

## [Conversion Is an Act of Violence](#)

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### MINISTERS MESSAGE

## Conversion Is an Act of Violence

Aggressive religion have no God-given right to destroy ancient faiths and cultures

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Religious conversion is a widely discussed topic in the Indian media these days. I think this issue needs to be thoroughly understood by all the people that count in every religion.

The world's religions can be categorically said to be either aggressive or nonaggressive. Each religion has a certain promise in the form of an ultimate goal. Their faithful people try to live the prescribed life and reach the promised goal. Neither they nor their clergy are out to bring the people of other religions to their flock. Zoroastrians follow their religious tradition without attempting to convert anybody to their religion. This is true with the followers of the Jewish tradition, Vedic religion (now known as Hinduism), Shintoism, Taoism and the many other religions of various tribes in the world. I call these religious traditions nonaggressive because they do not believe in aggressive conversion.

Then there are religions like Christianity, whose theologies, containing a number of basic nonverifiable beliefs, advocate conversion. Evangelism and proselytization are sacred commitments of the entire cadre of the highly organized clergy. The clergy-inspired laity are not any less committed to conversion. They are zealous in their mission of preaching and conversion. In their zeal, the end more often than not justifies the means. From the days of the Inquisition, every attempt recorded in history to stop their program of conversion only stoked their flame of zeal.

As a result, many religions with their unique cultures have disappeared, leaving behind only mammoth relics, like the ones in Greece and Mexico. The loss of such great living cultures of the world is the mark of success for the zealous of the aggressive religions. The truth is that where there should be a sense of guilt and remorse, there is a sense of achievement and pride. Many leaders of nonaggressive traditions think that the charity of the missionaries is designed to neutralize any protest from the native religious community. One cannot totally dismiss their thinking.

Religious conversion by missionary activity remains an act of violence. It is an act of violence because it hurts deeply, not only the other members of the family of the converted, but the entire community that comes to know of it. One is connected to various persons in one's world. The religious person in every individual is the innermost, inasmuch as he or she is connected to a force beyond the empirical. The religious person is connected only to the force beyond he has now accepted. That is the reason why the hurt caused by religion can turn into violence. That is why a religious belief can

motivate a missionary to be a martyr. When the hurt of the religious becomes acute, it explodes into violence. Conversion is violence. It generates violence.

Aggressive religions and nonaggressive religions are not on the same plank. Conversion is, therefore, a rank, one-sided aggression. The genius of the nonaggressive traditions cannot change, and therefore, they cannot be asked to do the same thing as the aggressive religions do.

Humanity cannot afford to lose any more of its existing living religious traditions and cultures. We want to enjoy the religious cultures of both Christianity and Islam as we also want to enjoy the cultures of Jews, Parsis, Taoists, Shintoists, Hindus and others. Humanity will not let a pyramid be razed to the ground by the Egyptian government to create a housing complex. Even though they are in Egypt, the pyramids are too ancient to be the property of that country. They are standing monuments of human genius--they belong to the whole of humanity. So, too, are all the monuments of the past lying all over the world.

Religion and culture are not often separable. This is especially true with the Hindu religious tradition. The greeting word, namaste, is an expression of culture as well as religion. Even though a religious mark on the forehead is purely religious, it is looked upon as a part of Hindu culture. Rangoli [patterns drawn on the ground with rice flour] at the entrance of a Hindu house is not just cultural; it is also religious. Indian music and dance cannot separate themselves from the Hindu religious tradition. There is no classical dance, bharata natyam, without Siva Nataraja being there. The classical, lyrical compositions of

Meera, Tyagaraja, Purandara, Dikshitar and many others are intimately connected to the Hindu religious traditions. Therefore, conversion implies destruction of this entire culture. A committed Christian will not wear a tilakam, much less have rangoli in front of the house. If there is no rangoli at the entrance to a Tamil Nadu house, we immediately know that it doesn't belong to a Hindu. A converted Christian woman ceases to wear Indian traditional clothes, like saris, etc. No Christian woman will wear a nose ring. It is amazing how easily cultures disappear by the program of conversion through various means, leaving only dead monuments to be preserved for posterity. The living religious traditions, intimately woven into the fabric of their respective cultures, have to be allowed to live and thrive. Religious conversion should stop--the aggressive religions should realize that they are perpetrating violence when they convert. We want them to live and let others live.

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