

Comments and Perspectives on Religious Freedom



 THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES

Forum on Faith and Public Life

Acknowledgments

As early as 1907, the Christian Social Council of Canada was concerned with issues of religious freedom, expressed at that time as “the religious question in relation to education and taxation,” or “fair treatment for authentic conscientious objectors.” The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), founded in 1944, has continued this focus on freedom of religion and of conscience over the years.

In the mid-1990s, the CCC participated in roundtables at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade proposing the creation of an Office on Religious Freedom. This office was officially opened on February 19, 2013. Dr. Andrew Bennett was appointed Canada’s first Ambassador for Religious Freedom.

In the spring of 2013, Dr. Bennett accepted an invitation from The Canadian Council of Churches to attend a meeting of the Governing Board where he was guest speaker for the annual Forum on Faith and Public Life.

The focus of the 2013 Forum was the mandate and work of the new Office of Religious Freedom, Canadian church experience and expertise in this area, and a sharing of perspectives from the different theological and church traditions who are members of the CCC. This publication brings together the contributions from the participants in that dialogue.

We wish to thank the Ambassador of Religious Freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett, for accepting the invitation to address the Governing Board and dialogue with Governing Board members on the topic. We also wish to thank our esteemed contributors Cyprian Hutcheon, Gerald Filson, Kathy Vandergrift, Scott Kline, and Laurette Glasgow for their preparation, contribution, and sharing what they know.

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The Canadian Council of Churches brings together, in work and witness, 25 denominations of the Anglican; Eastern and Roman Catholic; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern and Oriental Orthodox; and Historic Protestant traditions, representing in their membership 85% of the Christians in Canada.

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Foreword

The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton is an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada currently serving in ministry as the General Secretary of The Canadian Council of Churches.

And the truth shall set you free...

For over one hundred years, The Canadian Council of Churches and its direct predecessors have spoken about the question of religious freedom. The specifics of the articulation have changed over time and over decades as the societal context in which the Church lives and moves and has its being has changed. But as Gerald Filson says in his article in this publication, "Human dignity, of course, is the moral underpinning of this right to freedom of belief; and this freedom of belief, or unbelief, lies at the heart of how we understand the human being." This remains constant.

This particular time in the history of Canada, following the creation of the new Office of Religious Freedom, offers people of faith, and people of no faith, the opportunity to delve deeply into the questions and challenges of religious freedom. Although the mandate of the new office, housed as it is in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, is focused on religious freedom outside of Canada, it is incumbent on us all to consider the issue of religious freedom in all its facets as it pertains to countries both outside of Canada and to Canada itself.

Within this country issues of religious accommodation are very important, nation-defining even. In other places in the world, however, places where our sisters and brothers live as persons of faith, religious freedom, or the lack thereof, can be a question of life or death. And as Gerald Filson also states, "The establishment of sustainable peace involves some kind of arrangement that would allow for a pluralism where increased religious freedom and mutual respect among different religious communities would serve directly to help sustain peace." While peace may be required (though not a guarantee) for religious freedom, religious freedom may bring peace.

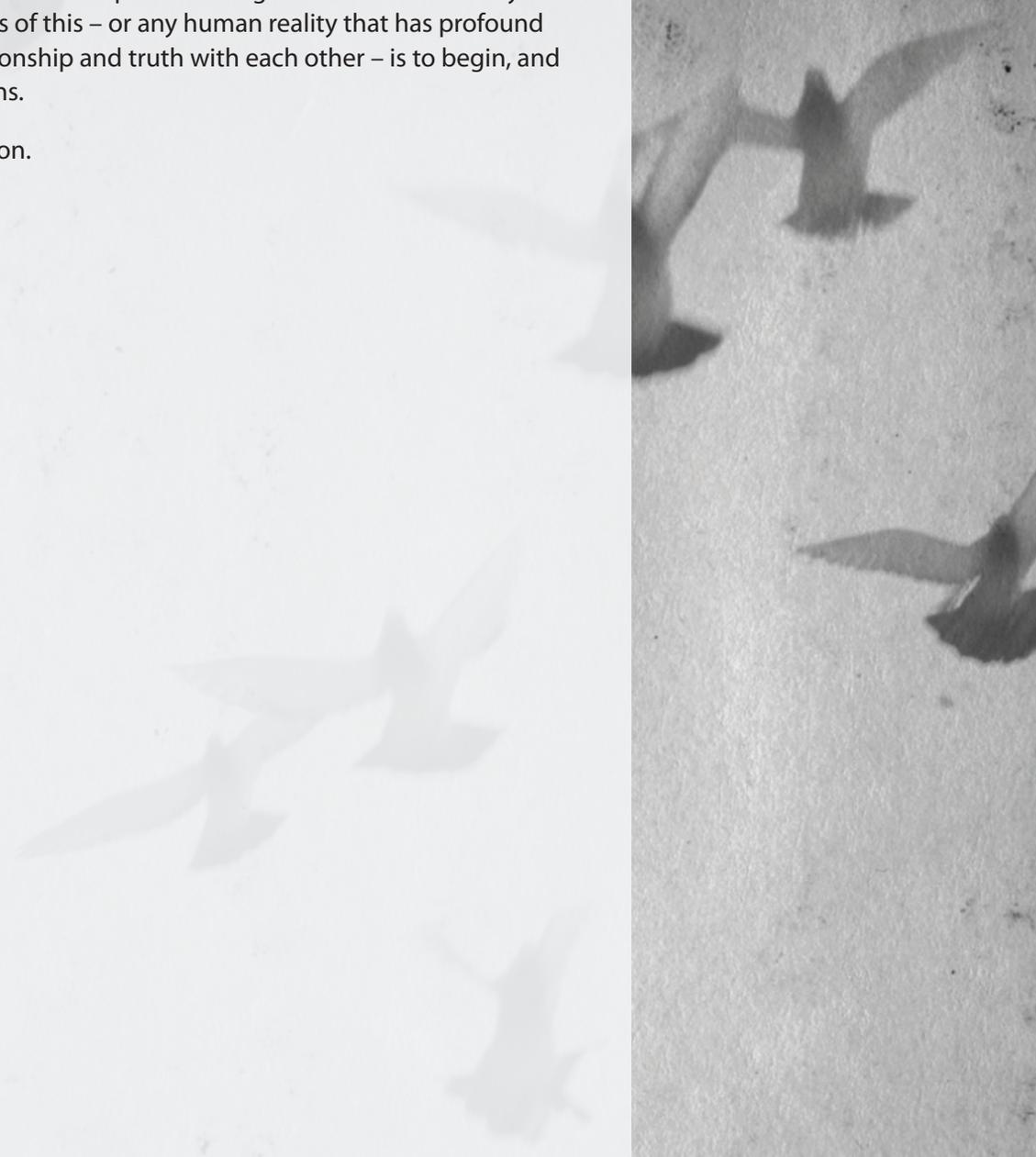
In any conversation about religious freedom, it is also extremely important to pay close attention to the relationship between faith and what may be called secularism. There are many definitions of both and there is no way, nor should there be, to draw a firm line between the two. Religious freedom means the freedom either to believe and practice, or not to believe or practice, the tenants of any faith tradition. Particularly crucial, though, is the relationship by which they are in dialogue with each other for the purpose of a whole and just society.

As Kathy Vandergrift reminds us in her submission to this publication, the relationship between religious freedom and other human rights is also an essential part of the conversation that needs to be ongoing. "If we believe that all

people are created by God and therefore deserve to be treated with dignity, then other rights deserve equal attention, even when they come into tension with the right to religious freedom.”

The comments on religious freedom presented in this document are often challenging, as is the call to each of us to promote religious freedom. The only way to deal with the challenges of this – or any human reality that has profound impact on how we live in relationship and truth with each other – is to begin, and continue, the vital conversations.

May it be so with this publication.



Introductory Remarks

*Very Reverend Father Cyprian Hutcheon, Orthodox Church in America.
Vice-President, The Canadian Council of Churches.*

On February 19, 2013, following up on a promise in the 2011 Throne Speech, the government of Canada officially announced the creation of an Office of Religious Freedom (ORF) within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Andrew Bennett was appointed head of the new organism with the rank of Ambassador, reporting to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

According to its Mandate, published on-line, the Office, building on Canada's past efforts, "will promote freedom of religion or belief as a Canadian foreign policy priority." The Office's activities of advocacy, analysis, policy development and programming will be "centred on countries or situations where there [are] . . . egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion . . . that could include violence, hatred and systemic discrimination."¹

Reactions to the ORF's creation within the Canadian Christian community have been mixed. Evangelical Christian groups and, to a lesser extent certain Eastern Christian communities, were pleased by the potential to provide assistance to their already existing efforts to support beleaguered co-religionists in various countries abroad. These interest groups were quick to point out that in the world at large, the majority of instances of religious persecution or discrimination against individuals or groups were in fact being directed against Christians, though they did not necessarily interpret this

to mean that the ORF should focus exclusively on instances of anti-Christian activity.

Other Christian observers, from a variety of vantage points, were less enthusiastic about the ORF and raised a number of critical questions about the whole enterprise. How, exactly, was the government defining "religious freedom" and for whom? Might not the ORF's actions risk becoming too focused on the plight of Christians abroad to the exclusion of attention to other persecuted religious groups?

Was it appropriate, some asked, for Canada's foreign policy to be focusing so narrowly on violations of religious freedom, rather than considering such violations and their elimination from within a broader context of concern for human rights and freedoms in general? What, it was asked, would be the relationship of the ORF to other movements and groups engaged in promoting universal respect for human rights in general?

Some critics pointed out that in Canada as a whole there was little apparent interest in, or knowledge about, the plight of various afflicted target communities abroad. Domestic interest in, and concern for, religious matters is in decline, judging from the results of a recent survey which indicated that some 40 plus percent of Canadians

¹ See http://www.international.gc.ca/religious_freedom-liberte_de_religion/mandate_mandat.aspx?lang=eng

have no religious affiliation. As an index of the low level of Canadian interest in matters religious, one might consider the quality and quantity of the media's attention to these same concerns.

Public media coverage of the ORF and of the plight of persecuted religious communities – like the scores of Egyptian Copts arriving in Canada daily – has been both negligent and replete with disinformation. In such a climate of public opinion, critics asked, how could the government and its ORF hope to motivate the public and its elected officials to take matters of religious persecution seriously and act upon them with vigour?

The Canadian Council of Churches is proud of its claim to represent 85% of Canada's Christians. But within the ranks of its member churches, the level of knowledge about, and interest in, religious persecution may not be much higher than it is among the Canadian population at large. There is a great need, it would seem, both inside and outside the Christian community, for strenuous efforts to educate Canadians and raise their consciousness about the questions the ORF hopes to address. One would also hope that the ORF will consider this to be an important part of its mandate as well.

Concerns of Eastern Christians

In the foregoing, I have tried to represent fairly a range of opinions held by CCC member churches concerning the ORF and its likely utility and effectiveness. In addition to chairing this panel for the Forum on Faith and Public Life, I was also asked to participate on it in order to widen the confessional range of the opinions represented around this table. Permit me therefore to conclude my introductory remarks by highlighting three concerns related in one way or another to the ORF and its activities, concerns that members of the various

communities of Eastern Christians in Canada – be they Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox or Eastern Catholic – might themselves raise.

- 1) Critics of the ORF have expressed concern that the ORF risks becoming too narrowly focused on the persecution of Christians overseas. Without denying this as an undesirable possibility, Eastern Christian communities would not want the ORF to be shy about addressing the plight of their Christian co-religionists in countries such as Egypt, Syria and Palestine.
- 2) Canadians can be justly proud of the efforts being made in our country to promote inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. The Jewish-Christian dialogue in Canada is a well-established and often successful enterprise which has been joined of late (from the Christian perspective) by emergent Christian-Muslim, Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Hindu dialogues. Though Eastern Christians need to be (and often are) supportive of such bilateral conversations, they are also concerned lest domestic fears about not "rocking the boat" should prevent the ORF from speaking out, for example, regarding Muslim persecution of Christians and Bahá'ís or Hindu persecution of Muslims.
- 3) What are the actual tools at the disposal of the ORF for its mandate to protect "religious minorities under threat"? Will the ORF be limited to using traditional measures like consciousness-raising, advocacy and diplomatic protests? OR will its actions be supported by more "muscular" governmental measures, e.g., preferential admission to Canada of victims of persecution or invoking economic sanctions?





Comments on Religious Freedom and the Canadian Office of Religious Freedom

*Gerald Filson, PhD, Chair, Canadian Interfaith Conversation, 2012-present.
Director of Public Affairs, Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1993-present.*

Religious freedom is in retreat around the world. The situation is a great deal more serious and life-threatening than Canadian religious accommodation issues, important as they are. It involves security of the person, often imprisonment, loss of employment or exclusion from economic sectors, and lack of access to education and other social opportunities that are a part of citizenship. Lack of religious freedom also means higher levels of in-country violence.

These facts are available from, among other sources, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the U.S. State Department's report on religious freedom and that of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. While each report varies slightly in emphasis, the facts are worrying. More than two-thirds of the world's peoples live in countries that have serious religious freedom issues. And these have increased in the past few years.

The Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University provides compelling evidence of the relationship between violence and the lack of religious freedom. While religion may not be at the heart of every major conflict in the world, the establishment of sustainable peace involves some kind of arrangement that would allow for a pluralism where increased religious freedom and mutual respect among different religious communities would serve directly to help sustain peace.

That these facts are not well known makes it all the more troubling that any fair assessment of the media coverage of human rights abuses over the past couple of decades reveals an under-reporting of religious freedom issues compared to reporting on other human rights violations. Over the past two decades, the international system, national governments and human rights NGOs have also, if we examine the record, neglected religious freedom as a priority issue. This latter neglect is finally giving way to greater awareness of religious persecution, but a similar trend in the media is not yet apparent.

All human rights violations are bad, of course, and we don't want to set up a competition among rights. Still, religion as a social phenomenon is often at the centre of a bundle of related human rights abuses. Contrary to a weak and unpersuasive argument, it is not the same as freedom of conscience, or even freedom of conscience plus freedom of expression plus freedom of association – even though it does overlap and often involve those other rights. Rights are, as we know, interdependent and inter-related, but religious freedom is a human right, of particular and singular characteristics, that calls for greater understanding, and it is one that is fundamental to any understanding of pluralism – a feature now crucial for the security and well-being of humanity and the global family.

Having made the point about the significance of religious freedom,

it is also important that the newly established Canadian Office of Religious Freedom understand and address the issue of religious freedom in the context of the international human rights framework of norms and standards. Human dignity, of course, is the moral underpinning of this right to freedom of belief; and this freedom of belief, or unbelief, lies at the heart of how we understand the human being. But whatever the various understandings of human nature, at the present time human rights provides the best common framework of understanding across the world by which we can talk to each other sensibly about religious freedom, and know what each of us means.

The international human rights framework of norms and standards gives us the definitions required, and that framework represents an impressive historical accomplishment. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains the best articulation of what religious freedom means and should be the minimum starting point of any discussion of this issue. I would suggest that it is better than Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the wording of Article 18 of the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

At the same time, the methods, approaches and work of the international community and the United Nations system mandated to deal with these norms and standards isn't anywhere near where it should be in the operational sense. And if implementing, applying, promoting and enforcing international human rights remains still quite inadequate, it may be that national initiatives, such as the Office of Religious Freedom, in promoting, monitoring and protecting

human rights is necessary as the history of humanity moves forward towards legitimate and effective international measures to protect human security and the rights of all.

In pursuing its work, the Office could well conceive of its work as a learning process involving one basket of initiatives having to do with promotion and education about this fundamental right within other branches of the government, within Canadian society, and abroad. Another basket could include bilateral and multilateral work that might encourage and assist in the creation and enforcement of better national laws consistent with the norms of international human rights. Finally, the Office ought to look to ways to learn things it can pass on to the international community to help it carry out its responsibility to protect the victims of religious persecution in more effective ways.

These observations on its work reflect the more specific recommendations which the Baha'i Community of Canada outlined in its submission to the Office, drawing attention to the importance of the Office functioning within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and serving in a policy leadership role, generating reports, developing a network of external thematic experts, explaining religious freedom relative to other government priorities, convening seminars and lectures, developing training programs, advising the private sector, while avoiding the concentration of all religious freedom issues in the office itself. That submission stressed the vital relationship that needs to be established with the Canadian public, with both the skeptical segment of the public and with religious communities, while also relying on the traditional tools





of Canadian foreign policy, whether bilateral measures and dialogue, overseas programming and multilateral initiatives in support of a more effective international instruments.

Among specific problems related to religious freedom, let's consider a few in particular, without attempting to cover all the issues. There has been a tendency over the past few years for some countries to enact blasphemy and apostasy laws, and efforts at the United Nations Human Rights Council to pass a resolution on blasphemy. Fortunately, Canada and other countries have pushed back this effort to constrain freedom of expression which would also have given cover to some countries to use such a principle to punish and oppress religious minorities.

Human rights are designed to protect human beings, not ideas, nor even beliefs, however deeply held. Protecting ideas and beliefs, rather than human beings, can provide another way of violating the rights of human beings who may believe and think in ways other than the "official" state or majoritarian religious ways. The excellent United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Religious Freedom, both the former Asma Jahangir and the current Professor Heiner Beilefeldt, have spoken out strongly and persuasively on these issues. Beilefeldt noted recently that this includes the listing of "official" religions which, of course, is another way of condemning members of other minority religions to second- or third-class citizenship.

Another area of concern is the right to teach and right to change and choose one's religion. Efforts to restrict this right, too, are underway here and there. Laws against conversion are becoming more common, but this has nothing to do with protecting culture,

an ostensible cover for such laws. We know that cultures live and grow and change through human freedom, not through paralysis, rigidity of culture and the closing down of the human spirit. Religious faith, by definition, is about choosing through the exercise of one's free will. It cannot be anything other than a matter of freely choosing, including the option of the right to exit a religion, which is as important as the right to join, according to one's conscience, one's heart and mind.

It's interesting to note on this point the views of two favorite philosophers of mine, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor – the first resolutely secular and a non-believer but of high integrity; the second, a believer, but very much by his own lights, and one of our pre-eminent Canadian thinkers. Both recognize that the moral resources and cosmopolitan conditions available to us in the modern era, themselves the legacy of the world religions, are such that, perhaps uniquely in human history, religion and belief in the divine is no longer the default position – while unbelief may well be in many sectors of today's society.

Hence, those who today choose a religious way of life are those who must make a conscious choice about religion. This is as true for those who decide each Sabbath to get up and attend church, or go to the mosque or synagogue, as it is for those who, on their own terms, step out of unbelief into a belief in something divine.

So, this idea of religious freedom – freedom to teach and to change one's religion – is not merely a human right. It links up directly with how religious belief is actualized in today's world. (If you feel I am addressing only the more industrialized areas of the planet, you haven't been a witness to the

enormous changes in religious affiliations underway in Africa, South America and elsewhere.) To turn back against this tendency of our collective human history is to put our heads in the sand. The only way to respond is to look towards a pluralism that is inclusive, that welcomes diversity, that respects all, and that trusts in the fundamental capacities of each and every one of us to seek out the truth, independent of coercion and mere tradition for the sake of tradition.

It's interesting to note here that Western democratic and highly secularized societies are not immune from their own ways of curtailing religious freedoms, such as the freedom of people to teach their religion and to do so in public. There is abroad in our culture and media a misunderstanding of religion, its positive contribution to society, its correlation with a lot of positive social indicators (from happiness to family stability, from adolescent educational achievement to societal solidarity and civic participation). There is widespread misreading of history where religion, since it was largely universal throughout the history of the human race, is read as the cause of all and every evil (neglecting to note that, though the same reasoning, religion can be claimed as the cause of every good). A more refined analysis is required to really understand the forces of history and the role of religion.

And why should all the corporations of the world, McDonald's and Chrysler, Viagra and Armani, be free to insert themselves incessantly into our life, telling us how to improve ourselves, and live a better life? Or why should politicians be able to knock on our door and hector us without end about what is needed to improve our well-being?

Yet at the same time the culture of materialism and individualism wants to deny the same right to religion and the religious who, likewise, should be free to tell us how a religious option might make life better. I don't understand that kind of narrow idea of democracy and freedom, and a secularism that is anti-religious, and anything but neutral.

Still, religions clearly have a responsibility to overcome not just a bad press, but also their own bad behaviour, or the bad behaviour of a lot of folks who speak in the name of religion but do so entirely out of self-interest, with an eye on power. By working together a bit more, demonstrating to a skeptical public the value and worth of religion to society, decreasing moral self-righteousness and continuing their public participation and service to others, while also accepting the rules of public discourse and participation (which is to say, being a whole lot less sensitive to criticism and more active in looking to principle and conceptual contributions, far less to criticism and adopting the methods of oppositional partisan politics and sectarian provincialities), religions can both help themselves and do more of what they surely want to do: help society and serve humanity.

These two challenges, the embrace of religious freedom and the need for the religions to work together in the public sphere, both require, and in turn contribute, to a genuinely pluralistic society. Religious freedom is a precondition if we are to have a society where religion, by whatever name but by its nature as the social institution best able to bind together the human family and the human and the divine, can make its much needed contribution to a healthy, a just and a peaceful human community.





How Canada Can Provide Leadership

Kathy Vandergrift, Chair, Christian Reformed Church of North America—Canada; Member, Commission on Justice and Peace, The Canadian Council of Churches.

I welcome this opportunity to engage in discussion on this important subject. Increased focus on freedom of religion is warranted in today's context and appreciated. The challenge is how Canada can provide leadership.

Historically, this is a renewal of work from the late 1990s when I participated in Roundtables on Religious Freedom, hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I experienced the benefit of diplomatic attention to an emerging religious freedom issue in Romania that came from partners in international development. Such diplomacy can be of great benefit.

Important elements were open, broad consultation with civil society groups in Canada and effective partnerships between government and civil society actors occurred. This is a field where each actor doing their part can result in an impact greater than the sum of the parts. I hope that will be the modus operandi of the new office. That is a first suggestion.

Secondly, integrating religious freedom with other human rights is essential for effectiveness. If we believe that all people are created by God and therefore deserve to be treated with dignity, then other rights deserve equal attention, even when they come into tension with the right to religious freedom. There is a tendency to use religious freedom as a trump card over other rights. In addition to avoiding

that, it is important for advocates of religious freedom to show leadership in resolving tensions with other rights.

These tensions exist in Canada as well. I experienced it personally. As a strong advocate for religious freedom, I led an intervention in the polygamy reference case in British Columbia by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, to ensure that the children's rights received attention. The judgment in this case is helpful guidance. It ruled that religious freedom cannot be used to justify or exempt violations of the rights of women and young people in matters like forced early marriage, freedom from sexual and economic exploitation and the right to education, including access to information about reproductive health.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Religious Freedom also provides guidance to "ensure that the right to freedom of religion adds to the values of human rights and does not become an instrument for undermining other freedoms."

Active engagement by persons who value religious freedom to resolve these kinds of contentious issues, with equal respect for all rights, will add credibility to claims for expansion of public space for religious practices in Canada and around the world.

Some have described religious freedom as the "canary in the mine" of all human rights. Others call it the "pinnacle of

human rights.” It is equally true that respect for other rights of often key to determining the extent of genuine religious freedom for all persons in a given situation.

Third is the importance of a peace building approach to work in this field. Issues of religious freedom can create conflict. Religious leaders can also be leaders in conflict resolution and peacemaking. Religion can be used to provoke anger in conflicts that are rooted in other causes; religion can be used to mask causes of conflict that may be less noble. In the past, Canadian officials and NGOs have worked together on peace and conflict analysis tools that can be used for discernment, public education, caution to avoid inflaming conflict, and identifying potential for religious leaders and dialogue to help build peace. This approach is a good practice for consideration.

Fourth is the importance of a preventive approach in balance with response to violations. Blaming and shaming have their place, but they are of limited effectiveness, as we have learned in other human rights issues. This is particularly true in contemporary contexts where demonizing the other is a tool used too frequently by political and religious leaders for their own purposes.

For long-term effectiveness, the pressure for advocacy in reaction to specific incidents needs to be balanced with an equal or greater focus on expanding good practices that foster societies that will respect religious freedom. International experience suggests some key indicators:

1) There is regular dialogue between religious groups and the state on emerging public issues.

- 2) All individuals have effective freedom to follow a religion, change religions, or choose not to do so.
- 3) There is easy access to dispute resolution tribunals for disputes between religious groups or between individuals and religious groups.
- 4) There exists broad respect and accommodation for conscientious objection in matters such as specific forms of medical treatment, military service, and others.
- 5) There are legal and social prohibitions against the use of religion for political advantage, nationalist goals or war propaganda.

Allocating a good portion of a limited budget to expand the use of good practices will be more effective in the long term than a long list of denunciations, however persuasive the rhetoric.





Challenges and Opportunities From a Catholic Perspective

Scott Kline, PhD, Chair, Project Ploughshares; Associate Professor of Religious Studies, St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo.

In response to the naming of the first ambassador to the newly created Office of Religious Freedom, the Canadian Council of Churches (the CCC) sent a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Conveying hope and anticipation, the letter states: "The Canadian Council of Churches welcomes and looks forward to cooperating with the Office of Religious Freedom in its stated mandate to protect and advocate on behalf of religious minorities under threat, opposing religious hatred and intolerance, and promoting pluralism abroad."²

In stark contrast to the CCC's response, a number of observers, both religious and non-religious, have raised suspicions about the Office of Religious Freedom and the appointment of Ambassador Dr. Andrew Bennett. For instance, Haroon Siddiqui, the veteran journalist with the Toronto Star, wondered why the Conservative government has chosen this new office after deciding in early 2012 to shutter Rights and Democracy, the federally funded agency that advocated for a range of human rights abroad. Created by the Brian Mulroney government in 1988, Rights and Democracy was supposed to operate at arm's length; however, that agency became mired in controversy when it reportedly funded conferences that were critical of Israel.³

My purpose here is not to cheerlead or to attack the Office of Religious Freedom – indeed, I believe the

issues surrounding "faith-based" or "religious diplomacy," as Douglas Johnston has called it, are too complex to lapse into binary for-or-against rhetoric. Instead, I would like to do something constructive: highlight four opportunities and challenges facing the Office. But before doing so, I would like to provide some context for my comments as a Catholic ethicist who works in the area of religion and politics – this context, I should note, is a confession of sorts.

Religious freedom and the Catholic Church: A new horizon

As a Catholic ethicist, I should not come to a discussion of religious freedom without first acknowledging, or confessing, that the concept of human rights is relatively new in the Catholic tradition. Popes since the French Revolution in the eighteenth century had rejected the general concept of human rights because they feared that personal freedoms would undermine the Christian (read: Catholic) worldviews, norms, and values that provided the foundations of society and ensured social cohesion and well-being. Their argument against

² The Canadian Council of Churches, "Letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper" (February 26, 2013): <http://www.councilofchurches.ca/uploads/Office%20of%20Religious%20Freedom%20-%20EN.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2013).

³ Haroon Siddiqui, "Stephen Harper's Real Agenda on Religious Freedom," *The Toronto Star* (February 23, 2013), http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2013/02/24/stephen_harpers_real_agenda_on_religious_freedom_siddiqui.html (accessed May 20, 2013).

religious freedom was that it allowed states to sanction religious error by allowing religions other than Catholic Christianity to receive state support.

By the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had lost much of its pre-French Revolution social, cultural, and political authority. Nevertheless, in this era of declining Catholic influence, the popes still felt empowered to speak out unabashedly against the modern secular state and many of the philosophical concepts that anchored it, including religious freedom.⁴

For instance, Pope Gregory XVI, in his encyclical *Mirarivos* (1832), condemned liberalism, individualism, freedom of conscience (he called it a *deliramentum* – a “delusion” or “madness”), freedom of opinion and of the press, democracy, and the separation of church and state.

Pope Pius IX, in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), condemned the idea that, “Every individual is free to embrace and profess that religion which by the guidance of the light of reason he deems to be the true one” (no. 15). Similarly, Pope Leo XIII, in 1885, lamented that a concept of the state had developed that enabled a multitude of people to obtain power and to make political determinations without regard to God.

Indeed, Pope Leo was appalled that this new, modern state had no obligation “to make [a] public profession of any religion; or to inquire which of the very many religions is the only one true; or to prefer one religion to all the rest; or to show to any form of religion special favour; but, on the contrary, is bound to grant equal rights to every creed, so that public order may not be disturbed by any particular form of religious belief” (*Immortale Dei*, On the Christian Constitution of States, 1885, no. 25).

In essence, Pope Leo taught that the Catholic concept of the state was fundamentally at odds with the modern secular state, which referred all questions that concern religion to private judgment and allowed people to follow whatever religion they preferred. Moreover, Pope Leo XIII declared in his encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum* (On the Nature of Human Liberty, 1888):

Justice therefore forbids, and reason itself forbids, the State to be godless; or to adopt a line of action which would end in godlessness – namely, to treat the various religions (as they call them) alike, and to bestow upon them promiscuously equal rights and privileges. Since, then, the profession of one religion is necessary in the State, that religion must be professed which alone is true, and which can be recognized without difficulty, especially in Catholic States, because the marks of truth are, as it were, engraved upon it. This religion, therefore, the rulers of the State must preserve and protect. (no. 21)⁵

In sum, Pope Leo, like other nineteenth-century popes, *rejected* the notion that (a) the state should be secular, (b) all religions should have equal protection under the law, and (c) the state must recognize the religious freedoms of non-Catholics.

Observers of Catholic teaching today may have a difficult time squaring the

⁴ See Pope Gregory, XVI, *Mirarivos* (On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism, 1832), nos. 5, 17, 19, 23, which outlined the Church’s rejection of democracy and freedom of religion.

⁵ We should note that Pope Leo XIII taught that, when Catholics were a majority in countries, they should not advocate for religious freedom (thesis); however, if they were a minority, they should (hypothesis). Critics of this thesis-hypothesis teaching often used it to point out that Catholics should not lead secular democracies, such as the United States, since they would eventually guarantee religious freedom to Catholics.





teachings of these nineteenth-century popes with more recent statements from Catholic leaders; for example, Pope Benedict XVI calling religious liberty the “pinnacle of all other freedoms.” How can we explain this change? To help answer this question, I turn to the work of Gregory Baum, the author of *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change*.

Baum argues that these nineteenth-century popes were still operating with an ethical horizon that was more in keeping with the Middle Ages – a period in which the Church saw the feudal structure as part of the natural order of things, benefitted from aristocratic privilege, and looked upon the secular-democratic state as little more than human arrogance run amok. The turning point for the Church began to emerge in the two decades following World War II.

In spite of changes among some lay Catholic groups, the Church’s official condemnation of human rights, generally, and religious freedom, more specifically, continued up to the reign of Pope John XXIII (1958–1963). Pope John had become convinced that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, was consistent with the Church’s teaching regarding the dignity of the human person.

Pope John came to this conclusion after hearing stories of gross human rights violations from Holocaust survivors. During World War II, Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, had served as a papal nuncio in Bulgaria and Turkey, where he reportedly supplied false baptismal certificates to Hungarian Jews. Due to his place in time, he witnessed the criminal dehumanization that can occur when

governments not only fail to uphold basic human rights, including religious liberty, but also become human rights abusers themselves.

As Baum correctly notes, John XXIII regarded the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a “sign of the times,” an expression the pope often used to refer to a significant historical event that demands a creative response from the Church. Such a response would have to entail a rereading of Scripture, a revisiting of the Catholic tradition, and a reaching out to victims of human rights abuses.⁶ In effect, the Church could no longer take the traditional, nineteenth-century line of denouncing human rights and religious freedom – the times had dramatically changed, which meant the social, political, and ethical horizon had forever shifted and the Church had an obligation to learn and respond.⁷

The change in the Church’s official teaching regarding human rights appeared in Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace in the World, 1963). Pope John stated:

Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable. (PT, no. 9)

⁶ Gregory Baum, *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005), 21.

⁷ The concept of a new ethical horizon comes from Gregory Baum; see *ibid.* By including the political and social here, I am a bit more explicit than Baum, who would recognize the significant political and sociological changes occurring in the mid-twentieth century.

According to the pope, the theological foundations of these rights are located in the biblical teachings that all humans are created in the *imago Dei* – the image of God – and are, through the redeeming work of Christ, “to become children and friends of God” (PT, no. 10). To deny people their basic human rights, then, is to disregard God’s image in the human person and the essential relationship that Christ has with humanity.

With these theological foundations, Pope John XXIII offered a list of human rights that was subtly, but crucially, different than the one presented in the Universal Declaration. Instead of putting the primary emphasis on civil liberties (e.g., freedom of expression, right of association, peaceful assembly, equal rights, and freedom of religion), Pope John began with the material conditions of people – that is, he began with a concern for the poor and marginalized. He wrote:

Beginning our discussion of human rights, we see that every human has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means that are necessary and suitable for the proper development of life. These means are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the necessary social services. (PT, no. 11)

In Pope John’s list, freedom of religion comes after the right of self-expression. Breaking with the nineteenth-century popes, he stated: “Every human being has the right to honour God according to the dictates of an upright conscience, and to profess his or her religion privately and publicly” (PT, no. 14). Economic rights, including the right to work in safe conditions, the right of association and peaceful assembly, and political rights proper to the democratic tradition round out his list.

It is important to notice that Pope John saw religious freedom as part of a broad human rights framework and integrally linked to other emancipatory movements: namely, the labour movement, which sought to humanize work (PT, no. 40); the struggles of women to achieve, in both domestic and public life, the human dignity befitting a human person (PT, no. 41); and colonial struggles for independence, leading to a situation in which “there will soon no longer exist a world divided into peoples who rule others and peoples who are subject to others” (PT, no. 42).

Moreover, he believed that states must work with each other to ensure that weaker states – what we might today term “fragile” or “failing” states – have the means to protect and promote these human rights and to foster the common good of the entire human family. Pope John wrote:

Since relationships between States must be regulated in accordance with the principles of truth and justice, States must further these relationships by taking positive steps to pool their material and spiritual resources. In many cases this can be achieved by all kinds of mutual collaboration; and this is already happening in our own day in the economic, social, political, educational, health and athletic spheres – and with beneficial results. We must bear in mind that of its very nature civil authority exists, not to confine men within the frontiers of their own nations, but primarily to protect the common good of the State, which certainly cannot be divorced from the common good of the entire human family. (PT, no. 98)





The pope concluded by noting a sober reality, especially for those stronger states seeking to balance their essential ethical responsibilities to assist weaker states with their political objectives, which appear in the form of foreign policy objectives, diplomatic ties, and strategic links with influential non-state actors:

Thus, in pursuing their own interests, civil societies, far from causing injury to others, must join plans and forces whenever the efforts of particular States cannot achieve the desired goal. But in doing so great care must be taken. What is beneficial to some States may prove detrimental rather than advantageous to others. (PT, no. 99)

How states determine whether their efforts are detrimental or advantageous to others states requires them to be an active part of global institutions such as the United Nations and involved at various levels with civil society organizations.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council affirmed the human rights teaching of Pope John XXIII. For instance, *Gaudium et spes* (Church in the Modern World, 1965) proclaimed:

There must be made available to all humans persons everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious. (GS, no. 26)

As scholars of Vatican II have detailed, there was a great deal of disagreement among the bishops regarding how to

address the matter of religious freedom – some from Catholic majority countries hoped to avoid or delay addressing the issue while others, including the U.S. bishops, were insistent that the Council should clearly affirm Pope John's human rights teaching. The phrase "even in matters religious" is the Council's subtle acknowledgement that religious freedom remained a contested teaching.

The final document promulgated by the Council was the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*, 1965). It begins with a statement that contextualizes the new social, political, and ethical horizon: "A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary human persons, and the demand is increasingly made that they should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty" (DH, no. 1).

Developing much of Pope John's teaching in *Pacem in terris*, the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom proclaimed: "It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or fear or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders people from joining or leaving a religious community" (no. 6).

Popes since John XXIII have continued to promote religious freedom. Pope John Paul II, for example, called religious freedom the "heart of human rights."⁸ Additionally, Pope John Paul developed the *Pacem in terris* teaching that protecting and promoting human rights are integrally related to peace. He stated in his 1999 World Day of Peace message:

⁸ Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, "Respect for Human Rights: The Secret to Peace (January 1, 1999), no. 5. We should note again that the human rights list in *Pacem in terris* begins with material rights, followed by civil and political rights, which include religious freedom.

We [should not] pass over in silence another problem indirectly linked to religious freedom. It sometimes happens that increasing tensions develop between communities or peoples of different religious convictions and cultures, which, because of the strong passions involved, turn into violent conflict. Recourse to violence in the name of religious belief is a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions. I reaffirm here what many religious figures have repeated so often: the use of violence can never claim a religious justification, nor can it foster the growth of true religious feeling.⁹

Pope Benedict XVI was a staunch advocate of religious freedom, making multiple statements expressing his concern over, what he believed, was the decline in religious freedom in the United States and the lack of religious freedom in places such as Pakistan, Palestine, and countries affected by the so-called Arab Spring.

As a Catholic ethicist who focuses on the relationship between religion and politics, I am humbled by the fact that it took my tradition almost 200 years to embrace human rights and to foster a broad concept of religious freedom.

Moreover, this history continually reminds me that religions, cultures, societies, and political institutions often change slowly, that change can take different paths, and that, ultimately, change must be sustained from within, even if the impulse toward change was sparked by engaging those from the outside.

Finally, I believe that Catholics who recognize and “own” the uneven history of religious freedom in our tradition are well situated to work with stakeholders involved in a transition to a rights-based society. However, if we Catholics

fail to recognize and “own” that history, we may well lose credibility.

The Office of Religious Freedom: Challenges and opportunities

I would now like to highlight four (of the many) challenges and opportunities facing the Office of Religious Freedom. My aim is not to provide extended arguments or solutions, but rather to raise issues and suggest general directions.

1. *Defining the identity of the Office of Religious Freedom*

According to its official mandate, the Office of Religious Freedom “fulfills the Government of Canada’s pledge to speak out and to protect and promote religious freedom around the world.” It exists because the Government identified religious freedom as a “Canadian foreign policy priority.” It is intended to be a vehicle that can advance “fundamental Canadian values, including freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law worldwide.”

The Office will engage in diplomacy as well as “advocacy, analysis, policy development, and programming relating to protecting and advocating on behalf of religious minorities under threat, opposing religious hatred and intolerance, and promoting pluralism abroad.” And it will concentrate on “countries or situations where there is evidence of egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion, violations that could include violence, hatred and systemic discrimination.”

In principle, the stated mandate of the Office is laudable and suggestive of many opportunities. However, in practice, there are a number of

⁹ Ibid.





challenges that will face the Office as it conducts its work and establishes a practical identity. The question of identity is crucial because it speaks directly to the nature of the Office's activities and its results. In other words, the Office's identity will be shaped by its outcomes – its successes and failures, which will be determined not just by the government but also those working in partnership with the Office. Moreover, the identity of the Office will largely determine how state and non-state actors engage the Office.

For example, if the Office were to adopt a narrow approach to promoting religious freedom, it would likely focus on opposing overt religious persecution – acts such as imprisoning people because of their religion or using armed force to remove certain religious groups from a region. The kinds of activity that the Office would engage in would be documenting and denouncing violations and violators of religious freedom.

As John Siebert, the Executive Director of Project Ploughshares has written, “Unfortunately, naming and shaming alone rarely provide lasting results.”

¹⁰ In fact, “naming and shaming” can have an adverse effect on the situation, particularly if the “shamed” country uses the “naming” – i.e., intervening in the internal affairs of an autonomous country – as a further pretext to limit religious freedom.

More likely, though, given the place of Canada in international politics, states such as Iran, Sudan, North Korea, and Burma would regard Canada decrying violations of religious freedom as little more than a whisper among a cacophony of Western democracies who have been calling them out for years for a myriad of other human rights violations.

A broader approach would enable the Office to support the efforts of both state and non-state actors to establish a rights-based culture from within. As Siebert points out, the Office could work with stakeholders to implement basic standards of religious freedom: e.g., religious people have recourse to the court system to resolve disputes with, say, individuals, religious groups, or even the state; individuals have the right to practice religion or none; and objections of conscience are recognized and accommodated by state institutions like the military, prisons, and health providers. ¹¹

Also, following the premise established in *Pacem in terris*, a broader approach could prioritize the material well-being of religious persons – ensuring, as much as possible, that all have the basics required with the right to life: food, shelter, and clothing.

In my view, the broader approach provides the greatest opportunities for developing a rights culture in countries coming to terms with “the signs of the times.” This broader approach also anticipates a second opportunity and challenge.

2. Building a network of faith-based and secular organizations

In order to achieve a broader view of religious freedom, the Office of Religious Freedom will need to reach out to both secular organizations (e.g., Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) and faith-based organizations. Not engaging secular organizations can send the message: for instance, that the Office is not serious about human rights generally

¹⁰ John Siebert, “Directions for Canada’s Office of Religious Freedom,” *The Ecumenist* 49:4 (Fall 2012): 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

and exists primarily to pander to certain religious groups within Canada.

Of course, the Office will need to reach out to faith-based organizations – they operate within a large network of civil society organizations and are, in many cases, the best equipped to respond to human rights violations, including acts of violence perpetrated against religious people.

One challenge here is the fact that the government has recently cut funding to a number of Canadian NGOs, including human rights defenders, women's groups, and development organizations. The implication of the government's recent actions is that these groups are not useful or relevant in meeting Canada's international goals.

But as John Siebert has rightly noted, these are exactly the groups with deep roots in Canadian society and with extensive contacts and experience working with religious groups and other minorities facing persecution and discrimination around the world. In sum, for the Office to effectively advance religious freedom internationally, it will need to engage a broad cross-section of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, both faith-based and secular.¹²

3. Educating foreign service officers and changing the culture at Foreign Affairs

In his book *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, Douglas Johnston writes, "Since the founding of the republic, American diplomacy has essentially placed religion beyond the bounds of critical analysis."¹³

Johnston's observation points to a serious challenge facing the United States: that is, educating its foreign service officers, policy analysts, and diplomats on the various roles that

religion can play in fuelling conflict, conducting international relations, resolving conflict, and peace building.

For many in the U.S. State Department, this education will be counter-intuitive, a type of retraining, having been taught in universities and on the job to believe that religion is almost always a cause of conflict and violence and not part of the solution. In this respect, their education and training has been largely shaped by the liberal suspicion of, if not bias against, the intermingling religion and politics.

In comparison to the U.S., I wonder if the situation is all that different at Foreign Affairs Canada. While I do not pretend to have any insight into the culture at DFAIT, I do have some experience with the general education that many foreign service staff received in Canada's universities. If they are products of political science, history, and economics programs, it is quite likely that they never took courses in comparative religion, received encouragement to analyze political situations through the (religious) worldviews of the actors, or considered ways in which religion could play a positive role in the conduct of international relations.

My hunch is that their education and training has been much like that in the U.S. – namely, they've been taught and trained to steer clear of religion, since it deals with emotions and should remain private, and focus on the "hard" realities of politics and economics. I may be wrong, but I can't imagine that there's a rush of staff at Foreign Affairs to work with the Office of Religious Freedom or to pursue what Johnston and others have called "faith-based diplomacy."

¹²Ibid.

¹³ Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.





Here I see real opportunity: the ambassador has an opportunity to cultivate a staff that is aware of the complexities of religion. The challenge, though, may be to move beyond the Western, liberal understanding of religion as something emotional, private, and somehow timelessly fixed (e.g., that there is only one true Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism).

To help develop adequate resources, the Office may need to consult, if not partner, with religious studies departments and scholars, ecumenical religious leaders, and leaders in the inter-faith movement. The objective here is not to cultivate the personal spirituality of those involved with the Office but rather to recognize the functional aspects of religion in people's everyday lives in certain parts of the world.¹⁴

4. Reconciling the contradictions between ethical principle and political-economic interest

Perhaps the greatest philosophical challenge facing the Office of Religious Freedom is reconciling the contradictions between ethical principle (the protection and promotion of human rights) and Canadian foreign policy priorities. To frame this challenge as a question: Can Canada champion religious freedom and at the same time sell Canadian oil, lumber, and wheat to blatant human rights violators?

It should come as no surprise that the first significant test that the Office had to face was precisely on this issue of principle versus interest. Just a few days after Ambassador Andrew Bennett was appointed to his post, Lobsang Sangay, the head of the group representing Tibetan exiles, requested that Canada send Ambassador Bennett to Tibet to investigate religious repression

and a host of self-immolations in the Chinese-controlled region. On the one hand, the Office must present itself as a non-partisan, consistent defender of human rights; but on the other hand, Foreign Affairs doesn't want to anger China, a major Canadian trading partner.

This is a particularly important challenge for many faith-based NGOs located in Canada, especially in light of the government's decision to merge the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

For instance, in its May 2013 newsletter, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace asked: (a) Will Canadian foreign aid maintain its focus on reducing poverty and promoting human rights? (b) What will be its impact of on work being done in solidarity with the most vulnerable? (c) What proportion of Canadian foreign aid will be dedicated to reducing poverty? And (d) how will NGOs fit into this new configuration?

For Development and Peace, Canada should always place human dignity at the centre of its aid policy, which means above Canada's commercial and financial interests. I have little doubt that faith-based NGOs will raise similar concerns with regard to the Office of Religious Freedom, that is, unless the Office is able to position itself as a principled defender and advocate of human rights and not as a vehicle

¹⁴ This raises the questions about the qualifications of the ambassador and his staff: must they be persons of faith? The short answer is "no." This is an office within Foreign Affairs and, as such, should perform the function of carrying out Canada's foreign policy on religious freedom and human rights – it is not supposed to be a pastoral office or the one place in government where religious people can appeal to their religious beliefs.

to advance Canadian political and economic interest. If the Office can rise above purely Canadian interest, then the Office of Religious Freedom – and indeed Canada – has a real opportunity to become a world leader in the defense and promotion of human rights.

¹⁵ Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, “Human Dignity, Justice, and Peace: Everyone’s Responsibility,” <http://www.devp.org/en/cida-merger> (accessed May 27, 2013).





An Anglican Perspective Tinged with Diplomacy

The Reverend Laurette A. Glasgow – Special Advisor for Government Relations for the Anglican Church of Canada/Diocese of Ottawa.

The Anglican Church of Canada, one of the 38 self-governing member churches of the worldwide Anglican Communion that numbers 85 million people in 165 countries on six continents, has a strong commitment to religious freedom, human rights, social justice, and ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation.

This commitment is rooted in our Baptismal Covenant that affirms the Great Commandment to love and serve others and that calls us to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being”.

Central to the Five Marks of Mission that guide all Anglicans worldwide is, *“To seek to transform the unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation”*.

Unjust structures of society can constrain, repress, or impede the freedom of individuals and groups to live fully and to enjoy the abundance of our creation in accordance with our shared values of freedom and fundamental human rights and dignity for all people.

Whether at home or abroad, the respect of the inherent dignity of each human being is at the core of our beliefs and in the many ways in which we give life and meaning to our faith through our policies, programs, and advocacy that touch not only on religious freedom and the myriad ways it is expressed, but also on all aspects of human rights and social justice.

Our principles of partnership advocate working with others in these areas, not only because there is greater strength in numbers, but because we hear the call to find unity of purpose and of being with our sisters and brothers, respectful of our differences, yet finding the wisdom to transcending them where and when we can.

Our own history underscores the importance of a heightened awareness of religious freedom in our society. Nearly 20 years ago, then-Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada issued an “Apology to Native People” because of its role operating residential schools, acknowledging our failure, expressing our sorrow and regret, and seeking reconciliation.

There is a particularly moving passage in the text of the Apology that reads: *“We tried to remake you in our image, taking from you your language and the signs of your identity.”*

The signs of identity for our Aboriginal sisters and brothers included their religious beliefs, rites, and traditions. Today, their right to religious freedom, a right that was abrogated with colonialism and residential schools, is enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The process of truth and reconciliation is an important vehicle through which we, generations later, seek to make amends. The lessons we have learned are, to paraphrase Leonard Cohen, like the crack through which the light gets in.

These lessons should not be lost. Rather they, along with so many others, and the values enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms should serve us and show us the way, as the light that has begun to shine with respect to religious freedom seeps into our collective Canadian political consciousness.

My esteemed colleagues on this panel have spoken eloquently on these rights, so I will not repeat their witness. What I would like to touch upon, however, draws not only from my scripturally-based convictions and formation as an Anglican and as an Anglican priest, but from my extensive experience in Canadian public policy and diplomacy.

Ambassador Bennett, yours is a great challenge. The vineyard is new and, although the soil has been tilled through Canadian human security policies and initiatives, this varietal is less well-known and has yet to be proven. The quality of the vintage will depend on many factors. Patience, persistence, and political support will play no small part in helping you develop a Grand Cru, as will the support, engagement, and efforts of your partners both at home and abroad.

If the reactions to date to the creation of the Office of Religious Freedom and your appointment as its Ambassador are any indication, you should be encouraged, for the usual skepticism is tinged with a healthy dose of hopeful expectation and support. There are many workers in this particular vineyard, and we all want for this to be a success. But for that to happen, we need to be an integral part of the effort.

What, then, are some of the tools at your disposal to carry out and to fulfill your mandate to “to protect and promote religious freedom around the world”?

Contrary to what some might believe, the world of diplomacy is not all pin stripes and cocktail parties, although there is a place for both! The world of diplomacy in the 21st century has evolved into a refined set of tools to promote and protect the values we hold dear. However, whether you engage in “hard” or “soft” diplomacy, whether you are a super or a middle power, an emerging nation or a war-torn country, diplomacy, at its heart, is about relationship-building.

The nodes and networks at your disposal are many. The Canadian diplomatic presence abroad provides you with an excellent window from which to monitor the situation on the ground, to interpret the political and social contexts, to voice this new dimension of Canadian foreign policy whether bilaterally or multilaterally, and to intervene as needed and appropriate.

To ensure greater effectiveness, however, it might be wise to invest in the further formation of diplomatic staff, adding religious understanding to other aspects of cultural sensitivity and awareness. And, given the importance and the key role played by locally-engaged employees in our missions abroad, they too should benefit from a full understanding of the policy as well as cross-cultural and religious perspectives. They may also require our protection for their safety. These elements are particularly important in countries of concern where loyalties may be divided.

Just as we, along with other faith groups and partners, can be part of your nodes and networks here in Canada, many of us, along with other not-for-profit organizations have a presence abroad. We can be an important source of information and cooperation, including through





our own networks with local political, religious, and private sector actors. Religious groups can also be a source of spiritual and prayerful support. And we should never underestimate the power of prayer!

Beyond relationship-building, diplomacy can achieve a great deal through capacity-building. The focus of much of our international assistance is to enhance the capacity of others to grow into stable, prosperous, and sustainable societies. Religious freedom can be seen as part of this continuum; it is not an isolated phenomenon. In that context, the capacity of our churches and the churches within those countries to carry out their

mission to reduce poverty, to address unjust structures of society, and to enhance the well-being and human dignity of all people will depend upon religious freedom – the freedom to walk the talk – and the active support of our government through its policies and programs.

The integration of CIDA into the new department of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Development offers an opportunity to seek out synergies, to enhance positive linkages, and to develop greater policy coherence. However, as our Primate and the Executive Director of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund highlighted in their letter to Prime Minister Harper, balancing the potentially competing interests of diplomacy, trade, and development can also present challenges. In cases of competing interests, however, Official Development Assistance (ODA), in our view, must remain true to its core purpose as enshrined in the ODA Accountability Act.

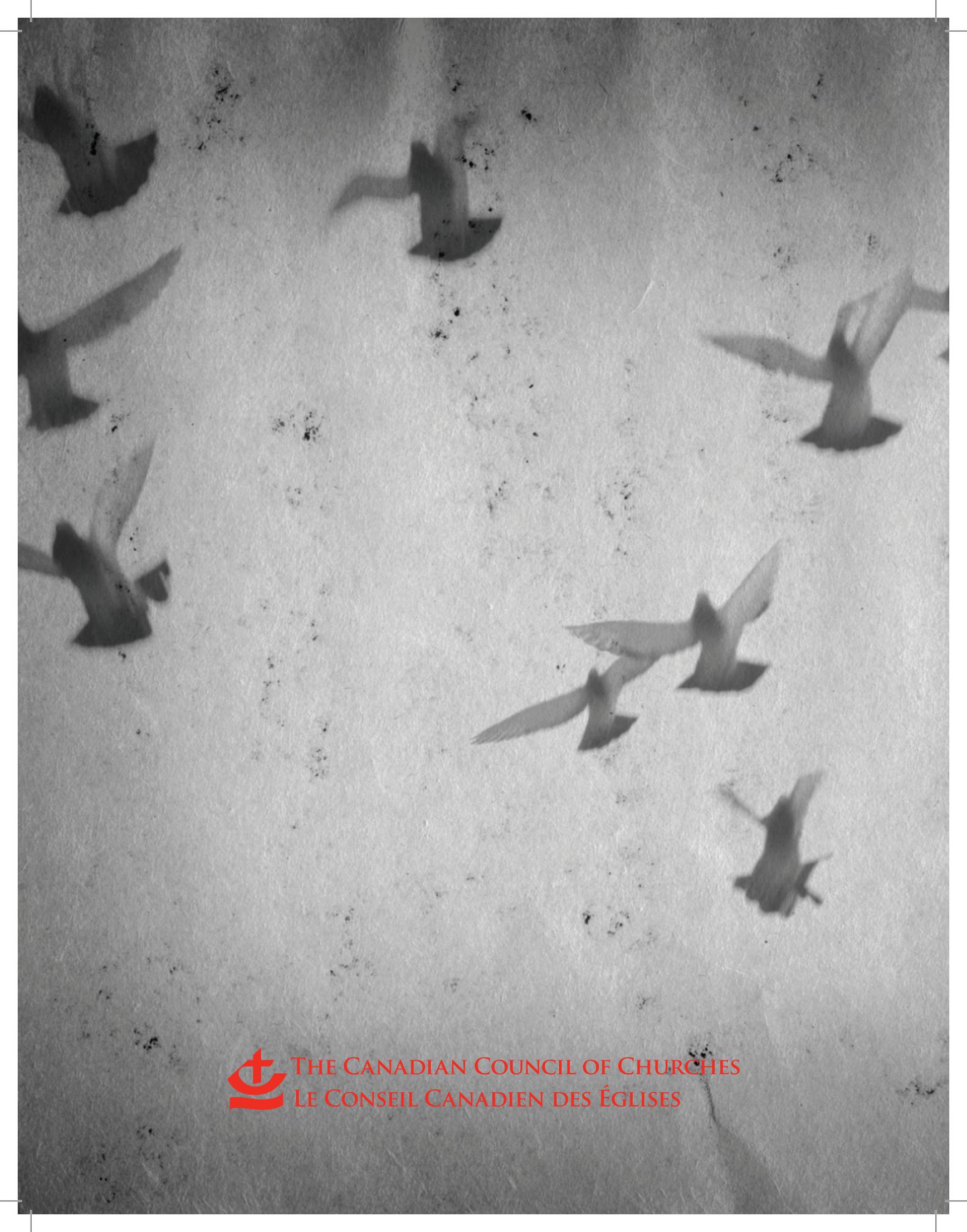
For a country of Canada's stature and influence, the use of unilateral political and economic/trade sanctions may be more limited than for a country like the United States of America that enjoys the capacity to "designate" countries of concern under its domestic legislation. Joining with others in UN efforts with recalcitrant countries, however, can be an effective "stick" in some circumstances. This may well prove to be a non-starter, however, when those countries of concern include permanent members of the Security Council.

Against that backdrop, "jaw-boning" continues to be a preferred approach to cultivating different behaviour in some countries. Doing so with the "like-minded" is increasingly an attractive option. There is strength in numbers and keeping open channels of communication is preferable to silence!

As with so many other things in life, however, leading by example is an important tool to effect change. Our capacity to be a force for the transformation of others will depend to a great extent to the degree to which we are "true" to our own philosophy! Canadians enjoy religious freedom, but there are issues that we too need to address. Religious groups need the assurance that their voices can and will be heard without fear of reprisal, including on issues of social justice.

The vineyard awaits. May our efforts be mutually reinforcing so that its yield will be abundant and of a quality that is worthy of our Canadian values.

Bon courage!



 THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES