



Catholic Civil Rights League

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Monthly highlights

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Catholic schools need to adapt anti-bullying initiative

The following is CCRL's analysis of Bill 13, introduced in the Ontario Legislature to supplement the province's Education Act.

TORONTO, December 14, 2011 (CCRL) - The Ontario government recently introduced its "[Accepting Schools Act](#)" (Bill 13, Nov. 30). The proposal can be viewed through a link from this analysis on our website (ccrl.ca).

The Catholic Civil Rights League supports efforts to make all schools welcoming and respectful of all students, and to provide guidance, support and pastoral care for individual students. Students have a right to be free from bullying in all of its forms. Moreover, that is what parents expect, whether they send their children to public or publicly funded Catholic schools.

However, there is more at issue in what the Ontario Liberal government has proposed. While some effort is made to allow school boards to develop policies that discourage and penalize bullying, Bill 13 also includes significant effort to advance a radical understanding of gender, adopted from various queer studies movements, of which great numbers of Ontarians may be unaware.

Bill 13 introduces in its preamble the acceptance of the disputed notion of "gender" as a social construct, making use of the acronym LGBTTIQ to describe variants of sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, two-spirited, intersexed, queer and questioning). Is there a need to engage in the broad acceptance of controversial studies in these areas to provide schools and school boards with tools to address bullying? Is it necessary to identify and label various students according to notions of their "gender" in order to hold bullies to account?

A comprehensive anti-bullying policy based on respect for the dignity of the person, which is consistent with Catholic teaching, would recognize that all students should be free from bullying, without categorization or qualification.

The government has gone further, and has deemed that school boards "shall support pupils who want to establish and lead...activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name." Why are parents, trustees, or school officials to be shut out from oversight of such clubs?

Parents of all faiths, including those with a blind faith in government edicts, will wish to know just what is being offered at their local school, especially in the areas of sex and gender, with or without the engagement of faith and morals.

In particular, a student led club for various strands of the now-identified LGBTTIQ theory of gender cannot be adopted in a Catholic setting, since all sexual activities outside of the traditional understanding of marriage are understood to be sinful, and in contravention of Church teaching. Forcing a student-led club on these themes on Catholic boards, in a manner implying approval of the subject matter, would be an affront to Church teaching, and a subversion or infringement upon the denominational guarantees established in the constitution with respect to Catholic schools in Ontario.

The broader reach of the newly proposed legislation may surprise parents of children at all public schools, who may find the establishment and mandated pro-

motion of the transgendered club, the two-spirited club, or the intersex club to be an affront to the values being taught at home. Given the Bill's wording, a school board would be required to allow any number of variants of such clubs. In Vancouver this past year, an anti-bullying program "Out in Schools" proposed student attendance at queer (and pornographic) film festivals, from which parents (those over 25) were strictly excluded. Is this the way to address bullying, or is it an example of programming to advance another agenda?

Taxpayers would normally expect that parents and teachers provide guidance in school activities, especially those that have moral and religious overtones. Placing a requirement on all school boards to support student-initiated LGBTTIQ clubs puts parents and educators who question the need for student-led clubs about sexuality in the unenviable position of appearing to challenge equality itself.

In its insistence on respect for the dignity of the human person and promotion of the common good, Church teaching offers an ideal basis for comprehensive anti-bullying programs. If there is no adjustment to this Bill to accommodate the constitutional guarantees of Catholic schools, a constitutional challenge can be anticipated.

All parents should be alarmed by the assumption by the state of the mandated promotion of a student-led initiative in heavily charged areas of gender and sexuality at all public schools, which leaves little room for parental or educator oversight.

Parents are the first teachers of their children, as recognized in numerous international instruments and treaties. The League has produced a [Declaration of the authority of parents and guardians in education](#) (CCRL, July 2011), which sets out the authorities that parents of children at all schools can rely upon to address mandated education initiatives which are intended to exclude them.

The [Supreme Court of Canada](#) will soon be releasing a decision which will explore the commonly understood recognition of parental rights in education arising from changes to the curriculum in Quebec introduced in 2008. Some guidance and precedent will be provided by that court's decision. In the meantime, parents in Ontario should remain alert to what may be in store for them and their children should the current Bill proceed.

CCRL urges support for Bill C-304

The Catholic Civil Rights League encourages its members, and all MPs, to support [Bill C-304](#), "An Act to Amend the Human Rights Act", which was read and debated Nov. 22 in the House of Commons. The private member's bill, introduced in September by MP Brian Storseth (CPC-Westlock-St. Paul), seeks to repeal Section 13 of the federal Human Rights Code banning hate speech over the Internet. Second reading and vote is expected this Spring.

Media Watch:

Update on Russell Peters Christmas Special

Thanks to the many League members who expressed concern to CTV about publicity surrounding the network's Russell Peters Christmas Special. The releases and articles made much of the fact that the Virgin Mary would be portrayed by Pamela Anderson in a nativity skit. We asked the network for a preview or other information about the show, but neither was provided. To avoid further, needless publicity about the show, we reserved public comment until after it aired.

In the end, the juvenile publicity surrounding the choice of actress was more a problem in the pre-show publicity than in the show itself. Apart from a tired old joke about the virgin birth, the show was within accepted bounds of what one would expect to see on any other channel at the same time. (To be sure, that is not saying much!) The overly-publicized choice of actress portraying the Mother of God was certainly insensitive to believers, however.

Let the League know: If you see articles, notices of TV programs or other media content that you believe have serious anti-Catholic content, please contact us at ccrl@ccrl.ca to help us evaluate and respond in a timely way.

Supporting the League

We rely completely on your generous support to continue our work. Gifts can be made online (www.ccrl.ca/join/donate) or by mail to CCRL, 500-120 Eglinton Ave.