POLITICAL INTEGRATION AND THE CHARTER OF VALUES

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This article seeks to examine the proposed Québec Charter of Values within the context of the political integration of minorities in North America. In particular, the focus is on the election of ethno-religious minorities to major positions in Canada and the United States. The record in Québec is found lacking. In addition , it is suggested that European models for minority integration, endorsed by many supporters of the proposed Québec Charter, leave much to be desired.

(Note: This article was written before the defeat of the Parti Québecois government in the 2014 elections. But the issues which animated the debate on secularism, religion, and diversity in Québec remain current, at least in large sections of public opinion. So too for the arguments developed below. Since this article was written, the elections for the European Parliament in May 2014 saw a sharp increase in support for the National Front in France, to 25% of the vote. This raises further questions about the desirability of the French model as a blueprint for diversity in Québec.)

The proposed Québec Charter of Values, notably articles which would prohibit the wearing of "ostentatious" religious symbols by all provincial public employees, seeks the goal of entrenching secularism in Québec society. The proposal has come under sustained attack. Some fear the move is largely a pre-election ploy by the PQ to attract nationalist votes. In late August Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, cited in the Montreal Gazette of Aug. 29, 2013, compared the Charter to the legal barriers of segregation and discrimination facing American blacks at the dawn of the civil rights movement. Even former Premier Jacques Parizeau in the Oct. 3 2013 Journal de Montreal criticized the proposal as going too far. A day later so did former Premier Lucien Bouchard, followed, in milder form, by former Premier Bernard Landry. And philosopher Charles Taylor speaking at McGill compared it to a Monty Python sketch…

Many people argued that this charter would be out of step with other North American jurisdictions. But Bernard Drainville, the Québec Minister in charge of the Charter, tried to rebut that claim. He pointed out in an interview with the Globe and Mail on Sept 12, 2013 that indeed two American states, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, have on the books laws which restrict the religious clothing of public school teachers. Yes, but this is true for just two out of fifty states. And the truth is that these laws are very old. For example, the Pennsylvania law dates pack to 1895. It was designed to combat the influence of Catholics, Jews, and immigrants in general in the United States, during a period of increased xenophobia. The law

was promoted by the Ku Klux Klan, along with other nativist groups. This is likely not the company that the Marois government would like to keep — one hopes. And no American state or Canadian province would today propose something as sweeping as the proposed Québec Charter.

In any case, Parti Québecois leaders have consistently affirmed that Québec has little to learn from other jurisdictions in North America, and that immigrants and minorities are being welcomed and fully integrated into Québec. Indeed, how to measure integration? One way is through the degree to which minority candidates can win elections. General surveys on race relations often ask respondents if they would be prepared to vote for an _____ for elected office. Québec had the non-pur-laine Amir Khadir as leader of the small fourth provincial party, Québec Solidaire. That is indeed one example of political integration, tolerance, and inclusion. And visible minority and/or non-Christian politicians in Québec have been members of provincial cabinets.

Yet how does this compare to other North American jurisdictions? Let us begin with Canada. At the federal level the NDP had a Jewish leader, David Lewis. In terms of provincial premiers, British Columbia elected a Jewish , Dave Barrett, and an Indo-Canadian, Ujjal Dosanjh, premier. PEI has had two of Lebanese ethnic origin, Joe Ghiz and his son Robert. The argument here is that elected premiers are more significant than a cabinet member. Looking at Ontario, in the post- war period each of the three major provincial parties has had a Jewish leader (Larry Grossman, Stuart Smith, Stephen Lewis). In the post-war period Toronto has elected three Jewish mayors (Nathan Phillips, Phil Givens, Mel Lastman.) These electoral victories were not at all due to any "Jewish vote." In fact in recent decades Jews comprised comparable percentages of the population in metropolitan Toronto and Montreal, about 3-4%. Even Calgary, in supposedly red-neck Alberta, has elected Muslim mayor Naheed Nenshi... As of this writing it is not clear when Quebecers will elect a Muslim, Jew, or a non-white, as a provincial premier, leader of a major party, or mayor of Montreal (Michael Appelbaum was appointed Montreal mayor after a resignation).

Turning to the United States, we note that major cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles have elected both Jewish and black mayors. The Americans have twice elected Barack (Hussain) Obama as President, an unusual black American, with his Arabic name and Kenyan and Indonesian elements in his background. Indeed, religion and religious commitments are front and center in American Presidential politics. No declared atheist would have a serious chance at a party nomination, let alone the white House. And Presidential candidates, and then Presidents, talk openly and personally about the importance of their faith and their church. They invoke God often in speeches.

But oddly the most relevant American political example for the current Québec debate may be Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, the Vice Presidential running mate with Al Gore in the year 2000. Recall that the Democratic ticket in fact secured a majority of the vote, but was denied the election following a decision of the US Supreme Court. Joe Lieberman was the first Jew on a major national American ticket, and would have been a heartbeat away from the Presidency. But more importantly, he is an Orthodox Jew. He observes the Sabbath and all holidays, keeps strictly kosher, etc. While he does not wear a kippa, he was certainly a visible symbol of strong non-Christian religiosity in American politics. He commented often during the campaign on his faith. Indeed, Lieberman has just published a book, The Gift of Rest, about the value of the Jewish Sabbath. More surprising is the fact that there is no research evidence that Lieberman's Jewish Orthodoxy caused any net loss of votes to the Democratic ticket.

Americans take seriously the separation of church and state. Indeed, there is not one dime of direct government funding for private religious schools. There are no manger scenes at Christmas, no menorahs, and no crucifixes on public schools or government property. The ACLU stands guard to keep the two separate. Yet at the same time, American candidates and elected leaders regularly discuss the importance of faith. It is hard to imagine any Canadian political leader, and certainly none in Québec, making the kind of speeches that President Obama made regarding his church and his ties to the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, or Joe Lieberman's discussions of his Judaic faith. Yet from debates about the alleged dangers of President Kennedy's Catholicism (and the feared influence of the Vatican?) to Mitt Romney's Mormon faith, these issues have been front and center in American political discourse.

The proposed Québec Charter will likely exempt elected officials from the prohibition on religious symbols, which is to the good. The fact is overtly religious figures have made important contributions to public life in North America. One thinks of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., or the Rev. Jesse Jackson in the US, or the Saskatchewan Premier and father of Medicare the Rev. Tommy Douglas. Perhaps in Québec such figures are seen as rare exceptions. Many Quebecers accept completely a post- 1960s narrative which emphasizes rampant oppression directed against them for so many generations by the Church. One option for modification of the charter is to restrict prohibitions of religious dress to those in direct authority over citizens. Surgeons yes, judges no. Yet the logic which would ban a hijab for a judge but accept it for Premier seems tortured at best.

Charter supporters have cited support of the French republican model as an alternative to the alleged dangers of multiculturalism, with regard to treatment of religious minorities, and immigrant integration. But there can be many versions of the French model. Which one? Is this also the France of Dreyfus, or the conviction of his defender Emile Zola, or the assimi-

lated Jewish premier Leon Blum (the anti- Joe Lieberman), or the collaboration of Vichy, or the brutalities of Algeria, or the riots of the heavily North African suburbs of Paris, or Le Pen and the National Front? In general, it is not clear why or how Europe offers a more welcoming model to religious or ethnic minorities. Throughout liberal-democratic western Europe today one can find legislative attempts to restrict the influence of religion, whether the issue is the wearing of religious symbols, male circumcision, kosher slaughter, the heights of mosques, etc. Minority origin politicians who succeed are usually those who are most assimilated. Moreover, most of these European democracies also have political parties which are openly xenophobic and anti-immigrant. While these parties have not generally passed the 20% threshold, they have certainly served to change the tenor of public debate and social concern about minority issues. It is not clear that this is an admirable model for a diverse society.

The continental-European model is rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy (reason over religion) and the French Revolution, which advocated submerging to the maximal extent all particularist identities under the all-inclusive *citoyen* label. Religion was to be uprooted:" In the words of Voltaire: *Ecrasez l'infame*." And this sentiment seems alive and well in contemporary Québec. Many of the current issues roiling Québec were foreshadowed during the Revolution in a debate on the emancipation of the Jews. In the words of Clermont-Tonnerre in the National Constituent Assembly in December of 1789: "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals."

The debate over the Charter is profoundly a debate about the degree of acceptance of an "other" by a majority group. An attack on the visible expressions of faith of a devout Muslim or Jew risks becoming an attack on all Muslims and Jews — their family or friends — and soon on all minorities as well. Many years ago I attended a conference in a western European city, dealing with immigration. A group of academics were standing around and chatting at a reception. I described how I had done research on Jewish issues and indeed taught a course on Jews at McGill. After the group broke up, someone tapped my shoulder. I recognized a local senior professor and university administrator. She drew me aside and whispered — yes whispered: " I heard you discussing your life in Montreal, was surprised at how open you were, and wanted to tell you that I too am a Jew." She went on to tell me — still whispering — that nobody in her university knew that. She recounted how she was a child survivor of the Holocaust, remained in Europe and married another Jewish child survivor. They decided to live a completely non-Jewish life, in academia, and never told their children about their background. She sighed and said she regretted that, but claimed it was too late. At the time buried deep in the closet, she avoided at her university any discussion about Judaism, the Middle East, and Israel. Hers is the tragic European experience of the 20th century which nurtures such discomfort and its latent marginality, whether among Jews who remained in Europe or refugee families who migrated to North America.

Devout members of religious minorities should not be pushed back into a closet. The proposed Charter of Values would steer Québec in the wrong direction.