

Opinion

LEAVE POLITICS TO POLITICIANS

Who asked churchmen to blather on free trade?

OTTAWA — "Get thee to a nunnery!" Or to a convent, monastery, temple, Bible school, yeshiva, mosque, mandir or ashram, or wherever else you've stashed away the God you used to talk about — that's what I yearn to shout when I hear clergymen telling me what to think about free trade.

On Monday, Dr. Anne Squire, moderator of the United Church of Canada, and Archbishop Michael Peers, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, denounced the planned Jan. 2 signing of the U.S.-Canada free trade pact as an "empty and meaningless" ceremony.

Squire, mouthing bogeyman words about big business, assured a parliamentary committee that Brian Mulroney, elected just over three years ago with the largest majority in our history, "is not really representing all the people of Canada." Peers, warning about awful "transnational companies," announced that the agreement simply "has no roots in Canadian society."

Forgive me, but it seems to me that these eminent clerics have no roots in trade or the economy. And, unless they studied political science instead of theology, I can't imagine why they think we care about their prejudices in politics.

Mixing religion and politics is only an angel-on-a-pin less typical than mixing religion and money. In this country, the meddling of turbulent priests in politics has grown so pervasive that it would be frightening if most clerics' politicking were not so laughable.

Throughout history, church and state have tangled in two ways, one with the church leading, the other with the state guiding the moves.

In the West, the last two centuries have witnessed sometimes lethal struggles to split church and state. The germs of this lurked in Locke, Rousseau and Voltaire and in their spiritual step-children, the U.S. Constitution and the French Revolution. Throughout the 19th century, Britain saw the falling of restrictions against Jews and Ca-



My
view

Keith
Spicer

tholics, then a surge to full equality of dissident Protestant churches.

Why dust off these old stories? Because when clergymen like Squire and Peers get away with intruding on political issues of no conceivable bearing on religion or morality, they are nibbling at gains our ancestors bled for.

The biggest of these gains was freedom of conscience. And when clerics claim — as these two do — either divine inspiration or divine blessing, and trundle their narrow political biases into the pulpit, they

are, in fact, abusing their office to constrain believers' consciences.

Believers, perhaps we should recall, in God. Believers who, when they go to church, search in vain in the Apostles' Creed to find a diatribe against free trade.

But weren't western churches too other-worldly barely a generation ago? Was not Pierre Berton, two decades ago, moved to flail suburban churchiness in The Comfortable Pew?

Yes. And in the wake of their awakening, the churches did some marvellous things. They opened doors and windows on the world, broadened their social action to embrace neglected needs and minorities, to become (as every tired Sixties institution had to) "relevant."

But in the past quarter-century, our mainstream churches have placed themselves in the hands of political ideologues, bureaucrats of the self-congratulatory left who think that compassion and half-baked 19th-century Marxism make

perfect substitutes for clear thinking.

Here is what clear thinking might produce for the muddled ayatollahs at United and Anglican HQs: Our membership continues to plummet; we can't even attract the young people whom "relevance" was supposed to attract; yet churches such as the Pentecostal grow dramatically — while emphasizing pure faith, salvation and decent living. Is it possible we are barking up the wrong tree?

Squire and Peers tell Mulroney that the vote of Sept. 4, 1984, did not happen. They tell him he dabbles in empty and meaningless ceremonies.

If they wish to see empty and vain ceremonies, they should go to their own churches. They will see there not comfortable pews but a flock — what's left of it — in disarray.

They will see an elderly and declining membership mystified by their chief pastors' off-the-wall preaching against "transnationals" and the evils of free trade. Congre-

gations wondering why, in God's name, they should be tithing for the ideologues' pet obsessions about big business, lesbian priests, and Nicaragua.

The Church of England used to be called the Tory party at prayer. Now both Anglican and United Church bureaucrats (plus a few Catholic ones) resemble the NDP at prayer.

The smugness of these ecclesiastical busybodies carries them serenely through any and every political and economic issue. But their know-it-all pride blinds them to the very reason for their calling: to help the little, ordinary people find God.

In their obscene way, even Tammy and Jim Bakker did better at slaking spiritual thirst. While siphoning money from the gullible, at least they spoke about God and the human heart.

Personally, I value Tammy's view of free trade as much as I do that of our lofty clerics.

(Keith Spicer is editor of the Ottawa Citizen.)

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New powers

The B.C. Teachers Federation should feel a little sheepish these days about how loudly it cried wolf last spring over what it perceived was the government's attempt through Bill 20 to erode its involvement in setting education policy.

One of the key points in Bill 20, the Teaching Profession Act, was the proposal for a College of Teachers to set education standards and adjudicate in matters of teacher responsibility and competence.

The BCTF called for a one-day walkout over Bill 20, and the teachers' continued state of agitation was a major factor in the decision by the B.C. Federation of Labor to call the province-wide day of protest over Bills 19 and 20 last June.

Finally realizing that whether teachers liked it or not, the Vander Zalm government was going to pass Bill 20 and set up a College of Teachers, the BCTF wisely decided that having a role in the future of education was infinitely better than sitting on the sidelines.

This week, the College of Teachers was born.

It has 20 members; five of them are government appointees and 14 of the other 15 are members of the BCTF. Results were delayed from the Peace River electoral zone, but a BCTF candidate is expected to be elected there.

So why the fuss?

Whether it liked the procedure or not, the BCTF now dons the cloak of a professional

organization, and can preside over formation of education policy and sit in judgment of professional standards of teachers.

And there isn't even a flip side of the coin — as teachers in school districts across the province vote on what type of representation they want in negotiations with their boards, it's a safe bet that most will respond to the BCTF's well-orchestrated campaign and vote to retain the federation as their bargaining agent.

So the BCTF will be both a union with the right to bargain and even to strike, and the standard-setting, policy-drafting organization for teachers.

Can this be the same group that has been bleating for months that the government was trying to find ways to wipe it out?

One could wage a spirited argument that the BCTF may have been given too much authority — that the province's school boards will be at a considerable disadvantage when they have to deal with an organization that has involvement in both personnel and wage matters, and educational standards.

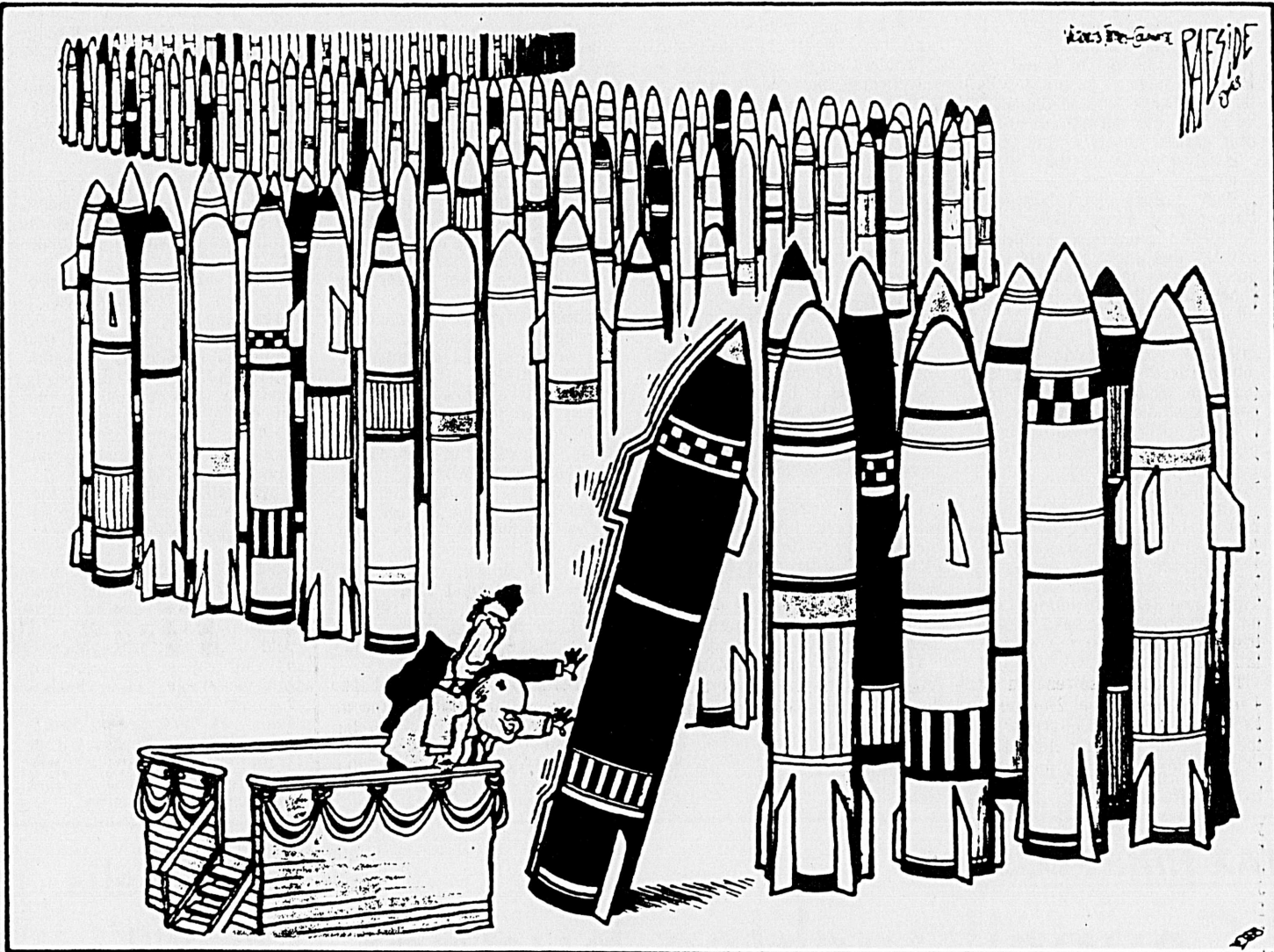
The BCTF now has a chance to prove it really means what it has said all along — that its overriding concern in the wrangles with government has been the quality of education for British Columbians.

We'd like to take it at its word.

Please write

The Citizen invites readers to express their views on topics of public interest. However, unless there are good reasons for anonymity, letters to the editor will be published only if signed by the writer. Address and phone number of the writer must also be included so that authenticity of the letter can be checked.

Letters must be free of libel, personal abuse or other impropriety.



Your opinion

Rescue efficient

My name is Paul Simpson. I live and work 90 miles north of Prince George. Today, people are very quick to criticize everything and everyone for anything that happens. I would like to compliment some people who I feel deserve to be complimented.

On Nov. 26, while travelling to Prince George, I came across an accident just north of Bear Lake. It was a serious accident and I stopped to help as best I could. In a very short time an ambulance arrived and the first aid people went to help the injured. Even the police and a second ambulance arrived and before I knew it a third ambulance and a rescue truck also arrived. Next, helicopters were landing on the road, the ambulance and rescue people were working to save the lives of the injured and soon the injured were on their way to the hospital.

I live and work north of Prince George, and never realized just how fast the emergency services can get out there to help. We are very fortunate to have such services and after talking with some of these people I feel we should compliment them for the job they are doing.

The ambulance people, some of them were volunteers, did a fantastic job in caring for the injured. The paramedics arrived and soon the injured were off to hospital, in helicopters with paramedics.

Watching for poachers

"Regarding the article on page 10 of Friday's Citizen, where it was reported that two prime bull moose were shot by that most despicable kind of "hunter," a poacher, it is nice to know that someone had the fortitude to report the atrocity.

The author of the article is quite correct in stating that the moose shot did not belong to the poacher — they belong to all of us, hunters and non-hunters alike. Some of us pay good money for the privilege

of hunting, and that is what it is — a privilege. It is not a right.

But I have a question: are the conservation officers just sitting around waiting for someone else to spot the poacher's vehicle, or are they actively looking for it?

Since a criminal offence has taken place, surely the RCMP can check the motor vehicle branch records. There are a maximum of 2,600 licence plates that start with 51, and end with K. How many of those are blue Ford pickup trucks, with or without a canopy? Since the vehicle color is included on the registration papers, it should not be too onerous a task to make a list of the possible suspects.

Or, perhaps the penalty for poaching two moose is too low and meaningless to make such a search worthwhile. Suspecting this may be the case, you can be damn sure that I for one will be keeping an eye open for that blue Ford pickup, licence number 51 — K. S. Johnson

Racist comments?

I feel very glad that Mr. Gilgan has focused public attention on an area that I believe needs a lot of public scrutiny.

For too long all we have heard are statements condemning the average Canadian's culture. We are told we stole from native (Indian). We don't understand the native. We don't do enough for the native. If I believed all this crap, I would do the decent thing and kill myself.

To a stranger who read this proliferation of anti-white propaganda, only one picture could emerge. Yet, having lived in this community for over 12 years, a less-sympathetic picture is perceived.

I believe every possible realistic attempt has been made to allow the native to join our club. We give special native tutors in schools, for students who skip out.

We have special native teacher training programs. There are all kinds of government hand-outs. The list goes on and costs the average taxpayer a lot of money.

The native response to this

seems to be: "It's the wrong kind of help," or "Give us more."

Our response is always the same — a guilt-riddled reaction and more apologies and more freebies. Why don't we just give them everything? We feel guilty about our mills because they destroy the "traditional way of life." Let's forget that these mills also pay the hand-outs.

Let's all feel guilty — burn them down. We are blamed because "they drink poison, cleaning solvent or anti-freeze." We criticize them and we are called racist by a great white politician.

Talk to the police about this group. Talk to nurses who have the misfortune to work in "emergency" particularly at the weekend. Talk to educators who constantly have to go eight-tenths, not 50 per cent to get along with this group.

The incidence of problems is much higher with this group. Yes, I am glad Bill Gilgan has raised this issue and I hope that rather than just fire the guy and brush his remarks under the racist carpet, some sincere person will have a damn hard look at this whole sad situation.

I have had this on my chest for a while and in closing would like to add that I have no axe to grind and I do admire the warmth and honesty of our native peoples, however I can't stand idly back and allow this issue to be resolved in the all too familiar way — lies and scapegoats.

I just wish we could see the good ones who are still in the bush — we need some good native ambassadors — not lawyers.

John Fogg

Correction

The name Mrs. R Strand erroneously appeared at the bottom of a letter to the editor in Wednesday's edition of The Citizen, about the plight of a dog that was injured in a traffic accident. The error was spotted by Mrs. Rose Strand, who telephoned our office to inform us that she had not written the letter.

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