



Consultation on the Draft
Ethics and Religious Culture
Program

Report submitted to the Minister of Education,
Recreation and Sports
May 2007



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Comité sur les affaires religieuses
Report on the consultation on the draft
Ethics and Religious Culture program

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACPQ:	Association of Catholic Parents of Québec
AJDS:	Association of Jewish Day Schools
APAVECQ:	Association professionnelle des animatrices et animateurs de vie spirituelle et d'engagement communautaire du Québec
AQCB:	Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops
AQPMR:	Association québécoise des professeurs de morale et de religion
CAR:	Comité sur les affaires religieuses
CBC:	Commission des biens culturels
CJF:	Centre justice et foi
COC:*	Coptic Orthodox Church
CRC:	Canadian Religious Conference
ECC:*	Eastern Catholic Churches
ESCC:	English Speaking Catholic Council
IIM:	Institut interculturel de Montréal
MELS:	Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
MLQ:	Mouvement laïque québécois
SAR:	Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses
SCGCIA:	Spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animator
SCGCIS:	Spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service
SQER:	Société québécoise pour l'étude de la religion
TCPE:	Table de concertation protestante sur l'éducation
UQAM:	Université du Québec à Montréal

* Unofficial abbreviation, used for this document only.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2005, the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports gave the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR) a mandate (see Appendix 1) to consult religious groups, organizations and resource persons on the religious aspects of the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program, scheduled for implementation in September 2008. The mandate followed the adoption by the National Assembly in June 2005 of Bill 95, which provides for the replacement of Catholic and Protestant moral and religious education programs by a single Ethics and Religious Culture program. The legislative intention behind this innovative decision was to allow Québec's young people to develop a broader general culture and a more open approach to others based on tolerance and respect. The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) responded promptly by designing a program whose quality CAR recognizes, and for which it congratulates the drafting teams.

For the Minister, the goal of this consultation was to ensure that the draft program followed the ministerial orientations made public in May 2005 in the document *Establishment of an Ethics and Religious Culture Program: Providing Future Direction for All Québec Youth*. This process, in which CAR would look at the views expressed by the general population, various religious groups, the school system and the State, was in addition to the process generally used to draft ministerial programs, which includes consulting experts, teachers and education partners and then field-testing the program in target schools. To ensure its autonomy in carrying out its mandate, CAR decided not to invite representatives from any of these groups to take part in the consultation itself.

In the first section of this document, CAR describes the consultation process and the religious groups, organizations and individuals consulted. In the second section, it carefully and accurately reports the various points of view expressed by the respondents. In the third and last section, it presents its own position on the draft program submitted on September 1, 2006, based on the results of the consultation.

CAR considers the draft program as an excellent starting point for developing the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program. With certain modifications, this strong, promising program could be implemented in September 2008.

SECTION 1: CONSULTATION PROCESS

1.1 STEPS IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The main steps in the consultation process¹ were as follows:

- September 2005: CAR receives its mandate.
- Fall 2005: CAR designs and adopts the consultation procedure to be followed.
- Winter and spring 2006: CAR identifies the groups, organizations and resource persons to be consulted.
- April 2006: CAR tables its preliminary comments on the program outline with the MELS.
- June 2006: CAR adopts the list of participants who will be invited to take part in the consultation process and two meetings scheduled for the fall of 2006.
- August 2006: CAR adopts the consultation documents (questionnaire [Appendix 2] and explanatory documents).
- September 13, 2006: The first consultation meeting is held (the program design parameters are presented, along with the draft Ethics and Religious Culture program, and the consultation questionnaire; the program and questionnaire are distributed).
- September 13 to October 13, 2006: Internal consultation meetings are held with target groups and organizations.
- October 13: The questionnaires are sent back to the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses.
- November 1, 2006: The second consultation meeting is held (the consultation process is validated and a discussion is conducted with the participants).
- December 2006: CAR analyzes the findings of the consultation.
- January to March 2007: The report on the consultation is drafted and adopted.

1. Throughout the consultation process, the MELS Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses looked after communications between CAR and the Direction des programmes.

1.2 PARTICIPANTS

1.2.1 Selection of participants

As a first step, CAR used Statistics Canada data (see Appendix 3) to ascertain the demographic profile of each of the main religions in Québec. Secondly, to take into account the internal complexity of each religious tradition, it called upon specialists in the field to identify individuals who could be invited to take part in the consultation.

Some religious groups had easily identified official representatives (see Table 1.1, p. 8); in other cases, CAR chose an authority figure (a Rabbi, Imam, Minister, etc.) or a member recognized by the community concerned and a good link to it.

Some resource persons not already involved in drafting the Ethics and Religious Culture program, along with organizations with a recognized interest, were also invited to take part in the consultation.

1.2.2 Table of consultation participants

The religious groups consulted are listed in Table 1.1. To reflect the demographic importance of the Roman Catholic Church and the variety of points of view expressed within it, various Catholic organizations² were consulted in addition to the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops (AQCB), the official authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the province.

For various reasons, the process for consulting Native communities and the Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine) Church was not completed, but CAR is continuing to work with these groups and will table the results with the Minister.

2. The Canadian Religious Conference, the Association of Catholic Parents of Québec and the English Speaking Catholic Council.

Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were invited to take part in the consultation and attended the first meeting on September 13. Despite repeated invitations, however, they then withdrew from the consultation process.

Table 1.1: Representation of religious groups

Religious group	Representative	Organization
Roman Catholic Church	Official representative of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops	
		Canadian Religious Conference
		English Speaking Catholic Council
		Association of Catholic Parents of Québec
Eastern Catholic Churches	Official representative	
Table de concertation protestante sur l'éducation (See Appendix 4)	Official representative	
Anglican Church	Official representative	
United Church	Official representative	
Coptic Church	Official representative	
Reform Judaism	Official representative of a congregation	
Orthodox Judaism		Association of Jewish Day Schools
Sunni Islam	Person responsible for a congregation	
Shia Islam	Person responsible for a congregation	
Buddhism	Member of the community	
Hinduism	Member designated by the community	
Sikhism	Official representative of a congregation	
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church)	Official representative	

List of other organizations:

- Association professionnelle des animatrices et animateurs de vie spirituelle et d'engagement communautaire du Québec (APAVECQ)
- Association québécoise des professeurs de morale et de religion (AQPMR)
- L'Autre parole*
- Centre justice et foi
- Commission des biens culturels*
- Conseil des relations interculturelles*
- Institut interculturel de Montréal*
- Mouvement laïque québécois
- Société québécoise pour l'étude de la religion

List of resource persons:³

- Najat Boughaba, teacher and journalist, *Échos de l'Orient*
- Jean-Marc Charron, theologian, Université de Montréal
- Dolorès Contré Migwans, Native artist (transmitter of “living arts”) and liaison officer, Native programs, McCord Museum
- André Couture, specialist in Hindu religion, Université Laval
- Kalpana Das, Institut interculturel de Montréal
- Roger Girard, doctoral student, Université Laval
- Édouard-Charles Lebeau, lecturer, Université de Sherbrooke
- Raymond Lemieux, religious studies specialist, Université Laval
- Jean-René Milot, islamologist, UQAM
- Micheline Milot, sociologist, UQAM*
- Jean-François Roussel, specialist in the social study of religion science, Université de Montréal

* L'Autre parole, the Commission des biens culturels, the Conseil des relations interculturelles, the Institut interculturel de Montréal and Micheline Milot did not complete the consultation questionnaire but sent a letter to the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses containing their main comments on the program.

3. The Direction des programmes had already consulted representatives of the English-language universities.

1.2.3 Procedure adopted by groups and organizations

CAR left each religious group and organization free to conduct its own internal consultation. On the basis of the answers given to question 19, *What steps were taken to have this questionnaire completed in your community?*, CAR is confident that those people who reported the views of the groups and organizations concerned were careful to relay these views accurately.

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS OF THE CONSULTATION RESULTS⁴

2.1 A GENERALLY WELL-RECEIVED DRAFT PROGRAM

The responses to the objective section of the questionnaire (see Appendix 5),⁵ the comments made by respondents and the responses to question 17 concerning expectations as to how the program would be received by each community reveal the respondents' *overall* assessment of the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

For the purposes of CAR's analysis, the religious groups, organizations and resource persons who answered the questionnaire were divided into three categories, based on their main focus:

- a) **Religious groups and organizations** representing the specific concerns of their respective communities. During the consultation, the respondents in this category were readily inclined to see students as believers, unlike respondents in the second category. In this document, the term "religious respondents" applies only to this first category.
- b) **Specialists in matters of religion and spirituality**, including organizations such as the AQPMR, SQER, APAVECQ and the Centre justice et foi.⁶ Their fields of expertise (scientific research, teaching, spiritual guidance, etc.) and intervention (schools, society at large, etc.) varied.

This category also included **observers**, in other words, resource persons who, whatever their own religious beliefs, acted as individual observers and not as spokespersons for specific religious organizations or groups. Several were specialists in the field of religion.

4. It is important to note that this section presents the viewpoints of the respondents and not of CAR.

5. The results for each question are analyzed in Appendix 5.

6. While the Centre is obviously rooted in the Catholic faith, its answers and comments during the debate bring it closer to the specialists in matters of religion and spirituality. The CJF defines itself as a "centre for social analysis based on a critical examination of the social, political, economic, cultural and religious structures in our world." [Free translation]. Source: the Centre's Web site.

- c) The **Mouvement laïque québécois**, which, because its main objective was to present the viewpoints of people holding humanist, atheist or agnostic convictions, could not be included in either of the other two categories.

2.1.1 Overview of the positions of religious groups and organizations

It can be said, from the start, many people agreed with the statements made on the questionnaire. Over 75% of the religious groups and organizations answered 10 questions out of 16 in the affirmative (see Table 9A in Appendix 5). An even higher percentage of the religion and spirituality specialists agreed with the statements made in 13 questions. And over 90% of the respondents in the first category indicated that they somewhat agreed with one statement, compared to six statements for the respondents in the second category.

Concerning the way in which the Ethics and Religious Culture program was likely to be received by religious groups and organizations as a whole, three quarters of the various people consulted, whether lay people, specialists or observers, anticipated a positive response.

Among the religious respondents, 70.6%, or 12 people out of 17, believed that the program would be well received in their communities (see Table 8 in Appendix 5). The comments made by the more reticent religious respondents (see section 2.3) showed that they expected a range of receptions and positions, from a lukewarm reception to a willingness to compromise, sometimes with conditions attached. Only one respondent predicted a complete rejection of the program.⁷

As the tables presented in Appendix 5 show, many Catholic respondents gave the same answer to a fair number of questions. This reflects a shared sensitivity to certain elements, rather than a monolithic mindset. Despite the apparent similarities in the answers (see Table 10 in Appendix 5), the comments made and the positions advanced revealed that assessments of the program varied appreciably from one spokesperson to another. The various ideas and strategies will be examined in more depth below (see sections 2.2.2.1, 2.3.1.1 and 2.3.2.1).

7. Of all the respondents, only the ACPQ was totally opposed to the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

The “liberal” Protestant churches (represented by one spokesperson for the United Church and another for the Anglican Church), which comprise the historically dominant segment of Québec’s Protestant community, responded quite favourably to almost all the questions, but made certain criticisms in their comments. The Table de concertation protestante sur l’éducation (TCPE), which represents practically all trends of Protestantism in Québec, was more critical (see Table 11 in Appendix 5). Some of the viewpoints expressed by the United Church, the Anglican Church and the TCPE will be discussed below (see sections 2.2.2.1, 2.3.1.2 and 2.3.2.2).

The Coptic Orthodox respondent, despite being more skeptical about the actual application of the program, was generally positive. The Mormon respondent, as shown by the answers and conclusion given, responded favourably to the draft program.

As shown in Table 12 in Appendix 5, the points of view expressed by the Orthodox and Reform Jewish respondents differed. The Orthodox respondent disagreed with half the statements, while the Reform respondent explicitly supported the program, and expressed reservations only with regard to elementary education. Their positions will be examined below (see section 2.3.2.3).

The religious respondents from outside the Judeo-Christian tradition gave a generally very positive assessment (see Table 12 in Schedule 5), especially the Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist respondents. In general, their comments were quite succinct. The fact that the Buddhist respondent (who wanted the program to be well received) answered all the questions positively is rather eloquent in itself. The Hindu respondent concluded by saying, “If pursued in the right way, choosing carefully the course content and paying adequate attention to who the instructors will be, the program will be well received. We as a community are very happy that this program is being considered seriously” (Q. 18).⁸

Apart from the few reservations expressed—which were not necessarily linked to religious concerns (see Table 12 of Appendix 5)—the two Muslim respondents agreed with most of the statements made on the questionnaire and appreciated the program’s objectives. However, they

8. (Q. 18) = Question 18 on the questionnaire.

did make several specific criticisms and identified elements that should be reviewed (see section 2.2.2.2).

The Mouvement laïque québécois (MLQ), which considers itself to represent secular Quebecers, disagreed with most of the questions. It even went so far as to hope that the “religious culture” component would be removed from the program. However, the MLQ did appreciate some of the elements in the program, such as the competency *Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life*.

The organizations specializing in matters of religion or spirituality, such as the AQPMR, APAVECQ, Centre justice et foi and SQER, agreed with most of the statements made on the questionnaire; however, the SQER was more reticent. The observers (or resource persons) who did not represent any religious group or organization agreed with a large majority of the questions, but considered some to be more problematical (see Table 7 of Appendix 5).

Taking all the comments as a whole (and with support from the quantitative results), we can make two key observations: the program objectives were seen in a positive light, but there were also concerns, mainly in connection with the applicability of the program (see section 2.2).

2.1.2 Social relevance of the program

According to the results analysis, many of the respondents understood that the program attempts to strike a balance between various imperatives that may seem difficult to reconcile. For example, most of the respondents considered that the program would foster openness to religious diversity in a context where learning remains rooted in Québec culture. Similarly, the program would also help students recognize various religious mindsets while presenting a range of secular perceptions (although some respondents requested that the latter be given more space). Many respondents also stated or implied that a concern for equity prevailed in the way the various religions were dealt with.

Giving students a religious culture that fosters community life, the recognition of others, openness to religious diversity and the practice of dialogue was supported as an objective by a large majority of respondents, including the representatives of some of the more reticent religious groups and organizations (see Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 5). Several respondents were unable to hide their satisfaction, and even their enthusiasm, with the program's main aims.

Although the program may still need some adaptation, many people consider it to be a step forward in the field of knowledge of religions. It appears, therefore, to be an answer to the challenges currently facing Québec in the area of community life.

For example, the Centre justice et foi, an organization deeply rooted in the Catholic faith, was “very happy to see the draft program take shape,” considering it is “the end of a long process of reflection and consultation in which we all played an active role” (Q. 18). The spokesperson for the Anglican Church said that the program was “sensitive, dialogical, critical and sympathetic to the place of religion in Quebec society. It is truly everything that I was trying to work for, [...] what I argued for ...” (Q. 18). The Sunni Muslim respondent said that the program “constituted progress towards recognition of the plurality of Québec society and the goal of community life.” The Shia Muslim respondent stated that “the draft program strives for openness and a coming together” and, as a result, was deserving of support. The spokesperson for Reform Judaism quoted Dr. Victor Goldbloom: “the first chapter, the introduction, is exceptionally well written.

The pedagogical and social objectives, and the underlying philosophy, answer hopes that I have been harbouring for decades. Through the education it is offering future generations, Québec has stepped into the forefront of civilized societies” (Q. 18).

2.2 QUESTIONS RAISED

The few concerns raised were focused on four elements:

- 1) An apparent lack of cohesion between the various themes targeted by the program
- 2) Gaps or deficiencies in the content
- 3) Teacher neutrality and training
- 4) Student discomfort

2.2.1 Perceptions relating to program structure

Many objectives were raised concerning the structure of the program. Most of them related to a central problem, namely, that the program was often seen as a thematic (or horizontal) study of various religions. Several of the remarks about concerning program structure alluded to this point.

2.2.1.1 The segmentation of religious traditions

Several respondents believed that the splitting of individual religions into various parts, and the disjointed nature of the material in general, would likely confuse students. From this vantage point, religion as a phenomenon could appear to be a quaint piece of folklore, or even a kind of marketplace where individuals can pick and choose whatever suits their fancy. Juxtaposing the elements shared by different religious traditions would make it hard for students to recognize the specific features or main characteristics of each, since these would fade into the background. To search for a guiding thread through all religions, then, is to overemphasize their smaller common denominators at the expense of what is distinctive about each.⁹

9. This point of view was not shared by the Hindu respondent, who considered that “unity within all spiritual traditions of the world is something that has to be emphasized at this level of schooling, rather than focusing on the differences” (Q. 18).

Apart from a pedagogical gradation that is not always easy to discern, what the respondents perceived as a thematic approach obscures the coherency of each religion behind its surface features (rites, festivals, buildings, etc.). Because of this, several respondents considered that, given the number of religions and themes, too much material is covered in class and hence dealt with superficially.

2.2.1.2 Anticipated effects on students

In the view of several religious respondents (Catholic and Protestant), the AQPMR and certain observers, the structure of the program could make learning difficult.

The AQPMR was clearly disappointed with “lopsided” time allocation for the program in Secondary Cycle Two. In the opinion of the AQPMR, this constitutes an impediment to continuing and progressive learning.

Elementary school students, whose identities are not yet formed, cannot integrate complex content in an organized way, and this can adversely affect their perception of reality (see Appendix 5, point 6). According to the AQCB, the program for Elementary Cycle One does not provide for bridges from explanation to comprehension. The list of key features for Competency 2 contains only descriptive verbs: names, describes, identifies, situates. No activity is suggested to introduce students to the reflexive thinking required in the following cycles. The ability of elementary school students to be objective about religious phenomena has therefore been overestimated.

Several religious respondents are worried about the possible effects on students of the segmenting of religious traditions. The program’s thematic structure could, they think, create difficulties for students at the cognitive level; indeed many religion specialists doubt that children would be genuinely able to “demonstrate an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion” (see Appendix 5, point 7). In addition, many religious groups and organizations, whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox Jewish, expressed the fear that young believers could encounter difficulties in constructing their identities. Children who have not yet acquired or

integrated the basic beliefs of their own religion could become disoriented by the panoramic display of other religions and their contrasting elements.

2.2.1.3 Failure to consider religious experience

The breakdown of religious traditions by theme caused what many people consider to be the essential element—religious experience—to disappear from view.

For some people, the word “phenomenon” was problematic because it appeared to make religion into an observable object reduced to its visible aspects. Some respondents considered it important that students be able to catch a glimpse or hint of the individual experience, of life lived religiously on a daily basis, and that they understand how believers see themselves—dimensions that could also be viewed from the inside. Most of these remarks were made by Christians and Muslims.

The TCPE stated the idea that “students initially experience religion in an intimate, familial relationship with the divine, which necessarily has repercussions on their community life. The program should show that belief-based actions must foster the well-being of the community” (Q. 5).

2.2.2 Remarks concerning program content

Apart from the structure of the program, some religious respondents criticized what it had to say about their own faiths in terms of missing or inaccurate information about their religious traditions (or related themes), or the lack of space devoted to it. Most of these remarks were made by the Catholic, Protestant and, to a lesser degree, Muslim respondents. In fact, many were expressing a reaction to the list of themes,¹⁰ which they considered to be fragmentary.

10. Draft *Ethics and Religious Culture* Program, Elementary, “Religious Culture: Themes and Related Content (Elementary-Secondary) - Synoptic Table,” Appendix 6, p. 93.

2.2.2.1 Elements relating specifically to Catholicism and Protestantism

The AQCB, ESCC and TCPE stated many grounds for dissatisfaction with the program. They complained that Christianity was given a relatively reduced role, and presented as “just one of many religions.” Some Catholics and Protestants said they could not identify with the program.

Added to the concerns expressed by all the reticent religious groups and organizations, the various deficiencies noted by the Catholics and Protestants accentuated their feelings of disappointment and even irritation.

The main grievances of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops were that the program: (a) made Christianity into a commonplace with a reduced role; (b) left out Catholicism; (c) focused on the universal components of religions while omitting their specific elements; (d) left out elements deemed essential by each religion (such as belief in the Trinity). Much of the resentment centred on the apparent display of visible features (symbols, festivals, practices) without reference to the spiritual experience of individuals. For the bishops, Québec’s religious heritage is a living entity that should not be limited, as in this program, to “recognizing the influence of religious traditions on Québec’s habits and customs as well as on a wide range of works of art”¹¹ (Q. 8).

Some of the comments made by the bishops hint that they detected bias (if not “compromise”) in the design of the program. They noted that the word “catholique” appears only once in the entire French version,¹² and pointed out furthermore that “Québec’s religious culture has been marked far more by Catholicism than is apparent from the program” (Q.4). The bishops also “basically disagree with the claim that the program ‘fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture’” (Q. 4).

On this point, the TCPE makes a similar observation: “The Protestant identity, that of Québec’s largest religious minority, does not stand out in the current program. We had to assess the quality of the program by asking ourselves this question: Will learners, after coming into contact with

11. Draft *Ethics and Religious Culture* program, Secondary Cycle One, p. 43, cited in the AQCB questionnaire.

12. Draft *Ethics and Religious Culture* program, Secondary Cycle One, version 2006.

the various elements and themes in the program, know what a Protestant is? Our answer is a unanimous no! The distinguishing features of Protestantism do not emerge from the program, contradicting the ministerial orientations, whose aim is to increase knowledge of Christian traditions.”

In addition, the TCPE considers it important for the program to explain the changes that Christianity has undergone (such as those which led to the emergence of its various branches), and for the events and dates that have marked its history to be “presented accurately,” especially those concerning the birth of the various Protestant churches (Q. 8). At another level, the Protestant contribution to various spheres of Québec culture should also be stressed.

In many respects the observations made by the AQCB resemble those of the TCPE in terms of the deficiencies in the program and the structure of the program and its effects (see sections 2.1.1.1¹³ and 2.4).

2.2.2.2 Elements relating to Islam

The Muslim respondents stated that, in the draft program, Islam is often associated with Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. They would prefer to see it associated with the two other monotheist (so-called Abrahamic) religions for reasons relating to history and religious affiliation.

Although the Sunni and Shia respondents explicitly stated their appreciation of the program objectives, they did not understand why Christianity and Judaism were given “preferential treatment”—these are discussed each year during a given cycle whereas Islam is covered “on a number of occasions during a cycle.”¹⁴ They consider that there is a contradiction between the program objectives (the recognition of others and the pursuit of the common good), the competencies to be developed, and what appears to be a “hierarchization” of religions.

13. The Catholic and Protestant respondents made fairly similar comments concerning the segmentation of religious traditions (see section 2.1.1.1), like many other respondents from various backgrounds.

14. Draft *Ethics and Religious Culture* program, elementary level, version dated September 1, 2006, p. 58.

The Muslim religious respondents and some religion specialists identified several problematical statements and associations concerning the Islamic tradition. They noted that, in the thematic examples, popular customs were often confused with actual religious practices. Similarly, they pointed out that no distinction was made between aspects of the Islamic religion and culturally specific customs not shared by all Muslims. Other statements appeared to be erroneous or to require elucidation.¹⁵ The same respondents noted the lack of documentation on Islam, and offered to provide the program designers with a proper bibliography. For all these reasons, the Muslim respondents considered it important to carry out a detailed review of the part of the program and teaching materials that deals with the Muslim religion.

The list of model individuals could be extended to include women, Shia figures and others.

2.2.2.3 General elements

Few requests were made to correct program deficiencies and there was little criticism of its content, except by the Catholic and Protestant respondents, who tended to compare the program to the denominational religious instruction programs.

The main areas of content that drew criticism from all denominations¹⁶ included:

- The poor representation of women: no women authors are presented; the theme of male-female relationships is not dealt with sufficiently; the debate over women's ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood is ignored; inclusive language is rarely used.
- The use of the concept of "sacred," considered out-of-date or incongruous by many religions (Christianity, Hinduism, etc.)
- Too much emphasis, in a program that already has a lot of material, on new religious movements in Secondary Cycle Two
- The dichotomy between ethics and religion, as if religions had no ethical dimension of its own. Some respondents saw this as a secularist bias. In addition, the first two competency

15. A list of the observations made has been forwarded to the program design team.

16. Unlike the other problems noted in this report, these elements were identified by a small number of respondents; but these were from different communities or presented the problem in a similar light. The question of women's roles was identified only twice (by the organization L'autre Parole and the Canadian Religious Conference), but it cannot be ignored, given its currency.

statements (*Take a considered position on ethical questions* and *Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion*) raise questions with respect to the ministerial orientations, in which the same formulation (in French, *La capacité de se situer*) is used for content in both the ethics and religious culture components.

Like other respondents, the Centre justice et foi was unhappy that, except for a few emblematic figures, the social commitment inherent in religious traditions was left out. The program “must make room for social justice as a part of religious culture, not just in the ethics component. It could be introduced, for example, when discussing the historical role played by religion in social services and education. It would then be a simple matter to examine the contributions made by believers to a fairer distribution of wealth and the pursuit of the common good” (Q. 18).

2.2.3 Teacher training

Since the questionnaire concerned various aspects of the program, it is not surprising that objections were made concerning the program content and the breakdown by theme. However, the comments revealed more acute concerns about the way the program would be taught.

2.2.3.1 Cognitive competencies

Some respondents saw the segmentation of the subject matter as a challenge for teachers, since it requires them to create links between the various components of the program, which is seen as disjointed, as well as extensive knowledge of the subject area. As suggested in the document setting out the ministerial orientations, the application of the program will require periodic refresher training. Even the respondents most favourably disposed towards the program expressed doubts in this area. Others simply did not believe that teachers would have the competency needed to teach the program properly.

The respondents familiar with the world of teaching wondered whether teachers would have the necessary resources—organizational, financial and pedagogical—to carry out their duties. The members of the APAVECQ pointed out, that in light of the experience acquired teaching the

former moral and religious instruction programs, this new program might not succeed—only too often in the real world teachers lack training or are left to their own devices concerning the content they teach.

Some respondents stressed that, while most teachers are poorly prepared to deal with the vast field of world religions, younger or more secular-minded teachers are no better equipped to present Québec’s religious heritage correctly. The Commission des biens culturels mentioned in its letter that “teacher training is a major concern. Without a basic knowledge of religious heritage, teaching ability is doomed to fall short. Complementary training in the history of art and architecture, or in ethnology, is necessary.”

In the view of certain specialists, regardless of the field (religion, history, etc.), pedagogical documents should be able to make up for individual professional drawbacks.

2.2.3.2 Pedagogical competencies

Ethics and religion are subjects that require great sensitivity and tact in dealings with students. The target competency is cognitive, but also psychoeducational.

Several respondents believed that the teachers who teach the program should have specific training to develop essential competencies such as an ability to respect the religious experiences of students during discussions, to display sensitivity concerning the impact of content on students and offer students support in their learning.

According to the APAVECQ, the most important role for teachers will be to promote dialogue, rather than play the role of religions specialists. This vision may, however, not match that of some religious parents who are more concerned about the accuracy of the knowledge taught. This is the paradoxical challenge facing teachers.

2.2.3.3 Teacher neutrality

More concerns were expressed about the extent of teacher neutrality. Although most respondents seemed to recognize that the program “informed without taking sides,” many respondents (religious and specialist) were still worried about a lack of objectivity, or even bias, among teachers. Teacher bias could have repercussions not only on the choice of themes and how they would be dealt with, but also on teachers’ attitude in the classroom. Many different examples were suggested on the questionnaire. Will an atheist teacher be able to present religion seriously and respectfully? Will a teacher belonging to a specific denomination be able to present the beliefs of another religion impartially? Will a teacher be tempted to stress his or her own religious or secular beliefs?

The TCPE, whose position is shared by many other respondents, quotes the opinion of pedagogues¹⁷ that it is not possible for a teacher to “simply teach facts without any personal slant; first, because the selection and presentation of the data used to illustrate fundamental questions is always subject to personal preference; and second, because teachers necessarily transmit something of their own personality, along with facts, when they teach.”

2.2.3.4 Specialized teachers at the elementary level

Several respondents worried that the elementary school program would be placed in the hands of teachers with no religious studies training, or with a negative attitude toward religion. Forcing teachers with no religious sensitivity to teach the Ethics and Religious Culture program could have negative repercussions for students, and could bring them and the teacher up against the issue of freedom of conscience and religion. Some respondents considered that, to limit the damage, the program should be taught by members of the teaching staff with a genuine interest in doing so, or (better still) by specially qualified teachers.

17. Opinion of E. W. Shideler, noted by S. B. Frost and quoted in Glenn Smith ed., *Éduquer les enfants, une vision protestante de l'école* (Québec: Sommet, 1998), p. 42. [Free translation]

The APAVECQ stated concerns based on its familiarity with the school system: “on the ground, many elementary level homeroom teachers are not comfortable with the idea of teaching the program, a feeling that is echoed in various regions throughout Québec. Many teachers have applied for an exemption from teaching religion; they are uncomfortable with the idea of discussing religion with their students, or afraid of raising questions that might generate controversy. At the secondary level, the existence of fragmented workloads could place some teachers in a difficult situation in terms of their discussing religious questions with students”

(Q. 6).

Given the context, many religious and specialist respondents are uneasy and consider that, in the final analysis, the success of the program rests on the teacher’s shoulders. This is why they constantly raise the question of teacher training, and how it might be designed.

2.2.4 The role of parents and the fate of the students

In addition to the concerns already outlined (over a program difficult to manage because of its thematic approach, and over teacher competence and neutrality), the latitude given to teachers and the lack of any clearly stated role for parents only increase the anxiety level. Some respondents feel that students may suffer the negative effects of an improper or clumsy application of the program.

Religious respondents with parental concerns were uncomfortable with the fact that the program does not talk about the role of parents, a deficiency noted by some Catholic respondents, including the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, and the Protestants involved with the TCPE. Other religious respondents fear that the religious education provided within the family could be jeopardized if it contradicts what is taught in the classroom. Some respondents believe that presenting various religions as equal to one another could harm child-parent relationships.

Starting from the premise that the program “stresses” differences between religions, the MLQ, unlike the other respondents, believes that the vision promoted at school could contradict the

vision presented by the parents (Q. 5). The MELS probably also has in mind parents who promote a non-religious “vision” at home.

Some respondents, like the Centre justice et foi and the TCPE, consider that educational synergy should include parent participation. The APAVECQ, expressing the professional concerns of its members, considers that teachers, the school team and students support services, including the Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Service,¹⁸ should all work together “to ensure that schools take responsibility for the spiritual development of their students”¹⁹ (Q. 10).

2.3 POSITIONS WITHIN DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS²⁰

A detailed analysis of the questionnaires (see Appendix 5) reveals strong opposition from various religious groups and organizations within the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish denominations. The positions and arguments presented by these groups and organizations, and the types of actions they propose, need to be examined here.

First, however, it is necessary to note the confusion created by the expression “religious culture” in the title of the program,²¹ since this provoked some of the criticism directed at the program itself.

2.3.1 Understanding of the term “religious culture”

The term “religious culture,” as used in the title of the program, created a problem of perception for several respondents that affected their view of the entire program. The term was not always understood in the same way and, in certain cases, this appeared to make the program seem less open. CAR would like to clarify this point. In the program, the term “religious culture” is used in a similar way to “musical culture” or “literary culture.”

18. The TCPE described SCGCIA as the “forgotten figures” of the program (Q. 18).

19. See the *Education Act*, R.S.Q., Chapter III, division I, section 36.

20. This heading refers to denominations in general, of which the religious groups and organizations consulted are a part.

21. In addition, some respondents saw this title as pitting ethics and religious culture against each other.

Some Catholic respondents appear to confuse this idea with faith-based education. In addition, they give the term “religious culture” an anthropological meaning, similar to “Québec culture.” The difference is between *possessing* a form of culture or *belonging to* a form of culture, two entirely different things.

Some Jewish and Hindu respondents pointed out that their religious traditions do not distinguish between the notions of religion and culture, meaning that the term “religious culture” can only be understood in an anthropological sense. It is possible that the use of the expression “Québec culture” adds to the confusion.

CAR saw the inherent difficulty of the concept exemplified when a religious respondent, who clearly understood what the term means, still referred to the “religious culture of other religions.” Such semantic slips seem to occur naturally, aggravating the problem.

The Hindu respondent, still focusing on religious education, displayed a degree of ambiguity: “There is great concern in the community over how the curriculum will be designed. Would it be the government telling us how the courses would be designed and what our children should study, or would adequate steps be taken to take into consideration firsthand knowledge from the communities themselves?” (Q. 18). CAR has observed that confusion between denominational education and the aims of the program can generate further confusion with respect to the State’s role in religious matters, as we shall see from the positions of some Catholic respondents.

2.3.1.1 Catholic respondents

The effects of this confusion can be clearly seen in the answers to question 16, dealing with the development of a “religious culture consistent with ministerial orientations.”²² The Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, which plays a leading role in Québec’s Catholic community, found this expression to be a stumbling block. Faced with the apparent ambiguity of the wording, the bishops wondered what exactly was meant by “religious culture” and whether it really referred to

22. In general, the religious aspects of the Ethics and Religious Culture program will allow Québec students to develop a religious culture consistent with ministerial orientations.

religious culture or, rather, to a secular culture open to religious aspects. If the second hypothesis were true, the bishops wondered whether the MELS wanted to develop a “secular culture” to replace “Catholic culture.” They also wondered “to what extent it is the State’s responsibility to shape the religious culture of a people. Toward what type of ‘religious culture’ does the Québec State intend to steer society via the school system?” (Q. 16). Paradoxically, the bishops agreed with the idea that “there is a need to instill a form of culture in students with regard to religion, in the sense indicated in the introduction to the program”²³ (Q. 16). Elsewhere, they use the term “religious culture” in its anthropological sense: “Québec’s religious culture is much more deeply marked by Catholicism than can be seen from the program” (Q. 4).

The Association of Catholic Parents of Québec (AC PQ), which equates religious culture with faith-based education, states that “it is not the role of the State to develop religious culture. [...] The Ministère must not go over the heads of parents, whose wishes the State must respect in the education of their children. Religious culture must be consistent with the truth about God and the world. True religious culture must be based on faith. This program cannot therefore lead to a true religious culture, since it is not designed to develop faith. The program must reflect the expectations of parents, and not of the minister” (Q. 16).

In a similar vein, the English Speaking Catholic Council states that “in terms of rights and freedoms” the program leaves parents out of any discussion of religion (Q. 5). The Council believes that “the ministry of education plans to use the ERC program to oversee the development of the religious culture of Quebec students,” and adds: Is it the role of the State, through its control of private and public education, to supervise the development of the religious culture of Quebec?” (Q. 16).

2.3.1.2 Protestant respondents

In the view of the Protestant respondents, faith-based education is a matter for parents and churches: “the Table de concertation protestante sur l’éducation has, for many years, defended the position that it is up to parents and the churches to transmit and teach their specific values

23. Draft *Ethics and Religious Culture* program, elementary level, p. 6.

and beliefs to the younger generation” (Q. 17). There is no ambiguity in the way they see the program: “we are aware that the role of the Ministère de l’Éducation is not to promote faith-based education, but rather an understanding of religious culture within a pluralist society. The goal of the Ministère to create a forum for dialogue, understanding and learning, in order to improve community life, is laudable and we are strongly in favour of and sensitive to this objective” (Q. 18, Appendix 5). It is possible that its understanding of the program objectives led the TCPE to greet the program with more enthusiasm than the Catholics.

The respondent of the United Church, without giving an explanation, considered that “the transmission of the specific 'faith' of the [United] Church can only benefit from the program if it is applied in the manner and with the aims set out in this document” (Q. 17). Perhaps this means that the program can help students acquire the basic knowledge on which a denominational group can then build its own faith-based education program.

2.3.2 Opposition expressed by some groups and organizations

An analysis of the questionnaire shows that the opposition expressed by some groups and organizations of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths was not echoed by other respondents from the same faith group, most of whom had a positive reaction to the program.

2.3.2.1 Comparison of the points of view expressed by Catholic respondents

Arguments against the program

The members of the Association of Catholic Parents of Québec are not opposed to the program solely on principle, but also because of its content: in their view, “the entire program as presently conceived should be discarded and withdrawn. The Catholic content and the order in which the concepts are presented should be decided by Catholic religious leaders, by the bishops, not by the State” (Q. 17). However, it is important to note that the Catholic religious leaders themselves, represented by the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, do not go this far (see their position as stated below). The English Speaking Catholic Council, although highly critical of the program, is neither absolutely nor definitively opposed to it: “If there is serious consideration of the

recommendations we are making, the ERC programme will be more favourably received by the [English Speaking Catholic Council]” (Q. 17).

The ACPQ and the ESCC cite another reason to question the program; in their view, it is likely to confuse elementary school students’ sense of denominational identity.

The Association of Catholic Parents of Québec

The only Catholic organization to categorically oppose all aspects of the Ethics and Religious Culture program is the Association of Catholic Parents, which believes that the program “is likely to trivialize and undermine the Catholic faith, which is treated superficially.” Because “children’s faith and stability are directly threatened by the program orientations,” the association demands “nothing less than the right to request a dispensation or exemption” (Q. 17). The underlying strategy appears to be based on the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, since the establishment of the program “does not respect the freedom of religion of parents who have made a conscious decision to inculcate religion in their children.” The ACPQ claims a right for children “to choose between religious instruction or instruction in Catholic religious culture, on the one hand, and the proposed (or “imposed”) Ethics and Religious Culture program, on the other” (Q. 5). This is why the members of the Association cannot, “as taxpayers, endorse this program, which will involve a considerable financial outlay [...] by the Ministère” (Q. 17).

The English Speaking Catholic Council

The ESCC’s main criticism of the program is that it places too much emphasis on the surface aspects and ignores the spiritual dimension. Although it recommends a “serious” revision of the program, it still recognizes the validity of some of its objectives. It asks that some content be reviewed, especially at the elementary level, and that parents be more involved: “There should be some dialogue and synergy between the home and the classroom in the arena of moral and religious education” (Q. 5).

In the view of the Council, the main difficulties will result from the introduction of the program, in its present form, in private denominational schools. The Council therefore suggests an asymmetrical approach: “The government should not impose this program on faith-based or

confessional schools but allow these schools to devise programmes of instruction connected to their traditions, but consistent with basic objectives of the ERC program. This asymmetrical approach would [be] more appropriate given the distinctive nature of confessional institutions and consistent with the recognition of freedom of religion and conscience. We are convinced that established confessional schools could fully meet the objectives of the program in a manner consistent with their missions” (Q. 18).

However, the ESCC shows its concern for students’ freedom of religion when it states that “respecting the students’ freedom of religion also means the willingness to work with their religious formation and development. Freedom of religion involves free self-expression, free exercise of religion. Students, teachers and administrators must feel comfortable with the free expression of religion. Real tolerance and respect should be able to deal with real expressions of difference” (Q. 5).

Eastern Catholic churches

The Eastern Catholic churches expressed some of the most negative views of all the Catholic respondents (see Appendix 5). Aware that their flocks constitute an ethno-religious minority, they nevertheless expected a “positive reaction” within their community: “despite the fact that this is a new paradigm that must be introduced, [...] families are able to understand how important it is for a society like Québec to provide itself with a program that is open to all religions, has an integrating effect and is conducive to a harmonious community life in which the faith of each individual is respected. Our attitude is positive because everyone, regardless of their religious ties, will learn to know each other, without proselytizing” (Q. 17). These churches’ reaction was not unreservedly enthusiastic and unconditional, however, since they recommended that the program be revised at the elementary level and that “parents be given the freedom to exempt their child from the program as presented, while giving another option to students as in the current program” (Q. 18).

The Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops

Although the AQCB, in turn, questions whether the role of the State should be to “*shape* the religious culture of a people,” it agrees that the program will undoubtedly give students “a first

opportunity to discover some aspects of religious life in Québec society. At the very least, it should get students beyond level zero of religious culture” (Q. 16).

Apart from these criticisms of content, the bishops consider it essential to clarify the prescriptive elements of the program (Q. 8). They are deeply concerned about the training provided for future teachers currently at university: “there must be a radical change in university teaching methods, which currently are totally unsuited to the achievement of the ministerial orientations” (Q. 18).

The detailed response provided by the AQCB following CAR’s consultation takes the opposite point of view from the ACPQ, since it is in keeping with the “spirit of vigilant collaboration” that the bishops referred to in their 2005 brief,²⁴ and that they intend to maintain “as and when the orientations and announced changes are implemented” (Q. 18). Although they are afraid that the MELS will “be trapped by overly tight deadlines that will prevent the necessary changes from being made,” the bishops hope that they will be kept informed of ongoing assessments of the program’s implementation.

The reaction of the AQCB could be described as moderately receptive to the program. A small majority of their answers to the questionnaire fell into the “Agree” or “Agree somewhat” categories, but the comments made hinted at a more negative reaction, given the abundance of articulated, systematic criticism. In fact the bishops, aware of the “enormous difficulties involved in developing this program,” attempted to make remarks and criticisms that, as they put it, were essentially intended to help improve the program to allow them to support it within their communities (Q. 17).

The Canadian Religious Conference

The Canadian Religious Conference is the association of major superiors of Catholic religious congregations (sisters, brothers and priests) in Canada. Many of its members are familiar with the world of education, having worked as teachers. The Conference was careful to gather the opinions of participants from many regions of Québec, working in public and private elementary

24. Brief submitted by the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops to the Committee on Education during its examination of Bill 95, June 2005.

and secondary schools. They read through the program attentively, distinguishing between the various cycles. The Conference appreciated numerous aspects of the program and was enthusiastic about its emphasis on community life and openness to diversity. However, it considers that, “to allow a restructuring of students’ identity,” at the secondary level, “it will be necessary to keep the focus on Christianity, because there is a clear risk that presenting all the ritual elements of the various religions will create confusion” in students’ minds or weaken their “attachment to the roots of their faith and culture” (Q. 5). This does not prevent the members of the Conference from agreeing with 15 out of 16 statements on the questionnaire, which suggests that they are relatively confident in the program.

The Centre justice et foi²⁵

The positive reaction and position of the CJF, a Catholic organization that draws inspiration from Ignatian spirituality, contrasts strongly with those of the ACPQ or ESCC. According to the CJF, “nondenominational teaching of the phenomenon of religion” should explore four key points, namely (1) the meaning of life; (2) the religious heritage in Québec and the Western world; (3) an introduction to the major religious traditions; and (4) the development of a critical approach to religion. Although, for the CJF, the “meaning of life” is one of the “shortcomings” of the program as it currently stands, the other three points are adequately dealt with (Q. 17). The program is a step in the right direction, although it could still be improved.

2.3.2.2 Comparison of the points of view expressed by Protestant respondents

The “liberal” or “mainstream” churches

The positions of the various Protestant religious groups concerning the program presented significant differences. The two largest “liberal” churches were explicitly in favour of the program. The Anglican Church respondent stated that “this proposed program is an excellent tool to foster self-knowledge and knowledge of others which has the potential to positively impact the students of today and our society as a whole” (Q. 18, Appendix 5).

25. The CJF perspective is reported here to illustrate the range of views existing within the Catholic community. Table 10 in Appendix 5 covers all Catholic consultations.

Despite some concerns, the United Church representative thought that “on paper, this fine program is good, and even excellent. [...] It’s time we had such a program to replace the existing, archaic one” (Q. 18 and 19).

The Table de concertation protestante sur l’éducation

The TCPE brings together representatives from all areas of Protestant life in Québec, but is marked especially by the presence of evangelical churches. Its assessment of the various aspects of the program included more criticism than that of the liberal Protestant establishment (see Table 11 of Appendix 5). According to the TCPE, one of the strong points of the program is the opportunity it provides to discover religious diversity. However, the TCPE questions the “obvious intent” to engage in a comparative study of religions based on the search for a common thread. The disadvantage of this approach is that it would level out the specific features of each religion to the point where the Protestant identity, that of “the largest religious minority in Québec,” would be barely distinguishable.²⁶ A cultural approach to the teaching of religion would give a reductionist view of religion as a phenomenon viewed from the standpoint of the social sciences. According to the TCPE, questions relating to the desire for transcendence would be relegated to the background.²⁷ Instead of a “comparative study of world religions,” the TCPE suggests “a more pluralistic approach, in which each religion (including secular perceptions) could be studied on its own terms.”²⁸

As its answers show, the TCPE reacted positively to most of the questions while remaining critical of certain aspects of the program, which it considered needed revision. This Protestant group was generally well disposed, and made comments designed to improve the program and correct the deficiencies noted with respect to the reference points and key features specific to the Protestant denominations.

Despite this generally favourable position, the TCPE believed that the program could generate negative reactions in “some communities,” especially evangelical communities, “and even

26. Comments relating to Question 18, appended to the questionnaire.

27. This fear was previously expressed by the Protestant Committee in its brief *A Single Non-Confessional Program: Educational Choices for Each School*, September 1999, p. 5 (Q. 16).

28. Comments relating to Question 18, appended to the questionnaire.

stronger reactions in others” (Q. 17). In this connection, the TCPE made a concrete suggestion: “it is important to communicate the ministerial objectives to the churches and parents in an explicit manner, because if the program objectives are not properly explained to parents, we believe there is a risk that the children of more conservative parents will migrate to the private sector. The objectives could be discussed in written documents and explained through oral presentations” (Q. 17).

2.3.2.3 Comparison of the points of view expressed by Jewish respondents

Orthodox Jews

The Association of Jewish Day Schools, representing private Orthodox schools,²⁹ quite willingly conceded that, “overall, it would be difficult to object to orientations intended to promote openness, discernment, respect for others, tolerance and dialogue, with a view to improving community life in a representative democracy traditionally based on integration but not assimilation” (Q. 18). However, the implementation of the program in Jewish schools would be problematical because, in the view of the AJDS, it would run counter to their special educational project, which is to preserve the traditions, culture and lifestyle of the Orthodox Jewish community.

As a result, the AJDS requests that Orthodox Jewish realities be taken into account via “a differentiated approach so as not to create an obstacle. The goal would not be to create preferential treatment, but to deal appropriately with various sensitive issues within the general framework of the democratic ethic” (Q. 5). In addition, if “schools were given sufficient leeway,” the Association believes that the program would meet with a generally positive reception in the Jewish community (Q. 17).

Reform Judaism

The respondent for the Reform Judaism community saw things differently, believing that, apart from the concerns about teacher training, the Ethics and Religious Culture program would be

29. Around three-quarters of the Jewish (Ashkenazi and Sephardic) congregations in Québec are classified as Orthodox.

favourably received in the community, and that the program has arrived at an appropriate point in the history of Québec (see section 2.1.2).

2.3.3 Freedom of conscience and religion

2.3.3.1 Respondents who raised this argument

The arguments raised by the Association of Catholic Parents, the English Speaking Catholic Council and the Association of Jewish Day Schools are based on the idea that the State should not intervene in the area of “religious culture”—in the sense in which they understand the term. These organizations feel that the construction of the students’ identity and religion would be compromised by the program, meaning that the State (or the Ministère) would fail to respect their students’ right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, as guaranteed by the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.

In addition, some respondents pointed out that the question of freedom of conscience and religion could also be raised by some teachers.

Apart from the ACPQ, however, which is totally against the program, the other religious organizations only raised the question of freedom of conscience and religion in connection with the implementation of the program in private denominational schools (English Catholic, Jewish), which is the subject of another debate.

The AQCBC sets out a very nuanced position: “the program makes a serious, praiseworthy effort to ensure freedom of conscience, but we still have doubts concerning its implementation. The program, in itself, generally respects students’ freedom of conscience, given that it does not promote any one religion and opens students’ minds to other, non-religious viewpoints. However, it is difficult to imagine that, in this sometimes perilous set of considerations, no student will suffer from a lack of recognition or esteem, or will be exposed to a discourse that does not fully respect his or her religious identity and beliefs” (Q. 5).

The Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops defended a point of view in strong contrast to that of the ACPQ. Although the Eastern Catholic churches agreed that students' freedom of conscience and religion could be compromised, they appeared to be ready to "live with" the program. On the other hand, the Canadian Religious Conference and the Centre justice et foi shared none of these concerns.

The Orthodox Jewish respondents felt that the beliefs of "certain groups"³⁰ require young people to acquire an in-depth knowledge of their own religious tradition without other "distractions." Before they reach adulthood,³¹ they cannot discuss other religions, "their symbols, sacred texts, or religious practices" (Q. 3 and 5). In such circumstances, the program would "inevitably call into question those practices that do not match the expectations and values that it tries to present as universal"³² (Q. 5).

For this reason, the program "does not respect the principle of neutrality incumbent on the government authorities with regard to the phenomenon of religion, in which the cultural aspects are indissociable from the religious beliefs and practices that are seen as one by the community" (Q. 17). As a result, the implementation of the program would compromise students' freedom of conscience and religion, and "infringe on the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, since [Jewish children] would feel forced to act against their beliefs and consciences" (Q. 5). If deemed necessary, the constitutionality of the program could be challenged under the provincial and federal charters. It should be noted that the Reform Jews also expressed fears concerning the freedom of conscience and religion of elementary school students.

The opposite viewpoint expressed by the Mouvement laïque québécois could fuel the debate, given how strongly its members feel that the freedom of conscience of both students and teachers is at risk.³³ According to this group, too much emphasis on "cultural and religious differences" could place children who want to "become part of the majority" in a difficult situation. This

30. Apparently, the remarks of this respondent applied sometimes to all Orthodox Jews, and sometimes to Hasidic Jews alone.

31. Probably Bar Mitzvah age (the age of 13 for Orthodox Jewish boys).

32. This being the case, perhaps the values that the Ethics and Religious Culture program aims to make universal should be specified, along with the ways in which they conflict with so-called non-conformist practices.

33. Even though the MLQ and the ACPQ can be seen as the opposite poles of a front that rejects the Ethics and Religious Culture program, the first, unlike the second, appreciated at least some of its elements.

“could force some students who do not wish to discuss the subject publicly in the classroom to ‘come out of the closet,’ concerning their parents’ religious beliefs” (Q. 6). In other words, the emphasis on difference could generate conflict between students.

2.3.3.2 Points of view expressed by religion specialists and observers

Among the organizations specializing in questions of religion and spirituality, only the APAVECQ believed that children’s freedom of conscience and religion would be jeopardized. With some hesitation, the SQER stated that “the program is part of a normative approach that works to exclude those who doubt or deny the existence of a sacred realm” (Q. 6). Nine other respondents agreed with the idea that the program respects students’ freedom of conscience and religion, whereas only two agreed somewhat. The AQPMR and the Centre justice et foi considered that the program did not infringe on students’ freedoms. There was a consensus among the independent observers: they all considered that the program respected students’ freedom of conscience and religion (see Table 9 of Appendix 5). This fact put the argument that the program infringed on freedom of religion into some perspective.

Teachers’ freedom of conscience and religion was not a cause for concern: the answers for question 6 in the same table achieved the highest score for the respondents in this category.

2.4 THE POSITIVE OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION

Given the results of the consultation conducted by the Comité sur les affaires religieuses, is there reason to believe that the program will be accepted by the various groups consulted? Based on questions 1 to 16, and then on question 17, which specifically addresses this issue (see Appendix 5), it is possible to state that the program should be positively received.

In the view of many respondents, the program’s focus on community life, particularly in connection with religious diversity, is one of its strong points and in itself almost justifies the program’s existence (see Table 1 of Appendix 5). Most respondents see the development of a “religious culture,” in other words, a basic knowledge about a range of religions, as a necessity

in Québec society. Therefore, many people praised this objective. Overall, in light of all the responses, it can be stated that the aims of the program were greeted positively, even very positively (see Table 9 of Appendix 5).

In some cases, the positive reaction seemed conditional on an adequate response not only to the issues raised by the program's design and content, but also to the concerns connected with teacher training, a fundamental implementation issue.

One can therefore say that, despite the unresolved aspects of the program, most of the religious respondents were open to,³⁴ interested in and even explicitly in favour of its implementation. This represents an opening, or agreement in principle, since it is clear that the respondents expect their observations to be heard, and perhaps expect the MELS to give them more information on the ins and outs of the program. A majority of the religious groups said that they were very concerned about the ways in which their tradition will be presented in the teaching materials made available to teachers and students.

CAR notes that, overall, the demands for revision do not appear to be unwarranted, given that such requests, more numerous among the Catholic and Protestant respondents, were not generally intended to create an advantage over other religious groups. Most concern substantive additions (various points of dogma considered fundamental, etc.) and increased emphasis on what each group believe to be the essence of their spiritual approach.

In general, the Protestant and Catholic respondents criticized the same elements of the program: a levelling-out of the specific features of each religion, creating a danger of relativism, the Christian heritage reduced to an artifact from the past, etc. In addition, almost all the Christian respondents noted the absence of the essential dimension of a quest for meaning. The disappointment and apprehension of some Catholic respondents is understandable, given that they must move from a system they know to one that will require them to adapt.

34. These respondents showed interest in the program without explicitly saying that they agreed with it.

An analysis of the questionnaires shows that no denominational family presented a united front. Within each denomination, various subgroups presented interpretations, viewpoints and strategies that varied widely from one group to another, even among the Catholic respondents, whose quantitative results appeared to show a united approach.

The more reticent religious groups made many different criticisms and requests for adjustment, some of which converged. In general, their respondents demanded an in-depth revision of the program (at least for the public schools), but did not oppose its implementation. A small subgroup could offer more resistance but, for now, only the Association of Catholic Parents rejects the program outright. English-speaking Catholics and Orthodox Jews, aside from the deficiencies they noted in terms of program content, tend to suggest an “asymmetrical” or “differentiated” application in the private schools, especially at the elementary level.³⁵ These three organizations are the only three to mention a possible *Charter* challenge.

The MLQ hopes that “the religious culture component will disappear at the elementary and secondary levels”³⁶ to avoid the “innumerable controversies” and “numerous conflicts” it apprehends (Q. 17 and 18). Unlike many Catholic and Protestant respondents, this organization sees the Ethics and Religious Culture program as “stressing” cultural and religious differences.

Most specialists and observers are, overall, more receptive to the program, which does not prevent them from being perplexed by what they see as a thematic approach to religion. This element should be emphasized, as several of these specialists are trained or teach in the field of religious studies.

The religious groups most favourably disposed to the program often gave quantitatively positive responses, although their comments showed that they expected various changes to be made. Strangely, some of the more reticent groups also hoped for a positive response from the MELS, in which case they would be more likely to give their assent.

35. Some evangelical Protestant denominations could also apply the same logic.

36. Religious culture classes could be offered as an option in Secondary IV and V, when students are more mature.

Overall, then, the draft program was relatively well received, at least in terms of its aims, but the demands for a revision were sometimes extensive. It is clear that if the MELS responded positively to the requests for revision, the support from religious groups and observers would be both broader and firmer.

SECTION 3: POSITION OF THE COMITÉ SUR LES AFFAIRES RELIGIEUSES

In the summer of 2005, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport began the process of preparing the Ethics and Religious Culture program, which included a field-testing period and validation operation. The goal of the process was to arrive at a quality program that could be applied in schools across Québec. The consultation conducted by CAR, and its position, as expressed herein, are in addition to the ministerial process but pursue the same goal of improving the program.

Now that it has analyzed the results of its consultation, CAR wishes to make its own point of view known to the program designers while work to improve the program is ongoing. CAR's position, as expressed herein, should not be confused with the brief submitted to the Minister following the tabling of the final version in the spring of 2007, pursuant to section 477.18.3 of the *Education Act*.

In the following pages, the Committee will set out the bases for its opinion. It will then suggest a way to attain one of the aims of the program: the recognition of others. This will be followed by several proposals for enriching the program, and suggestions to facilitate its application.

3.1 FOUNDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE'S POSITION

The Committee's position is based on the ministerial orientations released in May 2005, on the Québec model for secular schools, and on the broad consensus that has emerged from the consultation on the aims of the program.

3.1.1 The ministerial orientations set out in the document *Establishment of an Ethics and Religious Culture Program: Providing Future Direction for All Québec Youth*

The consultation involving religious groups and organizations as well as other respondents conducted by the Comité sur les affaires religieuses was intended to ensure that the Ethics and

Religious Culture program was consistent with the ministerial orientations, which set out four guiding principles for the program. Accordingly, the latter would support learning that:

- is continuous and progressive
- is rooted in the students' reality and in Québec culture
- respects students' and teachers' freedom of conscience and religion
- fosters living in harmony with others

The ministerial orientations also address the question of program content, centring on various aspects including:

- familiarity with Québec's religious heritage
- openness to religious diversity
- the ability of students to position themselves, after due consideration, with respect to religions and new religious movements

One final element, the ability of students to explore secular perceptions of the world and human beings, is part of the program content for both religious culture and ethics.

3.1.2 The Québec model of secular schools

To analyze the draft Ethics and Religious Culture program, CAR also referred to the Québec model of secular schools, as described in its recent brief.³⁷ The Committee presents the five structural elements that form an open secular model:

- respect for the freedom of conscience and religion of students, parents and school staff members
- the neutrality of the State and of public schools in religious matters
- concern for the spiritual development of students, a responsibility shared by the educational community as a whole
- the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service, which is related to this shared responsibility
- the Ethics and Religious Culture program

37. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *Secular Schools in Québec: A Necessary Change in Institutional Culture*, Brief to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, October 2006.

This new model will require far-reaching changes in the institutional culture of Québec's school system. It involves a new approach to teaching about religion, one based strictly on respect for freedom of conscience and religion and the neutrality of public schools. This is in contrast to the belief-based teaching that takes place in the home or within different faith communities. CAR is of the opinion that the new secular model is better equipped to ensure respect for the realities of life in today's Québec, given that a growing number of citizens, while remaining attached to certain traditions, identify less and less with religious institutions. However, these same people want their children to acquire a knowledge and understanding of religion, and to have access to the wealth of Québec's religious heritage.

3.1.3 The consensus that emerged from the consultation

The favourable reception accorded the program by a majority of respondents is based mainly on the relevance of its two key aims, namely, recognition of others and the pursuit of the common good, which were considered essential. An analysis of the comments and the answers to certain questions—especially those concerning community life (see Table 1 of Appendix 5)—supports the statement that achieving these essential aims is considered as a major challenge for a pluralistic Québec in which the rights of all individuals are respected. This is why the Committee hopes that the program will enable students to attain these aims, and why it will examine the program from that perspective.

3.2 A MAJOR ISSUE: THE RECOGNITION OF OTHERS

The Committee considers that some adaptations must be made to the program at the Secondary Cycle Two level to ensure that the aim of recognition of others is achieved. These adaptations, to the historical and experiential dimensions and to the development of an integrative view of various religious traditions, appear to be necessary to allow students to develop an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion.

3.2.1 Towards a systemic understanding integrating the historical and experiential dimensions

To develop an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion, students must, among other things, learn to recognize a living, complex, rich and ever-changing reality within each religion, and see this as part of an ongoing process with its own inner coherence. The Committee shares the concern of certain respondents that the current structure of the program makes it less likely that students will have gained this type of understanding by the end of the program.

To ensure that beliefs and practices are treated with respect, they must be explained within the logic and coherence of the tradition that created them and gave them meaning. This is only possible if, by the end of the program, students are able to sum up everything they have learned up to that point. Otherwise, the division of program content by theme (celebrations, founders, symbolism, geographic distribution, artistic expression, etc.) could lead to a sketchy understanding of religion. As in a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces must fit together to form a systemic understanding of religions, and go beyond the stage of simplistic or caricatured pictures. In other words, by the end of the program students must have been given an opportunity to study some religious traditions in themselves, without the distraction of comparisons with other religious or secular traditions. This idea was formulated as follows by the Société québécoise pour l'étude de la religion:

It would have been preferable, at the secondary level, to deal with religions one by one, on their own terms, in order to highlight their individual coherence. This would also have provided an opportunity to review some of the themes from the elementary level and to focus on the specific features of each religion in terms of each theme. (Q. 2)

At the end of the secondary level, after 12 years of schooling, [...] the students will still be unable to describe how each religion constitutes a system of beliefs, practices, duties, etc. Their knowledge will be partial. They will be able to name specific festivals, prophets and spiritual guides, but will be unable to explain the internal coherence and logic of each religion. A thematic approach will not enable students to properly understand cultures or religions with which they are unfamiliar, grasp what makes them distinctive or see how they constitute a whole. (Q. 9)

Special attention must also be paid to the historical dimension of the religious traditions. Just as in science courses, where students can be asked to study the key points in the historical development of a scientific theory (from the circumstances surrounding a theory's origin to its modern development), an attentive examination of the historical development of a religious tradition makes it possible for students to arrive at an understanding of its evolution and its present-day forms. Examples would include the Shia and Sunni forms of Islam, or the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox branches of Christianity. This historical viewpoint would also make it easier to understand the links and influences connecting some of the major traditions.

Finally, the experiential dimension, an essential aspect of religious culture, must be studied. Although one of the two aims of the program is to help students "get to know other people to better recognize them," it is clear that the second aspect of this (recognizing others) involves more than just studying the visible characteristics of religious traditions and schools of secular thought. All individuals are guided by beliefs that are rooted in experience and expressed in a range of commitments that give meaning to their existence. An understanding of the world of religious or other beliefs is impossible without taking this experiential dimension into account.³⁸ A study of certain key figures (Dr. Norman Bethune, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Helen Joseph, Jean Vanier, etc.) would allow students to understand how a commitment based on a religious or other belief can be beneficial for the human race.

In short, an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion implies that students have opportunities to gain an integrative view of several religious traditions by studying their historic and experiential dimensions.

38. The goal is not to offer students a "living experience," but to help them understand, through a range of different examples, the relationship between experience, belief and commitment.

3.2.2 A solution suited to a range of pedagogical approaches

CAR looked at the tools offered by the program to ensure an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion and foster recognition of others.

It notes that teaching for the program is based on learning and evaluation situations.

Learning and evaluation situations must be planned in order to enable competency development, using selected themes related to Ethics and Religious Culture, and must enable the construction and use of various resources that make up the other elements of the program content. The planning of learning and evaluation situations must also ensure learning progress.³⁹

CAR also notes that teachers are given ample latitude in their choice of teaching methods, as pointed out by the Assistant Deputy Minister for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education:

Teachers' professional practice is largely dependent on their professional autonomy. In other words, it is up to teachers to choose their instructional methods and learning situations. "Practices vary according to the level of education, the subject content, the characteristics of the students and the personality of the teacher," Bergevin explained. "All methods and approaches can be used, as this is part of the teacher's professional choice."⁴⁰

Some teachers may, therefore, select a method that will force them to refer directly to the themes suggested for preparing their classes. However, none of the themes proposed by the program allows for an integrative view of religious traditions.

These observations encourage CAR to seek a solution for Secondary Cycle Two, when students have acquired enough intellectual maturity to understand a phenomenon in all its complexity—when they are able, that is, to grasp the coherency binding together its various dimensions. The goal is therefore to find themes for Cycle Two that will give students an informed view of the phenomenon of religion, whatever the teaching methods selected by the teacher. These themes

39. Draft Ethics and Religious Culture Program, Elementary Level, p. 16.

40. Comments reported in *Schoolscapes*, vol. 7 no. 2, January 2007, p. 5.

could involve the study of a certain number of religions individually, including the Christian (Catholic and Protestant) tradition, an aspect of Québec reality that cannot be ignored.

Such themes⁴¹ could include:

- the historical and geographical dimensions (for example, from the founding to the present day, as well as aspects of geographical transmission and divisions within specific religious traditions)
- the world of belief (for example, dogmas and doctrines, founding texts, stories, the sacred, myths)
- the experiential dimension (for example, social commitment, key figures, ethical motivation, experience)
- the world of practices (for example, places of worship, services, hierarchical organization, symbols)
- artistic expression (for example, architecture, music, visual art)

The usefulness of these themes lies in their versatility, since they can be addressed separately or together as part of pedagogical activities, whatever the method used. In addition, this solution is perfectly in line with the aim of the program with respect to religious culture.

Instruction in religious culture promotes an understanding of the main constituents of religions and of the sociocultural contexts in which they take root and continue to develop. Sacred texts, beliefs, teachings, rituals, feasts, rules of conduct, places of worship, works of art, practices, institutions, and types of organization are some of the aspects on which it focuses. Knowledge of these aspects will enable students to grasp the experiential, historic, doctrinal, moral, ritualistic, literary, artistic, social and political dimensions of religion.⁴²

41. One could draw upon the dimensions proposed by Ninian Smart in *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (London: Faber, 1968). This work was cited by Fernand Ouellet in *L'étude des religions dans les écoles. L'expérience américaine, anglaise et canadienne* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), p. 122-123.

42. Draft Ethics and Religious Culture program, Elementary Level, Version dated September 1, 2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, p. 6.

This solution offers many advantages:

- it would allow for an overview of religious traditions and schools of secular thought, whatever the teaching approach chosen
- it would make it possible to deal with controversial subjects (new religious movements, the sacred and myths) without making them into specific themes
- it would respect the structure of the program
- it would promote the updating of knowledge and competencies developed throughout the program and strengthen the links between the elementary level and Secondary Cycle One and Cycle Two
- it would facilitate the implementation of the program in a context where, in the first years of application, students in Secondary Cycle Two would not have developed the competencies expected in the preceding cycles. This solution would make the program sufficiently flexible as a response to problems associated with the simultaneous application of the program from the beginning of elementary school to the end of secondary school, following the withdrawal of the notwithstanding clause option in June 2008.

In addition to these advantages, CAR believes that its solution would make the program more acceptable to religious groups because it would address their concerns about how their traditions are presented.

CAR also feels that, by introducing an integrative view of religious traditions and accommodating their historical and experiential dimensions at the end of the process, the program can give Québec's young people an opportunity to develop the competencies needed to recognize others, an essential condition for community life, social peace and the pursuit of the common good.

3.3 SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

CAR has already reported the remarks, often dogma-related, made by the respondents and forwarded them to the program design team. It has done the same with numerous suggestions for

clarifying program content. The Committee urges the design team to pay close attention to these remarks and suggestions.

In the following pages, the Committee will reiterate some points that touch on the key aims of the Ethics and Religious Culture program and that accordingly require a measure of adaptation. In CAR's view, the program should highlight gender relationships in religions, make a clearer distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism within Christianity, devote more space to cultural diversity within religious traditions, and increase the number of reference points from contemporary life.

3.3.1 Gender relationships

Two of the organizations consulted pointed out that the issue of women's place in religion was ignored. CAR is of the opinion that this deficiency must be corrected. Depictions of the sexes and of male-female relationships are major facets of all religions and, as such, must be recognized, i.e. not just mentioned in passing.

The evolution of women's roles, and the contributions they have made through their ideas and commitment, must be considered. This evolution is reflected in the roles and status often assigned specifically to women, which must be identified, compared and explained in relation to those of men. In this connection, it appears relevant to outline the ministries and responsibilities of women in various religious traditions.

In Elementary Cycle One, the program refers to religious texts containing founding narratives in which women often play significant roles. It would be advantageous to study these, while paying attention to the role played by the women who became the focus of scriptural tradition because of their unique destinies.

In general, the language used in the program should give more visibility to women.

3.3.2 The distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism

The program makes no distinction between the two main religious traditions that have shaped Québec, compromising the recognition of others in their uniqueness and making Québec's religious heritage incomprehensible.

There are many differences between the Catholic and Protestant traditions, each of which has left its own specific traces through its works, the priority it has attributed to certain values, its organizational structures (highly centralized and hierarchical in the case of the Catholic Church), its institutions and its relationships with the State—in short, through the impact each has had on the type of society Québec has become.

For example, the presentation of Québec's religious heritage should highlight the ubiquity of place names and institutional names derived from Catholicism and its history.

3.3.3 Cultural diversity within the religious traditions

As the following examples show, it would be beneficial to emphasize the cultural diversity that exists within the main religious traditions, in order to demonstrate their internal complexity and the wide range of sources on which they draw for their development.

Some forms of ritual gain added vitality from local culture, as we can see from African and Haitian Eucharistic services, which have few similarities with those generally attended by Christians in the West. Catholic churches in Québec have recently begun to incorporate features from the home countries of their new members, especially those from Haiti and Vietnam.

The program could also highlight the diversity found within the Orthodox Church, especially in the services of the Eastern Christian traditions (from Ukraine, Greece and the Middle East) in the Montréal region. Then, too, there is the diversity within the Québec Islamic tradition, reflecting the range of countries from which Muslim immigrants have arrived, especially since the 1970s.

Finally, the program can draw attention to the diversity resulting from the range of responses to unusual historic situations. For example, in the Islamic tradition, the need to ensure the succession of the Prophet gave rise to the Sunni, Shia and Kharijite branches of Islam.

Whatever examples are chosen, the goal should be to illustrate how the ongoing exchange between a given religious tradition and the surrounding culture, society and other religions creates diversity within the religious tradition.

3.3.4 Contemporary points of reference

To bolster the historical dimension of the program, the Committee considers it necessary to include a study of the growing secularization of Québec society. This would give students reference points from which to interpret the society in which they live, and allow them to understand the recent evolution of the religions that have helped shape Québec as well as the development of secular perceptions and new religious movements. It would also help students understand public debates about the place of religion in society.

3.4 FACILITATING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The following points are noted here because they could have an impact on the implementation of the program.

3.4.1 Teacher/class/student synergy

In the field, classroom management is the area where all the anticipated problems associated with teaching dynamics converge. This is where respect for freedom of conscience and religion must be shown, backed up by solid teacher training. Teachers must, moreover, demonstrate tact in encouraging dialogue among students with a range of beliefs and backgrounds.

Teachers managing classes composed mainly of students from a range of religious denominations must not only know each student well, but also his or her religion. The way in

which students' religion is dealt with in the classroom, even (or especially) in an informal manner, will be particularly important given their own sensitivity to this topic. Even where the teacher is competent and describes a religion accurately, discrepancies between students' self-understanding and the outside view presented by the program can cause conflicts, resulting in repercussions for the whole family.

In addition, the presence of a faith community may increase tension, especially since some religious groups consider that obligation to teach the Ethics and Religious Culture program infringes on their freedom of conscience and religion.

Apart from these concerns from the adult world, CAR considers that the Ethics and Religious Culture program must reach out to students in their own world: their experiences, questions, personalities, development, quest for identity, peer relationships, etc.

3.4.2 Teacher training

Clearly, initial or ongoing teacher training is the cornerstone in the implementation of the Ethics and Religious Culture program. It is important, therefore, for teachers to develop appropriate knowledge, pedagogical skills and attitudes if they are to help students achieve the program objectives. CAR is pleased to see the measures already taken by the MELS, and stresses that work must continue in conjunction with Québec's universities.

3.4.3 Ongoing, progressive learning

The Ethics and Religious Culture program is designed to ensure that teachers have ample freedom when choosing learning and evaluation situations. To avoid duplication and ensure that learning is genuinely progressive, this freedom must be exercised within certain guidelines.

Schools must be responsible for ensuring that the prescriptive elements for each cycle are completed. To do this, school administrators must promote dialogue, collaboration and

coordination among the teachers in each cycle team, and with other cycle teams. This supervision also ensures that content offered to students does not overlap.

CONCLUSION

The Comité sur les affaires religieuses was asked by the Minister to consult religious groups and organizations and various individuals with respect to the religious aspects of the Ethics and Religious Culture program, to ensure that it complied with the ministerial orientations. The Committee has done everything possible to take into account the viewpoints of the groups and individuals consulted. Québec's main religious denominations were consulted via their official representatives, congregation leaders or designated individuals. In all cases, CAR asked the persons concerned to serve as liaisons with their respective faith groups. In addition, various organizations and resource persons with an interest in the program were asked to give their opinions.

The Committee would like to thank all those who took part in this exceptional exercise, which included many problems. Their generous collaboration and pertinent remarks helped make the process an enriching experience for all involved, and this will most certainly have a positive impact on program quality and student learning.

Apart from the generally positive assessment of the program itself, five key ideas emerged from the analysis of the questionnaires: (1) the Ethics and Religious Culture program was generally seen to be consistent with the ministerial orientations; (2) there was a consensus concerning the relevance of the program aims (recognition of others and the search for the common good); (3) the program must be implemented; (4) some improvements could be made to ensure stronger support from the groups consulted; (5) work to improve initial and ongoing teaching training must continue.

The Committee has already forwarded some of the remarks to the Direction des programmes. It has also decided to reiterate some of the criticism from the groups and individuals consulted, along with requests for enrichment, including one request concerning the place of women in religion.

The Committee also wishes to reiterate some of the main concerns aired by the respondents. These pertained to the risk of having program content that was disjointed, the lack of historical perspective when dealing with religious traditions, and insufficient emphasis on personal experience as a factor of social change and evolution in religious or other traditions. The Committee's conclusions are based on what it considers to be three essential bases: the ministerial orientations of May 2005; the Québec secular school model; and the significant consensus that has emerged from this consultation. CAR therefore proposes that, in Secondary Cycle Two, the program should include versatile themes that can be used separately or together to help students recognize one or more traditions as living, complex and coherent realities, whatever pedagogical method is used by the teacher.

In closing, CAR stresses that teacher training must be the cornerstone of this ambitious project, in terms of the knowledge that teachers must master and the pedagogical skills and attitudes they must acquire to teach the Ethics and Religious Culture program. There must be continuous support for initial and ongoing teacher training, immediately and over the long term, especially from school administrators. In addition, special attention must be paid to teaching materials, which will probably be a main source of information for some teachers, given that there will be little time for training before the program is implemented. CAR also emphasizes the fact that the collaboration of school administrators will be necessary to support concerted actions by teachers, and to ensure ongoing, progressive student learning throughout the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

The Committee is pleased to note that the draft program matches the key orientations it promoted in its brief, *A New Approach to Religious Education in School: A Choice Regarding Today's Challenges*,⁴³ in which it espoused a nondenominational approach that included training in both ethics and religious culture. At this point in the development of the Ethics and Religious Culture program, the Committee considers that the project is on the right track and that the deadlines must be met. While waiting to see the final version and giving its opinion before ministerial approval is issued, we are confident that the program design team will draw on the results of the

43. Comité sur les affaires religieuses, *A New Approach to Religious Education in School: A Choice Regarding Today's Challenges*, Brief submitted to the Minister of Education (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004).

consultation, as well as on other validation processes, to put the finishing touches on a program that meets the expectations of Québec society.



Gouvernement du Québec
Le ministre de l'Éducation,
du Loisir et du Sport

Québec, le 28 septembre 2005

Monsieur Jean-Marc Charron
Président
Comité sur les affaires religieuses
1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 16^e étage
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Monsieur le Président,

L'élaboration et la mise en place d'un programme d'éthique et de culture religieuse pour tous les élèves du primaire et du secondaire représentent une étape importante dans l'évolution de l'école québécoise. En laissant une large place à l'étude des différentes traditions religieuses qui ont façonné le Québec ainsi qu'à celles qui, nouvellement arrivées, contribuent à l'enrichir, le programme visera à développer chez tous les élèves, des habiletés favorisant la reconnaissance de l'autre et le vivre ensemble ainsi que des attitudes de respect, de tolérance et d'ouverture au dialogue.

La consultation des groupes religieux et des personnes ou organismes intéressés sur les aspects religieux du nouveau programme est incontournable, voire essentielle pour assurer le succès de son implantation.

La loi actuelle prévoit que le Comité sur les affaires religieuses, « *lorsqu'il est appelé à donner son avis, [...] peut consulter des groupes religieux, des personnes ou organismes intéressés* » (LIP 477.18.3). Adopté par l'Assemblée nationale en juin dernier, le projet de loi n^o 95 modifie d'ailleurs le mandat du Comité, pour qu'à compter de 2008 ce dernier soit tenu de le faire. Aussi, il me paraît important de préciser dès maintenant mes attentes quant aux consultations que je demande au Comité de tenir.

La mise en place du programme au 2^e cycle du secondaire étant prévue pour septembre 2006, le mécanisme de consultation doit se mettre en place sans tarder, c'est-à-dire dès l'automne 2005. Cette consultation devra se poursuivre au cours des années suivantes et porter notamment sur les visées, les orientations et les contenus des programmes du primaire et du secondaire. À terme, je veux m'assurer que le programme d'éthique et de culture religieuse sera conforme aux orientations ministérielles annoncées au printemps 2005.

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Je demande au Comité de procéder à ces consultations par les mécanismes qu'il jugera appropriés pour s'acquitter pleinement de ce mandat. Je demande également que le Comité me rende compte des modalités choisies et de la synthèse des consultations dans son rapport annuel ainsi que dans les avis qu'il me remettra sur les programmes d'études du primaire et du secondaire.

Dans un autre ordre d'idées, je confie au Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses le soin de travailler à l'examen du matériel éventuellement approuvé pour ce programme d'études, et ce, en étroite collaboration avec la Direction des ressources didactiques. Toutefois, je m'attends à ce que le Secrétariat puisse faire appel, si nécessaire, au Comité sur les affaires religieuses et au mécanisme de consultation que ce dernier aura mis en place, pour mener à bien cette tâche importante et délicate.

Le Secrétariat aura également la tâche d'assurer le lien entre le Comité sur les affaires religieuses et la directrice générale de la formation des jeunes et le directeur des programmes d'études quant aux consultations menées.

En septembre 2008, au moment où le programme d'éthique et de culture religieuse commun à tous les élèves du primaire et du secondaire sera enfin mis en place, une page importante de l'histoire de l'éducation au Québec sera tournée. Dès aujourd'hui, en travaillant à l'implantation harmonieuse de ce programme, le Québec fait preuve d'audace, d'ouverture et d'une volonté incontestable de favoriser le vivre ensemble et l'essor d'une société tolérante, inclusive et démocratique. Nous devons tout mettre en œuvre pour que ce projet soit une réussite, et je considère que le Comité sur les affaires religieuses que vous présidez peut jouer un rôle important à cet égard.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur le Président, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.



JEAN-MARC FOURNIER

Questionnaire Religious Groups

COMITÉ SUR LES AFFAIRES RELIGIEUSES

Consultation on the
Ethics and Religious Culture Program

IDENTITY

Name:

Religious group:

Phone number:

Information and guidelines

1. BACKGROUND

a) Government decisions

- May 2005: publication of ministerial orientations, *Establishment of an Ethics and Religious Culture Program: Providing Future Direction for All Québec Youth*
- June 2005, adoption of Bill 95, which stipulates the following:
 - o The notwithstanding clauses will no longer be used as of June 30, 2008.
 - o The moral and religious education programs will be replaced with a compulsory Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program for all elementary and secondary students as of September 1, 2008.

b) The mandate of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses

- In September 2005, the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports gave the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (CAR) the mandate to consult religious groups and interested individuals or organizations on the religious aspects of the ERC program. The objective of the consultation is to ensure that the ERC program follows the ministerial orientations announced in the spring of 2005.

c) Steps in the consultation process:

- Spring – summer 2006, identify and invite people to take part in the consultation
- September 13, 2006, hold information meeting and distribute documents about the consultation (ERC program and questionnaire)
- October 13, 2006, return questionnaire to the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses
- November 1, 2006, discussion and validation meeting
- Winter 2007, write a report on the ERC program
- Spring 2007, present the report and consultation results to the Minister

2. THE ETHICS AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE PROGRAM (ERC)

The recognition of others and the pursuit of the common good are the two main objectives of this program. Both the ethics and the religious culture sections of the program aim to develop a distinct subject-specific competency and to take into account secular representations of the world and humanity.

The program also takes into account the fact that religions have a moral dimension. At the elementary level, one of the themes in the religious culture section addresses the question of religious values and norms. Likewise, another link is established between the two sections of the program through competency 3 on engaging in dialogue.

You will receive all three programs for consultation:

- yellow document: Elementary program
- blue document: Secondary Cycle One program
- green document: Secondary Cycle Two program

A reading guide will show you, for each program, which sections are required reading and which are optional. (The latter are not part of the consultation.) The last column of the guide indicates whether a section is specific to each program or identical in all three programs.

3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As CAR's mandate is to make sure that the religious aspects of the ERC program conform to ministerial orientations, no questions specifically address the ethics section. In addition, it is essential that you read the document, *Establishment of an Ethics and Religious Culture Program: Providing Future Direction for All Québec Youth*.⁴⁴

The questionnaire is made up of a series of statements, and you must indicate whether you **agree**, **agree somewhat**, **disagree somewhat**, or **disagree** with each one. In section 1 of the questionnaire, you must check only one box for each of the three programs.

The space reserved for comments allows you to explain your answer, especially if you checked a box other than **agree**.

If you choose to fill out a paper copy of the questionnaire, you may add pages at the end of the document. If this is the case, please indicate the number of the question you are answering.

Please return one questionnaire only per religious group or organization by October 13, 2006, to the following address:

Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses
Édifice Marie-Guyart, 16^e étage
1035, rue De La Chevrotière
Québec (Québec) G1R 5A5

44. Document available on the SAR Web site, in the *Publications* section:
<www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/affairesreligieuses>

SECTION 1: MINISTERIAL ORIENTATIONS

1. The Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC) fosters ongoing learning.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
 Comments:⁴⁵

2. The ERC program fosters progressive learning.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
 Comments:

3. The ERC program fosters learning that is rooted in the reality of young people.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
 Comments:

45. In the original version of the questionnaire, each question appeared on a new page, giving the respondents plenty of room to write their comments. This blank space is not shown here.

4. The ERC program fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
Comments:

5. The ERC program respects the students' freedom of conscience and religion.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
Comments:

6. The ERC program respects the teachers' freedom of conscience and religion.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
Comments:

7. The ERC program fosters community life.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __
Comments:

8. The ERC program enables students to become familiar with Québec’s religious heritage.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

9. The ERC program enables students to become open to religious diversity by having them

- discover (elementary)
- analyze (secondary)

the main characteristics of each religious tradition and those they share.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

10. The ERC program enables students to see where they stand in relation to religions and the new religious movements.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

11. The ERC program enables students to explore secular perceptions of the world and human beings, i.e. perceptions that are not religious in nature.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

12. The ERC program enables students to recognize others for who they are and to develop appropriate attitudes toward religious diversity (respect, tolerance, openness to dialogue).

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

13. The ERC program enables students to recognize those who interpret reality in ways other than through the prism of religion.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Elementary	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle One	[]	[]	[]	[]
Secondary Cycle Two	[]	[]	[]	[]

The comments target the following program(s): Elementary __ Secondary Cycle One __ Secondary Cycle Two __

Comments:

SECTION 2: GENERAL COMMENTS

14. The competency *Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion* is in keeping with the ministerial orientations.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Answer	[]	[]	[]	[]

Comments:

15. The competency *Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life* is in keeping with the ministerial orientations.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Answer	[]	[]	[]	[]

Comments:

16. In general, the religious aspects of the ERC program will enable Québec students to develop a religious culture consistent with ministerial orientations.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Answer	[]	[]	[]	[]

Comments:

17. The ERC program will be well received by our community.

	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
Answer	[]	[]	[]	[]

Comments:

18. Please feel free to add any comments you deem relevant.

19. What steps were taken to have this questionnaire completed in your community?

Religious demographics in Québec				
Religion		Percentage distribution	Percentage change	Median age
	(2001)	(2001)	(1991-2001)	
Total population	7 125580	100.0 %	4.6 %	38.4
Roman Catholic	5 930 380	83.2 %	1.3 %	39.4
No religion	400 325	5.6 %	55.6 %	28.9
Muslim	108 620	1.5 %	141.8 %	28.2
Jewish	89915	1.3 %	-8.0 %	42.5
Anglican	85475	1.2 %	-11.0 %	41.5
Protestant not included elsewhere (2)	64 040	0.9 %	13.3 %	34.6
Christian not included elsewhere (1)	56 750	0.8 %	45.6 %	31.9
United Church	52 950	0.7 %	-14.6 %	46.7
Greek Orthodox (3)	50 020	0.7 %	-7.3 %	38.2
Buddhist	41 375	0.6 %	30.8 %	36.2
Orthodox not included elsewhere (4)	37 600	0.5 %	31.0 %	35.8
Baptist	35 455	0.5 %	28.9 %	33.1
Jehovah's Witnesses	29 040	0.4 %	-13.1 %	37.6
Hindu	24 530	0.3 %	73.7 %	30.7
Pentecostal	22 675	0.3 %	-21.7 %	30.7
Lutheran	9635	0.1 %	-10.0 %	51.1
Presbyterian	8770	0.1 %	-53.5 %	49.7
Sikh	8220	0.1 %	81.7 %	30.8
Evangelical Missionary Church	7575	0.1 %	87.3 %	34.4
Adventist	6690	0.1 %	40.0 %	28.7
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)	4420	0.1 %	26.8 %	25.7
Ukrainian Catholic	3430	0.0 %	-14.0 %	49.7
Pagan (7)	1 330	0.0 %	533.3 %	27.2
Methodist (6)	1060	0.0 %	7.1 %	50.2
Ukrainian Orthodox	985	0.0 %	-25.1 %	45.2
Serbian Orthodox	920	0.0 %	152.1 %	33.6
Aboriginal spirituality	735	0.0 %	332.4 %	31.2
Brethren in Christ	590	0.0 %	-36.2 %	38.0
Non-denominational (5)	475	0.0 %	75.9 %	29.4
Mennonite	425	0.0 %	-74.3 %	37.1
Salvation Army	420	0.0 %	-65.6 %	37.1
Christian and Missionary Alliance	315	0.0 %	-37.6 %	42.2
Christian Reformed Church	115	0.0 %	-20.7 %	45.7
Hutterite	0	0.0 %	-100.0 %	47.7

Source: Statistics Canada, *Highlight Tables, 2001 Census*, published May 13, 2003:

<<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/highlight/religion/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&View=1a&Code=24&Table=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Canada&B2=1>>.

- (1) Includes persons who report "Christian," as well as those who report "Apostolic," "Born-again Christian" and "Evangelical."
- (2) Includes persons who report only "Protestant."
- (3) In 1991, included counts for Greek Catholic.
- (4) Includes persons who report "Orthodox." Also includes Armenian Apostolic, Bulgarian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox and Macedonian Orthodox.
- (5) Includes persons who report only "non-denominational."
- (6) Includes persons who report "Methodist." Excludes Free Methodist and Evangelical Missionary Church.
- (7) Includes persons who report "Wicca."

Denominations represented at the Table de concertation protestante sur l'éducation

1. Christian and Missionary Alliance in Québec (CMA)
2. Anglican Church of Canada (ACC, Diocese of Montréal)
3. Anglican Church of Canada (ACC, Diocese of Québec City)
4. Salvation Army (SA)
5. Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAC)
6. Assembly of Evangelical Baptist Churches (AEBC)
7. Independent Assemblies of God (IAG)
8. Evangelical Church Association (ECA)
9. Association La Bible parle du Canada (ABPC)
10. Québec Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (QCMBC) and École de théologie évangélique de Montréal (ÉTÉM)
11. Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ)
12. Christian Direction
13. Evangelical Free Church (EFC)
14. Free Methodist Church (FMC)
15. Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC)
16. Reformed Church of Québec (RCQ)
17. United Church of Canada (UCC)
18. Églises des frères chrétiens du Québec (EFC)
19. ELIM Fellowship, Evangelical Church (ELIM)
20. Fellowship Baptist Church (FEBC)
21. International Charismatic Mission in Canada (ICMC)
22. Missionary Church Canada East
23. Union of Baptist Churches (UBE)
24. Westview Bible Church from Brethren Assemblies (BA)

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF ANSWERS

Categories of respondents and methodology

For the purposes of CAR's analysis, the religious groups, organizations and resource persons who answered the questionnaire were divided into three categories, based on their main focus:

- a) **Religious groups and organizations** concerned with the specific interests of their respective communities. During the consultation, the respondents in this category tended to see students as believers, unlike those in the second category. In this document, the term "religious respondents" is used to describe those from this category.

- b) **Specialists in matters of religion and spirituality**, including organizations such as the AQPMR, SQER, APAVECQ and the Centre justice et foi.⁴⁶ Their fields of expertise (scientific research, teaching, spiritual support, etc.) and intervention (schools, society at large, etc.) varied.

This category also includes **observers**, in other words resource persons who, whatever their own religious beliefs, acted as individual observers and not as spokespersons for specific religious organizations or groups. Many were specialists in the field of religion.

- c) The **Mouvement laïque québécois**, which, because of its unique focus, could not be included in either of the other two categories.

The answers given on the questionnaire included various types of criticism that reflected a range of sensitivities; and these, in turn, depended on various viewpoints that greatly influenced the types of objections made. The appended tables present the data for each of the three categories,

46. While the Centre is obviously rooted in the Catholic faith, its answers and comments during the debate bring it closer to the specialists in matters of religion and spirituality. The CJF defines itself as a "centre for social analysis based on a critical examination of the social, political, economic, cultural and religious structures in our world." [Free translation].

to highlight the various types of sensitivities, assessments and analyses. The tables give a clear overview of the polarized positions on various questions. For each question, a score of “1” was assigned for the “Agree” and “Agree somewhat” columns (black), or for the “Disagree” and “Disagree somewhat” columns (grey).

Decimal fractions were used where respondents hesitated between two answers, and the score of “1” was divided into two scores of “0.5.” If respondents gave different assessments for different levels (Elementary, Secondary Cycle One, Secondary Cycle Two), the score could be further modulated by, for example, entering “0.3” in the “Agree somewhat” column and “0.7” in the “Agree” column for both secondary cycles.

The total for all answers made it possible to establish the percentage of “relative agreement” (combining the “Agree” and “Agree somewhat” scores) for all categories of respondents. The percentages have no absolute value, because the respondents did not constitute a representative sample of the population. The percentages are of interest in that they make it possible to evaluate the relative success of each statement made in a question, for each category.

A few respondents failed to answer some questions, through oversight or hesitation. The comments they made nevertheless enabled us to enter their answers in one of the four columns. In these cases, the same colour (black or grey) was used as for the other answers, but the score was “0.” However, these presumed answers were not calculated in arriving at the total percentages.

1. Community life (see Table 1)

Q. 7: The ERC program fosters community life

Q. 15: The competency Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life is in keeping with the ministerial orientations.

In the questions on community life, the religious groups and organizations, religion specialists and other observers tended, more than in other areas, to see things from the same point of view. The relative agreement score was exceptionally high: 94.1% of religious groups and organizations and 95.1% of specialists and observers were in “relative agreement” (a combination of “Agree” and “Agree somewhat”) with the idea that the program fosters community life. Apart from the Association of Catholic Parents of Québec (ACPQ), all the religious respondents were in agreement.

More reservations were expressed on the question of engaging in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life, but the relative agreement was still high, at 80% among the religious respondents and 88.5% among specialists and observers. Apart from the ACPQ, which entered “Disagree” for all the statements on the questionnaire,⁴⁷ the Table de concertation protestante sur l’éducation (TCPE) and the Association of Jewish Day Schools (Orthodox schools) were the only religious groups that expressed their relative disagreement. The fear that dialogue could lead to controversy in the classroom, or that it could be improperly conducted, explains some of the negative answers.

Unlike all the other respondents, the Mouvement laïque québécois was skeptical with respect to the question of dialogue. On the other hand, it expressed its satisfaction with the inclusion of dialogue as a dimension, because this has been improved since the previous version of the program.

It is important to stress that ministerial concerns about community life, as reflected in the program, are in the opinion of many people its strong point. Based on the answers given here, this dimension of the program, or at least its principles, appears to be justified.

47. For this reason, its answer will not be specified for each question.

Table 1

Religious group or organization	Question 7 Foster community life				Question 15 Engage in dialogue			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB		1			1			
CRD	1				1			
ECO	1					1		
ESCC		1				0		
APC				1				1
TCPE	1						1	
Anglican Church	0.3	0.7				0		
United Church	1				1			
COC	1				1			
Mormons	1					1		
AJDS		1					1	
Reform Judaism		1				1		
Sunni Muslim		1			1			
Shia Muslim	1				1			
Hindu	1					1		
Sikh	1				1			
Buddhist	1				1			
	10.3	5.7		1	8	4	2	1

MLQ			1	1			
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	1				1		
APAVECQ		1				1	
SQER		0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5
Centre justice et foi	1				1		
Resource person #1		1			0.5	0.5	
Resource person #2		1				1	
Resource person #3	1					1	
Resource person #4	1				1		
Resource person #5	1				1		
Resource person #6		1			1		
Resource person #7		1			1		
Resource person #8		1					1
Resource person #9	1				1		
	6	6.5	0.5		7.5	4	0.5

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	94.1%			80.0%		
Specialists/observers	95.1%			88.5%		

2. Openness to religious diversity (see Table 2)

Q. 12: The ERC program enables students to recognize others for who they are and to develop appropriate attitudes toward religious diversity (respect, tolerance, openness to dialogue).

Q. 9: The ERC program enables students to become open to religious diversity by having them discover (elementary level) or analyze (secondary level) the main characteristics of each religious tradition and those they share.

The idea that the program enables students to recognize others against a background of religious diversity through respect, tolerance and openness to dialogue (question 12) was well received by the religious respondents, with 84.1% in relative agreement. Only the Association of Catholic Parents, the English Speaking Catholic Council and the Association of Jewish Day Schools (Orthodox) saw things differently. The score of 88.5% among specialists and observers was high, linked to their evaluation of dialogue in question 15.

Strangely enough, question 9, which also focused on openness to religious diversity, was less well received. There was almost a consensus among the Catholic respondents, who expressed their doubts in this way. The Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops preferred not to answer the question; it said it agreed with openness to diversity, but found that the structure of the program was a problem. For Orthodox Jews, the word “enables” [*permet*] rather than “fosters” [*favorise*] made all the difference. Overall, around three-quarters of the religious respondents were in relative agreement.

An only slightly less mitigated response to this question was given by the specialists and observers, which points to a genuine difficulty. The linking of openness to religious diversity with discovery (elementary) and analysis (secondary) in the wording of the question seems to have led to all kinds of criticisms directed at the general structure of the program, especially the charge that religions are studied in a disjointed manner.

The MLQ answered both questions negatively.

Overall, all the respondents agreed that the program promotes openness to religious diversity, but some have reservations about the way in which the program content is delivered, due to its structure. In addition, a large majority of respondents recognized the value of interfaith dialogue. However, some thought that the objective of openness to religious diversity would not necessarily be met, given that the program does not enable students to grasp the inner coherence of each religion, and that the achievement of the aims of the program will, in the end, depend on the competence of the teacher.

Table 2

Religious group or organization	Question 12 Recognition of diversity				Question 9 Openness to diversity			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB		1				0	0	
CRD	1				1			
ECO		1						1
ESCC		0.3	0.3	0.3		0.3	0.3	0.3
APC				1				1
TCPE	0.7	0.3				1		
Anglican Church	1				1			
United Church	0.7	0.3				1		
COC	1					1		
Mormons	1				0.3	0.7		
AJDS			1				1	
Reform Judaism		1				0.7	0.3	
Sunni Muslim	1					1		
Shia Muslim	1				0.3	0.7		
Hindu	1					1		
Sikh		1			1			
Buddhist	1				1			
	9.4	4.9	1.3	1.3	4.6	7.4	1.6	2.3

MLQ			1			1	
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	1				1		
APAVECQ		1				1	
SQER		0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5
Centre justice et foi	1				1		
Resource person #1	0.5	0.5			1		
Resource person #2			1				1
Resource person #3	1				1		
Resource person #4	1				0.7	0.3	
Resource person #5	0.3	0.7			0.3	0.3	0.3
Resource person #6	1				1		
Resource person #7	1					1	
Resource person #8		1				1	
Resource person #9	1					0.3	0.7
	7.8	3.7	1.5		6	4.4	2.5

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	84.1%				75.0%		
Specialists/observers	88.5%				80.0%		

3. Secular world-views (see Table 3)

Q. 11: The ERC program enables students to explore secular perceptions of the world and human beings, i.e. perceptions that are not religious in nature.

Q. 13: The ERC program enables students to recognize those who interpret reality in ways other than through the prism of religion.

Among religious groups and organizations, there was quite high relative agreement concerning these statements (86.5% and 81.3%, respectively, for the two questions), including among Catholics—except for the Association of Catholic Parents of Québec (AC PQ), the only religious respondent to disagree. According to the AC PQ, this aspect should not be discussed in the classroom, except to demonstrate its meaninglessness. The English Speaking Catholic Council, responded negatively to Question 11, and did not respond at all to Question 13.

The Mouvement laïque du Québec (MLQ), another respondent that disagreed, expressed a vision diametrically opposed to that of the AC PQ; in its opinion, not enough time was given to secular perceptions.

The relative agreement score for Question 11 was lower (82.3%) among the specialists and observers than it was among the religious respondents. However, the rate of relative agreement dropped to 69.2% for Question 13. According to some respondents, including the APAVECQ and the Centre justice et foi, but with less insistence than the MLQ, secular perceptions are not given much emphasis.

Table 3

Religious group or organization	Question 11 Secular perceptions				Question 13 Recognition for views other than religious views			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB		1				1		
CRD	1				1			
ECO	1				1			
ESCC		0.3	0.3	0.3	0			
APC				1				1
TCPE		0.7	0.3			1		
Anglican Church	0.7		0.3					
United Church		1				1		
COC	1				1			
Mormons		1				1		
AJDS		1				1		
Reform Judaism	0.3	0.7				1		
Sunni Muslim		1					1	
Shia Muslim	1				1			
Hindu		1				1		
Sikh	1				1			
Buddhist	1				1			
	7	7.7	0.9	1.3	6	7	1	1

MLQ			1				1
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	1				0.7	0.3		
APAVECQ			1				1	
SQER	1				0.5	0.5		
Centre justice et foi			1				1	
Resource person #1	1				1			
Resource person #2		1				1		
Resource person #3		1			1			
Resource person #4	1				1			
Resource person #5		1					1	
Resource person #6	1				1			
Resource person #7		1					1	
Resource person #8		0.7	0.3			1		
Resource person #9		1			1			
	5	5.7	2.3		6.2	2.8	4	

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	86.5%			81.3%	
Specialists/observers	82.3%			69.2%	

4. Student lifestyles and Québec culture (see Table 4)

Q. 3: The ERC program fosters learning that is rooted in the reality of young people.

Q. 4: The ERC program fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture.

Q. 8: The ERC program enables students to become familiar with Québec's religious heritage.

The first two questions are linked, in the sense that Québec culture is a prominent feature of the reality of young people living in the province. In addition, contemporary Québec culture is necessarily imbued with a religious heritage, which established a link between the past referred to in Question 8 and the present in the other two questions. Although Questions 3, 4 and 8 are indirectly linked, the answers show clear similarities as well as opposing viewpoints.

The polarization is clearly evident in the answers to Questions 4 and 8, which were positive for all the religious groups and organizations, unlike most of the Catholic respondents, who answered Questions 3 and 8 negatively. The relative agreement among specialists and observers was over 90% for all three questions.

Some religious respondents consider that the program for Secondary Cycle Two, unlike that for the preceding cycles, is less likely to make students familiar with the major religious traditions, while new religious movements benefit from special treatment as the focus of a specific theme. The same respondents also deplore the fact that the notion of heritage is too often connected with the past, and does not highlight its dimension as a living part of contemporary culture.

The Catholic respondents pointed out that the Catholic tradition is hardly presented separately or even named in the program (the Protestant respondents point this out mainly in their conclusions). This fact probably escaped the attention of the non-Catholics and observers.

Several respondents were perplexed by the wording of the question on the reality of young people. What “reality” does the question refer to? The reality of the students’ age group, or that of the communities (Christian, Jewish, or other) in which they live, regardless of their age? Barely two-thirds of the religious respondents were in relative agreement with the statement in the question. Some wondered whether the program would be able to address the concerns of

young people living in Montréal and those living in culturally homogeneous communities. This concern was raised not only by Catholics and Protestants, but also by the Sunni Muslim respondent. Note that not all homogeneous communities are located outside Montréal. For example, some young people attend private Jewish schools that form a homogeneous community, as the Orthodox Jewish respondent pointed out. It was also pointed out that, if the program must foster learning rooted in the reality of young people, then the subject matter cannot be the same in all contexts. This being the case, how can uniform instruction be assured?

Table 4

Religious group or organization	Question 3 Reality of young people				Question 4 Québec culture				Question 8 Québec's religious heritage			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB			1			0.5	0.5				1	
CRD		1				1				0.3	0.7	
ECO			1				1				1	
ESCC			0.7	0.3		1			1			
APC				1				1				1
TCPE		1			0.7	0.3				1		
Anglican Church	1				0.3	0.7			1			
United Church		1			0.7	0.3				1		
COC						1				1		
Mormons		1				1				1		
AJDS		1				1				1		
Reform Judaism		0.7	0.3			1				1		
Sunni Muslim			1			1			1			
Shia Muslim		0.7	0.3		1				1			
Hindu	1					1				1		
Sikh	0.3	0.7				0.7	0.3		0.3	0.7		
Buddhist	1				1				1			
	3.3	7.1	4.3	1.3	3.7	10.5	1.8	1	5.3	8	2.7	1

MLQ			0.3	0.7				1		1		
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR		1				1			0.7		0.3	
APAVECQ		1				1				1		
SQER	1				1				1			
Centre justice et foi	1					1			1			
Resource person #1		1			1				1			
Resource person #2		1				1					1	
Resource person #3		1			1				0.3	0.7		
Resource person #4	1				1				1			
Resource person #5	1					1			1			
Resource person #6	1					1			1			
Resource person #7		1			1				1			
Resource person #8			0.3	0.7		0.3	0.7			1		
Resource person #9		1				1				1		
	5	7	0.3	0.7	5	7.3	0.7		8	3.7	1.3	

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	65.3%	83.5%	78.2%
Specialists/observers	92.3%	94.6%	90.0%

5. Freedom of conscience (see Table 5)

Q. 5: The ERC program respects the students' freedom of conscience and religion.

Q. 6: The ERC program respects the teachers' freedom of conscience and religion.

These questions generated strongly contrasting answers, depending on the categories of respondents. For the religious groups and organizations, this was a question that could not be treated lightly. One-fifth of all respondents considered that teachers' freedom of conscience and religion was threatened.

The score rose to one-third with respect to students' freedom of conscience and religion. A large part of the problem is associated, apparently, with teacher training. More concerns were expressed by the Catholic and Orthodox Jewish respondents, who sometimes feared that children would be left in the hands of a teacher from another denomination, or even an atheist. A similar situation can, of course, occur in public schools. The Coptic respondents were more qualified, stating that the program "targets" respect, while the Hindu respondents expressed concerns about students—despite responding positively to the objective questions. The MLQ shared the religious respondents' concerns about teacher neutrality. Some religious respondents, although they responded positively to the objective questions, also expressed concerns in their comments.

The religion specialists and observers saw things somewhat differently: 96.7% considered that the program respected teachers' freedom of conscience and religion. This was the highest rate of relative agreement for all the questions on the questionnaire (see Table 9).

The score dropped to 89.2% when it came to students' freedom of conscience and religion, since the respondents doubted whether the teachers responsible for them could remain neutral or free of religious prejudice. Two of the three organizations specializing in matters of religion and spirituality raised this concern, which is linked to the question of teacher training (APAVECQ, SQER).

Table 5

Religious group or organization	Question 5 Freedom of conscience: students				Question 6 Freedom of conscience: teachers			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB			1			1		
CRD		1				1		
ECO				1			1	
ESCC			1			1		
APC				1				1
TCPE		1				1		
Anglican Church	1				1			
United Church	0.3	0.7			0.3	0.7		
COC		0				0		
Mormons		1				1		
AJDS			1				1	
Reform Judaism		0.7	0.3			1		
Sunni Muslim	1				1			
Shia Muslim	0.3	0.7			1			
Hindu		1					1	
Sikh		1				1		
Buddhist	1				1			
	3.6	7.1	3.3	2	4.3	7.7	2	1

MLQ			0.3	0.7			1	
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR		1				1		
APAVECQ			1			1		
SQER	0.3	0.3	0.3		0.3	0.3	0.3	
Centre justice et foi	1				1			
Resource person #1	1				0			
Resource person #2	1				1			
Resource person #3	1				0.3	0.7		
Resource person #4	1				1			
Resource person #5		1				1		
Resource person #6	1				1			
Resource person #7	0.3	0.7			1			
Resource person #8		1			1			
Resource person #9	1				1			
	7.6	4	1.3		7.6	4	0.3	

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	66.9%				80.0%			
Specialists/observers	89.2%				96.7%			

6. Gradation of learning (see Table 6)

Q. 1: The Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC) fosters ongoing learning.

Q. 2: The ERC program fosters progressive learning.

Four-fifths of the religious groups and organizations were in relative agreement concerning the first statement about ongoing learning, and three-quarters concerning the second statement, about progressive learning. Most of the disagreement came from Catholic respondents.⁴⁸

With respect to ongoing learning, the religion specialists and observers expressed a high rate of relative agreement, at 93.8%. Most of their criticism was reserved for the question of progressive learning, where one-fifth anticipated problems.

The segmentation of the subject matter and perceived gaps in the gradation of learning explain the weaker results for Question 2 among both religious respondents and specialists.

For both questions, the Mouvement laïque québécois indicated “Agree,” a result that is worth highlighting given the group’s generally negative response.

48. The TCPE and the Reform Jewish respondent expressed partial disagreement, targeted at the elementary level.

Table 6

Religious group or organization	Question 1 Ongoing learning				Question 2 Progressive learning			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB		1				0.3	0.7	
CRD		1				1		
ECO			0.3	0.7				1
ESCC			0.7	0.3			0.7	0.3
APC				1				1
TCPE	1					0.7		0.3
Anglican Church	1				1			
United Church	1				1			
COC		1				1		
Mormons		1				1		
AJDS		1				1		
Reform Judaism		0.7	0.3			0.7	0.3	
Sunni Muslim	1					1		
Shia Muslim	1				1			
Hindu	1				1			
Sikh	0.3	0.7			1			
Buddhist	1				1			
	7.3	6.4	1.3	2	6	6.7	1.7	2.6

MLQ	1				1			
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	0.3	0.3		0.3	0.7			0.3
APAVECQ		1				1		
SQER	0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5		
Centre justice et foi	0.3	0.7			0.3	0.7		
Resource person #1	1				1			
Resource person #2	1						1	
Resource person #3	1				1			
Resource person #4	0.3	0.7				1		
Resource person #5		1				0.7	0.3	
Resource person #6	1				1			
Resource person #7	1				1			
Resource person #8	0.3	0.3		0.3			1	
Resource person #9	1				1			
	7.7	4.5		0.6	6.5	3.9	2.3	0.3

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	80.6%				74.7%			
Specialists/observers	93.8%				80.0%			

7. Cognitive objectives of the ERC program (see Table 7)

Q. 10: The ERC program enables students to see where they stand in relation to religions and the new religious movements.

Q. 14: The competency Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion is in keeping with the ministerial orientations.

Q. 16: In general, the religious aspects of the ERC program will enable Québec students to develop a religious culture consistent with ministerial orientations.

Viewpoint of religious groups and organizations

Questions 10, 14 and 16 drew the most criticism. At least 30% of the religious respondents considered that the competency *Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion* did not meet the ministerial objectives (Question 14) and that the program would not allow students to develop a religious culture (Question 16). Several respondents did not answer the question (this is reflected in the large number of “0” scores) but, based on their comments, the results could have been even worse.

Many religious respondents considered that the program would not “enable students to see where they stand in relation to religions,” an opinion expressed by almost one-half (54.4%) of the religious groups and organizations. This was the lowest score for any question. The main fear is that students, faced with a wide array of disparate, incoherent denominational elements, will be unable to see where they stand because they will not yet have acquired the reference points of their own religion. This is at the heart of the arguments shared by the most reticent denominational groups and organizations. This specific question raises concerns for most Catholics, the TCPE, the two Jewish respondents (Orthodox and Reform) and the two Muslim respondents (Sunni and Shia). Most of the religious respondents believed that elementary-level students will be affected by this problem.

The MLQ expressed the same negative viewpoint as most of the Catholic respondents, the Protestant TCPE and the Orthodox Jewish respondent. They challenged the structure of the program and the teaching approach suggested.

Viewpoint expressed by religion specialists and other observers

Strangely, while expressing some concerns, the religion specialists and observers appeared to see things differently: 86.9% considered that the program would allow students to “see where they stand in relation to religions.” Some observers expressed reservations about the elementary level. It is possible that the religion specialists and other observers do not have the same concerns as the religious respondents and that they view the problem mainly from the perspective of the acquisition of learning. The strong contrast between the two types of reaction to Question 10 can probably be explained by this difference of perspective and sensitivity.

On the other hand, a number of observers and specialists in religious and spiritual matters had doubts with respect to the “informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion” mentioned in Question 14, which obtained the lowest score of relative agreement (65.4%). The response to Question 16 was also lukewarm (73.1%).

Two points of view, the same reservations

For all three questions, some of the religious respondents expressed concerns about the beliefs already held by young people, which could be harmed by the program. The specialists saw things from a different angle and doubted that students, whether believers or nonbelievers, would genuinely be able to understand the phenomenon of religion, given that it is often presented in a fragmentary fashion and that the coherency of individual religions is lost. Lastly, despite their different sensitivities and concerns, both the religious respondents and the specialists questioned the breakdown of religions into their constituent parts, a strategy that inevitably dispenses with the question of religious experience, which was seen as forming the heart of the religious approach.

Table 7

Religious group or organization	Question 10 Ability to see where they stand				Question 14 Understanding of the phenomenon of religion				Question 16 Development of a religious culture			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB			1					1			0	
CRD		1				1			1			
ECO				1			1				1	
ESCC			0.7	0.3			1				0	
APC				1				1				1
TCPE			0.7	0.3		1					1	
Anglican Church	1				1				1			
United Church		1				1				1		
COC		0	0		1					0	0	
Mormons		1				1				1		
AJDS			1				1				1	
Reform Judaism		0.3	1.7			1				1		
Sunni Muslim		0.7	0.3			1			1			
Shia Muslim	0.7		0.3			1			1			
Hindu		1				1			1			
Sikh		1				1			1			
Buddhist	1				1				1			
	2.7	6	4.7	2.6	3	9	3	2	7	3	3	1

MLQ			0.3	0.7			0					1
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	1				1				1			
APAVECQ		1					1				1	
SQER	0.3	0.3	0.3			0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5	
Centre justice et foi		1			1				1			
Resource person #1		1			1				0.5	0.5		
Resource person #2		1					1				1	
Resource person #3	1					1			1			
Resource person #4	0.7	0.3			1				1			
Resource person #5	0.3	0.3	0.3			1				1		
Resource person #6	1						1		1			
Resource person #7	0.7		0.3			1			1			
Resource person #8		0.7	0.3				1				1	
Resource person #9	0.7		0.3			1			1			
	5.7	5.6	1.5		4	4.5	4.5		7.5	2	3.5	

% of relative agreement (Agree + Agree somewhat)

Religious groups/orgs.	54.5%	70.6%	71.4%
Specialists/observers	86.9%	65.4%	73.1%

8. Predicted reception in each community (see Table 8)

Q. 17: The ERC program will be well received by our community / our organization / various religious groups [question for resource persons].

Although several questions revealed the respondents' opinion on various program components, their answers to Question 17 probably gave the best indication of their overall opinion and underlying feelings. In Question 17, they were asked to predict whether the current version of the program would be well received in their community.

Denominational groups and organizations (see Tables 10, 11 and 12)

Concerning the reception of the program by the different denominational groups and organizations, the main trends hinted at in the answers to several previous questions were generally confirmed by the overall assessment required by Question 17 (compare Tables 8, 10, 11 and 12).

The respondents most often in relative disagreement with the previous questions were more likely, in Question 17, to state that their community (or organization) would not have a “positive reaction” to the program. This was the case with 5 religious respondents out of 17, or 29.4%.

This minority was made up mainly of Catholic respondents and the MLQ, but these groups and denominational organizations were inclined to claim that they represented, officially or indirectly, a majority of the Québec population. In the answer given to Question 17, the total disagreement of the Mouvement laïque québécois, close to that of the ACPQ, was expressed alongside the claim that each represented a majority of Québec students. However, it is important to note that a “majority” of Québec students cannot be both secular and Catholic.

In fact, only the Association of Catholic Parents of Québec was totally opposed to the program. It was also the only respondent to have answered “Disagree” to all questions, including Question 17.

Given that the Eastern Catholic churches answered many questions negatively, it may appear surprising that they “nevertheless” still anticipated a positive reception in their community. They highlighted the importance of the “integrative objectives” of respect for others to foster community life. It is possible that their concerns as Catholics prompted many of their negative answers, while their position as an ethno-cultural minority made the program’s focus on openness to others more attractive. The Coptic Orthodox respondent often appeared skeptical, but also gave a positive answer concerning the reception of the program in the community.

Throughout the questionnaire, the respondents of the liberal Protestant churches (United Church and Anglican Church) demonstrated their enthusiasm. The Anglican respondent apparently forgot to answer Question 17, but the generally positive assessment was clear. The Mormon and Reform Jewish respondents were also positive. In general, the latter respondent answered most of the questions positively, but was more critical concerning the elementary level of education.

Lastly, the Sunni and Shia Muslim respondents, as well as the Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh respondents, considered that the program would be well received in their communities, an assessment commensurate with the answers given to the other answers on the questionnaire.

Most of the religious respondents (70.6%) believed that the program would be positively received in their communities.

Specialists in religious and spiritual matters and observers

The organizations specializing in religious matters and the observers saw this question in its proper perspective, since they overwhelmingly agreed.

Among the organizations, the SQER was unable to choose between “Agree somewhat” and “Disagree somewhat.”⁴⁹ The APAVECQ indicated “Agree somewhat,” while the AQPMR and the Centre justice et foi both marked “Agree.”

49. The answer was not explained by comments. It is possible that the respondent did not wish to answer on behalf of all members of the organization.

All the resource persons, except one, considered that the program will meet with a “positive reaction among various religious groups.” The way in which the question was formulated for resource persons required them to assess the possible reactions of “various religious groups” rather than that of a single community, as was the case for the respondents associated with a specific religious group. In this way, the resource persons approached the question from a different angle, assessing possible reactions from a more distant, more general standpoint.⁵⁰ As a result the resource persons, many of whom are specialists in the role of religion in society, and (to a lesser extent) the non-religious organizations, probably gave a more neutral assessment of the possible reception of the program in Québec society as a whole and in its various constituent cultures.

50. The organizations were asked to state whether the ERC program would be well received by their members. The AQPMR, the APAVECQ, the SQER and the Centre justice et foi answered on their own behalf. However, denominational organizations such as the TCPE, the ACPQ and the ESCC probably answered on behalf of their communities as a whole.

Table 8

Note: Question 17 was worded in three different ways (see Appendix 5)

Religious group or organization	Question 17 Positive reception by community (or organization)			
	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree
AQCB			1	
CRD		1		
ECO	1			
ESCC			1	
APC				1
TCPE			1	
Anglican Church	0.5	0.5		
United Church	1			
COC		1		
Mormons		1		
AJDS			1	
Reform Judaism		1		
Sunni Muslim		1		
Shia Muslim		1		
Hindu		1		
Sikh		1		
Buddhist	1			
	3.5	8.5	4	1

MLQ				1
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Religion specialists and observers

AQPMR	1			
APAVECQ		1		
SQER		0.5	0.5	
Centre justice et foi	1			
Resource person #1		0		
Resource person #2		1		
Resource person #3		1		
Resource person #4		1		
Resource person #5		1		
Resource person #6	1			
Resource person #7		1		
Resource person #8			1	
Resource person #9	1			
	2	5	1.5	

% relative agreement

Religious groups/orgs.	70.6%		
Specialists/observers	87.5%		
Total (including the MLQ)	75.0%		

TABLE 9 A
Percentages of relative agreement (“Agree” or “Agree somewhat”)
Questions ranked by decreasing percentage

Religious groups and organizations	
7 ERC fosters community life	94.1%
11 ERC enables students to explore secular perceptions	86.5%
12 ERC enables students to recognize others [...] and develop appropriate attitudes [...]	84.1%
4 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture	83.5%
13 ERC enables students to recognize those who interpret reality in other ways [...]	81.3%
1 ERC fosters ongoing learning	80.6%
6 ERC respects the teachers’ freedom of conscience and religion	80.0
15 The competency <i>Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life</i> [...]	80.0
8 ERC enables students to become familiar with Québec’s religious heritage	78.2%
9 ERC enables students to become open to religious diversity by having them discover/analyze [...]	76.9%
2 ERC fosters progressive learning	74.7%
16 ERC will enable Québec students to develop a religious culture [...]	71.4%
14 The competency <i>Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion</i> [...]	70.6%
5 ERC respects the students’ freedom of conscience and religion	66.9%
3 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in the reality of young people	65.0
10 ERC enables students to see where they stand in relation to religions [...]	54.4%

Religion and spirituality specialists / observers	
6 ERC respects the teachers’ freedom of conscience and religion	96.7%
7 ERC fosters community life	95.1%
4 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture	94.6%
1 ERC fosters ongoing learning	93.8%
3 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in the reality of young people	92.3%
8 ERC enables students to become familiar with Québec’s religious heritage	90.0
5 ERC respects the students’ freedom of conscience and religion	89.2%
12 ERC enables students to recognize others [...] and develop appropriate attitudes [...]	88.5%
15 The competency <i>Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life</i> [...]	88.5%
10 ERC enables students to see where they stand in relation to religions [...]	86.9%
11 ERC enables students to explore secular perceptions	82.3%
2 ERC fosters progressive learning	80.0
9 ERC enables students to become open to religious diversity by having them discover/analyze [...]	80.0
16 ERC will enable Québec students to develop a religious culture [...]	73.1%
13 ERC enables students to recognize those who interpret reality in other ways [...]	69.2%
14 The competency <i>Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion</i> [...]	65.4%

TABLE 9 B
Percentages of relative agreement (“Agree” or “Agree somewhat”)
Questions listed in the same order as on the questionnaire

	1	2
	religious	spec.
1 ERC fosters ongoing learning	80.6%	93.8%
2 ERC fosters progressive learning	74.7%	80.0
3 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in the reality of young people	65.0	92.3%
4 ERC fosters learning that is rooted in Québec culture	83.5%	94.6%
5 ERC respects the students’ freedom of conscience and religion	66.9%	89.2%
6 ERC respects the teachers’ freedom of conscience and religion	80.0	96.7%
7 ERC fosters community life	94.1%	95.1%
8 ERC enables students to become familiar with Québec’s religious heritage	78.2%	90.0
9 ERC enables students to become open to religious diversity by having them discover/analyze [...]...	76.9%	80.0
10 ERC enables students to see where they stand in relation to religions [...]	54.4%	86.9%
11 ERC enables students to explore secular perceptions	86.5%	82.3%
12 ERC enables students to recognize others [...] and develop appropriate attitudes [...]	84.1%	88.5%
13 ERC enables students to recognize those who interpret reality in other ways [...]	81.3%	69.2%
14 The competency <i>Demonstrates an informed understanding of the phenomenon of religion</i> is in keeping [...]	70.6%	65.4%
15 The competency <i>Engages in dialogue with a view to contributing to community life</i> is in keeping [...]	80.0	88.5%
16 ERC will enable Québec students to develop a religious culture [...]	71.4%	73.1%

1= Religious groups and organizations

2= Religion and spirituality specialists/observers

TABLE 10
Reception by Catholic respondents, by question

Table in report	Question (and number in questionnaire)	CRC Relative agreement	CRC Relative disagreement	CJF Relative agreement	CJF Relative disagreement	AQCB Relative agreement	AQCB Relative disagreement	ESCC Relative agreement	ESCC Relative disagreement	Eastern Catholic* Relative agreement	Eastern Catholic* Relative disagreement	ACPO Relative agreement	ACPO Relative disagreement
1	7 Fosters community life	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	15 Dialogue with a view to contributing to community life	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	9 Openness to religious diversity	1	1	1	1	0	0	0.3	0.7	1	1	1	1
4	12 Recognition of others	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.3	0.7	1	1	1	1
5	11 Secular perceptions	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.3	0.7	1	1	1	1
6	13 Recognition of persons who interpret reality in other ways	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
7	1 Ongoing learning	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
8	2 Progressive learning	1	1	1	1	0.3	0.7	1	1	1	1	1	1
9	3 ERC rooted in the reality of young people	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
10	4 ERC rooted in Québec culture	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1
11	8 Québec's religious heritage	0.3	0.7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
12	5 Students' freedom of conscience	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
13	6 Teachers' freedom of conscience	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
14	10 Standpoint in relation to religions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
15	14 Understanding of the phenomenon of religion	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
16	16 Development of religious culture	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
		15.3	0.7	14	2	7.8	5.7	5.9	8.1	5	11		16

6	17 Positive reception in community	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
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The Centre justice et foi was added to this table because it belongs with the Catholic tradition.
(* Eastern Catholic = Eastern Catholic Churches

TABLE 11
Reception by Protestant and other Christian respondents, by question

Table in report	Question (and number in questionnaire)	Protestants				Other Churches		
		Anglican Church Relative agreement disagreement	United Church Relative agreement disagreement	TCPE Relative agreement disagreement	Coptic Church Relative agreement disagreement	Mormons Relative agreement disagreement		
1	7 Fosters community life	1	1	1	1	1		
2	15 Dialogue with a view to contributing to community life	0	1	1	1	1		
3	9 Openness to religious diversity	1	1	1	1	1		
3	12 Recognition of others	1	1	1	1	1		
3	11 Secular perceptions Recognition of persons who interpret reality in other 13 ways	0.7	1	0.7	1	1	0.3	
4	3 ERC rooted in the reality of young people	0	1	1	1	1		
4	4 ERC rooted in Québec culture	1	1	1	1	1		
4	8 Québec's religious heritage	1	1	1	1	1		
5	5 Students' freedom of conscience	1	1	1	0	1		
5	6 Teachers' freedom of conscience	1	1	1	0	1		
6	1 Ongoing learning	1	1	1	1	1		
6	2 Progressive learning	1	1	0.7	1	1	0.3	
7	10 Standpoint in relation to religions	1	1	1	0	1	0	
7	14 Understanding of the phenomenon of religion	1	1	1	1	1		
7	16 Development of religious culture	1	1	1	0	1	0	
		13.7	16	12.4	11	16	0	
6	17 Positive reception in community	1	1	1	1	1		

TABLE 12

Reception by non-Christian respondents, by question

Table in report	Question (and number in questionnaire)	Orthodox Judaism		Reform Judaism		Sunni Muslim		Shia Muslim		Hindu		Sikh		Buddhist	
		Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement	Relative agreement	Relative disagreement
1	7 Fosters community life 15 Dialogue with a view to contributing to community life	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	9 Openness to religious diversity 12 Recognition of others	1	0.7	1	0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	11 Secular perceptions 13 Recognition of persons who interpret reality in other ways	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
4	1 Ongoing learning 2 Progressive learning	1	0.7	1	0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	0.7	1	0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	3 ERC rooted in the reality of young people 4 ERC rooted in Québec culture 8 Québec's religious heritage	1	0.7	1	0.3	1	1	0.7	0.3	1	1	0.7	0.3	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	5 Students' freedom of conscience 6 Teachers' freedom of conscience	1	0.7	1	0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
7	10 Standpoint in relation to religions 14 Understanding of the phenomenon of religion 16 Development of religious culture	1	0.3	1	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.7	0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
8	17 Positive reception in community	8	13.8	2.2	13.7	2	15.4	0.6	15	15.7	0.3	16	1	1	

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