



EFC

The Evangelical
Fellowship of Canada

Submission of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Motion M-103, Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage On Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination

Introduction

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to participate in this study on systemic racism and religious discrimination.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) is the national association of evangelical Christians, with affiliates including 44 denominations, 65 ministry organizations and 34 post-secondary educational institutions. It is estimated there are 6,500 congregations that belong to our affiliate denominations across Canada. Established in 1964, the EFC provides a national forum for Canada's four million Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society.

Evangelicals are a significant segment of the Christian population in Canada. It is estimated that about 10 - 12% of Canadians, or 4 million people, are Evangelical.

Evangelicalism is a movement within Christianity¹ which is found in all cultures around the globe and is estimated to include 600 million persons globally. In Canada, Evangelicals tend to be more ethnically diverse than the Canadian population. One in four (24%) Evangelicals are immigrants, compared to approximately 22% of all Canadians.²

However, Evangelicals may not stand out from the general population as visibly distinctive, as the wearing of symbols or religious clothing is not a required part of evangelical faith and practice.

Evangelicals tend to be more tolerant than the average Canadian toward the wearing of religious symbols or clothing, although it is not a requirement of our faith. In a 2013 Angus Reid poll, 71% of Evangelicals disagreed with the statement "Public employees should be prohibited from wearing religious clothing or symbols while at work" compared to 53% of all Canadians.³

Importance of this study

¹ Evangelicals are Christians who:

1. are devoted to the Bible as God's word;
2. feel it is important to share their faith and engage in charitable activity;
3. emphasize the cross of Christ is central; and,
4. believe in conversion -- that each person must turn from their sin, receive forgiveness through Christ and commit to a life of discipleship and service

² Statistics Canada's National Household Survey, 2011.

³ Angus Reid Forum – EFC poll, December 2013. N=3,000.

The intent of this motion is to examine deep and systemic problems in Canadian society and to find ways to build solidarity and respect for one another. This committee's study is particularly significant because all freedoms thrive when freedom of religion is respected and protected.

While Evangelicals are ethnically diverse, and some of our community members experience the intersection of racism and religious discrimination, our submission to the committee will focus on religious discrimination.

Further, although they may intersect and that intersectionality is important to examine, racism and religious discrimination are different. We urge the committee to consider racism and religious discrimination independently, as well as their intersectionality.

Foundational nature of religion

Our faith, and every other faith, expresses a specific vision of how life should be lived. Religion is the system of belief, worship and practice that is of ultimate importance to a person. For some, it is the ultimate commitment to a divine being or force that provides personal and communal direction to life.

Religion shapes our beliefs about the purpose of our life and the world around us as well as how we are to live our lives in light of those purposes.

As religious freedom expert Dr. Paul Marshall, explains,

[R]eligion is not an isolated area of human existence. It is not merely what people do with their solitude. It is not merely acts of worship on a Sunday, or a Sabbath, or a Friday. It is not merely adherence to creeds or doctrines. Religion is the fundamental shaper of human life.⁴

This is true for those who are part of a long-standing religious tradition and for those who are not. Those who do not believe in a transcendent or higher power still have a worldview, or set of beliefs about what is ultimately important in life. A secular worldview may deny a transcendent being authority or power, but it is nonetheless a set of views and beliefs about the world that can be held, expressed and proselytized as ardently as any set of beliefs that orient around the transcendent or divine.

We would say that everyone, not just those who are part of a formal religious community, has 'religious' beliefs about what is ultimately important and about their purpose in the world.

Interfaith collaboration

There are good news stories of collaboration and cooperation among faith groups in Canada. The EFC has worked together in coalitions with other religions for over 25 years. For example, most recently, the EFC has worked within an interfaith group of Christians, Jews and Muslims on issues such as palliative care and hastened death. The *Interfaith Statement on Palliative Care*, introduced at a press conference on June 14, 2016, was a story of religious cooperation

⁴ Paul Marshall, *A Christian Defense of Religious Freedom*

and collaboration. Unfortunately, interfaith collaboration receives less media coverage than does conflict.

Is there an anti-religious climate in Canada?

The belief that religion is irrelevant to contemporary life is increasingly common. Even more troubling, the growth of ideological secularism⁵ in Canada has been accompanied by a fear of religion and a belief that religion should be privatized and kept out of the public square.

Secularism is a belief system that rejects religion, or that insists religion can and should be separated from the rest of life. Yet this view denies the foundational nature of religion. Ideological secularism promotes the view that religion is harmful, or that those who believe in a higher power or divinity are irrational and possibly dangerous. This perspective is anti-religious and fosters discrimination against those with deeply-held beliefs.

Opinion polls suggest there is increased concern about the expression of religion in public. Many Evangelicals feel an anti-religious sentiment and underlying discrimination. Although a small percentage of Canadians viewed Roman Catholics or Protestants negatively (13% and 8% respectively), a significant number of Canadians identified negative views of Evangelicals (27%), Sikhs (26%) and Muslims (44%), according to a 2015 Angus Reid poll.⁶ Only 65% of Canadians say they would vote for a party led by an Evangelical Christian, 63% for a party led by a Sikh and 58% for a party led by a Muslim.⁷

This perspective, however, does not take into account the significant benefits of religiously motivated action in Canada's past and present, such as refugee sponsorship, the alleviation of poverty and the provision of health care. For example, Statistics Canada data indicates that weekly attenders of religious services are among the most likely to volunteer⁸ and to donate to charities and non-profits.⁹ Volunteering contributes to social cohesion.

Ignorance of what religions actually believe and practice tends to enforce false stereotypes of those religions. Ignorance and stereotype lead to discrimination.

It is true that adherents of one religion may discriminate against adherents of a different religion. This too is often rooted in ignorance and stereotype. It may be based in fear or disagreement, or a desire for privileged treatment. There may also be disagreement between members/followers of a particular religion. One of the reasons the EFC was established was to foster dialogue, partnership and unity among evangelicals denominations in Canada, because those have not always been present.

⁵ We note the distinction between practical secularism and ideological secularism. Canada is practically secular in that the State does not preference one religion over another. Ideological secularism, however, insists that religion should have no voice or place in the public sphere.

⁶ *Religion and faith in Canada today: strong belief, ambivalence and rejection define our views*, Angus Reid Institute, March 26, 2015.

⁷ <http://angusreid.org/who-could-be-prime-minister-president/>

⁸ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015003-eng.htm#a11>

⁹ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-542-x/2009001/chap/ch1-eng.htm#a5>

It is also true that religious discrimination arises because of historical incidents where religious communities have done actual harm, or because adherents of a particular faith have done harm. However, at least part of the way religious discrimination can be battled is by acknowledging where religious communities have confessed their own historical failings and have sought to make reparations and changes for the better.

We note that there is also discrimination against the devout by those who hold religious claims lightly or who claim no religion.

Canada is seen as a nation that is multi-cultural, tolerant and inclusive. Yet the climate is increasingly anti-religious. How the government responds to this trend, the tone it sets, is important.

The state's task is to separate religious and political authority, not privileging one religion over another, in order to facilitate the access to democratic participation of all citizens, to protect the free exercise of religion and to protect the freedom of conscience of each individual.¹⁰

The state must also be careful not to privilege no religion over religious belief. The state must seek to be non-sectarian, recognizing any bias it may have and acting as fairly as possible.

Anti-religious incidents in Canada

It is anti-religious sentiment, misinformation and misunderstanding that lead to marginalization and discrimination. Increasingly, this discrimination is manifest in disturbing attacks and incidents directed at religious communities.

Reports of increased anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents across Canada are very troubling. The EFC denounced the horrific attack in January in which six Muslims were killed in a mosque in Quebec. The Toronto Police report on hate crimes found Jews (29%) and Muslims (15%) among the most targeted groups in 2016, with anti-Semitic incidents the most common hate crime for the twelfth year in a row. B'nai Brith Canada reports over 1700 incidents of anti-Semitic harassment, vandalism or violence in 2016, a 26% increase from the year before and the highest number of incidents ever reported.¹¹

According to Statistics Canada, over one-third (35%) of hate crimes in 2015 were motivated by hatred of religion, an increase over previous years.¹² Hate crimes against Muslims and Catholics increased by 61% and 57%, respectively, over 2014. The Jewish population remained the most common target for reported crime motivated by hatred of religion. Evangelicals are less often the target of hate crimes. This may be, in part, because Evangelicals are not as visibly distinctive, as wearing religious symbols or clothing are not mandated by evangelical faith and practice.

¹⁰ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/berkley-center/090101CasanovaSecularSecularisms.pdf>

¹¹ Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2016, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bnaibrithcanada/pages/394/attachments/original/1494343121/Audit_Financial_2016.pdf?1494343121

¹² *Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2015*, Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14832-eng.htm>

Evangelical experience of an anti-religious sentiment and underlying religious discrimination tends to be in response to our beliefs and practices. For example, doctors in Ontario who object to participating in euthanasia or assisted suicide are at risk of professional discipline, and many are concerned they may be excluded from the medical profession altogether.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) has policies which require doctors to participate in the ending of a patient's life, by providing a referral to facilitate "medical aid in dying." This forces physicians to choose between violating their conscience or deeply-held beliefs and facing professional discipline.

A court challenge of these CPSO policies was launched by five doctors (evangelical and Catholic) and several organizations representing doctors. The EFC was a co-intervener in this case with the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario and Christian Legal Fellowship, arguing for freedom of conscience for doctors. This case was heard by the Ontario Divisional Court in mid-June.

There are some who wish to dismantle conscience protection for physicians to an even greater degree. In a *Bioethics* article in September 2016, Queen's University professor Udo Shuklenk and a colleague argued that there should be no right to conscientious objection and that those with conscientious objections should leave the practice of medicine. As they state in the article,

One problem in countries like Australia, Canada, the UK and the United States face is that they have historically made provision for conscientious objection. Therefore people who enter medicine with a religious belief against standard medical practices such as contraception do so with an expectation that they will be able to conscientiously object.¹³

The article goes on to state, "The problem with conscientious objection is that it has been freely accommodated, if not encouraged, for far too long."

The authors also suggest screening applicants to medical school in order to eliminate those with conscientious objections to certain services.

Another example of discrimination on the basis of religious faith is the case of Trinity Western University (TWU), which will be heard by the Supreme Court later this month. The Christian university's proposal for a law school was accepted by most provincial law societies, but opposed by three because of the university's community covenant based on biblical teaching. These law societies did not express concerns about the quality of the legal training the proposed law school would offer. The legal training was acceptable; it was the beliefs expressed by the school that were at issue.

Increasingly there seems to be a trend to marginalize views from public discourse if they are not held by the majority, or to seek to withhold or deny public recognition, accreditation or benefit those who hold these views. In fact, it is a trend toward silencing opposing views, not just marginalizing them.

¹³ Julian Savulescu and Udo Shuklenk, *Bioethics*, September 22, 2016.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bioe.12288/full>

Responding with tolerance and respect

Canada is known and widely respected as a religiously plural and multicultural society. Such religious and cultural diversity necessarily means we will disagree. A critical feature of a free and democratic society is how we deal with these differences, and most importantly, how we respond when differences lead to conflict.

Different religions in Canada can and do engage in meaningful discourse on religion and come to agreement and collaboration on issues that concern the public good, while maintaining deep religious differences.¹⁴

Prohibiting the expression of dissenting ideas is not the solution. Tolerance means allowing difference and the “other” to exist. It does not require we believe the same things or agree with one another. Tolerance means that we allow those with whom we disagree to hold opposing views and to express them.

Tolerance is not, however, indifference, and it does not require affirming or celebrating a practice or belief with which one disagrees. Tolerance is, by definition, premised on disagreement.

There is a difference between tolerance and respect, and affirmation or celebration. As interfaith groups, we have profound differences on matters of belief and practice, but we seek to show tolerance and respect for one another. In fact, on many points, our beliefs could be considered blasphemy to one another. Nevertheless, respect one another, build friendships and seek to model collaboration toward common goals, for the good of not only our own communities, but for the common good of all.

There are necessary limits to our tolerance. Canada has decided as a society that some activities are contrary to a functioning civil society and the protection of all citizens, and that these activities will not be tolerated. The *Criminal Code* provides an extensive list of activities we do not tolerate, as a society. A critical role of our Parliament has been and is to decide what should or could be tolerated.

Respect is also an important principle. As Christians, we affirm all people are created in the image of God, that all people are loved by God, and are thereby to be treated with dignity. We believe that all persons have a God-given freedom to pursue truth and exercise their consciences. This is the basis for our promotion of religious freedom for all.

¹⁴ There are two different basic understandings of religious dialogue. The first assumes that all religions are essentially the same, but come at issues from different directions or using different vocabulary. The second assumes that religions have deep and substantive disagreements but nevertheless seek to work together toward the common good.

In reality, one would be hard pressed to find any reputable scholar of religion today that would proceed from the assumption that all religions are essentially the same. Even a cursory examination of the beliefs and practices of the major world religions reveals they are not. That doesn't mean, however, that because religions are essentially different there are no commonalities.

As the BC Court of Appeal said in its decision in favour of Trinity Western University, “A society that does not admit of and accommodate differences cannot be a free and democratic society.... This case demonstrates that a well-intentioned majority acting in the name of tolerance and liberalism, can, if unchecked, impose its views on the minority in a manner that is in itself intolerant and illiberal.”¹⁵

The solution to difference and dissent is not the pressured privatization of faith. As the EFC has said previously, “The solution to diversity cannot be found, however, by privatizing religion under the guise of neutrality.” The government should convey an attitude which recognizes and respects the importance and value of religious traditions and of those organized religions which are part of the lives of their citizens and within Canadian culture. (EFC brief to the Watson Commission)

Ignoring religious differences is not the way to live in harmony with one another or to do justice to one another. An ideological secularist view that excludes religions from having a part in public life is not a respectful response, but one that trivializes religious differences and forces privatization. Real religious differences should be brought into the public space and openly discussed/addressed.

We must not silence critique or challenge of religious beliefs. In a civil society, there must be robust freedom of speech. Tolerance and respect do not mean that religious beliefs are free from evaluation or critique.

M-103: The importance of clear and careful language

We are concerned with use of the term Islamophobia in M103. This term is vague and was not defined in the motion. As such, it is not clear whether Islamophobia refers to an irrational fear of Muslims or of Islam, to anti-Muslim discrimination, or whether it could include criticism of the beliefs of Islam. We, and many others, are concerned that if this term is used without definition and left open to interpretation, there could be a chilling effect on the freedom to critique Islam and therefore an infringement on freedom of speech.

Media reports indicate, for example, that the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) 2017 resource guide for Islamic Heritage Month defined Islamophobia, in part, as “fear, prejudice, hatred or dislike directed against Islam or Muslims, or towards Islamic politics or culture.” The TDSB has revised the definition in response to a complaint by B’nai Brith.¹⁶ This is a Canadian body whose original definition of Islamophobia included dislike of Islam and “Islamic politics or culture.”

We must not conflate criticism of doctrine or ideology with hatred and violence toward people who are religious adherents.

It is the task of government to govern all of the citizens within its protection, to do so with justice, and to protect each of its citizens, of all religious faiths. In Canada, the focus of our laws, however, is the protection of people, of citizens, not of their ideas or beliefs. People have the

¹⁵ *Trinity Western University v. The Law Society of British Columbia*, 2016 BCCA 423

¹⁶ <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/10/02/toronto-district-school-board-revises-islamic-guide.html>

freedom to believe and the freedom of speech, but it is the freedom of the person to believe and speak that our laws protect, not the beliefs or ideas themselves.

This focus on people and not beliefs or ideas is the core of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Under the *Charter*, the religious freedom protection in section 2(a) guarantees the freedom of people to manifest their beliefs in a manner consistent with living in a free and democratic society. Religious beliefs themselves are not protected from criticism or challenge. This is an important distinction.

We support the government's efforts to prevent discrimination and hatred toward the Muslim community, and all religious communities. However, we urge the committee to make sure the language used is clear and careful. A term such as anti-Muslim discrimination (somewhat paralleling the words anti-Semitic, anti-black, anti-Indigenous) would make it clear that the focus is on protection for people who self-identify as Muslims. However, the word would not presume to protect Muslims from critique of Islam any more than Christians or Jews are protected from critique or ridicule of their beliefs.

An example of a clear and careful definition is found in the working definition of anti-Semitism in the Ottawa Protocol Combating Anti-Semitism, which Canada affirmed in 2010, or in the working definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Recommendations

1. Take religious differences seriously.

- Study systemic racism and religious discrimination independently, as well as their intersectionality.
- Make a sustained and transparent commitment to freedom of religion, and to upholding it specifically, rather than letting it be subsumed under the more general category of human rights
- Allow religious groups and religious adherents to hold their beliefs and to practice their faith and not be marginalized or penalized. This is a *Charter* right, but it is fleshed out in legislation, regulations and policy.
- Don't minimize the differences of religious belief, because significant differences do exist. When we work together as an interfaith body on issues of common concern, we each approach the initiative out of our religious perspective. Our actions must be based on tolerance and respect.
- Allow faith groups to bring their perspective to bear in public debate.
- Don't compel or coerce Canadians to act against their beliefs or to celebrate beliefs that are counter to their faith. Legislate robust conscience protection so that no one with deeply held beliefs is compelled or coerced to act against their conscience.
- Pursue legislation that protects religious belief and practice. One example of legislation which provides this kind of protection is section 176 of the *Criminal Code*. Don't delete this section of the *Criminal Code*, as Bill C-51 proposes, but maintain it and amend it to clearly protect all faith groups.

2. Engage with religious groups directly.

- Consider whether you are as literate as you could be with respect to faith and religious practice. We encourage you to make the effort to engage with faith communities directly and to really listen to their perspective. Increase your religious literacy and dispel stereotypes.
- Lead by example. For example, ensure the committee hearing process encourages the inclusion of religious groups, rather than contributing to their marginalization.
- Consider establishing a forum for dialogue and cooperation to help foster relationships, improve cooperation, and dispel the stereotypes that cause misunderstandings. This might take the form of an annual dialogue between Parliamentarians, Ministers and faith leaders, or establishing a multi-faith advisory group or council.
- Encourage departments and ministers to seek advice and input on areas that intersect with religious beliefs in Canada from the faith groups who are involved in the policy area. Recognize the breadth of these areas, e.g. caring for seniors, volunteering, settling refugees, caring for those who are poor. Perhaps establish an multi-faith council to advise on a range of issues.

3. Protect free and informed dialogue

- Parliament should find ways to initiate a sustained conversation on differences and accommodation in a pluralistic society.
- Affirm a robust commitment to freedom of speech.
- Don't silence critique or challenge. There is significant concern that the term Islamophobia prevents challenge and critique of doctrine and ideology. We recommend instead the term anti-Muslim hatred or discrimination be adopted to address incidents against people of Muslim faith.
- Given the use of the term Islamophobia in motion M103 and in public discourse, the committee should define it clearly and narrowly, but not recommend its use.

4. Collect Data Consistently and Uniformly

- Develop uniform national standards on collecting, categorizing and reporting hate crime data to help ensure consistency across the country. This would provide a consistent body of information to inform dialogue and policy-making.
- Statistics Canada and other government departments should consult with faith communities in developing data collection.
- Recognize the benefits and relevance of religion to public life. Study its impact. Do not treat religion as irrelevant to or separable from public life.
- Collect data on the impact of religion and the social participation of those who are religious, for example, giving, volunteering and social participation by frequent attenders of religious services.