

# Tolerance? It's just respect for sacred

**R**ELIGIOUS tolerance sounds like a fine idea. It is one with which most of us can agree.

However, events of the past few weeks give reason to question the strength on which it stands.

Salman Rushdie and Madonna, regardless of their intentions, have

raised a question much larger than a book or a Pepsi commercial.

Tolerance is a rather shaky concept at best. It is only one step away from intolerance. There were not many years between the tolerance for Jews in Germany and the Holocaust. Witness the flimsy peace in Northern Ireland and the predictable

flare-ups in South Africa. Today's violence is seldom more than a stone's throw from yesterday's tolerance.

Tolerance based on law has never been a stable arrangement. That, of course, is not to suggest removing the laws. However, it does suggest that we are in need of something that goes beyond laws which do little

more than stall or contain disaster. Seldom can they prevent it.

That kind of respect is apparently not present in "Satanic Verses" nor can it be attributed to Madonna's rendition of religion and dance. The issue, however, is much larger than any one author or entertainer. It goes far beyond the concept of freedom of expression on the page or the stage.

THE DICTIONARY defines the sacred as that which is beyond criticism or ridicule. By that definition, we live in a world where the sacred is difficult to find.

Considering the diversity of the human family and the evolutionary nature of understanding truth, an expectation of agreement is beyond reality.

But agreement is hardly neces-

## perspectives



**Rev. Robert Schaden**

sary for respect. I may not understand any more about your religion than the fact that it is sacred to you, but that in itself should be enough to command respect. In fact, only when I can respect what is sacred in your life can I truly appreciate the sacred in my own life.

Perhaps a piece of the difficulty lies in a void of understanding.

The media keep us informed of the shortcomings of various religious groups. Stand-up comedians and talk

show hosts alike have made religion grist for their monologues. But as for understanding why this or that concept is sacred to a particular group of people, even our well-educated society falls short.

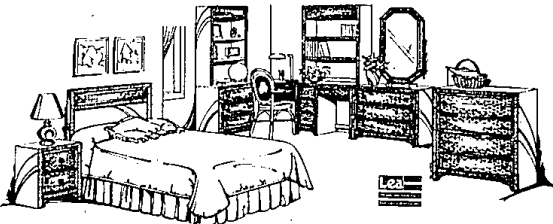
A friend of mine recently returned from a business trip to Japan. While he was there, he was invited to a service in a Shinto temple. Although he still aspires to his own religion, I rather doubt that he would appreciate slurs against the Shinto religion any more than if they were directed against his own.

The Rev. Robert Schaden is with Newman House at Schoolcraft Community College in Livonia.

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