

IDEA OF AN IDEAL GOVERNMENT



Abstracts of Proceedings
32nd World Religions Conference
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Commemorative Event

Held October 13, 2012
University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Representatives of
Aboriginal Religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism,
Humanism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Organized by the
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada



Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to the speakers representing various faiths and philosophical traditions, for participating and providing an abstract of their speech on the theme “Idea of and Ideal Government” for the 32nd World Religions Conference. These abstracts are compiled in this booklet for easy future reference.

In the staging of this conference, we have received support and help from numerous organizations and individuals. In addition to the speakers and guests that attended the event, we acknowledge the contributions of all our partner organizations; The City of Waterloo, The City of Cambridge, The University of Waterloo and the Federation of Students, Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association of UW, Sikh Students Association, Aboriginal Community of K-W, Brahmarishi Mission of Canada, K-W Council of Churches, Church of Saint Michael, Forest Hill United Church, St. Philip’s Lutheran Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Waterloo Riverview Dharma Centre, Aboriginal Community of KW, the Society of Ontario Freethinkers, WLU FreeThought Alliance, The Waterloo Record and Guelph Mercury, CTV, Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA), 570 News Talk Radio, Across Boundaries Multifaith Institute (Toronto), Phat Electronics, Callture and the Cross Cultures magazine.

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Nabeel A. Rana
Chief Planning and Coordinating Officer
32nd World Religions Conference,
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
October 13, 2012

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Introductory Remarks - World Religions Conference

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at of Canada and all our partner organizations to this magnificent celebration of mutual respect and harmony.

Buoyed by the contributions of so many faith communities that thrive in Canada, the World Religions Conference has enriched Canadian society by promoting peace, understanding, and tolerance for over 3 decades. Each year the conference grows in popularity and in scope. Today, scholars of 8 faiths and philosophies are participating in this conference.

This year's conference is particularly special as it commemorates the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's long-standing belief in the ideas of equality, justice and freedom for all faiths and philosophies. The theme chosen for this year's conference, "The Idea of an Ideal Government", further compliments her vision.

We expect this conference will explore the impact of faith on politics and government, addressing key questions such as: Does religion provide any framework for an ideal government? To what extent should state and religion be separate? Should governments provide laws to protect the sanctity of religious and sacred figures? How has the relationship of religion with politics changed after the recent significant world events? Does this relationship foster ideal governments in Canada and around the world?

The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, envisioned the format of such conferences over a century ago – and presented the interfaith concept to Her Majesty Queen Victoria on her Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in 1897. Describing the basis of respect other's faiths and respect for the founders of all religions he wrote:

“.....One of the principles upon which I have been established is the following: God has informed me that of the religions which have spread and are firmly established in the world through Prophets, holding sway over a part of the world and achieving survival and long life, none was false in its origin..... Therefore, this principle lays down the foundation of love, peace and harmony, and supports moral values, in that we consider all those prophets true who appeared in the world..... In light of this principle, we honour all religious founders.....”

Tohfa Qaisariyyah (Gift for Queen) p. 256-259

I congratulate all the speakers, participants, partner organizations and guests, who are participating in today's event. Respect for each other's faith and respect for all the religious holy figures is the only way to promote peace in this world.

I wish you all a successful and memorable conference.

Sincerely,
Lal Khan Malik
National President
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada
October 12, 2012
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada



THE GOVERNOR GENERAL · LE GOUVERNEUR GÉNÉRAL

It gives me great pleasure to send my warmest greetings to everyone in attendance at the 32nd World Religions Conference.

As governor general, I believe that we define our identity by what we show the world and how we treat others. Your presence at this conference demonstrates a shared belief in working together and collaborating with one another to understand the varied perspectives of faith structures as they relate to our world today. In doing so, you are learning more about each other and taking an active role in improving the human condition for all.

I am equally pleased to see that the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is also being recognized as part of the conference activities. In six decades, Her Majesty has promoted the values of peace, respect and equality around the world—values you are discussing and celebrating today.

I commend you on your efforts, and I wish you an enlightening and informative experience.

David Johnston

October 2012



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PRIME MINISTER · PREMIER MINISTRE

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings to everyone attending the 32nd World Religions Conference hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Canada.

This event — a special edition commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II— offers an important opportunity to enhance your understanding of the world’s many religions and their teachings in a spirit of mutual respect, peace, and community. I am certain that you will find great inspiration in Her Majesty’s remarkable history of service to Canada and in her enduring popularity over the course of the past six decades.

The longevity of this annual event is testimony to the respect Canada shows towards the varied faiths of its citizens. I trust that you will embrace the convention’s message of respect and inclusion and that you will find the experience an enriching one.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, please accept my best wishes for a memorable convention.

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.

OTTAWA
2012

32nd WORLD RELIGIONS CONFERENCE

October 13, 2012

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, I am honoured to extend warm greetings to everyone attending the 32nd World Religions Conference, presented by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at.

It is fitting that this meeting of faiths be held in Ontario, a province that has found great strength in its diversity. Ours is a province that embraces the good in every culture and respects every faith. We solve our differences through constructive dialogue and seek genuine mutual understanding. Our differences define us, but never divide us.

The progress we have made in our diversity journey has inspired other countries around the world to work through the challenges of their own changing populations. As Premier, I am proud of Ontario's success in building a harmonious multicultural society. Hosting events such as this is an opportunity to open our minds and hearts to the wisdom that other faiths bring. It is also a chance to cultivate a more profound understanding of our respective beliefs.

I commend all the delegates and speakers at this conference for their contributions. By attending this conference and engaging in meaningful discussions, you are helping to lay the groundwork for a genuine and lasting world peace and cross-cultural co-operation.

Please accept my best wishes for a memorable and inspirational gathering.



Dalton McGuinty
Premier

**Greetings from the
Honourable Mr. Justice Marshall Rothstein
Supreme Court of Canada
301, rue Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**

I appreciate the opportunity to bring greetings to the delegates at the 32nd World Religions Conference on Saturday, October 13, 2012 at the University of Waterloo.

In providing exposure and profile to many religions, your conference recognizes the importance of fostering understanding and respect for the religious faiths of others, so important in our globalized world today.

I wish you an interesting, stimulating and successful Conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Marshall Rothstein

Idea of an Ideal Government Aboriginal Spiritual Perspective

Lois MacDonald - Guelph
Missanbie Cree First Nations

I am a woman who lives a very simple life. The values and beliefs that were taught to me as a child by my parents are still there. However I have learned new ones to live by. Throughout my life, the journey I have been on has taken me to places that I could not imagine. These places are not exotic like Fiji, Hawaii or Thailand. The places I am talking about are here in my own back yard, where I started my journey to learn what it meant to “Walk the Red Road”. This learning journey is never ending, new people to meet and sacred places to find. Or do they find me?

Looking at the perspective of an ideal government in my opinion is and could be a great idea. Getting back to the basics of life where a community worked together and helped one another, could be one way; then again is my head up in a cloud? Am I looking at the world through rose coloured glasses? Am I so optimistic to wish this or can it become reality.

The leaders that are voted in to represent, speak and work for us have promised through their speeches, to take on the responsibility of making sure decisions made are in the best interest for all. These decisions affect all people and not just a few. Looking after the best interest of the people they serve some-how gets lost in their world of wheeling and dealing called “politics”. How can we have an ideal government who will make decisions that would benefit everyone when their eyes are clouded with other peoples’ values and promises of great things to come?

When I look at the world today, there is so much despair, frustration, anger; I’ll get you before you get me kind of attitude. Some people not all, on this life journey forgot the basic principle of life, treat others the way you want to be treated, with respect, dignity, kindness and compassion. On my journey, I have seen people from all races being treated in a way that is not respectful; there is no kindness, dignity, or compassion. Then how can we as spiritual beings living in a physical body expect others to give respect, dignity, kindness and compassion to others if we don’t have it within ourselves because it is forgotten?

There are words we First Nations call the ‘Seven Grandfather Teachings’ and they are: truth, respect, humility, courage, honesty, love and wisdom. These are simple words to see, learn and at times hard to live by on a daily basis. To learn what each one means on a personal basis is not only a life time of learning, because as unique human beings, the meaning of the word would change as we grow spiritually. Also the words would hold a different meaning to someone who is from a different culture and background. However they worship if at all, the words are put in a context that relates to their faith and belief systems. It is going back to the basics of what is within oneself that counts and those precious values that we hold onto and pass down to our children. As mentioned previously, all the words will mean something different to everyone; that’s what makes us unique and special.

It is going back to the basics of what is within ourselves that counts and those precious values that we hold onto to pass down to our children. I truly believe if all people, our leaders included were to try their best to live by these seven simple words, then in time we could have an ideal government that would look after the best interest of the people they serve, from a municipal, provincial and federal level. The reality of having an ideal government can be a vision made possible only if the human race held onto the

“Seven Grandfather Teachings”. Again, I am not saying individuals would have to walk away from their own values and beliefs. To fully understand what it would take to be the best person one can be is a personal journey and following their hearts. Knowing something is one thing, understanding it is another. To know the words that will help with your personal journey is one thing to understand them is another.

It is a personal journey for those who want to become the best that they could be and make change to have a better world. As mentioned previously it all starts with self and those values that were instilled in us through our life’s journey from child to adulthood that will allow us to follow our hearts. Then maybe we can pick leaders who we understand have those values and beliefs that would be able to make decisions for the good of all.

In closing, am I so optimistic to wish for an “Ideal Government” or can it become reality? Only the Creator knows for sure.

Idea of an Ideal Government Jewish Perspective

Dr. Karen R. Mock
Human Rights Consultant, Toronto

The Jewish religion embraces all aspects of life, not only ritual matters, because Judaism conceives religion as being inseparable from nationhood. I remember vividly the teenage discussions growing up: is Judaism a religion or a culture or an ethnicity? It is all of the above. All members of the Jewish “people” are members of the Jewish religion. And one cannot be part of the Jewish religion without being at the same time part of the Jewish people. Being a distinct “nation”, Judaism gave religious directions regarding the organization and form of government (Rakover, 1999). I will draw on both my personal experiences (as a layperson); and in my presentation I shall elaborate some of the following concepts based on my review of the origins of Jewish perspectives on the ideal government:

- * Judaism creates a unique blend of democracy and theocracy. The evidence of the democratic process can be seen in the primary biblical text regarding the appointment of leadership.
- * Judaism seeks to integrate religious practices into the everyday life; there is no contradiction between spiritual and practical way of life. There is mutual contribution between the religious system and the social system.
- * From the Jewish perspective, the system of government can be seen as a combination of both the religious wing and a secular one. “The Torah leaves the decision-making to man, not to heaven” (Rakover, 1999)
- * The Jewish ideal of government differs from the conventional concept of theocracy in that it does not regard the head of the state as the representative of God on earth. This is intended to eliminate the danger of the ruler using the name of religion for negative purposes.
- * Religion plays an important role by laying down certain over-arching values that resemble constitutional basic principles, which consensual legislation must take into account. The power of the ruler in the Jewish government is secular, while religion serves as a check on it, to prevent the abuse of that power.

Traditional Jewish System of Government

While the biblical model of governance is monarchical, the people as a whole play a key role in the ruler's election and authority. Moreover, in being subject to the law, the king is bound by a social contract that makes demands of him in relation to the people as well as to God, ensuring this democratic spirit is not undermined by any illusion of superhuman status. Government is clearly not an end in itself, but has the purpose of serving the public. A special ceremony every seven years precisely to affirm the rule of law emphasized the status of the king as representative of the people (Exodus 19.5-6). Similarly, the priesthood, although a position dependent upon tribal affiliation by birth, derived its mandate from the idea of representation. That is, the priest is viewed as an agent of the people, and a democratic concept was superimposed upon the otherwise hierarchical structure of the Temple service.

* Examples of the various institutions that made up the traditional Jewish system of government and how they cope with the danger of abuse of power in the name of religions:

1. **The Rule of Law:** God is the supreme authority; however, the rulers do not rule in His name but according to the laws He gave, the Torah. The people are not subordinate to the rulers, but rather to the law. The government that the Torah presupposes is the rule of fixed laws, and these laws are not man-made, but revealed by God. In the ideal Jewish state, the power in the hands of the ruler and the

high priest is solely the power to maintain and/or elucidate the Torah. A central theme in Judaism is that interpretation of the law is in the hands of human beings, and not in heaven. There is latitude given to consensus in civil law and other areas.

2. The Priesthood: The power is not deposited in the hands of the priests; rather, their role is to teach Torah and to serve in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem. This highlights two key principles: a) A person does not need the mediation of the priest in order to have connection with God; and b) learning the Torah is the right and obligation of every Jewish person and is not the privilege of the elite few. The relationship between the people and God is considered a “covenant”, based on mutual free will.

3. The King: The fundamental source of power in the Jewish system of ideal government is the people. The people rule through their representatives, whose freedom of action is controlled in a variety of ways. The monarch's authority is seen as the consent of the people, not religious dictate. Choosing the ruler involved religious elements (one of the 613 commandments of the Jewish religion is the obligation to appoint a king.) The King is subject to the rule of law; and if the monarch transgresses a religious prohibition or commits a civil offence, he is to be judged as any other person. (e.g. King Saul, when David was chosen to replace him after his transgression – I Samuel 15,11).

4. The Prophets: The prophets had an important role in religion and society, in that they denounced dictatorial and immoral practices of the King (Isaiah 1, 23). They could effectively influence the King as a moral opposition and provide Divine answers to the King on practical questions.

5. The Sanhedrin: The high court of 71 sages had a major role in government as the supreme judiciary and served as a legislature for the Jewish people, enacting laws according to the country's needs. They had some executive function to make certain appointments in the public service, and they judged according to religious law of the Torah; but they too required the assent of the people. In the Jewish system of government, the King (or democratically elected ruler) is head of the secular wing, while the Sanhedrin is head of the religious branch. But the secular wing contains some religious elements, and the religious wing has some secular segments as well

Qualities of an Ideal Leader, and Principles of Leadership

The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides (Rabbi Mosheh Ben Maimon) identified seven qualities which characterize an ideal leader:

(i) ability and standing; (ii) fear of God; (iii) humility; (iv) truth and honesty; (v) freedom from monetary ambitions and from susceptibility to corruption; (vi) wide knowledge and understanding (i.e. the ability to adapt existing knowledge to deal with new and unparalleled situations); (vii) enjoyment of public confidence.

British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks recently pointed out that the phrase “Jewish leadership” is ambiguous, in that it can mean leadership by Jews, but it also means leadership according to Judaic principles and values. He too has suggested seven principles for leadership done in a Jewish way, which I believe reflect a Jewish perspective on ideal government – the institution to which we look for (and from which we expect) leadership.

* Leadership begins with taking responsibility – At the heart of Judaism are three beliefs about leadership: we are free, we are responsible, and together we can change the world.

* No one can lead alone – in Judaism, leadership is an emergent property of multiple roles and perspectives.

* Leadership is about the future – As with Moses, before you can lead, you must have a vision of the future and be able to communicate it to others.

* Leaders learn – As Jewish leaders have shown us through the ages, study makes the difference between

the statesman and the politician, between the transformative leader and the manager.

* Leadership means believing in the people you lead – Judaism prefers the leadership of influence to the leadership of power.

* Leadership involves a sense of timing and pace – One of Moses' greatest frustrations was the time it takes people to change. Good governance and leadership involves the delicate balance between impatience and patience. Transformation takes time, and often more than a single generation.

* Leadership is stressful and emotionally demanding – Reflected in the words of Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah, among others, most transformative leaders at times feel burnout and despair – to lead is to serve, and living the responsible life is worth the pain that often accompanies hard work.

In summary, as Rabbi Sacks points out, the single overarching question of Jewish existence in the modern age is: what is it to live as a Jew in the public domain, in a world without walls? And he concludes that never in history has there been a better time to be a Jewish leader. However, he stresses that there is a right way for future Jewish leadership to go, and a wrong way. Rabbi Sacks cautions that “the wrong way is to emphasize antisemitism and the assaults on Israel, to exaggerate the tensions between the different streams in Jewish life and to bemoan the lack of Jewish leadership. The right way is to make friends within and beyond the Jewish community, to emphasize the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Judaism, to find social action projects we can work on across other divides and to find ways of making Jews feel proud to be Jews”.

In Judaism, values currently accepted in a democratic society (eg. freedom, human rights and the sanctity of life) carry significant weight, because we are taught that human beings were created in the image of God (Exodus 1, 27). Therefore, as Rabbi David Rosen emphasizes, a fundamental tenet of Judaism is that any act of disrespect to another human, is an act of disrespect towards God Himself. Therefore it is not possible to be truly God fearing unless one behaves with respect towards all human beings. Accordingly, this view of the individual is key to the effective functioning of the democratic ideal in Judaism -- an ideal which emphasizes not only the importance of public authority, but above all, the obligation of the system to provide for the greatest protection and enhancement of human life and the dignity of all people.

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Idea of an Ideal Government Islamic Perspective

Mubarak Ahmad Nazir
Senior Vice President and Missionary Incharge
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful.

My brief presentation will not be based on my own philosophical thoughts but will be based on purely Islamic postulates and instructions as contained in the Revealed Book of the 1.6 billion Muslims, the Holy Qur'an.

I have seen and read about democracies – monarchies – dictatorships – feudalism – Marxism – Leninism and a host of others. They have all come and gone like the wind through the annals of time because none were able to fully understand or meet the human needs. Some favoured the wealthy and discriminated against the poor. Others declared a few as chosen ones and the rest as servants.

The failure of all these systems clearly proves that there are crucial ingredients missing from these various systems.

However, God's law is perfect and so no vested interests or unfair provisions exist. This is because God desires only for the good and betterment of His entire Creation.

These two tenets act as the pillars through which the structure of any Government is held together; ignore any one of these tenets and sooner or later that system is bound to fail and that Government is destined for destruction.

FIRST TENET: "ELECTION PROCESS"

The first and most important tenet is the election process. God states in the Holy Qur'an, Chapter 4, verse 59:

"Verily, Allah commands you to hand over the trust of governance only to those who are entitled to them."

In this verse God tells us that when the election process takes place, we must handover the trust of governance to our representatives based on their personal qualities and characteristics. When we decide between representatives it should not be based on their political affiliations but rather on the bases of their righteousness.

In Chapter 5, Verse 3 the Qur'an states that when you take office then:

"Help one another in righteousness and piety; but help not one another in sin and transgression. And fear Allah."

In this verse God tells us that whichever policy will result in helping mankind should be adopted regardless of where it comes from and similarly each policy that will create disorder and chaos should be rejected regardless of who puts it forward. It is next to impossible to practice this Golden Qur'anic

injunction in the current political system where one must support his/her party. This is why the Holy Qur'an instructs that when election takes place it must be based on the personal characteristics of an individual and their righteousness. Similarly when that individual takes office then he/she also must carry out their responsibilities with righteousness and fear of God.

SECOND TENET: “ABSOLUTE JUSTICE”

The second tenet of an Ideal Government mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is Absolute Justice.

One of the main principles of modern politics is that whenever the tribal, racial or national interests of a nation clash with the principles of JUSTICE then Justice must be thrown out of the window and national interests must be achieved regardless of the means. In other words you give priority to your National interests even if the Principles of Absolute Justice are torn to shreds! You will all bear with me that when the National interest of a Government clashes or is at variance to the Principle of Justice then who cares for what is JUST hence the saying “the end justifies the means”.

On the contrary God declares in the Holy Qur'an in Chapter 5, verse 9:

“O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is aware of what you do.”

In this verse God commands the believers to always act with Absolute Justice. If we study the human history we will find that more often than not it was the lack of Absolute Justice that led to wars.

The Holy Qur'an states that Absolute Justice must be carried out at all times regardless of political, financial or any other ties. That is why the Prophet of Islam (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) declared in his last sermon in Makah that all people are equal. He stated that an Arab is not superior to a non-Arab or vice versa, nor does a white hold any superiority over a black or a black over a white. Our ethnic backgrounds and colors of our skin are merely a source of an identity not a source of superiority.

In Chapter 4, Verse 136 God has given us the ultimate definition of Absolute Justice. He states:

“O ye who believe! Be strict in observing justice, and be witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or against parents and kindred. Whether he be rich or poor, Allah is more regardful of them both than you are. Therefore follow not low desires so that you may be able to act equitably. And if you conceal the truth or evade it, then remember that Allah is well aware of what you do.”

If we wish to establish an Ideal Government, than we must practice Absolute Justice as defined in the above quoted verses. We must protect the rights of each individual and each nation.

While talking about Absolute Justice I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about the present unrest in the Muslim world because of that filthy film against Islam and the Holy Prophet. Look at the height of double standards and the lack of Absolute Justice— when 1.6 billion Muslims protest against a priest burning copies of the Holy Qur'an or at the publication of caricatures against our noble Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) it is termed 'Freedom of Speech' but when someone questions the holocaust or the number of Jews killed this suddenly becomes a punishable crime. These are not the quadrants of an Ideal Government. These are not the standards of Absolute

Justice. There must be a legislation that prohibits against the ridiculing of any Prophet of God or any Holy Scripture. Look! I am a Muslim. I love the Holy Prophet far more than my parents or even my own children. And this is true for all Muslims. Why poke fun and hurl abuses at my Master and then pour salt over my gaping wounds by saying that this is 'Freedom of Speech'!

If the crime of hurling abuse and ridicule against a noble Prophet of God was heinous let me also say that the reaction of many Muslim countries was equally atrocious and totally against the teachings and practices of the Holy Prophet (sa). How can a true Muslim condone the slaughter of its own citizens or the burning of its own property or the killing of an Ambassador? No wonder the Muslims are without a universal leader. It's like a ship without a rudder. The spiritual leader that was sent unto them was squarely rejected by then and now Alas the ensuing result of that rejection!

Having said all this someone, in fact everyone would ask: Are the Muslim states following these tenets of good governance as so clearly stipulated in the Holy Qur'an? The answer is a clear cut NO.

The fact is that they are corrupt – immoral – selfish – greedy and tyrannical. When one looks at the beautiful teachings of the Holy Qur'an as I have briefly enunciated and looks at the actions of many of our Muslim countries our heads bow down in frustration and embarrassment.

This is the reason that the revered Founder of Islam, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) had prophesied that a time would come on the Muslims when they would be totally derailed from the tenets of Islam. Only the words of the Holy Qur'an would remain and the meaning and philosophy would be lost – their Mosques would be filled with worshipers but they would be devoid of Faith. Their scholars would be the worst creation under the canopy of the skies.

He said at that time, Allah would send the Messiah and Mahdi who would once again rejuvenate and revive the true teachings of Islam and fight this spiritual battle to re-establish Absolute Justice on Earth!

Ladies and Gentlemen we are the followers of that Messiah and that Mahdi whose name is Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He founded this community more than one hundred and twenty five years ago. Our weapons for this unique Jihad of establishing Absolute Justice are love and compassion and our slogan is:

“Love for All – Hatred for None”

Thank you for your time!

Idea of an Ideal Government Sikh Perspective

Rupinder Kaur
Sikh Scholar and Press secretary for the NDP

The teachings of any religion guides one through our daily lives – leading us in actions, directing our thoughts, showing us the right path and deterring us away from the wrong. When following our faith, we become an ideal individual. So when faith provides insight on how to govern ourselves – we can extend that argument and make the case that faith also provides us the tools on how to create an ideal government.

For me, my Sikh faith teaches that I am a sovereign, independent individual; however, I make up part of the universal collective. That means, although I may think and act on my own, those thoughts and actions may affect those around me. If they negatively impact on someone else, that means I'm not following the principles of my faith.

Three basic and core rules in the Sikh faith are: kirit karna (work hard and honestly), vand chakna (share your wealth), and naam japna (reflect on the Creator).

These three simple tenets are like the “golden rules” and I'm sure a variation is practiced by many of us, regardless of faith tradition or culture.

In any government, there are political parties that are based on ideals – it forms their values and shapes their aspirations. We vote for a political party or candidate that best reflects our personal beliefs. One ideal we all strive for is fairness and it is a concept all democratic governments try to model themselves on.

In the grand scheme of things, the ideal government runs smoothly and the management of issues like justice, taxation, even environmental policy could be based on theology.

In the Sikh holy text, the Guru Granth Sahib, the concept of an ideal government is described in the metaphor of a city called “Begumpura” and it defines the epitome of a good city according to Sikhism.

The challenge for the good city would be to create a more equitable society with opportunities for all and in which citizens are spiritually greedy rather than materially so. Secondly, in the spirit of selfless service, ordinary citizens would be challenged to work with the less-fortunate, under-privileged or marginalized citizens. Thirdly, urban regeneration should not just be about cleaning streets, building bigger shopping malls and mansions should also reflect on the regeneration of the human spirit with a focus on positive development, sustainability and reducing our negative impact on the environment.

The citizens under an ideal government will play a vital role in its proper functioning and success. However, every successful organization has a skilled and able leadership team and this is no different for a city or government. The Sikh philosophy stresses that leaders should have the qualities of humility and selflessness, they should be servants of the people prepared to work tirelessly for the betterment of society. The Guru Granth Sahib describes the qualities of a leader:

Only he should sit on the throne, who is worthy of it,
And who has realized the Guru's word and silenced the five desires
(lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego).
Adi Granth, p. 1039

Members of the ideal government must be God-centred people, who strive to maintain the highest moral standards and who wish to carry out their duties, not for ambition, wealth and power, but for a real desire to serve the people and leave the world in a better state than when they found it.

The architecture of a city, its layout and environment shape our thought processes and should be a reflection of the character and spirit of the city and government.

In Sikhism there is a perfect example of how architecture can represent the qualities and ideals of a community and which can be extended to urban planning for the good city. This of course is Harimandar Sahib, or the “Golden Temple” as it is commonly known. It symbolizes a synthesis of styles but ultimately has a style of its own. It represents the eclectic nature of the Sikh faith and the bringing-together of people from all faiths under the umbrella of the Oneness of God. A single pathway or bridge leads the worshipper from the entrance gate of the Golden Temple complex to the holy sanctorum of the temple and denotes the connection between worldly and spiritual affairs. The actual shrine is kept at a lower level than the surrounding buildings symbolizing humility, an example to the leadership of a good city. The temple structure stands within a pool of water which gives out the effect of peace, serenity and contemplation, a cue for providing attractive public spaces in a good city.

The temple itself has four entrances signifying that, like a good city, it is open to all without distinction. At the core of the temple is the sacred scripture and its recitation resonates outwards to all who wish to hear.

An ideal government operates to meet the needs of all its citizens. It is not a static or constant model but changes with time, progress and circumstance. For Sikhs, there are key components for an ideal government which will stand the test of time and therefore should be ingrained in the social fabric. The city must be a beacon of truth and justice and incorporate the ideals of equality, diversity and selfless service. Employment opportunities, education and public services from health to transit, must be accessible to all. Most importantly, for Sikhs an ideal government represents a paradigm for the city of God.

Idea of an Ideal Government Hindu Perspective

Amit Madhusudhan Kinikar
Minister and Founder of the Vedanta Cultural Foundation Canada

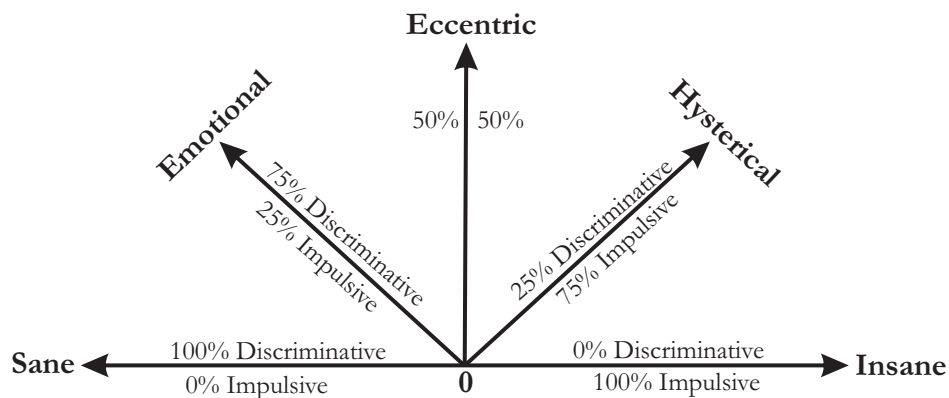
Any Government is run by individuals. And they alone can make it ideal. Therefore, in this essay we will focus on an individual or a leader. What makes one an ideal leader? Which automatically reflects in his or her government style to make it an ideal Government.

One cannot govern or manage anything external; whether it be a family, corporation or a nation, if one cannot manage oneself. Therefore any government or management boils down to self-management. And self-management is how your intellect manages your mind.

The body per se cannot act. The actions of the body emanate from one's mind and intellect. They are driven either by the likes and dislikes, feelings and emotions, whims and fancies of the mind or the reason, discretion, judgement of the intellect. The intellect is the ability to think freely, logically. The faculty to reason and judge without bias. When you develop a strong intellect your thinking becomes clear, your reasoning precise and judgement perfect. The intellect therefore must govern and guide the mind at all times. An ungoverned mind could turn ruinous and destroy the individual.

When the impulses, feelings of the mind drive actions without the guidance of the intellect then such actions would be impulsive. And when intellect controls and directs the mind to act those actions would be discriminative. Discriminative actions determine the sanity of the person. As impulsive actions displace discriminative actions he would gradually lose his sanity. The figure below shows the loss of intellectual application resulting in the deterioration of a human being.

THE FALL OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT



A renowned playwright, William Shakespeare has demonstrated this fatal consequence in King Lear, Macbeth, Othello and his other plays. A leader therefore has to be as close to OA as possible.

Thus all management skills reduce to self-management. And self-management depends upon the development and the use of the intellect. Intellect is not intelligence. Intelligence is information or

knowledge acquired from the external educational agencies while the intellect is developed through one's personal effort in thinking, reasoning, questioning. Just as you would develop a muscle by working on it. Even to use intelligence one needs a powerful intellect.

Few Qualities of an ideal leader

1. Objectivity: Objectivity is intellect controlling the mind in all the decisions, actions. Not being impulsive or rushing into action. Holding the mind on the present action without allowing it to slip into the past worries and future anxieties. Maintaining a spirit of detachment in the action. This is highlighted in Mark Antony's oration in Julius Ceaser. Mark Antony had the tremendous task of turning the whole mob against Brutus and the conspirators who had justified the assassination of noble Ceaser. Antony felt obliged to expose the villainy of the conspirators. Went about it meticulously in a spirit of detachment. At the end of his brilliant oration he left the result for destiny to work out-mischief thou art afoot, take thou what course thou wilt.

2. Spirit of Service and Sacrifice: A leader's obligation lies in merely performing his duty and responsibility without polluting it with personal motives. He should dedicate his work for the wellbeing of the people even at the expense of personal interest. Give rather than take. Such actions will command strength and power and inspire people.

3. Lead the Way: A leader should not merely point the way. He should tread the path himself for others to follow. "Whatever a leader does the masses follow, whatever standards he sets his followers emulate them". The subjects of a state emulate their ruler. It is not what he says that matters but what he does.

Therefore, he should fix an ideal beyond his self-centered interest. Embracing the welfare of the larger community. And strive tirelessly to achieve it. Masses will follow.

4. Identification, Empathy: A leader establishes his authority, power more through identification with, feelings for others rather than his position or status. The natural feeling of empathy brings about a rapport, a spirit of cooperation. The emotion of love also creates an atmosphere of understanding among the people. Such feeling and understanding fosters the attitude of service and sacrifice.

5. Humility: A leader understands that he is a spoke in the wheel. In the orchestra of life each one is unique, has a different talent and a role to play. And he plays his role to the best of his ability with the understanding that he is neither dispensable nor indispensable.

Thus it can be seen that it is the individual endowed with a powerful intellect and the above qualities would make an ideal leader. In ancient India kings themselves were sages Rajarishis. Raja means King and Rishi means an enlightened person. Kings led saintly lives. A life based on the higher values. Such leaders form the sap of an ideal Government. And lead it, through sound policies, stemming from the knowledge of higher values of life and living enunciated in the scriptures, and above all by personal example. Then there will be peace, harmony and prosperity in that society.

Source: Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2,3,4,6 and 18.

Idea of an Ideal Government Christian Perspective

Rev. Felicia Urbanski
United Church of Canada

There are many ways to “be a Christian” in the world today. My own perspective is that of “liberal” or “progressive” Christianity, which has historic ties to the “Social Gospel” movement.

In my presentation, I will attempt to answer the three questions posed by this World Religions Conference:

Do faith communities impact governments?

Should state and religion be separate?

Does religion provide a framework for a government?

What is essential to me in Christian faith and theology is that each of us humans are beloved of God. To "live, move, and have our being" in God means that we are constantly seeking that connection which I believe we had before we were born. We long to unite with God after we die, and to live in a way which fulfills each person's deepest purpose. I believe that the presence of God exists in each moment of our lives, we need only to recognize this and live with the recognition of our belovedness. I view sin as separation from God, and that there is both individual and societal (systemic) sin.

I do not believe that Christianity is the one and only way towards God, but for me and many others in the world, it is a deeply satisfying spiritual path. As such, it must be chosen, never coerced, to be a truly authentic faith. There is room for questioning and exploration within this faith tradition. It is ever-evolving and ever-changing.

The great incarnational story of God's imminence taking on human form in Jesus is a powerful one on many levels. Christian faith for me consists in the deep desire to follow Jesus in the best way possible, to heed the call to discipleship. It acknowledges the "Jesus of history" as well as "the Christ of faith".

I view the Bible as more descriptive than prescriptive. The Bible is our foundational text, and other sacred and secular texts can surely compliment it. The Bible is a "living document". I believe that revelation is not sealed. God continues to speak to people today. The Bible is a tool to use in understanding what our spiritual ancestors have experienced as God's abiding presence in the world. I do not interpret the Bible literally, but see it as a collection of inspired human writings pointing to the truths of our existence and our relationship with God.

There are several passages in the Bible about our relationship to governments which I will highlight in my presentation.

The incarnational story is also very challenging. Jesus' teachings are actually counter-intuitive to human nature and quite radical. They challenge us to look deeply within ourselves as well as at the very society in which we live, and to ask the question, "How is this bringing about the Kin-dom of God?"

I believe we are all called to be "co-creators" with the Divine. Through our individual relationship with God, we hear the "still, small voice within" urging us to live in tune with God's continual renewing of creation. Our own ongoing transformative process enables us to work together to realize God's realm of love and peace. Nurturing one's inner spiritual life through individual practices and through engagement in supportive Christian community results in positive outward action.

As we respond to our calling as sons and daughters of God, and knowing that a loving God will reconcile us to God's self in the end, we can live our lives in the light of Jesus' promise of spiritual abundance.

Idea of an Ideal Government Buddhist Perspective

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The relationship between religion and politics has been problematic throughout history, and has given rise to tremendous human suffering. Recent significant events have magnified the issues inherent in this relationship, highlighting, once again, our fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of who we are and our relationship to one another; and, providing us with an opportunity to look deeply within ourselves for new understanding and wisdom.

The deeper question at the heart of this issue is not whether there is a place for religion in politics or whether church and state should be separate, but rather what creates 'separation' and causes division between human beings. Once we have answered this question, the answers to the other questions naturally follow.

From a Buddhist perspective, all human beings: Buddhists and non-Buddhists; religious or secular, share a fundamental misunderstanding of who they really are. This misunderstanding arises from a deeply conditioned ignorance, rooted in habitual patterns of thought, which gives rise to a separate sense of self and other, obscuring the fundamental ground of their being which is inherent goodness: wisdom, love, compassion- self-less and not separate. The practices of meditation and awareness, which derive from the Buddhist tradition, provide a vehicle to awaken and reconnect with this primordial goodness by focusing attention on attitudes and actions and the underlying motivation/intention. The essential question is whether our attitudes and actions express genuine concern for others, or are they motivated by selfish concern-unwholesome intention (greed, attachment, hatred, anger).

Throughout history, we can find examples of political and religious systems that have been harmful and corrupt, or benevolent and wise. Whether operating independently or in relationship with one another, religious and secular principles and beliefs have been and can be interpreted through any lens of perception and used to justify any action, i.e. Zen Buddhism's support for Japanese militarism during WW 2; the Chinese/Tibetan situation with the Chinese oppression of the Tibetan people and the HH Dalai Lama, who advocates the practices of non-violence and compassion for all beings, including the enemy.

In all aspects of life: personal, political, economic, military, social, religious, and secular we will continue to suffer and perpetuate suffering, individually and collectively unless we deepen our awareness and understanding of ourselves, and unless our motivations and actions are rooted in the genuine wish for the well-being of others.

The path to peace, mutual connection and understanding regardless of faith or secular orientation is through practices and methods that support awakening to this deeper potential and knowing through the heart that is free from the forms of hatred, violence, prejudice, and greed that lie hidden in our minds, and give rise to our own personal suffering and the suffering of the world.

We can be a force in the world for goodness and peace, or harm and suffering, depending on how we

orient our minds and hearts. This is the essential training for all beings, all disciplines, all aspects of life-learning to relate to our life and experience with present moment awareness, wise understanding and a loving heart-knowing our own hearts and minds. This is the ultimate responsibility, to live and act from that awareness.

Religious and secular leaders need to be trained in the knowledge and skills needed for their positions, as well as training in awareness that allows for a deeper wisdom and understanding of how things really are, and ultimately a knowing, intention, action that come through the heart.

In the words of the Buddha:

*Phenomena are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made by the heart.
If you speak or act with a corrupted heart,
then suffering follows you—
as the wheel of the cart,
the track of the ox that pulls it.*

*Phenomena are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made by the heart.
If you speak or act with a calm, bright heart,
happiness follows you,
like a shadow that never leaves. (Dhp.1-2)*

And, in the Buddha's teaching to the Kalamas (AN 3:65) he points out that they should know for themselves, and he describes standards for doing this:

"...Kalamas, don't go by reports, legends, traditions, scripture, logic, inference, analogies, agreement through pondering views, probability, or thought that this is what spiritual authority says. When you know for yourselves that, 'These thoughts, mental qualities, speech, actions are unskillful, blameworthy, criticized by the wise; when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering—then you should abandon them....."

Don't go by reports, legends, traditions, scripture, logic, inference, analogies, agreement through pondering views, probability, or thought that this is what spiritual authority says. When you know for yourselves that, 'These thoughts, mental qualities, speech, actions are skillful, blameless, praised by the wise; when adopted and carried out, lead to well being and happiness—then you should enter and remain in them.....'

And he provides precise instructions on how to judge the results of one's actions, and learn from one's mistakes.

Whenever you want to do a bodily action, you should reflect on it: *'This bodily action I want to do—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or both? Would it be an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or both; it would be an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if in reflection, you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do.*

While you are doing a bodily action, *you should reflect on it: 'This bodily action I am doing-is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others or both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both.... You should give it up. But if you know that it is not... you may continue with it.*

Having done a bodily action, you should reflect on it: *This bodily action I have done-did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it.... You should exercise restraint in the future. But if on the reflection, you know that it did not lead to affliction.....it was skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities.*

Similarly with verbal actions, and mental actions, except the last paragraph on mental actions states:

Having done a mental action, you should reflect on it: 'This mental action I have done-did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both..... then you should feel distressed, ashamed and disgusted with it. Feeling distressed, ashamed and disgusted with it, you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know it did not lead to affliction.... It was skillful mental action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities.
(MN 61)

Idea of an Ideal Government Humanist (Atheist and Agnostic) Perspective

Doug Thomas
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President, Society of Ontario Freethinkers

1. Why do we need government?

Groups of more than 25 or so people seem to need a governmental style structure of some kind to achieve any goals and to be viable as units. An entity as large and diverse as Canada needs a complex and multi-layered government. Achieving an ideal government in such a nation is a difficult task especially when its citizens seem determined to have a multi-cultural society.

2. History of Current Canadian Government

Many Christians, including those who forced the inclusion of the preamble to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms like to present a rose-coloured revisionist version of Canadian history. They maintain that our country was founded on the principles that Christianity brought to this country. I hope not.

From the moment they arrived in New France, European settlers, both Roman Catholic and Protestant chose to ignore the Aboriginal society that, though flawed, had created societies at least as stable and perhaps less violent than the Christian societies from which the European settlers had come.

Nevertheless, for over 200 years, well into the 19th century, those Europeans tried to erase Aboriginal culture and religion with incessant missionary zeal. When this failed, all the churches decided to kidnap aboriginal children and put them in residential schools. Surely, these are not the principles upon which we should build Canada.

These Europeans were not much more tolerant among themselves. The British crown recognized only the Church of England in Upper Canada until the mid 1800s – a justice of the peace married Laura Ingersoll and James Secord because they were Methodist, a religion barely tolerated but not recognized by the British Crown. Surely, this is not a principle on which to base our ideal Canadian government.

Exactly 200 years ago today, British, Aboriginal and Canadian allies defeated American invaders at Queenston in the first major land battle fought on British North American soil. This victory was the first step toward the outcome of the war that decisively ensured that BNA would remain British and its government would evolve in lock-step with British Government including a monarchy welded at the hip to the Church of England.

In direct contrast although the Americans transplanted 18th century British government structure to Washington in 1792, they eliminated theism from their model. The hereditary House of Lords became the appointed Senate, the elected House of Commons became the elected House of Representatives, the god-appointed monarchy became the elected president and they specifically excluded religion from government.

3. What, then, are some of characteristics of an ideal government for Canada.

One that would establish our dream of being great example of multicultural harmony for the world.

Surely, such a government would treat all its citizens regardless of race, colour, personal philosophy or sexual orientation as equals.

Surely, such a government would make sure that all its citizens would have access to the counselling appropriate to their faith or personal philosophy.

Surely, such a government would reach out and defend the rights of all citizens of the world to individual philosophies, free speech and the basic freedoms that Canadians enjoy.

Surely, such a government would ensure that all its citizens could celebrate Canada proudly in national anthem, on its coins and with all the other symbols of multicultural nationhood.

4. The current structure of Canadian government.

The current government of Canada falls short of these ideal. We often criticize historic examples of top-down governments. Most of them included the imposition of the ethics and philosophy of the head of state. While it is certainly more benign than most, our monarchy still has that characteristic. The Canadian monarchy still includes the title of “Head of the Church of England.”

This leads to a kind of top down tolerance. Christianity is still the default set of ethics while other religions are included in token ways from time to time. Remembrance day ceremonies, for example, are Christian dominated with one or other religion playing a minor role.

Religions, providing they are theistic, get favoured treatment under the charity sections of the income tax act. For example, they can maintain building funds, participate fully in international bodies, both privileges denied to Secular Humanist organizations even if they do have charitable status.

Religious clergy enjoy income tax deductions for residence costs; Humanist Officiants do not. When Secular Connexion Séculaire applied for charitable status a conscientious and fair Charities Directorate employee replied with a six-page explanation of why our three goals: act as a communications nexus for Canadian Humanists, lobby for changes to discriminatory legislation, and represent Canadian Humanists internationally, would exclude us from the charitable status that a similar religious organization could have. No ideal government can exist with these biases

5. The ideal structure

Any ideal government would allow and encourage all members of a multi-cultural society like Canada's the ability to bring ethics that conform to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the decision making processes of government. This would include universal right to lobby government in a non-partisan way for changes to specific pieces of legislation.

An ideal government structure would not include inherent favouritism of any ethical system just because its head of state is welded at the hip to one church.

We are tantalizingly close to this structure. Our government functions very well without input or interference from the monarchy. Our real head of state, the Governor General, operates with complete autonomy within the Canadian context.

All we need do is summon the national will to tell Prince Charles that when he becomes Charles III, he and his family will always be welcome in Canada, but as foreign heads of state. This would sever the remaining invisible tendrils connecting Canada to a monarch that is so connected to religion.

Prince Charles, you see, has said that he will renounce the title, “Head of the Church of England,”

but he has also said that he would then be the “Defender of Faith,” – hardly much more ideal title especially from the Secular Humanist perspective.

At the same time we should make the position of Governor General an elected one with due safeguards to isolate it from party politics. This would remove the official theism from our head of state, but would not affect our position within the Commonwealth of Nations.

6. Symbolic Ideals

An ideal government should represent itself to its people with symbols that are inclusive. How ideal can a government be if 25% of its citizens can not sing the national anthem without being hypocrites? O Canada is both theistic and, in English, sexist.

We atheist Canadians want to sing about our cherished land. We want it to command true patriot love in all of us. We will keep our land glorious and free. Our national anthem should reflect that with these words:

O Canada our home and **cherished** land,
True patriot love in **all of us** command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise
The True North Strong and Free.
From far and wide O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
We'll keep our land glorious and free.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Il est très important que notre pays supports les choix démocratique, que sa valeur est plein de raison, et que nous protégerons tous ensemble nos foyers et nos droits. Notre hymne national devrait refléter ce fait que par ces mots:

O Canada, terre de nos aïeux,
Ton front est cîent des fleurons glorieux
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée
Et tu supports les choix
Ton histoire est une épopée des plus brillants exploits.
Et ta valeur **plein de raison**
Protégérons nos foyers et nos droits.
Protégérons nos foyers et nos droits.

7. Respect – not tolerance

An ideal government treats all its citizens with respect, not tolerance.

An ideal government structure ensures that everyone can take part in government without a top-down impression that one religion or philosophy is the ultimate or most accepted one.

Such an ideal government is devoid of religious symbols. We Canadians have managed to install non-religious affirmations for every public office and to remove the religious symbols from our flag.

Let us move forward to remove the theistically attached monarchy and to celebrate the new, respectful Canada with a new, respectful national song.

To approach the reality of an ideal government, we must end tolerance and begin respect.

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