

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 Buddhadharmā and deeper understanding for us all.

Sunday, April 8, 2012

Q : Is it appropriate that statutory holidays like Easter and Christmas celebrate events in the Christian calendar?

A : Part of this question returns to the issue of the relationship between religion and the state. I cannot see that the nation benefits by stripping official life of any reference to important cultural and ethnic celebrations. Certain sects of Christianity find meaningful and celebrate these two dates, and the state shows a proper recognition of the importance of religious life by designating them as holidays.

What stands out is the inconsistency of designation. We are at a time of unprecedented diversity and that would be ideally reflected in how we designate such religious holidays. In particular, dates of importance to significant populations in respective areas would make sense. This has been done in Quebec with the unique designation of St Jean Baptiste Day (June 24). If we wish to engender a knowledge, appreciation and respect for our so-called mosaic, it would seem time to represent important cultural and religious dates. Perhaps, as a transitional events, we might designate certain dates like World Interfaith Harmony Day (Feb 14), World Earth Hour (March 31), National Compassion Day (May15) or Canadian Aboriginal Heritage Day (June 21). In certain parts of the country certain dates might be of greater significance and be so-designated.

Such dates need not relate specifically to a religious tradition (like Christmas or Easter or Hanukkah or Diwali) but more to an

appreciation for the importance of cultures, beliefs and peoples to our national identity. This would make more sense than the efforts some have tried to make to squeeze all religious traditions into late December, citing some kind of equivalence between Christmas, Hannukkah, Kwanzaa, Ashura, Bodhi Day and so on, conflating and thereby nullifying everything as a catch-all time to wish friends a "Happy Holidays". It would be preferable too, if such dates remained as times of reflection, so that we would never wish to see any Giant Aboriginal Day shopping blow-out sales or twenty-foot inflatable menorahs on people's roofs.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

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