



Atheist Freethinkers

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Atheist Freethinkers denounces government inaction concerning the Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Montreal, 9th May 2017 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, denounces the inaction of the Quebec government with regard to the *Ethics and Religious Culture* (ERC) program. This program, in particular its religion component, requires pupils at all public school levels, up to the end of secondary school, to study religions in a sanitized form, without objectivity, with a total lack of critical perspective. It has been the target of many very serious and thoughtful criticisms. And yet, the Minister of Education, Sébastien Proulx, recently rejected outright any possibility of abolishing the program. Furthermore, although ERC is currently under revision, the proposed elimination of the religion component has also been dismissed.

Many spokespersons, mostly from organizations such as LPA-AFT who advocate secularism, have already explained in detail the numerous serious flaws in ERC's religion component. The most outrageous religious beliefs, including various forms of creationism, are presented with complete complacency, with little or no effort to distinguish between beliefs and facts, even when the target audience is children far too young to make such crucial distinctions on their own. Non-beliefs such as atheism are almost completely lacking from the program. Even in its title, the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program falsely associates ethics with religions, as if morality were impossible without religion. This compulsory course grants religious "culture" a level of importance which it does not deserve. It promotes communitarianism to the detriment of civic responsibility. It patently ignores the fact that, more often than not, religions are themselves generators of conflict, violence and hatred. ERC treats religious practice as the norm, rendering invisible both atheists and non-practising believers.

The organization *Atheist Freethinkers* called for the elimination of ERC's religion component in a declaration published in October of 2016 (www.atheologie.ca/special/contre-ecr/). A collective work (Leméac 2016) under the direction of Daniel Baril and Normand Baillargeon laid out in minute detail the serious problems presented by this course. In April of 2016, representatives from MLQ, AHQ and PDF-Q met with Minister Proulx to express their criticisms of the ERC program. In its brief presented on 4th November 2016 before the parliamentary commission studying Draft Bill 62, LPA-AFT recommended terminating the "Religious Culture" portion of ERC. Other associations made similar recommendations, in particular the *Rassemblement pour la laïcité*.

Such a programme in a secular school system is simply unacceptable. It is unconscionable that a compulsory course, imposed on all pupils from the very young to the end of adolescence, should be composed of mythologies, beliefs and superstitions. The ERC program is in reality a deceptive strategy to keep religious instruction in an ostensibly secular school system, but whose secular nature is seriously compromised and discredited by the presence of that very program. Furthermore, the ERC course is unconstitutional, contravening the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because it fails to respect the right to be a non-believer.

We demand that Minister Proulx withdraw the religion component of the *Ethics and Religious Culture* program.

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