

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*This is my response to this week's question of **Ask The Religion Experts**, a feature in the Sunday **Ottawa Citizen**. Questions are the editor's. All responses are available on the Citizen's online blog for the feature. We invite you to consider this response and share your own. It is our hope this will generate some thoughtful discussion of the real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

Sunday, October 23, 2011

Q : Is religious persecution declining or growing?

A : There has been a long history of persecution of Buddhism since the beginning of what we call the Common Era (C.E.). It hasn't been any one region nor any particular faith or secular group perpetrating it. Each period and country has had its own unique version. One of the most egregious modern examples was the Taliban murder of Buddhists in Afghanistan and the dynamiting of the masterpiece giant stone Buddhas. At present, the prime zones of Buddhist persecution are in The People's Republic of China (although this is diminishing since temples and monasteries now have value as a quaint tourist attractions), Tibet, Burma and some of the smaller countries of the South Asian Pacific. If one looks on the Internet, there are some isolated and mostly verbal attacks against immigrant Buddhists in the USA. In a few countries, the Buddhists are those engaging in persecution, notably Sri Lanka against Tamil Hindus.

Recent statistics report that North America is among the most tolerant of places in the world. Compared to other countries where one faith imprisons, tortures, murders or sustains socio-economic inequities against others faiths or sects, the kind of verbal abuse found in the USA and Canada does seem less worrisome. So, any decline or growth in persecution would have to identify which regions we are evaluating.

We also need to distinguish between state-sponsored, faith against faith and inter-

sectarian. persecution That is, do we consider Muslims attacking other Muslims, as in Iraq, as persecution? We have to consider that persecution isn't always expressed religiously between religious or groups or states. Further, do situations like that in many countries where one faith or sect dominates government, financial or military positions constitute religious, ethnic, class or religious persecutions? One group's religious identity can often be a mask for these other forms of persecution or exploitation.

Buddhism, with some small sectarian exceptions, strongly condemns any such persecution. Buddhist teachers acknowledge the immense value to be gained by Buddhists exploring other faiths. Our history has mostly been as the visitors to other countries and we tend to seek peaceful co-existence with them.

*Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,
Red Maple Sangha*