

Hinduism and Christianity Wrongly Reduced to "Love"

"[Some] Hindu groups have protested that 'The Love Guru,' the latest Mike Myers movie, exposes their faith to ridicule. Where is the line between acceptable humor about religion and offensive disrespect?"

What to outsiders is acceptable humor may be, to insiders, offensive disrespect. But this applies to both insiders and outsiders to religion and of any religion: Having fun *with* religion is innocent, having fun *at the expense of* religion is not.

So is this movie having fun at the expense of Hinduism? I clicked all over its online site, sniffing for disrespect. Having taught Hinduism at the University of Hawaii, I have a fairly sensitive nose for disrespect; and I found none – though I might if I were to experience the movie.

But while I found nothing I would call disrespectful, I did find something offensive: the reduction of Hinduism to pop-culture "Love." Not love in its full, rich sense of (Sanskrit) "*bhakti*" (centering in passionate devotion to a Hindu deity), but Hindu love as conceived in the woodstocks and communes of the 1960s youth culture. Back to the 1960s! "His Holiness Guru Pitka" is a sad retrogression. "Love, joy, and a Coca Cola chicken."

The parallel to the abuse of *my* religion, Christianity, is painful to me. In many quarters for many years, Christianity has been reduced to "Love," especially "Love thy neighbor." As in Hinduism, the central word for love centers on love for the divine, not the human. "*Agape*" (with grave accent on the last letter, main accent on the middle syllable) means, as Jesus summed up good religion, the adoration of God and universal caring for humanity, including oneself: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39; also in Mark and Luke.)

When Christian "agape"-love is shallowed either by anthropocentric flattening (eliminating God) or by reducing God to a sentimental lover, why not see the love-sentiment as the *kernel* of the religion and throw away all else as mere *husk*? Long ago, that great Danish thinker Soren Kierkegaard called this the slump of religion into ethics, on the way to the slump of ethics into mere esthetics.

This diminished Christianity of sentimental love was properly panned by Yale professor H. Richard Niebuhr in a sentence many theologians can quote: "A God without wrath brought men [i.e., people] without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." ("The Kingdom of God in America," Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1937, page 193.)

A few days ago, we Americans lost a great journalist, Tim Russert, only 58 years old. In his Roman Catholic high school, a priest pinned his shoulders to a wall for bad behavior, and Tim cried out, "Father, don't you have any mercy?" Replied the priest, "God takes care of mercy; my job is justice." God is not only kind, but also – necessarily to his character as righteous – stern: "Note the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22).

I commend "On Faith" for asking a question arising from sensitivity to an essential human value in this global world, namely, respect for religion and the religions.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JUNE 23, 2008; 8:58 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

PREVIOUS: [HUMOR A GIFT FROM GOD](#) | NEXT: [NO LOVE FOR THE LOVE GURU](#)

Comments

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Pagan now see what you did...

POSTED BY: GARYD | JUNE 24, 2008 11:21 PM
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i would like to take this time to say something i hope there is no need to say about a painting i did to give to a fellow classmate from my masters program at fsu named john.. he was one of the few people in graduate school teacher or student .. who took the time to get to know me a little and as so often happens in life he was the one i had picked out at first glance that i wouldn't like or get along with.. this is not the first time i have been surprised not by other people so much i guess as to my inability to on first impression completely size someone up... the painting i gave him was meant to speak about misperceptions so as to be personal and maybe special,, he knows my father was an animal scientist of some note and as a child i actually thought pigs, sheep and cows came with little red and blue rubber stoppers on their abdomens to retrieve gastric juices and study digestion. everything was done on the humane side and i treated some of the animals more like pets, and the goal was to produce more meat with less feed to hopefully feed more human beings and in this context i personally have had no conflict of morals and think of the animals as perhaps noble for helping us humans out. it is possible i'm not in a unanimous group here i completely understand and quite frankly do not condone any kind of animal cruelty.. john knows curious george was one of my favorite childhood characters because as the son of an animal scientist i quite naturally knew that curious george was more intelligent than the man in the yellow hat.. my father has a phd but being from the blue ridge mountains in virginia he wore bib overalls and a yellow straw hat.. maybe you get the picture.. anyway the painting i gave him was painted when they were having the terrible violence about the cartoons about a particular religion if you picked through history possibly all religions would at one time or the other be likely candidates for the seeming overreaction. my painting was called a devout hindu man having a christianity nightmare as an example of my ignorance of other peoples religionsand had a crucifix with steaks hanging from it and cartoon like cows in the background mournfully shouting like i've poisoned cows might do and some huddle figure at the base of the crucifix and it was done in a style that hopefully people who have studied art history would recognize was an echo and a homage to the painter francis bacon and his painting figures at the base of the crucifix a very famous type of note that put a permanent mind picture in my mind for some reason. if i owe anyone anywhere an apology i now give it and hope if it was necessary that someday soon we live in a world where no apology for something that was meant to be special to a friend of mine was needed...

POSTED BY: ARTISTKVIP | JUNE 24, 2008 3:13 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Ha. You know, Gary, it's almost as though if we joined hands now, we might just be able to bring the old jubilant 'Photon Guy' JJ back. :)

extending hand, Ready to come back, Jacob? You said you were going away a while, and then it got weird.

SOk, though.

Just gotta breathe. Feel your feet.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 24, 2008 12:39 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

For once Pagan we agree. What the Average person in the US knows about the reality of Hinduism could be written in fairly large print on a fairly small postage stamp with plenty of room left over.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JUNE 23, 2008 9:50 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Oops, someone left the screen door open, just when conversation was starting to happen. Hi, JJ.

Yes, you get those messages when you aren't playing well with others. Spamming your indignance about it isn't... helping.

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POSTED BY: FROM TIMOTHY (NOT LEARY) SHRIVERS BLOGG WITH LOVE-POTION#9 | JUNE 23, 2008 2:20 PM
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Excellent commentary!

POSTED BY: A SINNER | JUNE 23, 2008 1:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I wanted to start this out by questioning your salvation Mr. Elliott but thats a comment for another time.
I won't comment on Hinduism because it is religion.
The definition of Christian is to be Christ like. Christianity is a life style. To be conformed to the image of Christ and to live like Christ as much as possible living in the world.
Our Faith is subject to ridicule everyday. But Christ said if they have hated me they will hate you also. So we can expect it. We are to hate the sin not the sinner. So when they ridicule our faith it just shows we must be doing something right.
I do agree with you on one thing. Everyone does make God out to be just a loving God But it says in the Bible to know God is to fear God. God does chastise those he loves. If we cannot know God is the creator of the world and its fullness and has power of life and death over us we are fooling ourselves.
If we think we won't be punished for our sins we better think again. Just like a father disciplines us when were growing up,the same for our Father in Heaven will.

Another thing, If you haven't had a true salvation experience then the Holy Spirit doesn't live in you and if the Holy Spirit doesn't live in you how can you possibly know God?
You Can't!

POSTED BY: GREG WILKINS | JUNE 23, 2008 1:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

To get respect, you have to give respect.

The only other way, is to force respect, which is not really respect, bur just fear.

Many religious people and many religions need to learn this lesson.

I know that Mike Myers is a kind, gentle, and even enchanting person. So, why pick on him?

There are plenty of people in the world who need censoring, before we get down to censoring him.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | JUNE 19, 2008 2:37 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

No one knows what humor truly is. I've heard that humor is an obvious truth put in contextual twist. For example, "Baptist are against premarital sex because it leads to dancing." Is that humorous or disrespectful? Either or neither?

Laughter adds 8 years to one's life according to an insurance company selling life insurance so they should know. Calling humor disrespect explains why, "the good die young"? Doesn't India have the lowest life expectancy of all, 25 years, 1935? Explains why that film, a comedy is called disrespectful?

"Live, love, laugh and be happy" and live a long happy time too. Religion defeats humor so the good die young leading to the obvious next question. Do the good go to heaven or hell? In which of those two places is there humor and in which is there none at all?

Theories of God are a laugher in more ways than one. It's Lucifer that demands respect when none is due, not God for God gets everything God wants by simply willing it. You have read Genesis? Same God as the father of Jesus, the God or was that a would-be God in the burning bush? In Genesis God said, "Let there be light" and bang, light. In Exodus God said "He" wants "His chosen people" out of Egypt. When Moses asked how He replied with, we'll first trick the Hebrews into following you and them force, (plagues) the Egyptians into letting you and them go. Correct, that's not humorous but it is funny. Is it disrespectful?

POSTED BY: BGONE | JUNE 19, 2008 1:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"In his Roman Catholic high school, a priest pinned his shoulders to a wall for bad behavior, and Tim cried out, "Father, don't you have any mercy?" Replied the priest, "God takes care of mercy; my job is justice."

Thanks for the flashback, Reverend, but the quality of mercy is not strained, and as for Lady Justice, She don't see no collars or tonsures or I Believe license plates.

Yes, the movie's making fun of *60's* gurus, not Hinduism itself, not that anyone can tell the difference, which is the real problem...

But when the world's not short of *any* kind of love, whether you extol or scorn it, like it was some kind of zero-sum game, we'll give you a ring, how bout?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 19, 2008 3:30 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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