

The Medieval Turn in Education

By John Hilton O'Brien, 27 February 2023

It's a medieval policy. Literally. When the government tells churches what they can teach in their schools, it's medieval.

And in Alberta, it was brought back to us by the NDP.

Parents for Choice in Education possesses a remarkable document that demonstrates medieval policy in our modern political world. It was sent by the NDP's Education administration after Notley passed her famous "secrecy" laws. It is a letter of reprimand to a private Christian school, stating that certain faith-based documents were in defiance of government regulations requiring "diversity."

The government letter highlights the entirety of the school's "Profession of Faith" – the thing that makes the Christian school Christian – claiming it to be offside with government teaching. It takes particular issue with the word "Truth" that appears in that profession. It's hard to tell if it reminds one more of Pontius Pilate or the Spanish Inquisition.

It's not just some bureaucrat bullying a private school, either. We also saw the Catholic Trustees talking about creating a more Catholic version of sex education – and Notley publicly responding that they would never be allowed to teach such a thing. Schools would teach what the NDP wanted them to teach – even if what the NDP wanted them to teach was directly opposed to their faith.

According to the NDP, Christians must teach the government's doctrines, or not teach at all.

The technical term historians use for this approach is "Caesaropapism." It's the flip side of the coin from theocracy. In theocracy, the Church tells the state what to do: in Caesaropapism, the state tells the Church what to do. It was practiced by figures from the old Roman Empire to Byzantium to Henry VIII, and a key part of Europe's Wars of Religion.

That's the policy that Notley endorsed – straight out of the Middle Ages.

Now, maybe it is wrong for us to pick on the NDP, but we don't think so. In Ontario, government regulations mandated a Catholic school kicking out Josh Alexander for insisting on the truth of official Catholic beliefs in his Catholic school. And a former Catholic religious education director told me in the 90s that Don Getty's PC bureaucrats had sent back the Calgary Catholic religious education program for being "too Catholic." But these can be taken as the actions of overzealous bureaucrats. Notley is the first Premier to announce Caesaropapism as official policy.

This is particularly vexing, because it is not in the best tradition of the NDP. The NDP was always the party that embraced freedom. It defied big business, and denounced the overreach and corruption of the old PC government. Even on things that irked zealous social conservatives, like gay marriage, the NDP was insisting on the freedom of people to get married. This medieval insistence on forced speech is out of character.

The conspiracy-minded may claim that this is what the NDP really had in mind

all along. After all, Saul Alinsky approvingly cites Lenin saying "They have the guns and therefore we are for peace and for reformation through the ballot. When we have the guns then it will be through the bullet." And Alinsky's book, *Rules for Radicals*, is the acknowledged template for progressive organizers in North America.

The conspiracy theorists are probably wrong. Alinsky criticized Johnson's "War on Poverty" because it took power away from neighborhoods. That Johnson had the noble aim of helping the poor did not impress him: he thought elites were exploiting the image of the vulnerable to gain power and wealth for themselves, which he called "political pornography." He would say precisely the same about Notley's policy. The NDP attack on parents and the independence of faith-based schools is the absolute antithesis of progress, and not their traditional style.

I hope the NDP will see this policy as the mistake that it is. Diversity means *freedom*, not forced speech. Let people homeschool their children. Let Christian schools be Christian. Progress means *real* educational choice – not whatever choice the government dictates.

Enough Caesaropapism. It's time for the NDP's educational policy to come back out of the Dark Ages.

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