

## Muslim and Christian victims of violence aid one another



On December 20, 2015, a bus carrying 60 passengers from Nairobi to Mandera in Kenya was stopped by Islamist militants. Fearing for the lives of the Christian passengers, the Muslim women offered scarves to the Christian women for them to cover their heads.

When the militants ordered the passengers to get off the bus and to segregate themselves, Muslims on one side, Christians on the other, Salah Farah, a Muslim teacher responded, “Kill us all or leave us alone.” The Christians were untouched, but Salah was shot. He died some days after from the gunshot. For his bravery, he was posthumously honored by the Kenyan government.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the war in Marawi enters its fourth week. As of June 6, 2017, 134 terrorists, 38 government troops and 30 civilians have been killed according to Brig. Gen. Restituto Padila, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesperson. The battle between the IS-inspired Maute Group and government forces has left more than 240,000 homeless per the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Crisis Management Committee.

While most of the “bakwits”, internally displaced persons, have sought refuge in the homes of relatives in nearby provinces, thousands have sought temporary shelter in evacuation centers in Region 10 and the ARMM.

In response to the crisis the Catholic Church’s social action arm, the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) has urged all dioceses to shelter, protect and provide for our brother and sister “bakwits”.

The violence in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Marawi, to name a few, is not simplistically due to a religious war between Christians and Muslims, but to “religious” extremism. Just as most Christians desire peace and harmony in religiously and ethnically diverse societies, so do most Muslims. Just as most Christians shun violent assaults on innocent civilians and unilateral wars on vulnerable societies, so do most Muslims. And just as there are Muslim extremists, whose distorted notion of Islam has justified their persecution and extermination of the religiously or ethnically other, so are there Christian extremists who do violence upon non-Christians.

Whether Muslim or Christian, we are all victims of the hatred extremists bear toward the religiously other. Yet all of us are complicit in the violence around us, for we share in varying intensities the discriminatory attitudes of extremists toward the religiously and ethnically other. How many of us Christians prefer to shield our gated subdivisions from Muslims? To what extent do we share U.S. President Trump's xenophobia toward Muslims in particular or immigrants in general? Wars, we need to remind ourselves, are rooted in distorted attitudes about the other.

Hatred and fear of the other within us spurs and fuels wars without. We are thus complicit in the violence around us as we are all victims of our animosity toward one another. Our common sinfulness and victimhood to violence enjoins us to aid one another. In our Second Reading today Paul proclaims, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor.10:16-17).

The cup of blessing is the cup of wine that Jews partook of during the Passover meal through which they expressed their gratitude to the Lord for graces received. Paul associates the cup of blessing with the cup of wine that symbolizes the blood of Christ. Paul invites us to give thanks to God for Jesus, for the shedding of his blood on the cross through which our sins have been forgiven. For us Christians the cup of wine is the cup of Jesus' blood, that is, Jesus' suffering out of love for humanity. In Jesus, the cup of suffering has become a cup of blessing! To partake of the cup of wine is to participate in Jesus' suffering for others. Similarly to partake of the bread is to allow ourselves to be broken and given to others. And thus become a blessing to others.

As we aid and shelter our brothers and sisters caught in our wars, the cup of suffering becomes a cup of solidarity. Suffering shared is mercy experienced. As St. John Paul II writes, "The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a project of solidarity for all humanity. ... The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation" (Mane Nobiscum Domine, 2004). May we Muslims and Christians drink from the same cup of suffering, and in doing so, allow God Almighty to transform our cup of suffering into a cup of blessing.

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