

Is it time for Catholic educators to leave the ATA?

By DONNA TRIMBLE

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has voted that Catholic educators should have the autonomy to choose lessons that are in contradiction to the Catholic doctrine upon which their schools exist.

The primary curriculum supplement for which this vote was likely conceived, was mentioned in a recent Edmonton Sun article: "In particular, there have been concerns about teachers being discouraged from using the Professionals Respecting and supporting Individual Sexual Minorities (PRISM) toolkit that has been developed for teachers to talk about sexual and gender diversity in the classroom."

The PRISM toolkit describes the binary understanding of male and female, as "overly simplistic and often wrong," "misleading" and "exclusionary and harmful" (page 21), while imposing only one perspective of gender as fluid and subjective. This premise is profoundly discriminatory towards Catholicism and many other faith traditions who deem the binary understanding as sacred.

It is up to Catholic educators, parents and the separate school boards to discern how they will confront this latest attack on

their schools. The rights of parents to choose an authentic Catholic education for their children, grounded in Catholic values and permeated by their faith, must be protected.

But there is a deep lack of logic in the vote itself that cannot be permitted to stand.

This vote claims to offer up "rights" to educators that are supposedly losing autonomy, when in fact the ATA used the tyranny of the majority of their membership in an attempt to strip separate schools of their Catholic identity.

The ATA itself states in their Going to School in Alberta document, that "69 per cent (of their teacher membership) are in the public system, 22 per cent in the separate system and one per cent in the francophone system." The vote that took place did not account for the fact that 70 per cent of the ATA membership do not teach in Catholic schools and have no vested interest in Catholic education. That is tyranny of the majority.

We ask, if the ATA decided to disrespect francophone schools and call a vote that allowed teachers in the one per cent of francophone schools to "have the autonomy" to teach in English instead of French, and 99 percent

of ATA members, with no vested interest in francophone education, voted in favour, would that stand?

Would francophone education cease to exist in the classrooms of teachers that chose to take a job in a French school, only to fail to abide by the very *raison d'être* for that school's existence?

With the ongoing attack on Catholic schools by the ATA, we ask, is it time for Catholic schools to find a legal framework for deregistering with the Alberta Teachers' Association?

When there is an apparent attempt to undermine the very foundation of the faith tradition that Catholic education is built upon, how can parents be assured that their children will be provided with an authentic Catholic education in each and every classroom?

Is it time for parents to insist that Catholic educators of Alberta and their schools and school boards sever ties with the Alberta Teachers' Association?

This may be the only way to preserve the integrity of Catholic education in Alberta going forward.

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