



Chumir Ethics Forum



Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership

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Thinking about Ethical Leadership

“Public Funding for Religious Schools: courage, competence and an appeal to our best”

By Janet Keeping, President



The public policy implications of diversity are of central concern to the Foundation these days.

An issue of this kind is developing in Ontario where a prominent political leader has endorsed the extension of public funding for religious schools. Is this an example of ethical leadership? How do we decide this question?

There is no accepted definition of “ethical leadership”. However it is often said that good leadership seeks to bring out the best in us or, conversely, that bad leadership panders to our worst.

The logic of more funding for religious schools seems to be this: they (the Catholics) have it, we (of other faiths) don't, this is unfair, so we should have it too. This may express a legitimate concern about equality (see below), but it can also look like pure self-centredness. I want what others have and damn the consequences.

What are some of those consequences? One is a blurring of the line between church and state, a distinction crucial to freedom of conscience and religion.

Another is increased segregation along religious lines, which militates against the mutual understanding and respect needed in our highly diverse society. A third is less money for public education in Ontario, which is already regularly criticized as under-funded.

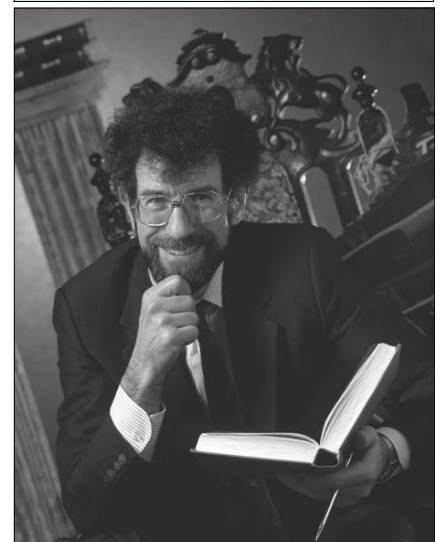
From an ethical perspective we must ask, is it unfair that Catholic schools receive public funds while other faith-based schools do not? Why only Catholics? And historically in Quebec, why only Protestants?

We can explain how this came to be: Canada's two founding colonial powers were of different religions—Britain predominantly Protestant and France overwhelmingly Catholic. And in the 19th century when Canada was created, religion played a more defining, indeed divisive, role in Canadian society. But that was then; this is now, when Canada is home to many people of either no religious belief or of religions other than Catholicism or mainstream Protestant denominations.

So does it follow that it is right to extend funding to other religious schools? No, another demand we rightfully make of political leadership is competence, which requires seeing the whole picture. Arguably the only ethical response is to acknowledge the current unfairness and an-

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Sheldon M. Chumir

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nounce the intention to remove it by eliminating public funding for Catholic schools.

In doing this, Ontario simultaneously achieves fairness, respects freedom of conscience and religion and shores up funding for public education. And it has been done before — in Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Would this be easy? Of course not: many Catholic voters will resist. But this points to another characteristic of ethical leadership — it is courageous.

Letter from Oakville

"Addressing Discrimination"

Addressing discrimination requires that we acknowledge the existence of discrimination. Canadians have been accused of sweeping our less than perfect past and current prejudices under the rug in order to avoid conceding that Canada is not the multicultural haven that we like to present. It is therefore important that we applaud instances in which discriminatory acts within Canada are acknowledged and discussed openly, rather than denied and shielded from view.

This summer The Toronto Star covered the story of a young black student who had applied for a summer position with the Government of Ontario Cabinet Office and received an alarming email from one of the individuals handling his application. The email read: "This is the ghetto dude that I spoke to before." It turns out that, in an error that she would soon regret, Cabinet Office employee Aileen Siu, sent this email to the applicant, Evon Reid, when it was intended for a Cabinet employee on the hiring team. Evon Reid quickly understood that he was Ms. Siu's 'ghetto dude' due to his mother's thick Jamaican accent and the fact that his address placed him in a predominantly low-income Toronto neighbourhood. Reid was not called for an interview for the media analyst position, and decided that the best recourse was to present the email to The Toronto Star.

It is easy for some individuals to excuse Ms. Siu's comment as innocuous and completely unrelated to Reid's race, but as a human rights practitioner, I am aware that it is comments such as this that commonly point to underlying and often unexpressed biases. By pretending that this comment is unrelated to Reid's race we allow ourselves to comfortably believe that we live in a merit based society in which the colour of one's skin does not affect that individual's chances of success. It is much more difficult to acknowledge that by labelling an individual a 'ghetto dude' we are associating that person with various racial stereotypes which limit the individual from being considered an attractive candidate.

Since acknowledging discrimination is more difficult than denying its existence, I was extremely surprised and impressed by how this incident was treated by the media, the public and the Ontario Government. The Toronto Star chose to treat the incident with enough significance to make the story front page news and subsequently printed scores of readers' responses. The responses expressed offence that such an incident had taken place and commented that acts of discrimination, such as this, should not be tolerated. Arguably, the most impressive response came from Premier Dalton McGuinty, who telephoned Reid to apologize and commend Reid for making the incident public. While we are often inclined to treat such apologies as politically calculated, from an ethical perspective it is crucial for leaders to encourage individuals to bring acts of discrimination to light so that they may be discussed and addressed openly. When acts such as these go unacknowledged, discrimination is allowed to persist unchallenged.

Nicole Bernhardt, 2005-2006 SCF Intern
Human Rights Investigator,
Ontario Human Rights Commission

The views expressed here are purely her own and do not reflect those of the Commission.



Bronte Harbour, Oakville—photo credit Donna Cutler

Diversity, “Otherness” and Democracy

[Over the next few years the Foundation plans to become more actively involved in issues connected with diversity and ‘otherness’. The purpose of this article is to provide some background on why the Foundation is going in this direction, the approach it will take and what some of its work in this area might be.]

Introduction

Canada is often used as a model of how a highly diverse population can live together well. It is true that we do comparatively well on this score and also true that our great diversity is a source of strength and vitality. But Canadian reality has never been as pretty as many think. We have only to consider relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people to realize that we have much hard work to do before self-congratulation is in order.

Indeed, it seems that our ever higher degrees of diversity are presenting more serious challenges than ever. Where do we see signs of this strain? Consider:

- There are pockets of culturally delimited violence and deep poverty in some large Canadian cities, such as in the Caribbean-Canadian community in Toronto;
- There is widespread aboriginal discontent manifesting itself sometimes in violence, for example in Caledonia, Ontario;
- ‘Old country’ conflicts sometimes surface in Canada, for example, in the clashes between Palestinian and Israeli students at Concordia University in Montreal;
- Gender equality is strongly resisted in some sub-cultures, for example, amongst some Indo-Canadian and Muslim communities;
- There are still deep divisions over some issues connected with sexual orientation;
- The divide between people of faith and no-faith seems to be growing, with increasing incomprehension of ‘the other’ in this context; and
- The second generation of immigrant families, i.e., children born in Canada, in many cases feel more estranged from the mainstream than do their parents.

For many people, concern came to a head in 2004 when the government of Ontario was on the verge of giving legal force to arbitrations based on *sharia*, a Muslim legal system which can severely discriminate against women. At that point many Canadians started to ask: in a country whose Constitution guarantees everyone – women included – the “equal benefit and protection of the law”, how could it possibly have come to this? We know that our institutions must make the effort to accommodate our differences whenever possible, but there are limits to accommodation. Not all differences are equally ethical.

But many Canadians seem to resist this conclusion. It seems that help is needed in thinking through the public policy implications of our diversity. The Foundation wants to contribute to satisfying that need in order that leadership on diversity issues be exercised in a more ethically informed and responsible way.

What types of diversity are we talking about?



Photo credit : Ontario Coalition Against Poverty

The Foundation’s activities in this area will address a broad range of diversity issues including ethnic, racial, religious, political and those based on gender or sexual orientation. While bitter religious differences are contributing greatly to the strains of diversity in Canada and elsewhere, they are not by any means the only sources of problem.

The growing gap between rich and poor must also be part of the picture. Poverty is related in an important way to, if not all, at least most of our problematic diversity. For example, if immigrants were finding good jobs as readily as they did twenty years ago, then we probably would not see as deep divides between ‘them’ and ‘us’ as we currently do.

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But lots of people are talking about diversity: what's distinctive about the Chumir Foundation's approach?

This is a good question. What can the Chumir Foundation add to the current public discussion? At least two things, we think. First, there is not enough discussion of the strains caused by diversity in Canada. Through the events we hold and the material we make publicly accessible, we intend to expand the opportunities for public engagement on the issues.

Second, we believe that much of the discussion already occurring is poorly informed. We help improve the level of the debate, for we bring to it a more solid set of assumptions than do many others, as outlined below.

Our intellectual framework

The Foundation will be approaching diversity issues with a firm commitment to what we see as the essential elements of a liberal, democratic society. These include the rule of law, the traditional civil liberties – such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion, and individual liberty – a clear division between church and state, freedom from discrimination and the equal benefit and protection of the law and other public institutions.

And why *these* principles? Because they constitute a framework we believe within which people of difference can live together well. We will never agree on everything, nor even share all the same important values. But to live together civilly and in peace, we must adhere to the framework that has been shown to make that civility and peacefulness more possible than any other.

We know that these liberal, democratic ideals are not consistently achieved in Canada, but believe that without a sturdy commitment to them a highly diverse society cannot thrive.

We also acknowledge that these elements of liberal democracy are not the only building blocks of a healthy society: they clearly aren't sufficient. For example, life itself will be impossible unless we take environmental threats seriously and adopt

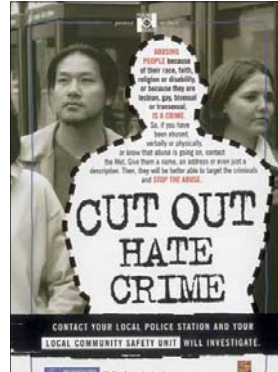


Photo Credit: London Metropolitan Police

environmental protection values.

We also understand that these elements sometimes point in opposite directions. For example, you can see a tension between freedom of expression and religious liberty. Members of some religious groups have demanded that it should be illegal to publish criticisms of their religion, such as the cartoons critical of the prophet Mohammed, because they harm their religious community. Or gay rights advocates may attack the homophobic remarks of certain religious leaders as hate speech and want the law used to limit that kind of expression.

These are real problems, to which solutions must be found in law and public policy. For example, a distinction has to be made between illegal hate speech and constitutionally protected free expression when a specific controversy arises. But there are better and worse places for that line to be drawn. On the view we take, the better solution will usually be found when we vigorously protect the principles – such as free speech – that have been shown to nurture human dignity in the long run.

Probably the single most important idea we bring to the table is a rejection of ethical relativism – the view that judgments about what is right and wrong can only be made relative to a particular culture.

It would appear that many Canadians think otherwise. For example, quite a few people seem to think that mainstream Canadians should not label the treatment women receive in certain ethnic or religious groups (such as, female circumcision, also known as genital mutilation) as ‘wrong’, because those practices are part of ‘their’ culture and ‘we’ have, therefore, no right to criticize ‘them’.

But relativism does not make sense. Suppose that ethics *were* relative to cultural groups and my group says it is just fine to pass moral judgment on the practices of others. If so, then there can be no criti-

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cism of our inclination to pass moral judgment from anyone outside our group. Why? Because our ethics are our ethics and yours are yours. Kwame Anthony Appiah makes the point well in his book Cosmopolitanism¹:

One may be reminded of an old story from the days of colonial India. A British officer who was trying to stop a suttee was told by an Indian man, "It's our custom to burn a widow on her husband's funeral pyre." To which the officer replied, "And it's our custom to execute murderers."



Burning of a Hindoo Widow, by James Peggs

But the striking thing about ethical or cultural relativism is that, while many people *think* they believe relativism is correct, no one actually believes any such thing. An example shows this to be true: we are all agreed that child sacrifice is morally wrong regardless of the fact that there are societies which still practice it.

There is plenty of room for disagreement over what is and is not right or wrong regardless of where the debate is taking place. For example, people around the world debate whether research using human embryos is morally acceptable. But ethics are not relative. *If* this type of research is wrong in Moscow or Shanghai, the same research is wrong in Montreal or San Francisco.

It follows that there are limits to the diversity which can be accepted, or accommodated, by any society:

some things are ethically better and some are worse. We want to and should embrace diversity, but not diversity that is ethically damaging. If we fail to draw the necessary ethical lines – for example, if we fail to understand that women are always and everywhere entitled to equal rights and dignity – that failure may undermine some of the best things that our highly imperfect society has achieved, for example, our public policy commitment to gender equality (yet to be fully realized, of course).

Some specific plans

There will be much more in future issues of the *Chumir Ethics Forum* on specific diversity issues and events, but here are four specific topics we expect to address: 1) Can excessive concern with one's identity polarize Canadians in a damaging way?, 2) What would ethical policy on accommodation of difference look like?, 3) What is the proper place of religion in Canadian public life?, and 4) Is it true, as many suggest², that multiculturalism is bad for women?

An invitation to respond

As always, readers are invited to send feedback to the Foundation. We welcome your thoughts.

Janet Keeping



Photo Credit: C.Y. Leow

¹Kwame Anthony Appiah Cosmopolitanism (New York: Norton and Company, 2006). I briefly reviewed this book in Chumir Ethics Forum Vol. 7 No. 4, Summer 2007

²See for example, Susan Moller Okin and others Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Governing with Integrity and Transparency? Lobbying and Conflict of Interest in Alberta



Recently, the Sheldon Chumir Foundation provided comments to the Alberta Government on *Bill 1, Lobbyists Act* and *Bill 2, Conflicts of Interests Act, 2007*. Why should these bills matter to ‘average citizens’ not involved in lobbying or government contracts? Both of these bills represent efforts to follow-through on the stated promises of the Stelmach government regarding “governing with integrity and transparency”¹ and suggest underlying values.

Detailed analyses of **Bill 1, Lobbyists Act** have been made public by groups such as the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta, Democracy Watch and the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organisations. They point to significant concerns such as burden of reporting, potential to decrease government-civil society engagement, and problematic exemptions to the lobbyist registry.²

Our interest is in ethical leadership. How well does Bill 1 achieve the transparency and accountability objectives of the government?

The Lobbyist Act clearly raises the bar for ethical practice among lobbyists, civil servants and elected officials alike. In addition, the registry goes some way to decreasing the scope for conflicts of interest and enhancing accountability, despite the exemptions. The exemptions, however, are not unimportant as illustrated in the case box.

Two exemption scenarios:

1. The Minister of Energy and a petroleum company board member golf together, and they discuss royalty levels. A few weeks later the government announces lower than anticipated royalty increases. Neither person is required to report their golf discussion because the board member is a volunteer.

2. A lobbyist for the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) attends a meeting on hospital wait times. She mentions a CMA study on wait time to several health officials over coffee yet does not speak during the meeting. The lobbyist is required to file a report to the government under the new legislation.

When the onus of reporting lies with the lobby-

ists rather than the government, we achieve a secondary accountability. As the holders of the public trust, it is the *government* who holds primary responsibility to citizens. If we share this democratic value, then the government *ought* to be transparent.

It is perfectly legitimate and, in many cases, desirable for the government to seek out the opinions of stakeholders in order to take into account the range of views in Albertan society. Determination of policy direction and the public interest is based on much more than the perspectives of paid lobbyists. We should be certain that the Act does not precipitate a decline in government engagement with the public.

Only public reporting by senior government officials and politicians of external opinions, solicited and unsolicited, from all sources whether paid or unpaid, would reasonably ensure full and direct accountability.

Bill 2, Conflicts of Interests Act, 2007 proposes changes to the current legislation, such as prohibiting MLAs from using inside information to benefit anyone’s private interests—clearly a laudable initiative. Increased cooling-off periods are proposed, which would restrict the types of employment that former senior staff and political aides can take (for six months following departure from government service), and Ministers (for one year). Given public concern over lobbying by former political aides in Alberta, a longer cooling-off period for political staff would demonstrate a clear response to an historical ethical issue.

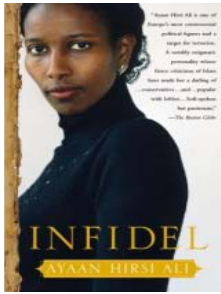
Many of the proposed changes would see the province ‘catch up’ with other regions. The *Federal Accountability Act* by contrast has a five-year cooling off period for former Ministers. Perhaps it is time to ‘lobby’ for greater leadership to move Alberta into the forefront nationally on conflict of interest legislation.

Heather MacIntosh

¹ Alberta’s Five Priorities, as outlined at www.gov.ab.ca.

² *Bill 1 Lobbyists Act: A Preliminary Assessment of its Implications for Not-for-Profit Organizations in Alberta*, Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd., July 2007.

Book Review: *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali



Surely one of the most compelling figures of recent times is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Think you haven't heard of her? You have. She is the Muslim woman from Somalia who fled to the Netherlands to escape a forced marriage. From her start in an immigrant camp she became a Dutch MP and then had to flee again, this time to the US. *Infidel* (Free Press, 2007) – her auto-biography – is a gripping story and essential reading for anyone trying to formulate an ethical response to the alleged incompatibility between fundamentalist Islam and western societies.

Most of *Infidel* is pretty gritty stuff, for Hirsi Ali has suffered humiliation most westerners cannot imagine and found self-respect only in her repudiation of a form of Islam which hideously oppressed her. Concerned as it is with the facts of her life, the book contains little theorizing, but there is a passage in which she succinctly sets out her take on traditional Islam versus the West:

It is always difficult to make the transition to a modern world. ... It was difficult for me, too. I moved from the world of faith to the world of reason – from the world of excision [genital mutilation] and forced marriage to the world of sexual emancipation. Having made that journey, I know that one of those worlds is simply better than the other. Not because of its flashy gadgets, but fundamentally, because of its values.

...[W]e in the West would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred toward women to the stature of respectable ways of life.

People accuse me of having interiorized a feeling of racial inferiority, so that I attack my own culture out of self-hatred, because I want to be white. This is a tiresome argument. Tell me, is freedom then only for white people? Is it self-love to adhere to my ancestors' traditions and mutilate my daughters? To agree to be humiliated and powerless? To watch passively as my countrymen abuse women and slaughter each other in pointless disputes? When I came to a new culture, where I saw for the first time that human rela-

tions could be different, would it have been self-love to see that as a foreign cult, which Muslims are forbidden to practice?

Life is better in Europe than it is in the Muslim world because human relations are better, and the one reason human relations are better is that in the West, life on earth is valued in the here and now, and individuals enjoy rights and freedoms that are recognized and protected by the state. (347 – 348)

Hirsi Ali went into hiding and eventually left the Netherlands when Theo van Gogh was assassinated for having made a film based on her concept of Islam's oppression of women. In a note fixed by a knife stabbed into van Gogh's body, the killer – a proud Islamist – announced she was next.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Hirsi Ali is unyielding in her belief that the only antidote to radical Islam is commitment to democratic principle. In an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, Hirsi Ali was asked how Europe should respond to the furor over publication of the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark. She replied: "There should be solidarity. The cartoons should be displayed everywhere. After all, the Arabs can't boycott goods from every country. They're far too dependent on imports. And Scandinavian countries should be compensated [presumably by other western countries] for their losses. Freedom of speech should at least be worth that much to us." (February 6, 2006 issue)

And what about the status of cross-cultural relations in the Netherlands? How is it that "cool" Holland was the site of a public, religiously motivated execution of a controversial film-maker and the exile of Hirsi Ali? For one very readable explanation, see journalist Ian Buruma's *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (Atlantic Books, 2007), and ask yourself: how is Canada like, and how it is unlike, the Netherlands on issues of "otherness".



If you are interested in whether fundamentalist strains of Islam can co-exist with societies committed to liberal values, such as free expression, the rule of law and women's equality, do yourself a favour – read these two terrific books.

Janet Keeping

Event Announcements

SEPTEMBER



The Future of Rural Alberta: Why Does It Matter?

Joint Event with Alberta Global Forum, Alberta Views Magazine, Olds College and the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership

September 26, 2007, 7:30-9:30pm
Duncan Marshall Place Lecture Theatre, Olds College
4500 - 50th Street, OLDS, Alberta

Room to grow? Agriculture and the industrial countryside

Roger Epp: Dean, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta

Environmental values, democracy and the future of rural Alberta

Francis Gardner: Rancher; Board Member, Southern Alberta Land Trust Society

The role of innovation

Dan Fullerton: Director of Innovation, Olds College

Education for the future of rural Alberta

Dot Negroponetes: Executive Director, Community Learning Campus, Olds College

Contact: Penny Winters at (403) 556-8335, or by e-mail at pwinters@oldscollege.ca
Elaine Wojtkiw at (403) 244-6666, or by e-mail at info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca

NOVEMBER

Dialogues on Democracy: Where are the Women?

Co-Sponsored with the Famous Five Foundation and
Equal Voice Edmonton Chapter
November 6, 2007 5:30-9:00pm
Royal Alberta Museum
12845-102nd Avenue, EDMONTON
Tickets: \$20 Light supper served.

Contact Elaine Wojtkiw at (403) 244-6666
or by e-mail at info@chumirethicsfoundation.ca

Global Citizenship: Thinking Beyond Borders **Irma Parhad Conference**

SCF Presentations: Cultural Relativism
Moral Obligations to Those Afar

November 23, 2007
Early Registration (\$40) by November 1
Parkdale United Church
2919-8th Avenue NW, CALGARY
Contact: Kelly Dowdell, Program Manager
(403) 220-2136 or parhad@ucalgary.ca

DECEMBER

Canada and the **Convention on the Rights** **of Indigenous Peoples**



Co-Sponsored by the
Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre and
Calgary Committee on Race Relations & Cross-Cultural Understanding

International Human Rights Day event

December 5, 2007 3:00-6:00pm
Rosza Centre
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW, CALGARY
ALL ARE WELCOME
Reception to follow

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