



Catholic Civil Rights League

www.ccrl.ca

Monthly highlights

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Equity policies are raising numerous questions

The past few months have brought news of policy initiatives that raise questions about the ability of those in public life to express beliefs based on religious teaching, and the rights of parents in the education of their children. In Ontario, questions have also been raised as to whether the province's equity policy will interfere with the teaching of Church doctrine in Catholic schools.

The *Québec policy against homophobia* was released in December by Premier Jean Charest and Justice Minister Kathleen Weil, who is officially "the minister responsible for the fight against homophobia." This document promises to wipe out attitudes not supportive of all sexual orientations, and is by no means limited to schools, but rather is meant to root out "homophobia" in all public institutions. It promises action against "homophobic attitudes and behaviour patterns" and "sets out the government's goal of removing all the obstacles" to full recognition of LGBT (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender) interests and modes of life. According to Douglas Farrow, professor of Christian thought at McGill University, "what is thus promulgated is no ordinary policy document, for it aims at the conversion, not merely of this or that piece of public infrastructure, but of the psychological and moral and sexual infrastructure of a generation. It is not directed at creating a situation of legal equality – that, it proudly proclaims, has already been accomplished – but at creating "a society free of prejudice with regard to sexual diversity."

In response to the document, Professor Farrow writes, "in committing itself to the assault on heterosexism it (the provincial government) has committed itself to an assault on the family and on the whole fabric of civil and religious communities in Quebec. We are told that "a government action plan, including rigorous monitoring and assessment mechanisms, will ensure the implementation of the policy and the achievement of its objectives." Institutions, public and private, will be pressed into partnership. The cooperation of every citizen is already expected, and will soon be demanded. A supportive school curriculum, mandatory in nature, will be forthcoming – indeed, the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program has already laid the foundations." The Quebec court has ruled that parents cannot exempt their children from this course, though the judgment may be appealed.

In Ontario, the comparatively modest "*Equity and Inclusive Education Policy*" will have all school boards, over time, adopting a written policy committing themselves to equality of access and opportunity for all students, with no discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds, including sexual orientation. As the League said in an interview with *The Catholic Register*, much of this document is not problematic, nor is it particularly new in that many boards already have comprehensive equity policies. The belief that all students, staff and other members of the school community deserve to be treated fairly and with respect is very much in keeping with Catholic doctrine.

In Ontario, the rights of Catholic schools to give preference to Catholics in hiring, and to teach the Catholic faith, are protected by law. We see nothing intrinsic to the policy that would cause conflict with these rights. With that said, there is potential for those who would challenge those rights to use equity policies as a starting point in human rights' complaints. Since much of this will unfold at the local level, particularly in the classroom, we can only encourage parents and teachers to be vigilant in upholding the Catholic character of their schools. When a not-dissimilar policy was introduced in the public schools of British Columbia, the League called for protection of the rights of parents to direct the moral education of their children, and insisted that school boards recognize it as well.

- Visit ccrl.ca for Prof. Farrow's article and other information about these policies, and links to all public documents discussed.

Christian organization loses charitable status

A Christian charitable organization in Calgary has had its charitable status revoked, in part because of public statements by board members. Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) in December told Kings Glory Ministry, which had operated as a registered charity for 30 years, that its status was being revoked. As such, it is no longer able to issue income tax receipts for donations, which are its sole source of income. The ministry oversees a number of charities, including Calgary's Street Church, which provides about 150,000 free meals each year to the homeless, and also places them in short-term housing.

(Charity loses status, from page one)

Noting that Kings Glory and Street Church have some members in common on their boards of directors, some of whom “espouse strong negative views about sensitive and controversial issues, which may also be viewed as political, such as abortion, homosexuality and divorce, etc.,” the CCRA stated that such “political activity” is in excess of what is allowed for registered charities.

The ministry is appealing the ruling. Pastor Artur Pawlowski told CCRL that the organization serves all the needy without discrimination of any sort. He acknowledged that he speaks openly and strongly about sexual orientation issues, and other topics such as divorce and abortion, but said he speaks from a Biblical perspective, not a political one, and that he considers it part of a pastor’s role to challenge politicians to “Godly leadership.” He has never endorsed a candidate, participated in a campaign or engaged in any other partisan activity, he said. “If the appeal is unsuccessful, I will seek a court case. This is an abuse of power,” said Mr. Pawlowski.

In addition to the advocacy work, the CCRA also cited a lack of clarity in how the agency spends its money. Most of the cases of revoked status listed on the CCRA’s website involve improper expense charges, inadequate bookkeeping or other administrative problems. Registered charities are not allowed to devote more than 10 per cent of their resources to political activity, and any such activity is expected to be in support of its core charitable activity.

The appeal may find that the bookkeeping problems cited by the CCRA will prove adequate reason for its decision. However, this is the first case of which the League is aware in which public statements by board members were mentioned in a letter from CCRA revoking charitable status. We will be watching closely for further developments.

Media Watch

Many League members in the Toronto area contacted the TTC to discourage the transit provider from allowing Ashley Madison Agency to advertise on the system (e-bulletins, Dec. 12). Thanks to public opposition, the agency’s offer of a fare-subsidy in exchange for the right to “wrap” selected streetcars with its “Life is Short, Have an Affair” message was refused. Of course we realized the protest could have the effect of giving the agency publicity, but

given the TTC’s propensity for accepting advertising of all types, we believed the risk had to be taken.

Let CCRL know: Articles, cartoons and advertising that you feel has strongly anti-Catholic content should be sent to ccrl@ccrl.ca to help us respond in a timely way.

Join us on Facebook: Search for “Friends of the CCRL”

YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/CatholicCivilRights

Visit *Media Watch* on our website for links to articles discussing the League’s work. For example, a CBC article Jan. 15 discussed the Holy Name of Mary Food Fund. It finances Le Foyer des Filles de Dieu orphanage in Haiti, and was established by Frank Chauvin, 2009 winner of our Archbishop Exner Award for Catholic Excellence in Public Life. Unfortunately three of the residents and one employee of the orphanage were killed in the recent earthquake. The emphasis now is on providing help in the massive rebuilding effort, which your generosity is helping make possible.

Silver Anniversary Gala

The League celebrates its Silver Anniversary this year. Special events include a gala dinner Thursday, June 10 in Toronto. Guest speaker will be Father Raymond de Souza, priest of the Kingston Archdiocese and columnist in *The National Post*. The evening will include presentation of the Archbishop Exner Award for Catholic Excellence in Public Life. Invitations will be mailed to those in the “M” and “L” postal codes, and will be sent to others upon request.

Anniversary membership drive

One of our goals this year is to increase our donor base in order to reach more people and to keep special fundraising drives at a reasonable level. We are in the process of contacting people who we believe would like to help in this outreach. If you would like to assist in this effort, just let us know.

Financial update

Our resources continue to be stretched due to the economic downturn of the past year. The League’s ability to respond to religious freedom and anti-defamation issues will be determined by your response to our renewal notices and appeal letters. Please be as generous as possible.

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