

Now Playing: Religious Persecution In Canada

by Charles Whitaker

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," July 2004

The following items from "Thinly Disguised Totalitarianism" by Raymond J. de Souza (*First Things*, April 2004, p. 9.) illustrate the current condition of religious freedom in Canada:

» The British Columbia College of Teachers denied a license to certify teachers to the Trinity Western University, which is affiliated with evangelical groups, because its "code of student conduct prohibited . . . homosexual relationships." In subsequent adjudication, "lower courts agreed with the College that prohibiting homosexual relationships is unacceptable because it might lead future public school teachers to harbor a discriminatory animus against homosexuals." Upon appeal, the evangelical college prevailed.

» The owner of a print shop cited religious reasons for refusing to print letterheads and cards for the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives. The Ontario Human Rights Commissions fined him \$5,000, ruling that his religious beliefs did not entitle him to turn down business from homosexual groups.

» A court ordered a religious high school to admit a male student to the prom, along with his boyfriend. The "boys" attended the prom. The case is still making its way through the appeal process.

» The Canadian House of Commons passed legislation adding "sexual orientation to the list of 'hate speech' categories." In Canada, any language that "promotes hatred toward an identifiable group" has been criminalized. The original intent of the law was to fight discrimination in general and anti-Semitism in particular. If the bill passes the Canadian Senate, "public expression of orthodox moral judgments regarding homosexuality" would be effectively criminalized. Conceivably, ministers could be penalized for preaching God's truth about homosexual relationships to their own churches.

» The Canadian organization charged with regulating pharmacists has ruled that it is "mandatory for all pharmacists to dispense" contraceptives and abortifacants (i.e., the "morning-after" pill). At stake is whether a pharmacist's conscience must "take a back seat to a 'public health' need." Health Canada argues, "Most provinces and territories have adopted a policy that allows pharmacists to have the right to refuse to dispense medication for moral reasons, but they would be expected, as a standard of care, to refer the woman to another pharmacist, a physician, or health facility where the medication could be readily obtained." This makes the pharmacist's conscientious objection of no effect.

» A medical student was penalized "for his statement that he would not do abortions." Medical students, whose professional future rests in the hands of their teachers, are not protected by the Canadian Medical Association's "conscience clause," which gives doctors an out if they do not want to perform any type of procedure that is against their conscience. The case is still under review in the medical college. Should the student not

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prevail in his cause, medical schools in Canada will be in a place where they can "punish incorrect opinions" concerning abortion and other controversial procedures. Medical ethics will have taken several steps backward.

It looks as if religious liberty in Canada is just hanging on and not much more.