

What does Hanukkah have to do with Quebec's Bill 59?

Yesterday I received a telephone call from my friend, colleague and sometime writing partner, Professor Salim Mansur, with whom I have written op-eds for the *Canadian National Post*.

As a young man, when I looked at newspapers and magazines, I used to automatically assume that all the writers knew each other and spent time together. After many years of writing for magazines and newspapers I have discovered that this is rarely the case. And so, I would like to think that our working friendship is somewhat unique.

Salim wished me and my family a Happy Chanukah and soon after we began talking again about Bill 59, which he has criticized in this same newspaper. He has argued that so many Muslims like himself came to Canada to escape Shariah and thought control and to enjoy the secular freedoms of the country. I pointed out that there are also sound Biblical reasons for opposing the Bill 59. Salim asked me to explain. Here is a written version of what I told him.

As the Quebec legislature debates Bill 59, not only are there solid democratic and political reasons to oppose it, but we must also remember the historical and religious reasons why it should not become law. A few days ago the *National Post* wrote about the pernicious nature of this bill;

Bill 59 assigns new powers to the Quebec Human Rights Commission (QHRC) to combat hate speech, as well as a variety of other provisions meant to protect against extremism by censoring speech that promotes "fear of the other." Ominously, the bill would allow the QHRC to pursue websites that in its estimation describe and denounce Islamism. Article 6 would

“give the QHRC the power to initiate legal proceedings before the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal without having to wait for complaints from the public.” Frémont explained that he planned to use the requested powers to sue those critical of certain ideas, “people who would write against ... the Islamic religion ... on a website or on a Facebook page.”

The author of Bill 59 is Jacques Fremont. The Post continues:

A presidential selection committee has unanimously approved the appointment of Jacques Frémont as the University of Ottawa’s 30th president and vice-chancellor, effective next July. Frémont will succeed Allan Rock, who has served in those roles since 2008.

Now you may ask, “What does Bill 59” have to do with Chanukah? A lot! This past week Jews around the world celebrated Chanukah, and so many of them are joined by friends and well-wishers from other faiths and communities. That is because Chanukah commemorates a miracle.

During the second century BC, when fighting for the liberation of Jerusalem from pagan oppressors coming south from what is now Damascus, (in today’s war-torn, ISIS-infested Syria), the Judea-based Jewish (Maccabee) freedom fighters liberated the Jewish city and Temple of Jerusalem. The Maccabees found insufficient olive oil to light the temple candles, but the little oil they found lasted for eight days; a miracle!

However, the real miracle of Chanukah and the revolt of the Maccabees is that it constitutes the first extensively documented national revolt in favor of religious freedom. For that and other reasons, the books of the Maccabees are still part of the Christian Bible, both Catholic and Protestant, in various versions translated from the ancient Greek.

The biblical books of the Maccabees and their message of religious freedom are common pillars of Judaism and Christianity. At a deep level, they are testaments to the fact

that without freedom of religion, there is no freedom of speech, and without freedom of speech, one cannot have democracy.

The Maccabees are not only heroes of Jewish and Christian writings, but until recently they were a recurrent theme in Western literature and art. If you visit the Church of St. Andrews in Cologne, Germany, you will see a beautifully adorned casket which the priests say contains relics of the Maccabees. The most widely-known example of the artistic presence of the Maccabees here in the West is accessible to any undergraduate musicology student in universities, or concert goer for that matter – that is Handel's magisterial oratorio, "Judas Maccabeus."

This Baroque oratorio was first performed in London, England on April 1, 1747. It is said that the Jewish community at the time congratulated and thanked the German born Handel for portraying a Jewish biblical figure in a heroic, as opposed to demonic light. Earlier still, in 1601, The English poet William Houghton wrote a play called Judas Maccabeus. Following in his footsteps across the Atlantic Henry Wadsworth Longfellow later wrote a poem about the Maccabees, called "Judas Maccabeus." After WWII in newly liberated Italy, a Grade B sword and sandal film called The Maccabees, was produced and directed by Italians. Even the unhinged but devout Catholic film star, Mel Gibson has recently suggested that he may make a film about the Maccabees. Here is the link to the remarkably pro-Jewish Italian "sword and sandal" version:

Today, the tiny democracy of Israel is defending itself against the onslaught of radical Muslims from what was once ancient Syria, all inspired by the teachings and policy of the Muslim Brotherhood, whether they call themselves Al Qaeda, ISIS, Hamas or Hezbollah. One of their legislative goals is to make any criticism of Islam in the West, illegal. In this capacity the Israelis find themselves once again in the

position of the Maccabees, defending freedom of speech and religion, against tyrants and war lords in the Middle East, not just for the Jews of Israel, but for all peace-loving Muslims in Israel and the region, as well as the threatened Christians of the Middle East and, and other minorities such as the Mandaeans of Iraq and the Yazidi, whose women have been raped and enslaved by ISIS in the thousands.

Here in Canada and the USA our basic freedom of expression in both the media and in the academy is under threat, especially from supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and its ever changing number of front organizations that seem to keep one step ahead of law enforcement; for this same organization manages to preach and facilitate world jihad and home grown terror in so many Canadian and American mosques. The Brotherhood is active and well-funded on college campuses and universities. It is the prime purveyor of radical Islam and is supported by fellow traveling cultural marxist ideologues. Their greatest self-declared enemy is the state of Israel, which they would boycott and destroy if they could.

And so if Bill 59 becomes law, criticism of Israel's declared enemies can become illegal in Canada. It follows then that the defense of Israel on campus and in the media will become "forbidden." Not surprisingly, this kind of legislation has been encouraged everywhere the Brotherhood operates.

Whether or not Fremont is a quiet sympathizer of the Brotherhood, his legislation could easily come from their "playbook." He is clearly a "fellow traveler" or, more bluntly, an activist in the cause of radical Islam. If he one days announces that he is unaware of the parallels, even worse, for he is an academic and this information is readily available to him. If he succeeds, then even those citizens who are uninterested in the defense of that small embattled democracy on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, will have lost their own freedom of expression, first in Quebec and then perhaps in the rest of the country.

This attack on freedom of speech and academic freedom will not stop there, but it will continue to undermine the one thousand years of personal freedom that distinguishes the Biblically inspired English-speaking world from other cultures, that is those who are inspired by the example of the Maccabees. If this latest attack goes unopposed, in the end, none of us will be free!

Imagine a scenario where Jacques Fremont, future President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Ottawa invokes Bill 59 to muzzle any student or professor at his university who is critical of radical Islam, even if he or she were born Muslim. It is right out of the pages of George Orwell's novel, *1984*. The festival of Chanukah is designed to remind us that ancient religious freedoms must be defended today in the present, as we celebrate their origins in past times.

Listen to Handel. He knew it to be true.

First published in the