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Imposing moral beliefs on children through a ‘one-size-fits-all’ curriculum

In his recent column on Ontario’s new sex-ed curriculum, Michael Coren argued that “If conservative Christians became as angry and active about poverty, injustice, unjust war and other such issues as they do about sex and sexuality, not only would the world be a better place, but the standing of conservative Christians would be far higher.”

I wonder how Mother Teresa of Calcutta would respond to that comment, were she still alive today. Her Missionaries of Charity continue to care for “the poorest of the poor,” described by Mother Teresa as “the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.” More than 4,000 sisters run orphanages, AIDS hospices and charity centres worldwide. “A beautiful death,” said Mother Teresa, “is for people who lived like animals to die like angels — loved and wanted.”

If Mother Teresa was sufficiently “active” about “poverty and injustice,” she was also well-known for her vocal and unequivocal opposition to abortion, which she described as “the greatest destroyer of peace” because “it is a direct war, a direct killing.” Receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, Mother Teresa asserted that “if a mother can kill her own child — what is left for me to kill you and you kill me — there is nothing between.” She spoke of teaching natural family planning to “our beggars, our leprosy patients, our slum dwellers, our people of the

street” as “this natural way of abstaining, of self-control, out of love for each other.” She reported that a poor person had come to thank her, saying: “You people who have vowed chastity, you are the best people to teach us family planning. Because it is nothing more than self-control out of love for each other.”

I don’t know whether Mr. Coren would consider Mother Teresa to be a “conservative Christian” or “insecure about other people’s sexuality.” In the past, he has written persuasively about how “conservative Christians” are over-represented when it comes to caring for refugees, the disabled, alcoholics, and victims of floods, epidemics and famine. There is no contradiction between hating injustice in all of its forms and manifestations, and also believing in sexual continence and self-control.

Ontario’s new sex-ed curriculum, for which Mr. Coren declared his support last week, does not teach abstinence or self-control. Instead, it presents the physical and biological aspects of human sexuality in a vacuum, detached from love, marriage and procreation. This may well be exactly what some parents want taught to their children. They should have it, because the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

But this right of parents cuts in all directions. Parents who are Catholics, Muslims, Orthodox Jews, Hindus, Sikhs

and Evangelical Christians, along with non-religious parents who disagree with the devaluation of sex as a mere tool for maximizing pleasure, do not want Premier Kathleen Wynne’s personal beliefs imposed on their children. To dismiss these parents as suffering from a mental illness in the form of an irrational fear, as Mr. Coren and Premier Wynne have done by accusing them of “homophobia,” is intellectually dishonest.

Every school, and every curriculum, has an underlying belief system, and imparts knowledge from a particular set of assumptions, or worldview. Collecting taxes from citizens who adhere to a wide range of different world views, and only returning the money to parents for education if those parents agree to have their children educated in the way chosen by the state, is quasi-totalitarian. When politicians and bureaucrats use the education system as a tool to impose their own moral beliefs on every child through a “one-size-fits-all” curriculum, they threaten Canada’s free society.

Whether Premier Wynne’s curriculum is good for children is not something that parents will ever agree on. That is exactly why, in Canada’s still-free society, parents should have the right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. There is no reason for education funding to be limited to only one curriculum, and only one kind of school.

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