

# By debasing religion, Canadian intellectuals are playing a dangerous game

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by Conrad Black



The case of Jonathan Bradley, a fourth-year student at Ryerson University and a contributor to the student newspaper the *Eyeopener*, from which he claims to have been fired because of his rigorous adherence to a conservative version of Roman Catholicism, raises a number of broader questions about the status of freedom of expression in Canada. The matter is now before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, which will be invited to comment on the extent to which people are free to express their views on subjects commonly referred to as “diversity” and “inclusiveness,” as well as demarcations of gender and sexuality. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms does refer to God in a manner that incites the inference that those who composed, sponsored and enacted it believe that some sort of divine intelligence exists. That was certainly the belief of the principal author and proponent of the charter, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Canada remains a society that professes to believe in

religious freedom, which means that individuals may practice their religions, as long as it is a recognized religious belief or an innocuous form of personal or group religiosity. While it is difficult to be precise about this, approximately 80 per cent of Canadians identify themselves as belonging to some religious denomination, and 35 to 40 per cent of Canadians practice their religion overtly. If the number of those who do so privately, however idiosyncratically, within reason, is added, the total number of religiously minded people in this country could be as high as half the population. There is scarcely a trace of this in the media's treatment of religious matters within Canada, however. The overwhelming slant of intellectual comment, and certainly media comment, is that religion is an outworn concept that has been reduced to the status of mere superstition or habit.

Though it is not often put in this way, and most still retain the civility and courtesy to consider religion to be a personal matter to each individual and not a suitable subject to question people about unless they are intimates, the prevailing view is that religious belief is quaint, antiquated, logically indefensible, has historically produced ignorance and misplaced sectarian belligerency and oppression, and has been steadily disintegrating under the irresistible advances of the Enlightenment and the triumphant march of science for at least 500 years. It is generally conceded that many members of the clergy of all denominations are well-intentioned people and that many of them achieve a great deal in assisting the disadvantaged, troubled and demoralized.

There is no possible dispute that, historically, Canada was a Judeo-Christian country. The French words of the national anthem still refer to French-Canadians knowing how "to bear the sword and the cross." Despite the widespread prejudice that religious belief is intellectually primitive and that more sophisticated minds are agnostic or atheist, the most admired Canadian intellectuals have been religious men.

Northrop Frye was a United Church minister. Marshall McLuhan was a diligently practising Roman Catholic. Jordan Peterson will not publicly state his religious views but acknowledges that he "behaves as if I believe in God." At some point, the general drift of the prejudice of conventional wisdom to ignore, and even to mock, thoughtful religiosity is going to provoke the great deferential mass of religious opinion, invisible though much of it is, into outright resistance to the faddish disparagement of the intellectual legitimacy of theology.

The implications of assuming that Jesus Christ was a charlatan who had no divine inspiration whatever, that all that is salvageable from Christianity is homiletics about the Golden Rule and being a good person, that although our existence cannot be logically disputed it is out of the question that there was any creator, that humans only have more active conscientious thoughts than most other animals because we are smarter, that there are no spiritual forces at all, that all miracles are frauds or hitherto undiscovered science and, most perversely, that every day the depredations of questing science bring us closer to a plenitude of knowledge, constitute a collective intellectual suicide. If the informal coalition of militant and merely dismissive atheists and anti-theists actually stamps out official toleration of godliness and spirituality, it will create a vacuum that humans cannot resist the temptation to occupy.

The practice of the ancients of elevating the most illustrious among them to the status of deities is demonstrably dangerous. No historically informed person would dispute that Alexander the Great, and Julius and Augustus Caesar were great men; they were, but they were not deities as they had themselves officially described. The leader of the French First Republic's committee of public safety, Maximilien Robespierre, celebrated the festival of the supreme being where the Eiffel Tower now stands; he was cranking up to become a middleman

between Providence and France when he was deposed and executed. Hitler and Stalin both regularly referred to God conversationally as if He were some sort of cosmic leader of the opposition, their version of Satan. The human spirit is not to be dispensed with so easily: it is a profoundly rooted human intellectual and intuitive conception where hope, faith and logic conjoin. It deserves greater respect even from non-believers than it is currently accorded in this society.

Returning to Jonathan Bradley, of course he has a perfect right to express Roman Catholic views and to write his interpretation of the Bible. There has been no allegation that he incited hatred toward others or ridiculed the opinions of others. When he was sacked in June of last year from the *Eyeopener*, he was informed that "members of our community, especially queer, trans and non-binary folks, would no longer feel safe if you're associated with the publication." This is unutterable nonsense; Bradley was not threatening those "folks." Inclusion in all organizations should be based on unbiased adjudication of merit and, if it is, diversity will automatically result at some point. There are only two sexes; it is possible to change between them and all adults should determine their own sexuality freely and without inflicting or being subject to coercion. All people, whatever their heritage, affiliation, orientation or beliefs, should be confident of themselves. Their dignity and composure will be assured by their own character and conduct and not by suppressing the right of others to espouse different opinions.

Canadians, more than most nationalities, are becoming absurd. Our human rights tribunals should be feverishly preoccupied with a counter-offensive on the woke tyranny. Most of them haven't figured that out yet; best of luck to Jonathan Bradley.

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