

Minum Kopi-Lah!

by Piya Tan

Last week, someone sent me an email about Paul Hattaway's "Peoples of the Buddhist World: A Christian Prayer Guide" (2004). That same week, another email told me that a Buddhist's dying relative is literally being crowded by a vulture-herd of evangelists to convert the helpless captive patient.

I remember reading Ajahn Brahm's book, "Simply This Moment" (2007: 148) where mentions such incidents in Singapore and Malaysia as being "really too much." More specifically, he reminds Buddhists "to stand up for themselves."

For a free download of Ajahn Brahm's article and book, go to:

<http://www.bswa.org/modules/mydownloads/singlefile.php?cid=19&lid=562>.

On a happy note, someone on-line replied to Hattaway's "planning for the demise of Buddhism" by simply stating "No thanks! I'll stick with Buddhism!" Please read Allen Carr's inspiring review here:

<http://politics.sgforums.com/forums/1728/topics/322840?page=1>.

To be frank, I'm a serious Buddhist today doing full-time lay ministry and translating the early Buddhist scripture because I have had really bad experiences with evangelists since my childhood. My elder brother was converted very young, and my terrified sister had to hide in the wash-room when they came to the house.

My brother became an elder in a Gospel Chapel. Now my 74-year old brother spends much of his time sitting in a corner and chatting with invisible Japanese girls! If only he had grown up with Buddhist mindfulness training.

Having lost much of their following in the West, churches are now beginning to look for opportunities elsewhere. Of course the Islamic world is out of the question. Even the most optimistic evangelist knows that the chance of spreading the Gospel amongst Muslims is nil. The obvious targets are Africa, India and the Buddhist countries of Asia. (Allen Carr in his review)

The constant harassment and religious bullying of the evangelists is actually good for Buddhism in a way. It keeps us on our toes and not to take things for granted. Throughout history, religions have learned from each other like children being immunized from viruses.

I also know many Buddhists who are admirably patient with evangelists. One of my fondest memories is that of a brother monk in Malaysia, a young Thai, who was once approached by an evangelist in his own temple in KL. He invited the sin-peddler to sit down and smilingly listened to him right to the end.

After about half an hour of self-righteous lecturing, the preacher finally asked the monk: “Do you repent now?” The friendly monk noticing that the evangelist had paused long enough smiled and quietly said:

“Minum kopi-lah!”

The Thai monk could not speak a word of English!

Let us be constantly fervent in our lovingkindness to the evangelists: they have such wonderful energy and purposefulness, although badly misguided and unfeeling for others. With our constant metta to them, they will begin to know that Buddhists can and know how to be happy without any idea of “sin.” This humorous yet beautiful anecdote reminds us of man’s inner goodness:

Native: Would I go to hell if I have never heard of God or Christianity before?

Evangelist: No.

Native: In that case, please do not tell me anything about them!

Please say NO to the evangelists!

Do say YES to your inner goodness, to the Dharma.

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