

Imagine no religion



Walking to work I pass a shop window display—a memorial to those who died in New York on September 11—with John Lennon’s words lettered on a sign:

“Imagine there’s no heaven
Above us only sky...
Imagine there’s no countries
It isn’t hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too.”

Religion may be more on our minds these days in the aftermath of the terrorist strikes. We are told that the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity were religious fanatics, part of a jihad or holy war against the U.S. The sign in the shop window holds out Lennon’s belief that a world rid of religion would be a better place.

So much evil has been done in the name of religion throughout history, from Spanish Inquisition to Irish IRA bombings, one might sympathize with Lennon’s hope. In Alberta, Lennon’s dream seems to be coming true. Religion here, as elsewhere in Canada, is in decline. But of all the provinces, Alberta is the least religious.

In this issue we include a transcript of a CJSR radio program broadcast within 10 days of the attack on the U.S. (p. 36). It examines the deeper reasons behind the event. Debbie Culbertson movingly describes her struggle to find an accepting community in which to express her faith (p. 44). Graham Chandler explores the changing religious affiliations and practices of Albertans (p. 30). Arran Timms discovers the religious diversity of the province and, in his quest for an indigenous religious architecture, the persistence of tradition in

Alberta’s churches, synagogues, temples and mosques (p. 22).

In her book *The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery, and Meaning in an Ordinary Church*, Margaret Visser asks “why have churches at all? The very idea of having a church building must be questioned, given Christianity’s founding story. For a Christian not to ask this question is to deny something that lies at the heart of Christianity. God or truth is not confined to the Church, let alone by church buildings. Every Christian should remain deeply suspicious of churches—both as buildings and as institutions; it is part of following Christ.”

Reginald Bibby, a professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge, has made his life work the study of religion. In *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* he says that religion can help us in our search for meaning, our need for dignity, our yearning for social justice, right relationships and community, our thirst for the numinous. He quotes Aurelio Peccei: “Humanity, although a prisoner of materialistic motivations, has a profound need for spirituality. We humans feel that we are living in a dangerous void, that we must restore communion with spheres that transcend these motivations.”

We may be able to live without religion but it is very difficult to live without faith: the conviction that life is sacred, that good is stronger than evil, that love is the omnipotent force in the world.

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