

The Age of Intolerance

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

IN the sixteenth century, Polish astronomer/scientist Copernicus formulated a model of the universe that put the sun at the centre of the solar system. This was a revolutionary moment in the history of human civilisation -- the model, known as the heliocentric model, negated the previous notion that the earth was at the center of the universe and thus challenged the centuries-old, well-entrenched concepts propagated by theologians and astronomers. The Roman Catholic Church issued a decree suspending Copernicus' theory as "against the scriptures" and convicted another great astronomer/scientist Galileo Galilei's suspicion of heresy for supporting the heliocentric model. It was 200 years later that the works of Newton and other scientists brought the Copernican debate to a closure proving his theory to be correct. Subsequently, the Church accepted the Copernicus model.

have failed to free us from the basic instincts of bigotry, intolerance and vengeance. Our contemporary world is characterised by conflicts, religious fanaticism, racial abuse and socio-economic injustices. Each year, thousands are mercilessly killed, discriminated against and marginalised only because their beliefs do not conform to those of their detractors.

A few examples may illustrate this phenomenon more concretely. In Bangladesh, several secularist writers, bloggers, academics and activists have been brutally hacked to death over the last three years. The heinous acts were purportedly committed by religious extremists, determined to eliminate citizens who they believe challenge their orthodox beliefs. In the United States, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential candidate, publicly spews hatred against ethnic and religious groups and recent immigrants. His hate rhetoric has reinvigorated Islamophobia, ethnic discrimination and racial tensions. We have also seen on our screens "peace loving" Buddhist monks in Myanmar killing unarmed Rohingyas and pillaging their villages.

Unfortunately, globalisation and improved access to information have failed to promote tolerance/acceptance for diverse ideas, customs and faiths. Instead the internet and social media are being employed to inflame religious sentiments and recruit extremists to radical causes. It is indeed sad that despite all its contributions to humanity, the progress of science and rational thought has failed to provide human beings with a moral compass. Science tells us how and why but has not helped us change our attitudes to become more compassionate to our fellow humans.

Technology has given us power, but has not guided us as to how to use that power for creating a more balanced and

harmonious world. About five hundred years ago, Copernicus and his followers transcended the barrier of religious dogmas and prejudices and gifted the world with an idea that challenged hard-core beliefs. In the 16th Century, Martin Luther shook the foundations of the Catholic faith by questioning its basic tenets and publicly protesting against its rituals. The Protestant Reformation was in fact aided by technological advances in the establishment of the Gutenberg printing press, which ensured the rapid dissemination of reformatory ideas in Christianity. Similarly, the free discourse of religion during Emperor Akbar's reign (1556-1605) inculcated tolerance and led to harmony amongst his subjects belonging to different faiths. It is ironic that today, hundreds of years later, we are stuck in a mind warp where people are killed for raising questions about their religious practices and traditions. Unfortunately, prejudice and bigotry have taken control of our better instincts and extremist acts and killings are often committed for a so-called "sacred cause" or in the name of high ideals.

Reason alone will not win this battle. Nor will scientific theories, discoveries or invocations of words like "freedom" and "democracy." And, all the military interventions in the world will not stem the escalating violence. We need a generation of dedicated leaders and educators who embrace the world in its diversity, promote multiculturalism and interpret sacred texts with maximal generosity. At a fundamental level, the real clash today is not between civilisations or religions, but between the good and evil in man. It's time for another Copernican revolution -- one that aims at toppling well-entrenched biases and beliefs and emancipating the human mind.

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.



IMAGE: STEVEN DEPOLO

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International Mother's Day Say it More



PHOTO: MOTHER AND CHILD, JAMINI ROY

TULIP CHOWDHURY

IN the old home, the octogenarian mother was smiling ear to ear, her toothless gums slurping over the words as she talked to her son over the phone. A colourful greeting card she held trembled, as her hand stricken with Parkinson's started to shake.

"Thank you son for the beautiful card, so glad you called..." she paused as if to take breath, adding, "I love you, you know."

Looking at her face, I could tell that on that very moment she was reborn by words from her son for International Mothers' Day. The son lived in another part of the world. He didn't miss calling her on the occasion dedicated to all mothers. In fact, for many busy sons and daughters, it is the day they say hello to their mothers in one way or the other. The mothers too wait, happy to hear from the children, even if that was an annual thing. Though, a mother gives each moment of her thoughts to raising her child, from cradle to road, she does not expect anything in return. The awesome, unconditional love of mothers has no comparisons.

As a mother, I don't think I could have borne this annual 'one time' hearing of my child's voice. I am lucky to be surrounded by my children, but life is what it is. If it came to a monthly or annual getting in touch with children, I too would have to accept, if that was how it worked for them. As parents we want what's best for our children. We know they love us and also realise that they may be unable to be in touch frequently. This trust in love gives us roots to life as age creeps in.

On the other hand, I wonder if, for the sake of the non-demanding parents or mothers who do not interfere in the lives of their

children, sending a card or making a call should be a monthly or a weekly occasion. Better still, a daily routine before going to sleep. A phone call or a short visit: any gesture of love lights up their whole being. In the sunset years of their lives, our love is like new dawns to their frail bodies and minds.

We are so taken with the hassles of life that often the call to the aging mother or father does not happen. But we pay the monthly bills on time because there are consequences to that. Parents don't hold us accountable for being silent. It is human nature to be more active when there is fear or reward. Our elderly parents may have spent their savings and energy on raising us without any expectations. It is our turn to give them selflessly.

When we take the presence of our parents for granted, we veil our gratefulness. Expressing gratitude is a way of life and it must be sanctimonious with our parents. The mother is the life-giver whom we can never thank enough. There simply aren't words to express precisely how grateful we are to our mothers. Kahlil Gibran has said: "It is when you give of yourself that you truly give."

A mother is the living example of such 'giving'. Months of carrying the baby in the womb, the pain of motherhood, every drop of milk for nursing the baby, each blink of sleepless nights in caring for the newborn: the list goes on. We can never repay our mothers, even if we send her wishes or wealth every day. A mother does not expect returns but is happy only with a touch of love. I cringe to myself when I cannot do enough for the body that gave me life, for the soul that keeps me tethered to love.

Before houses and cars, social recognitions and titles, our mission should be to fill our mothers' life with endless joy.

Celebrating motherhood and honouring mothers prevailed among ancient Greeks and Romans. Although in the modern world, over 40 countries hold yearly celebrations, one would think that it is not doing justice to mothers world over. Fathers' Day, Daughters' Day and others are fine with annual toasts, but the mother is no way on the same footing.

With the age of the internet, science and technology, we have updated countless information to ease life. Surely the age old annual celebration of Mothers' Day needs an updating? At this remarkable time of life, when women rule the world with fire and ice, we should give them the applause they deserve, and do so without a quota to merge them with others. They are above other blessings that keep us alive, make us who we are.

Let us connect to the bedridden mother in the old home or the far away village every first day of the month just to say, 'I love you.' That should be our answer to our hearts' call. Many of us do that already. We hold our mothers every day, just as they did when we were babies. When we bestow love on our mothers, heaven also smiles and our life fills with divine light.

Don't wait for Mothers' Day to wish her; she may not be there then. Let each heartbeat remember her so that love soars high like the infinite blue of the sky. No, those are not the words that really hold my thoughts. 'Ma, I love you' is really beyond words to express.

The writer writes from Massachusetts, USA.

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QUOTABLE Quote



WILLIAM FAULKNER

"Given the choice between the experience of pain and nothing, I would choose pain."

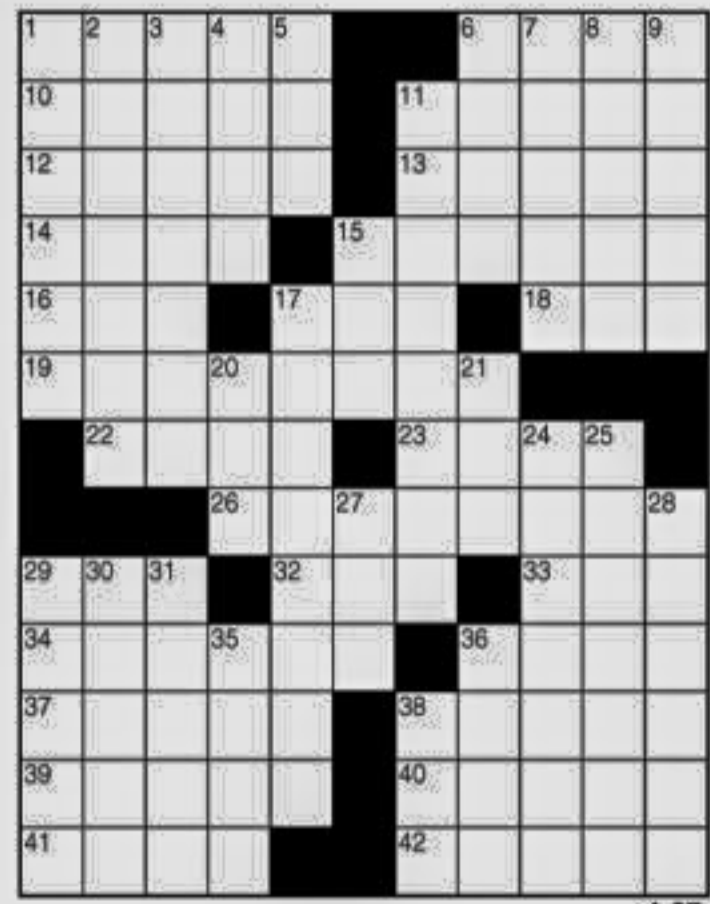
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Javelin
- 6 Substandard
- 10 Door feature
- 11 Soak
- 12 Almanac section
- 13 Patriot Allen
- 14 Pesters
- 15 Stick
- 16 Seventh Greek letter
- 17 Sort
- 18 Bitterly cold
- 19 Hardly concise
- 22 Barking beast
- 23 Honolulu setting
- 26 Subway sound
- 29 Bar bill
- 32 Urgent call
- 33 2016 Olympics host
- 34 Lined up
- 36 Retro style
- 37 Track athlete
- 38 Mexican money
- 39 School paper
- 40 Love to Luigi
- 41 Start a hand
- 42 Marie's brother

DOWN

- 1 Black eye
- 2 Targets at parties
- 3 Mating time
- 4 Gets older
- 5 Mystery author Stout
- 6 Trail
- 7 Different
- 8 "Pal Joey" writer
- 9 Make fresh
- 11 Partner of broomsticks in a 1971 movie
- 15 Clay, later
- 17 Imagined
- 20 Hotel feature
- 21 Lass
- 24 Employs
- 25 Tapestry subject
- 27 Do yard work
- 28 Silly
- 29 Like some tests
- 30 Biscotti flavor
- 31 Light wood
- 35 Genuine
- 36 Band sample
- 38 Jotting need



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PAPAS SPEAR
ELITE PADRE
APPLICATION
CHE ZEN TUT
HASTENS ISA
OUT JOEL
TAGUP WENDS
HURT MAD
ETA PATIENT
POP ART LOO
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