

## **Sustaining a Culture of Peace in Canada**

*Stan Chu Ilo*

Most visitors and new immigrants to Canada see this country as a very peaceful and friendly country. Having lived in Canada for the last three years, I have come more to appreciate this wonderful country everyday for its multiculturalism, its deep sense of tolerance and the sense of freedom and responsibility which everyone cherishes and upholds. There is a culture of peace in Canada which has kept this country moving in a positive direction.

This culture of peace is sustained both by the domestic policies and programs of successive Canadian governments and Canada's international policies as well. It is also the fruit of the quality of the character of Canadians. Canada is a country where every culture and civilization is acknowledged and nourished and where people grow to respect and admire cultures and civilizations outside their own, because something of our humanity resonates in them. This is not to say that this is a perfect society: there are obvious tensions generated by conflicting worldviews when it comes to morality, family life, balancing of political interests and educational goals and philosophies. However, these have been held in balance in a unique way in Canada.

It is important that this culture of peace and tolerance be sustained in Canada. This is why I think there is the need for education on peace and tolerance in Canada. The London bombings have shown that there is a poisonous seed being sown in the hearts of many young people in the dark alleys of our cities, which destroys their sense of purpose and sense of common humanity. It has also revealed that the next terrorist might be our neighbour. In our midst are many impressionable young people who can be radicalized by those whose religious zealotry translates into terrorism, violence and hatred in the name of God. Future terrorist acts in the West might be planned from outside but its execution will be done by our friends, relatives and colleagues who hate the very land that they gave them birth and hope.

This is why I propose that our public schools should embrace some comparative religious education that should be high on education for peace and tolerance. An ideology of hate and violence could easily be implanted in the young

people if they have no moral rudder on which to navigate the storms of life. The kind of education that is being envisaged here is one that discourages the passion for aggressive religious grandstanding, fanaticism and terrorism. It should teach the young that martyrdom does not mean suicide bombings but dying to selfishness and greed for the good of others. This kind of education will help our children to learn to love people who are different from themselves and to accommodate people who do not agree with them. Our children should be taught to renounce aggressive behaviours which have been promoted in our times through some movies and the daily violence which they see everyday on television, in the vicious cycle of violence in Iraq and via the internet and video games. Education for peace and tolerance helps to develop the capacity in our children to accept others as unique human persons to be encountered and loved and not as enemies and rivals to be defeated and humiliated.

This kind of education is capable of leading young people to an inner conviction that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights and that one's religious affinity does not confer any right of supremacy over others. It also leads to a realization that the evils of injustice and poverty which contour the face of our world can never be righted by violence but through commitment to the highest ideals of love and unflinching courage to work for justice and peace. When each religious group undertakes the formation of the religious mind of their young adherents and expose them to interaction with fellow adherents from other parts of the world, mutual respect of other religions are not often promoted.

Education for peace and tolerance will make each child to appreciate the real meaning and value of religion in creating a better society. This is not aimed at converting people to one religion or the other, but to help them to appreciate and respect the true value of religious traditions. Indeed, the measure of the true value of any religion is to what extent it promotes the peace and happiness of humankind and projects the ideal of love. The religion we need in the world of today is not the one that tends to totalize and swallow everyone in the blaze of dogmatism, violence and terrorism, but one that creates conditions for love and peace and readily concretizes in the hearts of adherents genuine concern for others, especially the weaker members

of society. Our children should be led to know that any religion that preaches ultimate peace with God but promotes war, terrorism and division is one that has lost its soul. We in Canada must work towards bringing up our children to appreciate authentic religious practices that create a culture of peace and tolerance which resonates in all religious and non-religious humanistic worldviews.

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