

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

Below is my response to the question provided for the Ask The Religion Experts feature in this Sunday's Ottawa Citizen. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.

Sunday, March 11, 2012

Q : What role should government play in regards to religion?

A : We might take this question as yet another opportunity to rail about the need to keep religion out of government, however, let me read it another way. Taking this from the perspective of someone deeply engaged in organized religious activity, it is an interesting question to consider what role the reverse might look like. That is, what might be the advantages of promoting a greater involvement of government in my activities. Were the government ever to creep out of the sham of the "separation of Church and State", it might begin to recognize the benefits of religious life, especially in certain areas. Three examples will suffice to make the point. Firstly, there is clear social science evidence that an active religious life (although equally clearly not any particular religion) is a positive factor in sustaining personal health, especially mental health. This being the case, and since depression, that is conditions of human despair, is our number one mental health issue, I might want government to encourage religious activity as part of its mental health promotion strategy.

Next, I would want (and, in fact have been part of the movement to build) an alliance with government on issues of environment and climate. So far this debate has been dominated by economic and employment considerations. The work of religions has been to underline the inescapable interconnection between human society and our physical environment. We desire some engagement with government in a process to protect our very survival in a

necessary relationship with an environment that supports us. Short-term prosperity holds little appeal when we all face the prospect of extinction as a consequence.

Finally, religious activity has been progressively pushed further and further to the margins of our society. In spite of this, religious activities continue to be significant contributors to the economic well-being of most communities. We are purchasers of services, we are landlords, we are cultural leaders and we are prominent in the provision of social services. There could be benefits in the area of economic development if religious organizations were acknowledged and partnered as economic contributors.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

This and all other contributors' responses are available on the Citizen's online blog:

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>

All my past 52 columns are available online at:

<http://www.realperson.com/ARE.htm>

We invite you to consider this response and share your own on our Red Maple Leaflet blog at <http://www.redmaplesangha.blogspot.com>