

A D-Day-level assault on the intellectual and spiritual freedom of Canada's soldiers

The defence minister's peppy, multi-disciplinary and very opinionated advisory panel clearly wishes to disqualify Roman Catholics from serving as chaplains in the CAF



by Conrad Black

The Ministry of National Defence's Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination recently produced a [somewhat horrifying report](#). This was probably inevitable; there is not a significant number of genuine racists in Canada, nor can Canadian institutions be considered racist. This is just an abrasive cliché that has become faddish for all those who for

whatever reason seek to dramatize, or at least aggravate, internal tensions in the country.

Of particular concern was Section 6 of the report, titled "Re-Defining Chaplaincy." This in itself is unsettling, since there is no need to redefine chaplaincy and the Department of National Defence has no moral authority to do so. Chaplains are usually Christian clergymen attached to different organizations, such as the Armed Forces, who, when requested, assist coreligionists, or anyone seeking spiritual guidance, with the resolution of questions having to do with their religious practices or concerns. The authors of this extraordinary document start hopefully enough with: "The Defence Team ... recognizes the importance of an individual's potential need for effective support in ethical guidance or spirituality through the new Total Health and Wellness Strategic Framework."

Unfortunately, the storm signals arise immediately after that portentous entree: "It is necessary as well to recognize that, for some Canadians, religion can be a source of suffering and generational trauma. This is especially true for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirited members of Canadian society. And Indigenous peoples have suffered unimaginable generational trauma and genocide at the hands of Christian religious leaders through initiatives such as Residential School and Indian Day School programs." Those members of the Armed Forces who find religion a source of suffering and trauma are free to avoid it without depending on this panel to conduct its own Reformation for them. The authors of this report manifest no aptitude to distinguish between the ecclesiastical needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirited members of the Armed Forces and those members of the military who could not be so described. The history of Indigenous people in Canada is far beyond the remit of even the most wildly aspirational advisory panel to the Ministry of National Defence. And no one has

suffered “genocide at the hands of Christian religious leaders” in the history of this country, whose civilized laws and principles it is the chief duty of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to protect, rather than to fictionalize and defame.

The redefining of chaplaincy by this panel had just begun, but it got worse: “At present, some chaplains represent or are affiliated with organized religions whose beliefs are not synonymous with those of a diverse and inclusive workplace. Some of the affiliated religions of these chaplains do not subscribe to an open attitude and the promotion of diversity. For example, some churches’ exclusion of women from their priesthoods violates principles of equality and social justice, as do sexist notions embedded in their religious dogmas. In addition, certain faiths have strict tenets requiring conversion of those they deem to be ‘pagan,’ or who belong to polytheistic religions. These faiths’ dogmas and practices conflict with the commitment of the Defence Team to value equality and inclusivity at every level of the workplace.... The advisory panel has observed that there are varying degrees of misogyny, sexism and discrimination woven into the philosophies and beliefs of some mainstream religions currently represented in the cadre of chaplains in the CAF.”

No, your eyes do not deceive you. This peppy, multi-disciplinary and very opinionated panel clearly wishes to disqualify Roman Catholics from serving as chaplains in the CAF, although they represent the largest religious denomination in Canada (representing almost 40 per cent of the population), including the sectarian identification of seven of Canada’s last nine prime ministers – i.e., the democratically chosen leaders of the organization that funds and commands the Armed Forces and is responsible for governing the country that it is the purpose of the Armed Forces to defend. The panel also considers various other Christian sects that are represented in the current chaplaincy of the Armed

Forces to be unacceptable. In its holy crusade against systemic discrimination, this panel has taken it upon itself to decide what clergy members of the Armed Forces may consult, and apparently feel entitled to judge what theology it is acceptable for members of the Armed Forces to be exposed to.

The report reassures us that the panel "does not seek to evaluate or categorize these religions in this report. Rather it is pointing out that the Defence Team cannot consider itself supportive of inclusivity when it employs as chaplains members of organizations whose values are not consistent with National Defence's ethics and values." And in its recommendations, the panel urges the rejection of "chaplaincy applicants affiliated with religious groups whose values are not aligned with those of the Defence Team."

It is undoubtedly appropriate for the Canadian Armed Forces, especially given the recent actions of some of its senior officers, to consider any changes that might be useful to eliminate harmful discrimination and generally to make the ambience of the Armed Forces as contented a workplace as it reasonably can be. But the idea that it has any standing to determine which of the world's Christian and other religious denominations are adequately inclusive suggests that what is required is less focus on inclusivity and a more rigorous administration of tests of the basic intelligence and psychiatric wellness of the Defence Ministry's advisory panel. More precisely: are these people mad?

It is chilling to think that the taxpayers are funding this hare-brained, wildly misguided intrusion into the religious liberty of the members of the Armed Forces. The analysis and recommendations included in this section of the report are a Vimy or Dieppe or D-Day-level assault on the intellectual and spiritual freedom of Canada's soldiers, sailors and airmen. It is time to stop this nonsense and launch a national and holy crusade to root out and dispose of systemic idiocy, and from the looks of this preposterously self-important and

authoritarian document, there is no better place to start than with the CAF, whose almost uninterrupted distinguished and courageous history appears now to be threatened by a cabal of tinkering lunatics trying to replace our Judeo-Christian and other traditions with contemporary moronic, busybody bureaucratese. This appears to have been recognized by Defence Minister Anita Anand's office, which assured Canadians on Friday that chaplains from a variety of faiths will continue to serve in the Armed Forces. Let us all hope she stays true to her word as the very dignity of our military is at stake. Our Armed Forces have made great sacrifices and 112,000 of them gave their lives and over 205,000 were wounded defending Canada and the cause of freedom throughout the world in the two world wars. It would be profoundly unjust if they were to have this scourge of mindless official despotism inflicted upon them by the government of the people that they so admirably serve and represent.

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