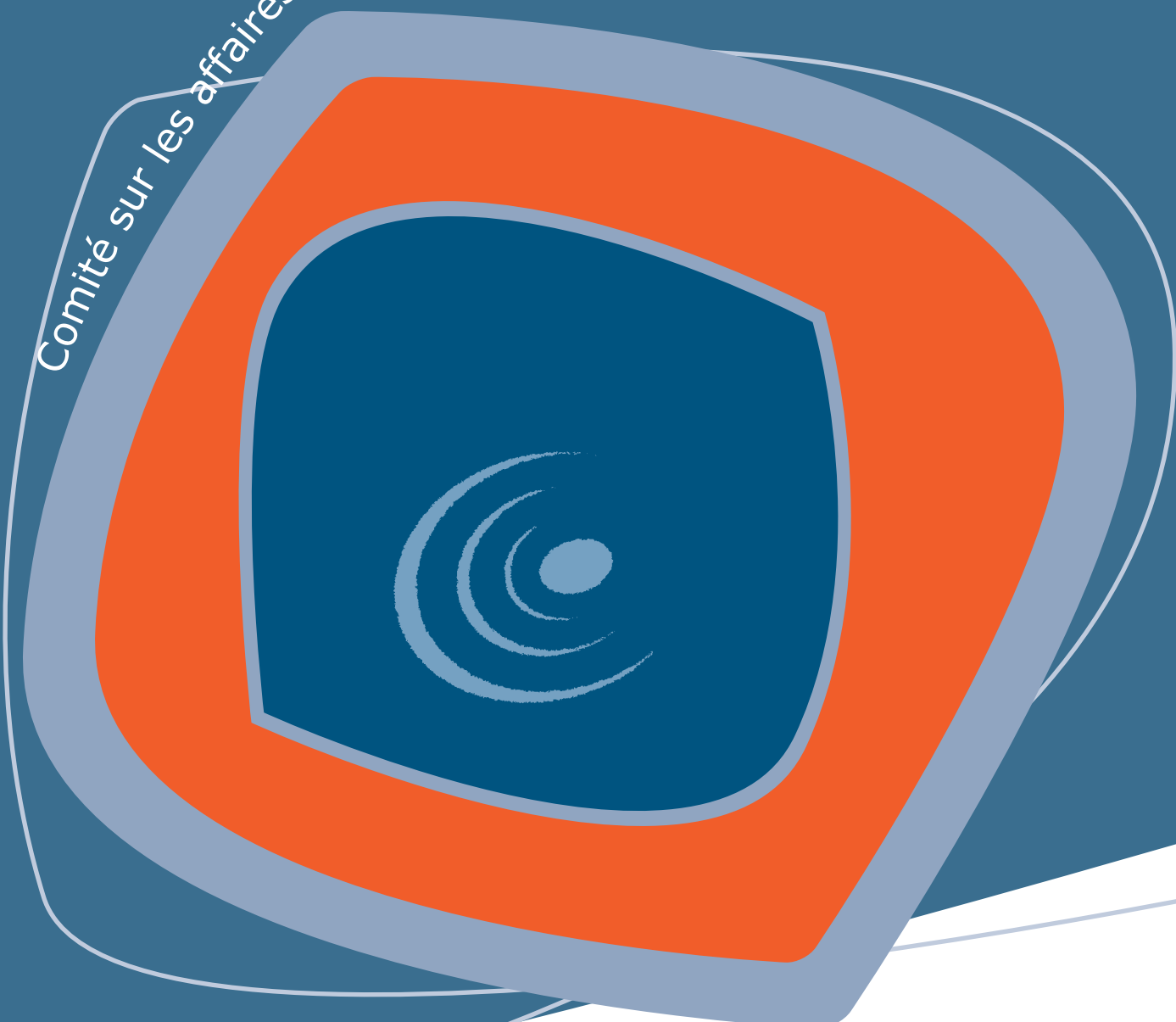


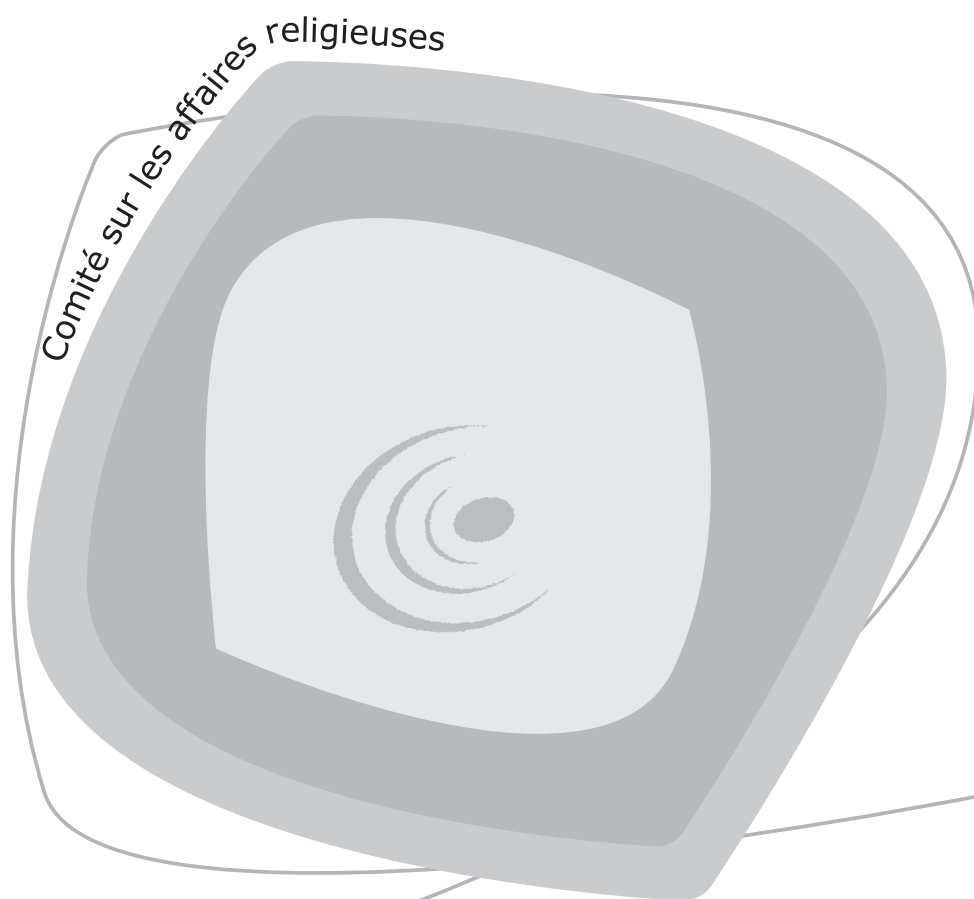
Comité sur les affaires religieuses



Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports
July 2007

Québec 



Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports
July 2007

Brief adopted at the 47th meeting
of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR),
June 14 and 15, 2007
(See Appendix for list of Committee members)

Supervision

Roger Boisvert
Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses

Coordination

Lorraine Leduc
Comité sur les affaires religieuses

Author

Claude Lafrenière
Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses

Translation

Direction de la production en langue anglaise
Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

© Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2007—07-00610

ISBN: 978-2-550-50871-7 (Print)

ISBN: 978-2-550-50872-4 (PDF)

Legal Deposit—Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2007

This document may be copied provided the source is acknowledged.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1 General Assessment of the Program	3
1.1 The Ministerial Orientations	3
1.2 The Results of the Consultation.....	3
1.3 The Québec Secular School Model	3
2 The Religious Aspects of the Program	4
2.1 Shaping Elements.....	5
2.1.1 The Balance Between the First Two Competencies	5
2.1.2 The Concept of Religious Culture	7
2.1.3 The Reorganization of Themes in Religious Culture	7
2.1.4 Compulsory Components	8
2.2 Related Content.....	9
2.2.1 The Concept of the Sacred	10
2.2.2 The Distinction Between Catholicism and Protestantism.....	10
2.2.3 The Gender Issue	11
2.2.4 Other Elements	11
3 Program Implementation	11
3.1 The Teacher's Professional Stance	12
3.2 Communicating With Parents	14
3.3 Teaching Materials	15
Conclusion	16
Recommendations	18
Appendix	
Members of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses.....	19

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of the *Education Act*, which stipulates that the Comité sur les affaires religieuses shall “give its opinion on the religious aspects of the local programs of study in ethics and religious culture submitted to the Minister for approval or established by the Minister” (s. 477.18.3), the Committee is submitting its brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports on the draft Ethics and Religious Culture program made available in May 2007.¹ This brief comes at the end of a cycle begun in May 2005, with the announcement of the ministerial orientations for this program.²

To follow up on these orientations, in June 2005 the government adopted Bill 95, which provides for the repeal of the notwithstanding clauses and the end of the system of choosing between confessional and moral education on June 30, 2008. The Direction des programmes of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) had, therefore, very little time in which to carry out an exceptional mandate, one that would consist in the simultaneous establishment of a new ethics and religious culture program at all elementary and secondary school levels. This was a bold, demanding and distinctive plan. To facilitate the introduction of this program and to ensure that it complied with the ministerial orientations, in September 2005 Education Minister Jean-Marc Fournier gave the Committee the mandate to consult religious groups, organizations and resource persons on the draft program tabled on September 1, 2006.

Faced with the limited time at its disposal, and the scope of the task before it, the Committee agreed, along with the Direction des programmes, to establish close collaboration between the two bodies in order to foster the development of a quality program. The Committee launched its consultation process in the fall of 2006 and submitted its report to the Minister on May 1, 2007. Outlining the generally favourable reception accorded the draft program, this report presented the main demands of the people consulted, as well as the Committee's own ideas on the project.

-
1. This preliminary version is slightly different from the version tabled with the Minister in July 2007.
 2. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *Establishment of an Ethics and Religious Culture Program: Providing Future Direction for All Québec Youth* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 2005.

Having familiarized itself with the May 2007 version, the Committee is now in a position to note the changes the writing team made to the program, and examine them in the light of the criteria presented in its consultation report—in other words, the ministerial orientations, the results of the consultation and the Québec secular school model. The Committee is also providing the Minister with its recommendations regarding the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

1 GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The Committee's assessment of the program is based on three criteria that it considers essential for both the quality of the draft and successful implementation: the ministerial orientations, the results of the consultation, and the Québec secular school model.

1.1 The Ministerial Orientations

The orientations announced by the Minister in May 2005 constitute the foundation of the Ethics and Religious Culture program. This is why the consultation conducted by the Committee in the fall of 2006 was meant to ensure that the program complied with these orientations.

The Committee considers that the current version of the program is perfectly in keeping with the general aim of the orientations, as well as with its principles and the learning focuses in religious culture. This draft makes it possible to become acquainted with Québec's religious heritage and to be open to religious diversity through ongoing and progressive learning that is adapted to the student's reality and that contributes to community life.

1.2 The Results of the Consultation

The religious groups, resource people and organizations consulted in the fall of 2006 expressed their agreement with the program objectives, namely, *recognition of others* and *the pursuit of the common good*.

These objectives will be all the more easily attainable if the program is well received by the population as a whole. In this respect, the Committee considers that the changes made satisfy to a significant degree the requests of the people consulted, and will ensure that the vast majority of them, and indeed the population as whole, are in agreement with the full range of program content.

1.3 The Québec Secular School Model

The Québec secular school model must also be taken into consideration when making an assessment of the Ethics and Religious Culture program. Stemming from Québec

government decisions made over the past decade, decisions that have redefined the relationship between religion and public schools, this model was set out in a previous Committee brief.³ Five elements have shaped the model in question: (1) respect for freedom of conscience and religion; (2) the principle of the neutrality of the public school; (3) consideration of the student's spiritual development; (4) the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service; and (5) the Ethics and Religious Culture program.⁴

The Committee is of the opinion that the draft Ethics and Religious Culture program, as it was written, fits well with the Québec secular school model.⁵

2 THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM

Like the overall assessment, the position expressed in the following pages refers to the ministerial orientations, the results of the consultation and the Québec secular school model.

The Committee considers it important, nevertheless, to explain its point of view with respect to those elements of the program that seemed to have the greatest shaping influence. Points of lesser import will be covered more briefly.

Moreover, we will not review requests that were dealt with adequately or that do not require any further clarifications from the Committee.

-
3. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *Secular Schools in Québec: A Necessary Change in Institutional Culture - Brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports* (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006.)
 4. One of the main characteristics of this model is that the Ethics and Religious Culture program does not have any special connection to the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service, unlike the situation under the Catholic confessional system, where the pastoral animator often worked closely with the teacher of the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction program but generally collaborated very little with teachers of other subjects. In this respect, the Committee is pleased to note that the Ethics and Religious Culture program is structured in a way that makes it possible to avoid such a situation.
 5. The Committee considers that the Ethics and Religious Culture program, in being non confessional, respects the principle of freedom of conscience and religion. The Committee stipulates, however, that it does not have the legal competency to rule on this matter.

2.1 Shaping Elements

The Committee will deal with the elements that shaped the program in three steps: first, it will enumerate the problems that were raised during the consultation, as well as the comments it made in its report. It will then present the solutions provided by the team that drafted the program in response to these remarks. Finally, the Committee will analyze these solutions in the light of the criteria outlined above.

2.1.1 The Balance Between the First Two Competencies

The program is intended to promote the acquisition of three competencies.⁶ A number of the people consulted said that they felt uneasy about the wording of the first two competencies in the version of the program that appeared in September 2006. They saw an imbalance between the first competency, which stated that the student *takes a considered position on ethical issues*, and the second competency, according to which the student *demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion*. Less was required, they said, with respect to the religious component, which thereby appeared to be devalued in comparison to the ethical component.

In response to the requests of those consulted, the program writing team made changes designed to establish a balance between the first two competencies. It decided to focus the first competency on the process of ethical reflection (*Carries out thorough reflection on ethical questions*) instead of changing the wording of the second competency.

The Committee agrees with this decision for several reasons. First of all, it ensures that there is a balance between the first two competencies by locating both of them in the cognitive field. Then, the wording of the competencies appears to be adapted to the nature of their focus: ethics presupposes a process of reflection and the development of related skills, while religious culture is constructed by bringing people into contact with the ways in which religious phenomena become rooted in culture in general. This decision also has the advantage of eliminating the ambiguity generated by the expression “takes a considered position,” which could have been interpreted as asking people to subscribe to specific

6. The three competencies are as follows: *Carries out thorough reflection on ethical questions*; *Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion*; *Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life*.

content, with the difficulty this would have involved with respect to neutrality and the freedom of conscience and religion, if it were applied to the religious sphere.

Finally, the Committee is of the opinion that the writers' decision respects the ministerial orientations. Indeed, what they have placed under the learning focus *the ability to take a reflective position on moral or ethical issues* has to do with analysis, understanding and discernment with respect to various visions of the world, human beings and life. This is a matter, then, of cognitive operations, which are also called upon in the wording of the second competency, namely, *Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion*.

The Committee is quite comfortable with this position in that it corresponds with what it affirmed in a previous brief,⁷ specifically with respect to learning that is to be acquired in the field of religion. The Committee presented one aspect of this—"taking a stance on beliefs"—not as an invitation to subscribe to a particular religion, but as what would be asked of students, in order to help them clarify their relationship to religion. The Committee further pointed out that this learning, which differs from yet complements what students learn in their families or belief groups, must respect the school's mission.

As for the statement of the second competency, some of those consulted feared that the term "phenomenon" might lead to undue distancing and objectification with regard to the religious dimension. To address this concern, the writing team pointed out in its introduction to the program that the phenomenon of religion could be grasped "in its *experiential*,⁸ historic, doctrinal, moral, ritualistic, literary, artistic, social and political dimensions." The Committee also introduced the theme of religious experience to Secondary Cycle Two.

7. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *A New Approach to Religious Education in School: A Choice Regarding Today's Challenges - Brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2004), pp. 14-16.

8. Italics ours.

2.1.2 The Concept of Religious Culture

The consultation revealed that some people were confused with respect to the meaning of the expression “religious culture” in the program title. Some took this as referring to faith-based education, while those who did not see tradition as distinguishing between “religion” and “culture,” the expression was something of a pleonasm.

The Committee transmitted a request for clarification to the writing team, distinguishing between the fact of “belonging to a religious culture” and “acquiring cultural knowledge” relating to religion.

To follow up requests for clarification, the writing team specified in the introduction to the program that religious culture:

is aimed at an informed understanding of the many forms of religious expression present in Québec society and in the world. It is called “cultural” because, not being confessional, it no longer offers students a particular set of beliefs or moral reference points, and because, like “literary,” “scientific,” or “technological” culture, it targets the capacity to grasp the field of religion in its various forms of expression.

The Committee is of the opinion that the clarification provided removes all ambiguity from the concept of “religious culture” by setting it apart from the confessional sphere and explaining it in terms of knowledge.

2.1.3 The Reorganization of Themes in Religious Culture

A significant portion of those consulted indicated that religious traditions, as presented in the program, could appear segmented and reduced to a series of external forms without any connection to the believer’s experience. The same people also thought that students were in danger of not grasping the coherence, spirit and identity specific to each religion.

The Committee echoed these criticisms by suggesting that Secondary Cycle Two students be given a range of themes diverse enough to facilitate an understanding of religions, one capable of integrating their historical and experiential dimensions. Religions could therefore be grasped as living, rich and complex realities in constant evolution. The Committee is of the opinion that giving students opportunities to develop an integrative perspective on

traditions different from their own is necessary for a true recognition of others and an informed understanding of religion.

The program writing team replied to these requests by reconfiguring Secondary Cycle Two, introducing the themes “Religions down through time” and “The religious experience” alongside “Existential questions” and “Religious references in arts and culture.”

The Committee is delighted with these modifications, particularly since these two new themes should enable students to make meaningful connections between various aspects of a religion, so that they can grasp its own specific coherence, complexity and ethos. The Committee considers it important to encourage Secondary Cycle Two teachers to take advantage of this option, to ensure that their students’ learning progresses, specifically with regard to their ability to synthesize information.

In elementary school and Secondary Cycle One, the program is designed to ensure that the students acquire basic information and begin to see how its various components are connected. This should normally prepare them to summarize what they have learned at the end of their studies. This pedagogical method will help foster ongoing, progressive learning, thanks particularly to the learning and evaluation situations (LES), in which a diverse range of content is integrated.

Moreover, the reduction in the number of themes has made it possible, particularly at the elementary school level, to better match the students’ cognitive capacities. Readers will recall that many of the people consulted feared that elementary school students might confuse aspects of other religious traditions with those of their own, and this at a time when their identities are still in the process of formation.

2.1.4 Compulsory Components

One of the requests for clarification made during the consultation pertained to compulsory components. Some people feared that certain elements deemed essential or basic to their religious tradition would not receive the attention they deserve.

In this regard, the Committee's report highlighted the school's responsibility to ensure that compulsory content be covered in each cycle.

The May 2007 version of the program emphasizes the logic behind the choice of compulsory content, based on the historical and cultural importance of Québec's religious traditions. As this document stipulated, teachers must ensure that:

- Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) is covered throughout each year of a cycle
- Judaism and Native spirituality are covered on a number of occasions in each year of a cycle
- Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are covered on a number of occasions during a cycle
- Cultural expressions and those derived from representations of the world and of human beings that define the meaning and value of human experience apart from religious beliefs and allegiances are covered in a cycle
- during a cycle, other religious traditions may be addressed, according to the reality and needs of the class

The program stipulates, moreover, that only the themes and related content are compulsory, while all the examples are just that—examples. This latitude enables teachers to adapt their teaching to the communities in which they work.

Thus, with regard to compulsory components, the program is consistent with the ministerial orientations, which highlight the importance of familiarizing students with Québec's religious heritage and anchoring learning in the pluralist reality of the students and of Québec culture.

2.2 Related Content

Various points mentioned in the requests of those consulted will not be presented here, since the program writing team has already provided the appropriate answers. The Committee would like, however, to review some aspects of the content, which, because of their importance or the type of treatment they have received, are deserving of some clarification. We are referring to the concept of the "sacred," the distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism, and the issue of gender.

2.2.1 The Concept of the Sacred

The inclusion of the “sacred” as a theme in this program generated some criticism. The notion of the “sacred” was made to appear, some felt, as a category to explain the religious, a view that does not correspond with the understanding that a number of religions have of themselves. In responding to the comments of those consulted, the Committee requested that the program make this concept a little less prominent.

In response to these requests, the drafting committee decided to drop the theme of the “sacred” from the final version of the program, and to replace it with the “religious” in the theme dealing with the arts.

The Committee is satisfied with this solution, for it considers that a good part of what is covered by the concept of the “sacred” could be dealt with by exploring the theme of religious experience.

2.2.2 The Distinction Between Catholicism and Protestantism

During the consultation, various religious groups were quick to point out that no distinction was made between Catholicism and Protestantism in that part of the program dealing with the religious heritage of Québec, where these two Christian traditions have played a pre-eminent role. The Committee highlighted this fact in its report, stipulating that this drawback was inimical to the recognition of what is specific to each of the religious traditions.

The writing team therefore modified aspects of the compulsory content, as well as some of the examples, throughout the elementary and secondary school cycles.

In the Committee’s opinion, these modifications should facilitate the work of the teachers, who will have to make the necessary distinctions between the two traditions. Thanks to these distinctions, it will also be easier for the students to familiarize themselves with Québec’s religious heritage, as called for in the ministerial orientations.

2.2.3 The Gender Issue

During the consultation, various organizations pointed out that the question of women's place in religion had been ignored. The Committee notified the program writing team that this deficiency should be rectified: in other words, the Committee invited the team to highlight the contribution that women have made to religion through both their ideas and actions. The Committee further indicated that the language used in the program, as well as the choice of examples provided, should give women greater visibility.

The writing team followed up these requests by specifically including related content under the "Existential questions" theme, and by supplying examples throughout the elementary and secondary cycles. The Committee considers that the changes made will enable teachers to give greater visibility to the role of the sexes in religion.

2.2.4 Other Elements

The report on the consultation also identified other problems: the absence of elements deemed essential to each religion, no discussion of the secularization process currently taking place in Québec, the undue amount of space granted to new religious movements, and no mention of religions' social and political commitment, nor of the quest for meaning or the cultural diversity at the heart of the religious traditions.

The Committee is of the opinion that the adaptations and readjustments made to these elements are satisfactory and do not require further clarification.

3 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure that a program is successfully applied, a number of factors must be taken into consideration. In the case of the Ethics and Religious Culture program, the Committee would like to underline the importance of the teacher's professional stance and the contribution that the competency on dialogue provides in this matter. The Committee also wishes to draw attention to the relationship the school will have to establish with the parents and the teaching materials to be used in class.

3.1 The Teacher's Professional Stance

One of the factors that emerged from the consultation was the importance of the role teachers will have to play with respect to what students learn in the Ethics and Religious Culture program. Those consulted expressed, among other things, their uneasiness with regard to the way their religious traditions might be dealt with in the classroom.

By expressing this concern, these people look to the teacher who, as a “cultural mediator”, has the responsibility to bring students to demonstrate an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Cultural mediators are passionate about culture and convinced of its importance for the student's development and life in society. They are the ones who kindle students' desire for knowledge and pave the way to it. In religious matters, they transmit cultural heritage to a young generation with a culture of its own. They are also able to pass on a thirst for understanding the many forms of religious expression that have left their mark on human history—and are still doing so.

Obviously, the role of cultural mediator also pertains to teachers dealing with ethical questions, as it does to teachers of other subjects. Like their colleagues, ethics and religious culture teachers work with intellectual tools developed in the sciences, and pass on the latest knowledge acquired by these means. While adapting their teaching to the students' level of education and their intellectual and moral development, they gradually bring them to an awareness of the fact that knowledge is growing and evolving with greater and greater speed.

By placing ethics and religious culture teachers alongside their colleagues in other subjects, one can clearly see the capacity in which they transmit knowledge about religion. As mediators of religious culture—not of religion in the confessional sense of the term—they approach the phenomenon of religion in a manner that is detached and critical, on the one hand, and curious and respectful, on the other; for the impartiality they demonstrate does not abrogate their interest in the transmission of culture. Leaving their personal convictions aside, they do not promote any one religious or philosophical option at the expense of any other, nor do they attempt to have their students adopt a stance on behalf of any specific religion (their own), or against religions (if the teacher is an atheist or agnostic).⁹

9. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, 2006, pp. 33-34.

Thus the professional stance of ethics and religious culture teachers is at once similar to and different from that of those who teach other subjects. Like the latter, ethics and religious culture teaching staff place themselves within the field of culture, and provide access to scientific knowledge. They are different from their colleagues to the extent that the world of convictions and values constitutes the main focus of their teaching. This is why they must be particularly attentive to the respect due to the freedom of conscience and religion of both students and parents.

This requirement is akin to the one which is incumbent upon spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service personnel, since they too come into direct contact with the world of convictions and values as they follow through on very different responsibilities and tasks.¹⁰ Since this service has been in place for more than five years, ethics and religious culture teachers might find it useful to draw on the experience acquired during this time, in order to clarify the issues through concrete examples in which the principle of freedom of conscience and religion is at stake. And discussions with colleagues can also provide the necessary discernment, as well as the search for solutions to the novel and delicate problems that teachers in the field have to contend with.

We should also point out that the program itself provides the teacher with the means required to establish his/her professional stance with respect to religious or ethical questions. The teaching staff will find, in applying the third competency (*Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life*), pedagogical intentions and various means they can use to develop, on their own, attitudes of impartiality, reflectiveness, attentiveness and respect—which will in turn lead the students to value these same attitudes. The students can then engage one another in productive dialogue, notably by learning to express their opinions properly and to see where they stand in relation to others.

10. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2005), *Developing the Inner Life and Changing the World - The Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Service. Ministerial Framework* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2005), pp. 10-11.

In other words, teachers will be equipped to guide the students in their learning about dialogue to the extent that they show, through their attitudes, what is involved in teaching in the area of convictions and values. Professional ethics, therefore, takes teachers back to their role as pedagogues, which consists in helping students to progress in their ethical reflection and in their understanding of the phenomenon of religion, in addition to assisting them to become more aware of where they themselves stand in relation to this world. A secondary school teacher might, for example, have to know how to hold his/her ground when confronted with an adolescent who takes opposition to his/her professional stance.

These considerations once again show the importance that initial and ongoing training should attribute to the acquisition of an appropriate professional stance among ethics and religious culture teaching staff.

3.2 Communicating With Parents

Among the representatives of some religious groups, the consultation revealed certain apprehensions with regard to discrepancies between what would be presented in an ethics and religious culture class, and what parents would consider as consistent with their own convictions. Such discrepancies might lead, these representative felt, to situations that many teachers would find it very difficult to manage. The challenge would certainly be no less daunting for parents who, while wishing to support their children in learning related to this program, would nonetheless find it hard to reconcile their own convictions with either the program content or the way it is applied.

To ensure the successful implementation of the program, the Ministère would do well, before and during implementation, to inform parents about its non-confessional approach, its educational aims, the competencies it promotes and the content it covers. This information will also have to clarify the teacher's role and professional stance, while at the same time taking account of the fact that many parents did not have an opportunity, when they attended school, to develop a knowledge of the phenomenon of religion in its manifold forms of expression, and that many others have moved well away from all forms of religious practice.

It would also be advisable to find ways of encouraging parents to guide and support their children as they go about learning within the context of this program. Parental involvement can help some students overcome a sense of defeat in the face of content that appears to elude them.

Moreover, to help teachers take up the challenge involved in managing the disparity described above, they will have to be made more aware of the role of parents, who have the prime responsibility for their children's education. Teachers will have to show discernment, and respect for the things that parents consider important, so that neither they nor their children come to feel that their values, or what is meaningful for them generally, are misunderstood. It would also be advantageous to have parents recognize the relevance of the approach taken in the Ethics and Religious Culture program, since this should minimize the risk that children will feel as if they are caught between adults' various views.

Finally, to facilitate the relationship with parents and ensure that the program is well received, it is important that each school develop an institutional culture that is open to the wide range of positions on religious and philosophical questions, and that it be able to accommodate people in light of their differences.

3.3 Teaching Materials

The material currently submitted for ministerial approval is made up of two elements: a student's textbook and a teacher's pedagogical guide. This is what is meant by the term "teaching kit." The Committee is concerned about the fact that other documents produced by publishing houses are not verified to see whether they are relevant to the program's aims. In this regard, it wonders about the soundness of the administrative directive, adopted in 1980, which excluded workbooks from the requirement of ministerial approval.

Moreover, attention must be paid to the way in which religious issues are dealt with in the material produced for the other subjects. The manner in which they present the religious traditions must respect the standards established for the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

CONCLUSION

The application of the Ethics and Religious Culture program will make it possible to significantly improve the education students will receive with regard to community life, ethics and religious culture.

To start with, this program calls for a form of school organization which, unlike the former system of options, will not separate students from one another. This new organization, which will bring together students from all walks of life, will provide a context in which they can learn how to engage in dialogue, and discover and adopt attitudes and behaviours conducive to community life in a pluralist society. With respect to education in ethics, the program will allow students to develop their ability to reflect, as well as their discernment and critical judgment when dealing with social issues. For example, in a society faced with the predominance of consumerist values, it will help to develop free, supportive and responsible persons. In the area of religious culture, it will give all students access to Québec's cultural heritage and provide them with tools for understanding the phenomenon of religion in its manifold forms.

This program will therefore significantly contribute to educating informed ethical subjects who are capable of engaging in dialogue and looking at the phenomenon of religion in a lucid manner. By helping students to develop these three competencies, the program will foster the attainment of the aims it proposes, namely, the pursuit of the common good and the recognition of others in their otherness.

The Ethics and Religious Culture program will therefore constitute a significant contribution to the school, particularly in the latter's mission to instruct and to provide qualifications—on the condition, however, that the school makes the implementation of the program a success. Completing changes that have already been made in the area of denominational schooling, this program will make the secular character of Québec's public schools clear, and will enable them to fully affirm themselves as common, inclusive, democratic and open. In fostering the development of institutional cultures, its implementation will facilitate the management of religious diversity, including the practice of reasonable accommodation and voluntary adaptation. In proportion to the efforts that will be made toward this end, we can expect to see a positive impact on all school staff and parents.

Therefore, by means of this new program the school will be able to better contribute to Québec society, which is becoming increasingly pluralistic, while grappling with the challenges associated with identity, integration and community life. As recent debates on these questions have shown, such challenges are of concern to all Quebeckers. The Committee is of the opinion, therefore, that this program will be useful throughout Québec, particularly since different forms of diversity are present everywhere. Less visible than ethnocultural diversity, which is more characteristic of the Montréal area, a diversity of positions relative to religion is discernable in every region of the province. This diversity is manifested in, among other things, the distance that some people have put between themselves and religious institutions, affiliations with more recent religious movements, (which are often based on Christianity) and the complete absence of religious reference points among those who claim to be atheists or agnostics. The Ethics and Religious Culture program fosters an understanding of these different forms of diversity in relation to the world of beliefs with which students come into contact through a variety of means of communication.

For all these reasons, the Committee considers the Ethics and Religious Culture program to be a brilliant response to the educational needs of young Quebeckers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whereas the Ethics and Religious Culture program will enable Québec's schools to better fulfill their educational mission by contributing to students' personal and civic education;

Whereas this program is consistent with the ministerial orientations;

Whereas this program will be well received by a large majority of the people consulted and the population in general;

Whereas this program is fully in keeping with the Québec secular school model;

the Comité sur les affaires religieuses recommends that the Minister:

- approve the draft Ethics and Religious Culture program tabled in July 2007 and ensure that it is implemented in public and private teaching institutions starting in the 2008-2009 school year
- provide teachers with the training they need to take up the challenge facing them, particularly with regard to their professional stance
- ask the Ministère to provide parents with relevant information on the program, before and after its application
- provide the Ministère with the means required to ensure that the teaching materials that will be used in applying this program and others dealing with religious questions are of high quality

Members of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses

Jacques Racine Chair	Professor Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses Université Laval
Rafat Noor Khan	Parent of a child in elementary school Montréal region
Cheryl M. Smith-Debanné	Parent of a child in elementary school Montréal region
Marie Joseph France	Parent of a child in secondary school Montérégie region
Si Ahcène Si Chaib	Parent of a child in secondary school Montréal region
Odette Guay	Elementary school teacher Commission scolaire du Pays-des-Bleuets
Denis J. Roy	Secondary school teacher Commission scolaire des Phares
Roch Bérubé	Director of the school system of Montréal Est, Pointe-aux-Trembles and specialized schools Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île
Suzie Bouchard	Spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service animator Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys
Patrice Brodeur	Professor Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions Université de Montréal
Thomas De Koninck	Philosopher and professor Faculté de philosophie Université Laval

Marie-Andrée Roy

Professor
Département de sciences
des religions
Université du Québec à Montréal

Roger Boisvert

Coordinator
Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir
et du Sport

Lorraine Leduc acts as Committee Coordinator.

For information on this brief, please contact the
Comité sur les affaires religieuses
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 16^e étage
Québec (Québec) G1R 5A5

Telephone: 418-643-7070, extension 3992
Fax: 418-644-7142
E-mail: <car@mels.gouv.qc.ca>
Web site: <www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/affairesreligieuses>

Comité
sur les affaires
religieuses

Québec 