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Wrong role for Scientologists

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Sectarian propaganda, however diluted and well-disguised, has no place in the classrooms of Ontario's public schools.

With that basic principle firmly in mind, Metro school boards should say, "Thanks, but no thanks," to members of the Church of Scientology who want to present a drug-education program to students starting in Grade 3.

According to a report by Ellie Teshler in The Saturday Star, Scientologists for Social Action are mounting an intensive campaign to introduce their Drug-Free Schools program of lectures and workshops into Metro's classrooms. They're seeking support from other Metro churches and from celebrities, especially popular music stars with an appeal to young people.

The ostensible object of the exercise — to teach young people from an early age about the dangers of drug abuse — is, of course, laudable. Few Ontario citizens, be they parents, teachers, social workers, policemen or clergymen, can fail to be concerned about the dangers of drug abuse among young people. Indeed, a 1979 survey of Ontario students by the Addiction Research Foundation showed an increased use of drugs such as marijuana, non-prescription stimulants and LSD. Alcohol abuse, too, is found to be a problem among some Ontario students.

So there's clearly a need for programs in the schools to teach young people about the hazards of drug abuse. But it is the school authorities, not the representatives of churches whose motives are mixed, who should do the educating.

The Toronto Board of Education, for example,

starts factual education about drug use as early as Kindergarten; by Grade 4, pupils have been taught the dangers of marijuana use and glue-sniffing. Other schools, using their own resources, can surely do as well.

And if outside help is required in a particular school where there may be a particular problem, there's no need to call the churches. There are independent experts — from the Addiction Research Foundation, from local public health departments, even from the police — who can be called on.

If the Church of Scientology or, indeed, any other church wants to get involved in drug education, let it do so on its own turf. Church-sponsored programs belong in parish halls, in the private homes of parishioners or even in public places where people have a free choice of whether or not to enrol. They do not belong among a captive audience in a public school classroom.

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