

COMMUNICATIONS

Religion and Education in Canada: Reply I

In this reply to Lupul's article¹, I would like to argue two points: (1) That the language employed in certain ceremonies observed by the government does not express partisanship in religious matters. It is primarily a ceremonial type of language and its function is to evoke emotions (2) and that Lupul has not conclusively shown that his religiously neutral school will be able to teach religion in the manner desired. Neither do his condemnations on the ineptness of the public school to handle the religious question prove convincing.

It is admitted that the prayer said at the opening of the Legislative Sessions and the religious oaths sworn in courts of law and in the inauguration of public officials suggest a theistic bias. But what kinds of statements are these? Mostly, they are ceremonials and rituals. Their purpose is to invest the ceremonies with a certain emotional atmosphere, a renewed sense of dedication, not to a Supreme Being but to one's country, to one's sense of law and order, or to one's sense of historic connections with the past. They are not intended to convince or persuade people to believe in a particular God. The use of the term "God" is primarily instrumental. Somehow, these kinds of statements are necessary to certain ritualistic proceedings if only "to break the ice" and to calm and put people at ease. These ceremonials are no different from those rites of passage that take place in other societies.

More important, these statements are not theological doctrines sanctioned by a certain ecclesiastical order or religious authority. They do not constitute the "statement of faith delivered unto the saints."

Some may say that the speaker in these ceremonies intends to convince his hearers of the "truth" of his religious claims. If so, a change in the language employed must be noted and his intention can be verified. That is, if the public intention (overt behaviour) of the Canadian Bill of Rights and the language employed in these ceremonies is to favor theism, then, the term "God" should have been defined specifically, given a precise meaning, such that everyone knows that the God being spoken of refers exclusively to the Christian God of the Old and New Testament, identified historically with the person of Jesus Christ. "God" *must* mean the Christian God. Thus, no one can confuse other "Gods" of other religious sys-

¹M. R. Lupul, "Religion and Education in Canada: A Call for an End to Hypocrisy," *The Journal of Educational Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Dec. 1969), pp. 141-150.

tems, be they humanistic or supernaturalistic, for the one God being mentioned and sanctioned by the government. Moreover, He must also be viewed as the source of justification for only certain acceptable, specified behaviours. All other private and public behaviours which do not find justification within this specified meaning of the term "God" will be legally suspect.

As it is, the term "God" is left vague. "God" here could easily mean the way John Dewey used it, the experience of a realization of an ideal. Or, "God" could mean the feelings of immortality welling up within one's being, not too different from the feelings evoked at the sight of a sunset, at the touch of the Beloved, or at the confrontation of a painting upon which one can hang his dreams. Perhaps, to most people, the term "God" expresses the sentiment: "I am glad I am alive." Without being irreverent, one may say that in these proceedings "God" is used as a "blank cheque." It is quite empty. As such, participants can write in their own meaning of "God." Lupul, if it pleases him, can be "God." This is not said in a derogatory manner. Along with expressions such as "Have faith," "Only believe," "Be thankful," and terms like "education" and "art," "God" is an accommodating term. The problem here is not that it is an error to give a cognitive meaning to "God." Neither is it that no one can give a cognitive meaning to it, be the meaning erroneous or otherwise. The point is that anyone *can* give his own "cognitive" meaning. The term "God" invites participation on the part of all, not exclusion or favoritism of some, hearers or readers, as Lupul suggests. No one is discriminated against.

The statements in question need not be taken for what they say, or sound like, but rather how they are used and what function they perform. Surely, no one expects to find a single task which all sentences perform, or else one falls back upon the errors of logical atomism or positivism. It is more profitable to ask: What does the statement do? What does the saying, utterance, of the statement enable the speaker to do? What are people doing when they use religious, ethical, scientific languages? When they express belief or claim knowledge?

Also, if God, in the religious sense, does not exist for the non-religious, then the term is meaningless for him. It is not in his assumptive world. No one should be bothered by something which he does not believe exists. God, being a non-existent entity, cannot offend the non-religious. Has anyone been offended or hurt by a unicorn?

Lupul limits the problem of neutrality to religion because he says it is an "entirely private affair" (p. 141). Other subjects which do not invoke a belief in a Supreme Being can be considered "public affairs." This much distinction between a private and a public affair can be gathered from Lupul's essay.

Religion can be taught and studied like any other subject in the context of his religiously neutral school, says Lupul. It will be understood and

discussed in its human setting, thus, religion as a human invention, as another form of human expression of hope, or another human attempt to explain events in man's life. It may differ from other types of human inventions, expressions, and attempts in its inclusiveness of interests; total life seems to be its domain. Even so, there is nothing extra-human or privately mysterious about it. It does not intrude into the privacy of individual lives. More important, it is not taught to be ". . . necessary for good living" (p. 146) or for life's meaning and "eternal" security. Questions pertaining to religion which may be considered public matters are the nature of authority of religion, religion as a social phenomenon, the good and bad influences of religious thought in history, and the religious aspects of certain historical events, such as the Crusades and the Reformation (p. 146).

Now, on what grounds does Lupul make the claim that his religiously neutral school will be capable of teaching religion in this manner? What proofs are offered to support the claim? Is it primarily because the proposed school does not believe in religion? On the other hand, why is the public school incapable of using the same approach that he recommends? (See pp. 146 and 148). Is it because, in Lupul's judgment, it is "blinded" by its faith in religion? If faith necessarily blinds one to what he accepts, in this case, faith in religion, such that he cannot discuss it objectively (unable to present the logic of religion independent of his wishes or feelings about it), then, does it not also suggest that no faith in religion may distort its public aspects? No faith and faith, after all, are similar in function. One is presence of faith while the other is its absence, but both are exercises of faith although their objects may be different. The question is the *object* of faith and not faith itself. In other words, there is the chance that one's total feelings about religion "get in the way" and that the claim to objectivity may be questioned. That which is being talked about, although termed the public aspect of religion, may be in actuality one's interpretation of it which may be biased because of his non-commitment to it. The individual's personal allegiances come first.

Just because one does not believe in religion does not insure his capability of teaching its public aspects well, although he may know them. Neither can one say that he is incapable of handling these aspects just because he is committed to its private beliefs. Being committed to a belief in a Supreme Being, or religion, does not necessarily preclude one from teaching its public aspects well. The question that is being raised here is: What is/are the necessary condition(s) that must be fulfilled to secure the teaching of religion and its "truths" objectively, that is, without evangelizing and proselyting the listeners? Lupul fails to inquire into this basic aspect of the problem. To suggest that those who do believe in religion cannot teach it like any other subject and those who do not believe in it can is, perhaps, a simplistic analysis of the problem, even naive. And the claim that a religiously neutral school can perform the task is, perchance, based upon prejudiced thinking. But, surely, there

are grounds other than personal beliefs, disbeliefs, or biases that can be explored and on which grounds the problem of teaching religion may be discussed and argued.

But let us grant the right to Lupul to say that the public school is incapable of teaching religion the way he thinks it should taught. What evidential support does he have for saying what he says? Lupul speaks of "bigotry" (p. 148) among so-called theists and their inability to reach a compromise on the subject of religion (p. 148). Presumably these are facts known to all, and they need not be supported. Do these cited evidences warrant his claim that the public school is incapable of teaching religion? From the facts of bigotry and absence of compromise, one cannot logically draw the conclusion that theists (*the public school*) are incapable of teaching religion like any other subject matter. To do so is to reason that "if one is bigoted in his beliefs, then he is unable to teach his beliefs objectively." But the form of implication here is not one of logical necessity such that "given a bigot in religion, inability to teach religion objectively necessarily follows." It is a casual implication which is a form of inductive inference. It is an observation based upon a number of certain experiences. The consequent does not necessarily follow from the antecedent, but is reached through an examination of a number of similar, individual cases. To support Lupul's conclusion, which is an inductive type of generalization, that those who are bigoted, who cannot reach a compromise on the matter of teaching religion, cannot teach religion objectively (like any other subject matter), sufficient, verified, and relevant evidences must be cited. On this point, the article is inadequate. To suggest that these cases are only too well known, hence, need not be documented or presented for public examination is, perhaps, assuming too much.

Also, statements on bigotry do not justify Lupul's conclusion that the public school is not able to teach religion in the manner that he desires. These statements are concluding or judgment type statements. To say "One is a bigot or is bigoted" is to judge. As a judgment, it is not a factual proposition; it is neither absolutely true nor false. It is not, therefore, conclusive evidence nor can it be made the basis of his statement on the inability of the public school to handle religious matters. Once more, proofs are needed to enable Lupul to arrive at his conclusions.

On his use of the term "bigotry" or "bigot," Lupul needs to present the criteria upon which he bases its use. That is, he must be able to identify the observable characteristics of a bigot — descriptive aspects which are empirically verifiable. If John fits the description of a bigot, then, one may say, "It is true that John is a bigot." Judgments are usually based upon statements which can be examined for their truth or falsity.

The other task for Lupul is to justify his selection of these certain observable characteristics which are judged to constitute his definition of the term bigot. It is to answer the question: "Why do you consider those

who hold religious convictions and not the agnostics bigots? Who, what, is a bigot? What constitutes bigotry?" This is a problem of justification. It is not as simple to solve as an empirical problem. But one can, at least, make public his criteria for the use of his term and hope for its acceptance on the part of his readers. The question is whether the term is defined too broadly so that anyone who believes in and does anything can be labelled a bigot. Or, it may be defined too narrowly so that no one qualifies as a bigot. In Lupul's article, for example, it appears that anyone who holds religious beliefs, who is a member of a religious group, is automatically a bigot. And persons like Lupul who are sympathetic to agnosticism are not or cannot be bigots! Is sensible disagreement with Lupul bigotry?

The other related question is to find out whether the description of the term "bigot" is made on relevant grounds. For example, is a belief in God, in a religion, a relevant ground on which to base one's definition of bigotry? What of agnosticism? What of a belief in science? If it is, is it a sufficient or a necessary ground? If the grounds upon which the judgment "bigot" is made are verifiable but irrelevant and insufficient, then, the relationship claimed between the judgment term and its identifiable grounds may be questioned logically. Some, of course, may say that the term "bigot" is clearly understood. It is not a problem at all: "One can find and see them all in churches on Sunday mornings!" Perhaps, so. But when the term occurs in Lupul's usage (and it is important to his argument) then the reader has the right to know who is being called a bigot and on what grounds he is judged to be so. This is important because if one admits that he is a bigot, on Lupul's grounds, then he has to ask himself whether or not he is capable of handling his religious beliefs in a responsible, objective manner toward his students and other fellow-Canadians who are non-theists. In other words, Lupul is obligated to make *public* his grounds, reasons, proofs which enable him to state the kind of judgments that he does toward those who hold theological positions. Argumentation has to be carried on on the basis of factual evidence and rules of logic. Lupul's article seems to be short on the first, inadequate on the second, and, unfortunately, long on judgments.

The same observation may be made of other points in his essay. For example, all human frailties, such as hypocrisy, insincerity, intolerance, seem to be the lot of the public school and the theists. But given his neutrally religious school, all goodness will follow, including interracial understanding. These are interesting comments but largely uninformative. One has to provide proof that the public school *intends* to produce theists (p. 143), that the products of the school have become theists because of *the* public school, and that these graduates are insincere, intolerant, incapable of international understanding. Then, Lupul will have to show that given his school, which presupposes the acceptance of non-religious beliefs, the benefits he mentions will follow. If, as he maintains, there are no necessary connections between racial, national, and religious

differences and the individual's behaviour (p. 149), then he will have to show the grounds on which he is making the claim that his non-religious oriented school will secure certain desired behaviours. On the one hand, Lupul claims that because of certain religious beliefs, certain behaviours (bigotry, intolerance, etc.) follow; on the other hand, he says that there are no necessary connections between beliefs and actions. Lupul tends to reason inadequately and to simplify the problem, thereby weakening his position.

With regard to teaching religion as approved by Lupul, one may ask if there is anything novel about it for the teachers. Is this not the same approach that is presently employed in teaching all subject matters? Teachers are supposed to enable their students to *understand* the underlying causes, reasons, or explanations of events which are put forth by different people. In different types of claims, for example, teachers seek to present the logic of these claims in order that *understanding*, not acceptance of or commitment to, these claims may take place. Students can understand why John Milton said what he said in *Paradise Lost* because they understand his religious beliefs. The public and private aspects of Milton's theological position are studied together in order that a comprehensive understanding of him and his works can occur. One can teach certain religious truths and values which are sanctioned and conditioned by certain specific theological views without necessarily teaching them for acceptance on the part of the students. One can even present the logic of these "truths" fully such that he can show their implications for living. Questions such as "What life style would one be committed to if one accepted a particular belief?" or "How different would I be from what I am now if I were to live by a different faith?" or "How would the world look to me if I rejected my beliefs now in exchange for a belief in 'unreason'?" could be entertained. Again, the purpose, as most teachers know, unless they are so confused so as to mistake the school for the church, is to secure *understanding* on the part of the students of the different ways of living, believing, feeling, knowing, reasoning, looking at important problems of life and resolving them. It is not to inculcate specific notions of truth, value, and beauty. In these attempts, no one is required to believe, in the sense of accept; everyone is encouraged to "imagine" different life styles. It is not too different from the artist's invitation: "Enter into my world and feel for it!" It is to learn to feel the feelings of another person who views life's problems from a different set of beliefs. In short, it is to encourage sensitivity, not condemnatory judgments, toward differences of opinions. *If this approach to the teaching of religion can be employed by the public school, and Lupul has not conclusively shown that it is incapable of doing so, then there is no need for a neutrally religious public school. The public school can be objective in dealing with religious topics.*

Finally, a discussion on the subject of religion and education needs to be removed, as much as possible, from personal prejudices. It must be

debated in the public domain. Also, to approach the problem in an either-or manner leads only to the hardening of positions but not to the enlightenment of the problem. Moreover, "should" type questions and answers do not clarify a problem. They are conclusions to its analysis. It appears that the problem of religion and education has not been sufficiently analyzed and clarified that attempts at conclusions may be made. Perhaps some of the following questions may help in clarifying some of its aspects: What is religious knowledge? Is there such a type? If there is, when may it be called educational knowledge? If it is not knowledge at all, may it have a place in education? What is the purpose of religious language? Does it have any similarity with the language employed in education? What elements in the present problem need to be aired as prejudices and biases which have nothing to do with religion, but with personalities? What current problems in it are based on an inadequate understanding of religion and misconception of education? What aspects of religion and which aspects of education can bring harmony and a closer sympathy for one another's problem? Wherein does the present problem of the relation of religion and education lie?

Perhaps it is too simple to say that scientific and humanistic knowledge, like religion, behoove of us, not arrogance and pride, but humility and charity for one another.

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