

# Act of God

## Dennis Bartels

8 April 2015

To: His Excellency Cardinal Vittorio  
Schiaperelli, DD  
Holy See, The Vatican

From: Fr. Patrick O'Malley, SJ  
Secretary, Archdiocese of Toronto  
Etobicoke, Ontario  
Canada

Dear Excellency:

Archbishop Oakes has instructed me to provide you with a brief account of the series of unfortunate events which has recently brought Holy Mother Church under unprecedented negative public pressure throughout Canada.

In winter of 2010, there was an encounter in a Toronto pharmacy between Fr. Wachira (St. Michael's Parish, Toronto, Ontario) and Justice Eleanor Casey of the Ontario District Court.

As you are no doubt aware, there has been a serious decline in vocations in Canada, so priests such as Fr. Wachira have been called to fill many vacancies. The sincerity and faith of Fr. Wachira are unquestionable. In Nigeria, he persisted in the True Faith even though he was surrounded by hostile Muslims and animists. His academic excellence earned him a scholarship to Rome where he studied with distinction under Fr. (now Cardinal) Adolph Mauszinger. Nevertheless, Fr. Wachira, like other priests from sub-Saharan Africa, was somewhat unfamiliar with important facets of Canadian culture.

Justice Casey was a faithful communicant in St. Michael's Parish.

The circumstances described above may explain why Fr. Wachira became incensed

when he saw Justice Casey buying condoms. If Fr. Wachira had requested a later meeting to discuss Justice Casey's action, this might have avoided future complications. But Fr. Wachira—newly-arrived in Canada and unaware that Justice Casey occupied a key role in Ontario's Justice System—chose to upbraid her publicly for defying God and Holy Mother Church. Not surprisingly, Justice Casey responded angrily and left the pharmacy.

The incident might have ended there but for a case which was heard by Justice Casey on the following day. Pamela Godot, an unemployed 38-year-old spinster, owns a single-family, detached house in Oakville, Ontario where she resides with her younger brother, Rex, a high school biology teacher. It is significant that neither Miss Godot nor her brother are baptized. It is even more significant that Rex Godot is the Treasurer of The Ontario Humanist Association.

On 2 July 2010, a tornado hit Oakville and felled a tree which damaged Miss Godot's roof. Miss Godot's house was insured with The Saturn Insurance Company. She filed a claim for \$5,000 to cover tornado damage to her roof. Saturn refused to pay on the grounds that the tornado was an act of God. Miss Godot took her case to small claims court which ruled against Miss Godot. She then appealed, and the case was heard by Justice Casey on the day after her encounter with Fr. Wachira.

Miss Godot argued that before Saturn could classify the tornado which damaged her roof as an act of God, it was incumbent upon Saturn to demonstrate the existence of God.

Ordinarily, Justice Casey might have dismissed Miss Godot's argument as frivolous. But she may have still been angry because of her encounter in the pharmacy with Fr. Wachira. In any case, Justice Casey ruled that Saturn had to prove that God exists.

At first, Saturn's lawyers did not think it would be difficult to prove the existence of God. They advanced a rather simplistic formulation of The Argument From Design. On behalf of his sister, Rex Godot put forward an equally simplistic (but wrong-headed) critique of The Argument From Design: if the universe was created by a Designer, who designed the Designer? Is there an endless progression of Designers who designed Designers?

Justice Casey ruled in favour of Miss Godot. Saturn appealed. The case was brought to the attention of Holy Mother Church by an Officer of the Court who wishes to remain anonymous.

By this time, Miss Godot's case was attracting significant attention from the mass media.

Attempts to settle out of court, including a generous financial offer to Miss Godot from Saturn and the Archdiocese, were rejected, perhaps because Miss Godot was under the perverse influence of her atheistic brother.

Some overzealous Protestants made an attempt on Miss Godot's life. They were thwarted by the intervention of humanists who were acting as Miss Godot's bodyguards. Miss Godot sustained minor injuries. This apparently strengthened her determination to pursue her case.

There were no plots against Miss Godot by Holy Mother Church despite media reports to the contrary. This is not to deny, however, that there were overzealous communicants who may have contemplated doing harm to Miss Godot.

The Archdiocese appointed leading theologians to argue the appeal. Leading proponents of atheism represented Miss Godot. The Canadian Taxpayers Association, hoping that a ruling against the existence of God would allow them to attack the tax-exempt status of religious institutions, retained lawyers to support Miss Godot.

As you are aware, the case was argued over four years. Each major argument for the existence of God was thoroughly examined. Disputations on the Ontological Argument took over two years. Eventually, the case ended up before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Nine Justices sit on the Supreme Court of Canada. Five were appointed by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Michael Ignatieff. One was appointed by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Two were appointed by the Liberal government of Paul Martin. And the Senior Judge, Aloysius LeBlanc, now over 74 years old, was appointed by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Judge LeBlanc is a staunch communicant at Loyola Parish in Montréal, and has kept Holy Mother Church apprised of the progression of the Godot case through the judicial process.

The Supreme Court had agreed to hear two cases against The Saturn Life Insurance Company. In addition to the Godot case, the Canadian Environmental Alliance (CEA) was arguing that tornados and other extreme weather events are not acts of God. Rather, they are anthropogenic-caused, in part, by altered weather patterns resulting from a build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The build-up of greenhouse gases results from combustion of fossil fuels. While any particular extreme weather event cannot be attributed solely to human activity, the overall increase in the frequency of extreme weather events is, indeed, largely caused by humans. This view is not incompatible with that of Holy Mother Church.

The Godot case was regarded by the Supreme Court as a minor issue in comparison to the CEA case. After devoting months of research and litigation to the CEA case, the court wanted to deal with the Godot case quickly. Five judges were in favour of dismissing the Godot case altogether. This would have been a victory for Saturn and Holy Mother Church. Judge LeBlanc, who perhaps did not fully understand the issues because of his advanced age, want-

ed the Court to conclude that the existence of God could be proved. He insisted upon hearing arguments to that effect. The remaining three judges were Jewish. Unfortunately, they had been influenced by actions of the Pontiff which have been widely (but wrongly) interpreted as condoning Holocaust denial. The three Jewish judges proposed a 'compromise' which was, unfortunately, accepted. The Supreme Court of Canada agreed to the following ruling: "It is beyond the competence of this Court to demonstrate the existence of God."

The proposed ruling was acceptable to Justice LeBlanc and to some of the other Justices because they assumed that the ruling would relegate demonstration of the existence of God to its proper realm—namely, theology. The proposed ruling was, of course, unacceptable to Holy Mother Church and to Saturn because it could have been interpreted to mean that rational demonstration of the existence of God is impossible. This unwarranted inference would have been welcomed by secular humanists and their atheistic ilk. Luckily, Judge LeBlanc secretly warned us of the impending ruling and the date of its release. Holy Mother Church had about six months to organize the political initiative which culminated in the so-called Act of God.

There are, of course, faithful communicants in each major political party. A Member of Parliament from Saskatchewan introduced The Act, and the Liberal Prime Minister persuaded the Cabinet to move The Act up the Order Paper. Each MP was allowed to vote according to his or her conscience, independently of party discipline. The Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the New Democratic Party publicly declared their support for The Act. Only the Leader of the Bloc Québécois publicly opposed The Act. (This is not surprising in light of the decline in the number communicants in the urban areas of Québec).

On 24 February 2015, the Speaker of the House of Commons read The Act: "This House

holds the existence of God to be self-evident." Two hundred and ninety-eight MPs voted in favour. Nine voted against. There was one abstention. Approval of The Act by the Senate was a foregone conclusion.

The results of The Act were, at, first, what we expected. The Supreme Court reserved judgment in the Godot case on the grounds that the issue had been decided by Parliament. We expected the humanists to challenge The Act in court, but we knew that such a challenge would be costly, and that it could be delayed indefinitely in litigation.

We did not expect the massive and concerted campaign of ridicule that has been mounted by bloggers and political satirists against The Act, against Parliament, against His Holiness, and against Holy Mother Church! Ordinarily, such a campaign would have been short-lived, giving way to the normal litany of sensationalism and titillation. But this has not occurred. More seriously, there has been a disastrous decline in communicants, confessions, offerings, and donations. Polling indicates that this decline will be long-lasting, even permanent. The falling-away of the faithful has not been confined to Holy Mother Church. Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism have also suffered. The humanists have made massive gains.

The storm of adversity unleashed by The Act has, no doubt, been sent to test our faith. It is a severe test, indeed.

We anxiously await advice from you and from His Holiness on how to cope with the present and future consequences of The Act of God.

Yours, etc.

*Dennis Bartels is a retired anthropologist who lives in Toronto. He is very pleased that his work will appear in Humanist Perspectives, one of the most progressive publications in Canada.*