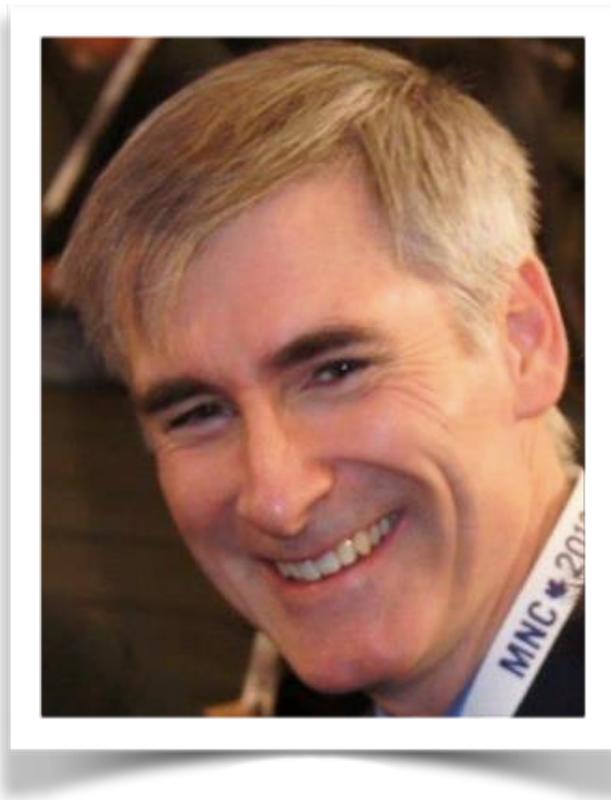


THE EVANGELICAL OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

“After School Satan Clubs” and More: Coming to a School Near You?

As if to underscore the profound confusion in education these days, two recent news items from the United States should give all social conservatives pause, as well as some reason to chortle.



First, as some may have read in August, a public elementary school in Mount Vernon, Washington— a mere Sunday-drive away from Vancouver— may play the role of perdition this fall, as it hosts **an After School Satan Club**.

I personally think it rather symbolic that the public school system is going to hell, but, apparently, the whole Satanic incubus for this club is not the fault of Seattle’s

Satanic Temple, at all. As their own website— complete with

cartoon Satan and ASS acronym — **makes diabolically clear**, the problem is not the devil-worshipping minions of darkness masquerading as proponents of enlightened reason, but those pesky proselytizing evangelical Christians who have their own club in the same Mt. Vernon school.

Satanists like to think themselves progressive, of course, but in this case they are obviously reactionary. Still, at least they're responding to their unhappy "triggers" by attempting to create elementary "safe" spaces. In this sense, they truly are every bit as "rational", and as "progressive", as our Marxist-inspired university campuses.

In any case, juxtapose this Pacific Northwest scenario with the more recent news coming from the all-is-not-peachy State of Georgia, where one public school in Henry County **has been told to** "remove all items which contain religious symbols, such as crosses, printed bibles, angels, bible verses, printed prayers, and biblical quotations".

Here, the philosophical trend is quite different than in Mt. Vernon: this School Board decision represents a kind of "commissar cleansing" — indicative of an aggressive commitment to secular-neutrality, and strict separation of religion from State.

Over all, then, two different American regions with two vastly different educational "worldviews" — as one can plainly see.

The first is effectively pluralist, which (with its multi-cultural assumptions) allows all religious cults some latitude within the public system; the second allows none but the State-sanctioned secularism that rather conveniently escapes most people's definitions of "religion".

Yet, this is not a uniquely American phenomenon. North of the border, the same two ideological assumptions exist. **When Canadians work to exile** any remaining evidence of the Lord's Prayer in the public (formerly Protestant) system, or express anger against Catholic or Evangelical schools that receive public money while resisting the incursion of Comprehensive Sex Education or Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs, they are expressing assumptions of both secular-neutrality and State control.

At the same time, as I've alluded to previously, the relative secular silence regarding various Canadian public schools offering Yoga in their gyms (Hinduism); Mindfulness for student stress (Buddhism); burning sweetgrass for reasons of cultural sensitivity (Animism); or **even entertaining regular Friday recitations of the Shahada** (Islam) is rather deafening.

Philosophically, when it comes to education, **governments don't really know what to do because they really don't know what to believe.**

For those government-subsidized academics who still believe in the "secularization thesis" — that the more wealthy and educated a society becomes, the less religious — the pervasive existence

of spirituality in its myriad public forms is a stunning defeat of their hypothesis. The implication is that secularism, itself, is something of an artificial state that may not be very sustainable.

For those, on the other hand, who advocate for multiculturalism all while resisting calls for greater educational choice, the challenge will be in creating a thoroughly level playing field that is entirely consistent across all levels of government services—including public schools. The implication, in this case, is that an Administrator may well walk the corridors of her school in the late afternoon, hearing the pandemonium of a Satan club on her left, and the enthusiasm of a Christian revival club on her right.

The only other alternative, one might argue, is for government to get out of education altogether, except for standardized curriculum development, and allow public money for infrastructure and salaries to be proportionately distributed to the various groups that care most about educating children in accordance with their own family values.

This last alternative, admittedly, is rather unlikely. For it would require no fewer than two distinct miracles: (1) for secular humility within the present system, and (2) for the bureaucratic will to relinquish a portion of government control.

In the midst of all the babble and confusion, one can still dream.

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