

**TAKING ACCOUNT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:  
A Case Study of Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program**

by  
Erin LeBrun

An essay submitted to the Department of Religious Studies  
in conformity with the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

July 2010

Copyright © Erin LeBrun, 2010

## **Abstract**

### **TAKING ACCOUNT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A Case Study of Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program**

Modern liberal democratic nation states are faced with new challenges to their ability to sustain a collective identity among citizens from increasingly diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. This Master's Essay examines questions about the most appropriate ways to take account of religion in a pluralist society, specifically as it relates to the education of young citizens in Canadian public schools. I use the Ethics and Religious Culture program adopted in the province of Quebec, examined through the lenses of a multicultural education model and a model of deep equality, to highlight the place of the study of religion in elementary and secondary education.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my appreciation to a number of people:

First, I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Dickey Young, whose encouragement and criticisms have shaped both this work and my approach to the study of religion. From the very beginning, Pam has been generous with her time offering guidance on the writing process and field research. Perhaps most importantly, at every stage of this process Pam has asked me questions that have helped me to develop my own voice as a scholar of religion.

I am likewise very grateful to my fellow MA students who have expanded my understanding of religious studies through both serious academic debates and late night conversations.

I would also like to express my gratitude towards the Queen's School of Graduate Studies and Research which generously awarded me a Senator Frank Carrel Fellowship and a Graduate Award, both of which have been instrumental throughout the course of my studies.

I furthermore wish to express my indebtedness to Dr. Vanessa Sasson whose summer seminar at McGill University is where I first discovered my passion for Religious Studies. In a sense this Master's degree has brought me full circle as it was during that summer course that I was first introduced to my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Dickey Young.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends without whose love and support the completion of this project would not have been possible. No words can express how deeply blessed I feel to have each and every one of you in my life.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One: Managing Diversity in a Pluralist State</b> .....	4
Liberal Multicultural Education .....	4
A Model of Deep Equality .....	14
<b>Chapter Two: 1960-1920: The Evolution of Religious Education in Quebec</b> .....	22
The Quebec Situation .....	22
Moving Toward Non-confessional Religious Education: from the Proulx Report to the creation of the ERC program .....	32
The ERC Program .....	36
<b>Chapter Three: Critiques and Challenges</b> .....	50
Critiques of Multicultural Education .....	50
Court Challenges to the ERC Program .....	52
Other Critiques of the ERC Program .....	62
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	68
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	72
<b>Appendix A: Sample Recruitment Emails</b> .....	76
<b>Appendix B: Sample Information and Consent Form</b> .....	77
<b>Appendix C: Sample Questions</b> .....	79

## Introduction

A common concern for contemporary liberal democratic nation states is their ability to sustain a collective identity among all citizens, in order to ensure the necessary level of group cohesion required for the proper functioning of the state. Whereas the underpinnings of such a collective identity are usually found in notions such as common ethnic background, religious affiliation, and shared history on a defined territory, modern states, particularly those with open immigration policies, face the challenge of finding new cultural elements on which to build the identity of the nation. Education has come to play a central role in the transmission of civic identity. This is particularly evident in countries with widespread ethnic, religious and cultural diversity such as Canada. This country provides an excellent example of the challenges faced by modern multicultural societies in trying to create and transmit a national identity while at the same time recognizing and affirming the multiple identities held by each citizen (McAndrew, *Immigration* 151-153; Bouchard, *Nation* 28-31). Appropriate ways of discussing and expressing these various identities in a public space are highly debated topics. Recent events such as the 9/11 attacks and the United States' War on Terror have brought into question the potential for holding one's civic identity in tension with one's religious identity; as opposed to privileging the former over the latter.<sup>1</sup>

In part due to the impact of these events, but also due to more general issues concerning the development of public reason in young citizens, questions regarding the discussion of

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the tensions between civic and religious identities, particularly in relation to Muslim identity, see Tariq Ramadan's chapter "Religious Allegiance and Shared Citizenship" in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Citizenship in Canada*, edited by Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle, 451-464. Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007.

religion in public schools<sup>2</sup> have recently come to the fore. This paper will examine questions about the most appropriate ways to take account of religion in a pluralist society, specifically as it relates to the education of young citizens in Canadian public schools. In Canada, education falls under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. I will be focusing on the new Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program, adopted in the province of Quebec in 2008, as a response to some of the challenges faced by Canada in defining itself as a pluralistic society. I will begin by presenting a theory of liberal multicultural education that legitimizes the use of public schools as a tool to forge a national identity and explore cultural diversity. This model, as expressed by Will Kymlicka, places an emphasis on the importance of transmitting overarching ‘Canadian’ values to students. These values are meant to provide the group cohesion necessary to create solidarity in the pluralist state. This approach will be interrogated with the criticisms offered by Lori Beaman’s model of deep equality which stresses the importance of valuing a variety of voices in understanding religious diversity. I will then examine the ERC program through the lenses of these two models paying particular attention to the history of religious education in Quebec which has led to the creation of this program. Next, I will consider various critiques of the ERC program that have surfaced since its implementation. Finally, based on my analysis, I will draw conclusions about how this program understands the study of religion and its role in education.

As part of this project, more specifically in order to gain a better understanding of the ERC program and reactions to it, I have completed four personal interviews with experts on the program.<sup>3</sup> Halette Djandji from the English Montreal School Board and Nicole LeBihan from

---

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper the term ‘public school’ is meant to refer to schools at both primary and secondary levels which are fully funded by government monies.

<sup>3</sup> I received approval for these interviews from The Unit Research Ethics Board for Religious Studies and Theology at Queen’s University on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2010. Further information about the nature of these interviews, recruitment methods and the questions posed to each of these experts can be found in Appendices A-C.

Lester B. Pearson School board act as consultants on the ERC program. They serve as resource persons for teachers and play an important role in the ongoing training of teachers working in their school boards. Spencer Boudreau is a professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill who is involved in the training of future ERC teachers. In addition, he was part of advisory committees to the government during the shift from confessional to non confessional school boards. Finally, Shahram Nahidi is a professor at *Université de Montreal* in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. He teaches an introductory course on Islam to future ERC teachers and is the redactor of the chapters on Islam for text books and teacher guides at both elementary and secondary level.

# Chapter One

## Managing Diversity in a Pluralist State

### Liberal Multicultural Education

Political philosopher Will Kymlicka asserts that a liberal democracy can be characterized by three main tenets: the prioritizing of civil political rights, a valuing of individual autonomy and a commitment to anti-perfectionist tendencies in state policies (Kymlicka *Lecture*). In the Canadian context, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives us a sense of the rights of citizens in relation to deeply held ideologies. Section 2 of the Charter guarantees the protection of freedom of conscience and religion by the state. Related to this is the right of citizens to equal protection under the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability found in section 15 of the Charter.<sup>4</sup> Kymlicka's model also insists on the value of individual autonomy which says something important about the way the good life is conceptualized under this model. Liberalism demands that persons be free to form, revise and pursue their conception of the good life (Kymlicka *Lecture*). Accordingly, mutual respect can be understood as one's regard for the capacity of others to do this. This is consistent with the conception of an anti-perfectionist state which does not rank ways of life, but provides fair terms of social cooperation without attempting to coerce citizens into living their lives a certain way (Kymlicka *Lecture*). Though there are always exceptions to this understanding, for example the state will legislate that its citizens must, for their own protection, wear seat belts when in a car, in a general way the state pursues laws which enhance or at the very least do not disturb the individual autonomy of its citizens.

---

<sup>4</sup> Since the 1995 case of Egan vs. Canada, protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation is also read into this section.



Kymlicka also identifies four virtues which are linked to liberal democracy and which, in his view, should be promoted in schools. They are: public spiritedness (which involves a willingness to engage in public discourse), a sense of justice, civility and tolerance, and, finally, a shared sense of solidarity or loyalty (Kymlicka, *Politics*, 296). In a liberal democracy, such as Canada, the government is representative and, therefore, there is a need to question authority in order to monitor officials and judge their conduct (Kymlicka, *Politics*, 296). In a democracy, the government should come to decisions through open and public discussion which emphasizes the need for citizens to engage in public discourse. “It is not enough to invoke scripture or tradition. Liberal citizens must justify their political demands in terms that their fellow citizens can understand and accept as consistent with their status as free and equal citizens” (Kymlicka, *Politics* 296-297). Thus, public spiritedness requires citizens to participate in the democratic process through engagement in public discussion. In the context of these four virtues, justice means not only that we do not actively harm or exploit others but also that steps are taken to prevent injustice by creating and maintaining just institutions (Kymlicka, *Politics* 297). This can sometimes include the elimination of economic or social barriers to the participation of disadvantaged groups in civil society. Next, the liberal virtues of civility and tolerance refer to the way one treats non-intimates in society. They are related to the requirements of non-discrimination, which applies to the government, private institutions and individual citizens, as it amounts to an obligation to treat others as equal citizens. (Kymlicka, *Politics* 298-299). Finally, a shared sense of solidarity between members of one nation or loyalty to that nation is what binds together citizens who, in the case of Canada, do not necessarily have a shared ethnicity or religion to create social cohesion.

The argument that solidarity is a virtue of liberal democracy requires further development here as it relates to particular issues present in the province of Quebec. Kymlicka asserts that “shared political principles obviously are helpful to maintain social unity, and indeed deep conflict over basic principles can lead to civil war. But shared principles are not enough” (*Politics* 311). Social unity also requires a sense of being part of a community, a sense of belonging to an ‘us’. In a liberal state, this is generally achieved by relating to a shared history and the through use of common language (Kymlicka, *Politics* 312). However, many national minorities, such as the *Quebecois*, have strongly resisted the imposition of the majority language on them. In the province of Quebec, French is an important identity marker of a people who understand themselves as sharing something with one another that is not shared by all Canadians. The adoption of Bill 101 in 1977, which asserts the primacy of French as Quebec’s common public language (Bouchard & Taylor 116), constructs the French language as part of the shared heritage of all *Quebecois* (Carrens 116). Kymlicka recognizes that “attempts to impose a single national identity on these national minorities are likely to undermine rather than promote social unity” (*Politics* 313). However, allowing national minorities their own schools and social institutions is likely to further feelings of belonging to a separate political community, maintaining only a secondary bond to the larger state. Thus in Canada, considered a multinational state because it is home to both a majority culture and a national minority known as the *Quebecois*, Kymlicka argues that the education system has a dual function of promoting a national identity as well as a transnational identity (*Politics* 314). In the case of Quebec the national identity, based on the French language and a shared history, is *Quebecois*, while the transnational identity, which serves to bind together various groups in the state, is Canadian. In Kymlicka’s estimation, the development of a transnational identity should be accomplished

through a truthful teaching of history which promotes an emotional identification with that history (*Politics* 315). Such identification may prove to be particularly challenging in Canada as education is regulated at the provincial level. Because of this, there is no body overseeing the implementation of programs which would promote a transnational or Canadian identity.

Kymlicka asserts that “[i]t is widely accepted that a basic task of schooling is to prepare each new generation for their responsibilities as citizens” (*Politics* 293). This, he states, was the reasoning behind making education mandatory for children (Kymlicka, *Politics*, 293). Under this framework, civic education is about more than learning about political life, it is about “acquiring certain dispositions, virtues, and loyalties that are intimately bound up with the practice of democratic citizenship” (Kymlicka, *Politics*, 293). Thus, civic education extends beyond classes on citizenship and government and becomes the goal of the entire curriculum. Although responsible citizenship is learned through children’s experiences within the family, neighborhood, church etc., Kymlicka maintains that this is supplemental to the civic education taught in schools which remains indispensable (*Politics*, 293). This is in large part because other institutions are voluntary and their main reason for existence is not to teach civic virtue. Additionally, such associations may also promote qualities which are not supported by liberal democratic principles such as neighborhoods promoting the ‘not in my back yard principle’ or churches promoting deference to ecclesiastical authority (Kymlicka, *Politics*, 302). Thus, schools remain an important focus for teaching liberal virtues and public reasonableness.

Central to debates about civic education is the question of autonomy and the role of the state in fostering its development in children. Kymlicka notes that though autonomy is not a basic virtue of liberal citizenship it will most probably be indirectly promoted by civic education (*Politics* 308). In gaining the skill necessary to think critically about authority and participate in

debates surrounding public reason, civic education indirectly promotes autonomy. Robert Reich, argues that minimalist autonomy<sup>5</sup> is not a transcendental good but should be considered necessary for those people living in culturally diverse liberal societies (Reich 120) such as Canada. He elaborates by affirming that minimalist autonomy is required for both achieving self respect and avoiding servility. Both of these things are necessary for the flourishing of life under the liberal model (Reich 123). He first contends that self respect requires the presence of minimalist autonomy because it allows one to assess both the worth of one's values and judge whether or not their realization is within one's reach, thereby giving value to one's commitments (Reich 121). In a similar vein he describes servility as strong constraints against a person's agency. This is incompatible with self respect because it does not allow the pursuit of one's own conception of the good life and is also opposed to individual moral agency. Therefore, the promotion of minimalist autonomy is in the interest of all persons in a liberal society (Reich 123).

In addition to being considered a liberal democracy, Canada is also a country that is known for its promotion of multiculturalism<sup>6</sup> through public policy. Although some have argued that multiculturalism is opposed to liberalism, Reich maintains that the latter has historically been used to support group rights, a major aspect of the multicultural project (3). I do not believe that the liberal state can remain totally neutral to the various culturally based ways of life

---

<sup>5</sup> Minimalist autonomy as described by Reich "refers to a person's ability to reflect independently and critically upon basic commitments, desires, and beliefs, be they chosen or unchosen, and to enjoy a range of meaningful life options from which to choose, upon which to act, and around which to orient and pursue one's life projects" (117).

<sup>6</sup> "Multiculturalism' as an official (Canadian) government policy, ... began in the late 1960s and 1970s, in the context of increasing immigration from non-white, non-Christian countries. And most of the group-differentiated policies which have arisen under the 'multiculturalism' umbrella, and which are aimed at accommodating these new ethnic/religious groups, are not about withdrawing from the larger society. The case of the Sikhs in the RCMP is a good example—the policy is intended, not to allow Sikhs to withdraw from the larger society, but precisely to modify the institutions of mainstream society so that Sikhs can integrate into them as fully as possible" (Kymlicka *Multicultural* 177).

engaged in by its citizens. I agree with Kymlicka who contends that all schools promote a particular culture just by their choice of language and text books (Seljak, 190). In schools, children are taught to become autonomous adults and acquire an appreciation for core liberal democratic values such as freedom of conscience, association and expression (McDonough 357). This very act of trying to foster autonomy in citizens privileges groups that value autonomy; they are more likely to flourish (Reich 113-114). As a result, though I do not think that the projects of liberalism and multiculturalism are necessarily in conflict, it is clear that the former does not value all groups in the same way.

In a multicultural society, where everyone has different conceptions of the good life, citizens must justify their political decisions based on what might be considered reasonably acceptable to other free and equal citizens (Reich 125). In order to demonstrate the virtue of public spiritedness then, one must first have gained an understanding of various conceptions of the good life. For such critical thought to take place, and for the stability of a nation to exist over time, the state must cultivate the kind of public reason which in turn requires a minimum amount of individual autonomy (Reich 126). Meira Levinson agrees that personal autonomy is central to liberalism, and posits that this in turn demands a plurality of commitments. First, a person must be allowed to question a particular value without losing their entire identity (Levinson, *Demands* 58). Second, a person must be allowed to critique and revise elements of their belief system from the standpoint of others (Levinson, *Demands* 58). Finally, a person who has knowledge of many types of constitutive values will be more receptive to the viewpoints of others and the criticisms levied against their own (Levinson, *Demands* 59). It is clear that autonomy, even in a minimal sense, is not present at birth and therefore is not an innate characteristic of humankind. It is a skill that must be learnt, one that is “aided by the presence of an educated community free from

false consciousness” (Levinson, *Demands* 59); or at least, in my view, a community that is open a plurality of conceptions of the good life. Public schools, as previously suggested by Kymlicka, are often understood as the institutions most capable of fulfilling this role.

So, though all schools favour the promotion certain cultural values over others, they are also in a position to promote both autonomy and diversity. The latter is achieved by recognizing a variety of cultural groups as contributing to the history of the nation and showing respect for them as fellow citizens (Reich 8). In this sense, public schools have an important role to play in the promotion of respect for groups that have long been excluded or marginalized (Macedo 415). This is because they are “a vehicle of civic education to the ideal of deliberative democracy” (Callen 63), which is a system of political decision-making that relies on popular consultation to form policy. Though public schools are not the only medium for the development of deliberative democracy, they are unique in that ideally they offer the possibility for all groups to get together on an equal and respectful footing (Callen 64). However, simply bringing together people with different identities does not necessarily guarantee a genuinely inclusive discussion. Mistrust of the public school system or a history of discrimination might make minority groups hesitant to participate fully in the conversation. In order to avoid this, schools must deliberately begin by taking all voices, including religious ones, seriously (Callen 65). Otherwise, discussions may result in reinforcing culturally dominant voices. Kevin McDonough also argues that education should promote respect for minorities and can be used to help deal with issues such as justice, political stability and conflict (352).

Bringing together ideas of liberalism and multiculturalism in the context of education raises questions about which, if any, values should be taught in public schools. Walter Feinberg argues that “educators in liberal societies are justified in tilting the playing field in favour of

liberalism” (Feinberg 385) and that they can do this without disrespecting the rights of citizens, whether or not they agree with liberal education practices. Though parents have a right to direct their children’s education, even to urge them in a non-liberal direction, the state has an obligation to future citizens as well. It is up to the latter to reproduce a population that will sustain the liberal democratic society in future generations, while at the same time ensuring that many conceptions of the good are allowed to flourish (Feinberg 386). School is a place where the skills of autonomy can be learnt, practiced and improved. This is not guaranteed to take place at home because parents and extended family will not necessarily be able to escape their own commitments and are often called to make important decisions for their children (Levinson, *Demands* 62). In addition, no other institution can fulfill this role as effectively because schools are mandatory and serve to create national citizens for whom autonomy is crucial. By fostering autonomy in students and recognizing the value of many cultural groups “[e]ducational practices are constrained and shaped by liberal values, but not determined by them” (Macedo 419). Ideally, liberal schools should ensure the freedom of all children to find their own path in the world (Levinson, *Demands* 64).

Liberal multicultural education serves both the purposes of the nation and the individual through its two main components: the development of minimalist autonomy and the promotion of learning about other ways of life. The latter pays particular attention to the history, practices and values of various groups. This focus can be justified at the level of citizenship in terms of its role in the realization of both the legitimacy and stability of liberal society. Also, at an individual level, multicultural education helps to develop autonomy which, as we explored earlier, is key to conceptions of the good life in a liberal society. Though this approach to education will do much to support group-based recognition and protect the right to freedom of association, groups that

promote illiberal values, particularly those who do not hold autonomy in high esteem, will have a more difficult time (Macedo 433). Children who are part of groups that promote illiberal values may be put in the precarious situation of questioning their minority identity while remaining unable to cross over into the national identity. These children might not entirely associate with the national identity while others may not understand them to be fully part of it (McDonough 363). Therefore, though it is important for the state to encourage liberal ideals, including the value of autonomy, it is important not to denigrate groups who choose to live in illiberal ways. The state must take care to balance the potentials harms and benefits of each policy in this regard (McDonough 364).

To look at this another way, one that might be more persuasive to those who disagree with some or all of the liberal democratic model presented above, there are two main justifications for a multicultural education system: instrumental and intrinsic. The former claims that national civic education promotes a shared national identity, reinforces liberal principles of justice and helps to rectify injustice. It is considered to be both necessary for developing in children a minimal amount of autonomy as well as important for the political virtues of civility and public reason (Reich 130). The intrinsic justification argues that civic identity and participation, promoted through education, are important to the good life and are an expression of the essential nature of a people (McDonough 355). In this justification, identity matters for its own sake. This position argues that multicultural education offers a more just representation of the nation's history by including the contributions of minority groups (Reich 131). Schools who follow this model of multicultural education should present both a variety of religious and secular ideologies side by side allowing students to explore a variety of perspectives. Therefore,



the main goal of civic education should be to foster a greater appreciation of national diversity within the state (McDonough 377).

There are two main ways to achieve multicultural education within a school. The first, involves engaging with a curriculum that deliberately teaches about a variety of cultural groups, their history and values, through books, movies and other activities. The second approach is to encourage diverse classrooms where students who affiliate with a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds can learn together. If possible, often depending on the location of the school, and if done thoughtfully, the incorporation of both methods is thought to increase the effectiveness of multicultural education (Reich 131.) By this understanding, multicultural education fosters minimalist autonomy first by creating and enhancing the possibility for independent and critical reflection and secondly by showing students a diversity of cultures which gives them options to consider. Though most people will not choose to exit their initial group, they will often decide to reject certain values in favour of others. “Multicultural education provides a tool box for multicultural, or cosmopolitan, identity construction” (Reich 135). Throughout one’s lifetime this is a constant process of renegotiation.

One of the main roles of the school is to get students thinking about political questions that they will one day have to answer as citizens, in particular those that will affect people who are different from them (Reich 136). An important political virtue in this regard is mutual respect. It is impossible to respect that which you do not know. Thus, multicultural education serves the important function of allowing students to get to know other cultural groups and develop respect for them. In addition, this model will “help to teach them why, and in what sense, they should respect views that they consider to be false” (Reich 136). A critical aspect of mutual respect is its insistence upon dialogue. Not only does this foster greater understanding

between groups but it is also an essential part of the development of public reason. Gaining a better understanding of how to participate in dialogue enhances one's capacity to participate in civic deliberations (Reich 137). In this way, the education system can promote skills that are required for living in a democracy.

### **A Model of Deep Equality**

As will be demonstrated later, the ERC program is a manifestation of Kymlicka's model for civic education through its promotion of certain liberal democratic virtues and by its particular emphasis on the engagement of dialogue necessary for participation in public reason. Although Canada seems to adhere more or less to this model of education and citizenship, it has not gone without criticisms. Lori Beaman's model of deep equality calls into question not only the practical implication of Kymlicka's model, but also the very language on which it is built. Her analysis of case law involving issues of religious diversity in Canada places the discussion in the context of fear and power relations (Beaman, *Harm* 3-6). She argues that it is important to acknowledge the ongoing tension between several aspects of this issue. Tensions are present concerning the recognition and protection of religious rights as well as fear of the religious other and the creation of boundaries associated with this othering (Beaman, *Harm* 5).

“In Canada, with less fanfare but equal commitment (as compared to the United States), we have adopted an approach that assumes the existence of a Christian nation. This is admittedly over laid with a constitutional mandate regarding both religious freedom and multiculturalism, which means that there is space for redefinition of the religious mainstream. Thus, society and Christianity become intertwined in complex ways, perhaps most profoundly through the links between ‘the Christian nation’ and democracy” (Beaman, *Harm* 16).

The underlying assumption that Canada is, in some meaningful manner, a Christian nation is problematic because Kymlicka's notions of the ‘good citizen’ can then be

conceptualized through Christian values. Beaman illustrates this process through her analysis of the Bethany Hughes case. This case, brought before the Court in Alberta, involved a 16 year old girl, Bethany, who had been diagnosed with leukemia. Her doctors prescribed blood transfusions and chemotherapy, but she refused the blood transfusions based on her religious beliefs as a Jehovah's Witness (Beaman, *Question 18*). During the trials Bethany explicitly stated that she wished to live and proposed alternative medical treatments suggesting that blood transfusions were risky and experimental (Beaman, *Question 24*). The state, in this case the province of Alberta, asked for and was granted temporary custody of Bethany and then proceeded to force her to receive blood transfusions (Beaman, *Question 18*). Despite this, Bethany Hughes died shortly after her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. In Beaman's analysis the state is understood as drawing on a "imagined body of the archetypical citizen who does not exist in actuality but who frames the image of the desirable, the good, the normal" (Beaman, *Harm 142*). Thus the imagined body is constructed as disease free while the imagined mind is understood to be autonomous, freely choosing and follows a liberal humanist conception of moral and social order (Beaman, *Harm 142*). There are numerous assumptions involved in this construction such as the assumptions that life should be privileged over death and that mainline Christian values are normative.

Despite Bethany's assertion that she wants to live, her refusal of the prescribed blood transfusions is consistently portrayed as a desire to become a martyr for a religious cause. Bethany's opinion is noted under the Child Welfare Act, which allowed the enforcement of blood transfusions, saying that this treatment "did not infringe on BH's freedom of religion or imposed justifiable limits thereon within section 1 of the Charter" (Beaman, *Rights 21*). Section 1 of the Charter "guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society"

(Canada). Through this example, Beaman demonstrates how non-compliance to imagined notions of the responsabilized citizen is seen as suspect and as something to be feared (Beaman, *Harm* 142-3). The practices of minorities are often constructed as potentially harmful and therefore it is considered justifiable to limit them in a free and democratic society (Beaman, *Rights* 21). Beaman suggests that the boundaries of risk are constantly changing and rooted in existing power relations, so a very real danger in this is viewing the ‘risk of harm’ as an objective test (Beaman, *Rights* 21). Implicit in the assessment of harm is a delimitation of the borders of ‘normal’ religion. From this analysis it is easy to see that minority religious groups are at a greater risk than the Christian majority of being marginalized. Beaman contends that to say that citizens can believe what they want without protecting the practices related to these beliefs amounts to an “empty definition of religion” (*Rights* 20).

Kymlicka’s model of liberal democracy then, which promotes the teaching of certain overarching ‘Canadian’ values in schools, can be understood through Beaman’s lens as perpetuating Christian hegemony through its promotion of values that are acceptable to Christians as part of common sense. In the words of Lori Beaman, “common sense is used as a guide to the constitution of reasonableness, tapping into ‘what we all know’” (*Harm* 144). This is most clearly played out in the language of reasonable accommodation which has become so common in current debates about religious diversity. Beaman contrast this with both the American approach, which promises a separation of church and state as well as the free exercise of religion while expecting citizens to follow a religion that looks somewhat Christian, and the French approach which relegates religion into the private sphere by a constitutional declaration of secularism, but belies a certain amount of fluidity between the private and public spheres as religion trickles from the former to the latter (Beaman, *Diversity* 199). The Canadian model

differs from these by claiming to recognize diversity, acknowledging the importance of religion to believers (as opposed to acknowledging it for its own sake), and managing religious diversity by accommodating it. However, the Canadian model remains similar to both the American and French approaches in that religion is more likely to be accommodated or tolerated if it looks Christian (Beaman, *Diversity* 200).

First it is important to recognize that Canada has no constitutional establishment of a secular state (Beaman, *Diversity* 206). In addition to this, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms contains numerous references to religion. The preamble establishes the supremacy of both God and Law (Canada). As previously discussed, freedom of conscience and religion are protected in section 2 of the Charter and section 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion. Following this, section 27 states that the Charter is to be interpreted based on the multicultural heritage of Canada while section 29 guarantees the supremacy of the constitution. Beaman argues that the accommodation approach has become prominent in Canada largely due to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in Quebec (*Diversity* 207). Though it did not get much press outside of Quebec, the negotiation of difference is a core issue for Canadians due to increased non-Christian immigration which has caused rapidly changing demographics. However, the language of reasonable accommodation was originally developed in the context of labour laws, in a power dynamic of employer and employee, and was never meant to be applied as a framework to talk about religious diversity more broadly in society (Beaman, *Diversity* 208). Beaman takes issue with this model because the language of accommodation is based on the assumption of a 'normal' or 'mainstream' which is problematic because it means that inequality is built into the framework (Beaman, *Harm* 146). In a similar vein, words such as tolerance have an 'othering' effect as they insinuate that one group gives while the other receives, and one must

be considered worthy of receiving. “To be blunt, if religious minorities are viewed as brainwashed crazies who are involved in excessive behaviour, there is little hope that their religious expression will be legally supported, no matter what constitutional protection is in place” (Beaman, *Harm* 146).

Instead, Beaman argues concepts like tolerance and accommodation will need to be abandoned if religious freedom is to be meaningful (*Diversity* 209). Maintaining such a power dynamic between an ‘us’ which has ultimate authority, and a ‘them’ who are given conditions for full acceptance, can lead to violence as it did in France (Beaman, *Diversity* 209).

“Reasonableness is like the idea of ‘common sense,’ which relies on an assumption of shared meaning and vision of what constitutes the boundaries of normal belief and behaviour” (Beaman, *Diversity* 210). This language reinforces a certain kind of hegemony by dominant groups, in this case Christian groups, and often excludes minorities from discussions of what is reasonable. To a certain extent in Canada it has been taken for granted that one must request to exercise one’s freedom of religion when one is considered to be an exception to something which hasn’t really been examined. Beaman argues that the ‘something’ is Christian hegemony which underlies both the legal and social structure of Canada (*Diversity* 210).

Instead of Kymlicka’s model, which to a certain extent maintains Christian hegemony and supports the language of reasonable accommodation, Beaman proposes beginning by reframing this language in order to reflect the desired equality. Though she recognizes that applied thoughtlessly the language of equality can be used to uphold Christianity as the prototype to which all other value systems are compared, she also argues that the language of equality grounded in Human Rights legislation, offers an important place from which to begin discussion about diversity (Beaman, *Diversity* 211). Although the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

safeguards religious minorities from the ‘tyranny of the majority’ it does not guarantee their full equality in practical expression of their beliefs nor does it ensure that their voices will be heard in discussions related to public reason. In addition, by situating the language of equality in the context of human rights protections, “it is in some measure insulated from accusations of cultural relativism [...] or differentiated citizenship, in which minority communities are given jurisdictional autonomy over certain areas of life, including family and education” (Beaman, *Diversity* 214).

In Beaman’s approach to religious diversity there are two major considerations to be taken into account. First, it is essential that religious groups themselves be at the centre of dialogue about law and public policy (Beaman, *Diversity* 213). Under the current model of accommodation assumptions are often made about the needs and desires of minority groups without attempting to consult them. For example, in 2007 when the Elections Act of Canada was amended to require the presentation of photo identification when voting, questions were raised about the possibility of accommodation for Muslim women who are veiled. The Chief Electoral Officer included an exemption for veiled women that the government opposed. However, “[a]s the Canadian Muslim Women’s Association noted, no one thought to ask Muslim women what they wanted. Thus neither side began with a view of Muslim women as equal” (Beaman, *Diversity* 213). In an equality approach, Muslim women would have been approached through a consultative partnership with the objective of achieving equality rather than approaching the issues in terms of making an exception for a tolerated group. This can be challenging as religions are not monolithic and many religious groups do not organize themselves in a hierarchical fashion, but Beaman maintains that it is a necessary first step.

Secondly, one of the greatest obstacles to the equality approach is the insistence by some courts that we live in a secular society (Beaman, *Diversity* 213). This position fails to recognize the impact that Canada's Christian heritage has had on both legal and societal systems. "Christianity is so embedded in Canadian culture that a wholly secular society is impossible" (Beaman, *Diversity* 214). Although Canada has a long history of attention to religious minorities, it is only in more recent legislation that non-Christian groups have received serious consideration. In addition, recent court cases continue to demonstrate an inclination to interpret current laws in favour of values held by the Christian majority of Canada. Beaman argues that Canada has a unique opportunity to work through the challenges of diversity and develop a system of deep equality. A major feature of such a system would be flexibility in thinking about how space is made for various religions; often involving a case by case analysis of situations (Beaman *lecture*). An institutional flexibility that recognizes the presence of minority groups as non-threatening would also be necessary (Beaman *lecture*). This model would allow groups and individuals to define themselves acknowledging that there is diversity within each religious tradition (Beaman *lecture*). Finally, Beaman argues that it is important not to overemphasize difference but to accent the positive aspects of a pluralist society (Beaman *lecture*).

As we move to a more in depth exploration of the particular situation in Quebec, namely looking at the events leading up to the creation of the ERC program, it is important to keep in mind the two models of civic education presented here. As we will see, the education system and Quebec society more generally appear to follow the Kymlickian model closely, particularly through the emphasis placed on certain values, in the hopes of forging a national *Quebécois* identity. However, whatever the benefits of this model, I think that Beaman offers important critiques, particularly regarding the language used to discuss issues of diversity, which cannot be



ignored. Language is a key element of public debates and has been given a place of prominence in the ERC program through the dialogue component. I think it is the dialogue component which has the potential to incorporate notions of deep equality into the discussion of religion in Quebec classrooms.

## **Chapter Two**

### **1960-2010: The Evolution of Religious Education in Quebec**

This chapter will explore trends in the areas of education and politics in order to understand the development of the ERC program in Quebec better. This province has a long history of religious education as the churches initially administered all schools in the province. The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s led to the creation of the Ministry of Education in Quebec (MEQ) in 1964, bringing education under government control for the first time. Despite this shift, confessional education continued to be part of the curriculum for many decades. From 1997-1999 the provincial government commissioned a group to study the place of religion in schools. Their findings, best known as the Proulx Report, recommended that confessional education in public schools be abolished and replaced by a program that would teach about religion from a social sciences perspective. The ERC program, which has been part of the Quebec curriculum since September 2008, is understood as the fulfillment of the recommendations made in the Proulx Report. This chapter will trace the history of religious education in Quebec and explore the content of the current ERC program.

#### **The Quebec Situation**

Both prior to and after Confederation, education in Quebec was overseen by the churches. The Roman Catholic Church ran the majority of schools as most of the population was Catholic. In 1845, as part of an attempt to protect the English minority living in the province, who were mainly Protestants, two school systems were created in Montreal, one to serve French Catholics and the other to serve English Protestants (Dufour 37). This “institutional segregation along the lines of language and faith” (Seljak 183) was common in Quebec and could equally be

found in the area of health, social services and leisure. For obvious reasons, this way of organizing education did not easily accommodate minorities; there was a sense that ‘Canadianization’ was in some ways synonymous with ‘Christianization’ (Seljak 181). Although clerical influence started to decline after World War II (Dickenson & Young 318), it wasn’t until the Quiet Revolution, during the 1960s, that parents began to call for major changes to the education system including modernization and state control.

The defeat of the Union National in 1960, a provincial party which had been in power in Quebec for the previous 15 years, by Jean Lesage’s Liberals is often used to mark the beginning of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution (Dickenson & Young 318). The Liberal slogan *Maîtres Chez Nous* (Masters at home) was meant to suggest that the government would affect positive change in the province by playing a more active role in variety of sectors. The 10 year period that followed was characterized by a government commitment to secularism, nationalism and modernism which included a strong presence in Education. In 1964, Bill 60 was passed bringing education under provincial administration and marking the creation of the MEQ (Bumstead 376). Nevertheless school boards remained divided along linguistic and religious lines. The establishment of the MEQ was a crucial part of the Quiet Revolution; a time “in which the ideological ground moved in fundamental ways” (Dickenson & Young 319). Increasingly, Quebecers were looking to the state to defend their *Quebécois* culture. During this same time period, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was taking place and had a significant impact on the province of Quebec. “The Church ‘exploded’ from within ... (and) since then the explosion has never been constrained but has, in fact, continued to expand” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 35). Vatican II led to a decline in the active participation of Catholics in church as well as a drop in the number of priests being ordained. As the state began to take over areas previously

administered by the Church, such as education, health care and social services, the influence of religion in the public sphere experienced a noticeable decline (Dickenson & Young 336; Quebec, *Laïcité* 47).

Although over 80% of the population of Quebec continued to self identify as Catholic on the Canadian census,<sup>7</sup> the *Groupe de travail sur la place de la religion à l'école* (Working Group on the Place of Religion in Schools), who in 1999 submitted a report entitled *Laïcité et religion* (Religion in Secular Schools) which is better known as the Proulx Report, considers Quebec society to be widely secularized (47). This report described secularization as “a sociocultural process that parallels the emergence of the values of modernity: democracy, the separation of Church and State, independent thinking and critical assessment of traditional schemas, liberalism and technical rationality” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 48). Previously described structural changes in the education system were echoed in cultural changes such as the liberalization of moral constraints, for example the increased use of contraception, the transformation of the family and the decline in the value accorded to authority (Quebec, *Laïcité* 48). However, these changes did not necessarily denote an anti-religious sentiment in Quebec society. Ultimately, since these changes, the influence of religious groups is generally confined to the religious sphere, though they do take part in debates outside this sphere and continue to play a role in the social services devoted to the least privileged members of society.

The loss of the influence of religion in the public sphere as well as a decline in regular attendance at religious rites suggest changes in the relationship between individuals and religion but do not necessarily imply the disappearance of religion altogether. Instead, the Proulx Report

---

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the demographic trends of religious affiliation in the province of Quebec from 1960s to the 1990s please refer to Quebec. Groupe de travail sur la place de la religion à l'école. *Laïcité et Religion*. Quebec : 1999. 35-47.

asserted that “[t]he values associated with modernity have been transferred to the religious experience: they include individualism, freedom of conscience, equality, freedom to challenge authority or established structures, respect for human rights and striving for personal fulfillment” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 48). Such a view implied that religiosity had become more individual, more akin to a personal quest, and less often associated with a group or community (Quebec, *Laïcité* 48). Individuals were less likely to turn to social institutions for answers to their spiritual or religious concerns. It has become more common for individuals to select reference points from a variety of religious traditions to suit their day-to-day spiritual needs. This attitude is perhaps most evident among Quebec Catholics “over 50 percent of whom state that they attach little or no importance to following the rules prescribed by their religion” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 49).

Recognition of religious and cultural pluralism in the province of Quebec can also be traced back to the 1960s. In 1966, the Parent Commission acknowledged that religious pluralism was growing and therefore needed to be addressed (Quebec, *Laïcité* 35). In addition, the Proulx Report made clear that pluralism referred not only to ethnocultural diversity but also to diversity within cultures and religious traditions. Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, in their Commission on reasonable accommodation, completed in 2008, also trace an awareness of ethnocultural plurality back to the Quiet Revolution (Bouchard & Taylor 116). This awareness can be understood as affecting language issues already present in the province. During the 1960s, tensions between the Anglophone minority, a group with important economic power that generally earned the highest wages in the province, and the Francophone majority were high. Language issues crystallized in Education where 75 percent of immigrants were choosing English education for their children (Dickenson & Young 323). This combined with a declining birth rate among Quebec-born Francophone families led to increased worries about a loss of

*Quebécois* culture. To counteract this, French was made the official language of Quebec in the early 1970s. In addition, the Charter of the French Language, more commonly known as Bill 101, was adopted in 1977 (Dickenson & Young 324). This Bill asserted the primacy of French as Quebec's common public language and restricted English education to those whose parents had been educated in English in Canada.

The Bouchard Taylor Commission suggested that Quebec's current model of interculturalism<sup>8</sup> was built slowly beginning with the adoption of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1975, followed by the adoption of Bill 101 in 1977. Over time the Quebec government developed a model of integration that served to encourage the maintenance of a minimum level of group cohesion among citizens of the society. The key components of this model were participation, interaction and protection of rights. Here integration was understood as relevant to both immigrants and children undergoing socialization. According to Bouchard and Taylor, numerous authors emphasized a distinction between the economic, social, political, cultural as well as other dimensions of the integrative progress which could sometimes lead to a fragmented approach to handling problems (115). Instead they proposed the concept of integrative pluralism which describes a respect for diversity and an emphasis on the interdependence between the various dimensions of the integration process (Bouchard Taylor 115). "The expression encourages the development of a keen awareness of differences and distinctiveness and their close interrelationship, which in turn calls for a comprehensive approach with regard to policies and programs" (Bouchard & Taylor 115). It is noted that the education system can sometimes lead to increased polarization between groups by exacerbating

---

<sup>8</sup> Quebec follows an intercultural model most often described as a third choice falling somewhere between multiculturalism, which is practiced in the rest of Canada, and *Laïcité* which is found in France. Interculturalism encourages ethnocultural diversity on the one hand and the continuity of French-language culture on the other (Bouchard & Taylor 118-119).

tensions already present in the larger society (Bouchard & Taylor 115). In order to avoid this, policies based on integrative pluralism must subscribe to the norms of equality, reciprocity and mobility.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of integrative pluralism is, in theory, a key component of Quebec's current intercultural model. Under this model, all inhabitants of Quebec are understood as *Quebecois* and all those who speak French, whether as their mother tongue or not, participate in the French-speaking community. The Bouchard Taylor report stated that “[t]here is no place here for any sort of hierarchy” (121). A virtue of interculturalism was seen in its flexibility and openness to adaptation. In addition, establishing French as the common public language set up a framework of exchange and encouraged communication between members of the society. The demand that French be accepted as the language of public life goes above and beyond the four virtues of a liberal democratic state as described in chapter 1. However, as previously noted in the Kymlickian model, social unity in a pluralist state is generally achieved by relating to a shared history and through the use of a common language (Kymlicka, *Politics* 312). In addition, the use of French as the language of public life can be legitimated by viewing it in terms of the thick theory of language which states that language is “centrally connected to and expressive of the culture and community” (Carrens 128.) So, the language requirement fulfilled the important goal of helping immigrants and children integrate into the francophone community while at the same time allowed them greater opportunities to participate in and contribute to the society. The ability to interact with others in society is a key element of interculturalism. The goal here was that the French language become part of the shared heritage of all *Quebecois* (Carrens 116), and that all

---

<sup>9</sup> Here the ideal of equality is understood to underpin the overall integration process. Reciprocity is understood as a demand for interaction. And the “imperative of mobility, whereby the fate of the individual, whether or not an immigrant, who integrates into society must not be confined to the path (social class, occupation, cultural milieu or ethnic group) that gave him access to it. In other words, the boundaries must be porous” (Bouchard & Taylor 114).

citizens feel that they are participating in the evolving notion of what it means to be part of Quebec's distinct society.

Jocelyn Maclure, a prominent Quebec thinker and expert analyst on the Bouchard Taylor Commission, argues that “[u]nlike many critics of Quebec nationalism, I think it is wrong to label this society as ethnic, closed, xenophobic, or ‘resentful.’ Quite the contrary: several studies have concluded that it is relatively open, plural and liberal” (Maclure 136). The dynamic of social interaction, present in the demand of the intercultural model for participation in the French-speaking community, is seen as a way to counteract the fragmentation often associated with multiculturalism. The Canadian model of multiculturalism is frequently criticized as a glorification of difference which leads to cultural relativism, ghettoization and ultimately conflict (McAndrew, *Pluralisme* 293). In contrast, proponents of interculturalism describe this model in terms of sharing of public institutions, respect for the fundamental values of democracy and the promotion of a common public culture (McAndrew, *Pluralisme* 293). Furthermore, the ideal of interculturalism presupposes a willingness on the part of new immigrants and Quebecers alike to open themselves up to one another, in order to find common ground that will permit each to grow in a communal space (McAndrew, *Pluralisme* 293). In this way interaction is demonstrated to be a key element of the intercultural model. At the heart of this interaction is dialogue; which is made possible through the establishment of French as the common public language. The former is equally a common theme in the ERC program which states that “[t]he practice of dialogue is intended to help students develop the aptitudes and dispositions needed for thinking and acting responsibly in relation to themselves and others, while taking into account the impact their actions may have on community life” (*Elementary Education* 295; *Secondary Education* 461).



The vocabulary surrounding intercultural education first appeared in 1983 in the publication *l'Avis* issued by the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (CSE), or Higher Council of Education (McAndrew, *Immigration* 147). The emergence of such language suggested a desire by Quebec to distance itself from trends towards multicultural education present in the rest of Canada. In 1984, a definition for intercultural education surfaced which was eventually adopted by all those involved in the educational system. Intercultural education is defined as consisting of a systematic effort to develop, among members of majority and minority groups, an increased understanding of different cultures, a greater ability to communicate with people of other cultures, and a positive attitude towards other groups in society (McAndrew, *Immigration* 148). As will be made clear shortly, these goals are consistent with the new ERC program which strives to accomplish all of these things through a discussion centered on ethics and religious beliefs. However, more recently the discussion in Quebec has broadened to include civic education (McAndrew, *Immigration* 154-156). An announcement by the MEQ has reiterated this by stating that ethnocultural diversity should be considered part of citizenship education, and associated with history courses (McAndrew, *Immigration* 155). The ERC program seems to draw from both the rhetoric of civic education and intercultural education. The curriculum uses the language of civic education describing its goals in terms of enabling students to participate in the development of a diverse and open democratic society. At the same time, the program seems to display intercultural principles by on the one hand placing an emphasis on the Christian heritage of Quebec while encouraging the exploration of cultural and religious diversity on the other.

A final component of the intercultural model is known as open secularism. "There is agreement on what the Proulx report called open secularism, which recognizes the need for the State to be neutral (statues and public institutions must not favour any religion or secular

conception) but it also acknowledges the importance for some people for the spiritual dimension of existence and, consequently, the protection of freedom of conscience and religion” (Bouchard & Taylor 140). The fact that this concept was outlined in the Proulx report, the same report which recommended the creation of a secular school system (Seljak 184) and ultimately led to the creation of the ERC program, makes obvious its connection to the current education model in Quebec. Open secularism is meant to ensure respect for freedom of conscience and religion through the establishment of neutral ground which ensures that each individual can live their life according their convictions (Bouchard & Taylor 136). Open secularism also promotes neutrality of state institutions, such as public schools, by ensuring that they be impartial in their dealings with different religions and secular equivalents (Quebec, *Laïcité* 79-80). This is accomplished by avoiding the hierarchical organization of “different conceptions of the world and of good that motivate citizens to adhere to the basic principles of their political association” (Bourchard & Taylor 134). Finally, the goals of open secularism demonstrate a concern, on the part of the state, for the spiritual development of students. Accordingly, the neutrality of the state should not be confused with a state policy of *Laïcité*<sup>10</sup> as found in France.

In Quebec, though the Catholic Church lost much of its influence during the Quiet Revolution, it continued to have an important foothold in the society through confessional public school boards (Lefebvre 184). The Proulx Report changed this by suggesting a new model for the education of Quebec students. This model of open secularism, previously described, is sometimes referred to as integral *Laïcité*. “A certain French speaking Quebec elite values its comparison with France, notably for nationalistic reasons. Establishing laïcité in Quebec, be it ‘open’ or ‘integral’ helps set it apart from the rest of North America” (Lefebvre 186). The use of

---

<sup>10</sup> Here *Laïcité* is understood as the political process “through which the State asserts its independence in relation to religion” (Bouchard & Taylor 135).

this language, which is not present in discourse taking place in the rest of Canada, signals that Quebec's national identity is separate from that of other Canadians. It should also be noted that in the wake of 9/11 fear of Islamist terrorism has strengthened those who mobilize around *Laïcité* (Lefebvre 186). These events have increased the popularity of calls for the privatization of religion, and opposition to public expression of religion through a variety of religious symbols.

The term integral *Laïcité*, which is close to, and sometimes used interchangeably with, the term open secularism, should be understood as something distinguishable from both secularism and *Laïcité*. When placed on a spectrum, with secularism on one end and *Laïcité* on the other, integral *Laïcité* falls somewhere between the two. The distinction between secularism and *Laïcité*, though sometimes ignored, is an important one. Françoise Champion argues that of these two patterns of societal emancipation from religion, which are both found in Europe, Laicization is most often found in previously Catholic countries while secularization tends to develop in predominantly Protestant countries (Lefebvre 183). She argues that this occurs because the Catholic Church asserts itself as a vocation for all followers. This gives it charge over all aspects of social life, and therefore the church sets itself up as a rival to state (Lefebvre 183). *Laïcité* then manifests itself through anti-clericalism; it is a criticism of Catholicism in particular and religion more generally. Furthermore, *Laïcité* is particularly opposed to religious symbols in the public sphere. Protestantism, on the other hand, affirms itself not as a rival to the state, but as an institution playing a well-defined role in the state (Lefebvre 183). Secularization then amounts to a weakening of these roles. In this way, we can understand *Laïcité* as having a more oppositional character than secularism. Solange Lefebvre suggests that this distinction

between laicization and secularization serves as a backdrop for distinctions between Quebec and the rest of Canada (183).

### **Moving Toward Non-confessional Religious Education: from the Proulx Report to the creation of the ERC program**

The religious landscape in Quebec underwent significant changes throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including an increase in immigration which led to an increase of religious minorities in the province, as well as the secularization of the Roman Catholic majority. In the last 20 years, revisions to the education system have been made which, in my opinion, better reflect the current composition of Quebec society. In Canada, the rights of citizens are guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; however, the rights of privileged Christian religious communities to denominational education are guaranteed in section 93 of the Constitution.<sup>11</sup> Adopted in 1975, The Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms gave parents the right to “‘require’ a public education for their children consistent with their religious and moral convictions” (*Gazette* D8); this led to the creation of a moral education course as an

---

<sup>11</sup> “In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education, subject and according to the following Provisions:--

- (1) Nothing in any such Law shall prejudicially affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union:
- (2) All the Powers, Privileges and Duties at the Union by Law conferred and imposed in Upper Canada on the Separate Schools and School Trustees of the Queen's Roman Catholic Subjects shall be and the same are hereby extended to the Dissident Schools of the Queen's Protestant and Roman Catholic Subjects in Quebec:
- (3) Where in any Province a System of Separate or Dissident Schools exists by Law at the Union or is thereafter established by the Legislature of the Province, an Appeal shall lie to the Governor General in Council from any Act or Decision of any Provincial Authority affecting any Right or Privilege of the Protestant or Roman Catholic Minority of the Queen's Subjects in relation to Education:
- (4) In case any such Provincial Law as from Time to Time seems to the Governor General in Council requisite for the Execution of the Provisions of this Section is not made, or in case any Decision of the Governor General in Council on any Appeal under this Section is not duly executed by the proper Provincial Authority in that Behalf, then and in every such Case, and as far as the Circumstances of each Case require, the Parliament of Canada may make remedial Laws for the due Execution of the Provisions of this Section and of any Decision of the Governor General in Council under this Section” (Canada, *Constitution* s.93).

alternative to religious instruction (Seljak 184). In the early 1990s the Quebec government decided to take another look at the state of religious education in public schools and by 1997 had obtained the abrogation of section 93 of the Constitution, removing provisions for Christian religious instruction in the public education system. At the same time, article 41 of the Quebec Charter was amended now stating that “[p]arents or the persons acting in their stead have a right to give their children a religious and moral education in keeping with their convictions and with proper regard for their children's rights and interests.” These changes meant that public schools were no longer required to provide confessional education and the government could move towards the creation of secular public schools. On July 1<sup>st</sup> 1998, the Quebec government abolished all confessional school boards and replaced them by linguistic ones. The Proulx report, as well as the reorganization of the education system into linguistic school boards, was met with much concern by the public for the future of religious education in Quebec (Djandi; Boudreau *interviews*). Each school, whether from the French or English school board, would now offer parents the option of Moral and Religious Education (MRE) which was previously the program of Protestant school boards, Catholic Religious Instruction (CRI), or Moral Education (ME). This three option system, which for obvious reasons caused significant logistical issues within schools, lasted for ten years and served as a stepping stone towards the creation of the ERC program.

Though the legislative provisions for Catholic and Protestant religious instruction were the same, their respective approaches to religious education demonstrated considerable differences. Based on information given by the Catholic Committee, a group in charge of religious education in Catholic school boards, the Proulx report described the CRI program as based on a Christian humanist approach, where the Catholic origins of this approach were

explicitly named, and, as such, it was a denominational program (33). In addition, this program suggested that “religious instruction should propose, but not impose, Christian faith and tradition to allow, in its words, young people to grow as human beings” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 33). In contrast, based on information given by the Protestant Committee, the Proulx report affirmed that the MRE program considered itself to be non-denominational. It was inspired by a philosophy based on the humanist values of the Protestant tradition but remained open to different world religions (Quebec, *Laïcité* 33). The MRE program was understood as having three main components: biblical study, ethical reflection and learning world religions (Djandi; Boudreau *interviews*). The ME program considered a range of ethical question through an examination of a variety of charters, treaties and agreements (Djandi *interview*). Though the emphasis in the MRE program was certainly on Christianity, it also more explicitly addressed other religious traditions. It was therefore seen as closer to the ERC program than either the CRI program or the ME program because both the study of world religions and reflection on ethical questions are prominent components of the new program (Boudreau *interview*).

After the change to non-confessional school boards in 1998, the MEQ also decided to keep in place pastoral or religious animators. In the Catholic schools boards, before the linguistic school boards were created, pastoral animators were employed to guide students in their moral and spiritual development. “[P]astoral animation is designed to allow students to integrate values into correct behaviour, to learn how to transfer their knowledge into their own lives, through various projects and activities. The activities, offered to all students, bear the imprint of Christian inspiration without being religious in nature” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 32). Protestant religious animation was not as widespread as pastoral animation found in Catholic school boards and served a slightly different function. Religious animators had a five-fold role in schools: as

counselors, animators, community liaison officers, social advocates and resource persons (Quebec, *Laïcité* 33). Under the system of linguistic school boards, pastoral or religious animation, now termed spiritual animation, was kept in large part due to the appreciation voiced by staff, parents and students for the work being done by animators (Quebec, *Laïcité* 69; Boudreau *interview*). Both the Catholic and Protestant school boards argued that spiritual animation services served to promote dialogue on values and played a significant role in the development of students (Quebec, *Laïcité* 69). As previously mentioned, at the time of the creation of linguistic school boards it was clear that the three option system of religious education was not a viable long term solution. What remained unclear was whether any program on the topic of religion would be retained in future education reforms. Despite uncertainties, the retention of spiritual animators in schools suggested that the place of religion in schools was valued. The MEQ realized that “[p]luralism constitutes a challenge not just for the structure of the education system, but also for safeguarding diversity while ensuring the continuity of social ties between citizens” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 51). The recognition of the challenges presented by pluralism suggested that, as argued more generally by Maclure, efforts should be devoted toward “solidifying a democratic, dialogical ethos that can influence how the inevitable disagreements over identity representations and public policy are addressed and negotiated” (Maclure 143). So, while linguistic school boards remain in place, the MEQ has recently adopted a unified program of religious education entitled Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC).

In contrast to popular belief, the ERC program in Quebec was not an afterthought meant to deal with the logistical problems of running three separate options for religious education in each school. Instead, research into alternative models already present in Canada, as well as consultations between the Quebec government and various religious communities, was evident

as early as 1999. One such document gave a comprehensive overview of the way religious education is handled in other provinces; breaking it down into three main models. The first, found in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and British Columbia, is a completely secular system. Under this model, public schools are declared non-confessional under the law and religious instruction is relegated either to private schools or becomes the responsibility of families and churches (Pratte 62). The second model, one that is unique to Newfoundland, recognizes the constitutional right of citizens to the non-confessional teaching of religion (Pratte 62). This program focuses on education *about* religion, as opposed to confessional religious education, and is compulsory from Kindergarten to grade 9 in all public schools under the jurisdiction of Newfoundland and Labrador (Seljak 193). As will become apparent shortly, this model appears to mostly closely describe the new program adopted in Quebec.<sup>12</sup> The third model offers the most variety as it leaves the question of religious education up to local school boards. It is up to each province to offer norms of procedure when school boards decide to adopt such programs (Pratte 62).

### **The ERC Program**

As early as the Proulx Report the province of Quebec recognized that “schools clearly have a major role to play in seeking a balance between the development of individual identities and a new openness toward pluralism” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 51). To this end, the implementation of the ERC program is meant to help all groups in the province live more harmoniously through the

---

<sup>12</sup> It is of interest to note that the *Religious Education Curriculum Guide*, put forth by the Department of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, and *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum* created by the New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island Departments of Education are the only Canadian programs cited as having been consulted during the creation of the ERC curriculum. This citation appears at both the primary (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 378) and secondary school level (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 538).



promotion of mutual understanding and respect (Proulx, *Remarques generals* 1). This is to be achieved by a focus on a “familiarity with Quebec’s religious heritage, openness to religious diversity and the ability of students to position themselves, after due consideration, with respect to religions and new religious movements” (Quebec, *Consultation* 44). Furthermore, in order to represent the various viewpoints present in Quebec society adequately students will also be exploring “secular perceptions of the world and human beings” (Quebec, *Consultation* 44). As of July 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 this program became a required course for all students from grade one through to the end of high school (with the exception of grade 9)<sup>13</sup>, which in this province is grade eleven. The implementation of this program is to be understood in the context of five guiding elements consistent with the secular and open quality of Quebec public schools: “(1) respect for freedom of conscience and religion; (2) the neutrality of public schools; (3) concern for the spiritual development of students; (4) the common spiritual care guidance and community involvement service; (5) a single ethics and religious culture program” (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 25).

In order to gain a better understanding of the spirit of the new program, it is important to explore these five elements further. First, in complying with section 37 of the Education Act, all schools must show respect for the freedom of conscience and religion of students, parents and staff (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 25). Thus, in a general way, schools are used as a tool to promote the values which are at the core of both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Second, by removing all provisions pertaining to the rights of Catholics and Protestants from the Education Act, and then proceeding to remove all confessional instruction, public schools have adopted the same ‘neutral’ stance as espoused

---

<sup>13</sup> Officially there is no time allotted for the ERC program in grade 9. This was done in order to make more room for arts programming. However some schools are in the process of splitting the hours allotted to the ERC program for the grade 10 level between grades 9 and 10 (Djandi *interview*).

by the State. I contend that this use of the term ‘neutral’ is consistent with the concept of open secularism<sup>14</sup> found in Quebec’s intercultural model. This contention will be explored more fully below. In adopting a ‘neutral’ stance schools must no longer promote one religion or spiritual practice over others and are expected to deal with each of these in a fair and open minded way. In accordance with this second guiding element, school staff may only initiate activities which are considered specifically educational and consistent with the new program. However, because students have a right to express their own religious missions, they may initiate activities specific to their faith community (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 34). Thus, these first two elements serve to ensure that the rights of students, parents and staff are protected.

In keeping with the commitment to have respect for students’ spiritual development, schools are charged with the task of helping students develop their humanity. A report by the *Comité sur les Affaires Religieuses (CAR)*<sup>15</sup> makes this statement: “[a]ll indications are that we are not born human, but we become human” (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 36). Therefore, part of the schools’ mandate is understood to be the development of each student’s humanity through the promotion of the recognition of each person’s dignity and value as acknowledged by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Great Religions of the world, as well as many schools of philosophy. CAR further insists that this is compatible with the first two guiding elements as “[w]e are not concerned here with promoting a specific vision of humans; rather, our goal is to encourage individual growth in humanity by respecting each person’s beliefs and process of

---

<sup>14</sup> I am using this term, as previously described, defined in Chapter VII of the Bouchard Taylor Commission on Reasonable Accommodation, pages 133-154.

<sup>15</sup> This is a committee established in 2000 mandated to advise the Ministry of Education on matters relating to the role of religion in schools. This committee is also called to give its opinion in regard to the ERC program. When giving its opinion on this program the committee must consult with persons and groups interested in its development. Furthermore, this committee is charged with ensuring that there is dialogue between the general public, diverse religious groups and the public school system in Quebec. For further information please consult (Quebec, *mels*).

development” (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 37).<sup>16</sup> Teachers are encouraged to draw from a wide variety of secular and religious resources which are promoted as ensuring the students’ success in both school and in life (Quebec, *Secular* 37). It is important to note that this argument is used to legitimize the State’s role in the transmission of certain norms to its youngest citizens. As will be discussed later, much of the debate over this program surrounds questions about *who* has what rights to the transmission of *which* norms and values.

As described previously, in the hopes of supporting the spiritual development of students each school must have a spiritual animator on staff. During the time of confessional education, such a position was filled by a local minister or priest and their role was to guide the development of students within the Christian faith. Under the current system, spiritual animators are no longer allowed to proselytize but are charged with supporting all students whether religious or not. Their goal is to assist students in becoming both “spiritually autonomous and responsible citizens by doing their part to build a harmonious and supportive society” (Quebec, *Secular Schools* 38). As will be shown in later, this dual emphasis on autonomy and mutual respect is consistent with Quebec’s intercultural project, and Canada’s liberal democratic model.

Finally, the development of a single Ethics and Religious Culture program is meant to foster an understanding of Quebec culture as it has been shaped by not only Catholic and Protestant traditions, but also, and more recently, by a variety of other religious traditions. Knowledge of the main faith groups which comprise Quebec society is now deemed as necessary to both the personal growth of students and their development as responsible citizens of a modern pluralistic society. The exploration of beliefs and practices of these faith groups is done

---

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of what it means to be human, and the definition of humanity, as perceived by the *Comité sur les Affaires Religieuses*, please see (Quebec, *Secular Schools in Quebec* 35-37).

with two main objectives in mind, the recognition of others and pursuit of the common good (Quebec, *Consultation* 45). Regarding the first objective,

“The recognition of others, which is intrinsically connected to self-knowledge, is also linked to the principle that all people possess equal value and dignity. Hence the importance each of us attributes to being recognized, particularly with regard to our world-view, or how we see ourselves and others, which in turn orients our attitudes and actions. This recognition occurs in dialogue that is characterized by listening and discernment, and that has no room for attacks on personal dignity or actions that might compromise the common good. In doing so, it contributes to building a common culture that takes diversity into account” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462).

The objective of recognizing the other is understood to develop the notion of humanity as something that needs to be developed in students through the recognition of the dignity of each person, which is accomplished by dialogue with others. In this context, recognition of others is linked to action in that the way we view others will, according to this program, influence our actions towards them and, in turn, play an important role in determining the way group interaction takes place in the larger society.

The second objective, namely,

“The pursuit of the common good, which goes beyond the satisfaction of purely personal interests, not only involves the greater welfare of the collectivity, but also that of each individual. It refers to three main actions: the search, along with others, for common values; the promotion of projects that foster community life; and respect for democratic principles and ideals specific to Québec society. Thus the pursuit of the common good presupposes that people from different backgrounds can agree responsibly to take on challenges inherent to life in society” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462).

I see this second objective as giving a more precise orientation to the first by insisting that recognition of the other is done in such a way as to benefit the society as a whole. Both hold in tension the needs of the individual and the needs of the larger society. Together, these two objectives are understood to promote the creation of “a truly common public culture” (Quebec,

*Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462). These two objectives are also considered to be instrumental in realization of the three aims of the Quebec Education Program, namely “the construction of identity, the construction of the world view and empowerment” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462). Therefore, one can understand the ERC program as a tool for the cultivation of a civic identity common to all people in Quebec.

Based on these two objectives, the ERC program can be seen to conform to the principles of liberal democracy, as outlined by Kymlicka in chapter 1, which guide civic education. The Proulx Report affirmed that schools are the main medium for the transmission of values to young people (75), values which will allow Quebec’s liberal democracy to self-perpetuate from generation to generation (*Laïcité* 86). In addition, the report clearly stated that “Quebec is a liberal democracy that must, in every area, uphold the principle of equality of all citizens” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 75). This is reflected in the ERC program’s main objectives which insist that “all people possess equal value and dignity” (*Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462). Furthermore, as future citizens, children “have a fundamental interest in being prepared for life in a pluralistic liberal democratic context” (Quebec, *Laïcité* 90). To this end, schools are tasked with teaching the main values of liberal citizenship, namely autonomy and the value of political participation (Quebec, *Laïcité* 85-86; Spinner 89).

There are also parallels in this program to the fourth virtue of a liberal democracy in the Kymlickian model, as described in chapter 1, namely, the creation of sense of solidarity between fellow citizens or loyalty to the nation. For example, the focus of the ERC program on the Christian heritage of Quebec can be understood as part of the process of creating solidarity among citizens by encouraging them to relate to a shared history which they are now part of and will continue to participate in. Equally, the notions of civility and tolerance as well as justice,

also among the virtues in the Kymlicka model of liberal democracy, can be found through the juxtaposition of the two objectives of this program. Recognizing the other in such a way that pursues the common good suggests that one must treat the other with civility and tolerate their customs within reasonable limits. At the same time, the ERC program objectives can be interpreted through the Kymlickian model as promoting the participation of all groups in civil society through the creation of just institutions. Though some might say that this ‘goes without saying,’ I would argue that the way that we develop this notion of the pursuit of the common good is not always obvious. For example, the current language of reasonable accommodation, though it certainly recognizes the other, can fall short of creating appropriate conditions for the equal participation of all groups. Beaman, as we have seen previously, argues that this recognition is often trapped in a language embedded within existing power relationships. Thus, though others are recognized, they are not necessarily given equal standing next to the Christian majority. For Beaman, I think that the culmination of these two curriculum objectives would involve recognizing the other as equal participant in society, one who should be at the center of dialogue about law and public policy particularly where it affects their community.

The two major objectives of the ERC program are to be attained through three competencies. A student in the program should reflect on ethical questions, demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, and engage in dialogue (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 296; *Secondary Education* 462). At the elementary school level the first two of these competencies are kept largely separate, many schools choosing to teach them in alternating terms. At the secondary level these two aspects of the program come into greater interaction. The first of these, a reflection on ethical questions, is seen as essential to the development of students living in a pluralist society such as Quebec. “In this program, ethics essentially consists in

critically reflecting on the meaning of conduct and on the values and norms that the members of a given society or group adopt in order to guide or regulate their conduct” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 295; *Secondary Education* 461). This type of reflection is to be done in order to further the development of the student’s moral sense, which is considered indispensable for making judicious choices, in the hopes that it will contribute to peaceful coexistence between members of society (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 295; *Secondary Education* 461).

Throughout their studies, students are evaluated on their ability to reflect on ethical questions in three ways. First, students are expected to be able to present a “detailed study of a situation from an ethical point of view” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 314; *Secondary Education* 479). Second, students should be able to consider cultural, moral, religious, scientific or social references, that are part of points of view presented. Third, from these, the student should be able to evaluate possible actions in order to determine which ones will best contribute to community life (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 314; *Secondary Education* 479). At the elementary level, topics of reflection surround the demands of living within a society and the individuals who make up that society (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 314). At the end of elementary school students are expected to be able to “grasp the causes and effects of prejudices and stereotypes that are present in a situation” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 314). They should be able to establish connects between different situations within similar contexts and assess the effectiveness of their own reflection process. At the end of secondary school they are supposed be able to “carry out ethical reflection on topics dealing with tolerance, the future of humanity, justice and human ambivalence” (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 479). At this level students should be able to identify a range of values and norms explaining the tensions and conflicting values that may exist between them. They are expected to anticipate the impact of the

application of these values and norms on both themselves and the larger community. In addition, they are expected to anticipate other contexts in which this ethical reflection may be useful.

The second competency, concerning the demonstration of an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, also has three key features. The first is “the ability to describe and put into context forms of religious expression by making connections with their tradition of origin” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 315; *Secondary Education* 480). The second consists of the expected ability of students to put these forms of religious expression into context by making connections between various elements of their social and cultural environment as well as other environments found in other parts of the world (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 315). This feature is meant to go further at the secondary level “by developing a more in-depth understanding of the shared and unique aspects of these forms of expression and by explaining their meaning and their role” (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 480). Finally, the third feature involves the anticipated ability to recognize various ways of thinking, being and acting within a variety of religious traditions found in society (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 315; *Secondary Education* 480). By the end of elementary school, students should have gained familiarity with forms of religious expression and practices related to the family, the community, the larger society and the world (Quebec, *Elementary School* 316). Throughout, secondary school students should be asked to use their understanding of various forms of religious expression and practices in order to examine more deeply the phenomenon of religion. The program begins with a focus on Quebec’s religious heritage, then goes on to explore fundamental elements of different religious traditions and a variety of representations of the divine as well as mythical and supernatural beings (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 481). Following this, students are expected to examine “situations that touch upon religions over time, existential questions, religious



experience and religious references in art and culture” (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 481).

Halette Djandji, ERC consultant for elementary and high school at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), describes this competency as one dealing with religious literacy. She understands knowledge of the phenomenon of religion at the elementary school level to involve familiarizing students with the language of religion, such as the use of words like ritual, holy scripture, and prayer as well as key religious figures, using examples from different traditions (Djandji *interview*). She describes the secondary level as a deepening of this understanding by placing this knowledge in the context of the cosmology present within each religious or cultural tradition studied (Djandji *interview*).

The third and final competency in the ERC program involves an engagement in dialogue. This competency involves three main features, students should demonstrate the ability to organize their thoughts, interact with others develop a point of view (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 320; *Secondary Education* 484). By the end of elementary school students are expected to be able to organize their ideas in the form or narration, conversation, discussion, deliberation, interview and debate (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 324). They should be able to recognize obstacles to the process of dialogue and contribute to overcoming them. In addition, they should be able to develop a point of view that is both relevant and coherent as well as take into account the points of view of others. At the secondary level, students are expected to practice different forms of dialogue including discussion and roundtable. They should be able to explore processes which are likely to hinder dialogue such as the ‘two wrongs make a right’ argument, straw man argument, false dilemma, causal fallacy, false analogy, slippery slope and conspiracy theories (Quebec, *Secondary Education* 484). Students at the secondary level ought to demonstrate greater autonomy in practicing different forms of dialogue. In this competency

students are asked to consider the challenges related to community life in a pluralist society through discussion and debate.

In my opinion the first two competencies, a reflection on ethical questions and the demonstration of an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, can be understood as promoting autonomy and critical thinking as described in Kymlicka's model of a liberal democracy. The ethics component of the program, in which students are supposed to reflect on the values and norms that various members of society adopt to guide their conduct, is meant to develop the students' moral sense. This exercise is considered indispensable to the development of a child's ability to exercise critical judgment, which in turn is understood as an expression of their individual autonomy (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 295; *Secondary Education* 461). Furthermore, by exposing students to a wide variety of belief systems, and by encouraging students from different backgrounds to engage in dialogue about their beliefs, the ERC program is likely to aid in the cultivation of public reason; a key element of liberal democracy. "By grouping all the students together, rather than dividing them into groups according to their beliefs, and by promoting the development of attitudes of tolerance, respect and openness, we are preparing them to live in a pluralist and democratic society" (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 293; *Secondary Education* 459).

These two competencies also highlight some of the issues brought to light by Beaman's model of deep equality. Beaman argues that it is important to recognize that the approach to diversity in Canada assumes the existence of a Christian nation, which in turn is intertwined in complex ways with notions of democracy (Beaman, *Harm* 16). The ERC program clearly recognizes that Christianity has had an important impact on the current society through its devotion of a significant portion of class time, at the both the elementary and secondary levels, to

an examination of the Christian heritage of Quebec. However, there is no explicit mention of the kind of Christian hegemony which so concerns Beaman. In addition, the ethics competency requires students “to be cognizant of and respect the basic values of Québec society” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 310; *Secondary Education* 476). Though these values are not explicitly named in the program, the acknowledgement of the Christian heritage of Quebec alludes to the fact that the values of this society have been significantly shaped by Christianity. Thus, though this program, through the first two competencies, has the potential to create an openness to diversity and strengthen social cohesiveness, it also has the potential to reinforce mainstream Christian values as normative. The outcome of this curriculum may largely be determined by the teacher’s approach to these topics. In other words, I think that though the ERC program attempts to name the existing power relationships between the Christian majority and other religious minorities, a task that is intimately connected with Beaman’s model of deep equality, it is unclear whether this program works to change the existing situation.

The final competency, centering around an engagement in dialogue, is to me the most interesting of the three. Not only does it bring together the components dealing with ethics and religion but it also swells the possibilities within both Kymlicka’s and Beaman’s models for addressing diversity in a pluralistic society. This competency deals directly with the first virtue of Kymlicka’s model, namely public spiritedness. This virtue involves not only a willingness to engage in public discourse but also an ability to listen and justify one’s political demands in ways that fellow citizens can both understand and accept as consistent with the values of society (Kymlicka, *Politics* 296-297). The dialogue component of the ERC program requires that students develop and practice their ability to participate in the development of public reason throughout elementary and secondary school. This competency demands that students use the

various points of view learned about through the ethics and religion competencies in order to engage with fellow classmates in a further exploration of what these opinions might mean to an individual, community or larger society. “In order to foster community life, such a (pluralist) society cannot circumvent the need for dialogue that is imbued with listening and reflection, discernment and the active participation of its members. This quality of dialogue is very practical for self-knowledge and indispensable for life in society” (Quebec, *Elementary Education* 320; *Secondary Education* 484). This echoes Kymlicka’s assertion that children must be prepared, through schooling, for their future responsibilities as citizens.

In terms of Beaman’s concerns regarding the impact of unexamined Christian hegemony in Canada and the inequality of minority groups, the dialogue competency of the ERC program offers an important opportunity to teach future citizens about a consultative partnership between groups with the goal of achieving equality. This program names many of the things which Beaman argues are essential starting points for the discussion of equality such as the impact of Canada’s Christian heritage on the current system, and the diversity present within each religion and cultural group. In addition, this program allows students the opportunity to work through current issues, ones that are relevant to both students and the larger society, on a case by case basis. Though I, like Beaman, acknowledge that the language of equality can be used to uphold Christian hegemony, I also believe that this language is an important place from which to begin the discussion. That being said, though, this program has great potential to deal with some of the issues expressed by Beaman, much of its success rests with the teachers.

As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, teachers’ presentation of issues within the classroom, their verbal and non-verbal cues while discussing possible points of view on a subject and the possible impact these might have on individuals, communities and society as

well as their ability to speak from a model of deep equality will play an important role in determining how students understand diversity and its challenges. The following chapter will also explore critiques of the multicultural education project and challenges to the ERC program itself.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Critiques and Challenges**

This chapter will take a closer look at the challenges of the ERC program as well as the criticisms it has received. I will first outline some critiques of multicultural education coming from within the liberal democratic model and examine the ways in which this program responds to these concerns. Then I will consider critiques specific to the ERC program and their implications for the future of this program.

#### **Critiques of Multicultural Education**

In the words of Robert Reich, one of the main goals of a liberal multicultural education is to “expand the interpretive and experiential horizons of individuals, aiming in the end to cultivate a cosmopolitan outlook in each student” (184). However, Levinson cautions that public schools do not necessarily fulfill this goal and can in fact hinder their achievement in some cases (*Common* 626). For one thing, public schools that are not already conscientious about promoting the ideal of mutual toleration and respect may exacerbate the problem by assuming that simply placing students from diverse backgrounds in the same classroom will develop tolerance. In some cases, this may only increase tensions already present in society. Another worry is that public schools with visible sources of diversity may lead students to be complacent about mutual awareness and thereby hinder deep cross-cultural understanding. In addition, schools may also neglect the diverse cultures, ethnicities and religious groups not present within their own school. In some cases, religion is completely neglected in order to deal with issues that are seen as more pressing, for example race relations. Schools might also suggest models of authenticity for minority groups which do not allow for diversity or change within the minority group. This is not

to suggest that all of these issues are present in all public schools; however, I agree with Levinson that inclusion alone is not enough (Levinson, *Common* 634).

Levinson suggests several concerns which need to be addressed in order to ensure that multicultural education, delivered through public schools, is successful at achieving its goals and serving its students. First, the public must take responsibility for public schools and understand them as evidence of the strengths, weaknesses and values of the community (Levinson, *Common* 636). This is to say that the achievements of public schools should be lauded as a community's success while its weaknesses should be addressed by that same community. Secondly, schools should be praised for actually achieving the goals of multiculturalism, not for simply attempting to express them symbolically (Levinson, *Common* 637). By praising schools for what they have not actually achieved there is a great risk of complacency both within the school and the community. Therefore, long-term studies of the ERC program and its impact on students become a very important factor in determining if this program is reaching its goals. Third, it is important to recognize that public schools are not necessarily diverse schools. The measure of their diversity has much to do with the community they are serving. Thus, when schools serve a more or less homogeneous area they risk being essentially segregated schools. In such cases, it is important to be aware of the potential pitfalls of segregated education that may not be present in schools serving a more diverse district (Levinson, *Common* 637.) This point is of particular interest in the province of Quebec where, outside of the Montreal metropolitan area, over 90 percent of the population self identifies as Catholic (Quebec, *Laïcité* 36).

It is important to understand the adoption of the ERC program by the province of Quebec as one response to the multicultural/intercultural project among many. Shahram Nahidi, professor at Université de Montreal and redactor of the chapters on Islam for the ERC textbooks,

suggests that this program is one of the solutions to the issues related to diversity which are present in society (*interview*). At the same time, he understands its development to be intimately connected with the history of Quebec. For Nahidi, Quebec not only has a history of discrimination, an aspect shared with many other parts of Canada, but also has a particular sensitivity toward finding an appropriate and efficient reaction to this history (*interview*). For him, this has to do with the *Quebecois*' identification as a minority community living within a majority that is culturally different (*interview*). In other words, Quebec is struggling to find a way to treat minorities within the province in a less discriminatory fashion than the *Quebecois* feel that they have been treated historically, while at the same time maintaining their minority culture. The ERC program then acts as starting point for further cross-cultural understanding.

The ERC program may also serve to address some of the issues encountered in more homogeneous communities by ensuring a space in which they can engage with diversity. At the same time, the resources developed for this program, which include books, videos and a number of websites, allow students to interact visually with aspects of diversity that may not be present in their own community (Djandji; LeBihan *interviews*). If we are attentive to the challenges that face the realization of multicultural education, and are attuned to the potential conflicts between the latter and public schools, solutions are possible that would allow multicultural education and public schools to become successful partners.

### **Court Challenges to the ERC Program**

The implementation of the ERC program has been met with mixed feelings on the part of parents, educators and the population at large. Ultimately in the short span of one decade, the province of Quebec made the move from confessional schooling to the institution of a program



which explores a multitude of value systems but it is also criticized by some as one that espouses very few values of its own. In general, conservative groups have argued that such multicultural education projects place too much emphasis on religious minorities so that students gain superficial knowledge of many groups rather than in-depth knowledge of one (Seljak 190). I think that in this instance conservative groups are ignoring the need of minorities to be recognized as contributing members of society. In addition, the ERC program is meant to help students contribute to the development of public reason in the long term, as they gain a better understanding of previously unfamiliar religious communities that make up an increasing portion of society.

Some opponents also worry that the treatment of religion from a Social Sciences perspective will trivialize it (Quebec, *Un seul programme* 5). By recognizing a plurality of views within each religious group, the ERC program attempts to avoid presenting each tradition as a stagnant monolithic institution. Through its promotion of dialogue it would seem that this program also encourages students to engage with the numerous voices in each tradition in order to gain a better understanding of the perspectives found within each community. In this way, the ERC program attempts to ensure that teachers do not approach various religions as museum exhibits, but rather as living evolving communities. Still, there are many others who feel that parents should be able to choose whether or not their children are exposed to different religions through the ERC program. On February 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, a group of Catholic families in Drummondville took the Des Chênes School Board to court, seeking an exemption from the ERC course for their children on the grounds that it violated their right to freedom of conscience and religion as protected under article 3 of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, and article 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Quebec Cour Supérieur, *Commission scolaire*

*des Chênes*). For these parents, a more theological approach to religion, one which promotes the values of their faith through confessional instruction, is the only appropriate way to address religion within the education system. Despite these arguments, the request for exemption from the ERC program was denied by the Quebec Superior Court on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2009 (Quebec Cour Supérieure, *Commission scolaire des Chênes*).

Similarly, many parents who subscribe to a secular value system are also in opposition to the ERC program. For these parents, the social science approach to religion remains suspect. They do not see value in exposing their children to a diverse range of religious beliefs. For them, the line between studying *about* religion and a faith based approach to religion is unclear. Although they are not encouraging a return to a system of exemptions, the *Mouvement laïque québécois* (MLQ) joins the Coalition for Liberty in Education, a group representing both Catholic and Protestant families, in asserting their belief that children of elementary school age are not mature enough to follow the new ERC program (*La Presse*). The MLQ sees the ERC program as a step backwards. They would like to see this course focused exclusively on ethics allowing students to choose the option of studying religious culture only in grades ten and eleven (*La Presse*).

Although Kymlicka's liberal model recognizes the right of parental discretion over the education of their children, it also insists that children are not an extension of or property of their parents (Reich 149). Defining what is in the best interest of a child largely depends on one's conception of the good life. Since Canada's ethos is currently constructed on the importance of a plurality of conceptions of the good life, it is impossible to come to a consensus.

Through Kymlicka's model we can understand the state as being interested in education because it wants children to become familiar with the political structures of society which will be

essential to their participation as adult citizens. The state is also interested in ensuring that children grow up to be capable of functioning independently of their parents. Parents generally share in this second goal but not always in the first (Reich 154). Children also have an interest in their education. This manifests itself both in an interest to develop the capability of functioning independently from their parents and in the perspective of autonomy as it affects one's ability to live well in liberal society (Reich 155). Students may gain the false impression that religious communities are not a deep source of identity, and therefore trivialize their importance, if religion is excluded from the curriculum or if only one group is included (Reich 199). They might also come to think that their religious convictions are the only sources of spiritual meaning, an idea which opposes a pluralistic view. For these reasons, I think that it is better to risk a reductionist approach to religion in the classroom as well as potential clashes between parental views and student views, than to leave it out of the curriculum all together.

The ERC program has equally been faced with the challenges of determining how best to represent a variety of religious convictions. "In September 2005, the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports gave the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR) a mandate to consult religious groups, organizations and resource persons on the religious aspects of the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program, scheduled for implementation in September 2008" (Quebec, *Consultation 3*). This led to a process of consultation which lasted two years and ultimately helped to determine the final content of the ERC curriculum. Over 75% of the groups consulted, whether lay people, specialists or observers, anticipated a positive response to the new program by religious groups and organizations (Quebec, *Consultation 12*). Despite this attempt to create a program which takes into account the points of view of all concerned, the program was not well received by everyone. For example, the MLQ, who was consulted during the drafting of the ERC

program voiced its hope that at some point the religious culture portion of the program would be removed altogether (Quebec, *Consultation* 14).

Better known are criticisms of the program received from certain sectors of the Catholic community. In addition to the above mentioned court case fighting for exemptions from the program, Loyola High school, a private Catholic boys school, has voiced objections to the ERC program on the grounds that it conflicts with the school's Catholic character and also presents a relativistic view of religion (Quebec Cour Supérieur, *Loyola*). Under the laws governing private schools in Quebec, Loyola petitioned the MEQ to allow them to teach the material of the ERC program from a confessional Catholic perspective through a new program of their design (Quebec Cour Supérieur, *Loyola*). The denial of this request led to the case being presented before Quebec Superior Court. Douglas Farrow, a professor of Religious Studies at McGill University who spoke on behalf of Loyola during this court case, contends that this program is evidence of a significant shift in assumption of responsibility for the transmission of norms. Farrow is opposed to the fact that “[w]hat was once the task of the family and of the religious community –which formerly worked in cooperation with the schools [...] –has now become the task of the state” (Farrow 2-3).

Farrow goes on to claim that the ERC program espouses a form of normative pluralism that emphasizes the valuing of diverse moral and religious practices as the norm (Farrow 5). He considers this to be problematic because this program is touted, on the one hand, as being part of a ‘neutral’ secular school system, while on the other hand, promoting what Farrow calls a “robust educational philosophy that recognizes the importance of human formation through the transmission of norms” (Farrow 4). He goes on to argue that this normative pluralism is exclusivist in nature because it insists, like other ideologies, that its point of view is the right one

(Farrow 6). Therefore, it cannot be considered neutral and in fact tends towards what Farrow sees as a monoculturalism that is inconsistent with both multiculturalism and interculturalism (Farrow 7). However, others, such as Kymlicka, argue that all schools promote a particular culture just by their choice of language and text books (Seljak, 190), and therefore no program can maintain an entirely neutral stance. To me, the argument over neutrality misses the point. As seen above, the Proulx Report affirmed that schools are the main medium for the transmission of values to young people (75). Both Kymlicka and Farrow agree that schools cannot be neutral; however, they disagree about who should choose the norms that are transmitted to students in the educational schools system. Farrow seems particularly opposed to changes to the Quebec Charter which mean that schools are no longer required to offer education consistent with the religious and moral convictions of parents (Farrow 3). The point is that those opposed to this program are particularly concerned with increased state control over value and norm transmission in the school system. Finally, Farrow argues that the ERC program operates as a filter distorting elements of various religious traditions, particularly in the context of private confessional schools, by disallowing the self representation of these religions (Farrow 7). In other words, detractors claim that this program does not simply teach children *about* a variety of religious traditions but also teaches them *how* they should think about these traditions.

This approach is problematic for devout parents who feel that it is their task to preserve the 'authentic faith' against change, particularly change resulting from an interaction with what they believe to be a morally relativistic program (Farrow 8-13). For them, only an insider account of their tradition can be valid. The ERC program, which attempts to treat all religions evenhandedly, is sometimes understood as supporting the idea that each religion is different but equally valid. For those who believe theirs is the one true faith, this is unacceptable. For such

parents, mandatory exposure of their young children to a program which may cast doubt on the fundamental 'Truths' of their faith or question the authority of religious leaders is seen as an attack on their religious freedom. That being said, most parents, with the exception of isolationist groups, recognize that children growing up in a multicultural environment like Quebec will eventually have to deal with a multitude of religious traditions. Though parents often acknowledge the benefits of preparing children for these future encounters, they argue that it is important to give their children a rootedness in their own faith before exposing them to a multitude of other value systems (Spinner 73-74). Furthermore, it is believed that this will allow children to develop a strong sense of their own values, which reflect the beliefs of their faith community, as well as give them the tools to answer and defend their beliefs when challenged (Spinner 74-76). This most often manifests itself in a stronger opposition towards the ERC program at the elementary level, and more openness to a multi-faith approach at the secondary level.

As we have seen, Beaman values the right of religious groups to speak for themselves, and finds their partnership in dialogue especially important for the creation of public policy. Given the process of consultation with a large number of interest groups both religious and secular, as well as the work of scholars of religion in consultation on the content of the ERC program it is difficult to see the criticism that the ERC does not let religions self represent themselves as the majority point of view. Certainly the ERC program, just like the confessional programs before it, or indeed any programs in the current school system, sets up a particular framework in which to discuss issues on a particular topic. The choice of text books, the goals of the program, the competencies to be evaluated all say something about how the MEQ understands the study of religion and the 'responsible' discussion of religion. So the question

becomes what if any role do parents or citizens have in deciding the standards of education? As it turns out, parents in Quebec hold only a consultative power for much of what goes on in schools while the State generally holds ultimate decision making powers; though some of this power is divided between the MEQ and individual school boards or schools (Proulx, *Pluralisme* 279). However, studies have shown that it is only a minority of parents truly seeking decision making power over school curriculum with one notable exception; the study of religion and the confessional nature of schools (Proulx, *Pluralisme* 280). In this area, parents feel very strongly that they should be able to choose the kind of education their children receive.

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to be aware of the fact that this debate extends beyond questions about how one might responsibly talk about religion in a pluralist society and becomes a debate over rights. More specifically, a large part of this debate has become a question of delimiting the scope of state rights and parental rights on the issue of value transmission to young people. The creation of the ERC program offers a practical example of an instance where the perceived rights of each group are seen as coming into conflict.

In both of the court cases brought forward against this program, the plaintiffs claimed that their right to religious freedom, as protected under the both the Canadian Charter and the Quebec Charter, had been violated by the imposition of this program on all Quebec students. In addition, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights put forth by the United Nations makes an assertion about these rights which is relevant to both of these cases.

Article 13.3 of this covenant states that:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

In relation to the current discussion, one interpretation is that parents have the right to choose educational institutions for their children which conform with their religious convictions, but the state need not give any financial support to these institutions. Parents seeking exemption from the ERC use this article to argue that the MEQ cannot require their children to this course because they understand the ERC to be in conflict with their convictions. The government, on the other hand, argues that this article does not make any mention of schools providing this type of education. Therefore, parents have the option of seeking religious education within their own tradition. In the case of the parents in Drummondville seeking exemption of their children from the program, the Hon. Jean-Guy Dubois found that their religious rights were not being violated and therefore they had no recourse for an exemption from the ERC program. However, in the more recent case of Loyola, a private Catholic Secondary institution that receives subsidies amounting to approximately 50% of their budget (Boudreau interview), the situation is slightly different. In the judgment of this case, rendered on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2010, the Hon. Gérard Dubgré finds that the MEQ, by insisting that Loyola teach the ERC program from a non-confessional standpoint, is infringing on the Loyola's freedom of religion in a way that is totalitarian in character and is essentially equivalent to Inquisition demanding that Galileo deny the Copernican universe (Quebec Cour Supérieure, *Loyola*).

The Quebec government has decided to appeal the decision. This is not surprising when considering the possible implications of the current ruling for the future of the ERC program. Many believe that if Loyola is allowed to teach a confessional program in lieu of the ERC program that other private confessional schools will follow suit. Private schools in Quebec make up about 10% of the student population at the elementary level and approximately 25% at the



secondary level (Boudreau *interview*). At the same time, though Hon. Gérard Dubgré does recognize that the Quebec Charter distinguishes between public and private educational institutions, this decision might strengthen a possible future court challenge by the parents in Drummondville. If the Court of Appeal finds that the religious rights of parents were violated through the imposition of the ERC program on Loyola High School, then parents from Drummondville can use this as precedent to argue for their right to an exemption from this program. Though this group has been refused an appeal to their case within the Quebec court system, they are reportedly asking the Supreme Court of Canada to hear the case (Montgomery A4). Spencer Boudreau, speaking before the Loyola judgment was rendered, said that he isn't sure the ERC program is out of the woods yet (*interview*). When asked about possible changes to this program in the future, he said that this program may only be taught at the secondary level, or possibly only in grades 10 and 11 (Boudreau *interview*). Nicole LeBihan, consultant for the ERC program as the Lester B. Pearson School Board in Montreal, fears that if the Loyola decision stands it might mark the end of program (*interview*).

There are approximately 1600 cases where parents have requested to have their children exempted from the ERC program. Halette Djandji affirms that these families tend to be both conservative and religious while also noting that so far, only Christian groups have gone to court on this matter (*interview*). When looking at these facts through the lens of Beaman's model of deep equality, it is interesting to examine the ERC program as a perceived threat to the existing Christian hegemony. While more liberal groups believe this program is a good first step, conservative groups claim that it is a relativistic program which violates their religious freedom (Boudreau *interview*). I think that Beaman would understand the reaction of conservative groups to be, at least in part, a reaction to a perceived loss of power through the loss of confessional

Christian education for their children. Whatever the root cause of these reactions, it is important to note that at least twice as many pages are devoted to Christianity in the ERC program than to any other religion (Nahidi *interview*), amounting to at least 60% of the content of this program (LeBihan *interview*). Particular emphasis, at both the elementary and secondary levels, is placed on understanding the Christian heritage of Quebec. In addition, the discussion of world religions and ethics is both a continuation and an expansion of the CRI and MRE programs previously in place, albeit more strongly aligned with the former Protestant program (Djandji and Boudreau *interviews*). Thus, though the format of engagement within the classroom has changed, the ERC program continues to give Christianity a prominent place in education.

### **Other Critiques of the ERC Program**

Nahidi makes clear that he believes there is a great need for programs such as the ERC. He contends that this program can help to teach students about the history of this province and help to begin the process of dialogue. However, he also suggests several weaknesses in the program which, in his opinion, should be addressed immediately. Nahidi argues that the scholarship of modernity has put such an emphasis on objectivity that we sometimes forget that when we are talking about religion we are talking about human issues, in much the same way as one does in the areas of history or other social sciences (*interview*). Instead of talking in passive forms, he suggests that the ERC program should focus on allowing children to understand religion through the lens of the people who practice that religion, particularly at the elementary level (*interview*). He proposes that this be modeled on the concept of Heteroglossia as developed by the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin. So instead of presenting religious views by saying “Hindus believe that...” or “Muslims believe that...” the teacher would present a character as a

member of a particular tradition who explains that tradition from their own perspective. For example, “Hello my name is Simon. I am Catholic and here is how my family celebrates Christmas.” By avoiding blanket statements about any given religion, this approach may also help teachers to emphasize the multiplicity of voices within each tradition.

Nahidi also suggests that the emphasis at the elementary level should be placed on opening students’ eyes to the diversity found in the world, and gaining an appreciation of this diversity (*interview*). He insists that this is best achieved by placing a greater emphasis on experiencing elements of various traditions first hand (*interviews*). This would include, but not be limited to, field trips to various places of worship or religious celebrations, the tasting of foods that are part of these celebrations, an exploration of music used in various traditions as well as an examination of various forms of dress associated with each tradition. At the secondary level, Nahidi would like to see an open discussion of religion and politics become part of the ERC program.

In addition, Nahidi contends that an increased emphasis on media literacy is important to the development of critical thinking among students (*interview*). He argues we must recognize that as a society we are exposed to an “over-mediatization” of religion (*interview*). Therefore, it becomes important to give students the tools necessary to think critically about what is presented to them through the media and not automatically take everything that they see or read about as truth. Teachers are also affected by this “over-mediatization” and come to the classroom with their own prejudices. Therefore, if teachers are to be facilitators in their students’ exploration of religious and ethical matters they must be trained to take a posture in the classroom that does not privilege one religion over the other (Nahidi *interview*). Non-verbal cues and tone of voice can

express a teacher's opinion with as much clarity as words and can be equally detrimental the process of open dialogue.

On the whole, most of the criticisms about this program that I have encountered surround the issue of teacher training. I believe that Boudreau sums it up best by saying "the Achilles heel (of the ERC program) might be the person who teaches it" (*interview*). By all accounts, teachers are overall unsure about how comfortable they feel with this program (Boudreau; Djandji; LeBihan; Nahidi *interviews*). At the two extremes some teachers have expressed excitement over the new program while others have complained about the burden of learning a brand new program which covers such large breadth of topics (LeBihan *interview*). The majority of teachers have reported feeling unprepared to convey this material to their students (Djandj *interview*). Boudreau, when training teachers for any program, always emphasizes the need for teachers to have knowledge that extends beyond the program requirements that they are teaching (*interview*). Certainly, this is a difficulty with any new program, but perhaps more so with a program that is so rich with possible topics of discussion and at the same time touches upon many sensitive issues.

Nahidi claims that teachers, when challenged about course material by students from a variety of religious backgrounds, are feeling a lack of confidence in both their own knowledge of religious culture and the program itself (*interview*). For example, the text asserts that the term *hijab* has not been mentioned in Qur'an as the head covering. If a child from a religious background contests this statement made by program, teachers with little knowledge themselves may begin to feel uncertain. In some ways, teachers can be silenced by the certainty of their students. Facts such as these are not always common knowledge to all who follow a religion. Some Muslims might be surprised to learn that there is no Qur'anic reference to *hijab* in the

same way that many Christians are surprised to learn that references to head coverings for women are found in the New Testament of the Bible (Nahidi *interview*). In Nahidi's opinion, this uncertainty may cause teachers to avoid pushing children to expand their knowledge further, something they are often encouraged to do within other subject areas, or to go beyond what is most obviously presented within text books and teacher guides (*interview*).

Before the implementation of this program in 2008, teachers in the English Montreal School Board received two full days of training on the ERC program which Djandji believes is the most training given to teachers at any school board (*interview*). The process began by asking for teachers interested in the program to volunteer to be trained as facilitators, who would in turn help to train other teachers and then act as resource persons for the program during the upcoming school year (Djandji *interview*). In addition, there is ongoing training offered to teachers throughout the school year, as there is for all programs required by the MEQ. For teachers currently pursuing a degree in secondary education, specializations of various types are offered in ERC in some universities (Boudreau; Nahidi *interviews*).

At the elementary school level, where teachers are generalists, very few courses in this area are mandatory. For example, at McGill University in Montreal, where the secondary level specialization in the ERC program is paired with a specialization in history, future teachers are required to take a minimum of 21 credits in the area in ERC related courses; this amounts to 7 semester-long courses (Boudreau *interview*). Those studying to become elementary school teachers are only required to take 6 credits, or 2 semester-long courses, in the area of ERC (Boudreau *interview*). Despite the fact that these education students may choose to take more than 2 classes in this area, and the fact that the ERC program is only taught for one hour a week at the elementary level, it is worrisome that so little training is required for such a sensitive topic.

It is also no wonder that these teachers then report feeling overwhelmed by the program material (Nahidi *interview*).

Once working within a school, teachers have the opportunity to pursue ongoing training in ERC, and other programs, on designated pedagogical days. There are only a handful of these days per school year however and according to LeBihan those who teach several subjects often feel pressure to attend workshops for programs which are allotted more time in the overall education system such as mathematics and languages (*interview*). In addition, some school boards have decided to offer teachers the opportunity to improve their knowledge of religious culture by taking them to various places of worship to meet with religious leaders in the community (LeBihan *interview*). However, this is done outside of working hours and on a completely voluntary basis (LeBihan *interview*). Thus, specialists and those most keen about teaching the ERC program are more likely to benefit from these days.

Despite these concerns, Quebec has been hailed as a trailblazer in the task of multicultural education. Many argue that teaching Western knowledge as the only truth devalues what minorities learn at home, from their religious communities and in some cases their country of origin (Seljak 192). Therefore, the new program can be understood as emerging out of an attempt to address institutional discrimination in schools. Furthermore, Lois Sweet argues that when children are taught to respect what they do not understand their tolerance remains superficial which poses a significant risk to society (Seljak 188). This program is meant to give students not only a greater understanding of the diverse society in which they live but also an appreciation for one another. When understood in this light, the importance of education about religion becomes clear. The ERC program in Quebec is meant to give students the tools

necessary to respond to world events, such as 9/11 or the Israel Palestine conflict in the Middle East, as well as the tools necessary to understand their neighbors and live in harmony with them.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the ERC program follows a more or less Kymlickian model of multicultural education. This model privileges the promotion of liberal democratic values such as autonomy, public spiritedness, sense of justice, civility and tolerance, but also requires a respect for diverse conceptions of the good life. In addition, this model supports the use of schools as a vehicle for the transmission of these values to future citizens. As we have seen, although Beaman would agree with many aspects of Kymlicka's model of multicultural education, her model of deep equality calls into question the language of reasonable accommodation used in the liberal democratic approach. She is particularly concerned with the power relations present in Canadian society between normative Christianity and everyone else. As discussed in chapter two, I think that her criticisms serve as important cautions for the ERC program particularly in the area of teacher training. If teachers are made aware of criticisms of the liberal approach to multicultural education, they may then work to avoid some of the pitfalls outlined by Beaman thereby creating a more inclusive classroom.

I think it is important to stress that the adoption of the ERC program by the province of Quebec should be understood as one response to the multicultural/intercultural project among many. As seen in chapter two, there are a multitude of education systems in Canada, some of which include the topic of religion and others which do not. With the exception of the program adopted by Newfoundland and Labrador, I think that Canada has done a poor job of addressing the question of religion in public schools. Many schools avoid this topic altogether or focus on only one tradition. Approaches which fail to address the growing religious diversity in Canada do not give students the tools necessary to become citizens who feel confident in their ability to



address the issues related to this diversity.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion such approaches also reinforce the notion that talking about religion in the public sphere is taboo. The deficit of public reason in this area, and general religious illiteracy among citizens, is symptomatic of this hesitancy to address questions surrounding religion. In a country that so clearly and proudly identifies itself with the multicultural project, I find this deficit peculiar. Though I do not believe that religion can be subsumed under the category of culture, I think that there are important parallels between arguments for the need of improved race relations and arguments for the need of improved interfaith relations. I think that at the center of each these projects is a need for increased understanding of the other. The importance of this understanding is reflected in the ERC program through the identification of the recognition of others among its main goals.

I believe that the development and adoption of the ERC program speaks to Quebec's view that education has a major impact on the creation of a tolerant and respectful society. In this paper I have shown that theories about liberal democracy and interculturalism have informed the creation and implementation of the ERC program, which in turn helps to develop a certain kind of public reason among students. This sense of public reason then informs the kinds of policies these future citizens will choose to pursue and the kind of political tendencies they will choose to support. At the same time this program has become a subject of study for scholars, informing new ways of engaging with religion. In addition, the framework set up by this program establishes the terms in which both students and policy makers engage with material on the topic of religion, which has a profound effect on their ability to appreciate the concerns of members of diverse religious traditions. By increasing the knowledge base of future citizens, the ERC program has clear implications for the types of policies that will be both pursued and supported

---

<sup>17</sup> I would like to make it clear that I am not arguing against all forms of confessional education, only those which do not in some meaningful way address a variety of religious traditions.

by the government of Quebec. This province has been at the center of much of the debates over religious diversity in Canada. Recently several major court cases concerning the rights of religious minorities, such as *Syndicat of Northcrest v. Amselem* in 2004 and *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* in 2006, have taken place in Quebec. This is a province genuinely struggling with the issue of religious diversity. In some areas, such as education, Quebec is being called progressive while in other areas it is labeled traditional. If the ERC program is retained in its current form, from grades one to eleven, I believe it will strengthen Quebec's commitment to religious diversity.

The fact that this program was introduced on the heels of the Bouchard Taylor Commission on reasonable accommodation only serves to add an exclamation point behind the notion that changes must be made in order for the Canadian multiculturalism project to be successful. Among other things the Bouchard Taylor report was the first official document to name Islamophobia as an issue in Canadian society. In light of this recognition, I believe that long term studies of the ERC program are crucial in order to assess whether or not this program accomplishes what it has set out to do. In the mean time, though not without its challenges, the ERC program has created an important space for dialogue about religion and issues of diversity. It supports the exploration of a variety of religious and cultural traditions by students, allowing them to be part of the constantly evolving dialogue between these traditions. The ERC program supports the notion that the study of religion can play a role in public education. By attempting to teach children about an array of cultures and religions this program attempts to empower students to be successful and responsible global citizens of the future. As we have seen, the adoption of this program has marked a significant shift in the way the study of religion is

presented in Quebec schools. If kept as part of the curriculum, the ERC program will have a profound effect on the way in which future generations relate to and discuss religion.

## Works Cited

- Beaman, Lori G. "A Cross-National Comparison of Approaches to Religious Diversity: Canada, France, and the United States." *Religion and Diversity in Canada*. Eds. Beaman, Lori G. and Peter Beyer. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2008. Print.
- . *Defining Harm: Religious Freedom and the Limits of the Law*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008. Print.
- . "Religious Diversity in Canada : Negotiating a Burden or Embracing a Possibility?" Dunning Trust Public Lecture. Grant Hall Queen's University, Kingston. October 19<sup>th</sup> 2009. Lecture.
- . "Canada: Religious Freedom Written and Lived." in *The New Religious Question: State Regulation or State Interference? Public Management of Religious Diversity*, edited by Pauline Côté and Jeremy Gunn. Brussels: Peter Lang Publishers, 2006, 113-130. Print.
- . "Religion and Rights: The Illusion of Freedom and the Reality of Control." *Culture and Religion: Special Issue: "Religion, Law and Human Rights,"* edited by Winnifred Sullivan and Rosalind Hackett. 6.1 (2005):17-29. Print.
- Bouchard, Gérard and Charles Taylor. *Building the Future. A Time for Reconciliation*. Commission de consultation sure les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles. 2008. Web. 25 October 2009.
- Bouchard, Gérard. "Nation et co-intégration contre la pensée dichotomique." *Repères en Mutation : identité et citoyenneté dans le Québec contemporain*. Eds. Jocelyn Maclure and Alain Gagnon. Montréal : Québec Amérique, 2001. 21-36. Print.
- Boudreau, Spencer. *Personal Interview*. June 17<sup>th</sup> 2010.
- Boudreau, Spencer, et al. "Losing Faith in Education." *Montreal Gazette*, 20 November 2005. *ProQuest Web*. 23 July 2010.
- Bumstead, J.M. *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.
- Canada. *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Ottawa: 1982. Web. 10 June 2010.
- . *The Constitution Act, 1867*. Web. 23 July 2010.
- Carrens, Joseph. *Culture, Citizenship and Community: A contextual exploration of Justice as Evenhandedness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

- Callen, Eamonn. "Discrimination and Religious Schooling." *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*. Eds. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 45-67. Print.
- Dickenson John and Brian Young. *A Short History of Quebec*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Print.
- Djandji, Halette. *Personal Interview*. June 16<sup>th</sup> 2010.
- Dufour, Andrée. *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec*. Quebec: Boreal, 1997. Print.
- Farrow, Douglas. *Report from Douglas Farrow respecting Loyola High School's and John Zucci's demand for exemption from the requirements of the ERC curriculum*. Montreal: 2008. Personal Communication.
- Feinberg, Walter. "Religious Education in Liberal Democratic Societies: The Question of Accountability and Autonomy." *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*. Eds. Walter Feinberg and Kevin McDonough. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 385-413. Print.
- Kymlicka, Will. "*Liberal Democracy and Ethnocultural Diversity*." Social and Political Philosophy Seminar. Watson Hall, Kingston. September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009. Lecture.
- . *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.
- . *Politics in the vernacular: nationalism, multiculturalism, and citizenship*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.
- LeBihan, Nicole. *Personal Interview*. June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010.
- Lefebvre, Solange. "Between Law and Public Opinion: the Case of Québec." *Religion and Diversity in Canada*. Eds. Beaman, Lori G. and Peter Beyer. Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2008. Print.
- Levinson, Meira. "Common Schools and Multicultural Education." *Journal of Philosophy and Education*. 41.4 (2007): 625-642. Print.
- . *The Demands of Liberal Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.
- Macedo, Stephen. "Liberalism and Group Identities." *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 414-436. Print.
- Maclure, Jocelyn. *Quebec Identity: the challenge of pluralism*. Trans. Peter Feldstein. Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Print.

- McAndrew, Marie. "Diversité culturelle et religieuse : divergences des rhétoriques, convergences des pratiques?" *Pluralisme, citoyenneté & éducation*. Eds. France Gagnon, Marie McAndrew and Michel Pagé. Montréal : Harmattan, 1996. 287-317. Print.
- . *Immigration et diversité à l'école : le débat québécois dans une perspective comparative*. Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2001. Print.
- McDonough, Kevin. "Multinational Civic Education." *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*. Eds. Walter Feinberg and Kevin McDonough. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 351-384. Print.
- "Militants Laïques et religieux s'opposent au nouveau cours d'éthique." *La Presse Canadienne*, 24 April 2008. Web. 23 July 2010.
- Montgomery, Sue. "Ethics class ruling might affect other schools." *The Gazette*, 20 June 2010: A4. Print.
- Nahidi, Shahram. *Personal Interview*. June 17<sup>th</sup> 2010.
- Pratte, Sonia. *La place de la religion dans les écoles publiques des provinces anglo-canadiennes*. Quebec: 1999. Web. 19 October 2009.
- Proulx, Jean-Pierre. "Democratie scolaire et participation parentale." *Pluralisme, citoyenneté & éducation*. Eds. France Gagnon, Marie McAndrew and Michel Pagé. Montréal : Harmattan, 1996. 255-286. Print.
- Proulx, Jean-Pierre. *Remarques generals sur le projet de loi 95 et l'enonce de politique ministerielle sur la mise en place d'un nouveau programme d'ethique et de culture religieuse*. Quebec: 2005. Web. 19 October 2009.
- Quebec. *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Quebec: 1975. Web. 14 July 2010.
- . Comité sur les Affaires Religieuses. *Consultation on the Draft Ethics and Religious Culture Program*. Quebec: 2007. Web. 19 October 2009.
- . "Personal Development." *Quebec Education Program: Elementary Education*. Quebec: 2008. 267-269 and 287-380. Web. 14 April 2010.
- . Groupe de travail sur la place de la religion a l'école. *Laïcité et Religion*. Quebec : 1999. Web. 15 February 2010.
- . "Mandats et Membres." *mels.gouv.qc.ca/affairesreligieuses*. Comité sur les Affaires Religieuses, n.d. Web. 15 April 2010.

- . "Personal Development" *Quebec Education Program: Secondary Education*. Quebec: 2008. 423-427 and 455-540. Web. 14 April 2010.
- . Comité sur les Affaires Religieuses. *Secular Schools in Quebec: A Necessary Change in Institutional Culture*. Quebec: 2006. Web. 22 October 2009.
- . Comité Protestant. *Un seul programme non confessionnel, des choix éducatifs pour chaque école*. Quebec: 1999. Web. 19 October 2009.
- Québec Cour Supérieure. "Décision: D.L. c. Commission scolaire des Chênes." *Société québécoise d'information juridique*. 31 August 2009. Web. 18 April 2010.
- . "Décision: Loyola High School et John Zucchi c. Michelle Courchesne, en sa qualité de ministre de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport." *Société québécoise d'information juridique*. 18 June 2010. Web. 25 June 2010.
- Reich, Robert. *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.
- Seljak, David. "Education, Multiculturalism, and Religion." *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*. Eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak. Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005. Print.
- Spinner-Halev, Jeff. "Extending Diversity: Religion in Private and Public Education." *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*. Eds. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 68-95. Print.
- United Nations. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. December 1966. Web. 4 July 2010.

## **Appendix A**

### **Sample Recruitment Emails**

#### Recruitment e-mail for informants working at school board

Hello,

I am currently pursuing a Masters in Religion and Modernity at Queen's University. I am writing my thesis on the new Ethics and Religious Culture program currently being taught in Quebec schools. In order to gain a better understanding of the implementation of this program, as well as a sense of the kind of reception it has received among both parents and teachers, I would like to interview someone at your school board as ERC program expert.

Your help in this portion of my research is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
Erin LeBrun

#### Recruitment e-mail for expert informants working at the university:

Hello,

I am currently pursuing a Masters in Religion and Modernity at Queen's University. I am writing my thesis on the new Ethics and Religious Culture program currently being taught in Quebec schools. In order to gain a better understanding of the implementation of this program, as well as a sense of the kind of reception it has received among both parents and teachers, I would like to interview you as an expert teacher educator.

Your help in this portion of my research is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
Erin LeBrun



## Appendix B

### Sample Information and Consent Form

Project title: Taking Account of Religious Diversity: a case study of Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Researcher: Erin LeBrun, M.A. candidate in the department of Religious Studies, Queen's University

Sponsoring institution: Queen's University

#### **What is this study about?**

This project will involve four sections. First, I will present a multicultural, intercultural education model as expressed by Will Kymlicka which places an emphasis on the importance of transmitting overarching 'Canadian' values to students. These values are meant to provide the group cohesion necessary to create solidarity in the pluralist state. I will also describe Lori Beaman's model of deep equality which stresses the importance of valuing religious diversity. I will then examine Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program through the lenses of these two models paying particular attention to the Proulx Report (1997), which called for the creation of a secular school system, all reports by the *Comite sure les Affaires Religieuses* leading up the creation of the program, and the final curriculum given to teachers. Next, I will consider various critiques of the ERC program. In order to accomplish this, I intend to conduct 4-6 interviews with relevant ERC resource people, both at the school board level and the university level, in order to gain a better sense of how teachers are being trained to present this program and the kind of critiques that have arisen since the implementation of this program. Finally, based on my analysis, I will draw conclusions about this program understands both religion and the study of religion.

The study will require one interview which will last between 1 hour 30 minutes and 2 hours. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

**Is my participation voluntary?** Yes. Although it be would be greatly appreciated if you would answer all material as frankly as possible, you should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time by sending a written request to the researcher.

**What will happen to my responses?** Interviews will be recorded. Both the researcher and researcher's supervisor will have access to full audio transcripts. Raw data will be kept in a safe place and destroyed once the project has been completed. Participants have been chosen for this study because of their expertise in the ERC program and therefore no guarantee of anonymity is being made.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** No.

**What if I have concerns?** In the event that you have any complaints, concerns, or questions about this research, please feel free to contact one of the following people.

Researcher: Erin LeBrun; [8el25@queensu.ca](mailto:8el25@queensu.ca)

Project supervisor: Dr. Pamela Dickey Young (613.533.6000, ext.74324); [youngpd@queensu.ca](mailto:youngpd@queensu.ca)

Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University (613-533-6081); [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca)

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Once you have read this Letter of Consent and Information and had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction you are asked to sign this letter and keep a copy for your records.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please confirm the following statements by initialing this statement below,

\_\_\_\_ I am granting permission for the researcher to use a tape recorder (and/or)

\_\_\_\_ I am granting permission for the researcher to attribute my name to any data from her interview with me.

## Appendix C

### Sample Interview Questions

- 1) Please briefly describe the main goals of the ERC program as you understand them.
- 2) How are these goals to be achieved?
- 3) Will Kymlicka, a notable political philosopher from Queen's University, proposes a multicultural education model which places an emphasis on the importance of transmitting overarching 'Canadian' values to students. In this model, these values are meant to provide the group cohesion necessary to create solidarity in a pluralist state.
  - (a) In what ways, if any, do you see the ERC program fitting into this model?
  - (b) In what ways, if any, do you see the ERC program diverging from this model?
- 4) Lori Beaman, a notable sociologist from the University of Ottawa, proposes a model for multicultural education which stresses the importance of valuing diversity religious diversity. In this model, a sense of deep equality between members of different groups is emphasized.
  - (a) In what ways, if any, do you see the ERC program fitting into this model?
  - (b) In what ways, if any, do you see the ERC program diverging from this model?
- 5) In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of this program? The greatest weaknesses?
- 6) In your view what have been the major commendations of this program from...
  - (a) students?
  - (b) parents?
  - (c) teachers?
- 7) In your view what have been the major criticisms of this program from...
  - (a) students?
  - (b) parents?
  - (c) teachers?
- 8) In your opinion, will any changes be made to this program in the near future? Why?