

September 2016

Why should  
we care



Dear Friend,

*Why should we care?*

Why should Evangelicals care if a condo refuses to grant a Jewish family permission to build a temporary sukkah on their balcony during the 9-day Jewish festival of Sukkot?

Why should we care if an employer makes no effort to accommodate a staff's request for time off on Eid, the most holy day on the Islamic calendar?

Or if a province forces the Hutterian Brethren to submit to having their picture taken in order to get drivers' licenses even though such a requirement had been waived for decades?

Would we care if these cases hit closer to home? If we were forbidden to display a manger scene on our front lawns at Christmas time? If we were denied a request to not work on Easter Sunday? If Christian charitable organizations, including churches, were mandated to hire those who did not subscribe to their statements for faith in order to keep their charitable status? Or if Christian groups were not allowed to rent a public facility?

Let's be clear. The loss of religious freedom for any faith group means a loss of religious freedom for every other faith group in Canada.

Sadly, most Canadians embrace the view that freedom of religion should be confined to places of worship or private homes – that all *public* expressions of faith should be eradicated. But religious expression can't always be private, as evidenced by the above examples. That's not unreasonable, given that our deeply held beliefs impact how we live at *all times and in all places*.

*And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. 2 John 1:6*

In fact, religion impacts a variety of current public policy debates in areas as diverse as citizenship, security, employment, municipal zoning, education, healthcare, justice and human rights. That's why our courts are being asked to decide, with increasing frequency, the limits and protections afforded by the Canadian *Charter's* section 2(a) freedom of religion. In the past two decades alone, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has intervened in more than twenty-five court cases to ensure strong protection for religious freedom in Canada.

The Supreme Court of Canada is poised to hear another such case soon. This one involves the Ktunaxa, a native community in B.C. that wants to prevent a commercial developer from building a year-round ski resort on land that is of deep religious significance for them.

*over please...*

It is how the government and a lower court responded to their claim that their religious freedom was being violated that raises several important questions about the strength of our religious freedom guaranteed under the *Charter*. First, is it permissible for governments to simply ignore religious groups' concerns that a government action will violate their religious freedom? Or must governments at least consider the claim and seek to balance religious freedom with other freedoms and rights?

**"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands." 2 JOHN 1:6**

Second, does any belief that imposes a constraint on the freedoms of others who don't share the same belief lose the protection of s. 2(a)? Does the *Charter* only protect religious practices that are private?

If a religious freedom claim can be ignored by governments because they don't want to be troubled by it, then the freedom becomes hollow. Then there will be no requirement for governments to respect religious freedom in any meaningful way or to reasonably accommodate our freedom to worship and live out our faith if it may impact others.

Freedom of religion must include not only the right to believe, but the right to practice and manifest one's faith. Without the latter, the former is meaningless.

How governments respond to claims from religious groups and how religious freedom is understood by the Courts impact us all – this is what the Supreme Court will be considering in the *Ktunaxa* case. As such, we can't afford not to be there. The EFC and the Christian Legal Fellowship are preparing to jointly intervene in this case.

The stakes are high, especially given the possibility that the decision in this case could very well have a direct bearing on the outcome of the Trinity Western University's religious freedom case\*, which will also be heard by the Supreme Court after this case. I invite you now to participate in our efforts to stand up for religious freedom in our courts in this and other cases through your prayers and financial support. Will you help prevent the erosion of religious freedom in Canada?

Sincerely,



Bruce Clemenger  
President

\* The Court will be asked to decide whether provincial law societies can refuse to accredit TWU's law school and stigmatize and even exclude its graduating lawyers from practicing law in their provinces because this private Christian school requires its students to abstain from "sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman."

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