



Religious war mongering far from the whole story

The relationship between Judaism, Christianity, Islam and violence is the subject of much controversy and rightly so, given that the history of religious violence between the Abrahamic faiths extends back for centuries, despite their many teachings which advocate peace, love and compassion. We spoke to Rev Professor Dorothy Lee, an ordained priest and Dean of the Theological School and the Frank Woods Professor in New Testament at Trinity College Theological School, University of Divinity, about her view on the topic 'Religion: Catalyst for Violence or Peace? Probing the Abrahamic Traditions for Answers', ahead of the BBI-ACBC 11th National eConference.

What do the Abrahamic traditions have in common?

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all have their source and common ancestor in Abraham. We share a belief in the one God. We also share the basic core values of integrity, goodness, justice and righteousness. We believe that this life is not all that there is but that there is another spiritual dimension. The God we believe in is not just an entity or an ideal; God is profoundly personal. Therefore, prayer, worship and ethical living are all part of what we do.

However, while we do have a lot in common, we can also state our differences. We might have the upmost respect for Mohamad and Islam and many of the things it stands for but we actually don't agree with all of them. It's the same thing for Jewish people. To them, Jesus was a good Jew. For Christians, he was also the Son of God who rose from the dead. Christians believe that God is one but manifested in three Persons and that's where Christianity is very different.

These differences can be shared respectfully with an openness to learn from each other. We [Judaism, Christianity and Islam] are actually very close; we're close cousins, if you like. Real engagement means having the capacity to see what we have in common but to be firm about where we're different.

Why is it that so many wars have been started in the name of Christianity?

People are always capable of falling away from their core values. Importantly, the Catholic Church apologised for The Crusades, under Pope John Paul II. We have to acknowledge our failures but also emphasize that the Church has worked very hard for peace on many occasions and that it also has a history of protectiveness of those who are weak and vulnerable and subject to oppression. Christian war mongering is far from the whole story. The media will tell these horrific stories of abuse, and rightly so, but they won't tell stories about infinitely more kids who are loved and helped and cared for by those same organisations. I think both sides of the story should be told.

What can we learn about violence and peace from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?

The Sermon on the Mount is about ethical living in the Christian community and the spirituality of the community, which I think is found in the Lord's Prayer. There are lots of passages which emphasise peace, for instance: "Blessed are the peace makers for they will be called children of God" Matthew 5:9. The whole point is that a peacemaker is somebody who is god-like. God longs for peace.

In the parable of the lost sheep, Matthew is talking about the need for us to protect those who are most vulnerable. How do we protect people who are in Afghanistan - women, children, Muslims, Christians, whoever - from the appalling injustices being suffered in the Middle East and elsewhere?

In my view, we need to be pacifists and peacemakers, but we also need to be protective of those who are weak and vulnerable and that might sometimes lead us reluctantly into the use of force. I'm not a hard lined pacifist, and in the eConference I do want to talk about strife in the community and how we handle that.