Reply II

Lupul's article deserves a reply because of several important points it raises. Although Lupul attempts to avoid some of the difficulties usually encountered in dealing with a very controversial subject by offering some definitions at the outset, their lack of clarity fails to elucidate the complexities of the issue. For example, Lupul says the term "religion" is understood in the "traditional sense of belief in a Supreme Being," but the definition does not state for whom this is true, nor does it clarify the spectrum of religious positions included in the definition. If it is intended to be a definition of the Christian religion it is inadequate because it does not distinguish between the classic monotheistic position and Christocentric theology.

The main thrust of the paper, which is apparently an attempt to clarify and resolve the issue of religion and education, is not strengthened by the somewhat illogical allusion to the Soviet situation regarding religion and education. There seems to be little justification for Lupul's citation of the inconsistencies in that country unless it is to suggest to Canadians that unless the present state of affairs regarding religion and education in this country is radically transformed, we will become like the Soviet Union. And that, apparently, though not explicitly stated, is bad. This line of thinking is more indicative of a scare technique than a rational argument.

Lupul says that the matter of religion is a "private affair," but the word "private" is not defined and the implication must be seriously considered that all "private" matters, whatever that may mean, should be kept out of the classroom. Also, with reference to the school, it is implied that there is no possibility of studying religion as a non-private affair, thereby denying the validity of any argument which poses that it could indeed be treated as a legitimate subject matter area. It might quite convincingly be argued that Lupul's comments imply that it would not be possible in the classroom setting to deal with certain religious aspects of historical events which crop up in the course of social studies curricula, for example, (the crusades or medieval church-state affairs), since these involve religious matters. While this might be stretching the point, by the same token it is not exactly clear, following Lupul's line of reasoning, what kinds of questions might be considered in a classroom setting. In other words, where can the line of distinction be drawn between religion and other psychological-social phenomena?

The citation from the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, "The Parliament of Canada, affirming that the Canadian Nation is founded upon the principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God . . ." is utilized as proof that governmental legislation has been passed which makes it legal for persons to indoctrinate, not only in the belief that God is Supreme, but

in aspects of the Christian faith can be taught unhesitatingly in school because the government has authorized such. All of this, according to Lupul's interpretation, is legitimized in the phrase "acknowleding the supremacy of God." It is difficult to see how such a phrase could be interpreted as justification for such a great many things, or furthermore, that the phrase is governmental indication that those Canadians should be cut off who do not believe in the basic Christian faith. It is at this point that one might expect to encounter an argument for individual freedom, existential authenticity, the rights of groups and individuals to make up their own minds about mores, faith, and values, etc., but instead, Lupul clinches his initial claim that there has now been established a direct parallel between Canadian practice and that of the Soviet Union, and therefore, the Canadian system is obviously in need of revision. Even if such a parallel were identifiable, it would still need to be proven that the present programme is inappropriate for this country.

That Canada has shown herself to be partisan in matters of religion instead of "neutral" might also be examined in light of the fact that Canada is partisan in many other matters. If total neutrality is desired, then tendencies toward preferring such social principles as free enterprise, individual rights, and even majority rule would need to be stifled. And so the question emerges, if the government of Canada is indeed partisan in various aspects of social policy, why pick on religion? If the sole argument is that in matters of religion only, privacy ought to be exercised, then why should it not be exercised in other areas as well? On what grounds can it be argued that the school needs to be neutral in matters of religion but not necessarily in other aspects of life, e.g. family, politics, economics, etc. In brief, the case against religion seems to be more than a little influenced by personal distaste rather than philosophic argument. If the position is taken that neutrality is desirable in *all* matters of life, it might follow that it would be ideally desirable to obtain the employment of neutral individuals: teachers, administrators, curriculum makers and the like. One might even argue for the obliteration from the classroom of all forms of media which pose or advocate a particular point of view, subtly or directly. The sole objective for education would be to prepare pupils for neutrality; at least this way, 8 per cent of the population (a figure quoted by Lupul) would be satisfied. This group of people might then form an active pressure group to rid Canada of democracy, for such a political arrangement lies at the root of the problem, making it possible and legal not to honour *all* the wishes of a minority.

And what about the possibility of neutrality in the schools? If a school is to be completely neutral, it is obviously not intended to be public (in the sense that our schools are now) and not a separate school either. In essence, it becomes a third kind of school, a school of a particular philosophic position. It has been said by philosophers that when a person takes a particular philosophic position and places it safely beyond criticism he is in danger of addressing himself only against those views he

does not hold, and he becomes, in essence, driven by these viewpoints. In actuality he has gained nothing in freedom by his departure from established viewpoints even if his new-found forte is labelled "neutrality." There would be no gain for tolerance through developing a third school system, because its quest for neutrality would easily lead to the warding off of certain kinds of positions and beliefs — indeed *any* kind of position and belief in the interests of neutrality. It would do little for social integration and understanding, a characteristic with which many contemporary educators, both theistic and non-theistic, are much concerned. Developing a third kind of school is much like starting a new religious denomination. Historically, at least, such attempts have not always worked out in terms of their original intent. Puritan America, for example, was founded so that people could freely practice their religion; in essence it turned out, at least in some colonies, to be quite intolerant and totalitarian. There is a real danger that any movement attempting to chart a similar course for freedom, even though that objective be neutrality, could share a similar fate. Norman Cousins, in an issue of the *Saturday Review* exemplified the anomoly of such a course of action when he appealed to people to join an organization which thrives on the principle that organizations are not essential — "this is an organization for people who dislike joining organizations."[1]

Lupul also argues that the public school in Canada is not "public;" but rather the tool of religionists. He backs this observation with the statement, ". . . nothing is more infuriating than the carol singing and the general evangelizing in what passes for Christianity at Christmas time." (p. 143). One might well pose another objection from an economic point of view arguing that the festivities of the Christmas season are not so much advocated by religionists as they are by money-making maneuvorists. In fact, the glorification and celebration of the person Santa Claus at Christmas time is even seen by some clergymen as anathema to Christian theology. The point is, that if one argues that the school is being influenced by pressure from outside one should in fairness acknowledge that this is not accomplished solely by people with religious convictions.

Lupul's criticisms of the Canadian schools are not fairly presented when he depicts them basically as "institutions for evangelism," a label which fails to take into account recent developments in the area of values and the classroom. For example, the MacKay Commission in Ontario[2] recently completed a study designed to deal with the question of religious and moral matters in the elementary and secondary schools; its recommendations were framed on the notion that *all* viewpoints should be honoured and respected when they occur in the course of a field of study, and indoctrination, or "evangelism" (to use Lupul's term), is to be carefully avoided.

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[1]Quoted in Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 51.

[2]*Religious Information and Moral Development,* The Report of the Committee on Religious Education in The Public Schools of the Province of Ontario, 1969.

Similarly, the recently completed Report of the Committee on Religion in Education of the Calgary Public School Board[3] presents much the same philosophy. The Report states that whenever religious and moral issues occur in the conduct of the classroom all questions are to be treated openly, and the viewpoints of the teacher and students are to be discussed as objectively as possible. In this way, an integration can occur among students regarding their own views and the views of others, including those on religion, as they are examined, compared, and discussed. The Calgary Committee's Report even recommends that the repetition of the Lord's Prayer and Bible Readings, as compulsory acts of worship, be discontinued[4]. The Ontario Report allows for the continuation of these practices but only at school convocations, not in home rooms. Certainly in light of these contemporary trends in Canadian education the idea of segregating children for purposes of keeping them away from the influence of others' convictions is antiquarian when compared with the benefits of exchange and mutual sharing of ideas and beliefs which these reports advocate.

The development of a third school system as a solution to the dilemma of prejudice toward particular forms of Canadian religion could severely damage any successes made in social relationships between groups, and add to the formidability of psychological and sociological walls that exist among people possessing religious, credal, or political differences of opinion. A third school system would only add, both economically and socially, to the difficulties and indignities already in practice with two school systems in some provinces of Canada.

The question of minority rights also emerges from the discussion in terms of the manner in which present systems pay heed to them. Certainly in the Canadian arrangement, various minority groups *do* have the right to develop private schools, and they have done so, e.g. the Christian and Jewish Schools in Calgary. If minorities wish to operate such institutions to keep their children free from the ideas of others, and to protect their own beliefs, that is their privilege. This, democracy allows. It is difficult, however, to see how a convincing argument for segregation can be put forth by anyone if he professes to take seriously the meaning of the word "neutral." In the dictionary, for example, such synonyms as "unbiased, and indifferent" may be found. Yet in Lupul's thesis we have a strong positional argument, one that is quite "un-neutral," arguing for its very opposite. Philosophically such a position seems unpalatable to say nothing about the practical difficulties of a third school system, i.e. bussing children to neutral schools, economic considerations pertaining to construction and maintenance, and social implications. The quest for a neutral school is advocated by Lupul with an evangelistic zeal one would usually expect to find in the apologetics of writers of a few centuries ago,

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[3]*Religion in Education.* Report of the Committee on Religion and Education of the Calgary Public School Board, October, 1969.

[4]*Ibid.*, see recommendations.. pp. 50-53.

with only the terminology changed. Certainly Lupul's ardent homiletical plea for Protestants to take seriously their own arguments of Christian charity would be appreciated by most any rigorous adherent of Protestantism.

The matter of post-secondary education, which Lupul introduces, can be nothing more than a straw-man issue to fill space because, in Alberta, and indeed in Western Canada, private post-secondary educational institutions are virtually unknown. The idea that children require one level of education which furnishes a relating to others holding opposing viewpoints is quite acceptable, but why wait until the child has already developed his ideas along the lines laid out by his peers and by the family? Sociologists and child psychologists will be quick to provide evidence which indicates that by early adolescence most mores and values have been jelled. What then is the point of bringing together at the university level students with fixed ideas about basic matters in life, including religion? It would be more desirable if this were accomplished from the elementary level on rather than only later. The idea of establishing a third elementary school system for the purpose of indoctrinating in neutrality (I doubt that anything else would occur) ignores this principle. It is, then, no solution at all to the question of religion and education, and if there is any light at all shed on the issue by such a proposal, it indicates nothing that would not be logically deducible from guidelines established by any other single-viewpointed philosophic system. Lupul does admit to the impossibility and undesirability of neutrality at the post-secondary level; at that level he advocates "the market-place of ideas" concept. However, in Alberta universities, and indeed in any public university, such practices are already in operation, and students are being offered varying viewpoints in both theoretical and practical subject matters for free discussion. There is no reason to believe that a similar practice at lower levels of schooling would not also be beneficial.

What we have in Lupul's paper is an argument for a thinly-disguised new "ismic" philosophic position. If it is to be considered anything else, it must be first viewed, not as a call for an end to hypocrisy, but a call for clarity.

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