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Editorial: Religion, Ideology and Violence
Kurien Kunnumpuram

Abstract: Ever since September 11, 2001, terrorism and violence have become hot topics of discussion in the media. The impression is gaining ground that religion and ideology are the root causes of violence in the world today. It is in this context that we have chosen as the theme of this issue of Jnanadeepa Religion, Ideology and Violence. We wish to explore the religious and ideological factors at work in human society that promote violence.

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Religion and Violence



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Editorial

Ever since September 11, 2001, terrorism and violence have become hot topics of discussion in the media. The impression is gaining ground that religion and ideology are the root causes of violence in the world today. It is in this context that we have chosen as the theme of this issue of *Jnanadeepa* **Religion, Ideology and Violence**. We wish to explore the religious and ideological factors at work in human society that promote violence.

There is one article in this issue which discusses in general the relation between religion and violence. It is the author's contention that most of the violence perpetrated in the name of religion has non-religious causes. Hence, it may not be advisable to speak of 'religious' violence. Another article deals with the sacralization of violence by socio-political organisations and institutions through a clever use of religious symbols and images. It also recommends Gandhiji's practice of non-violent and self-suffering love as a means to unmask and counter such violence.

There is a growing impression among many people today that in the name of Jihad Islamic extremists are indulging in a lot of violence in different parts of the world. It is against this background that one article examines the concept of Jihad. It comes to the conclusion that by and large Jihad does not involve violence. It is primarily concerned about one's struggle for personal spiritual growth as well as the efforts to promote unity among the Muslims. However, Jihad can at times refer to the attempt of the Muslims to defend themselves, even using force, when they are attacked by others.

What about the Hindu attitude to violence? Instead of answering this question generally, one article investigates whether the Bhagavad Gita advocates violence. The common opinion is that the Gita articulates a philosophy of violent warfare. After all, Gita purports to be a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. On compassionate grounds, Arjuna refuses to wage war against the Kauravas. Krishna tries to persuade him to forget his fine feelings and face the situation with valour by taking up arms. Gita is, therefore, often used to justify violent attacks on people who are considered to be enemies. After a thorough examination of the Gita, the article points out that it is a mystical poem which describes the inner struggles of people who are serious about their relationship to God, others and the cosmos.

There are four articles dealing with violence in Christian history. The first one deals with biblical perspectives on violence. By and large, the Israelites were a violent people living among other violent peoples. Yet they had laws that strongly advocated justice and peace. And the prophets of Israel dreamt of an era of peace and prosperity. The basic thrust of the New Testament is the establishment of a new humanity, which lives in peace and harmony with God, with itself and with nature. The second article deals with

violence in mission history. Here violence is taken to mean not only physical violence against persons but also various kinds of pressure on people to change their religion. It is undeniable that a certain amount of violence was used by the Church in its efforts to convert people. While some people throughout the centuries protested against the use of force in Christian missionary activity, it is only in Vatican II that the Church took an unambiguous stand against the use of force in its missionary work.

There are two things that people remember whenever there is talk of the Church and violence: the Crusades and the Inquisition. There are two articles in this issue which deal with them. The first one studies the crusades and comes to the conclusion that whatever be the arguments that were given in favour of the crusades, it is difficult to reconcile the hate-filled crusades with love commandment of Jesus. The second one investigates the origin and evolution of the Inquisition. The Inquisition bears witness to the fact that the Church became increasingly ready to use force in order to maintain purity of doctrine. Orthodoxy became more important than orthopraxis. What is really unfortunate is that the Inquisition spirit still continues to exist in the Church though Vatican II made a valiant effort to exorcise this spirit.

There is finally an article which seriously reflects on the atrocities committed against women in Gujarat in March-April 2002. The author points out how enormous crimes, including sexual violence, were committed against women belonging to the minority community. This violence was promoted and justified by the ideology that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar espouses. The only way out of this spiral of violence is the upholding of the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Besides these papers on violence, there are three articles included in this issue which deal with different aspects of postmodernism. The first one discusses the significant changes that have taken place in our understanding of art as we moved to the postmodern period. The second examines the rapid changes that have occurred in the world during the last few decades and comes to the conclusion that we are probably living through what may rightly be called a New Renaissance and a Postmodern Reformation. This should be reason for new hope. The third deals with the theory of the nonsensory perception of God in the context of a postmodern philosophy.

It is our hope that this issue will encourage readers to reflect on the problem of violence in our world today and resolve to take steps to counter it.

Kurien Kunumpuram SJ
Editor