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COMITÉ SUR LES AFFAIRES RELIGIEUSES

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November 15, 2001

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**Acknowledgments**

We would especially like to thank the members of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses for their invaluable assistance in writing this annual report.

November 15, 2001

François Legault  
Minister of State for Education and Employment  
1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 16<sup>e</sup> étage  
Québec (Québec) G1R 5A5

Dear Sir:

On behalf of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR or "the Committee"), I am pleased to submit the Committee's 2000-2001 annual report. This report documents the work completed by the Committee in the first few months since it was established, that is, since its members were nominated on February 5, 2001.

This report also reflects the concerns and goals the Committee holds dear, notably as regards the Basic school regulation, the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service, program orientations and reflection on the place of religion in schools following the adoption of *An Act to amend various legislative provisions respecting education as regards confessional matters*.

The Committee members greatly appreciated the participation of Christine Cadrin-Pelletier, Secrétaire aux affaires religieuses and representative of the Ministère de l'Éducation on the Committee. Her guidance was of great help in the Committee's initial work and the members are grateful for her contribution.

Sincerely,



Jean-Marc Charron  
Chair

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In June 2000, administrative structures were reorganized as a result of the general guidelines made public by the Minister on the place of religion in schools and further to the adoption of *An Act to amend various legislative provisions respecting education as regards confessional matters*. The Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR or “the Committee”) was then established following the abolition of the Catholic and Protestant committees of the Conseil supérieur de l’éducation.

The mission of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses is to advise the Minister on any matter relating to religion in schools and to monitor changes in the public’s expectations regarding the place of religion in schools. The Committee may be called upon to give its opinion on measures that the school system should take in this area and on the school system’s adaptation to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society.

The Committee is also expected to approve the confessional aspects of Catholic religious and moral instruction, Protestant moral and religious education and local ecumenical programs, and to give its opinion on the religious aspects of ethics and religious culture programs.

In carrying out its mission and before approving the confessional aspects of a program, the Committee must consult the churches or religious groups concerned and take their opinions into account. The Committee must also promote dialogue and provide an interface between the public, various religious groups, and the public school system. As needed, it may consult authorities with an interest in the issue of religion in schools.

The Committee is composed of 13 members from various groups: two parents of students in elementary school and two parents of students in secondary school; one elementary school teacher and one secondary school teacher; an education sector professional; a member of the management staff of school boards; four representatives of the university sector (two from the field of theology, one from the field of philosophy and one from the field of religious sciences); and an employee of the Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec (MEQ).

The Committee began its activities in February 2001, after its members and chair Jean-Marc Charron were appointed on December 20, 2000. To help the Committee carry out its mission, the MEQ put two permanent employees at its disposal, namely a professional who serves as committee coordinator and a secretary.

### **Getting started**

The Committee began its activities in 2001. The chair and the coordinator drew up a calendar in order to organize the Committee's initial activities. At the same time, offices were set up at MEQ headquarters and the mechanisms and services needed to ensure the smooth operation of the Committee were established.

### **Initial meetings**

From March 1, 2001 (date of the first Committee meeting) to June 30, 2001, the Committee held five meetings and one telephone conference for the equivalent of nine working days of intense and productive discussions.

At the first meeting, the Committee members were informed of their mandate. They were also briefed on the expectations of the Education Minister, who reminded them of the major groundwork needed to redefine the place of religion in schools and encouraged them to "be the enlightened guide the school system needs in order to better adapt to the socioreligious evolution of Québec."

The Committee began its work by determining its priorities and procedures, and formed subcommittees to reach its objectives.

### Reflection on the orientations of the school system and its adaptation to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society

In order to provide the Minister with its opinion regarding certain orientations of the school system, the Committee made recommendations in two areas.

Unaware of the Minister's expectations in this regard or of the procedures that would enable it to issue its opinion, the Committee decided to participate in the public consultations on the *draft Regulation to amend the Basic school regulation* by submitting its comments to the Minister on May 18, 2001 (see Appendix 3).

The Committee made a number of recommendations on:

elementary school education

- The Committee recommended that each of the subjects included under "Unapportioned time" be guaranteed a minimum of one hour per week or the equivalent on an annual basis.

secondary school education

- The Committee recommended that for the third year of Cycle One, two credits in moral education or moral and religious instruction remain compulsory, in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
- The Committee recommended that for Secondary V, two of the 16 elective credits be allotted to a compulsory course in ethics and religious culture.

In order to attain the fundamental objectives of this program, it appeared essential to require two Secondary V credits in addition to the credits already recommended for Secondary IV. More generally, the Committee would have preferred that a time slot be reserved for moral or religious instruction or for ethics and religious culture over the five years of secondary school. This would ensure consistency in the instruction offered to students and the workload of the teachers concerned, and guarantee the availability of high-quality university programs for those who choose to go into this field of teaching.

At the same time, the Committee analyzed the document entitled *The Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Service: Ministerial Framework* and sought the views of Catholic and Protestant religious authorities. It then formulated its comments based on these views as well as on its own study of this matter.

The following are the Committee's main expectations with respect to the ministerial framework:

- the need to clarify what is meant by "spiritual" as well as the relationship between "spiritual" and "religious"
- the need to define the new service as positively as possible in order to avoid constant opposition between religion and secularism

- the need to define the objectives of the service as they relate to the educational aims of public schools

In addition, the Committee suggested providing a few guidelines for the organization of the service, for example, a desirable ratio to ensure efficient and high-quality service or a more detailed description of the animator's task. The Committee also wondered about implementation of the service at the elementary level and the conditions that would make it possible to adapt it to this level of education. Lastly, the Committee noted with satisfaction that the service is offered as a student service that is essential to the educational project and to students' development.

#### **Approval of the confessional aspects of the moral and religious instruction programs**

During this period, the Committee examined and approved the confessional aspects of the programs submitted by the Minister.

- The English version of the Secondary I Catholic religious and moral instruction program was approved by the Committee on May 23, 2001. As regards the confessional aspects of this program, the Committee's approval came with a list of suggestions from the Assemblée des évêques du Québec. The approval process was a continuation of work suspended when the Catholic Committee of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation was dissolved.
- The confessional aspects of the Catholic religious and moral instruction program for the elementary level received final approval on June 22, 2001.
- The confessional aspects of the Protestant moral and religious education program for the elementary level were examined and received the Committee's final approval in late June 2001.
- In addition, the Committee familiarized itself with the *Guide de procédure provisoire*, which sets guidelines for the development of local ecumenical or ethics and religious culture programs, so that it would be prepared to evaluate such programs. It should be noted, however, that no local programs have yet been submitted to the Committee for approval of their confessional or religious aspects, as applicable.

#### **Analysis of the ethics and religious culture program**

The Committee reviewed the draft ethics and religious culture program developed by the MEQ in order to give its opinion on any religious aspects. The Committee noted that the program did not include religious content requiring consultation with churches or religious groups. Consequently, the Committee did not issue a formal opinion. It did, however, submit a few suggestions to those responsible for designing the program and expressed its appreciation of the program's innovative approach.

#### **Consultation with the churches**

As regards the Catholic and Protestant programs, one of the elements guaranteeing that the Committee can accomplish its mission is the establishment of linkages with the Catholic and Protestant churches, as stipulated in the Act. The churches were consulted prior to the approval of the confessional aspects of the moral and religious instruction programs.

Furthermore, the Committee chose to consult these same authorities with regard to the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service. In subsequent consultations on this non-confessional service, the Committee intends to go further and consult the representatives of various religious traditions or secular movements.

The Committee appreciates the collaborative ties established with the Catholic and Protestant churches and is aware of the importance of maintaining functional and harmonious relations with them. However, in accordance with its mandate and in light of the religious and cultural plurality of Québec schools, the Committee also intends to expand its network of partners by consulting persons representing various religious traditions, secular movements and viewpoints on the place of religion in schools.

#### **Relations with the community and the MEQ**

The Committee has begun to establish relations with representatives of the educational and university sectors. Some of these representatives have already written to the Committee and some have communicated with individual members or with the Committee's permanent staff.

Furthermore, the Committee has established significant collaborative ties with the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses (office of religious affairs) in particular and with different MEQ branches and authorities. The Committee appreciates the quality of these relations as well as the respect that everyone concerned has shown for its autonomy.

### **Priorities for 2001-2002**

Besides the activities it undertook in the first few months of its mandate, the Committee will continue to work on three main areas of concern.

First, the Committee will pay special attention to the new Secondary IV ethics and religious culture program, of which it made an initial evaluation in the spring of 2001. The Committee will ensure follow-up on the recommendation regarding the time allotted to this program in Secondary Cycle Two, which was made as part of public consultations on the Basic school regulation. The Committee wants to make sure that the time devoted to this subject will be sufficient to attain the educational objectives pursued, in the spirit of compromise reflected in the Act. The Committee plans to submit an opinion on this matter at the end of the 2001-2002 school year.

Furthermore, the Committee intends to monitor implementation of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service. In fact, when the ministerial framework for this service was made public in the spring of 2001, certain questions were raised, notably as regards the distinction between "religious" and "spiritual" and between "spiritual" and "community involvement." The Committee has already assured the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses that it will continue to cooperate in efforts to examine this matter.

Lastly, the Committee will take a keen interest in the development of the Catholic religious and moral instruction and Protestant moral and religious education programs for Secondary Cycle One. The Committee intends to closely monitor the importance that will be given to religious instruction and the overall development of the individual in the context of the education reform currently under way.

As regards other matters under its responsibility, the Committee aims to identify the representatives of the various social and religious groups it will likely consult, as mentioned earlier, in order to fully understand how the place of religion is evolving in Québec. The Committee also aims to strengthen its ties with the various MEQ authorities.

### **Challenges facing the Committee**

*An Act to amend various legislative provisions respecting education as regards confessional matters*, adopted in June 2000, has clearly defined the new parameters within which the religious aspect of the education of children and adolescents must be viewed. While the longstanding confessional framework governing Québec schools has been abolished, religion will continue to occupy an important place in schools, in a context of neutrality, pluralism and respect for different points of view.

The Committee members are concerned with how the various educational and religious communities will receive and interpret the spirit and letter of the law. The Committee is far from convinced that the general public and the relevant decision-makers have properly grasped the nature and scope of the provisions that have been adopted. Rather, it appears as though the numerous decisions that have been made or that are about to be made are based on the perception that religion has disappeared from Québec schools.

It is urgent that the Committee and MEQ authorities work toward providing both the public and administrators with accurate information on the new context and on the possibilities and limitations inherent in the *Education Act*. In this regard, the Committee intends to develop a communication plan aimed at raising awareness about the rights of children and parents and the obligations of schools.

Likewise, Quebeckers had grown to consider the place of religion in schools in terms of the confessional system. Although there were a variety of opinions on the system itself, most were able to reflect on the question of religion within this frame of reference. The new legal framework now requires us to think and act in accordance with other terms of reference, which, it must be admitted, are largely non-existent in a number of milieux. It is crucial that the Québec school system adopt, at all decision-making levels, a basic institutional culture concerning the place of religion and its expression in the public arena that is the school. It is also vital that society as a whole make a serious attempt to incorporate an awareness of religious matters into the education of future citizens, thereby laying the groundwork for a better community life.

Because of this new reality, various players involved in religious education have become somewhat disenchanted. For example, many teachers who are already teaching or who are in training have lost interest in this field. This situation has a direct effect on the academic programs and other activities offered by many universities. The problems involved in teacher training and in the training of spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animators as well as the problems facing school system administrators will be given special attention and priority by the Committee.

In order to properly advise the Minister, the Committee must ensure that it can call upon the best possible expertise with regard to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society, the expectations of the various communities concerned and the educational models for integrating religion that are in use elsewhere in the world. It is also imperative that it have the appropriate research staff as well as access to literature that will enable it to thoroughly examine this subject.

The members of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses are pleased to present this annual report, which describes the activities it has undertaken in its first five months and provides an accurate reflection of its accomplishments. The Committee would like the Minister to pay particular attention to the priorities it has established and the challenges to be met.

The Committee encourages the Minister to stay the course with respect to the ministerial orientations announced in 2000, while continuing to provide his full support for the CAR's mission.

COMPOSITION AND MANDATE OF THE CAR



## Excerpts from the *Education Act*

Chapter VII, section II.1

### Establishment

**477.18.1.** A Religious Affairs Committee is hereby established.

**477.18.2.** The Committee shall be composed of 13 members, including the committee chair, appointed by the Minister after consultation with groups or bodies active in the religious sector or in the education field, as follows:

- 1° two parents of students attending an elementary school and two parents of students attending a secondary school;
- 2° four members of the staff of school boards, including a teacher at the elementary level, a teacher at the secondary level, an education sector professional exercising education functions and a member of the management staff whose functions are related to educational services;
- 3° four representatives of the university education sector, including two from the field of theology, one from the field of philosophy and one from the field of religious sciences;
- 4° an employee of the Ministère de l'Éducation.

The member referred to in subparagraph 4 of the first paragraph may not be appointed as the committee chair.

### Mission and functions

**477.18.3.** The mission of the committee is to advise the Minister on any matter relating to the place of religion in schools.

The committee may be called upon, in particular, to give its opinion on the orientations to be favoured in this area by the school system and on the adaptation of the school system to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society.

The committee shall approve the confessional aspects of the programs of Catholic and Protestant moral and religious instruction established by the Minister under section 461 and of the local programs of studies in oecumenism; the committee shall also give its opinion on the religious aspects of the local programs of studies in ethics and religious culture submitted to the Minister for approval or established by the Minister.

Before approving the confessional aspects of a program, the committee shall take into account the opinions of the churches concerned; when it is called upon to give its opinion, the committee may consult religious groups and persons or bodies particularly interested in religious issues.

## Operation

**477.19.** Members ... of the committees shall be appointed for three years.

However, the Minister may appoint one-third of the first members designated by the Minister for one year and another third of the members designated by the Minister for two years.

**477.20.** At the expiry of their terms, the members shall remain in office until reappointed or replaced.

The total duration of successive terms of a member and of any period in which the member remained in office between terms shall not exceed six years. At the end of such a six-year period, a member shall remain in office until replaced.

**477.21.** Any vacancy during a term of office shall be filled, in the manner prescribed for the member's appointment, for the unexpired portion of the term.

**477.22.** Members ... of the committees shall receive no remuneration except in such cases, or such conditions and to such extent as the Government may determine. They are, however, entitled to the reimbursement of expenses incurred in the exercise of their functions on the condition and to the extent determined by the Government.

**477.23.** The chair shall preside at the meetings ... of the committee and manage its operations.

The Minister shall designate a member ... of the committee to replace the chair if the chair is absent or unable to act.

**477.24.** The quorum at meetings ... of a committee is the majority of its members.

**477.25.** ... the committees may hold their meetings anywhere in Québec.

**477.26.** The Minister shall place at the disposal ... of the committees the department personnel and physical resources they need for the exercise of their missions.

## Annual report

**477.27.** ... each of the committees shall submit to the Minister, not later than 15 November each year, a report of its activities for the school year ending on the preceding 30 June.

**477.28.** The Minister shall table the reports in the National Assembly within 30 days after receiving them if the Assembly is in session or, if it is not sitting, within 30 days of resumption.



MEMBERS OF THE CAR  
IN 2000-2001

Jean-Marc Charron (Chair)	theologian and Dean Faculté de théologie Université de Montréal
Spencer Boudreau	parent of a student in elementary school
David Harries	parent of a student in elementary school
Richard Flibotte	parent of a student in secondary school
Béatrice Swift	parent of a student in secondary school
Patrice Boivin	secondary school teacher Commission scolaire du Pays-des-Bleuets
Lison Jean	elementary school teacher Commission scolaire des Phares
Reynald Labelle	Assistant Director General Commission scolaire des Draveurs
Réal J. Vien	Animator of Student Services in Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Commission scolaire de Montréal
Luc Bégin	philosopher and professor Faculté de philosophie Université Laval
Patricia Kirkpatrick	theologian Faculty of Religious Studies McGill University
Fernand Ouellet	religious sciences and intercultural education specialist Université de Sherbrooke
Christine Cadrin-Pelletier	Secrétaire aux affaires religieuses Ministère de l'Éducation.

Lorraine Leduc acts as the Committee coordinator.



COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE CAR ON  
THE DRAFT REGULATION TO AMEND  
THE BASIC SCHOOL REGULATION  
MAY 18, 2001

## Comments

Given that its mission is to advise the Minister on any matter relating to the place of religion in schools, the Comité sur les affaires religieuses is of the opinion that the Draft regulation to amend the Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education embodies the general spirit of the ministerial policy statement on the place of religion in schools, entitled *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations*.

The proposed amendments reaffirm the choice between moral education and confessional moral and religious instruction at the elementary level and in Secondary Cycle One and provide for instruction in ethics and religious culture in Secondary Cycle Two, in accordance with the expectations expressed during the parliamentary committee hearings in the fall of 1999. However, it should be recognized that the suggested teaching time for these subjects, as outlined in the draft regulation, dangerously weakens this entire area of instruction, which no longer benefits from sufficient guarantees to ensure its place in the elementary and secondary level curricula.

In the current draft regulation, moral education or confessional moral and religious instruction at the elementary level is included in a block of four or six other subjects, depending on the cycle. The teaching time for these subjects is in no way prescribed, thus leaving it up to each school to determine the actual amount of time that will be allotted to this type of instruction. If decisions in this regard are left up to local authorities, we run a major risk of marginalizing these subjects, since certain schools already view them as being of lesser importance.

In Secondary Cycle One, the new Basic school regulation reduces the time allotted to moral education or confessional moral and religious instruction from six to four credits. It should be noted that this reduced time represents a step backward, not only with respect to the current school regulation, but also with respect to the ministerial policy statement of June 2000, which stipulated that "for the first three years of secondary school, students will have the same choice as in elementary school: moral education, Catholic religious and moral instruction and Protestant moral and religious education."<sup>1</sup>

As regards the ethics and religious culture course for Secondary Cycle Two, the Committee observes that it is compulsory in Secondary IV only, and that it may, though not necessarily, be offered in Secondary V as an elective subject.

In our opinion, this substantial decrease in the time allocated to moral education and religious instruction — regardless of their specific focuses — could have a significant negative impact in more than one respect:

1. Because there are no clear indications as to the minimum teaching time to be allotted to these subjects at the elementary level and because of the insufficient teaching time allotted them at the secondary level, the new Basic school regulation would seriously affect the feasibility of achieving the objectives set out in the programs.
2. Depending on the organization of the timetable (i.e. by week or by six- or nine-day cycle), the reduced teaching time allotted to moral education or religious instruction would have a major impact on teachers' workload. In order to have a full workload, teachers would have to teach

the same subject to the maximum number of classes (12 classes accounting for almost 384 students) at different levels in both the first and second cycles, a situation requiring that they master a number of different programs. Another scenario would have several teachers teaching these subjects in addition to their regular subjects. However, they would not necessarily have mastered the subjects concerned. In both cases, it would be wishful thinking to assume that teachers can establish a suitable educational relationship with their students, meet the expectations of young people, achieve the program objectives and provide quality instruction at the same time.

3. As for teacher training at the secondary level, marginalizing these subjects (particularly the ethics and religious culture course intended solely for Secondary IV) will certainly have a demoralizing effect on those who wish to teach these subjects and on the universities that offer teacher training in this area. If teacher training in moral and religious instruction does not provide career opportunities similar to those in other fields, there is good reason to believe that this sector will undergo a major slump in a relatively short amount of time. The uncertainty surrounding the future of religious instruction over the past few years has already had a negative impact. Already being pressured to offer better teacher training, universities will not be able to provide a suitable training program in moral education, in religious instruction and in ethics and religious culture if future teachers have a negative image of this sector and if, as a consequence, there are insufficient enrollments in these programs.
4. Lastly, according to the MEQ's proposal, ethics and religious culture is compulsory in Secondary IV only. This proposal is clearly inadequate, since only a minimum amount of time is allotted to this subject despite its importance to the individual's education and considering the teaching time it should therefore be allotted. If no compulsory credits are reserved for this subject in Secondary V, it will likely be jeopardized even before it has seen the light of day. Recall that the Proulx Report<sup>2</sup> proposed instruction in the culture of religions from the beginning of elementary school to the end of secondary school, without a decrease in teaching time.

The Comité sur les affaires religieuses is aware that the proposed amendments to the Basic school regulation follow on the heels of the orientations and decisions taken in light of the *Act to amend various legislative provisions respecting education as regards confessional matters*. While it agrees with these general orientations, the Committee is also concerned with the negative impact that the amended Basic school regulation would have in the area of moral education and religious instruction. The Committee feels that certain modifications could be made to the current draft regulation without compromising the related objectives, while providing better guarantees for this area of instruction.

## Recommendations

For elementary school education

For all of the subjects included under "Unapportioned time," *the Committee recommends specifying, in the Basic school regulation, that each of these subjects be guaranteed a minimum of one hour per week or the equivalent on an annual basis*. Like the other subjects in this category, moral education or confessional moral and religious instruction would therefore benefit from a prescribed weekly amount of

teaching time. Furthermore, this would prevent one subject from being favoured over another, while respecting local autonomy, that is, the prerogative of a governing board to increase the teaching time from the prescribed minimum, since it is agreed that all of these subjects are essential to the basic education of students.

For secondary school education

To ensure that the Basic school regulation more faithfully reflects the ministerial policy statement of June 2000, it would be desirable that, for each year in Cycle One, two credits be reserved for moral education or moral and religious instruction, depending on the subject chosen. In addition, in order to give more impetus to the new ethics and religious culture course planned for Secondary Cycle Two, it is imperative that it be given a significant place among compulsory Secondary V courses. The Committee is aware that choices must be made in order to meet all the objectives of the Draft regulation to amend the Basic school regulation. In this regard, its recommendations attempt to reflect the general spirit of the draft regulation. The Committee considers its recommendations to be realistic and feasible.

*Thus, for the third year of Cycle I, the Committee recommends keeping two compulsory credits in accordance with the provisions of the Act as regards the programs offered in Secondary Cycle One.*

*The Committee recommends that for Secondary V, two credits be subtracted from the 16 elective credits and allotted to a compulsory course in ethics and religious culture.*

This change would give the new subject the visibility and credibility it cannot be guaranteed under the current draft regulation, without jeopardizing its objectives.

## Conclusion

The teaching time stipulated in the current Draft regulation to amend the Basic school regulation is clearly insufficient to enable students to acquire the competencies specific to moral education and religious instruction and to contribute, in any meaningful way, to the acquisition of cross-curricular competencies. In their current formulation, the proposals hamper educational objectives related to personal development and the willingness to recognize that students' ethical, religious and spiritual dimensions are among the educational responsibilities of schools.

The Comité sur les affaires religieuses considers that the amendments it is proposing are realistic and easily implementable. These amendments would help to make the Basic school regulation more consistent with the spirit of the Act and the ministerial policy statement on the place of religion and ethics in schools. Lastly, they would send a clear message to the various stakeholders about the importance of the ethical, religious and spiritual aspects of the education of children and adolescents. Moreover, the proposed amendments would help enhance the entire field of personal development.

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1. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* (Québec : Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 11.
  2. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec* (Québec : Gouvernement du Québec, 1999).

COMITÉ SUR LES AFFAIRES RELIGIEUSES