NOT IN MY NAME

Posted on June 2, 2020 by Eddie

I serve a brown skinned saviour who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and humbled himself to death, even death on a cross. The sight of paramilitary police using violence to clear the path for a politician so that he can wave a Bible to the press is the antithesis of everything that I stand for

Category: Observations

I woke up this morning to find my various media feeds overflowing with images of the president of the United States standing in a church and holding up a Bible for photographers. At the best of times, I feel uneasy about church buildings and Bibles being used as props for a photo op and these are not the best of times.

In order for the president to get his photo opportunity, the police used tear gas to clear people, including the clergy, from the area around the church. At no point, were the church authorities consulted about the use of their building or about the use of violence to clear the area. The bishop in whose diocese the church falls made her position clear:

> *"Let me be clear: The President just used a Bible, the most sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and one of the churches of my diocese, without permission, as a backdrop for a message antithetical to the teachings of Jesus,"*
>
> *Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington*

At this point, I am aware that there will be at least two complaints about me raising this subject. The first is that, as a non-American, I should not comment on US issues. I understand that. I'm uncomfortable when people from outside the UK comment on my country - but that doesn't mean that they shouldn't do so. Those who feel that outsiders should have nothing to say about the US need to realise that what is happening there is an international story. It dominated my morning cup of tea and the tweet below shows how things are being seen in another country which is historically close to the US.

https://twitter.com/brett_mcgurk/status/1267662905383596032

The other complaint that is likely to be raised is that I should stick to religious issues and not comment on politics. To which my answer is that I am commenting on religious issues. Things don't get much more religious than a church and a Bible. If the president had simply given a speech from the White House garden, I would have been unlikely to comment.

So why am I commenting?

Firstly, I am a Christian, I belong to the biggest, most multi-cultural family in the world. The majority of Christians in the world are not white people of European descent, they are Africans, Asians and

Latin Americans. To take Christian symbols and to use them in the support of any national or party interest (anywhere in the world) is to fail to understand the reality of the church and the nature of the religion.

Secondly, all of this is happening in the context of the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and the unrest which has followed it. Yes, I realise that there has been unwarranted violence during the protests, but that must not be allowed to overshadow the history of oppression that African Americans have faced. This Twitter thread illustrates some of the issues:

https://twitter.com/ASlavitt/status/1267681549048254464

Bible translation work is about supporting and helping minority groups around the world. It is by its nature a subversive, political action.

> *Bible translation challenges these agendas of prestige, politics and globalisation by insisting that all languages are of equal value before God. Even if one were to sideline translation as a purely religious phenomenon, the fact that Bible translation is almost always accompanied by literacy and language promotion activities means that there is always a political dimension to this work. Bible translation always challenges the hegemony of dominant languages, be they national or international. This is a political act.*
>
> *Me, in 2014 - see the link above*

The point is, you cannot support the rights of minority groups around the world and yet be indifferent to the plight of marginalised groups in our home countries. There is a long history of using the Bible as a symbol to oppress people, especially people of colour. Bible translation does exactly the opposite and as I translator, I abhor the use of the Bible in this way.

Thirdly, I serve a brown skinned saviour who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and humbled himself to death, even death on a cross. The sight of paramilitary police using violence to clear the path for a politician so that he can wave a Bible to the press is the antithesis of everything that I stand for.

The Bible is God's message of salvation to people of every tribe, tongue and nation. It places every nation and every individual at the same level; in need of a saviour at the foot of the cross. When it is used as a political symbol, it's whole message is subverted.