NOT IN MY NAME (OR THEIRS)

Posted on January 20, 2015 by Eddie

Lots of different things are called 'Christian', but I wouldn't want to be associated with all of them. Likewise, there are lots of things that are done in the name of Islam, but we shouldn't assume that all Muslims agree with everything that is done in their name.
Category: Observations

Hang on a minute! Charlie Hebdo has a history of publishing cartoons which insult both Christianity and Islam; how come Muslims in Niger are reacting to the publication of some new cartoons by burning down churches? It's hardly fair!

IÂ defended the right of Charlie Hebdo to publish satirical cartoons, but this doesn't mean that I approve of the stuff they publish. For the most part, I find it rather puerile. They need to grow up a bit. I certainly wouldn't identify Charlie as a Christian publication, it's about as un-Christian as you can get; the product of an aggressively secular agenda.

So why are churches being burned in Niger It doesn't make sense.

Well, for the average Nigerien, France is a Christian country, which has sent many Catholic missionaries to Niger.Â Anything produced in France is seen asÂ Christian, so if a French magazine insults Islam, it is Christians who are insulting Islam and the response is to attack the church.

At this point, it would be tempting to think how ill-informed or even stupid, these people must be. Imagine not distinguishing between Christianity and Charlie! But before you start to feel all superior, how much do you know about the country of Niger? Do you know anything about the different groups there and their different motivations and experiences? If not, then don't be surprised that many Nigeriens aren't able to distinguish between different groups of Europeans!

Meanwhile, in London,Â Britain First are organising what they call Christian Patrols in areas with a large proportion of Muslims. They are handing out leaflets calling for the niqab and mosques to be banned. Subtle stuff!

Sorry, I don't want to be associated with this bunch either. The fact that they call their patrols 'Christian' doesn't mean that they have anything to do with a Galilean carpenter who laid down his life and called for us to love our neighbours, not harass them.Â However, I should not expect people in Niger (or even in the UK) to distinguish between groups like this who call themselves Christian and people like me, who also call themselves Christian. Whether I like it or not, we will be lumped together.

One organisation, Charlie Hebdo, cruelly satirises the Church and another, Britain First, claims to be defending ChristianityÂ but both of them are taken to be representative of the Christian Church by some outsiders. I'm really not comfortable with this; neither Charlie, nor Britain First has much to do with Christianity as I understand and practice it; but to people of other cultures and countries - these are just small distinctions.

So, every time that Charlie or Britain First does something that I don't like, am I expected to stand up and to say that they don't represent authenticÂ Christianity? That would be a full time job! So why do we expect 'moderate' Muslims to stand up and disassociate themselves from extremists on a constant basis? We need to understand that Islam is a complex phenomenon which covers a wide range of expressions and views and that we can no more blame all Muslims for terrorism than we

can blame all Christians for the excesses of the Lord's Resistance Army.

Just a few thoughts in conclusion:

- Despite what many have said, a significant number of Muslims did condemn the attack on Charlie Hebdo.
- However, we need to keep a balanced view of Islam and we need to avoid seeing everything through rose tinted spectacles.
- As Christians, the best thing we can do is to continue to demonstrate the radical nature of our calling through our actions.Â The real 'Christian Patrols' on our streets don't ride about in ex-military LandRovers, they wear blue jackets with the words 'Street Pastors' on the back, they help hungry people at food banks and they share the love of God in word and deed.Â These are people I'm proud to be associated with.

