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Trends. Religious Killing: Going By the Book

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One of the more unfortunate social phenomena in India since its nation-state inception has been the frequency and intensity of religion-based killing and desecrating. Most often involving Hindus against Moslems, the killing has also reached Sikhs--leading to the reactive assassination of Prime Minister Indira Ghandi--and Christians among others. Most recently making the international news have been stories of Hindus burning down a Christian school, demolishing another, stoning a church, murdering two priests, assaulting nuns, and seeking to set up a Christian-free zone.

A recent Hindu contributor to The New York Times has posited that the motivation for this violence rests on Hinduism not being based on a central, sacred text--unlike Islam and Christianity. Without such a text--so the argument goes--Hindus too easily conflate its religion with a sense of pure nationalism and a heightened sensitivity to those outside the nation. Violence is a too frequent result.

The problems with such an argument are at least two-fold. First, the notion of Christianity and Islam not being conflated with nationalism is easily belied by the killing engendered by Crusaders and Islamic theocracies. Second, belief systems among religions that fuel religion-based killing most often share malignant images of the enemy and outsiders regardless of the presence or absence of a central, sacred text. Explanatory vehicles for religion-based killing lie more within a primitive psychology of self versus other and--as some neopsychoanalysts would posit--object relations than in following murder by the word or number or lack thereof. (See Helminiak, D.A. (1997). Killing for God's sake: The spiritual crisis in religion and society. *Pastoral Psychology*, 45, 365-374; Persinger, M.A. (1997). "I would kill in God's name:" Role of sex, weekly church attendance, report of a religious experience and limbic lability. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 85, 128-130; Varadarajan, T. (January 11, 1999). Deadly zeal in India. *The New York Times*, p. A21.) (Keywords: Hinduism, India, Nationalism, Religion, Religious Violence.)