# THE RELIGION OF BLOOD

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The year 2014, like many of its predecessors, has left us with a warning. A major premise that has often dictated human behavior over centuries is wrong. Deadly wrong.

We live in a world where schoolgirls are kidnapped and sold into slavery, and school children are massacred in large numbers. We live in an era where young children, who can't even comprehend what is being done to them and why, are subjected to horrific torture, and infants who have barely learned to walk are so mutilated that one cannot sleep after seeing pictures of them. We are numbed by heart-rending pleas: "If you know where we are please bomb us... There is no life after this... I've been raped 30 times and it's not even lunchtime... I can't go to the toilet... Please bomb us." And we live in an era where we helplessly watch "...gun-wielding militants firing on cars of screaming children, tens of thousands of people trapped on a mountain, mothers keeping dehydrated babies alive with their own saliva."

While a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center reported a six-year high in religious violence across the world, what we have experienced in the recent years is not unique to this period. For centuries, our timeline has been pockmarked by one series of inexpressible horrors after another, including full-scale genocides and ethnic cleansings. Every few years, we run out of adjectives describing our red-hot outrage, but then quickly reset our sensibility thermometers to normalcy once the dead have been buried, the injured have disappeared from our radar, and we have purged our conscious of forever-festering psychological wounds of millions.

Our life returns to normal. Once again.

Ironically, most of what we do to our fellow human beings is done in the name of a god who we claim is compassionate and all-loving. We must recognize that such mind-numbing barbarity has nothing to do with God. No god would ever look kindly to such barbarity, much less encourage it or condone it. Notwithstanding all our justifications in the defense of God, whether in terms of our own karma or in some other lofty terms, a loving and compassionate God did not create us to be tortured, raped and killed in God's own name. In fact, if God indeed did so, do we still want to keep knocking on the doors of such a god?

One of our major premises over millennia has been that God has created some human beings as less than some others, that some lives matter less than others. Our premise dictates that women have been created "inferior" to men. That some people have been created as "low caste" and some others as "high caste." And that people born with certain skin color, or born in certain ethnic groups are "less" than others.

By the dictates of our premise, we are not content with just being humans. We are Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, or followers of another faith. We are of low caste or high caste. We are black, white or brown. We are Hispanic or non-Hispanic.

We have let prejudices, hatred and bigotry against one another develop into hardened memes in our social ethos. We shed the blood of innocent people claiming that our God is superior to their God. Since we all are children of the same God, it is like two sons of the same mother trying to torture and kill each other, each professing his mother to be superior to his brother's.

Our religion, race, caste or gender does not matter to God or to the laws of nature. A tsunami does not target an atheist preferentially over a Buddhist. An earthquake does not level a Sikh house and leave a Muslim house intact. A wild fire does not come with a list of our affiliations to determine which houses to turn into rubble and which ones to spare.

When a James Foley, a Steven Sotloff or a Hervé Gourdel is beheaded and his blood is shed, we cannot analyze the blood and determine the religion of the victim. When someone is forced to flee his city under the threat of death because he is a Christian, burned alive because he is a Sikh, dragged behind a truck on a rural road because of his dark skin color, or is brutally gang raped because of her caste, we cannot tell their religion, skin color or caste by analyzing their ashes.

In hospitals, we do not maintain separate blood banks for Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew, Muslim or Sikh blood; low-caste or high-caste blood; male or female blood. We do not ask for the religion, the skin color or the gender of the blood donor when we are on a surgeon's table.

Then why do we look at what blood to shed, what blood to hate, what blood to torture, and what blood to gang rape?

To save humanity from tearing itself apart, we must reject the erroneous premise that some human beings have been created as less than others. We must accept as inviolable and "self-evident" the truths that God is indeed compassionate and all-loving, and that all of us have been created equal. Unless and until we do so, we cannot escape the wrath of the tectonic plates into which we have divided and subdivided humanity, which keep rubbing against each other and keep shaking us up every now and then.

We do not have to forgo the diversity of our beliefs and faiths. We merely have to recognize that subscribing to a particular belief system or belonging to a particular faith does not make us superior to others, or make others' life worthless. That it does not make others' children a fair game for the most grotesque torture or sexual slavery we can imagine. Diversity is not to be despised, but to be cherished, and indeed to be celebrated.

In the short run, we have to do all we can to neutralize any immediate threats to the very soul of humanity from outfits like the "Islamic State." But we also need to strive for an enduring solution. Humanity cannot protect itself from persistently recurring internecine bloodletting until we recognize one fundamental fact.

Blood has no religion.