

Working Paper

**Reopening the Discussion on the Use of 'The Lord's Prayer' in the Ontario
Legislature**

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On February 13, 2008, Premier Dalton McGuinty sent a letter to opposition leaders calling for the establishment of an all-Party committee to examine the use of the Lord's Prayer in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. "It is time," he wrote, "...to better reflect Ontario's reality and celebrate our diversity. It is time to move beyond the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer ...to a more inclusive approach." (Prayers in the Ontario Legislature, 2008: 1)

The Speaker's Panel on Prayer in the Legislative Assembly, composed of MPPs Bas Balkissoon (Liberal); Cheri DiNovo (NDP); Garfield Dunlop (PC) and chaired by Speaker Steve Peters held its first meeting on March 20, 2008. Over the course of the next three months the Panel would conduct a thorough review of the practice of each Canadian legislature with respect to the recitation (or not) of prayers and carry out two consultations. The first was a link on the main page of the Ontario Legislative Assembly's website which took Ontarians to a dedicated form where they were asked to express their views on prayer in the Legislative Assembly. The second was a letter sent to over 51 groups that the Panel had identified as broadly representing the different faith groups and secular organizations in the province of Ontario. Some of these groups sent in their positions while others presented directly to the Panel.

The Premier's proposal triggered a public uproar so thunderous that in the weeks following, the Legislative Assembly's computer system crashed as a result of an overload of emails. In total, some 11, 000 responses were left on the OLA website, 90% of which called for keeping prayer, specifically the Lord's Prayer (Peters et al., 2008: 1). After reading through over 8,110 of the emails and meeting with numerous stakeholders, on June 11th, the Panel submitted its report to the three leaders, recommending that "As a result of all this information, advice and input, the Panel has concluded that it is appropriate for each day of the Legislature to continue to be opened with the recitation by the Speaker of the Lord's Prayer." (Peters et al., 2008: 2) In addition, in order to address the question of Ontario's ever-growing diversity, it proposed replacing the then current non-denominational prayer with a number of other religious prayers and a moment of silence that would be rotated such that "the faith and non-faith demographics of the Chamber and of the Province would be proportionally expressed over time." (Peters et al., 2008: 2) (See Appendix 1) On June 12, 2008, a motion echoing these recommendations was introduced in the Legislative Assembly and approved unanimously. Premier McGuinty was absent from the vote.

Although it was an important event in and of itself, representing the first time the opening of the Legislature had been altered since 1969, the Premier's proposal brought to the fore a broader question that Canadian political scientists have long grappled with: Are religious beliefs private matters, or do they have a role to play in the public policy-making process?

This paper endeavors to illustrate that despite Canada's self-proclaimed secularism, faith plays a role in the public-policy making process. Although religion in politics is something Canadians for the most part see as a poisonous mix, needing only to look at our Southern neighbors to see the rather intimidating sway held by religious lobbies, religion does in fact hold a role in politics—symbolically as seen through the overwhelming push to keep the Lord's Prayer in the Legislative Assembly; and at the bargaining table, as seen through a number of examples wherein government policy has been influenced by religious groups.

Expanding the conversation beyond the pragmatic issue of whether religion does play a role to the moral question of whether it should, the paper suggests a possible defense of faith in politics based on two claims. First and foremost, democracy at its core is a debate and as such, religion should have a seat at the political bargaining table. Nevertheless, as I will note further on in the paper by drawing on the debate that surrounded the use of the Lord's Prayer in the Legislative Assembly in addition to the faith-based schools funding issue that became the electoral issue in 2007 and the sex education reforms that were proposed in April 2010, democracy's offer of a seat at the table to everyone does not mean everyone sits down with the same bargaining abilities.

A second reason proposed is that an absence of religion does not necessarily serve as a foundation for the promotion of tolerance and common identity. Secular societies, often color blind end up underhandedly privileging whoever is in power or has held the majority.

History Behind the Lord's Prayer

Before examining the seat religion holds at the political bargaining table, let us first examine its symbolic role as seen through the Lord's Prayer. It is important to understand that the move made in Ontario to reassess the relevance and appropriateness of the Lord's Prayer in light of the changing demographic was in no way unprecedented. In fact, in 2008, Ontario was one of the only three remaining provinces in Canada that still said the Lord's Prayer. From the East Coast where Newfoundland and Labrador do not have a prayer in the House of Assembly and Nova Scotia uses a prayer that was written by the Speaker in 1972, to our brethren up north who in the Nunavut Assembly get to say a prayer of their choosing when it is their turn while in the Northwest Territories using a non-denominational prayer, to even our neighbors in Quebec opting years ago to replace all prayer with a moment of reflection. Even the House of Commons moved to a non-sectarian prayer in 1994 and formally adopted it in 2004, while the Senate firmed up its non-denominational prayer in 1991. In reality, the Ontario Legislature was lagging behind, accompanied only by New Brunswick and Prince-Edward Island (Benzie, 2008).

The reading of the Lord's Prayer originates from the British Parliament where it first appeared during the reign of Elizabeth I. Although initially read by the Speaker, beginning in 1659 a Chaplain took over the role. A Chaplain has ever since read prayer before the doors are open to the public. In Canada, prayer first appeared in the Canadian House of Commons in 1877, ten years after Confederation. Mirroring the practice in England, prayer was and continues to be said before the chamber is open to the public. In 1878, the Honorable Attorney-General Mowat put forward a motion in the Ontario Legislature that each day begin with prayer and that a committee be struck to determine which prayers be said. A week later, the committee presented the Assembly with the four prayers it deemed appropriate to be read by the Speaker. (See Appendix 2) The first prayer was a prayer for the Sovereign, the second a prayer for the other members of the Royal Family, the third a prayer for the Province, Lieutenant Governor and the Legislature, and the fourth the Lord's Prayer.

Although the committee had recommended the prayer be said by a clergyman, by 1893, when the first *Members' Manual* for the Ontario Legislature was published, it had

become regular practice for the Speaker to read it (Prayers in the Ontario Legislature, 2008: 1).

Although in the hearts and minds of many Christians, the Premier's proposal to review the prayer in the Ontario Legislature came as an unprovoked attack, it was not the first time the prayer had come under review for being 'out of date.' In 1969, Elmer Sopha, the Member from Sudbury, complained about the language of the prayers, criticizing them as "words from the Tudor age to which we are obliged to listen to in reverential silence." (Prayers in the Ontario Legislature, 2008: 4) He vowed to remain outside the Chamber during the opening of the daily proceedings until a more contemporary prayer was brought in. An informal Speaker's Committee met for just under a year and on February 24, 1969, unannounced, the Speaker read out a new prayer. (See Appendix 3) The House erupted in applause and although the Committee had drafted a number of alternatives, this remained the one used until 2008. Sopha, unaware that the new prayer was going to be read missed its inauguration as he waited in the lobby for prayers to finish ("Sopha Caught Out," 1969).

In 1990, then Speaker David Warner proposed what some eighteen years later the Premier himself would propose: that the Legislature come up with a better way of reflecting Ontario's religious diversity in its daily opening exercises. In a Toronto Star article dated December 14, 1990, Jane Armstrong writes that what resulted was a huge outcry from MPPs. "MPPs of all political stripes and faiths rebelled. They said Warner mistakenly assumed that MPPs wanted to secularize the Legislative Chamber." (1990: A.4) Speaking with the former Speaker about his proposal he answered between chuckles, "Some ideas that I thought were good were in fact really bad. I thought we were a multicultural, diverse society. The anger that exploded at my suggestion to better represent our ever-growing diversity suggested otherwise." (Warner 2010) Warner's predecessor, Liberal Hugh Edighoffer had also attempted and failed to update the opening prayers. With 70 new faces in the Legislature following the 1990 election, Warner had thought—wrongly—the changes would be welcomed.

The final attempt pre-2008, to update the prayers was brought forward by a citizen, Henry Freitag in 2000, wherein he called for the removal of the prayer claiming that Christian prayer made him and other members of non-Christian faiths feel that the government's concern extended only to Christians. The previous year Freitag, a non-Catholic resident of Penetanguishene had brought a complaint against the town to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) stating that the practice of opening up the Town Council meeting with the Lord's Prayer "infringed his freedom of religion under section 2(a) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms." (Benson, 2001: 1) He won the case, the Court finding that the purpose of opening council meeting with the Lord's Prayer was to "impose a specifically Christian moral tone on the deliberations of the Town Council" and thus, Freitag's freedom of religion was being violated (Benson, 2001: 1). In 2000, Freitag brought the same complaint against the Ontario Legislature through the OHRC.

The Speaker requested the Commission not deal with the complaint, as it did not hold jurisdiction over the internal procedures of the Legislature.¹

¹ The practice of federal and provincial legislatures is immune from the Court's review based on the constitutional principle that provincial legislatures and Parliament are independent of the executive and judicial branches of the government. Proceedings of town councils are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

The Commission argued it did have jurisdiction over the matter and subsequently rejected Freitag's complaint. The Divisional Court and the Court of Appeal ruled that the OHRC did not have jurisdiction and that only the members of the Legislature could decide whether the chamber should hear the prayer (Benson, 2001: 2).

The Speakers' Panel on Prayers in the Legislature

It was with this understanding that the four members of the Speakers' Panel on Prayers in the Legislature commenced their three-month study in March 2008, and on June 12, 2008 submitted their report to the three party leaders. Meeting with all four members on separate occasions throughout this past year and asking them about their take on the process and in turn the outcome, it is clear that they were unanimously pleased with the decision that was arrived at. Nevertheless, as is the case with contentious issues, they came at it from very different backgrounds and intentions, some of which I shall point to below.

Perhaps the member with the most obvious personal interest in defending the use of the Lord's Prayer in the Legislature was MPP Garfield Dunlop. Dunlop had been on the Penatengushene Town Council in 1999 when Henry Freitag took it to Court. In 2001, in response to Freitag's attempt to take the Ontario Legislature to Court, Dunlop started a petition calling for the Lord's Prayer to remain in the legislature. Freitag took Dunlop to the OHRC twice, his complaints only to be tossed out as vexatious. As Dunlop explained to me in our meeting, he went into the first meeting of the Panel with his mind already made up. "I don't care what you do," he said, "but it's not leaving." (Interview with Garfield Dunlop, 2010)

MPP Cheri DiNovo, a former United Church minister and the representative on the Panel for the NDP saw herself as the swing-vote. As an MPP, she explained, you have to represent your constituents. The decision was a populist one and indicated that Ontarians want to see faith in our places of legislation. Although in the media DiNovo criticized McGuinty's proposal, noting that instead of creating a Panel to study the use of prayer in the legislature, "With one in eight children living in poverty, perhaps we could be spending more taxpayers dollars to feed them." ("Lord's Prayer consultation begins," 2008) the issue of prayer has been at the centre of DiNovo's platform since her election to the legislature in 2007. Following her induction to Queen's Park she told the Catholic Register that she was surprised to find that an institution as important as the legislature lacked the kind of prayer and meditation space one expects to find in hospitals, prisons and airports. In 2007, she proposed a multi-faith room, naming it "A Place for People," in the Legislature be designated for those needing a place for prayer.

The Liberal member on the all-party panel, MPP Bas Balkissoon, appeared considerably less vested in the issue than the other two members, noting that religion is a lifestyle, some people need it, others don't. While the recitation of the prayer might help people to focus, its presence was neither good nor bad. What shocked him was the racism found in some of the emails, respondents attributing the proposal to a reverence for political correctness, and minorities and immigrants' refusal to adopt Canadian traditions. As an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago and of Indian descent, Balkissoon found it interesting that the people writing in did not seem to look at the Panel members and note that he was one of the 'immigrants' they were complaining about (Balkissoon 2010).

Finally, the Panel was chaired by Speaker Peters, a Roman Catholic, who responding to my query as to whether the removal of the Lord's Prayer would in turn remove religious influence on the policy-making process noted that as a servant of the house, you put aside your religious beliefs. However, this was a matter that dealt with both history and tradition. The use of the Lord's Prayer had become very established and as the responses to the Panel's consultations illustrated—less than 6.6% saying discontinue all prayers and even fewer calling for the removal of the Lord's Prayer—history and tradition were large obstacles to overcome (Interview with Rita Celli, 2008: 5).

As indicated by the Sapho and Warner episodes, updating (or attempting to) the prayers was not unprecedented. What was unprecedented was the level of anger and uproar that came from the public in 2008. Whereas in 1969 Speaker Fred Cass “quietly broke with a 91 year-old tradition” (“Sopha Caught Out,” 1969) and the 1990 proposal by Warner was mostly limited to the scorn of MPPs, 2008 saw the Ontario Legislature under fire from the public.

At the federal level, changes to the prayer had come and gone with little controversy. In the 1980s, Speaker Sauvé initiated a shortened version of the existing prayers, the Annotated Standing Orders of the House of Commons stating that, “These changes to the prayers have been made informally, without the House being advised of the change.” (1989: 2) Similarly, in 1994 when the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (chaired by current Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken) drafted a new version of the prayers (abandoning the Lord's Prayer for a non-sectarian one), the move did not generate much controversy at all. Speaking with Milliken as to what caused the lack of public outcry he pointed to two factors. First, like the British Parliament, citizens are not allowed in the public galleries until after the opening recital of prayers has been completed. In a similar vein, the prayer is omitted from the televised version of Question Period. But for Reform MP, Elsie Wayne who started a petition campaign to bring back the Lord's Prayer, the change went generally unnoticed.

Asked what brought about the review of prayers in the House of Commons, Milliken pointed to the 200 new members who were elected in 1994 (Milliken 2009). Soon after the opening of Parliament, some MPs had complained about the appropriateness of the Lord's Prayer “in a country as diverse as Canada.” (Thompson, 1994) The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs drafted a motion that was subsequently approved unanimously by the Members in 1994, and formally adopted in the Standing Orders in 2004 marking the House of Commons' break with the Lord's Prayer.

The fact that the public is allowed into the Ontario Legislature's public gallery prior to the recitation of prayers as well as the fact that the entirety of Question Period is televised might provide some answer as to why Ontarians rose up in arms some fourteen years later when Dalton McGuinty advocated for a more representative prayer. Nevertheless, this cannot fully explain the unparalleled uproar that filled the province of Ontario.

Understanding the Findings

More than 1/3 of the population of Ontario was born outside Canada. The province with the highest percentage of non-Christians, it boasts one of the most diverse provinces in the world. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, in 2031, whites will be the minority in Toronto, the immigration hub of Ontario. (“Minorities to rise significantly by 2031,” 2010) Accordingly, it proves difficult to wrap one’s head around the fact that in 2008, Ontario remained one of the only three provinces that still said the Lord’s Prayer. Moreover, it makes the task of understanding the Panel’s Findings all the more difficult, with 90% of respondents encouraging some sort of prayer, 56% defending the Lord’s Prayer. Quite tellingly, although the question on the Legislative Assembly’s website asked about prayer in general, most of the respondents spoke directly to the Lord’s Prayer. The conversation in the media also focused largely on the Lord’s Prayer (Peters et al., 2008) and more than half of the PC Caucus presented petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calling for the safekeeping of the Lord’s Prayer. Effectively, the conversation was taken over by those who wanted to keep the Lord’s Prayer and would see to it that it remained an important part of the daily opening of the Legislature.

Countless reasons were given for retaining the Lord’s Prayer, different media outlets conducting their own polls, call-ins, the Toronto Star even publishing a three-page sampling of written in comments. However, for the purposes of the Panel, the Legislative Research Services of the Assembly compiled a summary and analysis of over 8,100 submissions to the Panel to which I will briefly look at.

Keep prayer (especially the Lord’s Prayer)

Arguments for keeping prayer in general fell for the most part into three categories: heritage, that historically Ontario/Canada was a Christian province/country and it is an important component of our popular memory; ‘good to do so’, meaning quite simply that it is good for MPPs to pray before undertaking their legislating duties; and finally, tradition.² Many of the respondents who argued for the preservation of the Lord’s Prayer in the legislature based on the heritage argument also indicated that it should never have been removed from schools, while a few pointed to the fact that non-Christian minorities and immigrants “have not asked for accommodation.” (Summary & Analysis of Submissions to the Speaker’s Panel on Prayer in the Legislature, 2008) The World Sikh Organization and the Toronto and Region Islamic Congregation, two of the bodies that presented before the Panel supported this statement, the TRIC stating on the record, “there is nothing abhorrent in the words of the Lord’s Prayer... Muslims are not offended by the use of the Lord’s Prayer.” However, this did not necessarily indicate acceptance of the preeminence of the Lord’s Prayer, both groups pointing to the need to reassess and recalibrate our practices to suit the times (Salamat and Singh Bal, 2008). Among those in the ‘good to do so’ camp, some articulated the notion that the removal of prayer would

² The summary and analysis differentiates between tradition and heritage, based on the former not having the foundational argument of the latter. Nevertheless, if one looks at the discrepancy in numbers (heritage accounting for 46.7% of the share of responses and tradition only 3.5%) in comparison to the media coverage and interviews where the words are used interchangeably it is highly possible that few of the respondents differentiated between the two.

bring dire consequences upon the MPPs if not the province as a whole, presenting a somewhat apocalyptic warning. The traditionalists, MPP Dunlop among them, argued that our parliament is based on the British Parliamentary system, which in turn is based on Christianity. Religion and politics are forever intertwined, dating back to the Magna Carta (Dunlop, 2009). It is important to note that although the summary does not present much evidence of racism, MPP Balkissoon and other members of the Panel expressed surprise at some of the emails and letters the Panel had received calling for the maintenance of the Lord's Prayer (Balkissoon 2010).

At first glance, the heritage, 'good to do so' and tradition arguments seem fairly benign if not obvious reasons for why people would want to keep the Lord's Prayer. However, if we look closer it becomes clear that they are loaded opinions, arguably serving to privilege the Christian faith in Canada. Although one cannot discount heritage as an argument, it is important to recognize that the heritage denoted is that of European settlers and takes no consideration for our Native heritage. If we are to agree with John Raulston Saul's claim that our ties to the aboriginal are far stronger than our ties to the European, then we are doing ourselves a disservice by excluding Native heritage from our popular memory. Furthermore, when every other (save for two) province in the country and both the House of Commons and the Senate have opted not to use the Lord's Prayer, heritage as an argument proves incomplete.

The 'good to do so' argument, although uncontroversial enough a concept becomes debatable when you look at how few MPPs in fact say the prayer, many instead opting to wait in the lobby until the recitation is over—what Sopha did in 1968 in protest. Perhaps more telling is the fact that all religions see prayer as important so the 'good to do so' argument should equally work for any other prayer, not only as justification for the Lord's Prayer. Third and final, the decorum of Question Period puts into question what (if any) good has been done in the minutes preceding.

Lastly, on the issue of tradition, tradition does not guarantee that a practice is a sound one. Traditions are not self-legitimizing and when we look at certain past traditions—theft of native lands through unfair treaties, women's exclusion from politics and the legal persecution of homosexuals—we are reminded that we need a sounder reason than simply tradition, which cannot serve as a moral compass. Concepts like tradition and culture are to an extent analytic inventions that exist only in the choices and reinventions of a particular people.

Remove all prayer

Only 6.6% of the 8,110 responses reviewed called for the discontinuation of all prayers. Fewer even—only 1.1%—called for removing just the Lord's Prayer from the daily opening of the Legislature. For the majority of those opposed to prayer, the issue was not about the fact that it was a Christian prayer that was said, but that prayer was said at all.

Arguments for the removal of prayer fell for the most part into two groups: the argument that prayer/religion is a private matter and has no place in a government setting; and the argument of cultural diversity, which calls for some change to the prayers to better reflect the diversity of Ontario.

Those in the ‘private matter’ camp referred to the fact that we live in a secular society with a separation of church and state. Some also pointed to the fact that the daily reading of the prayer is not meaningful as it is not heartfelt, the Speaker ‘reading’ it instead of ‘praying’ it. Echoing these sentiments, in a Maclean’s article, Andrew Potter writes “It is patently ridiculous, if not offensive, to ask people who don’t have the faintest idea of the context or meaning of a religious ritual to be performing it.” (2008: 16) Those arguing from the cultural diversity base expressed the view that our society is diverse and as a result, we need to better reflect that diversity (Summary & Analysis of Submissions to the Speaker’s Panel on Prayer in the Legislature, 2008).

The volume of emails, letters and opinions that flooded the Legislative Assembly added to the media coverage the issue was given indicate that many took the issue to heart. Nevertheless, as is always the case in debates, there are those who take sides, and those who refuse to even take part. Many dismissed the issue as unimportant, calling on the government to focus on something more pressing, be it healthcare, funding, poverty, etc. Although admittedly, creating a Panel and providing the resources for a Panel to review the validity of a few words being recited seems ridiculous when looking at poverty levels in Ontario, the debate that took place on the Lord’s Prayer was important as it served to generate conversation on the broader issue of religion and politics, one that Canadians often prefer not to be apart of.

Religion and/in Politics in Canada

Canadians view themselves as multicultural, democratic and for the most part progressive. Unlike the United States our immigration system does not create a melting pot but instead fosters a cultural mosaic. Ask any Canadian about religion in our country and you will be hard-pressed to get an answer that does not mention our diversity and in turn the clear separation of church and state. Interestingly, legally, the separation of church and state in Canada is less clear as Canada’s Charter does not contain an explicit textual limitation on government establishments of religion. According to E.R. Norman, whereas the First Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1791 provided that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” the British North America Act of 1867 made no mention of a religious establishment on state-supported church but “simply assumed the practical loss of church privilege already in place in the various British colonies at the time of Confederation.” (Van Die, 1968: 4) Marci Macdonald writes that ever since the first Jesuit missionaries came to these lands to “repatriate aboriginal souls from the ‘stronghold of Satan’ while claiming tangible real estate for the French crown” we have tended to overlook the inherent link between religion and government in Canada (2008: 52).

In her new book *The Armageddon Factor*, Macdonald details the rise of the religious right in Canada during Stephen Harper’s time in office. Where many have dismissed the possibility of a Christian culture gaining ground in Canada, Macdonald argues that such a culture is quietly thriving in the Big White North. To account for the relative lack of interest or worry, she explains that the religious right in Canada is “Far-flung and often fractious, not fitting neatly into strict denominational slots, [lacking] a central spokesperson of unifying structure (2010: 8). Likewise, the face of Christians is

no longer Anabaptist or Calvinists. One third of new Canadian immigrants are Christians, originating from Korea, the Philippines and Africa (2010: 9).

Many have criticized Macdonald's book, claiming it to be propaganda that uses fear-mongering and inflated language to create a stir. In a piece for the National Post titled "A Comedy of Errors", conservative political activist Ezra Levant offers a scathing critique of the book, expressing his surprise that Random House "agreed to publish such a screed" (2010). Gerry Nicholls, author of *Loyal To the Core: Stephen Harper, Me and the NCC*, speaks of Macdonald's blunder in fashioning Harper as a social conservative who is trying to impose a Christian-style theocracy on Canada, noting that Harper is not an Evangelical Christian, not even a social conservative. "With her over-the-top hyperbole, she has cast Harper as a social conservative hero, a champion who will recast Canada as some sort of social conservative utopia. This will only serve to drive social conservatives into Harper's camp. And he won't even have to lift a finger" (Nicholls, 2010) And yet the skeptics are not limited to those who have brushed elbows with Harper. Even Queen's Park Bureau Chief for the Toronto Star, Rob Benzie downplays the Christian right in Canada in an interview, explaining that the level of sophistication that Macdonald attributes to the religious right is highly overstated. (Benzie 2010)

While perhaps Macdonald embellishes the presence of the religious right in Canada, her thesis serves as a useful springboard to examining the balancing act between religion and politics the Ontario government has been performing since 2007.

Religion and Politics in Ontario

In 2007, McGuinty won a second consecutive majority government—this was the first time this had happened in seven decades—many believed due to his promise not to extend public funds to religious schools. Defending the continued siphoning of taxpayers' dollars to the Catholic school system in Ontario, Catholic groups pointed to the fact that Confederation was justified because the British North America Act of 1867 had ensured that the minority education rights of Protestants in Quebec and Catholics in Ontario would be protected. In effect, the public funding of Catholic schools dated back to the creation of our country: it was part of our heritage.

Religious lobbies also pointed to the moral implications in sending one's child to a Catholic school, one of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) flyers on Catholic education, proclaiming, "Catholic school graduates make meaningful and important contributions that improve Ontario society and communities." ("OECTA Speaks on... Catholic Education," 2009) In all likelihood, public school and other faith-based school graduates also make meaningful and important contributions to the province; however, the Catholic lobby successfully monopolized and continues to monopolize the ability to provide its students with a moral education.

Evidently, evening out the playing field in the funding of schools arena is a greater feat than in the Legislature. While changes to the Lord's Prayer would simply require a motion, cutting funding to Catholic schools would require a constitutional amendment: not only an onerous process in the Canadian context, but a controversial one as you're dealing with a very organized and sophisticated lobby that includes teachers, parents and other Catholic church affiliates. Opting for the alternative—the extending of funding to other religious schools in Ontario—would cost the province roughly \$700

million per year (Young, 2009: 7), not an easy sell when the public school system is barely scraping by. John Tory's loss in the 2007 election, which was largely attributed to his 'playing with religious fire' also suggests few politicians will be willing to stick their necks out into the funding issue in the future.

Just a few months into his second majority, the Premier entered into yet another fierce debate on religion and politics by proposing a reevaluation of the use of the Lord's Prayer in the Legislature. What was arguably a sop to the faith-based community (Rob Benzie, Interview), Dunlop noting that the Panel received thank you letters from the Muslim and Sikh communities for taking the bold move of becoming more inclusive, put Christians on their toes. The overwhelming call for keeping the Lord's Prayer hinted for a second time at the organizing capabilities of the religious right, the 11,000 emails representing the most the Legislature had ever received on any issue. Although some might attribute the Premier's move as intellectually inconsistent with his Catholic roots—his mother apparently refused to speak with him for a week—the compromise reached by the Committee left just about everyone pleased, Christians happy to still be on top and other faith-communities happy to be included.

Most recently, the self-proclaimed 'Education Premier' risked losing a significant portion of his voter base in proposing reforms to the sexual education curriculum in Ontario. Although the reforms were long due, and in fact rather tame in their aspirations when one looks at other provinces and countries' curricula, many Liberals, primarily the South Asian community stopped dead in their tracks at the suggestion that their 5-year old would be learning about the anatomy, and their 8-year old about sexual identity and orientation. Speaking with one minister about the anger and confusion that emerged, she explained that the revision—posted on the Ministry's website—came to the fore just after a cabinet shuffle, and as a result the messaging was not as clear as it could have been. The Christian right capitalized on this, throwing around words like “anal intercourse” and “vaginal lubrication” as warnings that the changes would bring about a rise in sexual promiscuity. Charles McVety, the President of Canada Christian College and one of Canada's most notorious Evangelical Christian leaders stressed that the reforms had been undertaken by then Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, the first open lesbian to hold a ministry.

Although the Premier initially stood firm on the benefits of the reforms, stating "I think I speak with an understanding of the information available to children today. They are going to get this information. We (can) provide it in a format and in a venue in which we have some control, or they can just get it entirely on their own and be informed by potentially uninformed sources like their friends at school," (Nguyen, 2010) just a little over a week later, he acquiesced to the mounting opposition, noting “It's become pretty obvious to us we should give this a serious rethink.” (“Religious groups fight changes to Ontario's sex ed curriculum,” 2010) In so doing, the Premier avoided the planned May 10th protest organized by Charles McVety and the Institute for Canadian Values where parents planned to pull their kids out of school in objection to the changes. He also likely avoided losing some of his more blue Liberals in next year's election.

The quick speed with which McVeety and other religious lobbyists entered into the sex education debate, mobilizing parents to stage a walk-out and penetrating every news source with their views, illustrates yet again the sophisticated nature of the organizational structure of religious lobbies. As Dennis Pilon, political scientist at the

University of Victoria notes of the religious lobbies and churches at the federal level, “This is the one group that can get people out to a meeting. They have these interlocking networks that they can very quickly activate.” (Macdonald, 2010: 36-7)

Reopening the Conversation

In Canada it is ‘bad taste’ to bring religion into discussions of public policy (Rorty, 1994). Politicians avoid making reference to their faiths as there is little viability for parties with overt religious platforms (Young, 2009: 8). Differentiating ourselves from the United States as much as possible, politicians and political scientists alike argue that what is missing in Canada is an organized and influential religious lobby. And yet, the outcome of these three instances—the Catholic school system retaining its preeminence among faith-based schools; the Lord’s Prayer retaining its preeminence among prayers; and the conservative religious right retaining its hold on Ontario’s curriculum—points to the notion that religious lobbies do in fact play a role in politics—though obviously to a much lesser extent. Maybe, to a certain limit, there is good cause for that.

As John Young writes in the introduction to *Faith in Democracy?* “To suggest [religion] ought not to be part of the public discussion and debate or influence public policy is to diminish democracy—not because the Bible or the Qur’an are superior political texts, but because democracy is at its core, a debate.” (2009: 2) Religion has a place in the debate because it is part of who we are. The argument that religion is a private matter and has no place in the public arena denies the fact that faith is inherently part of our being. Although one must be careful to avoid heading down the path of essentialism, MPPs, who deal with difficult dilemmas on a daily basis, are likely to draw on their moral beliefs, which often (though not always) stem from religious beliefs. Banning religious beliefs from politics paralyzes the ability of legislators to engage in debate of moral implications.

A second reason that religion ought to be part of the debate is the fact that its alternative—secularism—does not necessarily serve as a foundation for the promotion of tolerance and common identity. Instead, in turning a blind eye to the presence and legitimacy of different faiths, it often serves to privilege the traditional or dominant religion. One only has to look at the legislation in France to ban the burka and niqab in public in the name of ‘la laïcité’ to understand Veit Bader’s assertion that state neutrality and non-establishment of religion in politics are unable to prevent but in fact serve to mask as religious majority bias (2010: 21).

Religious belief has and should play a role in the public policy-making process. However, as the paper indicates, there needs to be some recognition that churches and religious lobbies can better mobilize people in light of their organizational structures. Although the Speaker’s Panel on Prayers in the Legislature followed the proper procedural steps and consultation process, it skirted the broader issue of the implications of religion playing a role in politics, instead offering only a lame compromise solution. Canadians should not be so shy about religion because it has a role, and denying it risks bringing about the Evangelical state that Marci Macdonald warns of in her book.

Appendix 1

Prayers in the Ontario Legislature 2008-

- Lord's Prayer (both Luke and Matthew versions)
- Seven faith traditions were included in the initial set of sacred texts decided upon by the Speaker's Panel on Prayer in the Legislature to be rotated: Baha'I, Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Native, Sikh, Spirituality. A moment of silence will also be included in the rotation.

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Appendix 2

Prayers in the Ontario Legislature, 1878-1969

O Lord our Heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Ruler of Princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth; Most heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious Sovereign Lady Queen *Victoria*, and so replenish her with the race of thy Holy Spirit that she may always incline to thy will and walk in thy way: Endue her plenteously with heavenly gifts; grant her in health and wealth long to live; strengthen her that she may vanquish and overcome her enemies; and finally, after this life, may attain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. – Amen

Almighty God, the Fountain of all Goodness, we humbly beseech thee to bless *Albert-Edward*, Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales, and all the Royal Family: Endue them with thy Holy Spirit; enrich them with thy Heavenly Grace; prosper them with all Happiness; and bring them to thine everlasting Kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. – Amen.

Most Gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and Her Majesty's Dominions in general, so especially for this Province, and herein more particularly for the Lieutenant-Governor and the House of Assembly, in their legislative capacity at this time assembled; that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy glory, the safety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and Her Province of *Ontario*, that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities for them, and for us, we humbly beg in the name, and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, our Most blessed lord and Saviour. – Amen.

Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. – Amen.

Appendix 3

Prayers in the Ontario Legislature, 1969-2008

Oh God, our heavenly Father, we come before you this day, asking your blessing upon her Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth and upon her representative in this Province. Give to each member of this legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Guide us here in our deliberations. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Help us to use power wisely and well. Inspire us to decisions which establish and maintain a land of prosperity and righteousness where freedom prevails and where justice rules. Amen.

Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. – Amen.

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