

## **WHO DARES TO SPEAK ABOUT SIN?**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

A well known socio-religious thinker and author, Swami Sachidanand once complained to my friend Fr. Xavier, the Principal of St. Mary's School, Petlad. He said that it does not seem right and proper to him that Christian priests emphasize too much on sin. I agree hundred percent with Swami Sachidanand. It is certainly not right and proper if the Christian priests put more emphasis on sin than other more important matters. I heard about Swami Sachidanand's complaint from my friend, Fr. Xavier. But I am not very sure what exactly did Swami Sachidanand say. But it does not matter.

Actually I too have felt from the sermons of some priests and from the behaviour of some Christians that Christian Religion indeed puts too much emphasis on sin! Sin is a naked reality in the individual and social life of the people. Still I believe that it is not right and proper if more emphasis is put on sin than on giving more importance to matters like love, social justice, and service to the poor.

Love is at the root of all laws and regulations of Christianity. The foundation of Christian Religion is laid on love. A religion without love cannot be called the Christian Religion.

Christianity is not built on any principle of sin but on God's love for humanity. That is why Jesus says to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, who came to meet him at night, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3, 16).

Through words and deeds Jesus in all his life proclaimed God's love for men and women and he gave them command to love one another. Once a Scripture scholar, that is to say, the Jewish leader, a Pharisee asked Jesus to trap him:

" 'Teacher,' he asked, 'which is the greatest commandment in the law?'

"Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: Love your neighbour as you love yourself. The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments' " (Mt 22, 36-40).

I am not saying that there is no talk of sin in Christian Religion. Beginning from giving religious instructions to little children till the teaching of sacraments and commandments clear instructions are given to all Christians about morality, ethics and sin.

Many people of other faiths do not know that in Christian Religion every individual person has his/her full right to live and make one's own personal decision according to one's conscience. Christianity treats with respect the conscience or inner voice of individual person. So a person has also the responsibility to form an enlightened conscience, which is the source of one's inner voice. In Christianity a person's conscience is formed through religious instructions and moral teaching.

The Christian children may not know the laws and regulations of the Church. But they will have a fair idea about sin and virtue, good and bad, basic morals and ethics, just and unacceptable behaviour. So even the illiterate children can distinguish good and bad thanks to their socio-religious inheritance and traditions. They cultivate inner strength to be faithful and keep oneself away from evil things.

The teenager saint Maria Goretti is a beautiful example. Maria Goretti was born in a family of farm-labourers at Corinaldo in the Italian province of Marche. She never went to a school. But her God-fearing parents taught her basic Christian morality and ethics. Her father died when Maria Goretti was just 10 years old. The mother and two elder sisters earned a living for the family working in farmlands. While they went out to work in the farm Maria Goretti's job was to look after her younger siblings. Maria received the sacrament of Holy Communion when she was eleven and from that day she never missed Sunday worship walking 7 kms to the church with her elders.

When Maria Goretti was 12 years old, a young neighbour, an young farmhand attempted to seduce her. Thanks to her Christian upbringing and aversion for sin, she never gave in to the advances of the man.

But one day when Maria Goretti's mother and two elder sisters were away in the farm, the man tried to overpower and rape her. Maria's protest angered him and he stabbed her with a knife. Maria under the guidance of her spiritual father forgave and prayed for her attacker before she succumbed to her wounds.

About 50 years after the event in 1950 Pope Pius XII canonized Maria Goretti at Rome as a saint of the universal Church. The forgiven killer Alexander too was there at St. Peter's Basilica where she was declared a saint.

Without emphasizing too much on sin not only Christians but all people ordinarily know what is sin and virtue, what is good and evil deeds, what is moral and unethical behaviour. All the same some Christians especially those who hold special charismatic prayer services and a few Christian priests do put a bit too much emphasis on sin. On the other hand, some priests totally neglect to speak about sin!

Today, I wish that not only Christian priests but all religious leaders like Swami Sachidand without ignoring morality and justice speak about sins like social inequality. I think that it would not be proper for leaders like Swami Sachidanand and Christian priests to keep themselves away from speaking about socio-political sins. Such sins are employing children, ill-treating women, forcing labourers to work more than eight hours, under-paying labourers, discriminating people on the basis of caste and creed, preferring relatives in the place of qualified job-seekers, taking bribes and persecuting the minorities in one way or another.

In the twenty-first century if the children are undernourished and poor people go hungry to bed, the reasons are not lack of food or wealth in our country. But there is the sin of the rich who fill their pockets by under paying their employees and labourers. There is the sin of communal people who keeps the poor and dalit people underdeveloped. There is the sin of self-seeking

politicians who uphold and perpetuate the socio-political structures, which help the rich to become richer, and the poor to become poorer. There is also the sin of priests who co-operate with politicians in seeking gains for themselves.

Today which priest dares to call injustice a sin? Which priests dares to call a person sinner, who ill-treats the poor and prevents the development of the dalit people? Who will dare to call the priests sinner who collaborate with criminals and the people who perpetuate inequality in the society and religion? Who dares to call a guru criminal, who shoots from the first floor of his bungalow and kills a poor tribal person on the ground below claiming that the shooting was in self-defense? (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))