

Religion for peace

It was interesting reading Shyamom's article on 'religions at war' in the April issue of the 'Sannasa' magazine.

Shyamom's criticism of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism excepting Buddhism needs an appropriate response. In doing so, I will try not to resort to an attack on Buddhism as I have many friends from that faith whose sensitivities I do not intend to violate. I will however defend Christianity's record against the allegations made by Shyamom.

Shyamom claims that religion is a potent force for division in society because of its tribal inheritance. He quotes Northern Ireland as an example. He says that God provokes war!! Christianity has been and will continue be one of the greatest forces for goodness, peace and justice in the world. Mother Theresa's life giving service to the poorest of the poor in India, Martin Luther King's fight against Negro slavery and racism, Bonhoffer's fight against Nazism in Germany and the Christian church's unbound service in the areas of education, schools, hospitals, justice, poverty alleviation are unparalleled and unmatched in history. Are these great acts provoked by a God who entertains war?

Shyamom claims that religion's tribal nature is a threat to peace. In Sri Lanka, the Christian churches have in its membership people from many backgrounds, languages, cultures and ethnic groups. We even have bishops who do not believe in the basic tenants of the Christian faith! They often disagree but continue to live peacefully with each other! Given such a composition, how can anybody call Christianity a tribal religion!! Christianity is one of the most universal religions in the world today. The Christian church is one of the most successful multicultural, multi linguistic and multi ethnic organizations in the world.

Shyamom criticises Rev Robertson for his remarks about calling Prophet Mohammed a wild-eyed fanatic; but in his own article, Shyamom finds no problem in calling the Christian Cross a 'war shield', Christianity a 'tool for war' and that 'God is the problem' as suggested by his article title. We have no problem in readily criticising sacredly held Christian icons but will take Robertson to task when he does the same thing with Prophet Mohammad?

Shyamom goes on to say that St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas propounded the 'just war' theory. This theory was propounded to reduce the horrors of war and not as a justification to start any war. Does he not also want to acknowledge their great acts

of service to mankind in the areas of health, environment, spiritual and physical healing of the sick. Why do we only want to see the bad and the ugly in other religions and only the good in our own?

Shyamom describes Northern Ireland as a place of war. But would he also not admit that in today's Northern Ireland, if a Christian priest or a mob burns down a non-Christian place of worship, that they will be brought to justice in no time and that neither the Northern Ireland government nor the church will give any political patronage or protection to the culprits and allow them live freely in society. Does this happen in Sri Lanka? Shyamom's article is full of examples of wars committed by other cultures and religion but these hardly occur in Buddhist Sri Lanka and that Buddhism has so far had an unblemished record!!

He goes on further saying that in Northern Ireland, Catholics and Christians belonging to the same country, skin colour and language are fighting each other as if they belong to different species. Mate, what about Sri Lanka? Tamils and Sinhalese share the same country, same skin colour and similar cultures and yet they are killing each other.

I am reminded of the saying that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones at others.

Shyamom says that the present war between Palestine and Israel is because of a belief held by the Jews that the land of Israel should belong exclusively to the Jews. But does he also not acknowledge and recognise that if you speak to Sri Lankan Tamils, that they would say that the present ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka is mainly fuelled by extreme Sinhala Buddhists and sinhala nationalists. There may not be any truth to this assertion but what I am trying to say is that while Shyamom has no problem in using history to prove and discredit Jewish occupation why can't he also use the same yardstick to acknowledge what the Tamils are saying about the cause of the present conflict in Sri Lanka.

The article says that the US support for Israel is a major reason for the conflict in the middle east. I agree. But, will he also not acknowledge that the Tamil community's claim that the Government's support for

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