

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



OF GODS AND GUNS: ASSESSING THE IMPROPRIETY OF INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Maj C.G. Richard

JCSP 41

Exercise Solo Flight

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2015.

PCEMI 41

Exercice Solo Flight

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2015.

EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

**OF GODS AND GUNS: ASSESSING THE IMPROPRIETY OF
INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES**

Maj C.G. Richard

“This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions, which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

Word Count: 5424

“La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.”

Compte de mots : 5424

**OF GODS AND GUNS:
Assessing the Impropriety of Institutional Religion in the Canadian Armed Forces**

The image of Christian Canada – churchgoing, moral and devotedly partisan – strikes both believers and unbelievers today as somewhat archaic. Whether we like this image or not, it is unlikely that the church will have sufficient authority in our time to replace it with another.

– John Webster Grant, 1967

INTRODUCTION

Canada is an advanced, secular nation with an increasingly multicultural population. While the Christian faith is practiced by the majority of those Canadians who consider themselves to be religious, it is but one of dozens of religions in Canada. Census data reveals that the fastest growing religions in Canada today are not the traditional Christian ones; indeed, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and atheism (the absence of religion) are becoming ever more present.¹ Of particular relevance to this essay, 26 percent of Canadians reject religion altogether, and the eschewing of organized religion remains on a steady climb.² Yet, while government institutions across Canada move to eliminate the vestiges of institutionalized religion, and while the courts continue to rule against religion in the workplace, Canada's principle agent of power – the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) – continues to entrench organized religion in the form of chaplains, taxpayer-funded churches and a number of religious practices that surface primarily at ceremonial events.

This essay argues that, while the CAF must continue to provide for the spiritual and religious needs of its members, it is time to eliminate institutionalized religion in the

¹ Solange Lefebvre and Lori Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere: Canadian Case Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 43.

² The Angus Reid Institute, "Religion and Faith in Canada Today: Strong Belief, Ambivalence and Rejection Define our Views," accessed 8 April 2015, <http://angusreid.org/faith-in-canada/>.

form of public prayer. In addition, it examines the role of chaplains within the CAF and highlights prescient issues that warrant study and potentially controversial reform.

The essay commences with a look at the state of religion in Canada today, to include statistics, trends and some notable recent court rulings. Next is a brief look at religion in militaries generally, its consoling effect, and the degree – if any – to which it is necessary for military ethics. Last, the essay examines religion in the CAF, including religious influence upon key legislation and regulations, an appraisal of the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service (RCCS) and its efforts to modernize, and a discussion about the religious views of serving members today. The essay concludes with the recommendation that the CAF make reforms to fall in line with societal change and legal precedent, while highlighting the requirement to ascertain what today's serving members expect vis-à-vis religion in the military.

It is important to note that, in the context of this essay, religiosity and spirituality are considered to be two different things. The pamphlet, *Achieving Spiritual Resilience*, issued by the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre, summarizes the concept nicely:

Spirituality is a broad concept that is often confused with religion. While spirituality can be part of a particular religion, it can also be independent of religion. Spirituality is the part of us that connects us to our state of mind, being and place, and gives us a sense of purpose.³

The CAF *Chaplain's Manual* considers spirituality to be one's source of inner strength and purpose, while also affirming that religion is not a necessary component.⁴

³ M.S. Torchinsky, *Strengthening the Military by Way of the Soul: The Role of Spirituality in the Canadian Armed Forces* (Joint Command and Staff Programme Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2014), 12.

⁴ Department of National Defence, B-GL-346-001/PT-001, *The Chaplain's Manual* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 2, 4.

THE STATE OF RELIGION IN CANADA TODAY

As reinforced in the CAF publication, *Duty with Honour*, militaries (in democracies) must reflect their parent society and embody societal values.⁵ As times change and new memes emerge, militaries must follow suit or risk becoming alienated from the society they exist to protect. In their work, *Between 9/11 and Kandahar*, researchers Alan Okros, Sarah Hill and Franklin Pinch allude to the CAF's requirement to adapt to evolving social norms and to accommodate minority groups (examples include the removal of barriers to homosexuals and the integration of females into the combat arms).⁶ With respect to religion specifically, the CAF have also adapted, as is discussed in detail later.

The Statistics

Statistic Canada's 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey – the most recent *comprehensive* survey of its type – clearly establishes that, while first-generation immigrants attend religious services more often than native-born Canadians, second-generation descendants are no more likely to partake than others.⁷ This affirms the cultural shift away from religion and the fact that not even immigrant communities from highly religious countries are immune. Far more current are the findings of the Angus Reid Institute's 2015 *Religion and Faith in Canada Today* study,⁸ which, while highlighting the declining

⁵ Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-002, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 13.

⁶ Alan Okros, Sarah Hill and Franklin Pinch, *Between 9/11 and Kandahar: Attitudes of Canadian Forces Officers in Transition* (Kingston: Defence Management Studies Program, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, in cooperation with the Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society, Royal Military College of Canada, 2008), 9.

⁷ Lefebvre and Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere . . .*, 299.

⁸ The Angus Reid Institute, "Religion and Faith in Canada Today

dominance of Christianity in Canada, revealed some other interesting facts about Canadians today:

- 26 percent reject religion (only four percent did so in 1971, demonstrating rapid growth in this segment);
- 37 percent prefer to live without God or congregation;
- 33 percent believe the growth of atheism in Canada to be positive; and
- 43 percent are uncomfortable around the devoutly religious.

These statistics are consistent with the results of the 2011 National Household Survey which revealed a nearly 10% increase in the non-religious category since 2001.⁹ Clearly the times are changing, and it can no longer be assumed that the majority is content with overt religious symbolism in their daily lives.

Trends and Judicial Rulings

The trend in Canada today is away from organized religion and traditional places of worship, and CAF members – the subset of Canadian society that they are – are following suit.¹⁰ Aside from the statistics, one need only examine a cross-section of numerous recent court cases related to matters of religion to observe a shift towards limiting religious practices that counter societal norms. In 2009, for example, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled against a group of Albertan Hutterites that desired exemption from having their photos taken for drivers licences, and only a few years later, British Columbia's Supreme Court ruled against the practice of polygamy by

⁹ Statistics Canada, "National Household Survey 2011," accessed 14 April 2015, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm#a6>.

¹⁰ Joanne Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks: Belief and Religious Experience in the Canadian Forces* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 14.

fundamentalist Mormons.¹¹ The proposed *Quebec Charter of Values* – aimed primarily at keeping religious symbolism out of public workplaces – generated substantial debate even though it continues to receive support from a majority of Quebecers.¹² In 2015, the SCC, in a *unanimous* decision, ruled that Saguenay’s practice of group prayer prior to municipal council meetings violated Canadian Law.¹³ Given these rulings, it is reasonable to posit that the CAF practice of forcing members to participate in public prayer is only one court challenge away from termination.

Mindful of the shifting state of religion in Canada today, this essay now examines the role of religion within militaries, particularly with respect to military ethics.

RELIGION AND MILITARIES

Religion and war have throughout history often gone hand-in-hand, and religious traditions continue to play an active role in militaries worldwide. Mandated by the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the *Charter*), Canadian government institutions have become entirely secularized and religious symbolism has largely been expunged from public offices. Yet the CAF stand out not only for maintaining institutional prayer in numerous traditions, but also for sustaining an entire branch immersed in religion – the RCCS.

Religion and Consolation

Whether or not a God actually exists, it would be difficult to ignore the consoling effect of – and the psychological need of some people for – religion and the belief in

¹¹ Lefebvre and Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere . . .*, 6.

¹² Global News, "Quebec Needs Values Charter: Poll," accessed 8 April 2015, <http://globalnews.ca/news/1785417/quebec-needs-values-charter-poll/>.

¹³ Supreme Court of Canada, *Mouvement Laïque Québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015.

God, particularly during times of distress.¹⁴ And herein originates an argument that militaries differ from other public institutions when it comes to religion. It can be contended that since only the military exists to fight the nation's wars – and as such faces the most brutal and disturbing aspects of human nature – an exception should be made. Certainly many soldiers will become spiritual or turn to religion when faced with terror and the fear of death. This paper does not examine the rationality of consolation through religion, but concedes that many soldiers do find comfort in having chaplains and spiritual services available on the front lines – a supposition that forms a compelling argument in support of those who favour institutionalized religion in the CAF. Another argument that often emerges from pro-religion groups is that religion forms the basis of, and is thus necessary for, morals and ethics – a standpoint this essay next examines.

Military Ethics

Given that the CAF exist to manage violence – to include the application of lethal force – on behalf of Canada, it is evident that military personnel must be well versed in ethics. If service personnel lack morals and ethics, they can not be trusted with husbanding the nation's tools of war. The CAF place great emphasis on ethics and military ethos – key components of the military profession – and CAF members participate in ethics training at junctures throughout their career. Ethics doctrine has been developed and is applied in the form of the *Defence Ethics Program*,¹⁵ publications such as *Duty with Honour* and *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*,

¹⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2008), 394.

¹⁵ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Defence Ethics Program," accessed 18 April 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/defence-ethics.page>.

and as part of the career courses conducted at the Canadian Forces College and other training institutions.

Duty with Honour establishes a profession as unique group that addresses a particular social good by applying specific knowledge while drawing upon a core set of values, beliefs and expectations to exercise ethical and moral judgement.¹⁶ In *The Warrior's Way*, a textbook used for training officers on the CAF Joint Command and Staff Programme, Richard Gabriel explains that, absent ethics, soldiers are liable to simply follow orders, regardless of legitimacy.¹⁷ History is replete with examples of unethical behaviour by soldiers and thus it is no surprise that the CAF expend significant effort reinforcing ethics. But are ethics based on religion? Can one have a true sense of morality if not religious? And if religion *is* necessary for ethics and morality, then which religion (of the numerous religions in Canada today) specifically?

In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins (a noted atheist) describes from a biological and Darwinist perspective why genes, having developed over billions of years of evolution, influence their parent organisms to act altruistically with a view to furthering their own chances of survival. This influence manifests in two ways: the natural tendency to favour one's genetic kin, thus ensuring the perpetuation of "selfish" genes; and reciprocal altruism, whereby organisms work together to ensure their mutual survival.¹⁸ *The Origins of Virtue* by Matt Ridley also offers a comprehensive look at this phenomenon, while *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* by Harvard biologist Marc Hauser is based on scientific experiments that

¹⁶ Department of National Defence, *Duty with Honour* . . . , 9.

¹⁷ Richard Gabriel and Canadian Defence Academy, *The Warrior's Way: A Treatise on Military Ethics* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion* . . . , 247.

revealed that religious believers and atheists generally made the same judgements when faced with moral conundrums. *The Warriors Way* does not mince words when discussing the “confusion of ethics with religion”:

. . . the difficulty arises when one attempts to explain *why* a principle like “thou shalt not kill” applies or does not in a given circumstance. The difficulty is rooted in the fact that religion can only offer *statements* of principles, not *reasons* why they ought to be followed. This is because religion is based upon faith in a set of propositions, which, by definition, are not susceptible to proof or disproof in the empirical world . . . History is full of racial and religious slaughters, often done in full compliance with the laws of the state by persons of strong faith and character¹⁹

The *Chaplain’s Manual* refutes the “rational” theories about ethics described above by stating, “Without spiritual values there can be a tendency towards a mercenary . . . approach to soldiering . . . ,”²⁰ which is clearly arguable. In practice, however, CAF military leaders are taught not to rely on religion or spirituality as the basis of ethics, and contemporary CAF ethics and leadership doctrine does not insinuate necessity of religion. Military leaders today are taught to rely on reasoning and a formalized code of military ethics instead.

Having conceded that religion and its representatives are useful tools on the battlefield, but having concluded that religion is not a requirement for ethics in the CAF, this essay now examines the state of religion within the CAF today.

RELIGION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Tradition plays a role in military culture that far exceeds that in civil society. Militaries are often viewed as conservative organizations resistant to change, and many customs and symbols today are based on – if not unchanged from – those from centuries

¹⁹ Gabriel, *The Warrior's Way* . . . , 17.

²⁰ Department of National Defence, *The Chaplain's Manual* . . . , 3.

past. There exists a narrative that Canada was founded on ‘Christian values’ (notably Anglo-Protestant and French Roman Catholic), with some of those values (such as duty, honour, respect, loyalty, integrity and sacrifice) forming the core of military ethos.^{21,22} One might argue that Christianity does not have a monopoly on such values, but the fact remains that modern Canada developed into the country that it is thanks originally to European immigrants, the majority of which were indeed Christian. It is thus natural to expect that ‘Christian values’ and traditions dominate Canadian society, its government institutions and its military. A brief review of the key legislation that governs the CAF will help to establish the extent to which religion influences or is mandated by same.

Religion in Key Acts and Regulations

The *British North America Act* of 1867 makes no mention of a religious establishment or state-supported church, and scholar Marguerite Van Die argues this is because it was assumed that the church had already lost its privileged place in society by that time.²³ Upper Canada had discontinued public funding for the predominant United Church as early as 1854 (though some provinces continued to favour Christianity in their school systems long after, with some still funding distinct Catholic school divisions even today).²⁴ Ironically, the *Charter* does evoke ‘principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of the law,’ and religious elites are quick to point out that there is nothing in the *Constitution* that specifically *prohibits* the merger of church and state

²¹ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks . . .*, 15.

²² Lefebvre and Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere . . .*, 25.

²³ Marguerite Van Die, *Religion and Public Life in Canada* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 288.

either.²⁵ To quote Van Die, “As is clear . . . the cultural Christianity – whether Protestant or Roman Catholic – that until recently informed so much of public life has become part of the past.”

Lori Beaman, in her essay, *Between the Public and the Private: Governing Religious Expression*, points out that hegemonic religion comes to be considered ‘culture’ whereas other religions stand out as religion.²⁶ This is certainly the case in the CAF, with Christian traditions long having been ingrained as ‘culture’ and accommodations for minority religions (for example, CAF-authorized turbans) standing out as wildly different.

The *National Defence Act* makes no mention of God or religion other than in reference to oaths and to prohibit religious discrimination.²⁷ The *Constitution Act* makes reference to religion (besides in relation to *freedom of religion*) only in Part I of the *Charter* which begins with, “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God . . .” and Term 17 of the Terms of Union of Newfoundland which mandates that any religious instruction in school be non-denominational and which allows for religious observances upon request by parents.²⁸

The *Queens Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces* (QR&O) mention God only in the context of oaths (while also providing for the areligious solemn affirmation) and acts of God (regarding property liability). Religion comes up more often, but only in objective terms (such as discussion surrounding the refusal of

²⁵ Guy Chapdelaine and Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe Facultas Theologica, *Inter-Religious Prayer in a Military Context: A Canadian Praxis* (2006), 65.

²⁶ Lefebvre and Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere . . .*, 55.

²⁷ National Defence Act, R.S.C., c. N-5, s. 158 (1985).

²⁸ The Constitution Act, 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (1867).

inoculation on religious grounds). Chapter 33 of Volume I outlines the mandate of the CAF Chaplain General and lists various duties including, “leading prayers at national events or at other appropriate events as determined by the Chaplain General.”²⁹ Section 33.07 declares that chaplains are responsible for providing services to members and their families, if they so desire, regardless of their religious or spiritual affiliation or beliefs.³⁰ Commanding officers are mandated to provide for chaplain services on recognized days of religious and spiritual observance and to provide space for same. Forbidden is the ordering of any military member “to attend a parade that is primarily religious or spiritual in nature,”³¹ though it is subsequently stated that:

Officers and non-commissioned members may be required to attend a military ceremony that has a religious or spiritual aspect, including a Remembrance Day ceremony, colours ceremony, Battle of Britain Sunday ceremony, Battle of the Atlantic Sunday ceremony, military funeral or civic or memorial service.³²

This leaves the door open to interpretation, and thus the potential for mandatory participation in religious activities for military members is a reality. The *Chaplain's Manual*, which states “Regulation prohibits requiring any soldier to participate in a religious service parade, unless it is in connection with . . . a ceremony of significant civic or memorial nature”³³ corroborates the QR&O “may be required to attend” clause as, in practice, it is subjective as to what constitutes a “significant civil nature.” In 21

²⁹ Department of National Defence, *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1959), Vol I Sect 33.03.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol I Sect 33.07.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol I Sect 33.11.

³² *Ibid.*, Vol I Sect 33.12.

³³ Department of National Defence, *The Chaplain's Manual* . . . , iii.

years of service, the author has yet to experience a single instance of having been given the option to abstain from a parade or event during which religious aspects were overt.

For its part, the *Chaplain Manual* is a solid attempt to justify and rationalize the requirement for religion in the CAF, and generally the prose is objective and inclusive. This is betrayed somewhat by several allusions to “the originator,” the “divine,” and to God, revealing the manual for what it is – a handbook with Judeo-Christian roots that assumes that the concept of institutional religion in the CAF is legitimate. At the very least, statements such as “Religious practice, discipline and ritual . . . are means by which we seek to know God . . . as well as to discern and commit ourselves to living out God’s purposes . . .”³⁴ ought to include the qualifier “*some people*” as opposed to “*we*.”

Religious Traditions in the Canadian Armed Forces Today

Within the CAF, a number of traditions continue to incorporate public prayer as they have done for decades if not centuries. One such tradition is the saying of prayers during Navy “divisions” parades; another is prayer while commissioning new ships or regimental colours. Grace is commonly said at the beginning of mess dinners, and prayer forms an integral part of many remembrance ceremonies. During memorial parades, the rank and file is normally ordered to remove headdress while a chaplain leads prayers. There exists no choice to opt out for those who feel uncomfortable taking part. In fairness, the RCCS has moved to accommodate plurality during ceremonial prayers by opening with an invitation to pray to the “God of one’s own understanding” (or words to

³⁴ Department of National Defence, *The Chaplain's Manual* . . . , 5.

that effect), as opposed to the historical Christian approach; nonetheless, mandatory public prayer sessions are something that some military members do not appreciate.³⁵

Though the RCCS supposedly changed the official hymn of the chaplaincy from the Christian-centric *Onward Christian Soldiers* to the more neutral *Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee*, it is not uncommon to hear the former still played at mess dinners with the general expectation that all participants rise and give toast, regardless of their religious inclinations. In fact, the author attended a mess dinner in 2014 during which not only was *Onward Christian Soldiers* played, but the commander toasted the “God squad” (actual words) when it ended.

Even in the commonplace summary trial procedure one can witness the remnants of Christian superiority in the CAF, with defendants offered the option of swearing oath upon the Bible or giving a solemn affirmation (presumably the only option for non-Christians).³⁶ The issue here is not that there should also be a Koran, a Guru Granth Sahib and a copy of every other sacred text made available to every presiding officer, but instead a question as to why the Bible is still provided when a solemn affirmation should in theory work in every case.

Also prominent is the protocol of playing *God Save the Queen*, contested for reasons beyond only religious. Aside from the oft-challenged concept of monarchy, the religious tone of that ubiquitous anthem is inescapable. Debate over the religiosity of *God Save the Queen*, however, is difficult to uncouple from the use of “God keep our

³⁵ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks . . .*, 98.

³⁶ Department of National Defence, *The Queen's Regulations and Orders . . .*, Vol II Sect 108.

land . . .” within *Oh Canada*. That controversy, though alive and well,³⁷ is not discussed here, though it further serves to highlight the shifting culture in Canada today.

While the CAF are making a concerted effort to be inclusive of non-Christians in more and more ceremonies – consider for example the consecration of the National Military Cemetery which included Buddhist, Christian, First Nations, Hindu, Jewish Muslim and Sikh traditions³⁸ – the reality is that it is impossible to include every religious group at all times and there always exists the risk that someone will be left out and that the non-religious will be unimpressed. The RCCS certainly deserves credit for adopting neutral prayer, using terms such as ‘Sacred Source of All Life’ as opposed to the very Christian word “God.”³⁹ That said, in *Inter-Religious Prayer in a Military Context*, Guy Chapdelaine exposes the fundamental inability to reconcile specific religious dogma with true inter-religious prayer, leaving the impression that neutral and inclusive prayers are merely an illusion for the laity while being an *administrative* necessity for military clergy, even if theologically unsound.⁴⁰ Chapdelaine concludes that multi-faith commemoration is the way forward, but for reasons outlined above, such a proposition remains impractical in reality.

A precedent for non-religious commemorations has been set, however. In the wake of 9/11, a secular service occurred on Parliament Hill, with the Prime Minister, Governor General and United States Ambassador present. No clergy were visible, nor

³⁷ Toronto Star, "O Canada: How to Fix the 'God' Problem," accessed 18 April 15, http://www.thestar.com/life/2010/03/27/o_canada_how_to_fix_the_god_problem.html.

³⁸ Department of National Defence, "National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces," accessed 10 March 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=national-military-cemetery-of-the-canadian-forces/hnmx19n7>.

³⁹ Chapdelaine, *Inter-Religious Prayer in a Military Context* . . . , 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 73, 81.

were public prayers conducted, presumably to avoid any controversy linked to rising scrutiny of Islam thanks to Islamist terrorism. This did not occur without raising the ire of the Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy, however, which took the time to produce the following unflattering resolution:

Be it resolved that: This Interfaith Committee expresses its profound disappointment and distress to the Government of Canada that Canada was the only nation in the free world whose national observance was devoid of any appeal to God, religious faith or prayer – an oversight that is contrary to the country’s founding principles and the spirituality of its contemporary citizens. And be it resolved that: The will to be inclusive interpreted by Government as the exclusion of all spiritual and religious reference in public life is an offense to God and to the citizens of Canada.⁴¹

This resolution underscores the extent to which religious elites believe religion to be indispensable to Canadian society, and it foreshadows the battle ahead when significant steps toward dismantling institutional religion within the CAF are ultimately undertaken.

The Royal Canadian Chaplain Service

CAF chaplains “. . . minister to their own, facilitate the worship of others and care for all.”⁴² The origins of the chaplaincy in the CAF date back to the volunteer service of clergymen during World War I, with the branch gaining official status in 1945 at the end of World War II.⁴³ It was in fact two distinct services – Protestant and Roman Catholic – that came into being in 1945, and chaplains remained separated by faith up until the amalgamation of the two sects in 1995.⁴⁴ Change would not stop there, however, as the forces of religious diversity in Canada penetrated the military and accommodation for

⁴¹ Chapdelaine, *Inter-Religious Prayer in a Military Context* . . . , 64.

⁴² Department of National Defence, *The Chaplain's Manual* . . . , 7.

⁴³ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks* . . . , 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

non-Christians – such as the provision of prayer space for Muslims, uniform alterations for Sikhs, and approval of ceremonial braids for Aboriginal servicepersons – became necessary. The RCCS has done well in keeping pace with societal expectations, moving from ecumenical to interfaith, and opening the door to chaplains from non-traditional faiths, with the first Muslim chaplain inaugurated in 2003.⁴⁵ Chaplains are subject to training in religious pluralism,⁴⁶ and interfaith worship centres are joining or even replacing the traditional model of one Roman Catholic and one Protestant chapel on every base. Of course, the forces of modernity can only go so far in the realm of religion, and thanks to the dual professional nature of the RCCS (chaplains must be ordained or authorized by the applicable governing religious body), women are still forbidden from carrying out the full duties of a Roman Catholic priest despite their acceptance into the RCCS as pastoral associates.⁴⁷ This may well be the last vestige of institutionalized inequality in the CAF today.

In his dissertation, *Mental Injuries Sustained by Veterans of the Afghanistan Campaign*, Christian Lillington examined the important role of chaplains as front-line workers in the battle against operational stress injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁴⁸ Lillington notes that a bond is often developed between soldiers and their chaplains during times of stress, while also observing that the healing effect of spirituality relies more on the outlet and means of coping that it presents to soldiers as

⁴⁵ Department of National Defence, "First Muslim Chaplain for Canadian Forces," accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=first-muslim-chaplain-for-canadian-forces/hnocfjeg>.

⁴⁶ Guy Chapdelaine, "Working Towards Greater Diversity: A Blessing Or a Curse? the Experience of the Canadian Military Chaplaincy," *Canadian Military Journal* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2014), 40.

⁴⁷ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks . . .*, 29.

⁴⁸ Christian Lillington, "Mental Injuries Sustained by Veterans of the Afghanistan Campaign: A Comprehensive Issue" (master's thesis, Canadian Forces College, 2012), 57.

opposed to any specific healing properties of religion itself.⁴⁹ In her article, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, Ann Cation, while alluding to the controversial church-state connection in the military chaplain role, concludes that the lack of stigma attached to talking with a chaplain (as opposed to a mental health professional) is a key facilitator in getting troubled individuals to share their anxieties with someone trusted.⁵⁰ That chaplains, as the primary “welfare officers” on the front lines, provide invaluable support is a theme in almost all related literature.

Roméo Dallaire, who penned the foreword for *Religion in the Ranks*, extols the virtues of chaplains as unbiased listeners who can be of great service to those who may be suffering from PTSD.⁵¹ He further notes the value of chaplains as religious experts who are well equipped to understand the religious nuances in conflict zones and act as advisors to commanders and soldiers, a concept that Benham Rennick substantiates later in the book.⁵² That chaplains provide an important service as unbiased and active listeners, and that they can make for conversant religious interpreters in foreign countries, is beyond doubt. The question in the context of this essay, however, is whether or not chaplains need to be faith practitioners of organized religion – responsible to their *particular* faith communities and ecclesiastical superiors⁵³ – in order to provide this service, or if non-religious social workers (or cultural experts in the matter of interpretation) could provide the same service while better keeping church and state

⁴⁹ Christian Lillington, "Mental Injuries Sustained by Veterans of the Afghanistan Campaign . . .", 79.

⁵⁰ Anne Francis Cation, "Onward Christian Soldiers: Religion in the Canadian Forces," *On Track* 18, no. 1 (2008), 43.

⁵¹ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks* . . ., ix.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵³ Department of National Defence, *The Chaplain's Manual* . . ., iv.

apart. The fact that chaplains are not accredited mental health professionals (although they do receive limited counselling training)⁵⁴ must also be considered. In his article, *CAF Chaplains as a Primary Source of Spiritual Resiliency*, Harold Ristau argues that chaplains should be hired primarily to support spiritual resiliency, while concluding that in practice, chaplains' daily tasks have much more to do with support and resiliency than with religion.⁵⁵

One theme that is evident in *Religion in the Ranks* is the challenge that chaplains face in their duty to provide *generic* services to all CAF members when tenants of their *particular* religious faith collide with certain realities of the modern CAF demographic. Not only may a Catholic chaplain be required (perhaps by virtue of being the only chaplain on a particular deployment) to provide support to a Wahhabi or a Pagan, he or she may be called upon to provide counsel to a homosexual, an atheist or an unwed pregnant female considering abortion. In their report, *Gender Identity in the Military*, Alan Okros and Denise Scott draw attention to the incompatibility between the religions represented by chaplains and transgender issues, while explaining how, in developing the policy intended to guide CAF personnel in the management of transsexual members,⁵⁶ it was necessary to preclude any phrasing that might be interpreted so as to *mandate* chaplain participation in the provision of support to transgender personnel.⁵⁷ While it is not fair to question the professionalism of chaplains and their ability to suspend bias, it is

⁵⁴ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks . . .*, 32.

⁵⁵ Harold Ristau, "Canadian Armed Forces' Chaplains as a Primary Source of Spiritual Resiliency," *Canadian Military Journal* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 46.

⁵⁶ Canadian Forces Military Personnel Instruction 01/11 – Management of CF Transsexual Members.

⁵⁷ Alan Okros and Denise Scott, *Gender Identity in the Military: Perspectives on Trans Members of the Canadian Forces* (Report Provided to the Directorate of Human Rights and Diversity, Department of National Defence, 2013), 48.

fair to question the soundness of employing representatives of religions that are widely known to purvey views counter to modern Canadian laws and culture to help soldiers through sensitive issues. And while chaplains are able to avoid providing a service where it violates their beliefs thanks to the “faith and conscience” clause,⁵⁸ the question arises as to where that may leave a deployed soldier who is seeking support. One may further question why taxpayers must pay for chapels on bases if the theological foundations of said chapels discriminate against certain groups (such as homosexuals) that the CAF are legally obligated to accommodate. With chapel attendance continually declining,⁵⁹ the value of retaining base chapels in the traditional form is debatable.

In his journal article, *Working Towards Greater Diversity*, Guy Chapdelaine states:

. . . a new policy on public prayer is about to be announced. It reiterates the importance of offering a prayer during some public military ceremonies, while taking into consideration the religious diversity of individuals who attend a military gathering and being sensitive when using sacred expressions. Often chaplains are invited to pray during memorial ceremonies, such as Remembrance Day, but also during other military ceremonies, such as a change of command, the commissioning or decommissioning of ships, the dedication of regimental colours, or even at a mess dinner. The prayer must be inclusive when the military chaplain is the only voice heard. What is new in this policy is the fact that the chaplain mentions at the start of the prayer that the latter is voluntary, and that those who do not wish to pray for one reason or another are encouraged to take advantage of the occasion to engage in personal reflection, or to meditate in silence while others pray.⁶⁰

This is a sensible and progressive move, but it singles out those who do not believe in God or prayer, and as such can create awkwardness if even in the most gentle of manners. Chapdelaine goes on to conclude that religious diversity is a blessing in the CAF, while

⁵⁸ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks* . . . , 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59, 61.

⁶⁰ Chapdelaine, "*Working Towards Greater Diversity* . . . , 40.

acknowledging that the RCCS faces significant challenges in the years ahead due to the transforming religious landscape in Canada.

All of that said, what can not be overlooked is that at least *some* CAF members do want religious services and sacred spaces available and do take comfort in having ordained religious figures nearby, especially when lives are on the line. Feedback from chaplains that served in Afghanistan, for example, reveals that religious services were highly in demand in theatre (not surprising considering the common ‘life insurance’ approach to faith in war zones).⁶¹ In his book, *No Atheists in Foxholes*, Patrick McLaughlin claims that, “In times of war, prayer is one of the only ways we can try to make sense of things . . .,” and he dedicates a great deal of prose to extolling the power of prayer.⁶² Given that it is unrealistic to have one chaplain of every faith available at all times, the question arises as to whether it is sufficient to have a chaplain of *any* religious faith available to lead believers in prayer. The next question might concern the rising segment of atheists who possibly reject all religious authority – do they have the right not to be subject to religion in their place of work, even if that place happens to be a distant battlefield littered with agony and atrocity? Or is it true that there are no atheists in foxholes?

Fortunately, amongst CAF members, there appears to exist little but respect and appreciation for chaplains and the services they provide, even from those who reject religion. While only a subset may embrace the religious aspects of chaplain work, many more see value in the “ministry of presence” and emotional support provided by

⁶¹ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks . . .*, 113, 115.

⁶² Patrick McLaughlin, *No Atheists in Foxholes: Reflections and Prayers from the Front* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 8.

chaplains on the front lines. The question of whether or not a theological background and religious accreditation is required to do what chaplains do warrants consideration, but the requirement for the *service* provided by chaplains is not disputed.

Religious Views of Serving Members

There does not exist a current, comprehensive data set for the religious views of serving CAF members (as the CAF does not compile statistics on religious identities), however one excellent source of information is the *Between 9/11 and Kandahar* study by Okros et al. Though dated, the study was a Canadian imitation of the “Project on the Gap between the Military and Civilian Society” undertaken in the United States by the US Triangle Institute for Strategic Studies.⁶³ The Canadian study was based upon a survey of 215 serving CAF officers and included a number of questions related to religion.

Results relevant to this essay are drawn from the report and listed here:

- Only 49 percent were comfortable with prayer in public schools;
- Only 26 percent believed that “Canadian society would have fewer problems if people took God’s will more seriously;”
- 29 percent stated that religion provided them with no guidance in their day-to-day lives while only eight percent stated that it provided them a great deal of guidance;
- 34 percent never attended religious services while only nine percent attended at least weekly;
- Religious institutions warranted a confidence rating of only 3.6 on a scale from 0 (no confidence) to 10 (every confidence); and

⁶³ Okros et al., *Between 9/11 and Kandahar* . . . , 14.

- 71 percent believed that holding on to old-fashioned views of morality was harmful to military effectiveness.

In her research for *Religion in the Ranks*, Rennick conducted interviews with 16 chaplains and 16 non-chaplains in an effort to gauge the role that religion plays in the lives of military members.⁶⁴ Though the sample size was small, her results are useful when examining religion in the CAF. One inescapable conclusion was that ‘spirituality’ was far more prevalent than ‘religion.’ And perhaps not surprisingly, beliefs – be them spiritual *or* religious – were more prominent during times of stress and hardship.⁶⁵ But also inescapable was the conclusion that the RCCS faces significant challenges if the goal is to remain relevant in light of the shift away from religion in Canada today and into the future.

While all of the above affirms that there is still a place for the provision of religious services in the CAF, and that the other services provided by chaplains remain essential, it also illustrates that it can no longer be taken for granted that military personnel are content with overt religious symbolism. The acts and regulations that cite God require review, and a comprehensive look at what military members today want vis-à-vis religion in the CAF would be a good starting point when seeking to determine what reforms might be required.

CONCLUSION

Religious interests continue to exist in the CAF, but more so in an individualized and subjective manner than via adherence to formal, organized religion. The trend

⁶⁴ Benham Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks* . . . , 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

continues to be away from ‘the church’ toward unaffiliated spirituality, a variety of non-Christian denominations, and increasing atheism. Departments across the Government of Canada have become completely secular, and it is time for the CAF to follow suit. It can no longer be assumed that military personnel are receptive to mandatory prayer and religious influences in the work place. The questions that remain are: is it economical to maintain the RCCS as the means to providing religious services for those that do want them; how to accommodate the vast differences across the vast numbers of religious backgrounds represented in the CAF; should taxpayers continue to fund religious infrastructure on bases; must the RCCS sustain the current practice of employing only accredited religious leaders; are chaplains or uniformed social workers or a combination of both best suited to the needs of the military in the future; and what exactly is it that the serving members of the CAF want when it comes to religion in the workplace? A comprehensive survey of the religious views of CAF members ought to be conducted.

Despite the commendable efforts of the RCCS to become inclusive, recent court rulings support the assertion that institutionalized prayer during military ceremonies must cease in favour of secular commemorations such as that conducted in the wake of 9/11. The challenge will be that, while atheism is on the rise, there are certain things – such as ramp ceremonies, burial of the dead, and notification of next of kin (of the death of a service member) – that just *seem* to warrant the involvement of religious leaders. This notion will not likely disappear any time soon. And as long as CAF chaplains continue to be the professional, inclusive, caring people that they are, few non-religious members are likely to oppose their leadership at such moments. But the tide is nonetheless changing and CAF leaders must pay attention. Minority rights must be respected – and that

minority now includes a growing segment of atheists. Majority support for institutionalized religion in the CAF, if it indeed exists, must not be assumed to be everlasting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Angus Reid Institute. "Religion and Faith in Canada Today: Strong Belief, Ambivalence and Rejection Define our Views." Accessed 8 April 2015.
<http://angusreid.org/faith-in-canada/>.
- Benham Rennick, Joanne. *Religion in the Ranks: Belief and Religious Experience in the Canadian Forces*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. A-PA-005-000/AP-001, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*. 2nd ed. Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2009.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-346-001/FP-000, *The Chaplain's Manual*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*. Leadership in the Canadian Forces. Vol. 2. Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2005.
- Canada. Department of National Defence. *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1959.
- Cation, Anne Francis. "Onward Christian Soldiers: Religion in the Canadian Forces." *On Track* 18, no. 1 (2008): 43.
- Chapdelaine, Guy. "Working Towards Greater Diversity: A Blessing Or a Curse? the Experience of the Canadian Military Chaplaincy." *Canadian Military Journal* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 34.
- Chapdelaine, Guy and Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe Facultas Theologica. *Inter-Religious Prayer in a Military Context: A Canadian Praxis*, 2006.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. New York: First Mariner Books, 2008.
- Department of National Defence. "National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces." Accessed 10 March 2015.
<http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=national-military-cemetery-of-the-canadian-forces/hnm19n7>.
- Department of National Defence. "The Canadian Forces Chaplaincy." Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=the-canadian-forces-chaplaincy/hnps1tlr>.

Gabriel, Richard and Canadian Defence Academy. *The Warrior's Way: A Treatise on Military Ethics*. Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007.

Global News. "Quebec Needs Values Charter: Poll." Accessed 8 April 2015.
<http://globalnews.ca/news/1785417/quebec-needs-values-charter-poll/>.

Hauser, Marc. *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*. New York: Ecco Press, 2006.

Lefebvre, Solange and Lori Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere: Canadian Case Studies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Lillington, Christian and Canadian Forces College. *Mental Injuries Sustained by Veterans of the Afghanistan Campaign: A Comprehensive Issue*. Master's Thesis (Canadian Forces College). Vol. JCSP/PCEMI 38-16. Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2012.

McLaughlin, Patrick. *No Atheists in Foxholes: Reflections and Prayers from the Front*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Okros, Alan Charles, Sarah A. Hill, Franklin C. Pinch, Queen's University Defence Management Studies Program, and Royal Military College of Canada Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society. *Between 9/11 and Kandahar: Attitudes of Canadian Forces Officers in Transition*. Claxton Papers. Vol. 08. Kingston: Defence Management Studies Program, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, in cooperation with the Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society, Royal Military College of Canada, 2008.

Okros, Alan, Denise Scott. *Gender Identity in the Military: Perspectives on Trans Members of the Canadian Forces*. Report Provided to the Directorate of Human Rights and Diversity, Department of National Defence, 2013.

Ridley, Matt. *The Origins of Virtue*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Ristau, Harold. "Canadian Armed Forces' Chaplains as a Primary Source of Spiritual Resiliency." *Canadian Military Journal* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 46.

Statistics Canada. "National Household Survey 2011." Accessed 14 April 2015.
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm#a6>.

Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City) (2015).

Torchinsky, M. S. and Canadian Forces College. *Strengthening the Military by Way of the Soul: The Role of Spirituality in the Canadian Armed Forces*. Exercise Solo Flight. Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2014.

Toronto Star. "O Canada: How to Fix the 'God' Problem." Accessed 18 April 2015.
http://www.thestar.com/life/2010/03/27/o_canada_how_to_fix_the_god_problem.html.

Van Die, Marguerite. *Religion and Public Life in Canada*. Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001.