

HOLY WALL: GOD'S MOOD SWINGS

BELLIGERENCE AND BENEVOLENCE: THE DILEMMA OF CONTENT AND CONTEXT

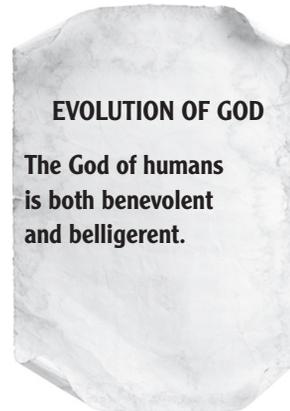
A careful reader of religious scriptures will notice that God has wide mood swings, from belligerence to benevolence, from love to rage. These changing moods allow religious fundamentalists to cite scriptures to justify “holy wars” and liberals to argue that content must be interpreted with reference to the context to arrive at the true meaning of God’s message.

The arguments typically go like this: the Muslim jihadists or 9/11 terrorists are not “true” Muslims because they don’t understand the true message of Islam, which is a religion of peace; and the Christian Crusaders or abortion clinic bombers were/are not “true” Christians because they don’t understand the “true” meaning of Christianity.

Professor Philip Jenkins, “one of America’s best scholars of religion (*The Economist*)”, in his landmark book *Laying Down the Sword*, demonstrates how holy amnesia helped Christians grow past their scriptures, which are far more violent than the Quran when taken literally. He concludes, “When Christians or Jews point to violent parts of the Qur’an (or the Hadith) and suggest that those elements taint the whole religion, they open themselves to the obvious question: what about their own faiths? If the founding text shapes the whole religion, then Judaism and Christianity deserve the utmost condemnation as religions of savagery. Of course, they are no such thing; nor is Islam.”

This endless debate can only be ended by recognizing that belligerence and benevolence coexist in our holy scriptures, and no single religion is solely belligerent or benevolent. Selected quotations from a few scriptures are provided on the next page to demonstrate this fact.

The selection of scriptures of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam in this section to illustrate God’s mood swings should not be misconstrued to infer that these religions are the only ones which can, and do, contribute to violence. These three religions are selected because they have a collective following of more than two-thirds of the world population. Other religions can and do contribute to violence with equal fervor. For example, *Buddhist Warfare* (2010), authored by American and European scholars, documented the violent history of Buddhism, which was traditionally considered a peaceful religion. Even a Godless ideology, such as atheism or secularism, can be violent and divisive, when the ideology itself, or the nation-state, promoting the ideology, becomes the object of worship.



WAR AND PEACE IN HINDU SCRIPTURES

“Considering also your duty as a warrior you should not waver like this. Because there is nothing more auspicious for a warrior than a righteous war. Only the fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get such an opportunity for an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven. If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty, lose your reputation, and incur sin. People will talk about your disgrace forever. To the honored, dishonor is worse than death.”

– BHAGAVAD GITA [2:31-34]

“You will go to heaven if killed in the line of duty, or you will enjoy the kingdom on the earth if victorious. No matter what happens you win. Therefore, get up with a determination to fight, O Arjuna.”

– BHAGAVAD GITA [2:37]

“May your weapons be strong to drive away the attackers,
May your arms be powerful enough to check the foes,
Let your army be glorious, not the evil-doer.”

– RIGVEDA [1:39:2]

“Day after day, from their seat he, Indra, drove them, alike, from place to place, those dark-looking creatures. The Hero slew the meanly-behaving Dasas, Varchin and Shambara, where the waters gather.”

– RIGVEDA [6:47:20-21]

“Om! May God protect us both together;
May God nourish us both together;
May we work conjointly with great energy,
May our study be vigorous and effective;
May we not mutually dispute (or may we not hate any).
Om! Let there be Peace in me!
Let there be Peace in my environment!
Let there be Peace in the forces that act on me!”

– KATHA UPANISHAD

“May all the Gods be peaceful,
May the Vedas spread peace everywhere,
May all other objects everywhere give us peace,
And may that peace come to us and remain with us forever.”

– YAJURVEDA