

Excesses in God's Name: Evaluation Vinod Victor's Outlook Article

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“When all that was local was ‘pagan’ and those unpalatable for the invaders ‘heresy’, conversions became a tool for subjugation.”

The history of the world reveals many calamities, destructions and annihilation of creation; adding to these we have umpteen cases of human caused calamities and destructions. And many of these human made calamities caused in the name of God and religion. The author of the Outlook article, Vinod Victor, points out how people (invaders) looted land, killed ancestors, destroyed cultures, annihilated a people—all in the name of God.

Whatever was local was considered pagan and any belief or thought against the dominant group was considered heresy. These were weapons used to dominate, control, subjugate, occupy and possess land and property. The religious outlook was a great consoling means to justify the wrong doings. When things happen so many people would begin to think, what is happening to God!

The words of Helen Ellerbe In her book, *The Dark Side of Christian History: The Inquisition and Slavery*, summarises to a great extent the horrifying story of religion. There has been no more organized effort by a religion to control people and contain their spirituality than the Christian Inquisition. Developed within the Church's own legal framework, the Inquisition attempted to

terrify people into obedience. As the Inquisitor Francesco Pena stated in 1578, "We must remember that the main purpose of the trial and execution is not to save the soul of the accused but to achieve the public good and put fear into others." The Inquisition took countless human lives in Europe and around the world as it followed in the wake of missionaries. And along with the tyranny of the Inquisition, churchmen also brought religious justification for the practice of slavery.

These and several other factors have affected the faith of the people of all faiths all over the world. A lot of people have turned away from God and religion. Even today we have many situations of refugees created by religion, in fact not by religion but by the fundamentalist believers of religion. When will they spare God from their selfish and clandestine de-

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sign? If God is God of love how can he/she be a god of hatred and war? Unfortunately this figure of God has been depicted several times in the earlier times and it continues even today. God was depicted as one who favoured some people and they flourished in life having plenty of wealth and making profit. In the process the poor was left uncared for, made to believe that their earthly struggle was transient and they would receive eternal reward. Together with these the killings of people in different places were gloriously justified for the sake of the Kingdom of God. As early as 1431, the burning at stake of Joan of Arc and in 1633 the killing of Galileo, were justified as divine acts.

During the crusades women dressed like men marched to Jerusalem to conquer the land; even children were not spared from taking part in crusades. The colonising and propagation of mission were two great attempts of cultural invasion leading to

the annihilation of the so called pagans and heretics.

Can we think that if religion is so inhuman, can atheistic humanism be a solution so that situation may change for the better? They are trying to be different from their aggressive forefathers and are trying to wear a new kind, gentle and humanist face. How far can they succeed is the question. Their assumption is that human nature is essentially good and so success may be achieved. In such a perspective we need not have the fear of God or need of God. Science is the solution for problems that crop up. Can we really say that humanism and science solve all problems? So far we have not succeeded in doing that. History is the real example to it. Can we human beings determine what is right and wrong? In order to determine what is right and wrong one has to first define what is right and wrong. If we deny God then we are left with human bias. This will lead to moral rela-

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tivism and each person will be free to determine what is right and wrong. The result will be chaotic. Another danger to this way of dealing is the rationalization of “end justifying means” as Machiavelli says.

If human beings rationalize all evils leading to some kind of benefit for future generations then there will be severe problems in the world. If we allow such things to prevail, all kinds of devious actions can be allowed. Nietzsche argued that “god is dead”. According to my understanding he meant, the moment human beings turned away from god there was no more a frame of reference for good and evil. Everything becomes subjective and opinions cannot be substantiated. For those who believe in Christ can objectively measure the morality of actions and thoughts. In other words it is necessary that we have faith in the Divine. That is where the difficulty arises for the atheists. We cannot deny that religion is related to our emotions. Bertrand

Russell in, *The Emotional factor* says that human beings in time of need like to believe in some divine being up there who loves and cares for us. If we feel loved and cared for, we would not do anything to harm others and we most likely wouldn't do any immoral acts.

Though religion has done great harm to humanity and civilization, religion inspires people to accept life, to have hope, to endure life's struggles and problems and not to give up. I do not doubt in saying that believing in God actually gives people hope to confront the difficulties they face in life. At times of course because of fear, that there is a great figure watching them and judging them, or they will go to hell for doing evil, but it also helps in keeping order in a society. I admit that religion and God or Divine is an essential factor in human life.

"God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas but for scars." — Elbert Hubbard

"The man of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies but also to hate his friends." — Friedrich Nietzsche

"Trees are poems the earth writes upon the sky, We fell them down and turn them into paper, That we may record our emptiness." — Kahlil Gibran

"He who knows all the answers has not been asked all the questions." — Confucius

"The desire to reach for the stars is ambitious. The desire to reach hearts is wise." — Maya Angelou