



EDITORIAL

James Foley

Scores of journalists are killed around the world each year while in the exercise of their profession. This means they died as a result of hostile actions such as reprisals for their work or in crossfire while carrying out dangerous assignments.

In Guyana we can probably include Father Bernard Darke and Mr. Ronald Waddell as examples. Not included under this heading are those journalists who may have died in vehicle accidents or from health ailments.

US journalist James Foley was not 'accidentally' killed on August 19 by shrapnel from a bomb dropped into a warzone from an aircraft miles above. What was especially barbaric about his murder last week by the group that calls itself the Islamic State was the manner in which he was killed and the fact that his killers chose to post on the internet a very graphic, sickening video of his beheading.

The Islamic State said they killed him in retaliation for U.S. airstrikes on the militants' strongholds.

It has been pointed out that neither Mr. Foley nor any of the other journalists being held by the Islamic State have any control over US government policy in Iraq, Syria or any part of the world.

The day after his murder the US flew at least five strikes against the Islamic State.

Mankind has still not yet learnt that violence accomplishes nothing but only provokes more violence and sows seeds of hate which can take years to heal.

In a letter to the Foley family Pope Francis said he "joins all who mourn him in praying for an end to senseless violence and the dawn of reconciliation and peace among all the members of the human family."

In a statement Mr. Foley's parents, who are devout Catholics, said their son "gave his life trying to expose the suffering of the Syrian people."

It is not easy to stand up and expose injustice and wrong doing when one believes one's own safety, or family or job may be put in jeopardy. Not to do so however is to join ourselves to the violence.

It was this conviction that brought Father Darke out onto Brickdam on July 14, 35 years ago. It was this conviction that drove Mr. Foley who wrote after being released from another period in captivity, in Libya, that prayer, specifically the rosary, got him through that captivity.

The deaths of men of courage and prayer like these, should show us where those who perpetuate violence, use violence, or provoke violence are leading us. Their deaths are also an example to us of the courage without which we cannot hope to stand firm against those who try to use us. ❖



ISIS - the result of Godlessness, hypocrisy, loss of values & direction

Dear Editor,

The horrifying atrocities committed by the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) against helpless Yazidi and Christian minorities have stunned the whole world. Some time ago, the Vatican made an earnest plea to Muslim leaders to unequivocally condemn these crimes against humanity in the name of religion. As if in response to this request, the leaders of several Muslim organizations and some activists organized a public meeting at Islam Gymkhana, in Mumbai, denouncing the ISIS as a 'monster'. One of the Muslim scholars present told the gathering that Islam is a religion of peace, that violence is unislamic and that the concept of 'jihad' is meant to be a struggle against oneself and not to be used for warmongering. The example of the Prophet's benevolent treatment of minorities after a military defeat was also cited. The organizers of the gathering were lauded for their initiative by representatives of the other communities who spoke on the occasion.

It is indeed shocking that even in our enlightened, post-modern age, barbaric crimes against innocent women, children and even monks from an ancient monastery are being perpetrated daily in the name of God by the ISIS. While the world has made phenomenal progress in so many fields, the era of globalization is here, and basic human rights have been accepted by most nations, there are still a growing number of extremist religious groups like the ISIS, in several parts of the world, who seem to be regressing to the dark ages of violence, ignorance and bigotry in the

name of religion. Yet, these same militants have among them highly educated people who cleverly use the latest advances in military and information technology to advance their petty goals, while preaching a return to primitive times! It is clear that these groups are not really interested in their religion, but are only using religious sentiments to further their narrow political, social and economic agendas.

What is very disturbing, however, is that in the highly developed West, more and more educated young people are turning to religious extremists, like ISIS, and even taking up arms to support them. There must be some explanation for this. It could be that many of the youth in these countries feel disillusioned by the sterile philosophy of Godless secularism, the hypocrisy of religious and political leaders, the spread of crass materialism and hedonism, the breakdown of moral values and family-life, and the loss of a sense of direction and purpose in life. In the fundamentalist religious movements they are probably seeking to discover meaning in life, a feeling of individual importance and a sense of belonging to a human community. Surely, this is a big challenge to all religious and political leaders and educators to examine the causes of alienation of their own youth, if they are to avoid their entire populations being infiltrated by violent extremists. Combating and denouncing religious fanatics alone are not enough.

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