

Eritrea's Culture of Tolerance is Sacrosanct

By Ogbazgy Abbay Asmerom

History is full of instances where religion, in this case, Christianity was used to oppress people, and as a result, many wars were declared in the name of the Almighty God. ***The Crusades Wars [1095-1291] were such vivid examples. The wars that followed the Reformation and Counter Reformation [1524-1674], the Thirty Years War [1618-1648], and the War in Northern Ireland [1969-1997] could be cited as other examples of religious wars.*** We also know organized religion was used as a tool to spread European colonialism and imperialism into Africa, Latin America, The Middle East, and southeastern Asia. For the sake of “evangelization,” and “civilized missionary activities,” natural resources were plundered, and different groups of people were annihilated. At one time, an African politician was quoted saying, “when we closed our eyes and raised up our heads up to heaven to pray, our natural resources were looted away.”

Slavery was justified by quoting Biblical texts; so was the pseudo scientific racist underpinning of “Manifest Destiny or Providence of God.” European and American “Christians” were the main slave traders and slave-owners. Religion was also used as a tool by colonialists to implement their “Divide and Conquer” or “Divide and Rule” strategies. As a result, the cohesiveness of many African societies was undermined. South African and American Apartheid systems were also championed by “Christian” leaders. On one hand, the world was told that “Christianity teaches that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free in the eyes of God,” On the other hand, those who claimed to “trust in God” saw no contradictions as they practiced slavery, committed genocides, scrambled to colonize territories, and to dehumanize other races. To practice Apartheid, and to acquire and use “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” they used the name of Christianity and the name of God in vain. In this way, true Christianity was defiled by people who did not want to live up to the vows of the teachings of true Christianity, but wanted to use it as a tool for their evil designs and machinations.

According to a prominent American scientist, Francis Collins, religion was given a bad name by those who did evil things. He stated, **“It is not difficult to identify examples where the church [Christian church] has promoted actions that fly in the face of principles its own faith should have sustained ... frequent examples of gross hypocrisy among religious leaders .. cause many skeptics to conclude that there is no objective truth or goodness to be found in religion.”** If religion is to be used as a credible tool of love, mercy, and justice, all of the negative actions taken by organized religion and religious leaders must stop. Men and women should not seek to dehumanize their fellow human beings because of certain religious beliefs or lack thereof.

In a similar vein, “true religion” is also being defiled by the actions of few individuals who had taken it upon themselves to be spokespersons of “religion”. These individuals have been waging a shameless “war” on Eritrea, the Eritrean government, and the Eritrean people. This war is primarily being conducted from the UK and the USA, and is done for individual gains, for personal power, vanity, and aggrandizement. Groups without genuine religious credentials are at the forefront of this campaign against Eritrea. Many of these very same individuals were directly or indirectly against Eritrea's war of

independence, and they had said nothing against Ethiopia's atrocities against Eritreans. Yet, now when Eritreans are charting their own independent path of development, they are "crying wolf" by saying there is "religious persecution" in Eritrea on regular basis. They have been appealing to every foreign power and organization they thought could help them bring damage to Eritrea. This should make everyone ask: "Who is really behind this false information? What is the real motive? What is that they want to accomplish? Who has hired them, and to do what?"

Is this how the followers of "true religion or the disciples of the Almighty" are supposed to conduct themselves? Is it morally and ethically right to work as "hands in gloves" with Eritrea's enemies so that the poor people are being denied of proper education, health care, food, and means of transportation? This is very absurd! It is unchristian!

These "self-declared defenders of religious freedom" do not have any religious truth to share or impart. They are only religious imposters! They may have a form of religion, not its power and spirit; they are not manifesting any evidence of religious conversion. By sounding false alarms, they are in the service of some interest groups who are operating through clandestine circles to wreck havoc in Eritrea as they have done in many neighboring countries. These individuals are like whitewashed tombs; they are like what the Bible speaks of the Pharisees of the 1st century, a self-serving religious group. Christ rebuked them during his ministry in this earth by saying "*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence. ... You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.*"

Many of these "religious elements," together with their handlers, are at the center of the ring of human trafficking, and illegal immigration that is exposing Eritrea's youth to dangers in the high seas. They are also the ones serving as false witnesses at political asylum hearings. Do they really know the meaning of the 9th commandment? It says, "You shall not give false testimony"!

Claiming to be "God's follower" and then misleading innocent citizens is not a trait of a true believer. These so-called followers of God need to repent and ask God's forgiveness. They might think they are doing well by deceiving people, but they should know better. They cannot deceive God. People who have not shown a genuine transformation in their lives cannot be advocates of a good religious life. They cannot be examples for others. Their deception is not going to bear any fruits. By simply crying we are, "In Chains for Christ" cannot make a true confession of true faith. Those who claim they are "being bound in Chains for Christ" need to first unshackle themselves from their carnal chains, and clean themselves from the evils of deception that have become the routine and daily activities of their lives. They need to show "unconditional love for others, provide selfless service for others, and show a state of purity of thought and righteousness of action." Their desire as true Christians must be love, service, peace, and not earthly power. If they claim to be people of "the books," they ought to dedicate themselves "totally and unselfishly for the good and service of others."

Those who claim that they are "the sons and daughters of the Almighty" **must be first for peace, patience, love, truth, kindness, humility, and justice.** Without having these qualities, they cannot say they do stand for God or Christianity. Before claiming to stand for "true religious freedom," they must first free themselves from worldly desires

and manifestations of: **“hate, contention, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension, and envy.”**

Karen Armstrong, the prolific English writer of religious affairs of our times, in her book **“The Great Transformation, The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions,”** concluded, **“If religion is to bring light to our broken world, we need ... to go in search of the lost heart, the spirit of compassion that lies at the core of all our traditions.”**

Eritreans had accepted Christianity and Islam way before the two religions were accepted in other parts of the world. The Eritrean people have a noble culture of religious tolerance. They do not need ungodly elements to show them how to interpret their Holy Books or to show them how to live a “godly” life. They have worked very hard to preserve their union, have worked in harmony, and co-existed in an exemplary way. Where in the world can one find people with religious harmony that has lasted for centuries? Only in Eritrea! Where in the world can one find followers of Christianity and Islam ready to die for each other’s safety? Only in Eritrea! Definitely, this Eritrean reality has made many “Religious Quislings” who wanted to fish in troubled waters to shudder and tremble. As a result, they are bent to sow seeds of enmity and discord. All and everything they want is to see “religious wars” flare up in Eritrea like those that are being manifested in some communities in the world. When this happens, then they will come to manage the crisis that they engineered. This becomes management of a crisis for them. Such is the reality we are witnessing all over the Third World!

It is evident the “Religious Quislings” who are operating in the Diaspora do not have the “needed wisdom, humility, grace, or intellect” to lead any religious movement in Eritrea. It is also very clear they do not have “any favor with God or man.” According to their profiles, they do not command “any inner beauty or desire to serve the Eritrean people or the country, but themselves.” They are devoid of the “needed courage, good religious activities, and the integrity to do good for humanity.” Their main motive is to divide the Eritrean people! What does one get out of such a cruel way of religious idolatry?

Eritrean Orthodox Christians and Moslems have lived harmoniously as brothers and sisters for nearly two thousand years. Even when the Catholics and Protestants showed up later in the history of Eritrea, this religious harmony and tolerance did not change. This age-old religious harmony is still in its place, and the people and government of Eritrea are doing their best to keep it that way. However, some “politically motivated religious movements” are campaigning to sow the seeds of discord and division among the people. This reckless interference or behavior should not be tolerated in Eritrea! Eritrea had no place for politically motivated religion in the past, and it should have no place for it in the future! In short, **Eritrea’s culture of religious tolerance is sacrosanct.** It should not change in this generation or generations to come. Any religious war has no benefit! Self-destruction has no future!

Let Eritrea and the Eritreans continue to live in a religious harmony. Let Eritrea’s culture of religious tolerance continue without any interruptions.

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