

Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity

Statement regarding the public funding of faith-based schools

July 30, 2007

Christianity is a religion that, throughout its 2000 year history, has probably caused more harm, done more damage, legitimated more human suffering, and justified the consumption and destruction of more of the earth's resources than any other single institution in the world. At the same time, it has been the motivation for innumerable individual and communal acts of compassion, justice, and self-less good, for some of the world's most beautiful music and richest art.

Something lies in the distance between these two extremes and points us toward the one and away from the other. It is the key to our future and it is not supernatural. It is not a single religion or a collection of religions. It is not religious tolerance or inter-religious understanding. It is not all of us understanding our own personal religions well enough to respect someone else's understanding of his or hers. It is the capacity of the human mind and spirit to care beyond its own self-interest. I know of no religion in the world that can, off the page, be understood in such a way.

Yes, religions can be taught in a way that promotes justice, compassion, and self-less love, but within faith-based schools responsible for the development of their own religious curriculum we would have no assurances that such would be true. Indeed, the denial of equal rights and privileges to women and Gay, Lesbian, Bi- and Transsexual individuals by a variety of faith groups, including the Roman Catholic Church which currently enjoys public funding, would give us reason to doubt their ability to teach and/or model the equality of all their pupils. Without this single most important building block, the fundamental recognition of equality and the inherent worth of all, no child will ever grow up committed to creating an ethical, sustainable world in which we celebrate our diversity and work together toward common, life-enhancing goals. This is the future we need—not a future of tribal division and perpetuated myths.

The public school system can learn much from religious traditions that accentuate the sacred in everyday life—deepening our sense of the earth's beauty, creating a reverence for all – not just human – life helping us recognize our interdependence, teaching us to trust and love one another and to live in a way that is worthy of another's trust and love. The life-enhancing values that religious traditions *can* articulate so clearly must have a place in the public school system and thereby make their way into the hearts and minds of the coming generations. Indeed, the success of what can yet only be called "the human experiment," may rely on our ability to achieve this one goal – to teach those who will lead us tomorrow the deepest and broadest forms of love known today.