

Queer Ontario Queers and Religion Statement

Preamble

Our western heritage of civil government and the creation of civil society have been taken for granted as a system that has safely insulated religion to individual pursuits and the private domain. This inheritance, with its stress on rational thought, scientific inquiry and secular government defused the force of superstition and reduced the dominance of religion over social and political life.

Civil society must understand that our communities have been the subject of persecution by some religions for thousands of years. In the Bible, Leviticus 20:13 demands that homosexuals be put to death and this is what they did; stoning us to death during antiquity. In the middle ages, churches organized the mass murder of queers by burning us alive at the stake, lighting “faggots” of wood at our feet. Right up to the mid-nineteenth century, church leaders in the British Empire gave their blessing to the state execution of homosexuals. And most religious institutions said nothing about the systematic extermination of thousands of queers in concentration camps by the Nazis prior to and during WW2.

Religious ideas have made a forceful re-emergence over the last few decades, making claims on politics and on civil society more frequently and with greater urgency. The reappearance of religion in politics has set in motion an increasingly acute series of collisions between secular democratic institutions, issues of governance and the claims of “religious freedom,” particularly over issues of sexuality and our queer communities. Over the last several years, Queer Ontario has devoted a significant amount of energy fighting for the rights of queer youth in publicly funded Catholic Schools across Ontario. During the course of our work, we encountered significant resistance by representatives of the Catholic School system and supporting Catholic religious authorities in Ontario who marshaled their Pastoral Guidelines in an effort to undermine support to same-sex students in Ontario Catholic Schools through establishing Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and instituting anti-discrimination policies. As such, and given the ongoing history of struggles between queer communities and religious institutions, we have developed a policy statement reflecting our organization’s position on religion and our communities.

Queer Ontario’s Position on Religion and its Relationship to our Queer Communities

1. Queer Ontario strongly holds that all queer people, including youth, as stipulated by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and by the *Canadian Human Rights Code*, have full human rights protection to enjoy security under the law and to pursue their full potential in Canadian society.

2. Queer Ontario recognizes that achieving full human rights also means civil society must work toward the elimination of discrimination and oppression against queers and provide our communities with support that is not undermined by religious groups that seek to suppress, restrict, discriminate and/or dehumanize our communities as a whole or as individuals.
3. Queer Ontario calls for an end to all discrimination leveled at queer communities by religious and faith-based institutions.
4. Queer Ontario consequently denounces religious and faith-based institutions which overstep their bounds and seek to exclude, discriminate, oppress and dehumanize queer communities, identities and expressions and which seek to subvert and undermine civil society's deliberative and liberal traditions.
5. Queer Ontario recognizes the idea that diverse religious, faith-based, philosophical and personal belief systems are part of living in our multicultural and pluralistic society.
6. Queer Ontario recognizes the rights of all individuals including queers to hold religious, faith-based, philosophical and personal beliefs and to practice religious/spiritual observance.
7. Queer Ontario recognizes that religious and faith-based institutions are not monolithic, that they experience internal disagreements over doctrine, and some religious individuals and groups do support and include our communities.
8. Queer Ontario recognizes the rights of those who choose not to adhere to any religious beliefs, and who may express views that are atheistic, agnostic and/or deeply skeptical or critical of religion and spiritual traditions.
9. Queer Ontario recognizes that religious, faith-based and spiritual traditions can impart valuable knowledge and ethical principles about how to live well and love in community with others.
10. Queer Ontario holds that the opportunity to seek out religious, spiritual and faith-based knowledge be based on individual freedom of choice, is responsive to an inter-faith dialogue or an ecumenical spirit, which does not dictate any singular truth upon civil society from a position of authority.
11. Queer Ontario holds that knowledge about living and loving in community with others is also available from many traditions that draw from a rich history of diverse social movements and activist communities.

12. Queer Ontario holds that when it comes to civil society, open deliberation and non-exclusionary human rights development must take precedence over religious knowledge and authority.

13. Queer Ontario supports policies, community-based efforts and social justice movements that work to alleviate and eliminate all forms of systemic oppression including class, racial, colonial, age, gender, sexuality and ableist forms of discrimination.

14. Queer Ontario opposes the use of religious and faith-based rights as a pretense for discrimination, oppression and marginalization, and we strongly oppose their use of unprofessional conversion and reparative therapy.

15. Queer Ontario recognizes the need for individuals and communities to sustain ongoing dialogue and discussion regarding the intersection of sexualities and religious systems of knowledge, belief and moral/ethical principles. These discussions should be held in good faith, and strive to be ecumenical, democratic and inclusive.

16. Queer Ontario urges civil society to recognize that numerous individuals in our communities have been the subject of discrimination, oppression, marginalization and even violence proliferated by individuals who base their prejudiced views of queer people on their religious beliefs.