

## **PASTORAL LETTER**

Dear Rev. Fathers, Sisters and Lay faithful,

It is with great dismay, shock and pain I am sending this pastoral letter to all of you in the wake of the recent atrocities against Christians, and well orchestrated attacks on our places of worship. When similar incidents had taken place in Orissa, Gujarat and other parts of the Country, we thought that our State Government would protect our constitutional rights, but, to our great shock and disappointment, it has not only failed to do so, but also seems to have supported fundamental groups, which are causing anxiety and tension to our Christian community.

1. As you are well aware, in Mangalore, Udupi, Chikmagalur and other parts of Karnataka, innocent people such as children, women and old people were beaten up mercilessly by police, and some of them were arrested and ill-treated in the police custody. I was informed that a few of them are still in prison. What really shocked all of us was the insults and beatings our poor nuns women and children received from the police! We do have the documentary and first-hand evidence for all these attacks. I requested the Chief Minister and the Home Minister to release immediately those innocent people who have been arrested and put in prison.

I have already expressed my sympathies to these victims and also asked the Government to give suitable protection to our people. More than losses to our properties, these inhuman acts have hurt our religious sentiments and also usurped the rights of minority, that are enshrined in the constitution of India to practice, profess and proclaim our faith. And, therefore, our constitutional rights should be protected at all cost and our places of worship should be safeguarded from fanatics and unruly elements.

2. The recent attacks on places of worship of Christians have caused me personally, and the Christian Community as a whole, great pain and anguish. The incidents in Orissa were shocking, but now the churches in Mangalore and other parts of the State have been vandalized, and Blessed Sacrament desecrated in Mangalore and the police instead of rounding up the miscreants have beaten up and arrested many of the innocent Christian faithful. Now the disease has slowly spread to the Archdiocese of Bangalore with attacks on St. Mary's Church, Kolar and, on 21<sup>st</sup> September, the fundamental outfits have ransacked St. James Church, Mariannapalya and damaged the Infant Jesus Statue at the Holy Name of Jesus' Church at Rajarajeswarinagar. At Mariannapalya, the Blessed Sacrament was desecrated. It is indeed a very grievous offence against our Lord. I am sure, all of us are deeply hurt and feel sorry for the insult caused to the Eucharistic Lord.

I had learned about these happenings while I was in the Holy Land. With great pain, anxiety and concern, I offered special prayers for the victims and offered their sufferings to the Father along with the sufferings of our Divine Lord who suffered and died for the salvation of the whole world. Let us hope that the sufferings of these innocent people may deepen our own faith and reinvigorate our Christian witnessing.

3. On my return from the Holy Land on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, I immediately called a meeting of the College of Consultors and also held a meeting with the Representatives of the Religious Congregations and Prominent Members of the Catholic Community in the City. Later, the Chief Minister accompanied by the Home Minister and three other Ministers, called on me. I told them strongly as to how hurt we were at these incidents and with the off-hand manner in which the Government had handled the situation. I also asked the Chief Minister to advise the police personnel not to enter any place of worship, and to take immediate action against those who forcibly entered the churches and physically assaulted innocent people including nuns, women and children. The Chief Minister has promised me that firm action would be taken against the culprits and that he would give necessary protection to the Christian minority. He also assured me that such incidents will not take place in future.

4. While these incidents cause bitterness and anguish, we cannot allow our anger to overcome us. Jesus, the Word made flesh, came into the world for all humankind. He Himself, on the Cross, asked the Father to forgive His enemies, for "they know not what they do". He taught the prayer: *Our Father*, that God is Father to each of us, and consequently all of us, irrespective of creed, caste, language or nationality, are brothers and sisters, and that love and forgiveness must be the basis for our human experience.

**5. Our first act must be one of public reparation for the desecration of the Blessed Sacrament. *On Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> September, I will be offering a Holy Mass and will be joining the Reparation Service at Mariannapalya starting from 8 a.m.***

**I also propose to concelebrate a Special Mass and to conduct an open air Reparation Service at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Frazer Town on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October at 3 p.m., which I hope will be well attended by the Priests, Religious and the faithful. After the Mass, we shall expose the Eucharist and proclaim our faith in the Most Holy Eucharist publically till 6.30 p.m. Besides, I exhort all the parishes and the institutions in the Archdiocese to hold a Day of Reparation on first Friday, i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> October, by conducting special Masses and Holy Hours. Please give wide publicity to these liturgical services.**

**Let us observe 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> October as Days of Reparation in the Archdiocese, with Masses being offered in honour of the Eucharistic Lord**

**and the Holy Hour conducted in reparation for the desecration and heinous act done to Him.**

6. Several Christian Organizations, heads of the other religions, leaders of the Secular groups such as Peace Coordination Committees, Inter-religious groups headed by the senior citizens and the *intelligentia* of the Society, the Dalit groups and many other organizations, not only condemned these atrocities and expressed their sympathy, but also extended their support in our efforts to safeguard our fundamental rights. I, on your behalf, thank each organization and its members for its goodwill, solidarity and support.

7. We need to wake up from our slumber and fight against the evil forces with Christian courage. Let us not resort to violence, but express our protests through silent and non-violent methods. We need to tell the Radical Hindu Organizations that they make false allegations that the Church converts illiterate people either through allurements or force, but these are baseless and absolutely false allegations. In fact, Indian government statistics have shown that the Christian population of India appears to be declining slightly. From 2.61 percent of the population in 1981, it fell to 2.53 percent and 2.3 percent in the census for 1991 and 2001. According to the latest census, conducted in 2001, 80.5 percent of India's inhabitants are Hindu, while 13.4 percent are Muslim. We need to conscientise our Community on this fact and reality.

8. In the wake of the recent riots and also to pre-empt any future untoward incidents, let us safeguard our churches and institutions by taking all precautionary methods. Above all, let us express our unity and solidarity by sharing the love of Christ with one another. **Let us not forget that our disunity would certainly cause harm to the Church, both within and outside!**

May the Lord deepen our faith, increase our hope, strengthen our unity and rejuvenate our courage to help us live and bear witness to our Christian life and commitment.

Given at Archbishop's House on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

With every good wish and God's blessings,

Yours sincerely,

**+ Bernard Moras**  
***Archbishop of Bangalore***