RECOGNIZE THE NEW RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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The description of Canada as a secular country is not accurate, but neither is it 'religious'. Faced with a new diversity, including the rapid growth of the nonreligious; a declining commitment to organized religion; an increase in migration and minority religions; and a renewed attention to indigenous spiritualities, the challenge is to develop inclusive practices that build a solid foundation for a complex future. This means acknowledging power and renegotiating old arrangements to recognize the potential of the new diversity.

La description du Canada en tant que pays laïc n'est pas exacte, mais le pays n'est pas non plus « religieux ». Face à une nouvelle diversité, incluant la croissance rapide du non-religieux, un engagement déclinant envers la religion organisée, une augmentation des migrations et des religions minoritaires et une attention renouvelée aux spiritualités autochtones, le défi est de développer des pratiques inclusives qui construisent une base solide pour un futur pour le moins complexe. Cela signifie reconnaître le pouvoir et renégocier d'anciens arrangements pour reconnaître le potentiel de la nouvelle diversité.

Is Canada a 'religious' country? A 'secular' country? Both? Neither? The answer to this is complicated and very much depends on who is responding. From the perspective of some people, Canada is secular, a fact which sometimes means the exclusion of religious people from public life. Others, however, experience Canada as still very much shaped by its Christian settlers, which also results in exclusion of those who do not share this worldview. The declaration that Canada is a secular nation stands in interesting tension with the declaration of 'the Supremacy of God' in the preamble of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the recitation of Christian prayers at various state functions (including the opening of Parliament, provincial legislatures and municipal council meetings), the presence of religious symbols in state buildings and the frequent intervention by religious groups in Supreme Court of Canada cases. Canada is very much in a period of intense change when it comes to religion, and descriptors like 'religious' or 'secular' do not capture the complexity of that shift, which can be characterized as 'the new diversity'. What does this mean?

Developments around diversity are changing the nature and shape of what we describe as the public sphere (or, claims on public sphere space and perhaps even function). Though these changes are broader than simply being about religion, the focus for our purposes is on several developments related

to religion.[1] First, during the past decade something rather phenomenal has happened in a number of Western democracies: for the first time ever, census data and population surveys show that a critical mass of people are nonreligious, identifying as 'none' when asked their religion. In Canada, nearly 24% of Canadians self-describe as nones or nonreligious, according to the most recent data available from Statistics Canada.[2] This represents a significant increase from 2001, when only 16.5 percent of people identified as nonreligious.[3] Other examples include the US (19.6%), Australia (30.1%), the UK (50.6%), France (28%), the Czech Republic (76.4%), Estonia (59.6%), and Sweden (27%). The nonreligious constitute a growing presence in a wide range of social, economic and cultural contexts.[4] The none category is made up of a wide range of worldviews, ranging from atheists, humanists, spiritual but not religious, and those who are quite simply indifferent. To date, they remain understudied, although this is changing.[5] The rise of the nonreligious has prompted debates over the implications of a society that is much less influenced by religion, sometimes bordering on a moral panic about a potentially godless world.

As we might expect, a simultaneous change has been the rapid decline in affiliation or commitment to organized religion. Numerous scholars have theorized about this shift, some like Grace Davie arguing that a small group of people are now 'performing' religion for the rest of us, who reap the benefits of that performance.[6] Davie calls this 'vicarious religion' and believing without belonging.[7] It is not clear exactly what role organized religion plays in the lives of the uncommitted. While maintaining an affiliation with organized religion, (in Canada this makes up about 67% of the population), they are not supporting the churches in tangible ways, resulting in, among other things, an abundance of church buildings available for condominium development and repurposing for other religious groups, often immigrant communities. In our Montreal focused research Monica Grigore and I have studied a number of such transitions,[8] including the transformation of a Grey Nuns convent into a university residence and study area, a church converted to a seniors home, and orthodox and catholic groups sharing, somewhat uncomfortably, the same church space. An increasingly prevalent architectural feature in city developments is the remnants of a church building incorporated into a new development. As rural populations decline once vibrant country churches are closing. Congregations are merging in an attempt to pool diminishing resources. There are feelings of loss, despair and fear as an old normal disappears in the midst of the new diversity.[9]

The third change is an acceleration of migration, often to the same countries in which the number of nonreligious has increased so dramatically and rapidly.[10] Migrant groups often bring with them religious practices and traditions that, while present in the receiving country, have been largely unnoticed. In Canada between 2001 and 2011 the percentage of those who identify as Hindus, Sikh, Buddhist, and Muslim increased from 4.9% to 7.2%, and account for 33% of immigrants who arrived within that ten-year period.[11] Australia has

1 Steven Vertovec (2007) describes this diversity as 'super-diversity.' He notes that "in the last decade the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables shows that it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere. Such additional variables include differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. Rarely are these factors described side by side. The interplay of these factors is what is meant here, in summary fashion, by the notion of 'super-diversity'" (Vertovec 2007: 1025). See also Vertovec (2017) and Burchardt and Irene Becci (2016) for discussions on superdiversity. Deirdre Meintel (2016) refers to this diversity as 'complex diversity.'

2 Statistics Canada (2011a).

3 Statistics Canada (2001).

4 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012); Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016); Woodhead (2016); and Pew Research Center (2015a). A WIN-Gallup International (2012: 15-16) report found that more than half of the populations in Vietnam, France, and Ireland consider themselves "not a religious person" or atheist.

5 There is an emerging literature, some dealing with atheism (Zuckerman 2010; Beaman and Tomlins 2015; Lee 2015, Day 2011; Day, Vincett, and Cotter 2013).

6 See Davie (2007; 2015).

7 Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) makes a related argument in her book Religion as a *Chain of Memory*, in which she argues that religious traditions preserve chains of collective memory within modern societies

8 See Grigore Dovlete and Beaman (2017).

9 For an excellent ethnographic study of a declining congregation, see Day (2017).

10 I may be overstating the dramatic nature of the rise. In a number of countries answering 'none' was not possible until relatively recently. Moreover, there has been a steady increase in the number of people answering 'none' or nonreligious for at least the past 7 decades. However, it does seem that this has accelerated to some extent in the past decade.

11 Statistics Canada (2011b).

had a steady increase of these same groups with Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims increasing from 3.9% of the population in 2001 to 6% in 2011.[12] In the UK, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Hindus increased from 5% of the population in 2001 to 7.5% in 2011.[13] According to Statistics Sweden as of 2016, 17.65% of the population is foreign born (in Canada it is 21.45%).[14] The statistics are similar in many Western democracies.[15]

Finally, there is a renewed attention to indigenous populations and the consequences of colonization. The Truth and Reconciliation made a number of recommendations related specifically to religion. Christianity played a key role in the attempted annihilation of indigenous culture. Indigenous children were taken from their families to church-run residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their language, communicate with each other and were often physically and sexually abused. Indigenous spiritual practices were forbidden and Christianization was very much part of the 'civilizing' of indigenous peoples. The global reach of the churches meant that Canada's indigenous peoples were not isolated in this: similar treatment was experienced by indigenous peoples in Australia, for example. The other aspect of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (in addition to the reparation called for by the churches involved in the residential school system) is a greater understanding and recognition of indigenous spirituality. This has, in part, resulted in an increased attention to indigenous spiritualities, which are present in indigenous law, environmental action and language.

All of these factors mean that Canada (and many other Western democracies) is becoming increasingly religiously and non-religiously diverse. This is not a change in kind, but a change in degree. But degree matters: this shifting ground has the potential to create increased conflict, platforms for exclusion and feelings of voicelessness in the public sphere. The primary consequence of this is the need to re-negotiate old arrangements if we are to achieve inclusion and the goal of living well together in a complex future. Re-negotiation, then, means acknowledging both the privilege of historically dominant religious groups and the power and vitality of their religious symbols and practices (including crosses and crucifixes in public spaces and prayers in public ceremonies).

Renegotiation may mean, then, a moment of silence instead of prayer, or giving way to aboriginal prayer connecting people to place, instead of invoking divine guidance. It may mean moving symbols from places of authority to places of equality and contextualizing their presence with explanations about historical significance. Responding to the new diversity in an inclusive way means relinquishing rightness and power by those who are accustomed to having it, rather than claiming victim status. It also means acknowledging that silence or failure to complain by those who do not share this worldview does not equal inclusion. Neither does assuming that one's worldview somehow represents universal values to which no one might take offence. Also at stake, though, are symbols and practices that are cherished by certain constituencies of the population and which have been historically present. Although the turn to culture and heritage as justification for maintaining privilege is troubling, it is important to work to find ways to treat such symbols and practices with respect while renegotiating the ways in which they may be present to create an inclusive society. Finally, there must be an examination and mobilization of the positive contributions of the constituent parts of the new diversity. Examples of this are blossoming as individuals, groups and organizations are responding to the new diversity to create inclusive spaces and practices. Mapping these can offer models for living well together rather than simply co-existing.

12 Hindus increased from 0.5% in 2001 to 1.3% in 2011; Buddhists from 1.9% to 2.5%; Muslims from 1.5% to 2.2%. See Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006; 2012).

13 Muslims increased from 3% of the population in 2001 to 4.8% in 2011; Sikhs from 0.6% to 0.8%; Buddhists from 0.3% to 0.4%; and Hindus from 1.0% to 1.5%. See Office for National Statistics (2004; 2012).

14 See Statistics Sweden (2016) and Statistics Canada (2016).

15 In the US, the amount of the population identifying with non-Christian faiths increased from 4.7% in 2007 to 5.9% in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2015b). Pew Research Center (2015a) has projected that France's Muslim population will increase from 7.5% (in 2010) to 10.9% (in 2050) as a result of migration, and that Sweden's will similarly increase from 4.6% to 12.4%.