



**ANGLICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CANADA
TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN COMMUNION**

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Primate and Metropolitan**



**CANADA DAY MESSAGE
July 1, 2018
Octave Day of St. John the Baptist**

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him.... For so is the will of God."

1 Peter 2:13-15.

Of recent weeks in the news, national leaders have been heard to quote Holy Scripture in defence of their policies and politics. In particular, the use of New Testament passages admonishing Christians to be obedient to the civil authority. Now this is not new. Rulers and statesmen have been using the Bible for all sorts of purposes through the centuries. Some honourable, as a way to test laws and policies against the commandments of God; others less honourable, as a way to defend their immoral or unjust laws and policies, and as a means to coerce people of faith to obey them. One way, as I said, is honourable and godly; the other is not.

On the opposite side of this coin, is the place of religion and religious belief in the civil discourse of the nation. What, if any, is the role of faith in the public square? Can church and state, religious belief and public policy, co-exist? Should one influence the other, or should there be separate spheres of influence distinct in their object and authority? And what of religious belief and practice in a pluralistic diverse society such as the one we live in, Canada; whose 151st anniversary of Confederation we commemorate today?

The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* declares in Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* declares in the Preamble: "Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." The *Charter* goes on in Section 2 to declare: "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association."

Men and women through centuries past, and on into our own day, have fought and died for these fundamental freedoms. So, what then do we make of recent events in the pronouncements of national leaders and the decisions of our highest courts? For these fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of religion and belief, are essential to our national well-being, and crucial to the continuance of social accord, human dignity, and the progress of western civilization.

Dr. Os Guinness, in his book *The Global Public Square: Religious Freedom and The Making of a World Safe for Diversity*, writes of the grave new menace from within the West resulting from a convergence of very different social trends that together form what he calls 'a perfect storm.'

He writes: "One trend is the general disdain for religion that leads to a discounting of religious freedom, sharpened by a newly aggressive atheism and a heavy-handed separationism, that both call for the exclusion of religion from public life. Another is the overzealous attempt of certain activists of the sexual revolution to treat freedom of religion and belief as an obstruction to their own rights that must be dismantled forever."

Dr. Guinness postulates that “each of these trends represents a serious crisis in itself. But when considered together, and especially in light of the generally maladroitness of governmental responses, they are also a window into the decline of the West.” He goes on to argue: “Where religion is disdained, freedom of religion and belief is discounted.”

Nothing could be more evidence of this trend than the two most recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada dealing with Trinity Western University, where the constitutional right of freedom of religion and belief within a private Christian institution was nullified in the place of a statutory mandate demanding LGBTQ rights be imposed and accommodated.

This ruling is but one of a growing trend lending credence to the idea that freedom of religion, and the free exercise of belief, are obstructions to other more politically correct rights, and therefore must be discounted and dismantled.

As Christians, as people of faith, and as citizens of Canada, we need to be aware of the growing threat of militant secularism and its impact on our fundamental rights and freedoms.

We should also be aware, and be prepared to counter, the arguments of those in our society who profess ‘no belief’. Those who regard themselves as secularists or even atheists, yet hold to their philosophies of life, their moral values, their rituals and traditions, as (in the words of Dr. Guinness) a ‘functional equivalent of religion’. Those who seek to impose their functional equivalent of religious beliefs and values on the rest of society, while at the same time decrying Christian beliefs and values. Again, Dr. Guinness writes: “The nonreligious and the antireligious also need reminding that their secularist beliefs are ultimate beliefs too.”

If such ‘functional equivalents of religion’ are to be recognized and even imposed, then all religious beliefs and values, including Christianity, must be recognized and allowed to be practiced in “a free and democratic society” – using the language of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his book *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, picks up this argument:

Atheism deserves better than the new atheists whose methodology consists in criticizing religion without understanding it, quoting texts without contexts, taking exceptions as the rule, confusing folk belief with reflective theology, abusing, mocking, ridiculing, caricaturing and demonizing religious faith and holding it responsible for all the crimes against humanity.

Increasingly in our national discourse freedom of religion is being distorted to mean freedom *from* religion. The militant secularists would have the practice of religion, and in particular Christian belief, be limited and restricted to private individuals within the confines of their homes and places of worship. To the absolute exclusion of any religious beliefs, values or morals within the public square or national debate. All the while promoting, demanding and even imposing on our “free and democratic society” their own beliefs, values, morality and lifestyles.

But we know that as Christians our identity, our outlook on life, our beliefs, values and morals, including our civic responsibilities, are formed out of our faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Gospel. And these in turn influence our citizenship and social discourse, together with its duties, responsibilities and obligations.

Each of us as citizens of Canada and disciples of Jesus Christ need to do our part to ensure that freedom of religion and belief are more than words in our Constitution; more than a private behind closed doors restricted practice. That as Christians our voice and our vote are heard in the corridors of power, reflected in the laws enacted by our parliaments, respected in our courts of law, and spoken truthfully in our institutions of learning.

Let us remember once again on this Canada Day 2018 that we are a nation and people who ‘recognize the supremacy of God’. That our rights and freedoms are only as strong as is our faith in the One who gives us those freedoms. That as citizens of Canada, but also citizens of the ‘heavenly country’ spoken of in Holy Scripture, we can only expect God to prosper our ways and to bless our land when we ourselves, and as a nation, make our ways His ways.

The blessings of freedom, peace and justice are not the products of politics or good government, nor of a benevolent ‘separationism’ – they are the fruits of faith and righteousness. In the petition of our National Anthem, let us continue to pray: *God keep our land glorious and free!*