

# SAY "NO!" TO THE EVANGELISTS

- a personal testimony by Ven. Piyasilo -

## I. COLONIALISM AND EVANGELISM

### PREAMBLE

Since our prehistory, human beings have tried to conquer and dominate one another. With the rise of religion—which began as an attempt to understand forces beyond our control (such as pain, disease, and death)—people then try to conquer one another's *mind*, but without understanding their own. Those religions and cults that in some way attempt to dominate others have one common historical feature: they were born amidst violence, and sadly continue to use emotionally violent and physically violent means of converting others, or punishing and getting rid of those "who are not with us".

The idea is that **if you are not with us, you are against us**. There is no middle ground of walking humbly with one's God, or simply walking at peace with oneself. When such a mental attitude dominates a society, its intolerance becomes destructive and stifles emotional and spiritual growth. Minds simply become mass-produced from the same mould; any misfit would be destroyed or, at best, mercifully marginalized.

When such an evangelical attitude reaches a global dimension, the disasters and pains are global and protracted. The early 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by suicide bombings and mass destruction in the name of religion. Religious war and hatred, and evangelically motivated politics are still well and alive even today. Not surprisingly, such a legacy has deep roots.

### 1. THE INCA TRAGEDY

When the European conquerors started coming to the East and the Americas around the 16th century, it was not for the good of the natives, but for "gospel, glory and gold". With the rise of population, power and knowledge in the West, the European adventurers vied with one another to claim foreign lands and heathen peoples in the name of their Christian rulers.

In the Americas, the natives were horribly unfortunate. One of the most tragic and dastardly episodes of human history is perhaps the Spanish conquest of the Incas. In 1530 Francisco Pizarro landed with 200 men on the Peruvian coast. He had planned to make an easy conquest of the Inca empire as his countryman Hernando Cortez had done—Cortez had seized the Aztec emperor Montezuma and this conquest in due course led to the annihilation of the Aztec civilization.

When the Inca (ruler) **Atahualpa** and his escort appeared in the square of Cajamarca, they found it deserted, for Pizarro had concealed his men in some large buildings opening onto the square. In other words, once the Indians entered the square, they had no avenue of escape. At a signal from Pizarro his soldiers, supported by cavalry and

artillery, rushed forward to kill hundreds of terrified Indians and take the Inca Atahualpa prisoner.

### (2) TREACHERY

The chaos that led to panic amongst the Indians was due to the following reasons: (a) the Indians were practically unarmed; (b) they had no chance at all against the Spanish firearms (the Indians did not have any such weapon then); and (c) they had never seen a horse (the initial sight of a man on a horse terrified them). The result of the fateful meeting was a glorious massacre. The only Spaniard hurt in the massacre that day was Pizarro himself who sustained a minor wound on his hand received from one of his own men!

In an attempt to gain his freedom; Atahualpa offered to fill his spacious prison cell with gold as high as a man could reach. Pizarro accepted the offer; but when the room had been filled accordingly, he told the Inca that he was to remain in "protective custody". Later on, however, Pizarro was convinced that Atahualpa was organizing a resistance movement. After a farcical trial, a Spanish court found the Inca "guilty" of polygamy, idolatry, and the murder of his brother Huascar. Atahualpa was condemned by the court to be burnt at the stake; but the sentence was, out of Christian compassion, commuted to strangling when he accepted baptism! [W H Prescott, "The Conquest of Peru", rev V W von Hagen, New American Library, 1961:bk 3 chs 5-7; Encyclopaedia Britannica Macro 10: 693c]

### (3) GALILEO

There is a very important reason that the sad story of the Incas opens this "answer to the evangelists." The significance for this will be explained at the end of this pamphlet. One further comment however is in order here. The cruelty of the evangelists are not exclusively reserved for the heathen; even their own kind who dare to think differently suffer a cruel fate. The classic case is that of the famous Italian scientist **Galileo Galilei** who was cruelly threatened with torture for believing in and writing that the sun was the centre of the solar system (while the Church believed that the earth was the centre). As a result of this infamous holy crime against free thought, the hub of scientific learning shifted to northern Europe where there was more tolerance.

Some evangelists may argue that they are not "Catholic" as those Spaniards were. Catholic or not, the above examples, illustrate what evangelists with power are capable of. If the early Protestants (and most contemporary evangelists) had enough power, they would have committed similar atrocities against non-believers and the local natives. Power tends to corrupt and, with the promise of "gospel, glory and gold", absolute power corrupts absolutely.

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

Indeed it is quite clear that the evils of colonialism are due to the biblical injunction to "go forth and multiply" and "have dominion over" others that one practically never meets a Christian who "turns the other cheek". One native African writer lamented that when the missionaries came, the missionaries had the Bible in their hand and the natives had their land. Then, one day, when the natives had the Bible in their hands, they discovered that their land was in the hands of the missionaries!

The worst expression of colonialism, both political and religious, is denoted by the term WASP—"White Anglo-Saxon Protestant". Thanks to the independence of our nation and the security of our Constitution, we today are not only free to choose and practise our own religion (or none), but we are also not so easily harassed by the evangelists.

### II. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY EVANGELISM

#### (4) GOSPEL OF FEAR

When an evangelist lacks political power, he uses the weapon of subterfuge or fear. Some evangelists befriend others, especially those in universities and colleges, and under the guise of "surveys" and "discussions," subtly apply their hidden agenda, trying to the "superiority" of the faith above all others.

As regards the use of **fear**, a classic case in point is that of John Wesley, the 19th century founder of Methodism. In his conversion technique, Wesley would first of all create high emotional tension in his potential converts. He found it easy to convince large audiences of his time that a failure to achieve salvation would necessarily condemn them to hellfire for ever and ever.

Wesley learned in time that to capture an audience he had first to gauge its intellectual and emotional capacity. For the simple folk, his favourite approach was the subject of death and judgment on which he would preach with fire. It is reported that John Nelson (one of Wesley's most able lieutenants) was converted in this manner:

"As soon as he [Wesley] went upon his stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards me where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me." [Recorded by **R A Knox**, "**Enthusiasm: A Chapter in Religious History**," OUP, 1950]

Indeed, so effective was Wesley's method that some members of his audience would be "trembling, weeping and swooning away, till every appearance of life was gone, and the extremities of the body assumed the coldness of a corpse. At one meeting not less than a thousand persons fell to the ground apparently without sense or motion". (A witness account by R A Knox, op cit).

Knox says further: "When attacked by the jerks, the victims of enthusiasm sometimes leaped like frogs and exhibited every grotesque and hideous contortion of the face and limbs. The barks consisted in getting down on all fours, growling, snapping the teeth, and barking like dogs.... These last [who barked like dogs] were particularly gifted in prophecies, trances, dreams, rhapsodies, visions of angels, of heaven, and of the holy city". [Quoted by **W Sargent**, "**Battle for the Mind**," Pan Books, 1959: 115]

#### (5) IMMUNIZING ONESELF

The best way to avoid conversion, possession and similar conditions is to avoid getting emotionally involved in the proceedings or give a cold shoulder to any advance from an evangelist. I remember an eyewitness account of an encounter with a charismatic group that "spoke in tongues." Some of the schoolboys, lured to the meeting refused to participate. Indeed, they found the proceeding so bizarre and amusing, that they could not help giggling.

The uninvolved behaviour of the schoolboys distracted the whole proceeding—indeed no one was converted or "healed" that day. The infuriated pastor's threat of "The devil's everywhere and he can take any form!" and his cajoling of "Believe!" only tickled them further until they had to be thrown out!

#### (6) BEWARE OF GUILT!

Too fierce an anger or contempt for the evangelists is also unhealthy. For if one goes on condemning them, there may come a time when one feels very guilty about it all, and like Saul on the road to Damascus, one's guilt would transmogrify into hallucinatory "visions" which may compel one to join them after all. In the 1970s, a well known Melaka (Malaysia) Buddhist temple, a couple of active Sunday School members used to fend off every evangelist advance with adolescent enthusiasm. But both of them were converted during their spell of studies overseas and became active evangelists. The contributory factor here, however, was that the Buddhist group they were involved in did not put proper Buddhist instructions or practice on a high priority.

On the bright side, we have the example of an inter-religious forum (in Singapore), chaired by a Buddhist monk. Most of the major religions were represented. The various evangelists spoke fiercely of their faiths almost with the hellfire tone of Wesley's. When the monk's turn came, he spoke so calmly and happily that the audience was actually shaken by the contrast—from the fire of insecure religiosity and triumphalism to the inner peace of spirituality expressed! The population of the campus Buddhist society which sponsored the forum doubled after that event!

# Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

## (7) WHY THE HIPPIES?

In the 1960s **the hippies** arose in the West in protest against the establishment. The hippies were a counter-culture of long-haired young people who indulged in marijuana and hallucinogenic drugs, rock music, and communal life-styles. This social explosion that fragmented the younger generations of the West was a reaction against social uniformity dictated by Industrialization—and the rule of the Church in their private lives. But the roots of the hippies, one might say, go way back to the Renaissance, short of the introduction of Christianity into the West.

**Renaissance** is the name for a rich cultural period in European history tasting from the 14th to the 17th centuries. It was a period of universal learning for the scholars, and great discoveries of new lands and wealth for the powerful—it was the birth of Western imperialism. Yet for the truth-seeker then, it was, consciously or unconsciously, a turning point away from the Church which vehemently denounced anything—even Science—if it were perceived as going against the Bible. If the coffin of Christianity was made during the Renaissance, its nails were hammered tight in during the Age of Science.

While the Renaissance widely opened the doors of knowledge to the West, it also led to the Industrial Revolution in Britain. British imperialism fed its factories and mills with Malayan rubber, Indian spices and Kenyan copper. When the popularity of Chinese tea incurred a heavy deficit on the British, they dumped opium in China to get Chinese silver (which later led to **the Opium Wars**). Indeed, at the height Western imperialism—concurrent with the Victorian period of British history—Christianity was already deeply entrenched in most of Western society. But it was also the age of the duel between Religion and Science.

## (8) RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Scientific progress and industrial advancement led to higher standards of living, a booming population and urbanization—which made the world "smaller". The improved communication system and mass media further reduced the "size" of world with radio, motion pictures, television, national magazines, record companies and universal advertising.

The result of this new wealth was a growing cultural uniformity throughout the country that wiped out ethnic and regional differences and concentrated on the creation and preservation of "high culture"—literature, the fine arts, classical music and opera, philosophy and social thought—to a small, educated elite. The Church too had become very wealthy, though less powerful, but nonetheless determined to win souls.

Invoking its ancient roots in the mediaeval universities and armed with these modern social expressions (printing, music, etc), the Church casts its net of **missionary school education** on foreign shores. What better way to evangelize the heathens than to

teach them Western languages and culture, and Christian morals. Indeed the missionaries were so successful that their influence practically reached the highest levels of power right down to the privacy of the converts' homes with their "missionary position"!

## III. SOCIAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY EVANGELISM

### (9) THE MISSION SCHOOL

One of the greatest Asian tragedies is **the mission school**. Those who think highly of missionary education fail to realize that all the good things that it offers—language, morals, health and culture—are just as good, if not, better given in our own vernacular. At least, we excel in what is really ours and are free to choose to learn whatever else we wish to. It is interesting to note that the average person who goes to a Chinese school (or any vernacular school for that matter) is generally more rooted in his or her own culture and more disciplined than the average mission school graduate.

I had two childhood Chinese friends: one came from a family that regularly attends the Wesley church; the other attended a convent. The Wesley Church friend went on to marry an English girl and migrated to England. The convent girl, on the other hand, was in the habit of claiming that the mother superior (head nun) at her convent school was "better than my own mother," which might well be in some ways, but the statement was made in contempt. She later converted and married a Scot.

I am not against mixed marriages out of love; but the point here is that the mission school is the main cause of our culture shock, generation gap, not to say, family fragmentation. There was a time when missionary school students had to study Latin, Bible Knowledge and attend chapel—over and above secular subjects. The pupils' own religion and culture were almost completely neglected.

The true purpose traditional mission school system is not to so much to educate its students, as it is to put into them an agenda of evangelical or colonial values. Had the mission schools been truly successful we would have lost much if not all of our culture and religious freedom.

The same applies to Christian "**social work**" and "**world vision**": the idea is to make sheep and fishes of men (and women and children) to be herded and harvested for the evangelist's dining table. An evangelical "people-helper" does not really help anyone (not even themselves), insofar as their real aim is to skew their helpees' minds to become like their. When the blind lead the blind, they grow in confidence, thinking they would not fall into any ditches (when they are actually already rutted in big ditch themselves!) There is no true unconditional love in a Bible-thumping evangelist: it is really a selfish zest (conscious or unconscious) motivated by the desire to dominate. He has created God in his own image.

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

### (10) INFERIORITY COMPLEX

Any free thinking person who has some experience of Christianity, would at some point at least, realize that "brainwashing" is an essential tool of the religion. As long as people have to "believe," all seems well for the evangelists. The general idea is to "realize" that one is utterly evil "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Then the way out is offered: "believe and be saved".

This pattern of conversion reflects a great sense of psychological insecurity because it involves fear. It is like the local school bully who threatens smaller kids with violence if they do not "contribute" some pocket money to him. Indeed, in joining a religion, one in a way, invests one's whole being in it. But the dividends of this strange religious business is a great feeling, albeit conscious or unconscious, of inferiority—an inferiority complex. Hence, the desire to dominate others.

The statement that "most Christians feel inferior and insecure" may sound rather strange; for one often notices that an evangelist looks modern and self-confident. But one should not be deceived by looks. The actions of the evangelists are very revealing to the astute observer. Despite their faith, influence and affluence, most Christians still feel that other religions are stronger and are eternally plagued by the problem of cults and sectarianism. We will come to this point again soon.

### (11) "CHRISTIANITY IS MODERN"?

Many of our local people have the misconception that to be Christian is to be "modern"—whatever the term means. This attitude is the result of not understanding one's local history—especially the Colonial Period when foreigners (especially the evangelists) ruled our homelands.

When we say that "Christianity is modern," **we must remember what made it modern and what "modern" means.** For Christianity is not the cause of what is said to be "modern"—if by the term one means speaking an international language, being well-dressed for church, saccharin sweet fellowship and, social work; in other words, a high standard of living.

But we forget that it was only after the State was separated from the Church that modern Science, Technology and social philosophies paved the road to what we today see as "modern" in the Western way of life. Indeed Christianity, we have seen, for centuries has been hindering free development of knowledge and where they are involved in education, especially the mission school, pupils are almost always blinkered so that they see only the Church's view of the world.

### (12) LOCAL MISCONCEPTION

Many local people have the misconception that Christianity is not only modern but has no problem. The Buddhists, they say, are often poor, uneducat-

ed and selfish. The Christians are wealthy, well-schooled and kind to one another, they argue. It almost sounds as if they are saying that Buddhism is the cause of poverty, ignorance and selfishness! Of course, these critics are neither Buddhist nor sympathetic to Buddhism.

These critics forget that these "wealthy, well-schooled, kind" Christians they are talking about are enjoying the legacy of the colonial past. It is only in the recent past, with our country's independence, local education and religious freedom that we are able to begin picking up the pieces to start organizing ourselves so that we can study our own religion and discover our own culture.

We have to begin by helping ourselves so that we can in due course help others—if they need and want our help, that is. Above all, one must never forget that Christians, too, have problems like any other religions—lack of commitment of the congregation, sectarianism, internal politics, self-righteousness, fanaticism, etc.

### (13) "VAMPIRE EFFECT"

A real life example will illustrate the "vampire effect" and inferiority complex. This experience was related by a Western friend of mine. He was taking a walk in Petaling Jaya (a township in Selangor, Malaysia) one day when a young boy ran up to him and proudly announced "I'm a Christian!" The Westerner was dumbfounded for a moment and then replied: "**I'm a Buddhist!**"

The main point here however is that the attitude that "Christianity is modern" reflects one's own feeling of inferiority to a religion well-publicized by public gospel rallies, colourful Christmas celebrations and Western movies. This is the "opium of the masses": one feels inferior because one fails to see the wealth of what is good in oneself.

Indeed one is unable to see what is good in oneself because one has been uprooted by the evangelists through mission school education and the mass media. This is called the "vampire effect" because once one gets bitten by evangelist bug one keeps going back to it especially in times of crisis.

## IV. SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS OF THE EVANGELISTS

### (14) GLORIFICATION OF FAILURE

The evangelist will sooner or later announce that his saviour died for mankind, or if we are to believe the biblical accounts—Jesus was crucified by the Romans. Most potential converts are not impressed by this statement which they neither understand nor accept. But religious conversion is like joining a club—one has sooner or later to accept all the rules of the game. It does not matter where one begins, the evangelists argue—the end justifies the means!

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

One is far from wrong if one says that the evangelists celebrates the death of Christ; indeed, it is a glorification of failure. It would be more meaningful to say that a certain local soldier died for the country if he had defended the land. But to say the "Christ died for you" amounts to saying that death is better than life.

Just because a charismatic person says that black is white does not mean he is right. Words have different meanings to different people, and we have to ask ourselves what do those words really mean to us. It is all right to think differently.

A beautiful analogy of "the cow and the sheep" illustrates the gist of the argument here. A sheep lamented to a cow one day about how unpopular a sheep is: "People are always talking about your kind eyes, your gentleness and your usefulness. They say you provide milk, cream, buttermilk, butter and ghee. The early monks use your fermented urine as medicine. Even your dung is useful as wall plaster and fuel. But I give more—I provide mutton and wool, and give up my life for it! Still nobody likes me! Why is this?"

The cow thought for a while and then replies: "**Well, maybe it's because I give while I'm still living!**" The moral of the story is that "to give one's life is a great sacrifice indeed; but the greatest gift - the gift of truth and love—can only be given while one is living."

Imagine you are a member of a troubled family, but instead of working at solving the problem, you think that it is better to die, to kill yourself. Clearly here it is easier to die, but more difficult to live! Moreover, it is more meaningful to honour a fallen soldier who has died for our country than to worship someone executed by the Romans (the Christians have been blaming and persecuting the Jews until lately for this), whose history has almost nothing to do with us in Asia!

### (15) THE JOY OF PAIN

In the right circumstances, the glorification of Jesus' death can only lead to a "**persecution complex**". Indeed, this is often the case. A careful study of Christian history shows that there seems to be only two courses: where Christianity is weak, it is usually persecuted; where it is strong, it often persecutes. And where the Christian factions are equally strong; they drowned one another in protracted violence.

Of course, one might concede that it is sometimes difficult to separate politics from religion—but that is point: evangelism is power politics. The avowed objective of evangelism is a "**world vision**" of more and more Christians, and unofficially, of less and less non-Christians.

The glorification of Christ's failure by the evangelists has led to the glorification of pain and can be said to be the basis of numerous neurotic problems in the West. Some of the worst manifestations of the glorification of pain and the persecution

complex (the two are often identical) are the charismatic churches.

The mass suicide in Guyana in November 1978 of the Peoples temple ("Jones cult"), a Protestant cult with 90% US Black membership is one of the greatest human tragedies. The cult had close illegal dealings with the ruling political party and organized a mass suicide-murder at Jonestown in the northwestern jungle, killing 912 persons [World Christian Encyclopaedia 1982:347]. The evangelists would of course deny that Jones' church was "Christian".

### (16) CHRISTIAN GUILT

One of the most devastating contributions of Christianity to the world is **the guilt conscience and sin**. As has been pointed out, the evangelists love to create a feeling of guilt as a tool for conversion. But this approach has a disastrous effect on the people and society because it is perpetuated through the family.

In one of my most difficult counseling cases I have had to deal with was that of a teachers' college girl suffering from a profound sense of guilt inherited from a Christian woman who took care of her in her childhood days. After the woman's death, she could not reconcile that "a kind God could take her away". She felt that she was an evil sinner and no one could help her.

After a series of counselling sessions, the college girl began to accept herself and felt happier. Then for a while we lost touch. The last I heard of her was that she had come into contact with some old Christian friends. She had had a relapse and was hospitalized. Unfortunately, there are many other cases like this one.

### (17) CHRISTIAN SECTARIANISM

One of the greatest embarrassments to the evangelists is **Christian sectarianism**. As a "religion of the book," it is rather curious that Christianity should be split up into about 21,000 sects "and they all hate each other" [World Christian Encyclopaedia 1985: 17]; and the number is growing. This is because (a) there many versions of the Bible; (b) a lot of editing (additions and omissions) of these Bibles; (c) the written word can be interpreted in so many ways and many of such interpretations are often contradictory; (d) intolerance of differing opinions.

Some of them have even "revised" their view of Christianity and say that the centre of Christianity is Christ not the Bible which they seem to admit, after all these centuries, is subject to various interpretations and human error. It will be interesting to see what future Vatican Councils, ecumenical conferences and godly assemblies will announce in the years to come. There will certainly be more than 21,000 internecine religious groups claiming the label of "Christianity", each claiming to hold the only true gospel!

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

Though the Pali Canon of early Buddhism is about 11 times the size of the Bible, and the Chinese Buddhist Canon about 40 times more voluminous, there are only three major schools of Buddhism. Though the sub-sects have not been officially listed, the various Buddhist schools and sects are, as a rule, tolerant of one another and arise in response to the challenges' of the place and times. Indeed most Buddhists are free to attend any temple or school they wish and many of them are often members of more than one school of Buddhism. While the evangelism talks of ecumenism (spiritual unity), the Buddhist takes it for granted!

Once a Christian nephew of mine visited me in the temple on a Sunday. Just before going to the shrine for the morning puja, I asked my nephew if he would be going for his own worship in the Baptist church next door. My nephew answered that he could not attend that church because they both had a "different confession." "Now you know one of the reasons why I'm not a Christian," I remarked.

### V. DISHONESTY OF THE EVANGELISTS

#### (18) SAY "NO!" TO THE EVANGELISTS

Often enough unwitting victims, especially campus Buddhists, are harassed by over-eager evangelists "to share their faith." The submissive attitude of most local Buddhists, their ignorance—and ironically, the Buddhist trust and hospitality to strangers—make them easy victims.

The best attitude to conversion overtures by the evangelists is to simply say "NO!" **Horace Walpole**, an English writer, could not be converted by John Wesley because Walpole refused to be emotionally involved. The best preventive measure is not to give the evangelist any opportunity at all.

The moment you discover that an evangelist is approaching you, your family, or colleagues, quickly walk away, or quickly and firmly excuse yourself and walk away. You must do this and do not be sheepish about it. There is no point speaking to them because they will not listen to you no matter how well you speak (because they cannot really hear you!), and your politeness will turn into sheepishness if you continue to listen to them because they have been well trained in handling potential converts (read marketing or salesmanship).

Moreover, you will most likely feel deeply hurt, angry or confused (or all of them) at the end of the session, that there are none so deaf as those who would not listen; none so blind as those who would not see.

#### (19) HOW TO RECOGNIZE EVANGELISTS

It is important to be able to recognize evangelists and then to avoid them. They may sit beside you in the train and start a polite conversation before going on to their true agenda. They know that Asians are generally hospitable and polite listeners—and they take advantage of this weakness.

Often they are audacious enough to enter a temple to sell their religion.

There is an amusing but true story about how audacious they can be. An evangelist once visited a Siamese monk in a Kuala Lumpur temple to convert him. The monk welcomed him with the customary smile and offered him a seat and a drink.

Seeing that the monk was friendly, the evangelist quickly went to lecture on sin, salvation and so on. For an hour the gentle monk listened studiously. Then finally the evangelist asked the monk: "Do you repent and accept Christ?" Noticing that the evangelist had stopped speaking, the monk smiled broadly and said: "**Ah! Sudah habis cakap, minum kopilah!**" (Now that you have finished talking, have your coffee!) He did not understand a word of English!

Of course, not many of us can be fortunate like the Siamese monk and not many evangelists will be unfortunate like their colleague above. One of the most notorious evangelist lies is the "**survey**," especially popular on campus. A small group of evangelists would visit the dormitories of freshies or individuals and claim that they are doing a religious survey.

When they discover that the person is not a Christian, they would ask him "Have you heard of Christ?" and so on. It becomes very interesting when they met another Christian because they usually is due course get into a violent argument over their own God idea, their scripture, their way of worship and their view of Christ! Many of the good Christians themselves are upset when approached by the evangelists.

(By the way, to the question, "What do you think of Christ?" a good answer, if you choose to answer, would be, "**Nothing at all! I often think of the Buddha, and that is good enough for me.**" An at once walk away.)

#### (20) HOUSE VISITS

Those evangelists who go from door to door (this is against the law in some countries), may use the survey method, but usually they say that they have something to share with you—or more correctly, they have come to take you away! I was myself approached a number of times, and once they used the "question" technique: "I know you are a Buddhist, I would like to ask you some questions".

But they were rather unfortunate because I had done many years of Bible study, and because I was rather free at that time, I first asked them to agree to discuss only the Bible. They could not answer the various problem questions which plagued theologians and went away rather perturbed. For the last decade or so I have not been approached by any evangelist! They do not like people who know too much about them.

#### (21) TRUE YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

Sometime in 1980, I had an interesting visit from a group of young Christian students from the Bible seminary near the Siamese temple I was staying. It seems that every year their lecturer had sent them to the temple down the road to "interview" the monks. Unfortunately, none of the monks they met could not speak English and led simple lives.

The impression I got was that the lecturer's idea was to give his students the idea that Buddhist monks are uneducated, idle (some of them we seen smoking away, for example), and uninvolved in society. But that year when they met me they were very happy to find a monk who could not only speak English but also discuss some very interesting and difficult points of theology and the Bible, and a bit of comparative religion (that is, Buddhism).

After some discussion, the young students appeared moved by with what I had said. Then one of the girls suddenly got hold of herself as it were and with a lump in her throat said: "I'm a Christian and I have faith in Christ..". My reply was: "Keep your faith, for even if I were to convert you, which is not my intention, I cannot provide you with the support and livelihood that you are being trained in".

After a few hours of discussion, the young Christians agreed to return to continue the discussion on another day, but they did not turn up for the appointment. When I met one of them down the road one day, he told me that the lecturer was not too pleased with them for having met me! They probably had had a long debriefing session from their lecturer.

In 1983, I founded the Community of Dharmafarers in Malaysia. We provided support and training for anyone (especially the laity) who wish to commit themselves to Buddhism. Yet we had no intention of converting the evangelists: I would rather "convert" the Buddhists to the Dharma!

### (22) SHARING TESTIMONIES

A popular practice amongst the evangelists is that of **sharing testimonies** of one's life leading up to one's conversion. Very often such a testimony starts of with a condemnation, in one way or another, of one's own culture and previous religion. Some of them would claim that "I was a Buddhist, but Buddhism did not help me...".

When such a "witness" was queried which temple had he or she attended, whether he or she had "taken refuge" before, did he or she know the Five Precepts or the Four Noble Truths—all the answers were in the negative! They had never been Buddhist at all! Buddhism has become a convenient scape-goat due to the ignorance and triumphalism of the evangelists.

The psychology of the evangelist testimony is a very interesting point for consideration. Assuming that all the wonderful things that the witness claims—the success, the healing, the joy etc, etc—were true, are they really because of Christianity?

Does it mean that just because one is not a Christian, one would not be happy? (A widely publicized scientific survey in 2005 says that Buddhists are really very happy people compared to the followers of other religions!)

### (23) BUDDHIST PRAYER WORKS!

There are a number, of cases I know of Buddhists who have experienced healing, their prayers answered and witnessed "miracles" through their faith in the Buddha or Guanyin. But we do not go around telling others to the effect that "since it has happened, it must be true and it must also happen to you!" Have such people never considered that their victims are already happy or at least not as sick as they themselves are?

There is an amusing anecdote about an evangelists preacher who newly arrived on a happy, peaceful and rich Pacific island where people had never heard of the word "sin", and were quite happy of the fact. After a fiery sermon by the preacher on the dangers of "sin", a gentle old woman walked up to the preacher and said, "I have never sinned before, but after listening to your sermon, I have sinned! Now I am so unhappy!"

### (24) PRAYING FOR CUSTOMERS

There is almost no difference between meeting a shop assistant of an expensive high class department store and meeting a zealous evangelist—they both welcome you with eager anticipation; for they both look at you as a potential customer.

Some of my evangelist friends often say that they are praying for me. What they really mean is that they want me to join their religion. I pray for them, too, in my loving-kindness meditation—wishing them well, prosperous, happy, peaceful and, above all, that they might understand their religion better and realize the highest truth.

"Christian charity" is an extremely relative term. Once I had a very sad experience when a young college student sought help for his brother who needed financial aid to go for a serious operation overseas. The young student declared himself a Christian but had come from a poor carpenter's family (as did Jesus!).

He asked me if we Buddhists could help him though he was a Christian. When we asked him why his church did not help him, he replied that he had approached his pastor. But the pastor said that the church could not help him without clearly explaining why and referred him to another church. The pastor of the second church said that he could not help the student because he was not a "witness" of the second pastor's church!

After some discussion of the student's problem, we passed the hat around in our own Centre and asked some of our friends in other temples to do their bit and managed to raise a few hundred dollars. In due course, the student had enough

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

funds and his brother had a successful operation. The student realized that the Buddhists were not cold and superstitious as he had been told—indeed his church rejected him because he was poor and simple. He became a Buddhist.

### (25) THE WORK OF THE DEVIL

Many Buddhists have reported that their prayers have been answered by the Buddha or by Guanyin. But they do not condemn other religions in spite of this. Indeed many other religions and even superstitious groups have reported miracles—of course, they are the work of the devil, retorts the evangelist.

As a schooling youth, though my interest lay in religion, I studied more Christianity than any other religion. The opportunity and motivation was, in large due to my elder brother (a convert) who was and still is a church elder. Although he is a fine tolerant example of a good Christian who would not let himself be “a stumbling block unto another brother,” Christianity has raised a string invisible barrier between us, and effectively my family.

For many years I was a paying student of the Emmaus Bible school (Australia), and received a number of certificates after I have successfully completed the study of the 4 Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, Romans and a few other texts. Towards the end of the course, I asked my tutor this question: I have many good and kind friends—some very elderly—who are from various religions; what is the Christian view of such people and their religions?

My Christian tutor replied that these non-Christian friends of mine were sinners and that their religions were the work of the devil. The answer came as a great shock to me; for in my Bible studies I was taught of God's forgiveness and Christ's love. The tutor had never even met any of these friends of mine to know their kindness and spirituality. Yet he passed summary judgment on them. This was the turning point in my religious life—I was convinced that there was something terribly wrong with Christianity and the Christians.

### (26) GIFT OF TONGUES

Any religion that stresses on unquestioning faith and makes use of fear as a motivating factor will experience **mass hysteria** among its followers. The gospel gatherings and charismatic meetings are the best examples. The loud and urgent tone of the speaker's voice, the accompanying gospel music, handclapping and the rhythmic swaying of the body in a short while would induce a trancelike state of spontaneous weeping and glossolalia (speaking in tongues).

**Glossolalia** or "gift of tongues" refers to utterances approximating words and speech, usually associated with intense religious excitement. The vocal organs of the speaker are affected, the tongue moves without the conscious control of the speaker, and unintelligible speech pours forth. Glossolalia

occurred in some of the ancient Greek religions and in various primitive religions.

Christians generally believe that glossolalia first occurred among the followers of Jesus at Pentecost when they "began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Paul, however, urged restraint in the practice since this practice could be abused. If the meaning could not be disclosed, Paul regarded it with suspicion, and he "would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Cor 14:19).

Other than the religious interpretations of glossolalia, various psychological interpretations have attempted to explain it as a natural occurrence. It has been suggested that it is a charlatan's technique; a neurotic or psychotic symptom; a form of epilepsy; or, most possibly, a hypnotic phenomenon resulting from religious excitement.

### (27) MASS HYSTERIA

If Buddhism is a path of personal spiritual development, then Christianity is a technique of mass conversion. One of the most striking characteristics of mass conversion is **hysteria**, a term derived from the Greek hysteria, meaning "uterus." This reflects the ancient belief that hysteria was a specifically female disorder resulting from disturbances in uterine functions.

In reality, hysteria may develop in either sex and may occur in children and elderly people, although they are observed most commonly in early adult life. In its pure form, hysteria seems to occur more often among the psychologically naive than among the better educated. Hysterias tend to be more common among those in lower ranges of intelligence than amongst those in the higher ranges.

Hysteria is a common manifestation in evangelism amongst the Pentecostal and "charismatic" Christians. The sessions usually start off with hymns singing, hand clapping and the usual preliminaries reminiscent of tribal rituals. After a short moment, a trance-like state is induced and the resulting "licensed madness" that result is similar to what has been described by R A Knox [5].

The incidence of hysteria appears to have been diminishing over the years in many areas of the world, probably because of cultural factors such as increasing sophistication, a more open view of sexual morality, a less authoritarian family and a breaking down of the influence of the church.

### (28) CONVENT GIRLS

In the early years of my monkhood (1970s) I had to deal with a very interesting case of mass hysteria involving some students from a Malacca (Malaysia) convent. On a Friday afternoon immediately after my weekly talk to the members of the Malacca Buddhist Youth Societies, two upper form convent girls came up to me with an ultimatum: "We want to



## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

know about Buddhism. If you do not convince us, we will convert to Christianity!"

The ultimatum was a rather tall order especially when I had just finished nearly three hours of talk and answering questions with the MBYS students. Anyway, I treated the convent girls' request with urgency and asked them to tell me everything that needed to be told.

Both the convent girls were from the same class. They reported that a number of their friends claimed that they had visions of "God or Christ" and that they (the two girls), too, thought that they were beginning to have the same experience. I listened to them very carefully for about an hour without interrupting them except to ask an occasional question to clarify certain points which I thought were unclear.

### (29) LEARNED VISIONS

When both the girls had spoken to their heart's content, I mentally prepared my own answer. I began my answer by talking about the centrality of the mind in Buddhism. One of the girls said that she had a vision of "someone who looked like Christ" in the balcony of her own room. The second girl, too, had a similar experience. In answer to my question, the girls replied that most of the other convent girls had similar experiences.

That experience was the Gordian knot—a problem insoluble in its own terms—for them. Like the historical Gordian knot, it could only be severed by Alexander's sword; in our case, it was Manjusri's sword of wisdom. One of the lowest common denominators of mass hysteria is that those involved would experience a similar, if not identical, hallucination, for example, a vision.

It would be very interesting indeed if, when all the convent girls were having visions of Christ, one of them had a vision of Guanyin! In other words, that "vision of Christ" was a learned or conditioned response, albeit encouraged by an over-zealous nun who was their teacher with daily doses of talk about faith in God, sin, salvation and so on.

### (30) VISIONS OF GUANYIN

This reminds me of another true life case of a Catholic woman who is a devotee of Virgin Mary. She has never been a Buddhist but in her prayers she keeps having visions of Guanyin and feels a great affinity for the Bodhisattva. Somewhat confused by this overlapping of two contrasting religions, she approached me for spiritual counseling and asked me if it was all right to worship both deities at the same time.

In view of her devotion to Catholicism and with respect for Buddhism, I gave her "a middle way" answer. I told her that it was all right in her special case to worship both deities; but, I stressed, when "you find that you need only one of them, you must

have the courage to accept that decision". Whatever the outcome, we remain good friends.

Coming back to the case of the two convent girls: I was very fortunate that these two girls were very intelligent and had the will to question even what is regarded as the "truth". Having understood and accepted my explanation of mass hysteria and the centrality of the mind, both of them became active young Buddhists. Both of them are still devout Buddhists happily married and having their own family. One is a successful school teacher, and the other a lawyer.

### (31) RELIGIOUS SEDUCTION

Mass hysteria in religion may be a serious problem but it is relatively easy to handle because its manifestation is usually an open one. The evangelist technique of subtle "religious seduction" is more difficult to notice, much less countered. This emotional trap is one of the most common method by which the evangelists become "fishers of men" in campus waters.

With adolescent difficulties, social problems, the search for a suitable mate, desire for economic stability and an uncertainty of the future, a young graduate is often at a loss. But much as some of them try to hide this insecurity, their penchant for the feeling of safety in numbers betray their urgent hunt for the comfort of "a bird of a feather".

Such emotional insecurity is far worse for undergraduates who sometimes have no one to turn to. Exam tension along with a deep sense of loneliness are common causes of depression and a feeling of loss amongst campus students. Where the women are more intelligent or better qualified, the problem for the men is even more severe because of academic and emotional incompatibility.

### (32) A BRIDGE THAT GOES BOTH WAYS

Sometimes the Buddhists are religiously weak as they fail to receive proper spiritual training and fellowship. There is an interesting case of a young Buddhist who after a few weeks in the robes in a well-known foreign mission's annual novitiate programme in Kuala Lumpur in the 1980s converted to Christianity.

As a gesture of friendship, he was invited to attend a Buddhist study group in one of the young graduates' house. At the end of the study, the convert announced: "Well, I have answered your invitation and attended your study. Now you must respond to my invitation to join our evangelist meeting!" I leave the intelligent reader to think out all the implications of this episode.

In trying the answer the evangelist, a Buddhist must be careful not to use the wrong method. Some Buddhists may think that it is all right to imitate the evangelists. For example, we have Buddhist songs like "We shall overcome!" (reminiscent of a gospel hymn) and the word Buddha

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

being suffixed with initials like those of a Muslim holy name (in Malaysia)! There is a world of difference between apeing and adapting. Western scholars call this tendency "Protestant Buddhism."

Such questionable techniques, though well intentioned, may work against the Buddhists. One must ask oneself if this enthusiasm is a reflex from a childhood of evangelist conditioning (for example, going to a mission school) or is it really a conscious Dharma-based attempt to answer the evangelist. A bridge joins both sides of the gulf; one can cross over to either side. The Dharma Bridge, however, is "the One Way" that leads on to Awakening.

When, on the request of a local Poly Buddhist Society, I wrote "The Four Spiritual Laws" in answer to the 1977 "I found it!" evangelist campaign for mass conversion and the June holiday public harangues against Buddhism by a Korean evangelist, I was careful to quote almost entirely from the Pali Canon and use a language familiar to the evangelist and the Christian-influenced Buddhist. Even when I made use of Buddhist Scripture, some Buddhist puritans, unfamiliar with the problem of the English-speaking Buddhist, still condemned the tract as confusing!

What more if one is not well trained for Buddhist missionary work. There is a grave danger in working with half-knowledge; one might catch hold of the wrong half! The solution therefore is Buddha-minded intentions, Dharma-based training, and Sangha-spirited fellowship. In short, a Buddhist worker is not simply a "qualified" person, but an educated person, i.e. one trained and cultured in the study and practice of the Dharma. It is never too early to start nor too late to begin.

### VI. CHERISHING OUR ROOTS

#### (33) DEATHBED CONVERSIONS

One more important evangelist threat must be mentioned and its solution suggested. This is the **hospital ministry** of the evangelists, especially deathbed conversions. A number of Buddhists have complained to me that their ailing relatives (especially those hospitalized) have been converted or were being harassed by evangelists (some of whom were doctors).

There was this sad case of a Buddhist nun's pupil who suffered from terminal cancer. As he lay dying, a doctor tried to convert him despite his painful protests. The nun arrived just in time to stop the doctor. "My student died a few minutes later, and it was indeed pitiful that he spent his last moments agitated like that". [The New Paper, a Singapore daily, 16 & 17 Oct 1988].

It is against the professional ethics of the doctors to try to convert a helpless patient. All hospitals, especially private ones, have rules against doctors who victimize their patients. Such doctors or hospital staff should be reported to the authorities; write complaint letters to the press (better still, launch a

signature campaign - but even a few signatures will help stress the gravity of the situation).

If the ailing relative is converted when he or she is very sick the conversion is not valid because the decision was made without a sound body and mind. Indeed such a conversion might be said to have occurred under duress. Any final instructions by the dying so converted need not be honoured. (It might have been different if the dying had himself or herself while still of sound mind personally requested to be converted or did not object to being converted.)

#### (34) PROTECT OUR CHILDREN!

Worse than sorrow at the death of an old relative is the loss of one's own living children at the hands of the evangelists. In our aspiration to provide our children with the best of education we sometimes forget who are educating our children and what they are putting into the children's heads. I am talking about the evangelist nurseries, kindergartens and Sunday schools.

The first seven years of the child must be spent with either, if not both parents. That child must have close contact with the parents. For these are formative years and what is experienced in those impressive years are going to make or mar the child for the rest of his or her life.

Some parents think that their children could "learn English" in the evangelist Sunday schools, or the parents think that they could relax while their children are in the Sunday school. Indeed such parents would get more than what they have bargained for. It is a package deal that goes only one way—one loses everything to the evangelists in the end. I raise this point because I feel that each of us owe some loyalty to what is good in our culture.

We must remember that our children are the perpetrators of our culture and social stability. We must never send our children to evangelist kindergartens or Sunday schools! Indeed I feel that parents who themselves spend time educating their children especially during the first seven years of their children's lives would be richly rewarded for their efforts because they have been involved with the formative lives of their own children.

#### (35) EDUCATE YOUR OWN CHILDREN

Buddhism is full of stories, such as the Jatakas and the Dhammapada stories for the education of children. They are very similar to Aesop's fables, both of which probably come from the same roots. Early guidance on the basic moral conduct is extremely important for the child—use the life of the Buddha and Buddhist stories. Indeed, the Jatakas are the oldest and largest collection of folk tales in the world!

In the 1980s **Buddhist Studies** was a very successful part of the Singapore secondary school

## Say "NO!" to the Evangelists

curriculum. In fact, it was the most popular of the religious knowledge electives. Sadly in the 1990s, the curriculum was abruptly ended (no clear reasons are known). In the decades that followed, there was a significant rise in educated Buddhists who know their religion better.

But not all was well. There was at least one case where the headmistress of a mission school who tried her best to discourage Buddhist Studies. She rang up the parents of all the children who opted for it and discouraged them. She succeeded the first year; but one Buddhist parent refused to give in to her subterfuge and insisted that his son be taught Buddhist Studies in a special class. In the following years, the number of Buddhist Studies students increased significantly and she had to relent.

In the 1990s, however, Buddhist Studies was no more a secondary school elective while the mission schools continued with their Bible Knowledge as they have done since colonial days.

### (36) CONCLUSION

This answer to the evangelists opened with "the Inca tragedy" because it serves as a grim warning of the consequences if we let the evangelists have their way. Colonialism is not dead in Asia; it has reincarnated into evangelism. One must never forget that though the "glory and gold" of colonialism is history, the "gospel" is still around.

It is true that some Christians are repentant of their past and even the Vatican had been apologizing again and again for their highhandedness in the past centuries. But this change of heart is not because they understood Christianity better or that they have become more compassionate—it is because they have lost most of their political power and therefore have now to win our sympathy by other means!

Many thinking Christians have begun to question many things that they have taken for granted. Many of them have realized that their way is not the only way to salvation. There is the interesting case of **Charles Templeton**, who was a major church figure in Canada and the US for more than 20 years. In the 1950s, he and Billy Graham (the best evangelist of the 20th century) were two of the most successful exponents of mass evangelism in North America.

Templeton use to speak nightly to stadium crowds of up to 30,000 people. However, he began to have doubts about the validity of the Old Testament and Christian teachings, and his spiritual crisis led him to resign from his ministry in 1957. He wrote about his experience in *Farewell to God: My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith* (1996), which is clearly easier to read than the classic *Why I am Not a Christian* of Bertrand Russell (1957).

Despite all that I have said, I still feel we, as Buddhists, can happily coexist with those of any religion or those with none. Other religions and even the non-religious are becoming more attracted to

Buddhism today. Buddhism is growing very fast in the West, and in Australia, it is the fastest growing religion.

It is not difficult, for example, to find a Catholic priest or a non-Buddhist who does Buddhist meditation. Modern psychology and psychotherapy are also beginning to place less emphasis on Freud and turning to the Buddha to understand the mind better and in people-helping.

These clearly show the modern world is re-discovering Buddhism. As such, it behooves us as Buddhists to study our religion even more deeply so that we do not wake up one day and realize that Buddhism has been taken away from us, as it were!

I have painfully written this for those amongst my relatives and friends who have been harassed and converted by the evangelists. Hopefully, this will be the only polemical writing I will ever write, and which I hope will knock down the walls of a closed mind and that the reader will think for himself and realize the highest truth within.

O o O

### SUGGESTED READING

- (1) Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Allen & Unwin, 1957; since repr.
- (2) Piyasilo, "The four spiritual laws," Dharma for the Millions series I. (Free leaflet)
- (3) —, "What not to look for in a religion", FOBM Dharma for the Millions series 9. (Free booklet)
- (4) —, "Nichiren: the new Buddhism of modern Japan", FOBM, 1988d (esp ch X).
- (5) —, "What not to look for in a religion," Dharma for the Millions series. Rev ed 2002.
- (6) Templeton, Charles. *Farewell to God: My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996.

2<sup>nd</sup> rev ed 2004; 3<sup>rd</sup> rev ed 2005

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