# Religion, Democratic Community, and Education:
# Two Questions

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## Abstract

This paper examines the mediating role that education plays between religion and democratic community. The paper is situated in the Canadian context and examines this mediation through two questions: First, what is the relationship between religion and education and what is the contribution of this relationship to and within a pluralist society?  And, second, do schools have a responsibility in developing a unified model of who the citizen is as a person?  Both questions are founded upon the premise that citizens are more than citizens; they are also persons.

## Précis/Résumé

Cet article examine le rôle de médiateur que joue l'éducation entre la religion et de la communauté démocratique. Le document se situe dans le contexte canadien et examine cette médiation à travers deux questions: tout d'abord, quelle est la relation entre la religion et l'éducation et quelle est la contribution de cette relation et à l'intérieur d'une société pluraliste? Et, d'autre part, ne les écoles ont une responsabilité dans l'élaboration d'un modèle unifié de l'identité du citoyen est en tant que personne? Ces deux questions sont fondées sur la prémisse que les citoyens sont plus que les citoyens, ils sont aussi des personnes.

## Introduction

Any contemporary discussion on Canadian identity cannot avoid including the influence of pluralism and multiculturalism, and particularly the impact and influence of religion in such a context. We saw, for example, that the issue of faith-based schools occupied center stage during the last provincial election in Ontario (October 2007). Whether this debate divided the province politically is a subject for another discussion, but it certainly politicized a matter that calls for reasoned analysis and judicious deliberation, and not just impassioned arguments based solely upon the often-divisive categories of religion and culture. I say solely because religion and culture are certainly powerful in forming human identity, but they need not be the only means of such a formation.  In his book *Identity and Violence,* Amartya Sen warns against the miniaturization of human beings when viewed solely from the narrow confines particularly of religion, but also ethnicity and culture.  He says that religion-centered analysis has been given great prominence, and he goes on to say that it is not helpful, indeed recent history would say it is very harmful, when it is considered to be the only legitimate lens to view and understand human identity. It is worth quoting Sen at some length:

> Viewing individuals in terms of their religious affiliations has certainly
> become quite common in cultural analysis in recent years. Does this make
> the religion-centered analysis of the people of the world a helpful way of
> understanding humanity?
> I have to argue that it does not. This may be a more coherent classification
> of the people of the world than civilized categorization, but it makes the

same mistake of attempting to see human beings in terms of only one

affiliation, viz. religion. In many contexts, such a classification can be

rather helpful...but to take that to be the overarching basis for social,

political, and cultural analysis in general would amount to overlooking all

the other associations and loyalties any individual may have, and which

could be significant in the person's behavior, identity, and self-

understanding. The crucial need to take note of the plural identities of

people and their choice of priorities survives the replacement of

civilizational classifications with a directly religious categorization. (Sen,

2006, p.60)

For his part, in his essay "The Values of a Just Society," Pierre Trudeau said that

federalism is "a superior form of government; by definition, it is more pluralist than

monolithic and therefore respects diversity among peoples and groups."(Trudeau, 1990,

p.360) However, Trudeau did not construct a foundation upon which one might secure

human diversity. In attempting to construct such a foundation, it has been asked whether

"our particular identities…will take public precedence over our more universal identities

as persons." (Gutmann, 1992, p. 9) This primacy of human personhood, in the midst of

diversity and plurality, is also of interest to Jürgen Habermas, developed through his

theory of "communicative action," which sets out how individual citizens as persons,

(and their moral and civic responsibilities) are manifested through their personal "self-

determination" and "self-realization" and stand in relationship to what he terms

"unlimited community." He goes on to say, "an identity that always remains mine,

namely, my self-understanding as an autonomously acting and individuated being, can

stablilize itself only if I find recognition as a person, and as this person." (Habermas,

1992, p.192) Jacques Maritain asks, "why is it that the person, as person, seeks to live in society?" (Maritain, 1972a, p.47) His answer, like Taylor and Habermas, concerns the nature of human persons, such as their generosity of spirit and their desire for knowledge and communications. He echoes Aristotle's statement that men and women are political by nature because they are rational by nature, and that reason requires "development through character training, education and the cooperation of [others], and because society is thus indispensable to the accomplishment of human dignity." (Maritain, 1972a, p.49)

Certainly much attention has been given to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as a primary source of political unity in this land, but the *Charter* presupposes active and participatory democratic life, and given that the state guarantees rights and freedoms and imposes certain duties, the *Charter* does not set out why political life needs to be lived in common, or why it is that citizens should pursue certain common political goals and social objectives.  The *Charter* is not meant to be a philosophical treatise outlining a theory of political personhood in relation to the state, nonetheless, as we have seen, political philosophers continue to ask about the relationship of human persons to political society and to each other as citizens, recognizing, of course, that there is no unified agreement on this relation or, and more significantly, no agreement on the nature of the person, *per se*.  The *Charter* does not say, furthermore, why the slide into political subjectivism of citizens, culminating in the claim of the autonomous individual that "whatever I choose is right," is, in fact, detrimental to the life of political society.

We are frequently witnesses to how this new and formidable sovereignty of the self is dignified in constitutionally entrenched abstract language about freedom, choice, equality, and rights....The seventeenth-century religious seeker said, "Whatever I feel is right is right," while the modern

seeker of democratic rights says, "Whatever I choose is right. (Gairdner,

2001, p.145)

Allow me to briefly clarify a few matters. First, in calling for the development of

a unified model of the citizen as a person, I understand that the citizen, by virtue of being

a person is one whose nature should be incrementally perfected in political society. In

addition to the political, the citizen also possesses a potential for the religious and

spiritual.  Second, political and civic unity can be overrated and misunderstood, and

confused with a totalitarian leveling of differences, a theme that stretches back to Plato

and Aristotle. (See, Mouracade, 2004)  "Statecraft," must allow "disagreement, conflict,

and variety." (Wolin, 2006, p. 59) Third, while *reason* and the *rational* have a chequered

history, all citizens living in democratic pluralist societies must, in the interest of the

public and communal square, intentionally seek for unity and rational consensus as a

perennial means to secure the "common good." (See, Trainor, 2008, pp. 910-918) Thus,

there is an inherent tension between the unified model of the citizen as a person and

learning to live with differences that do not and should not erode or fragment the

common good, such as differences of religion and culture.  Fourth, in this context,

"personhood" is used as a cumulative and incremental concept, one that stretches through

a lifetime of communal, political and social experience, while "person" is being used as

the concrete and existential revelation of personhood in the present and contingent

experiences of the here and now. Finally, I acknowledge that the concept of person is

complex and sophisticated, as is attested to in the history of philosophy. Part of that

complexity is, of course, referred to as this essay examines the relationship between

religion, democratic community and education.

**First Question**

I wish to explore the relationship between religion**,** democratic community, and education through two questions: First, what is the relationship between religion and education and what is the contribution of this relationship to and within a pluralist society? "Plurality" and "pluralism" are terms that are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference in description and valuing. "Plurality" deals with a multiplicity of different kinds and varieties, while "pluralism" indicates an evaluation of a particular kind of plurality. Pluralism also refers to a religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse group of people who strive to live tolerantly with one another, and where no single explanatory belief system or, to use the language of postmodernism, no single metanarrative accounts for the phenomena of life.

Liberal democracies define persons (if they use a term such as "person" at all) as citizens who live in society and who are determined by political and economic relationships; social relationships come under the broad umbrellas of politics and economics; other differences, particularly religious and cultural differences, are rendered private. However, while the state acknowledges the pluralism of its citizenry and the tendency of its citizens to categorize each other according to religion and culture, it separates the economic and political life in common from religions and cultures. The liberal state in remaining true to its principle of religious and cultural neutrality, and while celebrating diversity for its own sake, is satisfied in limiting its understanding of the citizen to this minimalist level of economic and political relationships. The difficulty, of course, is that the citizen is more than just a citizen, the citizen is also a person, and religions and cultures fill out the philosophical and theological picture of the citizen as a person, one which is left unattended to, and understandably, by the broad brush-strokes of

economics and politics.  As it stands, there is no general agreement as to how religions

and cultures are meant to draw out their philosophical and theological distinctiveness in

the context of religious pluralism.

In the milieu of religious and cultural diversity, the liberal democratic state

contributes to enhancing harmony and unity among its citizenry through a unified school

system.  In attending to the religious diversity of its citizens, the state could implement

different educational models, and here are some examples: schools could offer separate

classes of confessionally distinct religious education according to the diversity of its

student body; or they could offer a course in religious education, one that is broadly

informational, rather than narrowly confessional; or religious education could be kept out

of schools all together. Canada, as we know, does not follow any one of these three

models universally. There are two models of education in Canada where some provinces

offer both a publically funded education as well as a publically funded Roman Catholic

education, and consequently there are two competing ways of considering the

relationship between religion and education: one as intrinsically religiously formative,

and the other commencing from the position of a broad neutrality.

Some have maintained that one of the aims of religious education is the

"reconstruction of society;" (Boys, 1989, p.58) this is a heavy aim, and one that is not

immediately apparent or conceivable in the midst of a growing diversity. A more

manageable approach might be that while the kind of actions, choices, and decisions of

interest to religious believers and educators might well be different, each group does

prepare believers and citizens for life in common, and thus the relationship between

citizenship education and religious education will need to be explored:

There is a *general* trend currently to characterize religious education as

essentially providing a useful service to citizenship education, as a means

to multicultural education and training for (religious) conflict resolutions.

Yet religious education is about more than just the problem of pluralism—

religious education has a spiritual dimension which engages with the

meaning and purpose of our lives—and an emphasis on religious conflict

resolution may end by endorsing and reinforcing the popular view of

religion as essentially about conflict. If religious education makes closer

ties with citizenship education, it needs to be careful to keep sight of its

broader interests, alongside continuing to question the foundations of

morality within the context of a global and complex conceptualization of

what it means to be a citizen. (Watson, 2004, p.268)

What has begun to show strains is that not all religious believers look on

diversity and pluralism in a positive light. "Fundamental opposition to the pluralistic

point of view could arise from denying the existence of a certain plurality, in other words

rejecting plurality on the descriptive level. A more common version of anti-pluralism is

probably that which sees plurality as a problem to be solved, by reducing it, for instance,

to dual oppositions or some kind of monism." (Skeie, 2002, p.48)   Furthermore, it is

questionable whether many Canadian immigrants are intellectually and socially prepared

to agree with even the broad principles of *acceptance*, *freedom of expression*, and

*tolerance* that multiculturalism presupposes. Often previous "pre-modern identities,"

"tribalism," and "ethnic nationalism," can stand in the way of an integration that political

and democratic multiculturalism presupposes as a means to arrive at a consensus in the

midst of diversity. (See, Kymlica, 2007, p.20) A recent commentary on the Bouchard-

Taylor Report commissioned by the Government of Quebec says that multiculturalism

offers "very little help with regard to the multiplicity of non-Western religious beliefs on

display in all major Canadian cities." (Adelman & Anctil, 2011, p.3) For their part,

religious adherents of all stripes are challenging the models of individualism that are

celebrated in multicultural settings; in addition they do not see the celebration of diversity

for its own sake as a self-evident good. Values like freedom, rationality, and individual

autonomy are seen to conflict with the world-views of many religious believers.

> Many religious believers find that they cannot give pluralism their
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> unequivocal support because endorsing a range of lifestyles (rather than
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> prescribing more narrowly how one should live) is no more neutral than the
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> teaching in churches that declares some ways of living sinful and other
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> ways pleasing to God. Pluralism is considered by liberals to be the most
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> rational response to diversity but this can discriminate against those who
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> sincerely believe that some ways of living are morally acceptable and
>
> others are not. (Pike, 2008, p. 116)

On the other hand, those who do not object to diversity on religious grounds see

religious and cultural diversity as simply adding to the fragmentation of an already

splintered society, and they have called for the replacement of religious education with

citizenship education:

> ... there have been advocates of antiracist education and citizenship
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> education who have attacked religious education. Some antiracists have
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> argued that multicultural education (of which multifaith religious education
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> was seen as an example) reifies religions and cultures, reinforces
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> differences and should be replaced by antiracist education. One influential

educationist has argued that religious education is out of place in the

common school and should be superseded by citizenship education.

(Jackson, 2004, p.126)

It is understandable that religious educators, overwhelmed by a sea of diversity

and pluralism, seem eager to withdraw into the narrow confines of confessional

distinctiveness as the only apparent way to keep alive the religious traditions and secure

the value systems of their believers. In this context, maintaining that religious identity

and responsible pluralism are related may seem inconceivable, (see Veverka, 2004, p. 36)

but it seems to be one real way of stepping out of the sacred-secular distinction when

viewed either through the confined lens of the liberal secular state where religion is

relegated to the private sphere, or through the equally restricted lens of confessional

religions where pluralism and its accommodation are seen to be a threat to religious

distinctiveness.  However, the difficulties of pluralism are deepened in both instances:

when the state looks on religious differences as merely existential accidents and not

relevant to political unity, or when religions proceed to maintain that religious identity is

the sole identifier of the human person, even in the context of religious and cultural

diversity.

Democratic pluralism, some maintain, favors particular kinds of schools because

of its conception of rationality, and this conception of rationality will determine the

nature of particular forms of religious instruction. "Pluralism requires a conception of

rationality that is generous, allowing many conceptions of the good and many systems of

belief to gain support. However, it also requires a conception of rationality that is not

permissive and that is able to maintain reasonable educational standards." (Feinberg,

2006, p.94) It would appear that education, religious or secular, can neither minimize

these many conceptions of the good, (for they are intrinsic to the worldviews of citizens) nor can it allow these many conceptions to collapse into relativism. Once again, the security from such a collapse depends upon broadening our understanding of "person" and "personhood"—as referred to above—within political community.

Both religion and education develop worldviews, and both are influential in developing these worldviews towards life in common, even if religions tend to place more emphasis regarding this common life among its own adherents. However, in the context of education, social strains arise when religion is seen as just one subject of the school's curriculum, thus compromising the expansive world-view that believers attribute to religion and its influence across all dimensions of life, or on the other hand, when education is seen to be only in the service of religion, thus compromising the individual autonomy of individual subjects and leading to the clumsy and intellectually unwarranted insertion of religious beliefs and doctrine across the curriculum. Walter Feinberg reminds us of a further tension: "pluralism and liberalism pull in somewhat different directions when it comes to evaluating moral and religious education. Pluralists want a generous evaluation that will allow a "thousand flowers to bloom." Philosophical liberals insist that the evaluation maintain certain standards of rational reflection and, therefore, that it not be permissive." (Feinberg, 2006, p.xx)

The relationship between religion and education in a monolithic society is usually clear. In the midst of religious and cultural diversity, however, the relationship gets tricky and sticky, and it is here where one can encounter the extremes of fundamentalism or relativism: fundamentalism as a means to ensure religious identity, and, perhaps, in the context of pluralism, to assert the supremacy of a particular religion, and relativism as an easy and seemingly uncomplicated way of ensuring harmony (surely a simplistic

understanding of civic harmony) and accommodating differences. Educators of all stripes should shy away from either fundamentalism or relativism: fundamentalism constricts the choice of world-views and impinges upon the freedom of the citizen, and relativism collapses distinctions, consequences, and responsibilities and places all choice within the sovereign individual, as long as the these choices fall within the parameters of the law. Both relativism and fundamentalism narrow the stage for the flourishing of persons. Furthermore, religious fundamentalism reduces and miniaturizes human identity as being solely religious, while relativism reduces the complexity of the person, philosophically and theologically, as well as socially and politically, and it adds to the constriction of the sovereign individual self whose relationship to the common good are already limited and circumscribed by politics and economics. In both cases the pursuit of the common good becomes more and more difficult. Some see diversity giving rise to an inevitable or natural relativism, one almost rooted in nature:

> Understanding and interpreting other cultures and civilizations leads … not only to a pluralistic worldview, but also to a sincere and human relativism. Relativism is the explanation of diversity, as diversity has always been a constant in our natural and social world. In addition, to the acceptance and explanation of diversity, relativism also means that there is no universal authority, not even that of the sciences, which can determine the proper way to see and understand reality, the right ends in man's *[sic]* life, or the right design of human society."(Segesvary, 2000, p.21)

Perhaps another way of avoiding relativism, as a philosopher/theologian suggests, is by once again placing responsibility about persons and personhood, but not as static metaphysical and ontological concepts, *per se*, but by understanding human persons and

personhood against the backdrop of "historical mindedness," that is the understanding of human beings and their institutions in the context of their history: "For it is in history that man's *[sic]* making of man occurs, that it progresses and regresses, that through such changes there may be discerned a certain unity in an otherwise disconcerting multiplicity." (Lonergan, 1985, p.171)

In attending to the relationship between reason and faith in what he terms a "post-secular age," the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas recognizes the limited scope of a secular morality compared to religious consciousness, and while recognizing that religious consciousness only usually binds adherents of that particular faith tradition, it does, nonetheless have a more universal sway and has influenced societies and nations.

Secular morality is not inherently embedded in communal practices. Religious consciousness, by contrast, preserves an essential connection to the ongoing practice of life within a community and, in the case of the major world religions, to the observances of united communities of all the faithful. The religious consciousness of the individual can derive stronger impulses towards action in solidarity, even from a purely moral point of view, from this universalistic communitarianism. (Habermas et al, 2010, p.75)

In Canada, at least, there are competing understandings of the relationship between religion and education and its contribution to a pluralist society, and in every instance these competing understandings depend upon the world-views, usually of individual religions, and how a religion envisages education in the service of its particular world-view. The sacred-secular question in a global Canada is, admittedly, not limited to the relationships between Canadian citizens. For its part, globalization raises concerns of

the "capacity of states to govern in the interest of their citizen constituencies." (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000, p.422). In addition, many of the implications of our relationships as citizens living amidst religious and cultural differences seem too often to be swept under the ever-bulky and uneven carpet of multiculturalism. Our religious differences and the need for political unity, however, do cry out for a more responsible and accountable commentary and analysis. So, in short, the answer to question: what is the relationship between religion and education and what is the contribution of this relationship to and within a pluralist society? must be that the relationship and contribution, though contextual and historically situated, necessitates being secured on something more enduring like the social and civic nature of all citizens and the personal unity of the individual citizen amidst religious and cultural diversity.

## Second Question

Now to my second question: in the context of religious pluralism, do schools have a responsibility in developing a unified model of who the citizen is as a person? Indeed the implication of my question gives rise to a subsequent, less subtle, and more pointed query: does the fundamental role, and often fundamentalist role, that religions play in the life of believers in fact act as a detriment to political unity in the context of pluralism? With the exception of celebrating diversity for its own sake, the liberal, secular state has very little to say about diversity, particularly religious diversity. Perhaps if Canada were monolithically Christian, the state's silence on religious diversity may not have been problematic. However, Canada's religious diversity, one that is truly representative of the major faith traditions, does have implications for the democratic square. While the state's silence of not favoring one religion or culture over another may well be a good principle of democracy in the context of pluralism, its silence, on the one hand, and the

powerful influence of religion, on the other, does seem to suggest that the school remains the sole institution that works for the unity of citizens in the face of religious diversity.

It was said earlier that the secular state defines persons through economic and political relationships. It was also said that the citizen is more than a citizen, whose nature is more complex than political relationships alone.  Human persons manifest themselves in a variety of ways. One could describe persons in the most general way, as individual human beings who live in society and express themselves through a variety of relationships—politically, legally, aesthetically, economically, socially, professional, etc—and whose identities are formed as a result of different influences—hereditarily, religiously, culturally, educationally, etc. One could conclude, however, that these various diversities are accidental, since liberal societies see all cultures and religions as equal. On the contrary, adherents of religions and cultures do not view their distinctiveness as accidental; rather they are viewed as intrinsically formative.

Boethius' strict philosophical definition of the person as an individual substance of a rational nature may well have a unifying role in the context of religious pluralism. However, "rational" has historically been open to interpretation and dispute. While Habermas' has widened our understanding of rationality and its role in social relations, (see Habermas, 1993, pp.294-326) it is his thought on persons and their interrelations that enables us to see the width of his contribution as he broadens the concept of rationality. Persons, he says, are not independent of a shared life with others. Second, as "historical and social beings we find ourselves in a linguistically structured life world." Third, our subjectivity is dependent upon inter-subjective relations. Fourth, "it takes entrance in the public sphere of a linguistic community for a natural creature to develop into both an

individual and a person endowed with reason." (Habermas, 2005, p.2, p.10, & p.35) And, finally, individuation of persons occurs through socialization. (Habermas, 2009, p.269)

In light of religious diversity, a socially and civic conscious reason and rationality could or should act as an integral unifying element that brings a religiously divided citizenry together. Like Habermas, if one takes Charles Taylor's conviction that our identities are created dialogically, and not monologically, we can extrapolate and say that our political identities are created dialogically through rationality, freedom, and individual autonomy, and for its part, the state depends upon these political goods in order to govern. For their part, citizens require the goods of freedom, rationality, and individual autonomy to express themselves through their rights and duties. Thus Taylor's words:

> The monological ideal seriously underestimates the place of the dialogical in human life. It wants to confine it as much as possible to the genesis. It forgets how our understanding of the good things of life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love; how some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment....Thus my working out my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. This is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others. (Taylor, 1992, pp.33-34)

In this regard, a pertinent question raised is whether placing too much emphasis on the "dominant characteristics" of different cultural and religious groups results in

these characteristics taking precedence over more universally identifiable political and

civic virtues essential for our political life in common.

> If members of groups are *publically* identified with the dominant
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> characteristics, practices, and values of their group, one might wonder
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> whether our particular identities—as English or French Canadians, men
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> or women, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, or Native Americans,
>
> Christians, Jews, or Muslims—will take public precedence over our
>
> more universal identity as persons, deserving of mutual respect, civil and
>
> political liberties, and decent life chances simply by virtue of our equal
>
> humanity. (Gutmann, 1992, p.9)

There is increasing emphasis placed upon individual, cultural, and religious

differences, and they are readily emphasized in the belief that the apparent elasticity of

multiculturalism can accommodate these differences; but how?  What does

accommodation of these differences mean in regard to citizenship?   Citizenship is a

public and communal manifestation of the person, and one, among others, of the

manifestations of and the development toward personhood; it is political in nature, it

should be focused towards a common good, and it must have some agreed upon

mechanism of accountability, both regarding rights and duties. However, when religious

and cultural differences dominate the political square and become the main descriptors of

human identity, citizenship is inevitably diminished, leading to the miniaturization of the

citizen as a person.

William Gairdner in his book *The Trouble With Democracy* says that we have

reached a position of "hyperdemocracy," and we have arrived at this site as a result of

placing enormous emphasis upon the sovereign and autonomous individual and supported

by features such as "self-exaltation, materialism, atheism, moral relativism, social determinism...the elevation of individual rights over social and moral responsibilities and duties, and the rejection of any common good or standard of virtue as an *obstruction to personal freedom*." Indeed, he says that hyperdemocracy makes it increasingly difficult to form or sustain human community. (Gairdner, 2001, p.146. See also p.145) The introduction of religion to this mix, however, seems to further complicate this hyperdemocratic environment. For on the one hand, political society is reduced when the sovereign, autonomous, individual citizen is seen as the final court of appeal, and, on the other hand, it is also reduced when religious believers, particularly fundamentalist religious believers, see their beliefs as absolute and the only lens through which they look upon life in common and consider their responsibilities towards the common good.

In the context of pluralism, institutional education is carried out in common. However, with the proliferation of faith-based schools, institutional education runs the risk of becoming private by virtue of religion and race. This form of education is hardly new. What is new, however, is the proliferation of democratically pluralist societies— pluralist by virtue of race, religion, and culture—and the insertion of faith-based schools within such societies.  Both faith-based schools and secular public schools can be inattentive to the balance between the individual and the communal: the faith-based school by its potential of placing *absolute* emphasis on religious identity, thus eclipsing the many other identities of the individual student, and the secular school by its potential of *ignoring* the formative influence of religion and its shaping of students' identity.

Postmodernism announces the demise of grand narratives. (We recall the description of postmodernism "as an incredulity toward metanarratives." Lyotard, 1993, p.xxiv) Pluralism is situated in amidst the absence of agreed upon meta-narratives, at

least agreed upon in the context of communal and civic living. In this context, "the best

opinion for building moral consensus in postmodern, pluralistic democracies is not

agreement on a list of absolute values that all citizens should subscribe to. Rather, moral

agreement results from *processes* whereby citizens engage questions of moral and civic

virtue together, through discussion, debate and deliberation." (Smith, 2000, p.412)

Consequently, it follows, as some have maintained, that democratic education should be

linked to civic friendship: "What democratic education requires...is less an insurance

policy against human irrationality than an augmented imperative toward sincere and

sustained attempts at mutual understanding among citizens....[what it requires is] civic

friendship....This kind of move represents the best impulses of the liberal tradition: away,

where possible, from coercive state regulation and toward mutual understanding through

moral suasion." (Blacker, 2007, p. 39)

      Others have called for an agreement upon a limited number of presuppositions or

"procedural values" which would ground the project of "free citizenship education" as

opposed to an "indoctrinating system;" values such as: "freedom, toleration, fairness,

respect for truth, and respect for reasoning." (Crick, 1999, p.343) The first two values of

this list, freedom and tolerance, are, from the Canadian perspective, secured in *The

Charter of Rights*, particularly when it comes to policies and implications of

multiculturalism.  However, fairness, respect for truth, and respect for reasoning are, in

the context of religious diversity, both contentious and demanding, and often give rise to

supplementary questions such as: What are the prior principles in a situation being

examined for fairness?  Whose version of truth is being presented? And, what kinds of

worldview do these first principles of reasoning construct? While these questions are

demanding and difficult, they do reinforce the point that the citizen is more than a citizen.

The citizen is a person living in a social and historical environment, one that constantly calls for a social hermeneutic of collective civic understanding. And while there is no denying that religious diversity does pose significant challenges, every attempt should be made to grapple with these questions, without losing sight of the complexities, both philosophical and religious, that human personhood entails.

If one agrees with the traditional claim that the three principle agents in a child's education are parents**,** the religious institution, and the school, then in the context of religious diversity one could conclude that the only agency that seems to possess the greatest ability to unify students educational experiences is the school, and this is because the educational task is conducted in common—amidst the various diversities that makeup the student-body—where the student is introduced to a breadth of knowledge and exposed to a variety of educational experiences; for unifying the student's educational experiences is an intentional activity. By the time the student comes to the university, early specialization and professional education usually excludes this comprehensive unifying role that seems realizable only by the school.  This is not to ignore, of course, that societal and political plurality is usually  "fragmented," and often marked by "competing and often contradictory rationalities." (Jackson, 2004, p.8) The commitment of schoolteachers, therefore, is all the more necessary in the task of democratic education amidst religious diversity; they are the best agents to meet students where they are at, but also to lead them to some higher political and civic ground.

> Democracy will not flourish as a result of teacher-imposed obligations
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> to learn, but rather as the result of teachers taking students where they
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> are, working through their concerns for a better life and showing them

how to make democracy work as a guarantee of their individuality in

community. (Worsfold, 1997, p.399)

Thus, I would maintain that schools do have a responsibility in developing a

unified model of who the citizen is as a person. This is done certainly through all that

constitutes the educational experience of the school day; but it is more intentional than

that. Cultural diversity and religious plurality make demands upon civic life, and the

school should respond to this plurality and diversity not as accidents but as the stage

where human persons find themselves and play their part in the historical evolution of

society. Two factors are key: the nature of the citizen as a person and the historical

context of society.

### Conclusion

In Canada it seems that multiculturalism and religious pluralism put strains on

what is assumed to be a natural relationship between democracy, citizenship, and the

common good; indeed even describing the common good as general welfare or that

which is of benefit to all might well be a challenging task. (See Hostetler, 2003)   What is

missing is a common political and social vocabulary. The common good is more than a

collection of individual goods; it is "the good *human* life of the multitude, of a multitude

of persons; it is their communion in good living." (Maritain, 1972a, p.51) If social and

political life is simply a cacophony of cultural and religious claims to authenticity,

legitimacy, and truth, then democratic life has, in fact, broken down. Celebrating the

diversity of opinions and beliefs for their own sake, without any corresponding attempt to

draw them towards civic and political unity, leads, it would seem, to the inevitable

erosion of public values. Tolerance may well be a necessary and an acquired virtue for

life in a pluralist society, but while free speech has to be defended, not everything that is articulated and protected under free speech will necessarily support public values or the common good. Also, if Canada is indeed a mosaic and not a melting pot, then we have to elaborate as to how the different pieces of this mosaic are producing a unified political and social picture, one which all the citizens of this country readily recognize, share, cherish, and, most importantly, defend.

One of the challenges is the seemingly unqualified worship at the altar of multiculturalism; indeed any questioning or criticism of this worship is quickly dismissed as a case either of intolerance or, worse still, of racism. Two things: first, as some have asked, "what does a multicultural state look like?" (Kymlicka, 2007, p.65) And second, tolerance has more to do with "restraint in the face of something one dislikes" (Vogt, 1997, 3) than in the acceptance of the other. Adelman and Anctil's commentary on the Bouchard-Taylor report suggest that "tolerance" could be linked to "bending, " however, "the opposite of too much bending is to be unbending. But it can also mean not bending sufficiently." (Adelman & Anctil, 2011, p.57) Perhaps replacing "tolerance" with "fellowship" might put more emphasis and less strain upon the common good and communal political life as lived by persons.  (See Maritain, 1972b, p.116)

In replacing the secular humanism of liberal education, multiculturalism is seen to be a step in the right direction as it gives equal weight to all cultures and opinions, and it relieves the individual from the weighty business of making choices and decisions based upon particular values and truth. In his book *Education's End*, Anthony Kronman rightly states that the difficulty of multiculturalism, especially in the educational institution, is it replaces the rootedness of the Western Canon with the diversity of many different canons, except, there is no rootedness in this diversity just diversity for its own sake, an

intellectual shopping.  Kronman is not arguing so much in favor of the Western Canon as

he is for human rootedness in a particular intellectual tradition. (See Kornman, 2007,

pp.7-9)

This essay has attempted to grapple with the mediating role that education plays

between religion and democratic community.  That mediation is less dependent upon

formulas and prescriptions and more dependent upon those characteristics and features

that emerge when citizens are viewed as persons, and persons whose identities are formed

by a diversity rather than simply monolithic unity of religion alone, and everything else

considered as pure choice and governed only by the constraints of the law. Charles

Taylor's understanding of  "social imaginary" as "the ways people imagine their social

existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their

fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and

images that underlie these expectations" provides a framework for the citizen, who is also

a person, to be engaged socially and politically in the company of others. (Taylor, 2004,

p.23)

These concluding remarks must make some cursory mention of the *non-believer*,

and the *non-believer* as a person. The claim to be a *non-believer* is surely a claim possible

in adulthood, and one that need not blanket all of adulthood. However, this essay has

pointed out to the danger when culture and religion dominate the public and social

square. Today's danger is that religious identity not only can eclipse other identities but

also seen as the only identity. Some of the essential seeds in the perennial growth in

personhood must be sown in the school. However, neither belief nor non-belief are ever

settled or calcified at any one stage of life, and the personhood and personhood are more

complex and layered than the narrow designation of *believer* or *non-believer.*

The sacred/secular distinction and relationship is crucial to Canadian democratic life in common. An old metaphysical principle states that one distinguishes in order to unite. In Canada, we have certainly made many distinctions under the categories of "sacred" and "secular."  Perhaps what we have done less successfully, if at all, is to unite these categories in the citizen as a person.

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