

Where is the Separation of Church and State When We Need It? The Alberta Government's Sexual Theology

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Posted on the website of The Evangelical Office of the Public Square (<http://eops.ca/>) on September 29, 2016.

On March 10, 2015, the Alberta legislature adopted Bill 10, *An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children*. The stated purpose of this law is to allow students to create organizations that promote a safe learning environment. Clearly, that is unobjectionable. However, one of the provisions of the law requires schools to allow students to create gay-straight alliances (GSAs) or queer-straight alliances (QSAs) without regard for the schools' philosophy or culture.

Some private schools object to that provision because they see it as being in conflict with their identity as Christian schools. The purpose of Christian schools is to provide education from an explicitly Christian perspective. It is no secret that historic orthodox Christian theology opposes any form of sexual behaviour outside of a heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Thus fornication, adultery, prostitution, polygamy, polyandry, and homosexuality are all forbidden by orthodox Christianity.

As a result, many Christians reject having GSAs and QSAs in their schools because their gay-positive message conflicts with Christian sexual ethics and opposition to homosexual behaviour. Supporters of those kinds of clubs reply that the clubs are simply safe spaces for vulnerable students and therefore there is no reason for Christian schools to oppose their presence.

According to the Alberta government, however, there is much more to GSAs and QSAs than providing safe spaces for students. In August 2015 the Alberta government issued a document entitled *Gay Straight/Queer-Straight Alliances in Faith-Based Schools* (https://education.alberta.ca/media/142737/gs-qa_in-faith-based_schools.pdf). According to this document, one purpose of the GSA and QSA clubs is to promote a particular view of sexuality.

It's important to note that this document is specifically targeted at faith-based schools. The term "faith-based" refers to schools formed in accordance with a particular religion, but in Alberta the vast majority of faith-based schools are Christian schools of one variety or another. Therefore this document is offering direction primarily to Christian schools.

On page 2, *Gay Straight/Queer-Straight Alliances in Faith-Based Schools* specifies a particular theological perspective on sexuality that the Alberta government expects Christian schools to adopt:

GSA/QSAs in faith-based schools organize LGBT-themed events that are positive and support inclusion. They also promote faith-affirming conversations about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. GSA/QSAs recognize that sexuality and gender are gifts of creation. These gifts should be embraced and celebrated by all members of the school community.

In other words, Christian schools must recognize LGBT sexual orientations as “gifts of creation” that are to be “embraced and celebrated by all members of the school community.”

The problem is that the government’s requirement is incompatible with historic orthodox Christian theology. Orthodox Christians cannot embrace and celebrate non-heterosexual orientations without contradicting the Bible and historic Christian doctrine. Yet the Alberta government now requires Christian schools to change their theology on sexual matters to align with a theological position on sexuality that the government itself has adopted.

This conclusion is reinforced by a statement on page 3 of *Gay Straight/Queer-Straight Alliances in Faith-Based Schools* where it says: "Schools can play an important role in helping students embrace their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. They are unique gifts that should be affirmed and supported."

Basically, Christian schools are expected to encourage homosexually-inclined students to embrace their homosexual desires. But no genuine Christian school could do such a thing.

It is clear from the Alberta government’s *Gay Straight/Queer-Straight Alliances in Faith-Based Schools* that one purpose of imposing GSAs and QSAs on Christian schools is to change those schools’ historic Christian beliefs about sexuality. No longer is monogamous heterosexual marriage to be the standard for Christian sexuality. The government has embraced a very different theological perspective on sexuality, and it expects Alberta’s Christian schools to follow suit.

This leads to certain inescapable questions: Since when did the Alberta government obtain the authority to make judgments on Christian theology? How did the government become qualified to amend Christian doctrine? What kind of a Christian would accept the Alberta government’s rulings on theological matters?

The fact that the Alberta government believes it can issue a document requiring change in historic Christian theology is an ominous development. It's also more than a little ironic that in a culture that frequently touts the "separation of church and state," the Alberta government wants to determine certain aspects of theology for Christian schools in the province. But the government possesses no such authority and its theology must be soundly rejected.