

# Bill C-16: A Lament and a Call to Action

singingmenno.wordpress.com

Do you know what it feels like to have your very existence constantly up for public debate?

If you don't, please, listen closely.

If you do, I am so sorry—

    Feel free to come and find commiseration.

    Feel free to leave if reliving this pain is too much right now.

But if you don't know what it feels like to be trans, I implore you to *listen!*

Bill C-16 is currently in its second sitting in the senate.

It would add gender identity and gender expression to the protected classes in the Canadian Human Rights Act and in the Criminal Code.

    Sounds great, doesn't it?

    It doesn't?

Apparently protecting a vulnerable group of people is too much to ask if our existence makes you uncomfortable.

How is this even up for debate?

In 2015, after three years of being eviscerated until the remnants were meaningless, a similar bill died in the senate,

Victim to the lie that trans peoples' safety is less important than cis peoples'

    That trans people having the same rights as cis people will endanger society.

Two years later, another bill offers protection,

    Offers to help heal this wound.

Yet the accusations and fear-mongering have come back once more:

    Your pronouns are plural; they're not even real!

    Men will sneak into women's bathrooms!

    You are betraying the feminist cause!

These sentiments never disappeared;

They just lingered under the surface for a while—

    Lies that are easy to ignore if they aren't about you

    Lies trans people can't escape from hearing.

This conversation keeps on coming back in different iterations,

    Like Mozart's Variations on a Common Theme,

    Like Pachelbel's Canon coming back to haunt our music decade after decade.

But it seems cruel to music that I would even use such an unflattering metaphor to describe how

The demonization of trans people  
Of trans bodies

Keeps cropping up like a sludge you can never clear away,  
Burrowing into our psyches like mould  
Innocuous in appearance until you realize that  
The tendrils have dug in deep under the surface,  
Spoiling something that once was pure,  
Villainizing the innocent.

Even fellow members of the trans community criticise each other, and I learn that

I am indecisive.  
I should choose a side.  
Non-binary identities are invalid.

This has been brought up in the Senate:

“The transgender community... believes there are only two genders... yet, seventy-plus  
genders will be included in this bill.”

The problem is,

They only talked to a small group within the trans population,  
Science corroborates that gender and sex are not binaries,  
And gender identity and expression also impact people who don't identify as trans.

Does my having rights,

in addition to your having rights,  
somehow diminish your rights?

Jordan Peterson has stirred up fear that this bill heralds the end of free speech,

That he could be jailed for not using my pronouns,  
That his rights are on trial here.

This lie, too, has entered the Senate debate:

“This bill compels speech. It doesn't just work against freedom of speech. It actually  
compels certain speech.”

Some facts:

This bill protects people from genocide and  
From having hatred incited against them

It extends the same protections for people on the basis of gender identity and expression

As are extended on the basis of “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex,  
sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability, and conviction for an  
offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record  
suspension has been ordered.”

Exhale.

These are not “special protections.”  
These are basic human rights.

Every human deserves to live free from fear for their safety  
Free from having their humanity diminished  
Free from being a constant representative of an entire group of people,  
From constant analysis and scrutiny and judgement.

But this bill does not guarantee these rights for trans people.

It just guarantees that it will be a specific crime to encourage genocide or incite hatred  
against us.

There are even protections in place for you:

If your hate speech is  
Stating a truth,  
Part of public debate, or  
Part of your religious doctrine  
You are protected from prosecution.

Intentionally misgendering someone  
Intentionally using the wrong pronouns  
These are acts of violence.

But you are within your rights to attack our dignity.

In the last year,  
More than a third of trans youth have attempted suicide,  
Almost two-thirds of us have self-harmed,  
Over two-thirds of trans people are homeless, unemployed, or underemployed,  
And you’re worried about losing your right to disparage us?

This bill is just trying to ensure that  
All people really are equal before the law.

There is still a long way to go before this will ring true  
Before all trans Canadians actually have access to basic human rights.

Basically, this bill enables the government to collect stats on hate crimes towards trans folks.

Is that too much to ask?

Your right to continue speculating about my gender,  
    To continue ignoring my pronouns,  
    To continue being unaffected by my pain,  
Will still far outweigh my right to feel safe in society,  
    To feel respected and dignified,  
    To not worry about my existence.  
Tell me, whose rights are in jeopardy?

In all the talk around Bill C-16,  
    In which Jordan Peterson's voice has been elevated louder than all others,  
    Drowning out the cries of trans people for justice,  
I have yet to hear a Mennonite individual or organization speak up.

Maybe I missed it;  
    I'm not the only trans Mennonite.  
But I lament that in all the conversation surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion,  
    You only really talk about the L and the G.  
Your concern that two people who love each other,  
    but don't fit your vision of Family—  
    that they could create something beautiful  
This concern dominates the conversation,  
Burying the identities and concerns of  
    trans Mennonites  
    bi Mennonites  
    queer Mennonites  
    intersex Mennonites  
    ace Mennonites.

Yes, we do exist  
And we need you to hear us.

Jesus said to love your neighbour.  
I guess I missed the part where he qualified that statement.  
    Love your neighbour—so long as they agree with you.  
    Love your neighbour—provided their existence doesn't make you uncomfortable.  
Even if you disagree with us,  
Even if you think that we are somehow misguided,  
When we are telling you over and over again that we don't feel loved  
    That your words and actions are making us afraid  
    That your rhetoric is painful  
    That your decisions are literally killing some of us, *especially* trans women of colour  
Isn't it time to reconsider?

Jesus also said that if someone asks for bread you shouldn't give them a stone  
Yet you are trading fish for snakes and eggs for scorpions.

You are hurting me.

I am frustrated and hurt that you don't know I exist  
Frustrated and hurt that even in my affirming congregation,  
I don't feel safe enough to be out.  
I'm tired of people using the wrong pronouns  
Tired of limiting my out-ness and gender expression  
Tired of being afraid.

I'm mostly feeling frustrated, hurt, and exhausted when it comes to the church.

It is exhausting to be trans, and to be trans within the church.

I'm tired of constantly thinking about my identity  
Tired of trying to figure it out for myself  
of worrying about coming out or being outed  
of wondering what people think of me  
Frustrated that this "issue" is the main thing I think about  
that my existence can be reduced to an "issue."  
I have other interests; I have school!

If the church really wants to exhibit the love and justice of Jesus,  
You'll make the church a safe place for humanity to authentically *be*  
So that trans people have energy to live life, form relationships,  
and contribute to the church.

Stop hurting us.

If you hurt a member of the church, you hurt the body,  
And trans people are the church.

Please help improve the lives of trans people in Canada by writing to or telephoning your senator  
and asking them to vote for Bill C-16. You can read this article to learn more:  
<http://qmunity.ca/news/bill-c-16-and-transphobia/>

A Brief Bio:

This poem was written by a non-binary, queer Mennonite who is not publically out, so their identity  
has been withheld. They blog sporadically at [singingmenno.wordpress.com](http://singingmenno.wordpress.com).