

The Canadian Secular Alliance invites our government to uphold equality in the marketplace of ideas, by eliminating the public subsidy to organized religion



What is the Canadian Secular Alliance (CSA)?

- The Canadian Secular Alliance is a non-profit, public policy research and advocacy organization advancing church-state separation and the neutrality of government in matters of religion. We seek to represent all Canadians, religious and non-religious alike, who believe that the Canadian government should adopt public policies consistent with a secular state.
- The CSA believes in church-state separation — the idea that the government of Canada should not favour one religion over others, or religious belief over non-belief. Our commitment is to liberal-democratic principles of equality, fairness and justice for all under the law, regardless of religious belief or lack thereof.

Does Canadian law grant charity status to organizations whose only purpose is the promotion of religious opinions?

- Yes. To be registered as a charity in Canada, an organization must meet 2 requirements:
 - (1) Its purpose must fall within one or more of the following 4 categories:
 - (i) the relief of poverty;
 - (ii) the advancement of education;
 - (iii) the advancement of religion; or
 - (iv) other purposes beneficial to the community that the courts have identified as charitable.
 - (2) It must be established for “public benefit”.

Should the promotion of religious opinions be a charitable activity?

- No. Under current law, organizations engaged in “advancing religion” enjoy the legal presumption that they meet the “public benefit” test without having to demonstrate that they actually benefit the public in any way. The CSA believes that if a religious organization wishes to relieve poverty, educate the public, or engage in other activities that have a clear public benefit, then it deserves charitable status. However, in the absence of any evidence to indicate otherwise, there is no reason to assume that promoting theism is beneficial to the public.

Isn't the promotion of religious opinions beneficial to society because it promotes ethics?

- To gain charity status under the "advancement of religion" category, government regulations state that an organization must have “an element of theistic worship, which means the worship of a deity or deities in the spiritual sense. To foster a belief in proper morals or ethics alone is not enough for a charity to register under this category.” Thus, the intent of current government policy is the promotion of theism, and not the promotion of morals or ethics.

Is financially supporting the promotion of religious ethical systems in the public interest?

- Not necessarily. Even if ethics are promoted indirectly as a byproduct of promoting theism, Canadians have a legitimate right to question what kind of ethics they are paying to promote. Many religions advocate practices that are fundamentally at odds with basic human rights as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For instance, many religious doctrines:
 - (i) oppose equal rights for men and women;
 - (ii) oppose equal rights for heterosexuals and homosexuals;
 - (iii) oppose the right to freedom of speech (condemn "blasphemy");
 - (iv) oppose the right to freedom of conscience (condemn "apostasy").
- As a result, Canada is in the dangerous position of financially supporting the indoctrination of citizens against its own liberal-democratic values.

Is it appropriate for government to decide that it is better for citizens to be religious?

- No. Just as it would be inappropriate for government to decide that one religion was superior to others and provide it alone with financial benefits, it is equally inappropriate for government to decide that it is better for an individual to belong to any religious denomination than none.

Do charities whose ONLY stated charitable purpose is “the advancement of religion” cost the public purse a lot of money?

- Yes. Data obtained from the Canada Revenue Agency’s Charities Directorate shows that in the 2007 tax year, there were over 26,000 registered charitable organizations that declared no programs other than those aimed at “advancing religion”. Calculations by the CSA indicate that these 26,000 entities cost the public purse over \$1 billion dollars. These “religion only” charities:
 - (i) receive millions in direct funding from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments;
 - (ii) cause the collection of less personal income tax (from people making donations towards the cause of “advancing religion” and receiving an official tax receipt);
 - (iii) are fully or partially exempt from paying property tax and property-transfer tax in most jurisdictions;
 - (iv) are partially exempt from paying sales tax in most jurisdictions;
 - (v) benefit from tax loopholes for religious officials: travel allowances, residence deductions, etc.

Could refusing financial subsidy from the state actually be in the best interests of religious organizations?

- Yes. Along with taxpayers' money comes the expectation of accountability. Canadians have a legitimate right to question the use of public funds to support religious organizations that, for instance, do not extend equality rights to women. Such organizations will inevitably come under public pressure to change their anti-liberal-democratic practices as a pre-condition of receiving public money. Declining government subsidy would eliminate this source of leverage and free religious groups to practice their beliefs without interference by the government or the courts.

Does the CSA support forcing religious organizations to adopt the secular values of the state?

- No. The CSA upholds the fundamental right of religious groups to freedom of expression and freedom of religion — including the right to express views and maintain internal practices that are sexist, bigoted, authoritarian, discriminatory, and deeply illiberal. The CSA simply rejects the idea that the state should be financing them. Religious groups should compete for followers in the marketplace of ideas without the advantage of public money, as all other ideologies must do.

Last updated May 2014

For more information, contact: info@secularalliance.ca

For media inquiries, contact the CSA Media Officer/Spokesperson at info@secularalliance.ca or 416-402-8856