

CHURCH AND STATE

FOR HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS

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SUMMARY

In this lesson, students consider the meaning of the separation of church and state. They will then look at a comparison of Canadian law and God's law and see how the different roles of church and state are God-given roles. Students conclude by examining different news articles and writing their own letters to the editor.

For more information or to give feedback, contact info@arpacanada.ca

CHURCH AND STATE

OVERVIEW

The concept of the separation of church and state is often misunderstood to mean the separation of religion from politics. It actually has more to do with the different roles God has given to the church and the state.

Christians are often told to keep their religious views private and away from political issues. But God calls us to be a light in our world and to be prophets, priests, and kings. How do we respond when our society tells us to keep our faith private?

Separating the institutions of the church and state is necessary for a free society. God has given different responsibilities to the church and the state. He has also set up different authorities in

each institution. Though they are separate institutions, God remains sovereign over everything, including the state. As a result, our faith cannot be separated from politics. In fact, despite popular claims to the contrary, there is always a faith-based worldview behind political decisions, even in our secular society. Behind the scenes, there is a battle of worldviews competing to rule our nation. These worldviews are often hidden in an attempt to make decisions seem “value neutral.”

Christians must courageously hold up the Christian, biblical worldview in the public square and demonstrate how it is best for all Canadians. At the same time, we must respect the different responsibilities given to the church and the state.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we best respect the different roles between church and state while still being a salt and light?

This question is intended to get students thinking about the different roles between church and state, an often misunderstood concept.

ENGAGE THE STUDENTS

Write the phrase “Separation of Church and State” on the board. Provide students with a short time to write down what they know about it, and what they wonder about it.

EXPLORE WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY

Distribute *Handout 1 – What does the Bible say?* Lead a class discussion on the following Bible passages:

- Read Romans 13:1-7. Who institutes civil authorities (government)? What is the task given to civil government? How does this compare with the role that government now plays in society (providing child care, welfare, flood relief etc.)?
- Read Matthew 22:15-22. Who is “Caesar” today? What does this tell us about our relationship with civil government?
- Read Titus 1:6-9. What does this tell us about different roles for the institution of the church and the institution of the state? What are some examples of situations where one institution may be tempted to interfere in the authority of another institution?

Students should write a paragraph summarizing what they have learned about the biblical relationship between church and state.

EXPLAIN THE WORLDVIEW BEHIND THE PHRASE

Distribute *Handout 2 – What does the separation of church and state mean?* Discuss whether the biblical worldview should apply just to the private lives of individuals or the public life of a nation. You can approach this discussion from another angle: is the Bible only true for some people (allowing people to say “I believe” or “this is my truth”) or does the Bible describe a universal reality (allowing people to say “God says” or “this is true”?).

EVALUATE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Distribute *Handout 3 – Public Statements*

Read *Excerpt #1: Justin Trudeau’s Perspective on the Separation of Religious Beliefs and Public Duty*. Lead a class discussion on the following points:

- Does Justin Trudeau promote the separation of church and state, or the separation of faith and politics?
- How is he correct in his comments?
- How is he wrong?
- Are religious beliefs simply a private opinion?

Read *Excerpt #2: The Introduction of Quebec's Bill 21*. Have the students underline all references to *secularism*, *religion*, and *rights and freedoms*. Lead a class discussion on the following points:

- What religious worldview is Quebec trying to promote with this law?
- Is this a correct way of trying to separate church and state? Why or why not?
- The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the freedom of religion. Does this law respect freedom of religion? Why or why not?

EVALUATE THE STATE'S WORLDVIEW

Encourage students to try think of examples of new laws and policies that are being promoted that are not based on the Bible.

- What are they based on?
- What is the new authority?
- Who are we expected to look to for help, for guidance, for determining right from wrong?

Focus the discussion to the underlying issue:

- What is really going on? Is the question really about the separation of church and state, or is it the battle of one worldview against the other?
- A new worldview (secular humanism, which looks to human beings and human institutions for authority) is fighting to push the old worldview (Christianity, which looks to God for authority) away.

Encourage the students to think of ways to present Christian principles to someone who doesn't believe in God or the authority of scripture.

- How do we respond?
- May we promote the Christian worldview in a country that is no longer Christian?
- How do we do this?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Record your notes and thoughts on the class discussion of the three Bible chapters.

Romans 13: 1-7

Matthew 22: 15-22

Titus 1: 6-9

WHAT DOES THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE MEAN?

Excerpt from the first edition ARPA's Christian Citizenship Guide (page 27-28). The entire Christian Citizenship Guide can be found at <https://arpacanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Christian-Citizenship-Guide.pdf>

In many respects, the more recent imposition of secular-humanist values in Canada is the mixing of religion with politics, just as Christianity did before. There are differences, including the lack of an explicit secular-humanist creed. But the underlying principle of applying one's worldview to Canadian public life is exactly the same. Like all other worldviews it answers life's fundamental questions: Who am I?; Where did I come from?; What is the purpose of life?; Where am I going? According to this worldview we are the products of millions of years of evolution and yet possess dignity and rights because of our autonomy. We give our own meaning to life and define our morals according to what we prefer, recognizing that our preferences will change. Our future is completely in our own hands so we had better control our population and environment to ensure our continued wellbeing. Secular-humanism then applies the answers to Canadian law and public policy, as evidenced in the next chapter about human rights and the Charter.

What this means is that there remains a fundamental misunderstanding about the role of religion in public life. When politicians refer to their Christian faith as a guide for decision-making, they are ridiculed for "mixing church and state." But this is not what the separation of church and state means. That concept (which is American, not Canadian) refers to the separation of the institution of the church and the institution of the state. An example of infringement would be if the Prime Minister decided who should be the pastor of a particular church, or if a church

decided who should be selected for a cabinet position. We don't have that or anything close to that. What we do have is the mixing of religion with politics, and that is impossible to avoid. Every political decision requires an underlying worldview. It has to be in keeping with basic beliefs about what is good and bad for people. Either this decision will be influenced by a Christian worldview, or a secular-humanist one, or an Islamic one, or something completely different. But it has to be influenced by something.

Who were the people who built this country and what did they believe? What motivated them to make the sacrifices they made for future generations? Why did they basically all see heterosexual marriage as an ideal and consider sex outside of marriage to be sinful? And why did they oppose abortion? Because they didn't believe in "Canadian values"? Only a fool would say so. Then what really is the test of Canadian values? The answer is Canadian history — Canada's Christian history.

Some may want to leave this heritage behind and embrace a new worldview of one stripe or another. But let's not kid ourselves and call it "Canadian" or pretend that it's not mixing religion with politics. The choice is not between religion or no religion, worldview or no worldview. The choice that Canadians have to make is which religion or worldview will we be guided by as we move forward. What role will this worldview have in a pluralist country? How will the competing worldviews be given consideration in decisions relating to policy and law? We can only answer these questions when we get rid of the fallacy that the secular-humanist worldview is somehow "Canadian" and morally neutral and that policy decisions have to be made devoid of an underlying worldview or religion.

JUSTIN TRUDEAU'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE SEPARATION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PUBLIC DUTY

*Excerpt from Prime Minister Trudeau's biography
"Common Ground" (Page 17)*

"I believe very deeply in the liberal idea of freedom. In the spring of 2014, I would announce a firm stance in favour of a woman's right to choose. It was a big change for some of my parliamentary colleagues. Previously, the Liberal Party considered this right to be subservient to the freedom of an individual MP to vote in Parliament according to his or her religious beliefs. As someone who was raised Roman Catholic, and who attended a Jesuit school, I understand that it is difficult for people of deep faith to set their beliefs aside in order to serve Canadians who may not share those beliefs.

But for me, this is what liberalism is all about. It is the idea that private belief, while it ought to be valued and respected, is fundamentally different from public duty. My idea of freedom is that we should protect the rights of people to believe what their conscience dictates, but fight equally hard to protect people from having the beliefs of others imposed upon them. That is the difference between the views expressed by a citizen and the votes counted in Parliament. When MPs vote in Parliament, they are not just expressing an opinion; they are expressing a will to have all other Canadians bound by their opinion, under law. That is where we need to draw a firm line."

INTRODUCTION OF QUEBEC'S BILL 21: AN ACT RESPECTING THE LAICITY OF THE STATE

Note: This Quebec law, passed in 2019, makes it illegal for government workers – such as Members of the National Assembly, teachers, and even bus drivers – to wear religious clothing such as a cross necklace, a hijab (Muslim face covering for women), or a turban while on the job. It also prohibits people with certain religious clothing from receiving a government service. This law was passed to protect the laicity, meaning the secular nature, of the Quebecois government. The following text was presented by Mr. Jolin-Barrette (Quebec's Minister of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusiveness) as he introduced the bill in the Quebecois National Assembly on March 28, 2019.

“This bill aims to affirm the secularism of the state and to specify the requirements that flow from it.

To this end, the bill indicates that the secularism of the state is based on four principles, namely the separation of the state and religions, the religious neutrality of the state, the equality of all citizens and as freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. It provides that parliamentary, governmental and judicial institutions are bound to respect these principles within the framework of their mission. However, with respect to the judges of the Court of Québec, the Human Rights Tribunal, the Professions Tribunal and the municipal courts as well as presiding justices of the peace, it entrusts the *Conseil de la magistrature* with the responsibility of establishing rules translating the requirements of the secularism of the State and to ensure their implementation.

The bill proposes to prohibit the wearing of a religious symbol by certain persons in the

performance of their duties. However, it provides that this prohibition does not apply to certain persons in office at the time of the introduction of the bill, according to the conditions it specifies.

The bill provides that a staff member of an organization must carry out his duties with his face uncovered. It also provides that a person who presents himself to receive a service from a staff member of an organization must have his face uncovered when necessary to allow verification of his identity or for security reasons. It provides that the person who does not respect this obligation cannot receive the service. It specifies that these obligations do not apply to a person whose face is covered due to health reasons, a disability or the requirements specific to their functions or the performance of certain tasks.

Moreover, the bill amends the Charter of human rights and freedoms [of Quebec, not Canada] to include in it that fundamental rights and freedoms must be exercised with respect for the secularism of the State.

The bill provides that its provisions prevail over those of any subsequent law, unless expressly stated to the contrary. It also provides that it cannot be interpreted as having an effect on the emblematic or toponymic elements of the cultural heritage of Québec that testify to its historical course.

The bill clarifies that it has effect regardless of certain provisions of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution Act, 1982.”