

Intolerance and Diversity

I heard just the other day about the difficulties being faced by Christian charities in India. Since the election of the current Hindu nationalist government in 2014 there has been a crackdown on Christian charities funded from overseas. Indeed one large charity was forced to close down its operations last year. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of attacks on Christians and Muslims, not necessarily condoned by the authorities but at least encouraged by the government's ideology.

We naturally associate Hinduism as a broad and tolerant religion – and so it is. And yet religion can be used by hardliners to further their own agendas. An even more extreme case is Myanmar where the Muslim minority is persecuted by the Buddhist regime. Again violence and persecution are not what we associate with Buddhism.

Not of course that Christians have a clean record either. Even a cursory look at Church history reveals many examples of intolerance and cruelty committed in the name of Christ.

St Paul's words to the Church in Philippi which we heard just now (Philippians 2.1-4) are addressed to Christians. However, they surely have a universal resonance, with the call for compassion and sympathy, for freedom from any selfish ambition, for humility and seeing others as better than ourselves, for motivation not by our own interests but by the interests of others.

If those attitudes and that behaviour were more generally followed then ours would be a much better world. There would no longer be any reason for conflict, animosity or prejudice. But sadly that is not the reality of our world today.

One of the guiding principles of the Community of the Cross of Nails is: Learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity. That requires openness, tolerance, understanding.

Of course that is not always easy. It is natural to assume that our ways, our attitudes, our beliefs are right, and they may well be right for us. Living with difference and diversity does not mean that we are to water down or even abandon what we hold dear. Far from it. It does, however, challenge us not to denigrate or dismiss the beliefs of others, unless of course they are founded on hatred and violence.

Such is the path towards peace and reconciliation for which we are called to continue to pray and to work. Peace and reconciliation are the only sensible way forward in our troubled and divided world. Only then can we get anywhere near that same mind and same love to which St Paul calls us.

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