Setting the Research Agenda for Canadian Religious Pluralism

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> A pluralism that cannot be integrated into unity is chaos;
> unity unrelated to plurality is tyranny.
> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

In the past twenty-five years the religious landscape of Canada has changed radically. Where once there were Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, now there are Islamic mosques, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist temples, Sikh gurdwaras, and aboriginal healing centers in virtually every major Canadian city. The encounter between people of very different religions and cultures takes place in our own cities and neighborhoods. Today we find ourselves sharing the workplace, the classroom, the hospital, and the courts with fellow Canadians of different religious and cultural traditions. The 1991 census (Statistics Canada 1993) reveals the tremendous scope of ethnic change in our society, but tells us little about its religious dimensions or its religious significance. A glance at table 1 shows that from 1981–1991, while Christianity increased only 4% and Judaism 7%, the other major religions registered huge percentage increases: Buddhism 215%, Islam 158%, Hinduism 125%, and Sikhism 118%. In Toronto, for example, the Buddhist community now includes over forty sub-groups representing the three main branches of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana) and nearly all the countries/cultures in which Buddhism has flourished over the centuries. Yet with all this activity no major study of Buddhism in Canada has been conducted. These large increases have been in religions that are tied to ethnic communities. What is surprising is that to date the major studies of ethnicity or pluralism in Canada frequently give religion only minor attention (Buchignani and Indra1985). Hugh Johnston's studies of the Sikhs

(1979, 1995); Sheila McDonough's look at the Muslims of Montreal (1994); Parin Dossa's anthropological study of Ismailis in Vancouver and Calgary (1988); Harold Coward's field studies of the Alberta Sikh, Hindu, and Japanese Buddhist communities (Coward and Goa 1986; Coward, Goa, and Neufeldt 1984; Coward and Goa 1983); Joseph O'Connell's close examination of the Bengali community in Toronto (O'Connell and Ray 1985); and Milton Israel (1994) do better in this regard. But there is still much more work to be done. Research needs to establish both the dimensions and the significance of Canada's new religious plurality by documenting the ways the major new religious groups are affected by and adapting to Canadian culture, as well as the ways in which Canadian culture is being altered by them.

Pluralism in the form of multiculturalism has for some time been a cherished part of Canada's public policy (Statistics Canada 1993; Bancroft 1990; Ledoux 1990). Canadians of European Judeo-Christian heritage have traditionally shown enthusiastic support for ethnic events featuring folk fairs, craft exhibits, and dance performances. They have also applauded the trooping of flags of the mother countries of our immigrants in Canada Day celebrations. Yet as Canada's diversity grows, tensions arise over immigration patterns, turbans in the RCMP (Graff 1989, 56; Lucow 1994), and Islamic dress in school (Picard 1994, A4). There is lively discussion in civic, religious, political, legal, and educational institutions over the implications of our multicultural and multireligious society. For example a front-page story in the *Globe and Mail,* 28 November 1994, reports Canada's federal Multiculturalism Minister Sheila Finestone as saying that authors like Neil Bissoondath (1994) are threatening the fabric of Canadian society. Bissoondath, for his part, argues that the official encouragement of ethnic diversity as multiculturalism may be threatening a core Canadian way of life. How we appropriate plurality to shape a positive pluralism is one of the most important questions that Canadians will face in the years ahead. Research in religious pluralism needs to make available to all Canadians the information that we will need to engage effectively in shaping the future of our multicultural nation.

What do we now know about the new landscape of Canadian religious diversity? To date the popular press has dominated, often with a focus on contentious issues. Academic studies have examined Canada's new religious groups as they exist in their home countries. A review of the literature reveals only a few scattered studies of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Sikhs as they exist in Canada. Reginald Bibby's (1993)most recent study of religion in Canada pays no attention to such groups and reveals that little diversity can be found in Canada's mainline Christian

churches, which are composed of persons of mainly European and North American ancestry. Yet in our cities, on public transit, and in hospitals and schools, new Canadians of non-European background abound. Where are their religious groups? They keep themselves relatively invisible, perhaps because of threats of racist violence. Quietly, however, they have taken over warehouses and movie theaters, rented space in shopping centers, and business buildings, bought old churches, and established temples in private residences. Careful study is needed to make visible the religious dimension of Canada's multiculturalism that today remains largely invisible. Once these religious communities are "mapped," we will then be able to say what this new Canadian religious landscape looks like. We will be able to ask what happens to traditions of such groups as the Zoroastrians, Muslims, or Sikhs when they are transplanted into Canadian soil. And we will be better placed to answer the question: how are the people of mainstream Canada responding to this new reality?

Research Issues

A list of issues in Canadian religious pluralism that require research includes the following:

1. A database needs to be created that documents the changing face of religious pluralism in Canada. It should include: histories of the religious communities in Canada; demographic data on the size and spread of the communities; maps, photographs, audio, video, and text description of the structure of these communities in Canada, including their places of worship, rituals, religious schools, cultural associations, and so on.

2. With such a database in hand one can then begin to explore how living in Canada is changing these religious communities—in their worship both in public and in private; in their forms of adaptation and religious education in the Canadian context; and in their encounter with mainline Canadian society, its civic institutions, and its dominant religions. Special attention needs to be given to the experience of women in these ethnic religious communities. Whereas fathers and children are out in Canadian society at work and in school, women are sometimes stuck at home alone. They may not have the support of the extended family, to which they are accustomed, and not being out in society they may not become as proficient in English or French or as adapted to Canadian society as their husbands or children. Thus problems arise such as isolation, depression, tension between mothers and children (especially daughters), and difficulties between wives and husbands. Religion is involved in these problems in that the home-bound wife/mother may be operating

on the religious norms and practices of, say, village India where she grew up, while husband and children accommodating themselves to life in Canada may well give up or significantly adapt their traditional practices. Examples of such tensions are especially evident around the rites of passage: dating, marriage, raising of children, care of elderly, and dying. Tensions resulting from religious and cultural expectations are not only internal to the family, but also manifest in relation to Canadian practices of education and health care, to mention only two important areas. These experiences will likely be different depending on where in Canada the family lives: a large city like Toronto where the size of the religious ethnic community may be sufficient to enable many to retain ethnic religious language, patterns of worship, education, and marriage; smaller cities where the small size of the ethnic communities necessitates the joining with others of the same religion but of different traditions for worship, religious education, and cultural activity (here the ethnic language may well be lost); and towns or rural areas where there may be insufficient numbers to form a religious or cultural community.

Longitudinal studies of what happens in the above kinds of religious communities as we move from first to second, third and fourth generations are especially needed. Will Herberg (1960) argues that the experience of the third generation from the immigrant is crucial in determining the future of the tradition in its new country. The pattern Herberg suggests is that what children of immigrant parents reject in tradition in order to "fit in," grandchildren seek to recover and adopt, though perhaps in new forms. Of course Herberg postulates this as the pattern of immigrant American Catholics and Jews, but does this pattern hold true for immigrant Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians? What about the fourth generation? Raymond Williams (1992, 253) suggests that by the fourth generation all that is left is a kind of symbolic religious identity—identification with holidays, ethnic festivals, and ethnic foods, but with little of the whole pattern of ethnic religious identity of first-generation immigrants. Symbolic religious ethnicity, Williams argues, may simply be a stage on the way to full assimilation and secularization of some form. In making these observations Williams is thinking about the United States. He is careful not to generalize about Canada with its different official policy on multiculturalism. Will the fourth-generation experience in Canada be markedly different than what Williams suggests will be the case in the United States? Only time, and some solid longitudinal research, will tell. Moreover will Williams's projections for the United States and its so-called melting pot policy hold up? Diana Eck's (1997) pluralism project will undoubtedly shed some light on the question. However, the United States, like Canada, would seem to be lacking

the careful longitudinal studies that are needed to provide answers.

3. Exploration is also needed of the way these immigrant, ethnic religious communities are changing Canada—especially in the response of the aboriginal, Christian, Jewish, and secular communities to their new neighbors. Analysis is required of both positive and negative responses to the incidents of racial hatred and fundamentalist backlash, as well as to the positive developments of interfaith councils, to the emergence of new theological questions that arise from pluralism, and to the recasting of traditional church-state issues in politics, health, education, culture, justice, and security. How is mainstream Canada, if we can use that term, responding to such issues?

4. Analysis of the above questions sets the stage for the final and most difficult set of research questions, namely the public-policy issues that religious pluralism poses for a democratic country like Canada with its official policy on multiculturalism. Issues here include the emerging meanings of religious pluralism for Canada's religious communities and public institutions, and a consideration of the challenges and opportunities of a public commitment to pluralism in the light of the new religious contours of Canada, in terms of public-policy issues such as Bissoondath (1994) has raised, and that appear in education and health-care delivery. Study here must proceed on two levels simultaneously: theory and practice.

On the level of theory there is much discussion as to how a liberal democracy such as Canada ought to respond to the challenge of religious and ethnic diversity. Amy Gutmann (1992, 4–5) effectively summarizes the debate. One side argues that religious or cultural diversity should not be recognized in our public policy. Public institutions, this line of thought suggests, should be impersonal so as to insure that all are treated as equals regardless of particular racial, religious, ethnic, linguistic, or gender identities. The impersonality of public institutions is the price citizens should be willing to pay for living in a society that treats us all as equals. In this view the sacrifice for religious and ethnic communities is enormous, namely the giving up of all of one's distinctiveness in public. An opposing position holds that the treatment of people as free and equal citizens requires that public institutions acknowledge rather than ignore ethnic and religious differences. Therefore since the religious and cultural context is what gives meaning to a person's life, this view argues, a secure recognition of religious and other differences at the public-policy level is required of society. Consequently for those people whose self-understanding depends upon the vitality of their religion and/or culture, public institutions ought to acknowledge rather than ignore their differences. In addition not only ought differences to be recognized, but liberal democ-

racies ought also to help minority religious or ethnic groups protect themselves against being overwhelmed by the mass or majority culture. This means that tax dollars should be allocated to the support of minority languages and cultures—a decision governments find difficult to make in good times, let alone in periods of economic restraint. Another difficulty for this position arises when the content of various cultures or religions is examined and found to contain attitudes of racial, religious, or ethnic superiority and therefore to be antagonistic toward others. How can respect for the differences of others, which includes "superiority" groups, be reconciled with the liberal democratic commitment to treat all people as equals?

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994, 25–73) offers an original contribution to this problem. Taylor offers a philosophical analysis, based on Rousseau and Kant, of what is at issue when people of different cultures/religions demand equal recognition by the public institutions of a democracy. He begins his analysis with the following premise:

> our identity is partly shaped by recognition of its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people of society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (25)

Thus, dominant groups have entrenched their superiority by inculcating a sense of inferiority in the subjugated. From this premise Taylor argues that it is not sufficient simply to have a social policy that allows cultures/religions to defend themselves, but that we must go further and *recognize* the equal value of different cultures/religion, "that we not only let them survive but acknowledge their *worth*" (64).

The logic behind Taylor's position is contained in the view that we owe equal respect to all traditions, that all traditions that have sustained human societies over an extended period of time have something important to say to all of us. Just as in a liberal democratic society all have equal civil and voting rights regardless of race or culture, so too all should enjoy the presumption that their culture/religion has value (68). This means, for example, that educational curricula include presentations of all cultures/religions, not just those that dominate, and that health-care institutions make space and give recognition to the wisdom of traditional healing traditions alongside those of modern Western medical science. The logic of including and respecting traditions does not, however, imply or necessitate the conclusion that they are all of equal worth. The *demand*

for judgments of equal worth, says Taylor, is paradoxically and tragically homogenizing. It implies that before we have done the hard work of study and opening ourselves to others, we already have the standards to make such judgments. "A favourable judgment made prematurely would be not only condescending but ethnocentric. It would praise the other for being like us" (71). Or, as Freud put it, we are simply defending ourselves against the difference of the other by projecting our own position upon them and proclaiming that they are the same as we are. This is comforting because it allows us to hold our own view unexamined and unchallenged by the other, and altogether avoids the possibility that there may be something wrong with our view or that there may be something new of value in the position of the other (Hall 1958, 89). The implicit standards we have in Canada are those of North Atlantic civilization. Including others by implicitly employing our standards to judge others can have the result of making everyone the same, that is, like us. By contrast Taylor's (1994, 71) presumption of worth "imagines a universe in which different cultures complement each other with quite different kinds of contribu-tion. This picture not only is compatible with, but demands judgments of, superiority-in-a-certain-respect." Equal worth, therefore, is not a pre-sumed conclusion, but a stance we adopt in meeting or embarking upon the study of the other.

Taylor supports this approach by an appeal to the religious view of divine providence according to which the variety of culture/religion is not an accident but a means of bringing about greater harmony. From a purely humanistic perspective Taylor (1994, 73) argues that "cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject." To reject this possibility a priori would be an act of supreme arrogance and moral failure. The humility that recognizes that we, and our particular religion and culture, are but a limited part of the total human story requires from us not peremptory and unauthentic judgments that all are of equal value, but rather a willingness to be open to the meeting and study of others that must widen and transform our standards in the process.[1] Taylor concludes that this means that we are far from any ultimate standard or horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures/religions may be judged.

While there is much in Taylor's theorizing that is admirable, there is a practical problem that remains unresolved. The separation of religion and state that exists in a liberal democracy such as Canada in itself seems

to undercut the full recognition and practice of religions such as Islam or Sikhism, which see themselves as complete ways of life. Let me illustrate with an example from Sikh experience in Canada. In the early British Columbia Sikh communities, the gurdwara was not only the religious center but also the locus of social service, political, and cultural activities. Canadian public policy, however, has increasingly separated out the religious from these other activities, placing the latter into an ethnic rather than a religious context. While consistent with Canada's stated commitment to multiculturalism and religious pluralism, this policy has resulted in new government or government-supported institutions established on an ethnic basis to provide social and cultural services in a non-religious context. Thus whereas Canada's first gurdwaras provided food and shelter for homeless Sikhs, helped with immigration and employment, and offered educational and cultural programs, these functions are now largely taken over by government agencies or semi-governmental organizations like the Immigrant Services Centre and various ethnic health services organizations. Also, with the establishment of community groups such as the Punjabi Cultural Association and independent Punjabi schools, one finds that ethnic cultural and educational activities no longer belong exclusively to the gurdwaras (Dusenbery 1981, 89). However, this has not meant a lessening of support for the gurdwaras either in attendance or financial contributions. On the contrary, new gurdwaras are being built and, if anything, a Sikh religious revival seems to be under way. But gurdwaras now, in greater conformity with Canadian public policy and religious practice, are more focused on religious concerns and function increasingly like western-style "houses of worship." Support for this differentiation between "religion" and "ethnicity" is especially strong among two groups: Canadian-born second- or third-generation Sikhs and a small but vocal group of white non-South Asian Sikh converts.

Second- or third-generation Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry are now a sizable group and are marked by their strong ethnic identity. By and large they have not married outside of their own group. While they have responded aggressively to increasing anti–South Asian hostility in recent years, they have in the main kept their distance from recent Sikh religious revivalism, "regarding it as unfortunate return to aspects of life in 'village India' with little relevance to, or positive implications for, the community's situation in Canada" (Dusenbery 1981, 109). In line with Canadian public policy and its separation of religion and ethnicity, many second- and third-generation Sikhs are comfortable in identifying more closely with ethnic and political institutions than with religious organizations from which they may feel estranged. Thus the idea arises that in Canada one can be "ethnically Sikh" without being "religiously Sikh."

This is, of course, consistent with Canadian public policy where religious practice is seen as a matter of individual preference and quite separate from one's ethnicity. It is just such a "Canadian" or "Western" way of living that may properly cause concern among those who judge Sikhism to be a total way of life, not separable into religious and secular ethnic components. While religion, as a matter of individual religious preference that is quite separate from one's language, culture, and ethnicity, is not a problem for Taylor's theory of pluralism—and is quite consistent with the expectations of liberal democracy—it may be a kind of religion that is not sustainable in the long run, or so the experience of Judaism and Christianity may suggest. From the practical perspective the question must be raised whether a separation of the sort experienced by the Sikhs in Canada between religion and ethnicity, as well as between religion and its traditional educational and social-service functions, is a necessary result of living in a modern liberal democracy. If the answer is "yes," the further question must also be raised, namely, "Does the separation of religion and ethnicity, religion and education/social services, necessarily over time result in the diminution of religious vitality for traditions that have experienced themselves in the past as comprehensive 'ways of life'?" Yet another question for pluralism research is whether plurality is viable in the long term if cultures/ethnicities become separated from the overall religious context in which they were originally embedded? For example will Sikh ethnicity survive through several generations if separated from Sikh religion? If the answer is "no," we are then forced to consider whether or not public policy of democratic liberalism is, in its separation of religion and state, a homogenizing that ultimately destroys both ethnic and religious diversity.

Canada, with its proclaimed multiculturalism policy and its constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, is a wonderful "living laboratory" for the examination of the above questions. Such research, however, is not easy.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Harold Coward (1993) or Diana Eck (1994) in which this encounter becomes a source of new theology.

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