

Religious Education and the Canadian Regime: Some Considerations
Remarks Prepared for Roundtable on Religious Education

Respecting Religion in Public Education: International Experience and Current Russian
Debates
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- Canadians struggling with 2 great questions concerning education & political order
 - Meaning of secular & meaning of civic education
 - The civilizational question & its place in the particularities of the Canadian regime
- Meaning of “secular”
 - Spectrum: inclusive pluralism (includes religious voices) vs. secular monism (no religion)
 - Inclusive pluralism: what SC has adopted in Chamberlain
 - All philosophical systems have faith-component
 - “to act is to assume and to assume is to have faith” (J. Henry Newman)
 - Acting implies belief in immortality of soul (Aristotle)
 - Confusion and ambiguity of language in Canadian debates
 - E.g., secularism taken to mean “separation of church and state”
 - CJ Dickson: must be careful in applying that US category
 - How Taylor/Bouchard commission has defined it
 - Its problem: might imply exclusivist secularism & neglects faith component of all human action
 - McLachlin: state has duty to enforce “modern imperative of tolerance”
 - Or what Hobbes called “complaisance”
 - Preferring love of “all” instead of friends
 - More appropriate for communism
 - State sees family & religious communities as main competitors
 - Family & religion: deemed “partial” or “insular”
 - State is universal (Kantian)
 - Values language in Canadian education system and broader culture
 - “values” instead of “virtues” taught in curriculum
 - “Values” drawn from Nietzsche

- “the language of values entails that nothing is intrinsically good and nobody is intrinsically worthy” (E. A. Andrew, *Genealogy of Values*, 170)
 - So religious education cannot possibly education
 - Studying religious “values” simply soliciting preferences
 - Reinforces one’s own “values”
 - Reinforces loving one’s own, instead of the good (goal of liberal education)
 - Declining birthrates and decline of family (re. SSM) → need to educate children according to state values (b/c family impotent)
 - “The child is not your child, [children] are the property of the state, like our oil” (Alex Proudfoot, former chair of Calgary Board of Education)
 - Because children have right to state education (and parents cannot deprive them of this right – in case of home-schooling) (65)
- Meaning of civic education
 - What is “civic” in an unfounded country
 - No Canadian “values” of citizenship
 - Except liberal ones: tolerance, equality
 - But no sense how these are applied to Canada:
 - We love equality, etc., but lack sense of why we should love them here (except in form of anti-Americanism)
 - Canada regionalized; provincial curricula set by provinces
 - Quebec: imposition of secularism
 - Bill 95 in Quebec
 - Ideology of “normative pluralism”: all religions on display, none confessed or taken seriously
 - Imposes uniform religious and ethics curriculum on all schools – including private ones
 - George Leroux (gov’t advisor & professor): “Our children will be better than us because they will be more open to religious and moral diversity and more committed to normative pluralism. They will believe that it is preferable to be plural than homogeneous.”
 - Leroux: this program will “enable Québec students to develop a religious culture consistent with ministerial orientations.”
 - Alberta: Amy’s Indian on a horse imagery:
 Alberta is a lone Indian on a horse at the top of a hill. It is a settler beating at a runaway prairie fire, or building a shanty of sod. It is a section-man laying track for a railroad. It is a teacher giving English lessons to children from countries far away. It is a farmer running a combine late at night, or a brave man capping a burning oil well.... Above all else, Alberta is people It is every Albertan who gave the sweat of his or her brow to make the promise come true. It is a

tribute to people who were, and who still are, brave enough to follow a dream.

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