Religious Diversity and Canada's Future:

Introduction

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Public opinion surveys reveal that relations between faith communities and between religious and secular Canadians are a very important preoccupation. The significant demographic change that the country has experienced over the past four decades has been characterized by considerable growth in the percentage of Canadians that are not Christian. Over that same period, there has been an important increase in the numbers of Canadians reporting no religion, partly reflecting the diminished importance of religion in many people's lives.

L'identité religieuse a joué un rôle fondamental dans l'histoire du Canada. Indeed from the very outset, Canada was in the business of managing religious diversity. It established its own version of the wall of separation – in this case, however, it implied the institutional separation of Catholics from Protestants. Dû au fait que historiquement, les droits constitutionnels soient limités aux Catholiques et Protestantes en matière d'éducation, les juifs étaient considérés comme protestants jusqu'aux années soixante-dix. Growing up in parts of Canada in the 1970's, non-Christians attending public schools joined with other students in singing praise to Jesus. Over the past few decades, the introduction of the *Charters of Rights* and the growing support amongst the population for principles of equality might make these examples appear anachronistic.

Still, we are struggling with ways to accommodate religious diversity as witnessed in the very public debates over the funding of religiously-based schools in Ontario, the place of faith-based arbitration and around the establishment of a commission in Quebec looking into reasonable accommodation of diverse cultural practices focused on religious diversity.

To examine these questions, this edition of *Canadian Diversity* has invited some of Canada's leading thinkers to discuss various aspects of the contemporary debate around managing religious diversity. The concept of this issue of Canadian Diversity magazine was developed by Dr. Kamal Dib and Mr. Jaime Opazo, both leading policy researchers at the Department of Canadian Heritage. Early in 2006, they have noted the absence of a holistic approach towards a rational discussion of religion in Canada. They noted the knee-jerk reactions to global events and hasty attempts to "securitize" religion. Hence, they recognized the need to understand the socioeconomic dimensions of religious diversity in Canada and they have started a research agenda that resulted in quality studies and reports. This edition is the fruit of this research agenda on religious diversity. Its publication comes closely after a ground-breaking seminar hosted by the Department of Canadian Heritage on Religious Diversity in Canada on February 27, 2008. Messrs Dib and Opazo hope that the research effort represents a modest contribution to the study of contemporary Canadian demographic diversity. I want to thank them for their support. I also want to thank Jennifer Bitz of the Department of Canadian Heritage for her continued support as well as Fred Dufresne and Sofia-Gallagher-Rodriguez. I also acknowledge the important efforts of the ACS staff Marie-Pascale Desjardins and Dornett Roachford in generating this publication.

In his essay, David Seljak concludes that the refusal to confront the persistence of religion in Canadian society by clinging to an abstract and ahistorical concept of the separation of Church and State leads to misunderstandings and injustices. He maintains that the residually Christian nature of this public sphere places a further burden on members of minority religious communities that adherents of mainline Christian churches do not need to shoulder. The issue of religion must be addressed in discussions of social inclusion, immigrant integration, multiculturalism, democratic participation and justice. Seljak argues that policy-makers and other stake-holders need to engage in a broad dialogue to craft solutions to the issues of religious pluralism and multiculturalism that can take advantage of established interfaith networks.

Dans mon texte, je note que le bénévolat demeure fortement influencé par des initiatives à caractère religieux. L'importance accrue attribuée au capital social pour renforcer notre vie démocratique doit tenir compte du rôle de l'identité religieuse qui demeure la principale motivation pour de nombreux bénévoles. Malgré la préoccupation du bénévolat religieux pour la cohésion communautaire au dépend de la cohésion sociale, les efforts pour distinguer entre le bon et le mauvais capital social demeurent problématiques. En fait, les tentatives de chiffrer les exemples de bon et mauvais capital social ne porte aucun fruit. Par ailleurs, le sentiment d'appartenance au Canada des membres des minorités religieuses engagées dans le capital social à caractère confessionnel n'est pas différent de celui d'autres citoyens.

Bramadat and Wortley review existing evidence related to the question of religious youth radicalization in Canada. Reviewing websites of various religious groups, they find that radicalization has a marginal presence. Most Canadian groups continue to express their opinions, and even their grievances within the established traditions of law and deference that characterize Canadian life. There are, however, a number of problems that face anyone seeking to address what small amount of religious radicalization exists in Canada. They strongly urge that more research be conducted in this regard.

Imam Dr. Zijad Delic reminds us that Canadian Muslims do not constitute a monolithic bloc. He contends that Canada offers a model based on constructive integration which provides an alternative to assimilation or isolation and permits Muslims in Canada to preserve and remain faithful to their religious beliefs. It is important that Muslims be encouraged to greater civic engagement without fearing their religious identity will be undercut He concludes that there is a need for more inter-ethnic and inter-faith sharing of knowledge and experience around the history of Islam.

For his part, Kamal Dib discusses research parameters around the relationship between religious identity and security concerns. He maintains that a multidisciplinary approach in research on security and religion is necessary to support social policy development. This approach needs to address the growing complexity of religious identities in a globalized world. Greater cooperation across the policy-making community is needed so that analysis of religious diversity looks at the intersection between labor market conditions, immigration and justice. On issues of security, Dib cautions that too often cultural and religious explanations for acts of violence are not adequate for a proper comprehension of what underlies such phenomenon.

Pour sa part, Professeur Solange Lefebvre maintien qu'il est impossible d'ignorer les dimensions religieuses de l'histoire canadienne. Or elle évoque le défi d'implantation d'un nouveau cours d'éthique et de culture religieuse dans toutes les écoles du Québec, aux niveaux primaire et secondaire. Lefebvre insiste sur l'importance d'un grand nombre de connaissances religieuses pour comprendre des textes, des œuvres de fond, des histoires et des usages ainsi que des personnages historiques. La culture des traditions religieuses s'avère aussi importante, pour assurer la compréhension et le respect mutuel.

Selon Jean-François Gaudreault-DesBiens, le débat sur les accommodements raisonnables a fait ressortir la présence d'au moins deux atavismes identitaires de la société québécoise. D'une part, l'identité religieuse canadienne-française, que l'on croyait évaporée depuis la Révolution tranquille, a resurgi dans le débat public. D'autre part, le « nationalisme méthodologique » inspirant la saisie que font de nombreux Québécois des évolutions de leur société y exerce plus que jamais une fonction amplificatrice des débats juridico-identitaires les plus triviaux.

La présence au sein de la société québécoise (mais surtout au sein de sa majorité d'origine canadienne-française) de courants idéologiques aussi différents en ce qui a trait à leur conception de la place de la religion dans la sphère publique laisse selon moi planer des doutes quant à la profondeur et à la portée réelles du mouvement de résurgence de l'identité religieuse traditionnelle de cette majorité.

Karim H. Karim and Faiza Hirji point out that, despite conscious efforts that are made to de-sacralize structures of the secular state, a country's culture cannot be completely separated from its religious heritage. They note that debates involving the intersection of religious and civic identities tend to become conflated with negative perceptions of immigration, of overly reasonable accommodation that privileges minority rights over those of the majority, and concerns about gender rights and public security. In several cases, they believe that the extent of the social conflict has been magnified by the media to produce moral panics. Official and unofficial symbols, public ceremonies, common linguistic phrases etc. are often based on religious culture.

In his essay, Marc Gold reminds us that the relationship between religion, society and state has been a core driver in the evolution of the modern western state for the past five centuries, and has been an ongoing theme in Canadian public life, both before and since Confederation. He considers the issue of the relationship between religion and the state from the perspective of recent developments in Quebec, notably over reasonable accommodation. He argues for a *laïcité inclusive* as a model for addressing the reasonable accommodation debate in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, based as it is on the principles and values embodied in the Canadian and Quebec Charters of Rights that is rooted in the historical and constitutional traditions of Quebec and Canada. More particularly, the debate has been on which conception or interpretation of *la laïcité* ought to be adopted in Quebec. In this regard, the state should be neutral with respect to religion in the sense that it should not promote one religion over another. But the principle of the neutrality of the state does not mean nor require that the state banish all signs of religion from the public space. State neutrality towards religion does not necessarily mean state hostility towards religion. Nor, he adds, should it.

Finally, Sarah Elgazzar examines the place of religion in public institutions as well as some of the key players in resolving the issues surrounding the accommodation of religious and visible minorities. It explores discrimination in attaining employment in the public sector and also explores what Canadian society can do to maintain social cohesiveness and further mutual understanding within our communities. Certain media outlets concentrated on sensationalist headlines focused on often insignificant issues often wrongly characterized as reasonable accommodations. Such coverage increased hostilities towards persons who were openly religious. One of the pillars of a healthy democracy is a well informed public which requires a responsible press and permits the public to be able to counteract misinformation.