



Catholic Civil Rights League

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Monthly highlights

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Poll on religion and voting patterns

On May 2, Canadians elected a new Parliament composed of 167 Conservative MPs, 102 from the New Democratic Party, 34 Liberal, four Bloc Quebecois and one Green. The massive nature of the upset to the Liberal dominance of almost a century, and the historic inroads of the NDP in Quebec at the expense of the BQ, have been (and will be) commented upon extensively.

Many analysts believe the votes of religiously-motivated electors played a key role. A recent Angus Reid poll on the question, which became one of the most widely-quoted in the last weeks of the campaign, found what many already suspected: The votes of practicing Catholics, and Christians active in other denominations, are more likely to go to the Conservatives than was the case several decades ago. (Read poll results at www.angus-reid.com.)

Religious belief and practice have always played a role in how people vote; the change may simply be the issues and realities put before us. To take just one example, if previous generations had encountered re-definition of marriage as an election issue and party responses had been like today's, perhaps allegiances would have changed then. The social gospel movement helped create the forerunner to the NDP because the responses of the then-existing parties were judged inadequate to meet the social problems of the 1930s. However, despite this history, we can expect this poll to be used by anti-religious people hyper-sensitive to any sign of Christian influence on the new (or indeed any) government.

In any event, what has changed before can change again. As Father Raymond De Souza noted in a National Post column May 3, any party that takes the vote of one group or another for granted runs a real risk of losing it. League members did their best to elect the candidates most likely to deliver (or perhaps least likely to offend) on faith-based issues, but as with any

election result it will take time to see how the issues play out and get addressed in practice.

Also of concern, neither the issues, nor the pre-election polls and campaign advertising, changed the fact that a significant portion of the population does not vote at all. Monday's turnout of 61 per cent is only about two per cent higher than the historic low recorded in 2008. The League will continue to advocate in support of respect for life and religious freedom with this Parliament, as it has with others in the past.

League supports students' free speech

CALGARY, AB April 13, 2011 – The Catholic Civil Rights League is pleased to learn that members of Campus Pro-Life at the University of Calgary have gone to court to assert their campus free speech rights.

Represented by The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF), seven students are Applicants in an Originating Notice filed at the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench today. Their application for judicial review asks the court to quash a University of Calgary decision that the students are guilty of "non-academic misconduct." In May of 2010, eight students were found guilty of "non-academic misconduct" for having set up a pro-life display on campus while refusing to comply with the university's demand that their signs be set up in a circle facing inwards, such that people walking by could not see the signs.

"The right to free expression simply cannot exist if citizens enjoy a legal right not to be disturbed or offended by speech – including images – that they do not wish to see" said John Carpay, president of JCCF. "The University of Calgary's patronizing and paternalistic approach – trying to decide on behalf of students what they can and cannot see – has no place in a free society, especially not at a public university that is funded by Alberta taxpayers."

Ontario tribunal decision supports religious freedom

TORONTO, April 26, 2011 (CCRL) - A pro-life message on church property in Eastern Ontario does not violate the Ontario Human Rights Code, according to a recent ruling by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (HRTO).

In a decision by Adjudicator Michelle Flaherty, the tribunal stated that the message does not violate the Ontario Human Rights Code because it is an expression of religious belief, not a matter of provision of facilities or services.

The League finds the decision particularly significant, and welcome, in that it recognizes the filing as an attempt to use the HRTO process to challenge the teachings of the Church. The written decision makes clear that this is not an appropriate use of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

“It is clear to me that the applicant is attempting to use the (Ontario Human Rights Code) as a vehicle to challenge not only the monument but also the Catholic Church’s belief system and teachings. In my view, this is not an appropriate use of the code,” wrote Ms. Flaherty.

“Freedom of religion must not be interpreted in a way that voids the positive dimension of the freedom (the right to hold beliefs, practice and disseminate them) of any meaning,” the decision stated.

The case between the Chevaliers de Colombe (Knights of Columbus) and Marguerite Dallaire stems from a monument and inscription on the lawn of the Church of St-Jean Baptiste in l’Original, Ont. stating (in French) “Let us pray that all life rests in the hands of God from conception until death.”

Ms. Dallaire, a parishioner, complained to the HRTO that “the inscription is offensive and discriminatory because it denounces, victimizes and excludes women.” Her application, and the HRTO decision, make it clear that she disagrees with the Church on the matter of abortion.

In the April 5 decision, the HRTO said the content of the message is a matter of religious belief and not the business of the provincial human rights body.

The League hopes this decision will send a signal that human rights codes are meant to protect people from discrimination in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services. They are not meant to be a tool to attack religious belief or teaching.

League applies to intervene in Whatcott appeal

The League has applied for leave to intervene in the Supreme Court of Canada appeal between the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and William Whatcott, who has faced numerous human rights filings in Saskatchewan because of his public leafleting and picketing on various homosexual rights questions. In its application for leave to intervene, the League noted its long-standing opposition to Section 14 and its counterparts in other provinces. “In the CCRL’s view, hate speech should be a matter solely for the courts in criminal cases; government tribunals ought not to be permitted to regulate expression.”

Advertising complaint successful

The League’s complaint with the Advertising Standards Council concerning some billboards by Virgin Radio in Toronto has been upheld (Monthly highlights, March 2011). The ads, one of which faces a Catholic high school and others that are located close to residential neighbourhoods, feature obscene slogans and content demeaning to women. We filed our complaint under the ASC’s “inappropriate portrayals” guideline. Although the complaint against the “Usher” ads was upheld, ads in the same series featuring content degrading to women were judged to be within community standards.

Let the League know: Articles, cartoons and advertising that you believe have anti-Catholic content should be sent to cclrl@cclrl.ca to help us respond in a timely way.

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