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HEADLINE: BILINGUALISM'S BECOME A RELIGION;
CREED PRODUCED NO UNITY AND COST PLENTY

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BODY:

When an Alliance MP recently rose in the House of Commons to attack the administration of official **bilingualism**, he did more than just challenge a government policy -- he committed heresy.

After all, enforced national **bilingualism** in this country isn't mere policy. It has attained the status of a religion.

It's a dogma which one is supposed to accept without question.

So it's no wonder the Alliance MP's views triggered outrage among **bilingualism's** chief apostles; the liberal media, the Liberal Party and the Red Tories.

Now, I don't know this MP, so it's hard for me to judge his motives, but at the risk of committing blasphemy myself, let me say I have difficulty seeing what's so "extremist" about questioning the costs and failure of current language policy.

My own experience with **bilingualism** goes back to the summer of 1968. Pierre Trudeau had just come to power.

My parents sent me crosstown to a primitive immersion course, probably more to get me out of their hair than to help construct a new federal theology.

In those days, the promise was that **bilingualism** would lead to a new country -- more united, more fair, truly bilingual.

It didn't work.

In fact, Canadians aren't much more bilingual today than they were back then.

According to the 1996 census, for example, the proportion of Canadians who are English-French bilingual is 17%.

But, as far back as 1951, long before we had heard of Trudeau, that number was well over 12%.

Even this puny growth in official **bilingualism** (at enormous long-term federal expense) is doubtless exaggerated.

Many anglophones especially have pursued immersion programs and are thus encouraged to consider themselves bilingual.

But with no deep economical, social or cultural reason to master and maintain the French language, the skill simply atrophies.

This is not a negative comment on the quality of French immersion teaching or the earnestness of the taught.

It is simply difficult -- extraordinarily difficult -- for someone to become bilingual in a country that is not.

And make no mistake.

Canada is not a bilingual country. In fact it is less bilingual today than it has ever been.

Oops, I committed heresy again.

But before you call out the language inquisition consider this: While the proportion of officially bilingual Canadians has remained relatively static, real **bilingualism** in Canada is quite geographically isolated.

Most francophones actually live in French unilingual regions of Canada -- mainly Quebec -- and most anglophones live in English unilingual regions outside the province.

Areas with significant numbers of both linguistic groups are almost all narrowly concentrated near the New Brunswick-Quebec and Quebec-Ontario borders, where most genuinely bilingual Canadians also reside.

And there's nothing wrong with this.

A unilingual anglophone or unilingual francophone is as much a "real Canadian" as a bilingual one.

And Quebec City or Calgary "define Canada" as much as Ottawa or Montreal.

The difficulty only comes when the federal Liberals insist Canada become the bilingual country it is not.

But the ugly truth is that even the Liberals are losing faith in their own creed.

They are not practising what they preach.

While there have been ongoing and unsuccessful attempts to promote French outside of Quebec, the federal government has increasingly surrendered to Quebec's activist policies of official unilingualism.

The discrimination against English and English institutions by Quebec language laws is well documented.

And now the double standard has reached new heights with the appointment of Stephane Dion as minister of official languages.

Dion is an unabashed supporter of the French-only Bill 101 inside Quebec and official

bilingualism elsewhere. As minister, he immediately declared his view of national **bilingualism** "to promote French."

The Liberals, of course, believe that emphasizing Canada's "Frenchness" will encourage more loyalty to Canada among Quebecois.

But as Quebec becomes more French and the rest of Canada becomes more English, it really means the Quebecois identify more with Quebec than with Canada.

So there you have it. As a religion, **bilingualism is the god** that failed. It has led to no fairness, produced no unity, and cost Canadian taxpayers untold millions.

I guess that's what happens when you mix church and state.

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