



Catholic Civil Rights League

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Monthly highlights

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Right to Life politicized in foreign aid plan

On February 2, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper “to assure Canadians that he won’t change Canada’s long-standing tradition of recognizing women’s reproductive rights and access to contraception as part of his maternal health initiative, and will work in full partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).”

Mr. Harper had announced Jan. 27 that he would encourage all G-8 nations to join Canada in a “major initiative” promoting maternal and child health in developing countries. His announcement did not provide a detailed analysis of this plan, but emphasized clean water, immunization and the provision of adequate food as cornerstones. The League wrote to the Prime Minister to thank him for his commitment to maternal and child health, and to express the hope that it would be implemented by organizations respectful of the sanctity of all human life. In our experience, there are truly inspiring figures involved in foreign aid who are completely pro-life.

It’s no great surprise that there are politicians and journalists who turn an international aid commitment into an effort to bolster their claim that the Harper government has an agenda to reduce women’s rights and decrease access to abortion and child care. In this case, the Liberal Party’s own press release listed pro-life statements made by Conservatives going back as far as 1990 in an effort to keep the story going. It is disturbing to see such finger-pointing in this regard, as though a commitment to respect for life is a sign of lack of fitness for public life.

Archbishop Thomas Collins of Toronto and Bishop Fred Henry of Toronto both rejected Mr. Ignatieff’s comments. Archbishop Collins called it “sad to see Mr. Ignatieff introduce into the discussion this negative proposal, which in no way serves to improve the health of mothers or children, but which rather imperils the most vulnerable among us.” Bishop Henry commented that “I thought it was pathetic for a political leader to suggest that abortion is somehow tied to the health of women and children. It was a particularly crass remark in light of all the orphaned children we now see in Haiti. It was absolutely incredible that he would say that and he is alienating religious people with these comments.

This will not win him votes.” As the League noted, there are outspoken pro-lifers within the Liberal party, and other parties for that matter. As an organization, we do not engage in partisan politics because, like millions of Canadians, we regard respect for life as a good thing in a candidate and we know that there are candidates in all parties who share that sentiment.

Faculty association attempts to marginalize faith-based school

The League commented Feb. 3 on news that the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has claimed Trinity Western University of Langley BC falls below an accepted standard of academic freedom because it requires faculty to sign a statement of Christian faith as a condition of employment. The CAUT has also placed the school on a list of “institutions found to have imposed a requirement of a commitment to a particular ideology or statement as condition of employment.”

Trinity Western (TWU) is the first school to be placed on this list, but several more are said to be under “investigation” by the CAUT, a national umbrella group of faculty associations. According to officials at TWU, there were no interviews with them during the investigation, and it was not in response to any complaint. Rather, e-mails were sent by CAUT to faculty at other B.C. schools asking if they had ever had problems with TWU. The school was chartered by the BC government in 1969 as a Christian post-secondary institution. It became an accredited university in 1985.

“To us, this is a fairly straightforward attempt to find problems with universities that take their religious heritage seriously, in an attempt to further marginalize religion in academic life” said Phil Horgan, president of CCRL. “Both sides appear to agree that there had been no complaint of infringement of academic freedom, or overall quality of the staff and their work. So why send out e-mails to academics looking for problems that would surely be well known if they existed?”

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In the mid-90s, the BC College of Teachers tried to challenge Trinity Western's right to train teachers for the public school system, claiming that their beliefs could lead to discrimination against homosexual students. But the Supreme Court of Canada did not agree, ruling in 2001 that the graduates could be judged only on their behaviour in the classroom.

Most of Canada's universities were established by Churches and religious orders, usually as seminaries that included liberal arts education open to non-clergy candidates. Many would now be better described as having a religious history than as actively affiliated with a Church. Nevertheless, theology schools are still part of most universities, especially the older ones. There is room in the academic landscape for all shades of religious affiliation. Most of the League's founders were university professors, and many continue to be found among our membership.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms specifies that freedom of religion is a basic right of all Canadians. Given the key role that universities play in research and education of all kinds, it is important that academics and administrators recognize the role faith has historically played and continues to play in inspiring people to learn and to contribute to society. Unfortunately that spirit appears to be absent in this case.

League News

Manitoba region sponsors presentation

Our Manitoba region sponsored a presentation February 16 at St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba with Sonia Mata of Opus Dei, a well-known but little understood Catholic organization.

"Opus Dei has probably been the subject of more media misinformation than any other Catholic group," commented Francine Lee, League director and parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Carman. "We were pleased to invite Sonia to present the truth about the organization and its work." Dr. Mata agreed the movie, *Da Vinci Code*, misrepresented the organization and, yet, at the same time, helped members realize they need to do more to communicate what they do. Their work includes many social initiatives, solidarity with the poor, and programs for women to improve their life skills and sense of self-worth. In Manitoba, Opus Dei organizes a project that teaches high school students at the

Berens River First Nation (about 430 km north of Winnipeg) how to provide community assistance and service. Opus Dei serves the Church by fostering the responsibility of lay people to live fully their Christian vocation. Dr. Mata discussed how the organization helps people integrate their faith with their family life, work and friendship networks into a seamless whole. Student residences, medical and dental clinics, and family centres, especially in developing countries, are among the institutions Opus Dei operates.

For information about League speakers available in your area, contact Joanne at ccrl@ccrl.ca

Our *Windsor-Essex chapter* is responding to numerous local issues, including a mid-February panel at the University of Windsor Law School that misrepresented the League's participation in the national court case on prostitution laws. (The League's views were dismissed as a juvenile attempt to impose "our" morality on society.) For information about chapter events and activities, contact president Bob Baksi at robert@baksi.com.

Antgonish chapter meets the first Tuesday of each month and is active in media and public school issues. For more information, contact president Don MacLellan at maclellan_donald@yahoo.ca.

Media Watch

Earlier this month, we encouraged our BC membership to write or phone TV station CHBC to reconsider its decision to pull an advertisement from Kelowna Right to Life. While the station has run pro-life ads in the past, it found this one too strong. As of this writing, its decision has not changed.

Let the League know: If you see an article, TV program, billboard or other advertisement that you believe is defamatory to Catholics, please send it to us at ccrl@ccrl.ca, or by mail to the address below.

The League relies on you

Our ability to respond to religious freedom and defamation issues will be determined by your response to our renewal notices and appeal letters. Please be as generous as possible as our funds are seriously depleted at this time. If you are a member of any organization that may be able to assist us, please let us know so that we can try to meet with them.

Subscribe via e-mail by request to: ccrl@ccrl.ca

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