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Windows into the Canadian Approach to Managing Religion: Refugee Policies and the Office of Religious Freedom

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Windows into the Canadian Approach to Managing Religion: Refugee Policies and the Office of Religious Freedom

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Abstract

Even though the Canadian government has adopted a more self-conscious and distanced approach to religion in the past half century, the state has in fact quite often involved itself with religious groups and claims. It is unlikely that the consolidation of functional secularism will lead to any dramatic decrease in at least the number (if perhaps also the type) of interactions between the state and religions. In this paper I examine two instances in which the federal government relies upon or perhaps seeks to capitalize on its significant ties with religious groups. In the first case, the government's long-standing relationship with religiously-affiliated refugee settlement agencies reminds us of the power of a particular kind of secularism. This particular ideological orientation both frees and constrains religious and state agents. In the second case, the government's establishment of an Office of Religious Freedom provides a window into the complex forces associated with public engagements between the state and religion. While the promotion of religious freedom around the world was one of the objectives of this undertaking, it is also important to consider other more mundane political factors.

In liberal democracies it is not uncommon for citizens to assume that the state is and ought to remain decidedly disinterested in religious convictions, practices and communities. After all, why should the state concern itself with such matters provided these groups do not run afoul of the law and do not impede the economic, social and political flourishing of the broader society? There is something attractive about the putative 'functional secularism' (Bhargava 1998; cf. Biles and Ibrahim 2005a; 2005b) of liberal societies such as Canada, where the state at least theoretically seeks to be equally neutral in its treatment of all religious communities.

Of course, in any academic assessment of the ways the state and religion interact in Canada one is compelled to mention that Christianity continues to enjoy numerous privileges: statutory days of rest on Christian holy days, powerful Christian moral norms that animate aspects of our legal and political regimes, and the fact that in our largest province a constitutional guarantee for government funding exists only for Roman Catholic schools (other

schools receive no support at all) (Beaman and Beyer 2008; Bramadat and Seljak 2009; 2013). While these benefits are over a century old and often seen as benign or too entrenched to extricate, the federal government and most provincial and municipal governments are certainly cautious about adding new forms of privilege. Indeed, these levels of government can be said to be engaged in at least a de-Christianization, and also arguably an overall secularization of the Canadian public sphere (Bramadat and Seljak 2013; cf. Beaman and Beyer 2008). Nonetheless, even as this new more self-conscious and distanced approach to religion has taken hold in the formal spheres of Canadian society during roughly the past forty years, the state has in fact quite often involved itself with religious groups and claims. Whether this engagement reflects the government's awareness that a particular social need can be met more effectively by a religious rather than state entity, or, instead, a political calculation that a particular kind of involvement might achieve certain electoral objectives, it is unlikely that the consolidation of functional secularism will lead to any dramatic decrease in at least the number (if perhaps also the type) of interactions between the state and religions.

This creates an interesting opportunity for scholars interested in drawing some broader conclusions on the on-going relations between religious groups and ostensibly secular states. In this essay I examine two instances in which the Canadian federal government relies upon or perhaps seeks to capitalize on its significant ties with religious groups. In the first case, the government's long-standing relationship with religiously-affiliated refugee settlement agencies reminds us of the power of a particular kind of secularism. This particular ideological orientation both frees and constrains religious and state agents. In the second case, the government's establishment of an Office of Religious Freedom provides a window into the complex forces associated with public engagements between the state and religion. While the promotion of international religious freedom was one of the objectives of this undertaking, it is also important to consider other more mundane political factors.

Case Study One: Religiously-affiliated Refugee Settlement

Many Canadians are proud of Canada's post-war¹ refugee policies. In particular, Canada has become well known around the world for the refugee settlement policies and traditions that developed in the last half century. Especially since the Vietnamese 'boat people' crisis in the late 1970s, religious groups (among others) have helped thousands of people fleeing political turmoil. Sometimes refugees remained in Canada permanently; on other occasions, they returned to their own societies when particular political conflicts abated. A rich literature on these efforts in Canada (and similar practices in other societies) illustrates the powerful impact of religious motivations (Ager 2011; Eby et al 2011: 586; cf. Beiser 1999; 2003; Denton 2003; Derwing and Mulder 2003; Ives et al 2010; Ives and Sinha 2010: 213; Wilson 2011).

While religious groups have contributed significantly to the provision of these services for decades, there is reason to wonder why this relatively easy interaction between religion and the state will continue. After all, in the past half century Canadian society has become both more multicultural and multi-religious, and during this period government officials simultaneously have become more mindful of the problematic roles played by Christian denominations in Canadian history. In particular, the revelations that many First Nations Canadians and indeed Euro-Canadians (Grant 1996; Overton 1993), had been victims of often

¹ Our dismal pre-war response to Jews desperate to leave Europe was – to put it mildly – not an example of far-reaching moral leadership (see Abella and Troper 1983).

protracted and horrific forms of abuse at the hands (often) of clergy who were operating educational institutions funded by the government, certainly contributed to the re-orientation of the state toward religion. As well, the tumultuous changes brought about by these scandals must be seen as part of a sea of change in many Western societies since the 1960s. This is clearly not the place for a full consideration of the changes that characterized these decades; for our purposes it is sufficient to note simply that because of these tectonic shifts two relationships became increasingly problematic over the past century: first, between the state and religious agencies that delivered state-supported services, and second, between the religious agencies providing such services and the citizens receiving such assistance.

In an effort to address some of the theoretical and empirical questions related to the first relationship (agencies-state), I recently conducted a pilot project among some religiously-affiliated refugee settlement agencies in British Columbia. In the project I posed two general questions: first, what are the key challenges and opportunities facing these agencies as both their relationship with the state and often the very survival of the denominations to which they are attached are now more problematic than ever? Second, what are the broader ideological forces evident in the way the government and the agencies discuss religious issues?

Although I reflect formally on the results of this study elsewhere (Bramadat 2014 in press), in general the groups I studied worry about both changes in our society that make it more difficult to sustain the kind of volunteer and donor base needed for refugee settlement activities, as well as the increasing bureaucratization and securitization of refugees and immigrants by the federal and provincial immigration and policing authorities.

In addition to collecting data on these particular concerns among the volunteers I interviewed, I noticed an additional dynamic that is relevant to the concerns of this article. In particular, the agencies in question frame and justify their activities in explicitly religious terms. That is, among themselves, and with me, the organizers were quite clear that they felt they had a religious duty to help refugees. Many were able and inclined to quote chapter and verse of a given sacred text to explain their own and their agency's commitment to this work; others noted more broadly that providing assistance to the neediest newcomers was an important general value of the religious community closely associated with the agency. To put it succinctly: religious motivations featured prominently in the ways these volunteers spoke among themselves and with outsiders (such as myself) they perceived as sympathetic.

However, when I asked the volunteers if they felt free, or might wish, to share these motivations with the government representatives or members of secular service agencies, schools or healthcare facilities with whom they need to interact when working to settle refugees, they almost all responded negatively and without hesitation. Some responded in such a way that showed they felt the question itself was ridiculous. As one participant remarked, "Why would we want to talk about such issues with [representatives of the government or a secular social service agency]? I mean, we don't talk about this kind of thing with our plumbers, architects or lawyers." It was interesting to note that when I spoke with federal government representatives involved in refugee settlement, I also raised the possibility of such a discussion. They responded in an exactly analogous manner. One replied: "No, we wouldn't want to talk about that. What's the point? That's not our job. I mean, how would it affect our roles as civil servants?"

Eventually it became clear that when it came to religion, both the volunteer agencies and the secular government representatives with whom they liaised functioned according to a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. Although the government and the broader society benefit from religiously-inspired volunteer efforts, neither the state nor the religious groups has an interest in discussing the motivations involved. For now, in our functionally secular society, the policy of silence works. The state gets free labour and its representatives do not need to risk

embarrassment by entering too deeply or too often into interactions with religious groups, some of which operate according to principles, employ practices or involve histories that might be used by a ruling party's political opponents to cast aspersions on the government. Interestingly, in addition to the benefits this 'don't ask, don't tell' approach ultimately confers to the refugees, the state and the broader society, there are also benefits for the religious groups. By secularizing their own motivations in their interactions with state representatives, and by ensuring that they are cautiously secular when making statements in public, they secure the state's imprimatur, something that is crucial to any Canadian group that wishes to be a "sponsorship agreement holder." Since the federal government alone has the power to approve these agreements, it therefore somewhat ironically has the power to determine whether or not a religious group has the ability to live out a certain set of explicitly religious convictions. It might be the case that all groups assisting refugees tend to provide similar kinds of services – raising funds, registering children in schools, helping refugees cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, helping them find housing, medical care and employment. From the perspective of the state, the competent provision of services is what matters. Nonetheless, in the case of religiously affiliated refugee settlement groups, the Canadian state is the sole facilitator of what everyone knows – even if no one wishes to discuss such matters – are religious convictions.

At present, this pragmatic form of functional secularism does not appear to represent a major problem for either agents of religious groups or the state; or at the very least no one I interviewed complained specifically about the 'don't ask, don't tell' approach. The volunteers had other concerns, including new rules that might reduce the numbers of refugees Canada accepts each year, as well as an increased 'securitization' of the broader immigration regime that is affecting the ways settled Canadians conceive of newcomers (Bramadat 2014 in press; Ives and Sinha 2010; Ryan 2010).

Although the implicit rules precluding the use of religious discourse do not seem especially problematic, certain changes in our society might require Canadians to consider altering what appears to be a polite model of *co-vivendi* (Milot 2009). Let us turn our attention to these shifts now. First, 'don't ask, don't tell' works reasonably well if everyone agrees tacitly not to look too closely at (or not to care very much about) the actual convictions, histories or practices of the groups in question. However, if or when it becomes public knowledge that a group attached to a (relatively) eccentric or illiberal set of ideals and customs (say, Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons) has been empowered by the government with a social service with broad public ramifications, or when such a group is involved in hosting a schismatic or politicized religious group (say, a group of salafi Muslims or fundamentalist African Christians), it is hard to imagine that either the religious groups or the government will be comfortable with the ensuing controversy. To put it another way, 'don't ask, don't tell' works well in a regime of closed, rather than open, secularism;² better in a context in which the line separating religion from the state is clear and well policed than in a context in which the relationship between these two spheres is more fluid. As Ager notes in his analysis of the dominant norms influencing the ways states frame refugee settlement, "we work in an era when across an increasingly broad array of 'public' contexts our discourse reflects the language and mindset of secularism, while acknowledging domains within which individuals or communities may legitimately deploy faith-based thinking and actions." (Ager 2011: 458) However, it is not difficult to imagine situations in which the "faith-based thinking and actions" associated with

² See the report emanating from the 2007-08 *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* that analyzed the state of these issues in contemporary Quebec, written by Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor.

refugee settlement groups, or indeed with refugees themselves, could create anxieties among the broader population.

Second, ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ works best in a context in which the ethnic and religious mix of newcomers to Canada changes in controlled and predictable ways. At present the vast majority of settlement activities are performed by groups associated with one of the established Christian denominations, and a great many of the refugees themselves are Muslims. However, what happens if or when our mix of refugees and immigrants shifts dramatically? If climate change, for example, creates migration flows that increase the number of Portuguese or Spanish-speaking Roman Catholic refugees, how might that alter the ways members of the public or the state think and talk about refugee settlement? Indeed, even if we imagine a more or less consistent profile of refugees claimants, what happens when the number of Muslims in Canada reaches 5-10% of the total population (something that is likely to happen within the next decade) and the more settled members of this community wish to participate in refugee settlement activities in a different – perhaps an explicitly religious – manner? In other words, what if a relatively new and thriving group does not wish to play by the secularist rules of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’? Might we see, for example, not just a general loosening up of the rules around the secular nature of the public sphere and refugee services, but also the introduction into the public arena of hitherto strictly communal intra-group tensions (such as those one sees between the Sunni and Shia communities)?

Third, and most broadly, the implicit ‘don’t ask don’t tell’ policy refers not just to the kinds of conversations one might imagine between religiously inspired volunteers and government representatives, but also to a broader discourse one can witness elsewhere when actors in both intimate and public arenas carefully avoid controversial topics in pursuit of some larger objective. The dominant regime within which religious people agree to translate their religious convictions into publicly accessible language (Cf. Habermas 2005) in order to abide by a set of tacit rules is an artefact of a particular phase of history. This pattern is a *product* of a number of developments associated with Northwestern Europe and North America (e.g., the post-Westphalian order; increasing personal and legal autonomy; broad trends in secularization; pervasive discourses on human rights; revelations about the depredations of religion in the colonial era; the popularity of the ‘new atheist’ rhetoric); but it is also the *producer* of a particular set of rules and discourses that structure everyday interactions (e.g., a certain secularist habitus, a certain set of norms that determine how best to contain religion). While it is not difficult to trace the pattern’s history, it is less clear how it disciplines our lives today. Here it is sufficient to observe that discourses and social arrangements that once seemed inevitable or necessary can often come to be seen as constricting due to the emergence of new economic, political and cultural phenomena. There are obvious precedents: once unimaginable shifts have occurred in the past century in the arenas of human sexuality, relationships between colonial powers and colonized regions, and our use of communications and transportation technologies. Similarly, eventually the ways Canadians have agreed to manage social services such as refugee settlement may come to seem anachronistic in a rapidly and perhaps even post-secular regime (Bramadat and Seljak 2013).

Case Study Two: Canada’s Office of Religious Freedom

The second case study involves the creation of a new political entity that has attracted quite a lot of media, but almost no sustained academic attention. (Cf. Buckingham 2011; Hoover 2011) Nonetheless, certain features of the venture enable us to comment on the broader issues addressed in this article.

Background

When the Conservative Party won a majority government in May 2011, part of its electoral platform was the establishment of an ‘office of religious freedom.’ The office, they promised, would be modelled to a significant degree on the American Office of Religious Freedom, situated within the US State Department. Canadian politicians, ambassadors and others had already been issuing complaints about the limitations imposed on the religious freedoms of others for many years, mostly through platforms created by the international diplomatic corps and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Nonetheless, the federal government argued that a separate office devoted to these matters would enable it to promote international human rights norms even more forcefully.

In October 2011, the federal government convened a ‘consultation’ on the future of the Office of Religious Freedom (ORF). The meeting was held in Ottawa at the headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. About 120 people – including myself – were in attendance at this half-day event, featuring short presentations by six invited speakers and an open forum designed to give the invited religious and ethnic community leaders an opportunity to express their hopes for and concerns about the ORF. The speakers consisted of the brother of a slain Pakistani human rights lawyer (Shahbaz Bhatti; the brother was flown in specifically to speak and to receive accolades on his brother’s behalf); Thomas Farr, the former director of the US Office of Religious Freedom; Suzanne Tamas, the leader of Canada’s small Baha’i community; Frank Dimant, the leader of B’Nai Brith; Raymond de Souza, a Roman Catholic priest and columnist for the right-of-centre *National Post* newspaper; and Anne Brandner and Don Hutchinson of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Baird, initiated the consultation conversation with a speech in which he re-articulated his government’s commitment to the protection of religious freedom around the world (Baird 2011).

At this consultation I met a great many people who were attached to very conservative versions of their faith traditions. Notable among these groups were members of very small evangelical Christian organizations representing minority (e.g., Pakistani) Christian communities whose co-religionists are persecuted in their native countries. Very small conservative Euro-Canadian Protestant and Roman Catholic groups were also present.³ The small number of people at the consultation who were identified with broadly liberal forms of religion were almost entirely silent. In other words, the audience clearly did not represent the range of religious communities in the broader Canadian sphere.

Moreover, the audience included only two academics (David Seljak and myself) trained in religious studies, and indeed our areas of expertise are far removed from the international political and legal issues related to human rights. The consultation could quite easily have included a larger number of experts since the event took place just one day after a major meeting of a national research project on religion and diversity, housed at the University of Ottawa. Present at the annual meeting of this ‘Major Collaborative Research Project’ (funded

³ While ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘evangelical’ Christians in the United States combined make up as much as 30-40% of the whole population, in Canada the analogous cohort is probably less than a third that size. Although some pundits and journalists (McDonald 2010) do worry about the Americanization of Canadian conservatism and the increased clout enjoyed by conservative Christianity in Canada since Stephen Harper became Prime Minister, the Canadian cohort has never had the same kind of access to political and economic levers of power, as evidenced by the fact that even with a majority government, Harper has not sought to appease this conservative religious base by rescinding liberal laws and policies related to multiculturalism, abortion, or same sex marriage. As such, the number of small evangelical Christian groups invited to the consultation was peculiar if only because ordinarily these groups play a fairly minor role in Canadian public life.

by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council) were dozens of Canada's (and perhaps the world's) experts on religion, law, inclusion, diversity, human rights and public policy.⁴ None of them was invited; indeed, when I told my colleagues at this meeting that I was attending the ORF event I learned that none of them knew the consultation was taking place.

When the budget, structure, location and leadership of the office were finally revealed in February 2013, several Canadian critics recalled that the office had been established with virtually no consultation with scholars.⁵ An additional irritant to many was the fact the press almost all repeated the Prime Minister's characterization of the inaugural director, Andrew Bennett. The new director, we were told, was a dean of a liberal arts college and a scholar of religious studies, and most members of the media accepted this description without asking any difficult questions about whether he indeed had the expected *sine qua non* of the professional academic. Although Bennett's appointment could easily have been justified by virtue of his having a doctorate in the social sciences, a deep personal sympathy for religious convictions and considerable experience in the civil service, the Prime Minister and others in Ottawa opted to frame him in far more ambitious terms.

In fact, as a number of religious studies experts observed in the weeks following the announcement, the new director did indeed hold a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, but it was in political science. In addition, Bennett has also not published any peer reviewed academic work. Bennett's academic life at the time of his appointment was rooted in Augustine College, a very new institution operating out of a church in suburban Ottawa, with four non-salaried faculty members as well as a dean (Bennett) and president (a medical doctor). In fact, three of the total six staff members at Augustine do not hold PhDs. This of course meant that Bennett did not undergo the normal scrutiny of peers that other academics face to secure positions as faculty members (and certainly as deans). Moreover, Bennett's page on Augustine's website reported that he "has taught at the School of Social and Political Studies and the Centre for Canadian Studies, both at the University of Edinburgh, and in the Department of History at McGill University"; the Prime Minister himself claimed that Bennett had "an extensive educational background in history, political science, and religious studies" (Government of Canada, 2013). In fact he has not had extensive academic training in religious studies, and has never held a regular teaching position at any university (although he has performed the valuable duties of a teaching assistant during his time as a graduate student).

Although I do not wish to impugn the sincerity or intelligence of either the college's founders or of Bennett in particular, the fact is that Augustine specializes in eight-month programs aimed at preparing largely conservative Christians for further studies in secular institutions that Augustine's own website characterizes as awash in disorienting relativism and shallow liberalism. While Augustine's students might benefit immensely from their program, and while there is certainly value in considering conservative ideas and ethics as well as liberal ones, it is not surprising that many established scholars were quite uncomfortable with the Prime Minister's characterization of the new director.

The 2013 announcement of the ORF also indicated that it would effectively function as a program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Although the former director of the US office on which the Canadian office was based, urged Canadian policy

⁴ Among others, these participants included Lori Beaman, James Beckford, Benjamin Berger, Peter Beyer, Gary Bouma, Avigail Eisenberg, Pascale Fournier, Pamela Klassen, Kim Knott, Solange Lefebvre, Richard Moon, Nancy Nason-Clarke, Sam Reimer, Bruce Ryder, Winnifred Sullivan, Bruce Wilkinson, and Linda Woodhead.

⁵ To test this impression, I personally contacted approximately 30 of Canada's leading scholars, each of them expert in the areas of religion, law and human rights in Canada or abroad, to determine if they had been contacted in any way by members of the government for advice about how such an office might be designed; none of them had been consulted.

makers at the 2011 consultation meeting to give the new office significant autonomy, the Canadian announcement in 2013 not only made it clear that the ORF would be an instrument of the government's foreign policy, but also hinted that we should all keep our expectations low. While the ambit of the office would be religious freedom in the entire world, its budget would be five million dollars – even though the office would need a full complement of staff – and the 'deliverables' were not clearly specified.

It might be inappropriate to expect a full account of the office's scope and practical plans so early in its existence. However, it is not surprising that concerns were raised both by the fact that the office was constructed with very little consultation with experts, and by the way in which the director was introduced to the public. Although even the office's most voluble critics would not dispute the goal of reducing religious persecution around the world, and even though I personally wish the office and the new director every success, this early phase of the office raises some concerns. In particular, it leads one to wonder whether, in fact, the ORF was created not mainly to advance the cause of religious freedom in the international sphere, but rather to gratify the generally stable (30%) Conservative bloc of voters, some of whom are members of relatively new religious and ethnic minorities who have grave (and legitimate) concerns about the safety and well-being of their friends and family members 'back home'.

This is not the place to tease out all of the potential side effects of formal responses to threats to or attacks on religious freedom throughout the world. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile here to identify two concerns. First, if the ORF is indeed so closely affiliated with DFAIT, will its director be free to criticize any state? That is, will the office be – or with the leader be likely to feel – constrained by the fact that Canadian officials (especially those in DFAIT) actively seek unimpeded trade relations with countries such as India, Russia and China? Or, for that matter, will the ORF be free to take exception to one or another Israeli policy *vis à vis* the Palestinians, given that the Harper Conservatives are among Israel's staunchest allies in the world? Should we expect much response to potential protests about the diminished religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists, given that the criticism will emanate from such a minor office led by such a young bureaucrat that Chinese leaders will almost certainly see as peripheral to the Canadian political establishment?

Second, and rather more abstractly, one of the unintended dangers of protesting the diminished religious freedom of a particular group is that it risks reifying that group. There may be many reasons why a dominant group (or a state apparatus) opts to persecute a particular minority group – the weaker group might be associated with a class, caste, region, ethnicity, race, political orientation, and/or religious identity deemed offensive by the majority (or by an ascendant minority). When we – in the West, or 'they', elsewhere – describe such injustice as infringements on 'religious' freedom, often the more complicated nature of personal and group identity becomes obscured. Is it just or even mainly religious identity that is at stake in a given incident of persecution, or is religion, as is arguably the case in most situations, indistinguishable from caste or class identity? Moreover, what do we have in mind when we speak of religious identity *per se*, and how might one differentiate between religious, ethnic and cultural forms of identity? Are such claims and distinctions intellectually coherent and credible? In fact, the very category of 'religion' is itself currently the subject of intense analytical scrutiny, most of the debate revolving around the value or meanings of a concept invented in the modern West that generally emphasizes doctrines and beliefs and often fails to encompass the full range of experiences and behaviour one might conceivably include within it, such as practices and discourses associated with many forms of religion in China and India, not to mention Western forms of 'spirituality' as well as 'lived religion', both of which are often juxtaposed against conventional definitions of religion (Arnal 2000). Claims of religious discrimination might attract the attention of the international community (and offices such as

the ORF) more effectively than cries of ethnic, economic or political discrimination – but that fact alone may then encourage people to define themselves as essentially religious subjects experiencing essentially religious persecution. This reflection does not invalidate any particular complaints, but it is important to wonder about whether the main and perhaps the only freedom being denied is religious.

General Observations

Although the above two case studies are obviously quite distinct, it is nonetheless possible to draw out some general conclusions. First, in each case, the federal government's ideological orientation is fairly clear. In the case of religiously-affiliated refugee settlement groups working in conjunction with the Canadian state, we see the power of closed secularism to establish and police a discursive regime in which conversations about substantive religious motivations are almost impossible. In the case of the policies associated with the creation of the Office of Religious Freedom we see (among other things) a rather explicit Conservative effort to appease a voting bloc and promote a distinctly Western notion of what it means to be religious.

Second, in practice the situation is complex. In both cases above the state is pursuing many objectives that would be embraced by a wide range of citizens. In the first case, the state has demonstrated its sincere wish to help refugees and not to evaluate the religious convictions of the groups petitioning to provide assistance. In the second case, the state clearly wishes to provide a public political forum for addressing the kinds of violence and victimization suffered by people around the world. These motivations co-exist with the other more complicated interests I have articulated above.

Third, these cases reveal a broad anxiety about how the putatively functionally secular liberal state can and ought to deal with issues and communities associated with strong religious convictions. Given the fact that religious communities have been associated historically – and continually – with innumerable forms of violence and narrowness, governments are understandably reticent to involve themselves with groups bound together by religion. Nonetheless, there appears to be an on-going commitment from the Canadian government to continue often rather awkward and fraught interactions with religious groups. It is far from obvious how one might improve either the ways religiously motivated volunteers interact with a secularist state to assist refugees on the one hand, or the ways the government might more effectively design, promote and staff an office of religious freedom on the other hand. As well, it should be said that in these two cases – especially the first one, although such a pattern was also evident at the 2011 consultation described in the second – we see that religious individuals and groups need to adopt the dominant secularist human rights discourse (largely pre-defined by the state and society) if they wish to see their perspectives taken into account by the state. Whether religious people are seeking to aid refugees or to draw the attention of their government to the limitations of their co-religionists' freedom elsewhere in the world, they necessarily operate within a discursive field that places significant limitations on how they present their interests. Regardless of how one might prefer the government and its citizens to relate, in the two sites I have described above we see that the rules that govern the interaction are complex and difficult to change.

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