

## **The recently concluded Decennial Anglican Bishops Conference in Canterbury**

" The recently concluded Decennial Anglican Bishops Conference in Canterbury failed to address meaningfully the Christian disposition to the reality of poverty and misery of human existence in the third world and to the morality of evil wars in many theatres that consume human life on a large scale. These Christian leaders have averted their eyes from the ravages of the longest continuing ethno-religious war in the world at present that devours innocent lives and generates human rights abuses on a mass scale in Sri Lanka. Bearing witness to the truth is to lift up the cross and follow in the way of Jesus Christ who died for the truth.

Instead the Conference was content to deal largely with the esoteric and largely irrelevant conflict between liberals and conservatives involving gay priests and women bishops in the Anglican Communion.

To limit the risks of discord, the Conference organisers had asked the bishops to take "appropriate care" in anything they said to reporters.

The arrangements have led to criticism of Archbishop Williams from liberals and conservatives, who say his "stealth" approach to the most sensitive issues will do nothing to resolve them.

The criticism has built on a frequent critique of Archbishop Williams, as an other-worldly, Oxford-educated theologian who lacks the political skills, and the power of personality to take insightful decisions.

Mr J. Anand of the TWG wrote in May 2007 to correct a partisan view taken by Archbishop Rowan Williams regarding the ethnic war that appeared to encourage surgical military action by the Government of Sri Lanka.

We thought it appropriate to publish it now as a rejoinder of what each of us can do to try and change the minds of our leaders, some of whom pay mere lip service to the teachings of Jesus Christ."

### **SOME COMMENTS ON THE ARCHBISHOP'S VISIT TO SRI LANKA**

Dr. Rowan Williams, the head of the worldwide Anglican Church and the Archbishop of Canterbury, recently visited Sri Lanka and has gone on record saying ..

'..it was inevitable that Sri Lanka was launching surgical military action against terrorism'. Dr Williams also told the BBC Sinhala service the he hoped and prayed that military action would lead to an opening of communication between the government and the Tigers. If this reporting is correct, I am afraid, with respect, Dr Williams' comments were simply naïve and grossly out of touch with ground realities. By the 'surgical military action' did he mean the indiscriminate bombing and shelling on the Tamil population irrespective of Tigers, civilians including the elderly and the children? Every time SL government goes on surgical military action the innocent are ducking and diving and eventually civilians are displaced

in their thousands. His Holiness the Pope Benedict's representative went to see the displaced in the eastern province recently.

On the following Sunday after the visit of Dr. Williams, the Christians the world over, irrespective of any denominations would have read the Gospel of St John 14:25 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.' The song based on the philosopher St. Francis of Assisi would have been sung as well.

Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love  
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord  
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope  
Where there is darkness, only light  
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

All the appropriate sentiments like peace, love, hope, joy etc from this song would have made an excellent speech for Dr. Williams. But he chose 'the surgical military actions'. Incidentally these lines from the above song were delivered eloquently by the Iron Lady Mrs Margaret Thatcher on the night she became Prime Minister, outside No 10 Downing Street.

A few years ago St Peter's Church near Jaffna was bombed after people were asked to assemble there by the army. Last year Fr. Jim Brown who was a witness for the navy killings crossed the SL army check point to carry out his mission, never to appear again. Late Mr Joseph Pararajasingham an MP and a Human Rights activist attended the midnight Christmas mass, received the Holy Communion and was shot dead while returning to his seat. Army uniforms were found in church yard, no inquiry yet. I wonder if Dr Williams is aware of these goings on. Does he also know the effect of the closure of the A9 route by SL government?. The first death by starvation was report in November 2006. People including the children and the aged are mal nourished. Out numbered by the army the government is operating an open prison state there. Children are allowed to come out of the house only to attend school.

The post boxes were removed or damaged by the army to prevent any bombs being planted by any suspects. In short, all Tamils are assumed to be Tigers or Tiger sympathisers. Hence the need for surgical military action. By the way, there is no railway line to the north beyond Vavuniya, while vast amount of money from the donor countries is being spent on surgical military action.

Now turning to the other hope of Dr. Williams ie the military action would lead to an opening of communication, one could say that it is too ambitious. Political observers have told time and again that the Tigers cannot be defeated militarily. Fr. Jagath Gasparaj, a scholar and a political analyst has told that Tigers will negotiate only from a position of their strength. They declared openly in November 2006 that they had enough of the corruption and deception of the SL government for more than half a century, and they would go alone, with their de facto government, for self determination and self rule. When God given fundamental rights are denied to them, it's a Hobson's choice, meaning no choice. If anyone is interested in Peace they should read and implement the Cease Fire Agreement of Feb 2002. Further more, the Tamils, who have suffered for decades under the tyranny and surgical military actions, will never trust or tolerate the

same regime again. They have reached the point of no return. Stage is set and the history is being written in Wannai for posterity. Responsible leaders who make carefully worded statements, with little knowledge, may regret later. Lot of them see and hear but do not understand. In order to understand, we have to put ourselves in the place of those who suffer.

Sri Lankan problem and the Tamil question is a complex one which needs a lasting Solution. This problem cannot be grasped or understood by westerners. For example, US envoy Richard A Boucher visited Sri Lanka including Jaffna. There the Bishop of Jaffna, Dr. Thomas Sounderanayagam who has been raising his voice like a voice in the wilderness showed him the human tragedies. Mr Boucher said as usual he was concerned about the goings on. He also supported the government approach to deal with the problems. He might as well released this report from his office without taking the trouble to visit these desolate places. So much so for people's conscience.

In conclusion, I will quote from the Bible again. On the night, when he was going to be betrayed and arrested Jesus said 'It is their hour and the power of darkness'. On the Cross He said 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'.

-Anand UK.