

It is very sad that in many state schools religious education has partially or completely disappeared in recent years. Yet we are now a multi-racial society and this is not just a matter of racial colour. It is also a fact of culture, and of creed or faith. Christianity has rightly been charged with claiming to be the only true faith. This at a time when anything goes, and no one is tolerated who cannot tolerate everyone else's views and beliefs. No one is allowed to believe one thing above all others.

But the fact is, as St Peter says in his great sermon in the Temple at Jerusalem in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4.12), Christianity was founded and built upon the foundation that "There is no salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved". That name is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This claim tends to put people like me on a spot; who preach and try to practice, toleration to peoples of other religions: especially for those of us who have lived amongst several other traditions in Asia. But this claim was not made because there were no other major religions known in Jesus' day. Indeed not! Apart from *Islam*, all the religions we are now encouraged to accept on the same level as Christianity, were already well established and widely practised before Jesus' time on earth.

There are those who claim that Jesus with his *Jewish* background knew little or nothing of the other great religions. That may be true of *Hinduism* or *Buddhism*, but he almost certainly knew something of the *Greek* and *Roman* faiths, since they were practised in and around occupied Israel and were supported by the State authorities. Moreover, the *Jewish* religion into which Jesus and his followers were born, was a greater moral and spiritual force and a greater religion there, than any of the others. Yet it was against that background of Judaism, that *Christianity* was proclaimed as the only true faith under which salvation could be found.

In this belief, Christianity has flourished in Britain for more than 1,500 years. It has fashioned our culture. It has formed our character. It has determined our standards of morality. It has inspired our highest achievements. Should we now forego all this, in an attempt not to indoctrinate members of other Commonwealth countries, who now make up a significant minority of this nation? There are many people who believe that we should do just that. There are those who would oust Christianity from its unique position in the curriculum in our schools. Indeed there are those who do that; who flout the law of the land to deny our children the Christian instruction that is their heritage and their right. They do this in the name of 'Comparative Religion'.

But let us not forget that members of other faiths are not ashamed to proclaim their faith to the exclusion of others. For example: consider the *Sikhs*, though we could choose any other. As symbols of their religion their ladies conspicuously wear trousers under skirts, even with nurses' uniforms: their men conspicuously wear turbans. In both cases the English law has upheld their right so to do. Members of other faiths are often equally conspicuous. All that is, except the Christian who so often seems to feel reluctant to admit that he or she is a Christian. An exception was one nurse who was told not to wear a neckless with a cross to avoid offending non-Christians;

quite rightly she refused. This toleration by the Christian partly exists from a generosity of spirit. But it is more likely because many believe that all faiths are equally good, or bad. There is undoubtedly a considerable amount of good in each of the other main-stream religions but, as far as we are concerned, that good is unbalanced.

Let me in an over-simplified way list some of the good. In *Islam* there is a noble assertion of the sovereignty of God. In *Hinduism* we find the truth of the imminence of God in human life; that he is nearer to us than our breathing. *Buddhism* declares the transitoriness of our human life: that all things on earth are but for the moment, and that the unseen things are eternal. In *Confucianism* is to be found the great assertion of all human relationships: the unity of that bond which relates us to the life of the past and all the life that is to be.

Yet there are compensatory weaknesses in their theology. For example, Islam has the idea of the sovereignty of God - but not of God's love, of his Fatherhood. *Hinduism* has the idea of imminence - but not of God's holiness. *Buddhism* thinks of this life as transitory - but has no conception that this is the sphere where we are to do the will of God and achieve a character of service to mankind. *Confucianism* sanctifies our human relationships - but knows nothing of life beyond the senses. Christianity however, has gathered to itself much of the good from all the religions of the world, without attracting those concepts that obscure.

Now there are some today who would have us follow the example of one of the Roman Emperors called Alexander Severus, who placed in his private chapel the statues of Apollonius, of Abraham, and of Jesus; as an honour due to these respectable wise men. Heretics such as *Scientologists* practice similar thoughts today. If the Christians of the first century had been content to share the person of Jesus with other respectable sages chosen by the Emperor, they would have been spared persecution or death in the arena. Instead, they demanded that Jesus be given the one and only place, because he is unique.

It was this bold claim that so incensed the Jewish authorities. As verse 13 following our reading says: "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered." We too ought to have such boldness to proclaim our faith as the only faith leading to salvation. We ought to encourage this to be taught to children in our schools, as well as in our homes: for if we deny them this their fundamental right, we shall be answerable to God himself, for hiding the truth from them. Naturally the children of parents of faiths other than Christianity should have the right that has been observed in Britain for centuries by Jewish parents: that of withdrawal during periods of specific Christian instruction or devotion. But if we do this sincerely, we are more likely to gain the respect of non-Christians than if we adopt a wishy-washy humanism.

In past centuries, Christians were willing to die for their faith. Think how much better this nation

might be today if each person who professed to be Christian actually started to live their faith. For as St Peter said: "there is no other name under heaven granted ... by which we may receive salvation". So I ask you not only to believe that Jesus Christ is supreme - but also to act as if He is!