

Violence Against Aid Workers

Each week we hear of terrible atrocities in one part of the world or another. A particularly cruel one took place a few days ago when terrorists attacked the offices of Save the Children in the Afghan capital Kabul. A number of aid workers were killed and the charity was forced to suspend its activities.

Here are people working to help vulnerable children, to support their education and to give them a better life. Quite clearly they do not deserve to be subjected to violence and danger. We just cannot understand why perpetrators can even contemplate such violent attacks on those whose lives are devoted to the service of others.

We will perhaps never be able to delve into the psyche of such men of violence, and they are usually men. Their minds are so clouded by distorted ideology that they resort to committing inhuman acts which go against all norms of religious orthodoxy or common humanity.

In our Bible reading just now (James 1.17, 22-27) James reminds us of the basis of true religion: generosity, care for others, especially the vulnerable and those with particular needs. Whatever we believe must be reflected in the way we live our lives. To quote the well-known saying: actions speak louder than words. And that is not an exclusively Christian idea. It lies at the heart of all the major religions. Which is why it is such a distortion when acts of violence are committed in the name of God. Such claims must always be challenged and opposed.

Any process of reconciliation must involve dialogue, sometimes even compromise. However, there are some who are not willing to enter into dialogue, whose views are so extreme that no compromise can be entertained. For reconciliation requires honesty and openness.

That poses a major challenge for those working for peace, justice and reconciliation. Thankfully there are those so committed to those goals that they persevere. We cannot blame them, though, if they feel they are not achieving anything and to continue is in vain – as was the case with the American member of the international advisory panel who was trying to talk to the Burmese authorities about the terrible plight of the Rohingya refugees. His resignation highlights the intransigence of the regime in the face of international isolation.

It is right that the media continue to focus on these conflicts and not allow them to be forgotten. Our prayer and hope is that the efforts to resolve such conflicts and lay the foundations for a lasting and just peace will ultimately succeed.

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