

THE EVANGELICAL OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Is a Secular Society Really the Goal? Roland Weisbrot, 11-19-2016

On November 15th, 2016, *LifeSiteNews* reported that a mother in British Columbia has decided to sue her children's elementary school for allegedly coercing them “into taking part in a religious [Aboriginal] ‘cleansing ritual.’” Though all the details have yet to emerge in this peculiar case, I would like to discuss my thoughts on the matter.



First, my understanding of secularization involves the complete removal of all religion from public entities— schools, hospitals, governments, etc. Yet here we find the “John Howitt Elementary School (JHES) in Port Alberni, B.C.” deciding to host a “Traditional Nuu-chah-nulth Classroom/Student Cleansing” performed by a “Nuu-chah-nulth Member,” which parents were informed about via a letter from the principal earlier in the year.

Now of course a person can say that since parents were informed in advance that there is no room for complaint. That parents had ample time to

instruct their children on whether they wanted them to participate. However, “the letter did not provide a date for when these cleansing rituals would take place.” Even if it did have a date, my question remains: in a supposedly secular society, what business does Aboriginal religious practices have in our schools? Could you imagine the outrage if this were a Christian practice?

My answer to this question is simple. I think this boils down to a darker reality, that **when people say secularization, they truly mean de-Christianization**. What the secularists want is the removal of Christianity from public space, not total religious removal. Otherwise this “cleansing ritual” would have never been brought into the school in the first place. In “progressive” secularists’ minds, if the religion is not Christianity and helps promote “diversity” and “tolerance” then it can be used in schools.

I suggest that everyone who values freedom of conscience and the right of a parent to raise their own children how they see fit should pay close attention to this case. Whether the mother wins or loses, the ramifications will be felt across the country. For example, if the case is lost, then a parent’s right to raise their child is diminished and children attending public schools could potentially be made subject to countless religious practices— with or without consent. If, however, the plaintiff wins then you will likely see one of two solutions provided by the court:

1. All religious practices will be prohibited in public schools (Secularization).
2. Religious practices will be allowed so long as every religion gets equal representation (Pluralization).

If the court chooses the first option, then we go back to the actual definition of secularization. If the court chooses the second option, however, then the floodgates have opened for public schools to become religious melting-pots of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Aboriginal religion, and every other group under the sun. You do not need to look very hard to see the trouble this case could be for Christians and even other religious groups.

In conclusion, I am left wondering what it truly means to secularize our state and whether this principle applies only to some groups and not others.

