God and their fellow human beings. Yes, there are some who fall by the wayside, but please do not let us ignore the nobility of their calling and the magnificence of their charity by an undue concentration on the negatives. To do so only denigrates the sacrifice of those who accept the challenge of a vocation but also serves to give solace to those in our society who seem to have a vested interest in the breakdown of religious faith and the calling of a higher service. The compassion, love and understanding given by these people have certainly proved more positive in our society than credit is given for.

Time expired.
