

## PREVENTING DISHONOR TO JESUS CHRIST IN OUR WITNESS TO HIM

Have you ever cringed because a Christian has done something profoundly unchristian? Maybe he or she has been convicted of a crime and sent to prison or a tele-evangelist who has been found guilty of fraud and sent to prison or an evangelical leader has been guilty of immoral conduct, cheating on his spouse, misusing charitable funds or whatever. The higher the pedestal the higher the fall. The secular newspapers were probably full of it, gloating all the way. At the office the next day people may have said to you “Well, if that is what Christians do I want nothing to do with it. They are just a bunch of hypocrites”. You seek to distance yourself because you are a member of a [whatever] church, whereas the offender is, horror of horrors, a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Pentecostal, Charismatic – or whatever – and “we” are not like that.

But does that cut ice with the outside world? Do you think the fine distinction of denominational affiliation counts for much, or is even recognized? I have often been amazed how little Christians know about Christians in other denominations, let alone non-Christians on the outside.

We have all had to live with the fact that decades of child abuse by paedophile priests have been exposed and gloated over by the secular press. But that does not involve us, we are evangelicals, not Catholics! There’s a difference you know. “We” are not like “them”. But are we or are we not affected by “them”, because just like us they call themselves Christians (even though some think they are not!)?

Take a penetrating look from the outside. For a moment see it the way non-Christians see it. You are not a Christian. To you all Christians are the same and what “they” do is shameful. At least “we” (non-Christians) are not hypocrites like “them”.

Now take another look, this time from an extra-territorial location – heaven to be precise. What does Jesus think? After all, it is His good name that is being besmirched and dishonored. He is the one taking the flak for what His followers are doing down there on earth. His holy name is being dishonored. That should be a great worry for all Christians, of whatever denomination. So unitedly it is our duty to ensure that others do not dishonor the name of Christ - as well as our own people.

This problem is bad enough in Christian-majority nations, but imagine yourself as a very exposed Christian in a minority context where with the slightest pretext you are likely to be attacked, accused, imprisoned, raped, beaten, your church burnt to the ground, or whatever – just because someone from another brand of Christianity has done something wrong – or perhaps not.

That is why we need rules as to how we act as Christians, which means all those in the world who openly profess faith in Christ, whether “we” think “they” are real Christians or not, or vice versa.

The rules are all set out in the New Testament of course, as well as the supreme example of Jesus Christ himself. So how about compiling a list of these guiding principles divinely exemplified and taught by Jesus and the Apostles – a sort of Code of Conduct for Christians, something short enough to summarise what is written in the New Testament?

Actually that is the very thing that the World Evangelical Alliance has done in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. We all have gripes as to what “others” have done and which affects our own witness for Christ, whether prominent evangelical leaders who

fall from grace or priests who are guilty of paedophilia. It affects us all. So we all set to work to compile a set of biblical principles (not denominational theological principles) to govern the conduct of all. The result, the four-page document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World, Recommendations for Conduct”, is peppered with twenty quotations from the New Testament – an average of five per page. The three world bodies went back to that divine source of truth, the Bible, to find the answers to the question “How then should we act as Christians?”

We in the WEA are pleased that we have played our part, with our colleagues in other families of faith, to bring honor to the name of Jesus Christ, and seek to prevent dishonour. To those who criticize us, ask yourself two questions: (1) What wording do you disagree with in the document itself?” and (2) “How do you think Jesus sees it?”.

I hope that there are many more occasions when Christian bodies can work together with scripture as our guiding light.

John Langlois

Chairman, Religious Liberty Commission

World Evangelical Alliance