



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 21, 2011

Vatican Asks Hindus to End Anti-Christian Propaganda

Christian outreach to untouchables in India is well over one hundred years old. Christianity, like Islam, places no special value on the circumstances of birth. The government of India sets aside certain benefits for Dalits, a form of welfare for a still-despised group. Yet the same government programs deny benefits to Dalits who become Christian or become Moslem, because — the argument goes — their denial of the Hindu caste system means that they no longer consider themselves in the sub-caste (or “casteless”) position of “untouchables.” This does not apply, however, to Dalits who become [Buddhists or Sikhs](#), although those conversions also would mean a rejection of the caste system.



Christianity also grants women a higher status than Hinduism (which historically does not regard a woman as possessing a soul until she marries) or Islam (which creates a distinctly inferior status for women). As a consequence, Christianity has a profound appeal for the most hopeless Indians, “untouchable” women. The message of Christian love finds an eager ear among the “untouchables” of India.

Simon Hawthorne of the Life Association, who has worked for 20 years ago among the Dalits, explains what this means to these “untouchables” of India: “As a Dalit, you start off living life thinking you are not made by God. It’s such an oppressive system and, because of the sheer numbers of people, it’s the biggest human rights issue today. But in the message of Christianity you were made in the image of God. There is nothing more opposite to the message of Christianity than the Hindu caste system.”

The Papal message against anti-Christian violence has grown stronger in recent years. In October 2008, Pope Benedict called on Hindus, in recognition of the message of Gandhi, to refrain from violence against Christians. As the pope doubtless knew, but thought better not to emphasized, the non-violent Gandhi was an adamant foe of Hindus converting to Christianity. He also shifted his position often on the caste question, and never called for the abolition of the caste system at all.

Indeed, Christian missionaries in the early decades of the 20th century sought his help in combining to attack the notion of caste and the plight of the “untouchables.” Gandhi, politely, refused. The most effective criticism of the great evils of Hinduism — the suttee or ritual self-immolation of widows, consummation marriages of old men with child brides, young girls working as temple prostitutes, and the like — came from Christian westerners in India, and Gandhi, directly and through surrogates, attacked those Western journalists.

Doubtless Gandhi would denounce the growing violence against Christians by Hindus over the last decade, as he denounced the appalling violence committed by Hindus against Moslems, Sikhs,



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Christians, and Parsees in India when he was alive. But his entreaties did not stop the violence, which at times (like around the independence of India and Pakistan) rose to millions of deaths, rapes, assaults, and similar violence.

The Prime Minister of India today is a Sikh, the first non-Hindu in the nation's history, and he has also condemned the violence (his fellow Sikhs have been victims of this violence often in India's history, which accounts in part for the military tradition of Sikhs) but that has also not stopped the violence from growing almost annually in the last decade.

In the past, British imperialism has been a factor in Indian resentment, but India has been independent since 1949 and is now a major world power. Hindus, to the extent that they have any view of the Christian West today, see it as an ally against militant Islam, which essentially surrounds India in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaya, Uzbekistan, and the other former Soviet socialist republics, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is in spite of the de facto alliance with the West, not because of foreign encroachments in India, that Hindus have attacked Christians in India.

Nor can it be that Christians have done damage to Indian society since independence. In fact, the other person in the history of India to receive a state funeral, besides Gandhi, was Mother Teresa, who for many quiet decades served the poor, the sick, and the dying in Calcutta. The dramatic demonstration of Christian compassion that she demonstrated, like so many other missionaries less well known who are bringing help, and crucially hope, to the poor and the despised of India are exactly the reason why resentment of Christians boiling over to savage violence against Christians exists and grows in India.



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