

Misusing the Word GOD

Religion, War and Bigotry in the Age of Globalization

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Theme: [Religion](#)

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2011 is the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible.

The most misused word in the English language may be the one spelled G-O-D. It is a word used freely and frequently by hundreds of millions of English-speaking people who belong to the Christian churches, and even as a curse word by many people.

But how many really understand the meaning behind that word? How many have truly attained the state of consciousness known as God-realization? How many instead use the word to justify various forms of bigotry against those they perceive as non-believers? Can it be that misuse of the word has even given the being or reality the word may represent a bad name?

Christians profess belief in the Bible. Yet the word "God" never appears in the original language of the Bible. Instead, such words as *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, *Ho Theos*, or *Ho Kurios* are used.

According to the *Reader's Digest Family Word Finder*, page 351, "Our word 'god' goes back via Germanic to Indo-European, in which a corresponding ancestor form meant 'invoked one.' The word's only surviving non-Germanic relative is Sanskrit *hu*." This form "appears in the *Rig Veda*, most ancient of Hindu scriptures [as] *puru-hutas*, 'much invoked,' epithet of the rain-and-thunder god Indra."

The word "God" found its way into English-language Christianity through such translations as the King James Bible of 1611. But its origins are decidedly both racial and "pagan." So in the most important word of their lexicon, Christians use a term that may be far-removed from the scriptures they profess to believe and often cite in looking down their noses at others.

What has probably done the most damage to the idea of "God" has been the use of religion by its adherents for the justification of war. Throughout history, more people have been slaughtered in the name of religion or its ideological derivatives than for any other cause. In this way, organized religion has often made itself repulsive to sensitive souls.

The charge has often been led by Christians of the West. Immense damage was done to religion by World War I, when Christian nations murdered each other by the millions. The damage continues in what is obviously a latter-day crusade being carried out today by the U.S. military, and whatever allies it can muster, against the Islamic world. This crusade has been cheered on by many Christians, even to the point of burning the Koran in public.

The churches have also had little to say in criticism of the predatory system of Western-based capitalism that has increasingly polarized the world. The rich live in ever-increasing luxury, while increasing numbers are consigned to low standards of living or a growing hell of unemployment, poverty, and even starvation. While the churches rail against homosexuality and abortion, they say little or nothing about the corporate greed that places profits over people or destroys the natural environment.

The hypocrisy of the Christian churches has led many to flee the usual denominations for alternative types of worship. This has included the formation of independent Christian congregations, reliance on the ethical standards inherent in secular humanism, or conversion to other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism.

Striking have been the emergence of movements such as the Nation of Islam among African-Americans, the spread of yoga as both a spiritual practice and way of life, and the widespread adoption of Buddhist forms of practice among the Western intelligentsia. Also notable are the growth of the Sufi movement, the revival of indigenous forms of spirituality, especially among Native Americans of the Western hemisphere, and the search among Christians for their authentic roots by study of the Essenes, the Gnostics, and early Jewish Christian teachings.

One development dating from the 1960s is the Madonna House apostolate within the Roman Catholic Church that brings the Orthodox Russian practices of the prayer of the heart and *poustinia* into a Western context. Another important source of teachings is the Spiritis movement, deriving, it says, from direct appearances of Jesus Christ himself to its adherents, resulting not only in new and vibrant explanations of Christian scripture but also integration of spirituality with scientific discoveries in unified field theory.

Spiritualism too has played a role through such figures as Edgar Cayce, the appearance of channeled teachings like *A Course in Miracles*, and even the search among accounts of extraterrestrial contacts for the spiritual messages therein.

Faced with this plethora of new avenues of profound soul-searching, the standard Christian denominations often have little to say, except to retreat more deeply into doctrinaire interpretations of scriptures they do not really seem to understand. No wonder Gandhi said: "I like your Christ. But I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ."

But what all these movements point to is that in spite of the rejection by many of the forms of religion historically practiced in the West, the search for spiritual meaning and experience has never been stronger. So the likelihood remains that whatever the truth may be that hides behind the word "God," it is a truth that continually calls to humanity for its exploration, understanding, and expression. For many, this search for truth has become a living fire.

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