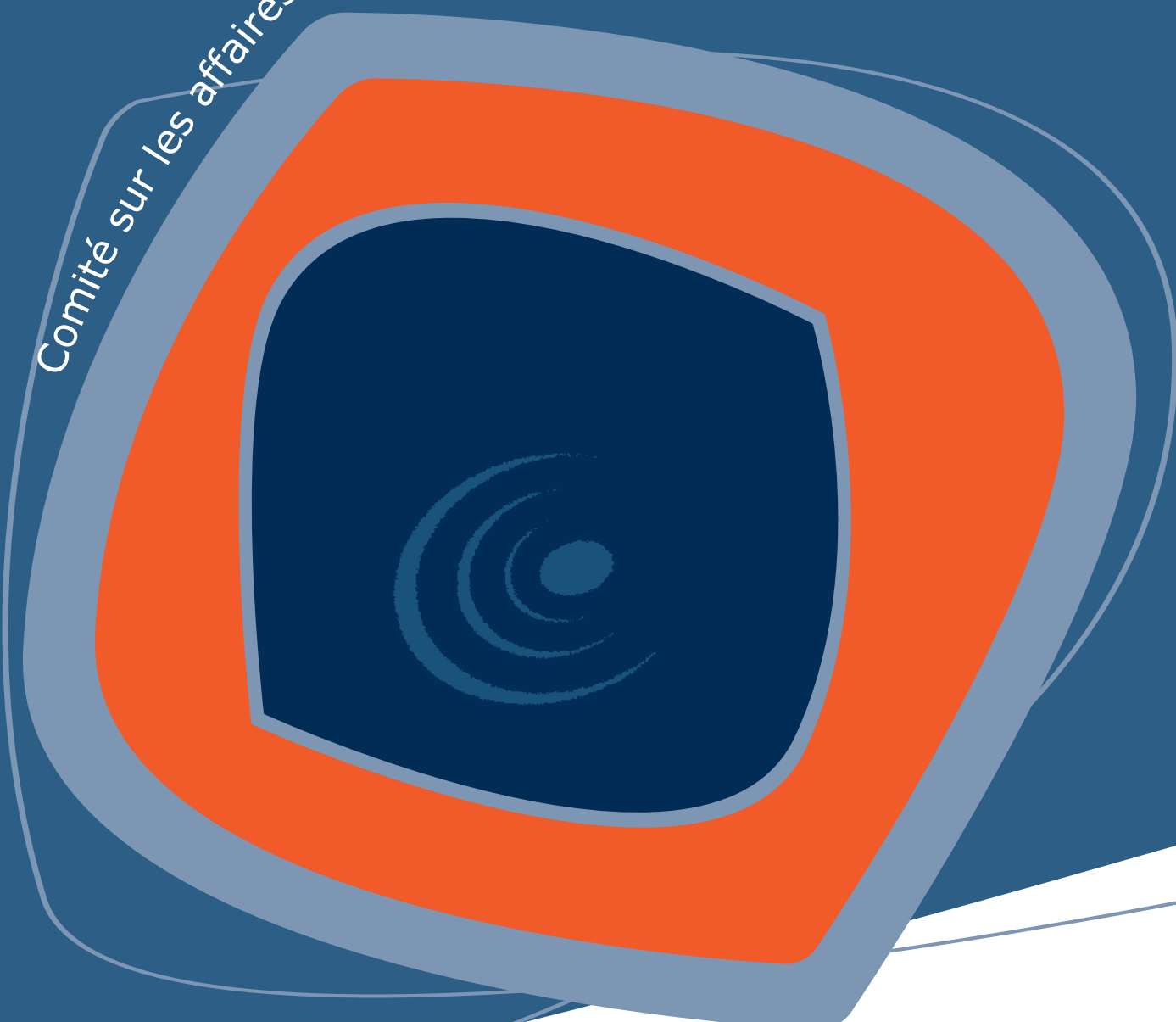


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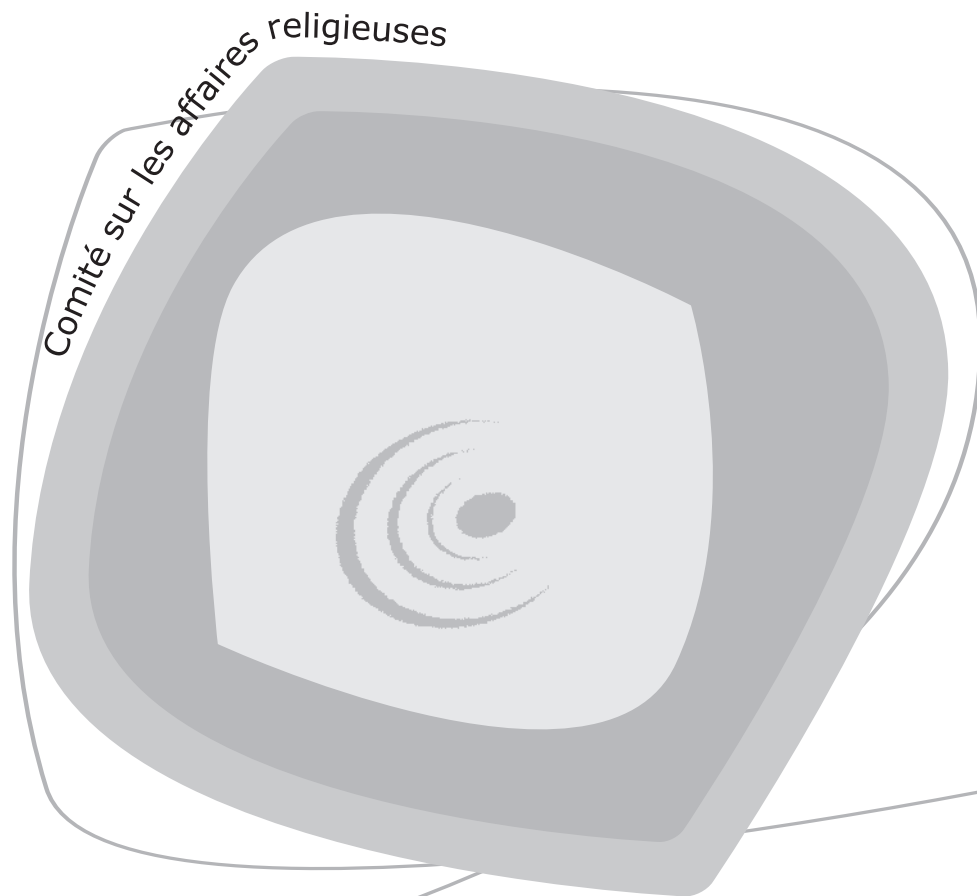


A New Approach to Religious Education in School

A Choice Regarding Today's Challenges

Brief to the Minister of Education
March 2004

Québec 



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INTRODUCTION

In November 2003, the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (the Committee) presented the Minister of Education with a brief on teacher training in the field of personal development.¹ This document outlined various problems encountered in this sector, especially as concerns teacher training in relation to religious issues in general and religious instruction in particular. From the outset, the Committee affirmed that the “problems encountered in this sector of education . . . are symptomatic of a larger problem at another level.”²

The Committee has observed that the crisis in the personal development subject area at the elementary and secondary levels is affecting teacher training. This subject area has been greatly weakened by the cumulative effects of decisions made in the context of curriculum reform and the redefinition of the place of religion in schools. These effects are becoming apparent just as the Ministère de l'Éducation has affirmed the importance of preserving the personal development subject area, in particular in the educational policy it adopted in the wake of the Estates General on Education and in the orientations established after the Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools had submitted its report.³

Based on this observation, the Committee announced that it was committed to ongoing study of the problems in this subject area. It would also seek solutions to problems in the school's exercise of its responsibility to teach about religion that are better adapted to the development of Québec society and its school system. This, in short, is the reason this brief was written.

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1. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *La formation des maîtres dans le domaine du développement personnel : une crise symptomatique*, brief to the Minister of Education (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003). [Free translation]
 2. Ibid., p. 3. [Free translation]
 3. Ibid., p. 3. [Free translation]

In June 2000, the National Assembly of Québec passed Bill 118, which enabled Elementary school and Secondary Cycle One students to continue choosing among Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction (CRMI), Protestant Moral and Religious Education (PMRE) and Moral Education. It also announced an Ethics and Religious Culture Program for Secondary Cycle Two. These decisions, coming at a time when the government had already begun to dismantle the denominational school system,⁴ were seen by some as a reasonable compromise, especially in light of the substantial amount of disagreement then prevailing among a great variety of opinions. Three years later, we must concede that this compromise is no longer viable.

At the level of practice, it continues to limit the schools' treatment of current religious issues to denominational programs, which means that an ever-growing minority of young people who opt for Moral Education (ME)⁵ do not have the opportunity to acquire the basic religious knowledge that, now more than ever, is essential to understanding culture, acknowledging diversity, participating in democratic debate and exercising critical judgment.

When the current system of options was implemented in 1984, it was based on generous principles with respect to freedom of conscience and of religion. However, it has ended up discriminating among students on the basis of their secular or religious belief systems, and does so at a time when the education community's efforts are focused on developing young people's capacity for dialogue while being respectful of differences. This system of options also risks fragmenting education since a given student can switch from one type of instruction to another without any regard for

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4. Bill 118 also replaced the Pastoral (Catholic) and Religious (Protestant) Animation Service with Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Services offered to all students. It also abolished the Catholic and Protestant committees of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation and set up the Comité sur les affaires religieuses. In addition, it abolished the denominational status of the ministerial structures responsible for religion in schools. In 1997, the government also succeeded in obtaining an amendment to section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, and adopted Bill 109, which established linguistic school boards the following year.
 5. Statistical data for the past three years show an increase in Moral Education enrollments. At the elementary level, the percentage rose from 14% in 2001-2002 to 15% in 2002-2003, and then to 16.5% in 2003-2004. The same trend prevailed in Secondary Cycle One for the same years, with proportions of 29.9%, 31.2% and 32.7% respectively.

continuity throughout elementary school up to the first years of secondary school. Indeed, the Moral Education program, the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction program and the Protestant Moral and Religious Education program were developed independently of one another, and the few thematic or pedagogical links⁶ that exist among them do not ensure educational continuity for students who switch programs. Finally, this system of options raises practical scheduling problems, the consequences of which often go against the objectives set by the system itself. At best, the difficulty of the tasks entrusted to the teaching staff assigned to these subjects at the secondary level undermines” the conditions necessary for quality instruction; at worst, these options are simply not offered, in order to make school organization easier.

The compromise reached in June 2000 does not deliver on its promises and is even less likely to do so, now that denominational religious and moral instruction, like Moral Education, has been confined to a subject area (Personal Development) that has been marginalized and made increasingly precarious. As the Committee pointed out in a previous brief,⁷ undermining personal development has led new teachers to turn away from it, while the skills that would prepare them to teach in this field are the same ones required to teach the kind of program we are proposing here.

Despite sustained efforts to improve the denominational programs and the concrete results that have been achieved, many people are still dissatisfied. In the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction programs, religious experience seems to be limited solely to its moral dimension while, in the Protestant Moral and Religious Education programs, some aspects of the Protestant tradition, including its origins and diversity, are rarely discussed. The Committee has already pointed out these shortcomings and stated that “new orientations are needed in today’s common and open secular schools.”⁸

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6. For example, the moral competency that is common to the three programs (ME, CRMI and PMRE) at the elementary level (“takes an enlightened position on situations involving a moral issue”) and in Secondary Cycle One (“takes a reflective position on ethical issues”).
 7. Québec, Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *La formation des maîtres dans le domaine du développement personnel : une crise symptomatique* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 8, 19.
 8. Québec, Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *Annual Report 2002-2003* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 7. The *Report* expressed similar concerns about the future Ethics and Religious Culture program. See p. 17-18.

The Committee is of the opinion that it is time to review the type of methods used to teach religion, given today's context in which schools are secular yet open to religion and spirituality, in a cultural and social environment marked by the diversity and complexity of religious reality.

Religion in Society and Culture

Religion, in its multiple forms, remains an important component of today's social and cultural fabric.⁹ Although many people predicted its disappearance in the face of a burgeoning scientific and technical culture, it has persisted and even become increasingly important as a marker of identity, especially in contexts where individuals and groups feel that their integrity is threatened. One does not have to follow current events closely to realize the extent to which religion, when blended with political demands, economic interests or movements of national affirmation, remains a substantial spur to group action. Those who ignore it or reduce it to a cultural or intellectual anachronism are prevented from understanding the movements that inspire both individuals and communities.

A key element of the great civilizations, religions have bequeathed to humanity an impressive spiritual and cultural heritage. The holy writs of the great religious and spiritual traditions are the result of colossal literary endeavours and are among the masterpieces of the human spirit. The artworks they have inspired include Gothic cathedrals, Hindu temples, fertility goddesses and the sculptures of Bernini, not to mention numerous literary and musical works that portray the religious dramas of the various civilizations. Since time immemorial, the human mind has found, in the religious or spiritual impulse, a place to express its creativity.

Christianity has shaped both the culture and social structure of Western societies. In Québec, in particular, it is impossible to overlook the role that Christian churches have played in the evolution of society, the creation of various charitable institutions and the advent of a distinct culture. Despite a drastic decline in religious practice, a substantial

9. The following pages are largely based on Régis Debray, *Le Feu sacré. Fonctions du religieux* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

percentage of the population still expresses its aspirations and commitments through the Christian tradition and its rituals and symbols.

In another vein, religion is still both present and significant in society.¹⁰ Not so long ago, in Québec, religion still meant Christianity and its diversity was limited, as a rule, to quarrels between the two solitudes—Catholic and Protestant. Religion today is pluralistic, and diversity and complexity are the main characteristics of the current socioreligious landscape, especially in large urban centres where the majority of communities whose background is neither Western nor Christian are concentrated. Aside from its many affiliations with the major religious traditions, religion can no longer be limited to the explicit links between an individual and an institution. This is another significant feature of religion today, if not of the spiritual pilgrimages of our contemporaries. The current fragmentation and complexity of religious beliefs call for a keen understanding of what is at stake.

From another viewpoint, we must concede that if many people continue to embrace religion in the 21st century, this must be because they find in it a valid response to certain basic needs such as those associated with belonging, community and a sense of identity. Religion also continues to guide people in the exploration of their inner selves, in addition to providing them with stories and other textual means that they can use to interpret their own histories, with refuge from the storms of existence, with causes to which they can dedicate themselves so that their lives are more meaningful, and so forth. We may too easily forget that religion responds to humanity's needs for belief and hope, which are basic impulses that take individuals beyond the constraints of the human condition. Belief enables human beings to structure the way the world appears to them and gives them inner strength. Although it has put down deep roots in the rich soil of religion, it has also found purchase in the equally fertile soils of great ideologies of past centuries, like nationalism, communism and “civilizing” imperialism and, after their decline, found refuge in science.¹¹ Thus, for many, science has replaced religion not only as a way of explaining the world but also as a means to utopia and secular salvation.

10. Québec, Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity*, brief to the Minister of Education (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 29-52.

11. This idea is borrowed from Jean-Claude Guillebaud, *Le principe d'humanité* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), p. 326-336.

This brief overview helps us understand that religion cannot be confined solely to individuals' private lives or personal conscience, but must be perceived as a social reality that calls for social interpretation. Independently of each individual's personal convictions, we must keep this in mind and concern ourselves with the way public institutions, especially schools, take it into account.

Students' Educational Needs

It is now an accepted fact that young people suffer from a severe lack of familiarity with religious matters that prevents them from understanding even the most basic expressions of their cultural heritage. This religious illiteracy can be observed even among university students who, when confronted with historical texts or artistic masterpieces, are no longer able to comprehend the meaning of basic religious references. This ignorance with respect to religion encompasses not only Christianity, which forged Western culture, but extends as well to other religious traditions that are increasingly present in the public sphere. This situation reflects educational shortcomings in the exercise by schools of their responsibility for introducing students to the basic instruments of culture.

Today's young school goers live in a world characterized by religious and cultural diversity, and this trend will continue as they mature into the adult citizens of tomorrow. Schools therefore have a duty to help them develop the knowledge and attitudes they will need to live in society, including the foundations of sociality, democratic culture and acknowledgment of different horizons of thought and belief. In the long run, the objective is to lay the groundwork for a culture of peace, something our societies desperately need. Today, more than ever, learning how to reflect and becoming involved in joint endeavours are essential to building a society in which everyone may take his or her place with no fear of discrimination.

As we have already pointed out, on the open market of world-views, religion—like other forms of belief—currently appears in fragmented and shifting forms. Young people are continually being targeted by competing messages that often come without the benefit of any context or frame of reference that would enable them to make informed choices and

avoid getting caught up in sometimes perilous ventures. Therefore, it is up to the schools to develop students' critical judgment and their ability to distinguish promising avenues from dead ends.

It is clear that the schools' role with respect to religion is more than a cultural one. The *Education Act* is explicit in this regard, entrusting schools with responsibility for their students' "spiritual development."¹² This expression, as we know, refers ultimately to a basic energy that drives humans to constantly better themselves in their quest for meaning, identity and inner cohesion. Historically, this energy has generally been expressed in specific spiritual movements, particularly in established religious traditions or certain secular practices. In order to take this dimension of their students' lives into consideration, schools are encouraged to explore the concrete terrain of well-established spiritual movements.

Where religion is concerned, today's youth need to have a better understanding of, the numerous traditions, how they are manifested in society and how they contribute to diverse cultures. They need to do this to prepare themselves for community life and the various belief systems this implies, to develop their critical judgment with respect to beliefs and convictions, and to gain access to the wealth of wisdom contained in religion and in secular trends of thought.

12. Section 36.

It is in this general context that the issue of religious instruction in the school curriculum must be dealt with. The question is no longer whether such instruction is necessary, but rather what form it should take in formerly denominational schools, in order to satisfy students' educational needs and conform to Québec's socioreligious reality. Thus, in response to growing criticism from authors and other players in the education community who decry the failure to adequately address the role of beliefs in the socialization of individuals,¹³ the Committee proposes an approach that differs from denominational religious instruction and from the cultural approach, which involves the teaching of religion from a phenomenological perspective.

A TYPE OF INSTRUCTION THAT DIFFERS FROM THE DENOMINATIONAL AND CULTURAL APPROACHES

After more than a century of existence in Québec's public school system, denominational religious instruction is well known.¹⁴ Whether its content tends more toward the cultural or the catechetical instruction aimed at transmitting the basic elements of the doctrine and beliefs of a specific religion it perpetuates a devotional tradition. Such instruction fosters an understanding of the inner self, thereby reinforcing each child's personal sense of religious affiliation. This denominational perspective may be said to be exclusive in that it is based on "confessional" affirmations that are meaningful first and foremost for those who belong to the religious tradition in question, even though children from other traditions may be able to follow the instruction given and thus learn how the tradition is "self-interpreted." As we indicated in Chapter 1 of this

13. France Gagnon, Marie McAndrew, and Michel Pagé eds., *Pluralisme, citoyenneté et éducation*, Éthikè series (Montréal: Harmattan, 1996).

Dominique Schnapper, "Comment reconnaître les droits culturels ?," in W. Kymlicka and S. Mesure eds., *Comprendre les identités culturelles*, Revue de philosophie et de sciences sociales, no. 1 (Paris: PUF, 2000), p. 253-269.

Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in A. Gutmann ed., *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 25-73.

14. This paragraph applies more to the Catholic than to the Protestant program, which adopts a more cultural approach. The use of this approach can be ascribed to a feature of the Protestant faith that encourages each individual to exercise his or her freedom of choice and be responsible in his or her search for the truth, and to the religious diversity of the students who attended Protestant schools before the school system became secular.

brief, it is becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile denominational instruction with the demands for neutrality on the part of the state and public schools.

In the phenomenological approach, religion is situated in a strictly cultural and historical context and the principal objective of such teaching is to ensure that students become familiar with the various historical manifestations of religious phenomena in order to better understand the development of societies and the artistic, literary and architectural works engendered by religion. Such teaching can also provide young people with the intellectual tools they need to understand certain social and political phenomena that have religious dimensions and that are regularly covered by the media. This is the type of teaching that the Debray Report proposed in France. As we can see by the commitment to implement this approach in the French context, its main aim does not require that it be taught in a special course (although expert opinion is divided on this point). Its objectives can be achieved in other subjects such as history, geography or literature, provided the teaching staff is adequately prepared.

Despite its appeal and pertinence, the phenomenological approach seems to come up against two problems linked to how Québec society perceives the relationship between school and religion. The first problem stems from a long-standing custom in Québec public schools whereby religion is not addressed from a strictly historical or cultural standpoint. Even though denominational instruction has fallen out of favour with parents, teachers and school principals,¹⁵ religion is nonetheless perceived as an active component of individuals' values and existential choices and, as such, is expected to be taught with this dimension in mind. The second problem relates to how society seems to perceive this type of teaching. There are reservations about teachers' ability to adopt a truly objective pedagogical attitude, doubts whether students (especially at the elementary level) will show an interest in a plethora of facts that appear removed from their real-life experiences, and suspicion among parents from minority religious groups that such teaching will not respect or recognize their child's identity.

15. Micheline Milot, Fernand Ouellet (contributor), *L'enseignement de la religion à l'école après la loi 118. Enquête auprès des parents, des enseignants et des directeurs d'établissement*, research study commissioned by Immigration et métropoles centre (2004).

The new school context and current social issues relating to religion require that we go beyond these two models, and the new program proposed in this brief appears to be a promising avenue. In the new program, religion would not be considered solely as a cultural or historical feature of social life, but also as an intimate part of many people's experience of the world and their identity, and hence of their relationships with others in society. Seen in this light, the phenomenon of religion manifests itself above all in the ways in which beliefs shape the vision of oneself, the world and relationships with others. Each citizen must acquire a certain level of personal and social competency to be able to participate in public debate calmly and respectfully. This type of instruction is justified above all because of its contribution to personal development and citizenship education in a complex, pluralistic social context. It may be incorporated into the curriculum in a variety of ways, but its objectives cannot be achieved if its learning content is included only in other subjects, as is the case with the teaching of religion from a cultural perspective.

THE AIMS OF THE NEW PROGRAM

Although it is increasingly clear to the vast majority of people that the transmission of religious beliefs is first and foremost the responsibility of families and religious organizations, a consensus has nonetheless begun to emerge that schools have a key role to play in the area of religion. Schools are capable of assuming this role, as long as it is clearly understood that religious teaching and learning contribute to personal development and citizenship education. In the Committee's opinion, these are the two aims that must be targeted together by any new program.

These aims are interdependent. Citizenship education requires that students become free subjects who develop inner strength and who express their convictions through community involvement. A responsible citizen is aware, free, compassionate, involved and supportive, and has developed analytical and synthetical skills that enable him or her to make connections among various personal and social phenomena. A responsible citizen is also autonomous, and has developed an ability to judge and evaluate that he or she applies to his or her own actions as well as those of fellow citizens.

Personal Development

The Québec Education Program (QEP) makes students the principal agents of their learning. The aims of the QEP (to help students construct their identity, construct their world-view and become empowered) attest to a turnaround in educational perspective, according to which learning is valuable insofar as it contributes to structuring the individual. The identification of nine cross-curricular competencies (in the intellectual, methodological, personal and social fields) underscores the same concern. This emphasis is apparent throughout the QEP and bears out the mission of schools, which is to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and give them qualifications.

This concern would be addressed more adequately if it were explicitly included along with the three-pronged mission of schools. The UNESCO International Commission on Education made a similar link when it identified the four pillars of an education that helps meet the challenge of change: learning to know, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to be.¹⁶ Whereas the first three pillars correspond very closely to the threefold mission of Québec schools, the fourth, learning to be, refers to personal development. The Commission justifies the importance of this fourth pillar of education by mentioning the danger that technological and scientific progress may dehumanize the world.

[The challenge will be to] ensure that everyone always has the personal resources and intellectual tools needed to understand the world and behave as a fair-minded, responsible human being. More than ever before, the essential task of education seems to be to make sure that all people enjoy the freedom of thought, judgment, feeling and imagination to develop their talents and keep control of as much of their lives as they can.¹⁷

We cannot overemphasize the importance of having *learning to be* and *humanization* as part of the mission of Québec schools, because “humans always retain the dizzying freedom to be inhuman, to destroy that which makes them human, both within others and within themselves.”¹⁸ Humanity is thus a value and not a simple fact, a form of

16. Jacques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Highlights)* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), p. 91-104.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 102-103.

18. Olivier Reboul, *Les valeurs de l'éducation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), p. 90. [Free translation]

dignity acknowledged in others and in ourselves, rather than an object of formal study, since human dignity is based on who we are and not on our usefulness, accomplishments, skills, riches or talents. Kant held that dignity has no price and no equivalent, since its value is not relative but absolute.¹⁹ It is because of human dignity that it is important to foster students' personal development, to provide instruction that gives them inner strength and helps them handle transitions with lucidity, courage and humour. Personal development also helps to make people freer (and democracy implies freedom) by increasing their ability to "resist the deterrent power of violence founded on fear, the reward power of money founded on servitude, and the seductive power of rhetoric founded on ignorance."²⁰

The Committee is convinced that the new program on religion can, like moral education, make a unique contribution to developing students' personal and social conscience. As a complement to the other subjects that make their own contribution in this area, the new program can help young people better ground their identity by facilitating a critical appraisal of their social, cultural and religious heritages. It can also make it possible for students to question their identity (which is sometimes defined in isolation, in "the comfort of an accord with oneself"²¹) by considering religious and cultural diversity both here and elsewhere and, in turn, realizing that various conceptions of the "good life" exist. Exploring this reality can also help students recognize that each individual's identity shifts constantly through the interaction of its multiple strands of belonging.²² Furthermore, all facets of religion, especially its internal diversity and the roles it plays in societies and cultures, must be considered to construct a world-view that reflects a veritable desire for understanding.

Citizenship Education

Québec schools have focused on citizenship education since the 1990s. This concern has resulted in the creation of the broad area of learning known as citizenship and

19. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Lewis White Beck trans. (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1989).

20. Jean Bédard, conference given at a symposium on spiritual development in education, organized by the Comité sur les affaires religieuses, November 11 and 12, 2003. [Free translation]

21. In *L'éducation à la citoyenneté* (Paris: Anthropos, 1998), François Galichet refers to the need to ask questions that challenge the "self-importance of identity." [Free translation]

22. Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (Paris: Grasset, 1998).

community life and the inclusion, at the elementary and secondary levels, of a Citizenship Education program within the subject area of the social sciences. This program introduces students to the main social and democratic institutions. In a non-denominational context, the religion program we are proposing fulfills one of the key stated aims of citizenship education.

Religious differences go hand in hand with citizenship. Participation in public life requires some measure of conviction: indeed religious and secular convictions are an important part of what prompts people to take part in building their community. Citizens' involvement in public life is based on symbols and world-views that may diverge or even be diametrically opposed. In a social context of pluralism, religious persuasion can be more divisive than unifying, even if many religions uphold similar values in terms of respect and love for others. Faced with this reality, liberal democracy advocates moral commitments that are translated into norms for citizens to foster responsible citizenship, and that become obligations that the state must meet for this goal to be achieved. One of the legitimate aims of political governance is to ensure citizens are informed and qualified to take part in public debate. To make responsible participation in public debate or collective action possible, citizens must have a positive self-image and be capable of evaluating what they can reasonably expect of others who do not all share the same definition of "the good life."

Hence the importance of studying religion to foster community life and democratic debate. Such learning can enable students to discover that which, in many different guises, brings together people of different beliefs. Above all, a more in-depth knowledge of religious groups helps eliminate prejudice and makes it easier to recognize that others have the right to be different and to affirm this difference. The religious education we are advocating thus promotes a positive view of otherness and diversity. The study of religion in schools must respect the origins of children's respective identities, the imperatives of a democratic, pluralistic society, certain members of which remain extremely attached to their traditions, and the imperatives of political governance that is promoted by developing citizens who are qualified to take part in public debate and action, regardless of the diversity of their respective convictions.

LEARNING TO BE ACQUIRED

The new program on religion will help students acquire important learning that allows them to construct their identity and to successfully participate in community life. This learning includes taking a stance on beliefs, knowledge and acknowledgment of others, reflecting on one's own convictions, and reconciling the social affirmation of identity with civic mindedness.

Taking a Stance on Beliefs

The Committee is aware of the sensitive nature of the questions pertaining to the relationship between students and religion, and emphasizes the precautions to be taken when they are raised in the classroom. Teachers will have to deal with these issues prudently if they are to respect the level of maturity of students, their freedom of conscience and religion, their family's religious heritage and the responsibility of parents and belief groups toward them. Thus, "public schools are not obliged to ignore the spiritual dimension of students' experiences, but they must address it in compliance with their educational mission."²³ What does this mean?

"Schools do more than give students . . . tools; they also enable them to set goals for their lives and prepare them to contribute to society."²⁴ Thus, by empowering students and helping them construct their world-view and their identity, schools "raise" students and encourage them to exceed their limits and grow as human beings.²⁵ What should the new program teach in order to promote this growth?

The aim of this new program is to enable students to take a stance in relation to the world of beliefs and values—religious or otherwise—as members of the human community, which offers an array of options in this respect. This can be done by initiating a slow and gradual clarification process that develops the autonomy of students, helps

23. Québec, Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec, *L'enseignement culturel des religions. Principes directeurs et conditions d'implantation*, Study no. 1 (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), p. 12-13 [Free translation].

24. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program. Secondary School Education, Cycle One* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 6.

25. See Olivier Reboul, *Les valeurs de l'éducation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), p. 88-94.

them understand options and feel confident to defend them, and enables students to clarify these options when they interact with others. Teachers can use different methods by, for example, making students aware of the many-faceted universal experience of believing (closely linked to hoping but different from knowing), which includes trusting, believing in oneself and others, having faith in ideas or ideals, believing in transcendence, etc. They may also provide students with conceptual aids and a vocabulary to help them understand the religious experience and the relationship with religion or a specific set of ideas (e.g. those of believers, atheists, agnostics, churchgoers, missionaries, militants, mystics, etc.), and they can help students discover that there are a variety of possible stances with regard to any body of doctrine or philosophy (liberal, conservative, fundamentalist, etc.).

In addition, the framework of the new religion program affords the perfect opportunity to broach questions concerning life, death and suffering, which must be dealt with by each individual conscience. Teachers can provide an overview of how different religions and philosophies have tried to answer these questions throughout history, thereby helping students construct their world-view and their identity.

Thus, various types of learning can help students clarify their relationship with religion. What is important is that the learning comply with the school's educational mission, which means that the learning must be different from and complementary to what is learned within the family and from belief groups. Also, this learning should not be separated from other learning to be acquired as part of other learning targeted in the new religious education program.

Knowledge and Acknowledgment of Others

The pertinence of educating students about religion is often justified by pointing out how much such teaching contributes to their understanding of Western culture, and by seeing the study of religion as part of our duty to remember our religious heritage. This argument constitutes a necessary but insufficient justification for an education program focusing on religion.

In a democratic society, we can observe that people's moral preferences or political convictions are often linked to their religious or philosophical ideas, which is why it is vital to take these fundamental beliefs into account. Understanding these beliefs requires a knowledge of institutions, religious doctrines, their social manifestations, the rights and obligations that go hand in hand with freedom of religion, and the historical and social origins thereof. In this sense, it is a good idea to be knowledgeable about religion, because the world of beliefs underpins the values that guide action. However, time and time again events have shown that, when humans do not share the same beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, they have trouble living together in harmony and often go so far as to kill each other. This clearly shows that knowledge about other people's beliefs does not necessarily entail tolerance.

For this reason, knowledge of beliefs and practices associated with various religions must be oriented toward the *acknowledgment* of others. Thus acquiring knowledge for the purpose of acknowledging others is the best way to define the pertinence, in a school context, of teaching students to think critically about individuals' religious or moral preferences. Acknowledgment thus goes further, in terms of learning, than does knowledge: it is not solely a question of "knowing" that others do not necessarily share our own beliefs or values, but also of developing a respectful attitude toward them and helping them to feel that they are accepted and recognized for who they are.

By promoting this attitude, the study of religious phenomena in school helps children, regardless of the extent to which they identify with a specific religious group, to develop a positive self-image, without worrying about how others view them. This is especially important given that individuals or groups who feel excluded from society due to their beliefs or the public expression thereof tend to adopt offensive or defensive withdrawal strategies, to the detriment of their participation in democratic life. Individuals who lack social acknowledgment tend to overly accentuate the belief-related element of their identity. The same applies to people who are part of a majority group in society: learning to acknowledge others can help them avoid the reflex of acting in a condescending manner, a behaviour of which they may be entirely unaware.

Learning about religion in school independently of any particular denominational perspective means allowing others—in this case, students and teachers—to contemplate one's identity, whether one is affiliated with the majority or a minority. This window of learning is crucial for students' socialization because it helps them acquire

psychocognitive abilities through contact with the genuine diversity present in school communities, even those that may appear homogeneous. Different ways of expressing affiliation with the Catholic faith and the presence of children whose families are of Protestant or other persuasions or non-believers are realities that can be found throughout Québec. The development of this ability to acknowledge others is indeed a duty to be performed by the school, because the family and the religious group can help a child develop a positive self-image, but only in relation to the family or religious group itself (without any challenge by diversity or input from other people).

Schools must help students understand the viewpoint of people with different religious or philosophical convictions, so that they can mature and participate responsibly in society thanks to their acknowledgment of each individual's rights.

Reflecting on One's Convictions

While it is true that children are not expected to take part in public debates, they do become prepared to do so through a slow process of education and socialization. Indeed, this same readiness is developed from a very early age in the schoolyard, as it were; for, aside from the home, this is one of the first environments in which respect for others and acceptance of their differences must be practised and in which the slightest deviation from the norm can so easily lead to a child becoming marginalized vis-à-vis the other students.

We see the capacity for reflection as an essential component in a life based on convictions, blind adherence to which is the source of so many conflicts. In the literal sense, which is the one we typically find in definitions, the capacity for reflection is an ability to have thought focus on itself and presupposes a certain facility for distancing oneself from one's own convictions or beliefs.

Taking a step back from one's convictions makes it possible to perceive that others may quite legitimately not share them. It also enables us to understand that others' beliefs, no matter how different they may be, can also be valid. Distance with regard to one's own convictions does not indicate a denial of them. Nor is it a matter of requiring children to make value judgments pertaining to the beliefs to which they and their families subscribe. Reflectiveness must not be confused with a radical critique of the givens of a tradition, nor with an implicit desire to tear down the foundations on which identity is

based. Uprooting specific cultures is most certainly not a desirable aim. While reflectiveness does involve a certain capacity for creating a critical distance from the values and beliefs to which one subscribes, its objective is not cultural uprooting but, rather, an informed affirmation of identity. We are dealing, therefore, with a cognitive ability.

It is normal for families to introduce children to their traditional beliefs by—in the case of Christians, for example—having them go to church. In school, children may become aware that some beliefs are meaningful to Christians, while other people may legitimately have other beliefs, or believe in some other manner. Without this capacity for distancing, neither children nor adults can understand how different absolute statements can be equally legitimate. Thus, the teaching of this capacity falls to the school and must be distinguished from the role of the family and the students' belief group. It is the development of this ability that makes positive tolerance possible.

Since the time of Locke, the concept of tolerance has generated a considerable body of literature. To simplify matters, one could say that tolerance may be interpreted in either a “weak” or “strong” sense. At the lowest end of the scale, it could be defined as “putting up with” something or someone because the law obliges us to do so, allowing other individuals who do not share our ideas or belong to the same ethnic group to live freely. In this sense, tolerance makes social peace possible but does not necessarily extend to understanding and respecting others: we can live alongside others without ever sharing anything with them.²⁶

Strong or positive tolerance is first and foremost a psychological and cognitive ability, as opposed to a social one. Positive tolerance does not require that we approve of other people's beliefs or practices. When we ask people to be tolerant toward others, we are not asking them to put aside their personal convictions; rather, we are simply asking them to respect the rights, values and ways of life of others who do not share these convictions. The recognition that others are entitled to the same respect that we enjoy is based not on the belief that their values are necessarily just and good, but on an awareness of their equal human dignity, whether or not their convictions may seem strange, not aligned with the majority view, or undemocratic. Positive tolerance presupposes that we consider our own convictions as good and valid for ourselves, but

26. Amy Gutmann, “Civic Education and Social Diversity,” *Ethics* 105, 1995, p. 55-79.

that those of others are equally good and valid in their eyes. Once again, this type of learning takes place gradually, particularly with respect to religious convictions, which are based on absolutes and not on any social consensus that could be revised and redefined. Children can learn positive tolerance only if they are exposed to viewpoints different from those taught at home, or by the religious community to which they belong.

This principle requires that we examine—taking the age of the child into account—both the positive aspects of convictions and those that are more problematic for individuals and society as a whole. At the same time, we must ensure that a reference framework derived from Christianity does not predominate (if the society in question is predominantly Christian), and be attentive to the tensions that this creates in children with regard to the concepts of their own traditions. With the acquisition of analytical thinking in adolescence, when positive identity is more developed, more critical considerations of the religious phenomenon can be incorporated more adequately into the Québec Education Program.

Reconciling the Social Affirmation of Identity with Civic Mindedness

How can the civic mindedness required for living together be defined with regard to religious or philosophical convictions? What criteria could we use to guide us? Of course, the recognition of freedom of conscience, religion and expression always comes with certain limits attached, particularly in the areas of social peace and the public good. Our concern is not, however, with an external constraint connected to fundamental freedoms, but with an awareness that the absolute nature of religious affirmations can constitute an obstacle to respect for others and lead to the inequitable treatment of people who do not share a particular set of beliefs. Hence the need for moderation in the social affirmation of one's identity and convictions.

Some believers—not the majority, however—wish to proclaim their religious convictions loud and clear in public, and this is only normal. But given the nature of deeply felt religious or philosophical convictions and their importance in shaping individuals' moral choices, one might reasonably expect citizens to express their separate and distinct social identity with a certain degree of moderation. Moderation here does not mean that one must repress or conceal one's religious identity, but that it should be expressed in a way that does not impede mutual respect and sharing with others.

Adaptation means that certain strong and “exclusive” forms of affirmation have a place within the family circle or group to which one belongs but, insofar as such forms may lead to discrimination and the inequitable treatment of others, individuals must adopt a sort of inner “code of public life” so that they can establish respectful collaborative relationships with others. This attitude does not concern only those people belonging to minority groups whose religious convictions largely define their social identity and play a major role in their moral decisions. The same holds for majority groups that often develop expectations with respect to those of their fellow citizens who fit a different profile, and consider that the latter’s behaviour within civil society should be consistent with the general rules—implicit if very pronounced—of the majority.

This attitude of moderation must be taught as an integral part of the school’s mission. Even more so than the family or religious organizations, the school must seek to kindle mutual respect among young people so that all students can live in accordance with their convictions while recognizing that they have to set certain limits to the expression of these convictions in their relationships with other people. To accomplish this, the abovementioned criteria must be applied: as soon as children are confident that their specific identities are recognized as legitimate within the school, and when they have access, through learning, to the tools they need to develop their thinking skills, moderation is not felt to be self-denial but a way of relating to others who do not share the same convictions. This ability goes hand in hand with another requirement, that of reciprocity.

Children must learn to distinguish between the legitimacy of their conception of the good, their attitude toward those who do not share this view, and what they can reasonably expect from others. The ability to think in reciprocal terms makes such learning easier: we must do unto others as we would have them do unto us. History, unfortunately, gives us a rather disappointing picture of the capacity of individuals with strong religious or ideological beliefs to act in keeping with this concept of reciprocity in relation to ideological or religious beliefs. No legal obligation can force us to conceive of our relationships with others in terms of reciprocity. The law can, at the very most, forbid us from doing harm to others but it cannot require us to recognize their identities and lifestyles as acceptable or valid.

Developing this ability to affirm one's convictions without expecting others to share them should eventually enable citizens to feel free to participate in public discussions and group action on the basis of their religious convictions, since such participation would be seen as legitimate in the eyes of others. The requirement of reciprocity is what makes it possible to maintain a balance between the public expression of religious references and the recognition of those of others.

We can, therefore, reasonably expect the new program to target the development of a civic sense in the experience and expression of religious identity. By the time they become adults, individuals socialized in this way will know that they can legitimately justify their political or institutional demands on the basis of their religious convictions, but that they must do so in terms that are understandable to those who do not share this world-view and that are in keeping with reality.

PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATIONS TO BE TARGETED

The Committee wishes to stress how important it is to reflect on teaching practices in the context of the implementation of a religious education program. To satisfy the requirements of this form of education with respect to the aims and learning to be attained, certain specific pedagogical orientations must be targeted. The pedagogy of the new program rests on four basic principles: a concern with being rooted in the concrete reality of religions, a desire to have the students assume responsibility for their own learning, emphasis on the development of deliberation skills, and intellectual rigour. The Committee calls upon the stakeholders concerned to make use of these principles to produce a renewed pedagogy that fosters personal development and citizenship education in the context of a pluralist society and that satisfies the school's mandate to facilitate the students' spiritual development in keeping with equality and freedom of conscience and religion for all.

The new program must avoid taking a descriptive approach that would confine itself to a rigid, encyclopaedic or even folkloric or idealized presentation of religious traditions. To do otherwise would be to risk losing sight of children's needs and best interests, and to paint a simplistic picture of religious belief and practice. Religious education must therefore be rooted in young people's experience of religion and based on observable

religious facts. It should study religions through their concrete expression and bring to light the particular religious or secular heritages in which identities are rooted.²⁷ This means that, in schools intent on enabling each student to have an “understanding of the world,” religions and currents of thought are approached “as elements that are significant for, and in large measure constitutive of, the history of humanity, factors that, on the one hand, contribute to peace and modernity and, on the other, lead to strife, lethal conflicts and regression.”²⁸ This type of pedagogy recognizes the contribution of faith communities and secular belief groups to the core values that make society possible, as well as to the public debate on the priorities to be established. Through it, the school participates in the construction of a common public space that integrates individual, religious or other forms of identity.

Anchoring religious education in the students’ experience of religion requires developing a style of pedagogy that stresses their autonomy and acceptance of responsibility for what they learn. With this concern, the Committee subscribes to a pedagogical approach that is solidly grounded in the education reform and that considers students as the prime agents of their own learning. In religious education, one has to instill in young people a desire to overcome the complexity of religious phenomena and grasp their meaning. This is a pedagogy that makes young people receptive to existential questions, accommodates their search for meaning and puts them in contact with humanity’s stock of knowledge. It imparts not only knowledge but also an attitude toward knowledge, leading students to raise questions and to make them cherished tools in their quest for humanity.

This type of pedagogy also facilitates the development of attitudes conducive to deliberation, which are necessary because religious and spiritual questions often lend themselves to controversy. Although the desire to maintain a calm class environment may lead teachers to avoid controversial religious questions, dealing with these should be seen more as an opportunity for learning about democratic life in a pluralistic context, and for developing intellectual, personal and communication competencies. By helping

27. The British writer Andrew Wright has shown the limitations of an inclusive approach to spiritual education which, in an attempt to find a common denominator for all forms of spirituality, is wary of any discourse seeking to identify individual spiritual experience. See Andrew Wright, *Spirituality and Education* (London: Routledge; New York: Flamer, 2000), p. 72-81.

28. Jack Lang, *Préface à Régis Debray, L’enseignement du fait religieux dans l’école laïque*, Report to the Minister of National Education (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), p. 9-10. [Free translation]

young people acquire the ability to debate controversial questions, compare their own views with those of others and manage conflicts, religious education can make a major contribution to citizenship education and personal development. Thus there is a “pedagogy of deliberation” to be developed, one that, in the context of a society marked by “multiple and exclusive sets of norms,”²⁹ will make it possible to arrive at a *modus vivendi* when consensus is not possible.

These three pedagogical orientations involve a striving for rigour in the treatment of religious questions—as is other areas. Because of its own special focus, religious education can play a significant role in initiating young people to the free study of sources and data, thus fostering the development of the cross-curricular competency pertaining to the exercise of critical judgment.³⁰ The school has the responsibility to approach religion in a critical manner, and to present students with the main points that the science of religion has established with respect to religious traditions, their founding texts and central figures. The school brings a historical perspective to bear on these realities, one that enables students to see that every religion is a living tradition shaped by change, debate and new interpretations. The requirement for religious education to be rigorous must also take account of the particular nature of this reality, and translate into appropriate attitudes. Believers generally attach great importance to expressing their faith, since it reaches into the most profound aspects of their identity, to the mystery, one might say, of each human being. One must therefore show great respect and be particularly careful when dealing with religious questions, in addition to demonstrating openness to believers’ self-understanding, which they are fully entitled to express in the school, in accordance with the principles set out in this brief.³¹

ADAPTING TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training is key to the implementation of the model of religious education advocated by the Committee. This model requires suitable teacher training and

29. François Galichet, *L'éducation à la citoyenneté* (Paris: Anthropos, 1998), p. 143. [Free translation]

30. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program: Secondary Cycle One* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2004), p. 41.

31. In an earlier brief the Committee also set out the limits to the expression of believers’ self-understanding. Québec, Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses, *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 52-54, 56.

professional development opportunities for elementary- and secondary-level religious education teachers. Teacher training must strive to impart a thorough understanding of the content, educational aims and learning targeted in the new program, facilitate the assimilation of the related pedagogical approaches, and ensure that teachers are fully aware of the attitudes required for this type of teaching. In this respect the Committee reiterates the recommendations it made in its previous brief on the quality of initial training to be offered to all elementary- and secondary-level teachers of ethics and religion, to which certain elements of citizenship education must be added. The Committee particularly stresses the need to offer a specific training profile to those preparing to teach in these areas of knowledge,³² and invites the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) to mobilize the necessary resource people and to invest the monies required to ensure that practising teachers called upon to teach these subjects obtain the professional development services they need.

The training they receive³³ not only familiarizes teachers with their subject content (beliefs, figures, works, etc.) but also gives them an understanding of its meaning, symbolic depth and impact on civilization. Such training enables them, moreover, to lead students to an initial understanding of symbolic modes of thought and of the role played by religious depictions and practices in individual and collective life. Teachers learn to present religions in both critical and respectful ways and to have students recognize that it is legitimate for them to express their religious or secular convictions. Teachers also become skilled at dealing with subjects in which there is a wide variety of opinions and know how to contend with the possibility that some students, not recognizing the soundness of a critical approach, may object to what is taught about their religion. Their training enables teachers to develop strategies that allow students to assume responsibility for their relationship to religion and to express their convictions in ways that are acceptable to others. Such acceptance of responsibility on the part of young people requires a true understanding of what is at stake in the experiences of belief groups, and makes continued striving for quality teaching a necessity. The training teachers receive must make them acutely aware of the respect owing to both learners and what they are learning.

32. La formation des maîtres dans le domaine du développement personnel : une crise symptomatique, p. 15-18

33. This paragraph is based on a written submission made by Jean-Paul Willaime to the Comité sur les affaires religieuses on October 15, 2003.

CHAPTER 3 ESTABLISHING A COMMON EDUCATIONAL PATH

The new approach to religious education involves a major revision of the ways in which it is incorporated into the curriculum. The Committee is of the opinion that it would be advisable to abolish the current system of options and coordinate the future religious education program with ethical instruction within one educational path for all students all the way through elementary and secondary school. If the teaching of ethics in Québec schools was designed to serve as an alternative to religious education in a confessional context, this can no longer be the case in the context of secular schools, where each educational component has its own specific *raison d'être*.

The Committee's proposal provides a solution to the various problems raised in the first section of this brief and makes it necessary to review the choices made in June 2000. Among other things, the Committee's choice of non-confessional religious education would make it possible to bring together students of all religious and secular convictions in a way consistent with equality and respect for each person's freedom of conscience and religion. A common educational path would also have the considerable advantage of simplifying school organization at the elementary and secondary levels, while avoiding wasting time at the elementary level due to students' moving to separate classrooms for different subjects. The establishment of this educational path will require significant investments on the part of the MEQ, in order to develop or adapt programs and provide support for teacher training.

A Common Educational Path for Religious and Ethical Instruction

The development of the common educational path should ensure that both fields of knowledge are autonomous and on an equal footing, and meet the educational needs of students in an age-appropriate manner. With a firm belief in the importance of moral education for the student's development, the Committee is of the opinion that the new path should make equal room in the curriculum for religious education and ethical instruction.³⁴ These two areas of study in fact examine extremely complex social issues and raise questions that are crucial for young people's education. This means that the

34. However, it is not up to the Committee to demonstrate this importance since moral education does not fall within its purview.

two subjects must extend throughout elementary and secondary school, since religious education cannot be confined to elementary school as if it were of concern only to young children. The arguments set out in this brief demonstrate that the complexity of religious issues require that they also be covered in secondary school.

The common educational path should be developed in such a way that the autonomy of the two fields of knowledge is respected. By ensuring that religious education and moral instruction remain independent, one can avoid the twofold danger of making religious education subordinate to moral instruction or creating a form of moral instruction pervaded by religious influences. It is important to keep in mind that religion cannot be reduced to ethical issues, just as ethics can be taught without any reference to religion. Also worth remembering is the fact that the Commission des programmes d'études cited the difficulty of harmonizing ethics and religious culture in one and the same program as its reason for not recommending the approval of the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program put forward in 2002.³⁵ It is clear to the Committee that the specificity of the knowledge continuum that embraces the subjects of ethics and religious studies, each branch of which has developed its own methods and tools of analysis, must be taken into account by the school. However, the autonomy of each field of knowledge requires that the ways in which they are related be clarified.

The application of the principle of autonomy normally involves the creation of distinct programs for religious education and ethical instruction. For the secondary level the Committee proposes this arrangement, which provides a guarantee with respect to the acquisition of learning specific to each subject and to the development of the competencies specific to each. Moreover, the establishment of an educational path integrating two distinct programs raises practical questions of organization. A fragmentation of content that would make any educational follow-up problematic is to be avoided if one is to ensure that teaching is of the highest quality, and the mode of alternating programs should take this into account.

The reality of school organization at the elementary level, however, has led the Committee to qualify its position. Since, at this level, both moral and religious education

35. Québec, Commission des programmes d'études, *Avis au ministre de l'Éducation sur l'approbation du programme d'Éthique et culture religieuse – 2^e cycle du secondaire (version pour expérimentation)* (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2002).

are most often the responsibility of the homeroom teacher, it seems more realistic to incorporate these two types of instruction into separate modules within one and the same program. The Committee encourages the program designers to ensure that these two modules are interrelated in a meaningful and balanced manner, so that they can serve as effective guides for the teacher.

The Committee also stresses the need to set aside enough time for the common educational path for the duration of the curriculum. Due to the complexity and importance of learning centred around religious questions and ethical issues, young people must be provided with conditions that will enable them to construct their knowledge of these realities progressively as their capacity for understanding develops. Future arrangements will, therefore, have to respect the minimum of 72 hours per cycle of instruction that are currently devoted to these subjects at the elementary level,³⁶ as well as the number of credits slated for Secondary Cycle One. As for Secondary Cycle Two, the Committee, which supports the position of the Commission des programmes d'études,³⁷ proposes that the time devoted to religious and ethical questions be increased. The fact that 137 Québec schools, on both the French and English sides of the private and public sectors, offered locally developed Secondary V ethics and religious culture programs during the 2002-2003³⁸ school year indicates that this recommendation is well in line with the expectations of the school community.

Certification of Studies

In the opinion of the Committee, the importance of a religious education program for personal development and citizenship education is such that it should be taken into account in the certification of studies. As things stand, the five subjects certified by the Basic school regulation are confined to only three subject areas: Social Sciences,

36. Some people deem this to be an insufficient amount of time. The Committee therefore invites the governing boards to take young people's religious and ethical education needs into account when they set aside time for each subject that involves non-distributed time.

37. Among other things, the Commission pointed out that the two credits slated for the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program were insufficient. Québec, Commission des programmes d'études, *Avis au ministre de l'Éducation sur l'approbation du programme d'Éthique et culture religieuse – 2^e cycle du secondaire (version pour expérimentation)* (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2002), p. 12-13.

38. According to data in the MEQ's SESAME system. The codes of these two documents are 069552 and 569552.

Languages and Mathematics, Science and Technology.³⁹ The new *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*⁴⁰ adopted in the fall of 2003 announces a departure from these practices. More specifically, it states that “the certification of studies must take into consideration all of the components of the education programs, that is, the subject areas, the broad areas of learning and the cross-curricular competencies.” Moreover, it stipulates that the Secondary School Diploma must “demonstrate the acquisition of the subject-specific competencies in the different subject areas.”⁴¹ To ensure that these orientations are translated into actual practice, subjects in the areas of Arts Education and Personal Development must be incorporated into the certification rules contained in the Basic school regulation. In keeping with this policy, the Committee proposes that the subjects in the common educational path be subject to certification.

Effects on the Personal Development Subject Area

The Committee’s proposal raises the question of the suitability of keeping the future common educational path and the Physical Education and Health program within the same subject area. Although the relationship of physical education to religious and ethical questions is somewhat ambiguous under the current Basic school regulation, keeping these different subjects in the same subject area would have the advantage of encouraging reflection from a holistic perspective, which would in turn establish links among the body, health and spirituality. On the other hand, splitting this subject area might make it possible to find a term that refers more to the learning content—as is the case in the other subject areas—than to the ultimate aim, i.e. personal development, which is, in fact, the overall aim of the school as a whole. A name like *Religion, Ethics and Society* would point to the learning content, while reflecting the idea that religious education and ethical instruction contribute to citizenship education and integrate some

39. The Basic school regulation stipulates that “the Minister shall award a Secondary School Diploma to students who earn at least 54 credits at the Secondary IV and V levels including at least 20 credits at the Secondary V level, and among those 54 credits, the following compulsory credits:

- 6 credits in Secondary V language of instruction;
- 4 credits in Secondary V second language;
- 4 credits in Secondary V mathematics or in a Secondary IV mathematics program established by the Minister with objectives of a comparable level of difficulty;
- 4 credits in Secondary IV science and technology;
- 4 credits in Secondary IV history and citizenship education.”

40. Québec, Ministère de l’Éducation, *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003).

41. Idem, p. 43-44.

of its features. This last point might also lead one to ask whether it is possible to link the common educational path in religious education and ethical instruction to the subject area of the Social Sciences.

CHAPTER 4 THE CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

The establishment of the common educational path that the Committee is proposing would involve a period of transition, the success of which could not be guaranteed in advance since it could lead to systemic effects that are hard to predict. It is important that the Minister's decisions convey a clear intention to keep teaching about religion in the schools. Also, the transition should have a clearly defined orientation and proceed in an orderly and diligent manner, in order to avoid the risks of deviations.

Two particular pitfalls that must be avoided are ambiguity and haste. Ambiguous messages stemming from contradictory decisions, or even from the tardy application of appropriate decisions, would surely sow doubt in people's minds and run the risk of further destabilizing a sector that has already been substantially shaken by the changes generated by the education reform and the review, conducted in the year 2000, of the place of religion in the schools. However, it is just as important to avoid the kind of haste or improvisation that would create even more confusion and cast more discredit on this sector of education. In both cases, the goal is to avoid compromising the possibility of renewing religious education in the schools.

The situation requires that the Minister take a strong position. The Committee invites him to make his views known publicly in a document specifying how the orientations defined in the year 2000 will affect teaching as it relates to religion and ethics,⁴² and setting out the conditions for the implementation of religious education in the Québec school system. This initiative should reestablish trust within the community, particularly among future religious and moral education teachers, and help to maintain university-level expertise in the training of teachers in the area of religion.⁴³

Creating a common educational path would require extensive effort. The Minister would first have to mobilize the human and financial resources needed to develop and set up new programs of study. He would have to support school boards in applying this new

42. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Religious and Moral Expectations* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), p. 9-13.

43. Québec, Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *La formation des maîtres dans le domaine du développement personnel: une crise symptomatique*, brief to the Minister of Education (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 3-5, 13-14.

path and in providing teaching staff with the appropriate professional development opportunities. He would also have to decide how much time this new path should take up in the elementary- and secondary-school timetables and whether it should be distributed over the students' entire stay in elementary and secondary school or be confined to shorter time periods, in addition to determining how the teaching of religion and ethics should be alternated. The Committee hereby invites the Minister to adopt the preceding brief's recommendation that specific teacher training programs be created for all future religion and ethics teachers.

While waiting for a common educational path to be set up, the Committee thinks that it would be better to maintain the current programs instead of making moral instruction compulsory for all elementary- and secondary-school students. Despite the previously described drawbacks of the current system and the need—let us reiterate this—to rapidly shift to a new paradigm of religious and moral education, this measure would avoid lending weight to a certain perception which has it that all religious teaching is destined to disappear, a view inimical to the successful introduction of a new program. The Minister could, however, authorize exemptions from the Basic school regulation for public and private schools (particularly those already offering a locally developed ethics and religious culture program) that wish as soon as possible to establish common educational paths based on their current experience and drawing on the guiding principles set out in this brief.

The Committee would like for its proposal to prevent the government from having to resort to notwithstanding clauses⁴⁴ in order to maintain religious teaching in the schools, a measure that actually jeopardizes this type of teaching. Despite this objective, the Committee is aware that the political decision-makers may feel the need to make temporary use of notwithstanding clauses to ensure a smooth transition to the new educational model. It is up to the government to decide what is appropriate here. Meanwhile, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse is not

44. In this respect its position converges with that of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, for which recourse to notwithstanding clauses should take place only in exceptional circumstances. In the document where this point is made, the Commission also draws attention to the fact that a new framework for teaching religion in the schools would likely require a revision of section 41 of the Québec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, *Mémoire à la Commission de l'Assemblée nationale sur l'éducation sur la place de la religion à l'école*, September 1999, p. 5-6, 14-15. [Free translation]

opposed to the use of notwithstanding clauses in such circumstances, since, in a debate on the place of religion in the schools, it has stated that it recognizes that:

an orderly debate on the place of religion in the schools requires a certain degree of legal stability during the public deliberations. In accordance with the principle that exemptions should be accorded only when absolutely necessary, any notwithstanding clauses required during this transitional period will have to be abrogated as soon as the conditions required for the establishment of a system that fully respects rights and freedoms are put in place.⁴⁵

45. *Idem*, p. 19-20.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given

- the educational needs of young people with respect to religion
- the importance of taking society's social, cultural and religious evolution into account
- the vulnerability of religious instruction in Québec schools
- the requirement to respect the equality and the freedom of conscience and religion of all people
- the need to find solutions that will make recourse to notwithstanding clauses unnecessary

The Committee recommends that the Minister

- publish, as soon as possible, an orientation paper on religious education in the schools, basing himself on this brief and indicating the direction to be taken in the years ahead
- abolish the current system where students choose among moral education, Catholic religious and moral instruction and Protestant moral and religious education in elementary school and during Secondary Cycle One
- create a new religious education program based on the principles outlined in this brief and distinct from both confessional teaching and from the teaching of religion as a cultural phenomenon
- set up a single educational path for all students from the start of elementary school to the end of secondary school, devoting equal time to religion and ethics
 - in elementary school, these two subjects would be taught as separate modules within one and the same program
 - in secondary school, each subject would constitute a different program

- include the acquisition of compulsory credits in these subjects in the certification of studies, in keeping with the orientations of the *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*
- mobilize the human and financial resources required for a smooth transition to the common educational path recommended in this brief and, more particularly, set aside whatever monies may be required to provide teaching staff with the professional development they need to teach these subjects
- ensure that future elementary-school homeroom teachers—who are generally entrusted with religious and moral education programs—receive suitable initial training in these fields of knowledge and that a good grounding in ethics and religious culture be an integral part of training for all elementary- and secondary-school teachers
- invite the various education departments to offer a single training profile for future secondary-school teachers who wish to provide religious education and ethical instruction including training in citizenship education

CONCLUSION

The Comité sur les affaires religieuses is advocating the creation of a new religious education program distinct from confessional programs and from programs that view religion exclusively as a cultural phenomenon. The Committee also recommends that a single educational path in religious education and ethical instruction be set up for all students—an innovative solution which the Committee deems to be compatible with the charters of rights and freedoms and would not, therefore, have to be called into question every five years. The Committee sees this proposal as a development stemming from the review of the place of religion in the schools conducted by the Commission de l'éducation and as following in the wake of the efforts made in 2000 to define the features of a secular school open to religion. In light of the shifts that have taken place in Québec society since this debate began, the Committee is proposing a path that is consistent with young people's needs for religious education in the current pluralistic context.

If the current system is maintained, the situation is likely to continue deteriorating to the point that this type of education will disappear altogether. The Committee therefore invites our political decision-makers to turn toward the future and venture out on the road to change. As far as the Committee is concerned, the choice is clear. The school has a major role to play concerning religious education . At the social level, so much is at stake in this type of education that the school cannot relinquish its responsibilities in the face of the challenges involved.

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