

CHRISTIANITY IN THE EYES OF PANDIT JAWAHARAL NEHRU

Extracts from *Glimpses of World History*

Differences of opinions created havoc

Instead of understanding and following the teachings of Jesus, the Christians argued and quarrelled about the nature of Jesus' Divinity and about the Trinity. They called each other heretics and prosecuted each other and cut each other's heads off. There was a great and violent controversy at one time among different Christian sects over a certain diphthong. One party said the word Homousion should be used in a prayer; the other wanted Homoiousion; this difference had reference to the Divinity of Jesus. Over this diphthong, fierce war was raged and large numbers of people were slaughtered (pp. 86-87).

Even the children were not spared

About this time, the Inquisition, that terrible weapon which the Roman Church forged to crush all who did not bow down to it, was established in Spain. Jews, who had prospered under the Saracens, were now forced to change their religion and many were burnt to death. Women and children were not spared (p.191).

Restrictions on bathing

The Christians even went so far as to issue orders "for the reformation of the Moriscos" or Moors or Arabs, that neither themselves, their women, nor any other persons should be permitted to wash or bathe themselves either at home or elsewhere; and that all their bathing houses should be pulled down and destroyed (p. 191).

Christian Crusaders came to fight and mostly to die in the "holy" land. This long warfare yielded no substantial results to the Crusaders. For a short while Jerusalem was in their hands, but later it went back to the Turks, and there it remained. The chief result of the Crusades was to bring death and misery to millions of Christians and Muslims and again to soak Asia Minor and Palestine with human blood (p. 193).

The blood river in Jerusalem

The Crusaders at last managed to reach Palestine under a Norman, Godfrey of Bouillon. Jerusalem fell to them and then the "carnage lasted for a week." There was a terrible massacre. A French eyewitness of this says that "under the portico of the Mosque the blood was knee-deep, reached the horse's bridles." Godfrey became King of Jerusalem (p. 194).

Flamed the city

One batch of Crusaders went to Constantinople and took possession of it. They drove out the Greek Emperor of the Eastern Empire and established a Latin Kingdom and the Roman Church. Terrible massacres also took place in Constantinople and the city itself was partly burnt by the Crusaders (pp. 194-195).

The most destructive

These Christian Knights did more injury to Christian Constantinople than any infidel had done. From this great catastrophe the Empire and the city of Constantinople never recovered (p. 202).

Hanged the preacher

As early as 1155, the wrath of the Church fell on a popular and earnest preacher, Arnold of Brescia, in Italy. Arnold preached against the corruptions and luxury of the clergy. He was seized and hanged and then his dead body was burnt and the ashes were thrown into the river Tiber so that people might not keep them as relics! To the last Arnold was constant and calm (p. 229).

Disgusting cruelty and frightfulness

The popes even went so far as to declare whole groups and Christian sects, who differed in some small matter of belief or who criticized the clergy too much, as outcasts. Regular crusades proclaimed against these people and every kind of disgusting cruelty and frightfulness was practised against them (p. 229).

Sages and monks burnt alive

About this time ... there lived a man in Italy who is one of the most attractive figures in Christianity. He was Francis of Assisi. He was a rich man who gave up his riches and, taking a vow of poverty, went out into the world to serve the sick and the poor. And because lepers were the most unhappy and uncared for, he devoted himself especially to them. He founded an order of St. Francis; it is called something like the Sangha of the Buddha. He went about preaching and serving from place to place, trying to live as Christ had lived. Great numbers of people came to him, and many became his disciples. He even went to Egypt and Palestine, while the Crusades were going on. But, Christian as he was, the Muslims respected this gentle and lovable person, and did not interfere with him in any way. He lived from 1181 to 1226. His Order came into conflict with the high officials of the Church after his death. Perhaps the Church did not fancy this stress on life of poverty. They had outgrown this primitive Christian doctrine. Four Franciscan friars were burnt alive as heretics in Marseilles in 1318 (p. 229).

Burning of men and women

The Church started the reign of violence in religion, formally and officially, in 1233, by starting what is called the Inquisition. This was a kind of court which inquired into the orthodoxy of people's beliefs, and if they did not come up to the standard, their usual punishment was death by burning. There was a regular hunt for "heretics" and hundreds of them were burnt at the stake. Even worse than this burning was the torture inflicted on them to make them recant: many poor unfortunate women were accused of being witches and were burnt (p. 230).

Condemnation of science

The Pope issued an "Edict of Faith" calling upon every man to be an informer! He condemned chemistry and called it a diabolical art. And all this violence and terror was done in all honesty. They believed that by burning the man at the stake, they were saving his soul or the souls of other people (p. 230).

Even the bones were burnt

One of the men who started criticizing the Church rather freely was Wycliffe, an Englishman. He was a clergyman and a professor at Oxford. He is famous as the first translator of the Bible into English. He managed to escape the anger of Rome during his lifetime, but in 1415, thirty-one years after his death, a Church Council ordered that his bones should be dug up and burnt! And this was done (p. 231).

Although Wycliffe's bones were desecrated and burnt, his views could not easily be stifled, and they spread. They even reached far Bohemia, or Czechoslovakia as it is called now, and influenced John Huss, who became the head of the Prague University. He was excommunicated by the Pope for his

views, but they could do little to him in his native town as he was very popular. So they played a trick on him. He was given a safe conduct by the Emperor and invited to Constance in Switzerland, where a Church Council was sitting. He went. He was told to confess his error. He refused to do so unless he was convinced of it. And then, in spite of their promise and safe conduct, they burnt him alive. This was in 1415 A.C. Huss was a very brave man and he preferred a painful death to saying what he knew to be false. He died a martyr to freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. He is one of the heroes of the Czech people and his memory is honoured to this day in Czechoslovakia (p. 231).

The Maid of Orleans was burnt

You know something of Jeanne d'Arc (or Joan of Arc), the Maid of Orleans. She is a heroine of yours. She gave confidence to her dispirited people and inspired them to great endeavour and under her lead they drove out the English from their country. But for all this the reward she got was a trial and sentence of the Inquisition and the stake. The English got hold of her, and they made the Church condemn her and then in the market-place of Rouen they burnt her in 1430 (p. 235).

The Japanese ordered to quit

But soon enough the Japanese came to feel that these missionaries were dangerous, and immediately they changed their policy and tried to drive them out. As early as 1587 an anti-Christian decree was issued ordering all missionaries to leave Japan within twenty days on pain of death. This was not aimed at merchants. It was stated that merchants could remain and trade, but if they brought a missionary on their ships, both the ship and the goods in it would be confiscated. This decree was passed for purely political reasons. Hideyoshi scented danger. He felt that the missionaries and their converts might become politically dangerous. And he was not much mistaken (p. 272).

The *Manilla Galleon*, which you may remember used to go once a year between the Philippines and Spanish America, was driven by a typhoon onto the Japanese coast. The Spanish captain tried to frighten the local Japanese by showing them a map of the world and especially pointing out the vast possessions of the Spanish King. The captain was asked how Spain had managed to get this huge empire. Nothing so simple, he replied. The missionaries went first, and when there were many converts, soldiers were sent to combine with the converts and overthrow the government. When a report of this reached Hideyoshi he was not over pleased and became still more bitter against the missionaries. He allowed the *Manilla Galleon* to go, but he had some of the missionaries and their converts put to death (p. 273).

Missionaries were forcibly driven out and Japanese converts were made to give up Christianity. Even the commercial policy changed, so afraid were the Japanese of the political designs of the foreigners. At any cost they wanted to keep the foreigner out (p. 273).

One can understand this reaction of the Japanese. What surprises one is that they should have been penetrating enough to spot the wolf of imperialism in the sheep's clothing of religion, even though they had little intercourse with Europeans. In later years and in other countries, we know how religion has been exploited by the European Powers for their own aggrandizement (p. 273).

Giordano Bruno, an Italian, was burnt in Rome by the Church in 1600 for insisting that the earth went round the sun and the stars were themselves suns. A contemporary of his, Galileo, who made the telescope, was also threatened by the Church, but he was weaker than Bruno and thought it more expedient to recant. So he admitted to the Church that he was mistaken in his folly and that the earth was of course the centre of the universe, and the sun went round it. Even so, he had to

spend some time in prison doing penance (p. 279).

Do you remember the great monument to the Reformation in the Park at Geneva? The huge expanse of wall with statues of Calvin and others? Calvin was so intolerant that he burnt many persons because they simply did not agree with him and were free thinkers (p.284).

Luther, the Great Reformer

Luther, the Great Reformer, what was his attitude? Did he side with the poor peasants and support their just demands? Not he! On the peasants' demand that serfdom should end, Luther, said. "This article would make all men equal and so change the spiritual Kingdom of Christ into an external worldly one! Impossible! An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of persons. Some must be free, other serfs, some rulers, other subjects." He curses the peasants and calls for their destruction. "Therefore let all who are able hew them down, slaughter and stab them, openly or in secret, and remember that there is nothing more poisonous, noxious and utterly diabolical than a rebel. You must kill him as you would a mad dog" (p. 284).

All that it cared for was religion of the most bigoted and cruel kind. All over the country the Inquisition flourished and the most horrible tortures were inflicted on so-called heretics. From time to time great public festivals were arranged when batches of these "heretics" – men and women – were burnt alive in huge pyres in the presence of the king and royal family and ambassadors and thousands of people. *Autosdafa*, acts of faith, these public burnings were called. Terrible and monstrous all this seems. The whole history of Europe of this period is so full of violence and horrible and barbarous cruelty and religious bigotry as to be almost unbelievable (p. 289-290).

Philip tried to crush the privileges of the cities as well as the new religion. He sent as Governor General the Duke of Alva, who had become famous for his oppression and tyranny. The Inquisition was established, and a "Blood council," which sent thousands to the stake or the scaffold (p. 292).

The Inquisition actually condemned in one sentence in 1568, all the inhabitants of the Netherlands to death as heretics, with a few named exceptions. This was an amazing sentence, unique in history – three or four lines condemning 300,000 people.

England escaped the bitter religious struggles of the Continent. There was a great deal of religious conflict and rioting and bigotry, and a scandalous number of women were burnt alive because they were considered to be witches (p. 296).

Kang Hi was quite favourable to Christianity and Christian missionaries. He encouraged foreign trade and threw open all the ports of China to it. But soon he discovered that the Europeans misbehaved and had to be kept in check. He suspected the missionaries, not without good reason, of intriguing with the imperialists of their home governments to facilitate conquest. This made him give up his tolerant attitude to Christianity. His suspicions were confirmed later by a report received from a Chinese military officer at Canton. In this report it was pointed out how close the connection was in the Philippines and in Japan between European governments and their merchants and missionaries. The officer therefore recommended that in order to safeguard the Empire from invasion and foreign intrigue, foreign trade should be restricted and the spread of Christianity stopped (p. 329).

The bitter religious wars between Catholic and Protestant, the intolerance of both the Catholic and the Calvinist, and the Inquisition all resulted from this intense religious and communal outlook. Think of it! Many hundreds of thousands of women are said to have been burnt in Europe as

witches, mostly by Puritans. New ideas in science were suppressed because these were supposed to be in conflict with the Church's view of things. It was a static, an unchanging view of life: there was no question of progress (p. 337).

This growth of toleration and rationalism in Europe was a slow process; it was not helped much at first by books, as people were afraid to criticize Christianity publicly. To do so meant imprisonment or some other punishment. A German philosopher was banished from Prussia because he had praised Confucius too much. This was interpreted as a slight on Christianity (p. 338).

The most famous writer of the time on rationalistic and other subjects was Voltaire, a Frenchman who was imprisoned and banished, and who ultimately lived at Ferney near Geneva. When in prison he was not allowed paper or ink, so he wrote verses with pieces of lead between the lines of a book (p. 338).

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