

CONFESSING

THE FAITH IN INDIA :: NO. 6

THE WITNESS OF S. K. GEORGE

K. THOMAS

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The Series on Confessing the Faith in India consists of studies in the theology of prominent Indian Christian thinkers who have sought to express Christian faith against the background of Indian life and culture.

In *The Witness of S. K. George* Mr T. K. Thomas takes up the study of a man of sterling moral and intellectual integrity who, having been brought up in the evangelical Christian tradition, discovered in Gandhian Satyagraha the supreme example of the application of the Cross. The fact of Gandhi challenged his Christian confession. Responding to it, George sought to understand afresh the meaning of his own faith, its relation with other faiths, and its bearings on social and political questions.

To understand and evaluate the response of men like S. K. George to the challenge of Indian nationalism and Gandhian Satyagraha is an essential part of Indian Christian theological enterprise.

**DATA ENTERED**

**CATALOGUED**

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THE WITNESS OF S. K. GEORGE



**THE WITNESS OF  
S. K. GEORGE**

T. K. THOMAS

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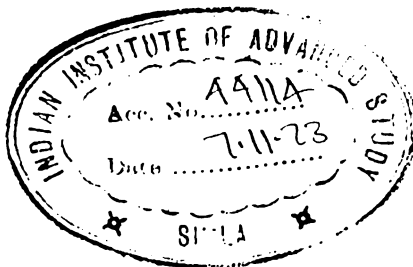
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Madras

25 April 1970

T. K. THOMAS

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## PREFACE

A living theology is much more than the translation of credal and confessional formularies. These traditional formularies are themselves the result of the Church's encounter with its environments in times past, and they are a goodly heritage of the Church, in India as elsewhere. But they are valuable to us here in India precisely in the measure in which the Indian Church seeks to confess Christ in the context of the thought-forms and life-situations of its own setting. As a statement of the East Asia Christian Conference puts it:

A living theology must speak to the actual questions men in Asia are asking in the midst of their dilemmas; their hopes, aspirations and achievements; their doubts, despair and suffering. It must also speak in relation to the answers that are being given by Asian religions and philosophies, both in their classical form and in new forms created by the impact on them of Western thought, secularism and science. Christian theology will fulfil its task in Asia only as the Asian churches, as servants of God's Word and revelation in Jesus Christ, speak to the Asian situation and from involvement in it.

This is the rationale behind our search for an Indian Christian Theology.

A discriminating appropriation of the insights of Christian individuals and movements that have contributed to this search in the past is an integral part of our own search today. These men and movements had entered into serious dialogue with the religions and secular cultures of the land, both in their classical forms and in their renascent phases. Many of them tried to clarify to themselves and to others the truth and meaning of their Christian faith, from within their dialogical situation. We are only beginning today to recognise the relevance of their insights.

In this series of books, to which we have given the general title *Confessing the Faith in India*, we seek to present brief interpretative studies of these pioneers, with selections from their writings.

The first four books in the series were *The Theology of Chenchiah* by D. A. Thangasamy, *The Theology of Chakkarai* by P. T. Thomas, *The Theology of Goreh* by Balwant A. M. Paradkar, and *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* by Kaj Baago. They dealt with the manner in which Christian thinkers sought to confess their faith in Christ in relation to the religious and cultural milieu in India.

The fifth book in the series, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* by M. M. Thomas, took up the issues posed by the Neo-Hindu leaders from Rammohan Roy to Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan and Gandhiji in their grappling with the person of Jesus Christ and the historical phenomenon of Christianity. It also dealt with the dialogue that was carried on by some of the Christian thinkers with these Hindu leaders, thus making explicit the dialogical framework of Indian Christian theological enterprise.

In the present book T. K. Thomas takes up the study of a man of sterling moral and intellectual integrity who, having been brought up in the evangelical Christian tradition, discovered in Gandhian Satyagraha the supreme example of the application of the Cross. The fact of Gandhi challenged his Christian confession. Responding to it, George sought to understand afresh the meaning of his own faith, its relation with other faiths, and its bearings on social and political questions.

To understand and evaluate the response of men like S. K. George to the challenge of Indian nationalism and Gandhian Satyagraha is an essential part of Indian Christian theological enterprise.

M. M. THOMAS

T. K. THOMAS

*Editors*



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# INTRODUCTION



## Early Years

Srampical Kuruvilla George was born on March 10, 1900, in a Syrian Christian family in Kottayam. His father was a cloth merchant in the town, an upright man and a loyal member of the Church. George dedicated his book *The Story of the Bible* to the memory of his father 'whose resonant readings from the Bible in home and church,' he wrote, 'first instilled in me my love of "The Book".'

George grew up in the pious if closed atmosphere of the Anglican Communion under the C.M.S. Church. In a paper he presented in 1949 to the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Fellowship of Friends of Truth, he testified to his Christian upbringing. 'Church and Sunday School, morning and evening family prayer, with systematic reading of the scriptures, constituted the atmosphere in which I grew up.'<sup>1</sup>

He had his collegiate education at the C.M.S. College, Kottayam, and at the Madras Christian College where he took his Honours Degree in English Language and Literature. It was during his college days that he came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Society of Friends, the Sarvodaya and the Fellowship of Friends of Truth', in *The FFT Quarterly*, Vol. VII, Nos. 1 and 2, (S. K. George Souvenir, hereafter called *Souvenir*), 21.

George was an earnest young man who took his faith seriously. He had from early years wanted to serve the cause of Christ in India. It was his innate idealism that made him give up the teaching job he had taken up in a government school in Quilon and join the Ernakulam Church as a catechist.

It was about this time that he met, and married, Mary George. They were a devoted couple, committed to each other and to the noble causes to which they gave their whole life. George never thought in terms of money or position, and he never compromised his vision or his ideals. Consequently his was a life of poverty and suffering, made up, in fact of a series of experiments in integrity. Mary stood by him through all these, and theirs was truly a partnership in privation.

When George was 24, he was sent by the Church to Calcutta to study theology at the Bishop's College. He took the Serampore B.D. Degree, but by then he had developed serious doubts about the orthodox theological position of the Church. He could not accept, for instance, the exclusive divinity of Christ. This meant that Christian ministry was closed to him. For a year he served as lecturer in English at Noble College, Masulipatnam.

Bishop Pakenham-Walsh, who was at that time Principal of Bishop's College, offered George a tutorship at the College. For three years he taught there, in the fields of Philosophy of Religion and History of Religions. His serious involvement in the national struggle dates from this period. On the publication, in 1932, of his manifesto entitled *India in Travail*, George was compelled to resign his post in the College.

### Conversion to Nationalism

The organised church in India was at no time entirely sympathetic towards the national struggle. There were, of course, individual Christians who took an active and creative part in

the nation's fight for freedom, but their participation was as private individuals; it was primarily personal commitment, not involvement as a community, that drove them into the ranks of freedom-fighters. It would appear that George was not content to leave the realisation of the legitimate aspirations of the nation to sporadic personal decisions. He wanted the Church to take a stand. And the Church obviously could not take a stand that appeared to subvert order and the rule of law. When it made official pronouncements, as occasionally it did, they seemed to support the *status quo*. This was certainly true of the letter that Metropolitan Foss Westcott published in the *Calcutta Diocesan Record* in 1930. The Metropolitan was sympathetic towards the national aspirations of India, but he did not approve of agitation, whether non-violent or otherwise, and he condemned the whole Civil Disobedience Movement. George reacted sharply to this letter and wrote a strongly worded reply to the Metropolitan, 'as a member of the Church of India'. He said in it:

I fail to be impressed by, or to understand, your Lordship's comparison of the British Government in India to the Laws of Nature. The analogy doesn't hold at all, for while the Laws of Nature are ordained of God we cannot grant that all of any man-made systems of government have the same fixity, sanction or sanctity. Your Lordship's argument from the analogy of the Laws of Nature would rule out all attempts at reforming or seeking to annul any system of government, once it has been established in authority, however, unjust it may be. It is only by mending or ending unjust ordinances and institutions that mankind has progressed. One striking biblical parallel suggests itself to me whenever I think of Gandhi, viz. that of Moses leading the revolt

of Israelites, creating disaffection among them against constituted authority and leading them to independence. Moses would stand condemned by your Lordship's argument from the analogy of the Laws of Nature.<sup>1</sup>

George went on to point out that the Metropolitan's letter contained no condemnation whatever of the policies and practices of the British Government, and he vindicated the role of Gandhiji in the nation's struggle for independence. He was absolutely convinced of the justice of the national cause and concluded his letter on a biblical note of warning: 'Therefore, be not found fighting against God.'

The Metropolitan's reply to this letter was not calculated to win back the loyalty of George. He maintained his earlier position—that to offer Civil Disobedience was un-Christian, and that the Government had every right to use force in order to enforce the laws of the country. The tone of the letter was unconciliatory. To take just one example:

When you ask me to believe that the government under Lord Irwin, the most Christian Viceroy who has ever presided over the destinies of this country, is inhuman and unjust, you are simply showing that you have been led away by the unscrupulous lying propaganda which is responsible for so much of the evil in India at the present time.<sup>2</sup>

The Metropolitan characterised Civil Disobedience as 'the way of riot and bloodshed'. He was indeed on thin ground when he wrote:

I always understood that (Moses) went with the full permission of Pharaoh. It is true that Pharaoh repented,

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence between S. K. George and Lord Bishop in *Souvenir*.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

according to the Old Testament narrative, of the permission given, but his pursuit was arrested not by the violence of Moses but by what is recorded as an act of God.<sup>1</sup>

George's reply to this letter is included in full in the *Selections* that follow (p. 90). It brings out the intensity of his inner struggle during those days of great and strong passions.

In *India in Travail* George urged the Christians in India to identify themselves with the national struggle and to cooperate whole-heartedly in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Satyagraha was 'the Cross in Action', he said, and Gandhiji was the true follower of Christ. The Bengal Government took legal action against the publishers of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in whose columns George's manifesto had been published. It is a little surprising that George himself was not arrested.

For some time, after resigning from Bishop's College, George was without a job. The Georges had two children, a son and a daughter, and Mary George went with the children to live with her parents in the South. George issued another statement entitled *A Personal Conviction*, which was widely circulated among his friends. In it he explained the circumstances in which he resigned from the College. The document is important because it is basically George's *apologia*; in it we notice both the disarming clarity of his political convictions and the inherent ambiguity in his theological thinking.

. . . . I believe that the Spirit of God is moving mightily to establish the foundations of the Kingdom of God in this land . . . . the church with its commitments, its alliances with vested interests, its natural conservatism and, unfortunately in India, its foreign leadership, was not to

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 8.

be expected to welcome such a radical thing as the Kingdom of God coming in power, particularly when God's chosen agent for it happens to be one outside its own fold. For it is my conviction that Mahatma Gandhi today is a worker for the Kingdom of God, perhaps the greatest force working for it here or anywhere else. . .

Believing as I do that the Indian Satyagraha is the Cross in action and that it gives Jesus Christ His greatest opportunity to enter the heart of a remade India, I held it to be my highest duty, both towards the College and the Church in India, to identify myself entirely with this non-violent movement, based absolutely on Truth and seeking solely to establish Peace on Earth and Goodwill among men. . . . I fully trust the church in India will not continue in its present apathy and will not finally miss the great opportunity to take her religion and her Lord right into the heart of new India in the making, and thus win for Him the devotion of this dear Mother of us all. . . .<sup>1</sup>

### **In the wilderness**

George knew that his decision to leave Bishop's College would mean that he must now, in his own words, 'wander into wilderness'—not an inapt description of his subsequent career. He went to Gandhiji's ashram in Sabarmati and lived there for a period. Gandhiji himself was in jail at the time but they exchanged letters, and George's loyalty to the Mahatma grew stronger as the years went by. But these years were years of struggle and unsettlement. Writing to one of his friends in 1940 he said about this period of his life:

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 4 f.



The years following my resignation from my College in Calcutta were years of loneliness and struggle. I wandered about seeking an institute or a group I could attach myself to. In spite of my political sympathies, I felt politics was not my main interest, and in religion I could find no helpful affiliation. I stayed in Mahatma Gandhi's ashram for some time, and also tried two or three centres of Christian work. But I did not find my home in any of these. During these years, my wife who had stood by me wonderfully, accepting the uncertainties of life, took special training in Kindergarten teaching and we started a school in Trivandrum. It was a pioneering effort, Kindergartens being new in this part of India. We kept up the school for over five years, and then handed it over to the local branch of the All India Women's Conference, because of my wife's poor health and lack of funds. For me this was a period of great trial, trying to earn a living through teaching in my wife's school, through a little tutoring and journalistic work, all the time struggling to maintain my intellectual integrity and my right to existence even, as an independent and unattached Christian in this very orthodoxy-ridden part of the world. Teaching and other institutional work controlled by either government or orthodox missions were practically closed to me because of my free thinking, politically and religiously. But I was all this time making contact with non-Christian friends, many of them sharing to the full my religious and political convictions.<sup>1</sup>

In 1936 their little daughter died—'due to near-starvation', according to Bishop Pakenham-Walsh. The Bishop has com-

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, xiv.

mented, in moving terms, on George's 'lone life of sacrifice—far greater than any jail—involving years of extreme poverty in spite of heroic efforts to earn a livelihood through the talents of both wife and husband. Their work was accepted, but hardly paid for. . .'<sup>1</sup>

George helped with the organization of the Inter-Religious Student Fellowship. In 1938 he went to Manchester College, Oxford, for a year, at the invitation of the General Assembly of Unitarians. It was during his stay in Oxford that he wrote his first book, *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*.

Back in India George continued his wanderings, espousing one good cause after another. In 1942 the Gorges settled down in Koorkancherry near Trichur in Kerala. He helped with the work of the Inter-Religious Fellowship; he did some tutorial work; he wrote a good deal, including his delightful little life of Christ.

In 1946 George went to work at Shantiniketan, while Mary George stayed back in Kerala, having been persuaded by Gandhiji to take over charge of the Kasturba Trust work. George's resignation from Shantiniketan was a characteristic gesture; when the authorities decided to introduce military training in the institution George decided to quit.

In 1950-56 George served as Lecturer in English at the Wardha Commerce College. During this period he was also Secretary of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth and Editor of *The FFT Quarterly*.

It was when George was working in Wardha that the Madhya Pradesh Government appointed him as a Member of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Dr M. B. Niyogi. The Niyogi Commission Report

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 70.

is a sad commentary on the aberrations of missionary enterprise on the one hand, and on the blatant communalism of the Hindu majority on the other. It is a strange document full of unwarranted conclusions, glib generalizations and inaccurate information. There was a good deal of protest over the appointment of George as a member of the Committee. A government press note justified it in these words:

As regards Shri S. K. George, he is a devout Christian and a nationalist, belonging to the oldest church in India—the Syrian Christian Church—and has been an educationist and public worker of more than twenty years' standing. He has pursued theological studies both in India and Oxford, and was also working in Shantiniketan. He has published several books on Christianity. Commenting on his appointment, one of the outstanding Christian leaders in the country described it as a 'wise' and 'correct' choice.<sup>1</sup>

The part that George played as a member of the Niyogi Committee is not clear. He explained his own position in these words:

An Indian today, high caste or Adivasi, Hindu or Christian, whose heart does not glow with love and devotion to his motherland . . . is untrue to his genius and disloyal to his nation. It is not sufficiently realised that Western Christianity is the result of a marriage between Hebraism, the Semitic heritage, and Graeco-Roman culture. A real welding of Hindu spirituality and Hebrew ethics might result in a Christianity that might enrich the whole world. An Indian Christian that is really Indian and

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 84.

truly Christian might give a lead to world Christianity. An Indian Christianity that emphasises its essentials and holds lightly to its trappings, mainly of western devising, will find a welcome from India that is awakening from its lethargy under centuries of foreign domination. . . . If missionaries from the West, with their specialised training and aptitudes, are willing to serve India without the ulterior motive of adding to the numerical strength of the denominations they belong to, they will be truly representative of their Master and will be doing their best to win for Him the heart of India. . . . We wish Christianity in India to become truly Indian and truly Christian, and the religions of India to come together in genuine co-operation, giving a lead to the nations in peaceful co-existence.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing startlingly new here. It does not justify the Christian opprobrium that was heaped upon George. But, on the other hand, one cannot help feeling that George's uncritical identification with India's religious and cultural heritage and his abiding humility were exploited by a communally motivated committee.

In 1957 George resigned from the Commerce College. He was tired and ill. He returned to his home in Koorkancherry, determined not to take up any more work. But he was pressed into accepting the editorship of *Gandhi Marg*. The Georges now went to Bombay to take up the new duties. In a little over a year, however, George had to give up the editorship. He had been suffering from Parkinson's disease, and he was growing more and more helpless. They returned to Kerala. Mary George, who was herself ill, nursed him cheerfully till she died in 1959.

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 85 f.

A few months later, on May 4, 1960, while on a visit to Gandhigram near Madurai, George passed away.

'Whether life has anything more in store than this existence or not,' George once said, 'I am supremely thankful to have been alive, to have known the joys and sorrows of earthly existence'.<sup>1</sup> That he neither strove for the riches of this world nor wanted to take heaven by storm—nor even to enter it by stealth—is one of the endearing things about S. K. George. The following extract taken from his essay entitled *What Life has taught me* provides perhaps the right note on which to close this account of his life.

. . . . In following the gleam of the vision I had seen in early life I have had to let go some of the easy prizes within the grasp of one with my opportunities; but I have no regrets in having missed them, and though still poor in many of the things that make life smooth and pleasant, I go forward, smiling and undaunted, with the sole longing that I may never stagnate and never rest content with the lower ideal and the smaller world.

It is the call to the enlargement of the boundaries of religious freedom and association that I have specially heard and that has given me my vocation in life. Brought up in a strict and narrow creed, I have felt the liberating influence of modern thought and have won my way to freedom in a world in which every man is a friend and all I met my kin. While my debt to English writers like H. G. Wells and Bertrand Russell is very great for this liberation, it was the grip of Mahatma Gandhi on my young mind that set the tone and colour to all my later thinking. I saw in Gandhiji the essence of Christianity lived out in the Indian setting. His ideal of

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 29.

Ram Raj or of Sarvodaya seems to me a concretion in the context of Indian life of Christ's ideal of the Kingdom of God on earth. And the vision came to me of a living and dynamic synthesis of all that is vital in man's quest of God and of the Good Life for all. To live for the realization of this synthesis, to work for a time when Christianity in India will no longer be a warring creed, fighting against other religions, but a partner with them all in realising peace and good-will among men, is to me to find life's fulfilment. . .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir*, 28 f.

## WRITINGS

S. K. George wrote three books, and a great many articles which were published in journals like *The Guardian*, *Young Men of India* and *FFT Quarterly*. The more representative and significant among these articles are included in our *Selections*. We shall concentrate here on his books.

The first of these is *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*, originally published by Allen and Unwin, London; an Indian edition was brought out in 1947 by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. The second is *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, published in 1942 by G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras, in their series on *The World Teachers*—in which brief books on Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed and Sankara had already appeared. The third, *The Story of the Bible*, was published in 1951, also by Navajivan Publishing House. We shall begin with George's *Life of Jesus*; it was his understanding of the Jesus of history that determined the nature of his concerns and commitments.

### The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ

George clearly owes much to the 'liberal' portrayals of Jesus as primarily a man. For Middleton Murray, for instance, whose influence is evident throughout the book, 'Jesus was above all

else a man of genius'; he was the 'teacher of an ultimate wisdom', 'a teacher who died to save men who would not listen to his teaching.'<sup>1</sup>

Jesus of history, George contends in the *Preface*, has been obscured by the deified Christ of Christian churches. 'Yet Christ after the flesh, the Man of Nazareth, is pivotal for the Christian faith'.<sup>2</sup> In the process of apotheosis, the man Jesus was conveniently forgotten; his nobility and heroism no longer challenged us. Jesus is worshipped, not followed, and in our passion to vindicate his divinity, we escape the challenge of his humanity. 'My charge against the churches that deify Jesus is that in seeking to exalt they have failed to follow him and have removed the challenge, taken away the fire, out of his life and teachings'.<sup>3</sup>

The man Jesus is as relevant today as in the days of his earthly life. In order to recover this relevance we must first rediscover his humanity. 'To make him real to us as far as we can do so, to stand face to face with him across the centuries, sweeping aside the cobwebs of Christologies that have been spun round his strenuous personality, is a far more bracing experience than contemplating the innumerable portraits that have been painted of him and adorned and worshipped down the ages'.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of the book, therefore, is to reveal the reality and thus underline the relevance of Jesus the man. His way has never been tried—except perhaps by Gandhiji in our own day. George says that he does not want to advance 'any mystic claims for Gandhi', but he is convinced that 'Gandhiji has recaptured the spirit of Jesus and is demonstrating the possibility, as well as the way, of its application to life in the modern world'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Middleton Murray, *The Life of Jesus* (London, 1926), 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ* (hereafter called *Life*).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.



The book itself is a straightforward narrative, clearly and consistently presented, and the perspective of the Preface—which has a title, *Jesus, not Christ*—determines both its contents and its character.

The first chapter of the book analyses the Jewish heritage which Jesus inherited. The Jews had a 'tenacious sense of divine commission.'<sup>1</sup> They considered themselves as the Chosen People of God and looked forward, in spite of repeated disappointments, to be vindicated by their God. They hoped that God would deliver the nations of the world into their hands—the nations which had oppressed them throughout their chequered history and did not serve their God. It was only natural that the visionaries among them soon began to interpret their future sovereignty in spiritual terms. They produced a host of apocalyptic books which pictured God as 'intervening miraculously through his appointed agent, a supernatural Son of Man who is to appear on the clouds of heaven to judge the world.'<sup>2</sup> Jesus shared to the full this spiritual hope of his people; he was steeped in the prophetic tradition of his race.

. . . . Above all he made his own the Second Isaiah's conception of God's chosen servant, triumphing through suffering and death—not conquering through violence, but through humiliation and death, fulfilling God's purposes of redemption.

This spiritual conception of God and religion and of his own destiny was the deepest element in the make-up of Jesus. Of course, elements of the other hope, the supernaturalistic one, entered into his final conception of the mission; but that he regarded himself as standing in the line of succession of these prophets and as carry-

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 f.

ing forward their message is absolutely clear. Jesus can only be understood aright in the light of that succession, and his message can only be carried forward in that spirit. The true succession from him is not that of any ecclesiastical corporation, however unbroken its historical links with his immediate followers, but of those who are moved by his spirit, who are on fire with God, like the prophets of old, like Jesus himself, like the revolutionary saints of all time.<sup>1</sup>

The second chapter is on Jesus' initiation and temptation. The accounts of the birth of Jesus have 'the beauty not of literal fact but of poetic fancy.'<sup>2</sup> It is with his baptism at the hands of John that Jesus emerges into the light of history. It was a decisive moment in his life; now he felt called, set apart by God, and throughout his life he was faithful to the call.

The content of that vocation deepened and altered by the experiences that came to him in its fulfilment, but to the call itself he remained faithful to the last, even unto death, and unto, what perhaps to him was more trying than death itself, the sense of desolation and desertion by his God that seemed to overtake him on the cross.<sup>3</sup>

Baptism, for Jesus, was an inner experience of far-reaching significance, and it is against this background that the Temptation becomes meaningful. 'It has its parallel in the temptation of the Buddha by Mara the power of evil.'<sup>4</sup> The temptations are indeed the shortcuts to his goal that present themselves to him; their rejection was the measure of his commitment to God.

Jesus commenced his mission by the preaching of the Kingdom, which is the theme of the third chapter of George's book.

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 9 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

At first Jesus was well received. But his teaching was radical and revolutionary. 'It went beyond the externalities of Pharisaic teaching to the heart of real religion in the conscience of the individual.'<sup>1</sup> It was inevitable that official opposition to his work and message would gain strength. And it was when thus faced with increasing opposition and rejection that Jesus 'rethought his message and arrived at a new conception of his mission and destiny.'<sup>2</sup> Now he became convinced that he was to be the Messiah of his people, a Messiah who would have to die in order that the people might not perish.

The message of Jesus was addressed to the lowly and the despised. The condition of the Kingdom was repentance and a change of heart. This was, of course, unacceptable to organised orthodoxy with its set rituals and formalised piety.

Most of the miracles attributed to Jesus, according to George, can have naturalistic explanations. 'Great claims, for example, are made for Indian yoga, and the prodigies performed by some yogis will baffle modern science.'<sup>3</sup> George's treatment of the miracles is cursory, but his conclusion—'that the modern mind sees the evidence of his divinity, such as it is, not in the miracles but in the fragrance of his sacrificial living'<sup>4</sup>—will be acceptable to many Christians today.

Jesus was in fact carrying forward the work of the inspired prophets of Judaism, broadening and deepening the basis of their social message, widening its appeal, and centring all on absolute faith in God who, in his teaching, is throughout presented as a loving father and intimate companion.

*Teacher turns Messiah* is the title of the fourth chapter of the book. Here Jesus is pictured as trying to escape, on the one hand, from the over-enthusiastic mob that want to make him

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

king and, on the other hand, from the jealous custodians of Jewish tradition who want to get rid of him. Both these spell rejection, and when thus rejected by his people Jesus' conception of his role and mission undergoes a profound change. This is integral to George's understanding of Jesus. He says:

From Bethsaida he led the disciples up to Caesarea Philippi and there he disclosed to them the secret of his Messianic consciousness as he had come to grasp it afresh. A new conception of the Messiah and of his own destiny had come to him. Grappling with the fact of his rejection by his own people, which was in line with their reaction to all God's prophets . . . he came to believe that God's chosen servant to redeem his people must be a suffering servant, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy regarding it. That destiny, Jesus felt, was laid upon him. It was a destiny not merely to suffering, but to victory through suffering. . . . Later Apocalypses had conjured up visions of the Messiah as the supernatural Son of Man, appearing in the clouds of heaven to execute God's judgement on earth. By a daring act of imagination and faith Jesus combined the hitherto unrelated pictures and pictured himself as the Messiah-to-be through suffering and humiliation. It was a daring and original conception which his disciples found difficult to grasp till the very end.<sup>1</sup>

This intense consciousness of a new kind of Messianic vision received its final sanction in what is known as the *Transfiguration*. It was for Jesus an intensely subjective experience of tremendous moment. To the disciples it was 'a vision of the glory of their

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 59 ff.

incarnate Lord, similar to the vision granted to Arjuna by Shree Krishna, the Divine Charioteer.<sup>1</sup>

The next chapter deals with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He knew that the odds against him were many and great, but he refused to evade what he knew to be his divinely appointed destiny. Thus he 'resolutely decided to challenge entrenched authority in its very citadel and to break it or perish in the attempt. That decision meant for him ignominious death on the cross; but that cross has become for ever the symbol of suffering, conquering love, and is drawing all men unto it.'<sup>2</sup>

We are taken through the last days of Jesus' life. He goes confidently through the ordeal of physical suffering and mental agony, secure in the sense of his mission and in the knowledge that he is doing his Father's will. He died for others, even as he had lived for others.

Did he rise again? George finds it difficult to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. The spirit of Jesus emphatically triumphed over physical death. It is precisely this power that we need today, and it is precisely this power that Jesus has made available for us.

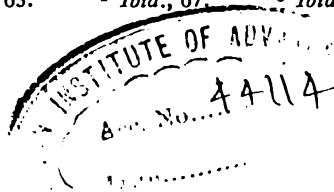
What is indispensable in accounting for the rise of the Christian movement and what really matters for modern living in the power of Christ is the belief that the spirit of Jesus has triumphed over physical death and that 'though dead he still speaketh.' That faith is independent of the legend of the empty tomb.<sup>3</sup>

That is to say, George concludes in the last chapter of the book, Christianity should be understood as a way of life and not as a creed.

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.



Christianity, in its orthodox forms, has been presented to the world as a creed, a system of beliefs, acceptance of which decides one's destiny in a future existence. But Christianity, as it was lived and taught by its founder, was essentially a way of life, a way of victorious living in the world, not by escaping or evading its many sorrows and trials, but by cheerfully overcoming them.<sup>1</sup>

This way of life, George repeats, is as relevant today as it was at any other period in human history. It is no doubt a difficult way, entailing suffering and sacrifice. Suffering, by itself, is of course not a virtue. 'It is unmerited suffering, voluntarily endured, out of love for the wrong-doer, that is effective in redemption.'<sup>2</sup>

Satyagraha, George is convinced, is only another name for such suffering, and Gandhiji in our day has demonstrated its power, recapturing the spirit of Jesus. 'He is an invaluable commentary on the life of Jesus, throwing a flood of light on many of the difficult sayings of Jesus, and demonstrating the soundness and the practicability of Jesus' way of life.'<sup>3</sup>

Here indeed is the real thrust of George's book. Even as Christianity is a way of life, Jesus is a leader.

. . . Jesus has to be seen as a Leader of men against every yoke, religious or secular, that would stifle human life, in order to be truly loved and followed. The theologies and Christologies that have been built round his person have obscured this heroic Son of Man. What is needed is that the man Jesus of Nazareth should be set forth, in the simplicity as well as the grandeur of his heroic manhood. We must try and see him as he came to

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 96 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

those disciples of old by the sea side, and hear him calling to us 'Follow me', as he sets us to the tasks he has to fulfil for our generation. And it is in the measure of our faithfulness in following him that we come to understand the full significance of his personality. That significance has to be grasped afresh and interpreted freely by every age and country. Such reinterpretations will, of course, take into account former ways of belief, orthodox as well as heterodox, indeed every avenue of faith by which men have drawn inspiration from him, but will not be bound by any of them. The attempt so far made by highly organized Christian missions and churches to present for India's acceptance unchanged ancient orthodoxies, formulated in entire ignorance of India's heritage, and in the light of a world-view that science has long ago discarded, was doomed to failure. The individual successes it has had, and the struggling little community it has called into being, are not commensurate with the expenditure in men and money involved in the enterprise. Jesus has yet to be presented to India as a Leader and Christianity as a way of life. But that presentation requires a different approach from that of the existing missions and churches. It would mean a more complete identification of the Christian movement in India with the life and struggles of the Motherland. Jesus might demand of the churches that claim to worship him to sell all that they have, even their cherished Christologies, and find him afresh in the toils, the struggles and the privations of real life. A Christian community that follows Jesus in that sense will be the salt of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 100 ff.

## The Story of the Bible

The book is an excellent introduction to the Christian scriptures. It is precisely what it claims to be—The Story of the Bible. Though within the general framework of George's own religious orientation, it maintains, nevertheless, a high degree of objectivity. We have plenty of demythologization in the book, but it is demythologization at its most reverent.

The Publisher's Note, after referring, with surprising irrelevance, to Gandhiji's views on conversion, expresses the hope that the book will find a place in the religious education programme in colleges, recommended by the Radhakrishnan Commission's Report. It is admirably suited for the purpose, and will be ideal as a text-book for the Moral Instruction courses in our colleges.

George states his purpose very clearly in the Preface. The Bible contains 'the thrilling story of one of the most remarkable races of the world, and traces the evolution of a religion that has been one of the most dominant influences in world history.'<sup>1</sup> George's object is to relate this story in intelligible language. The book is thus an introduction to the Bible; it is also an anthology. At the end of each chapter we have what are described as *Illustrative Readings*, a selection of some of the noblest passages from the Bible. This is how George describes his purpose in writing the book :

. . . Essentially my testimony to the spiritual significance of a book that has moulded my life, it is also my humble contribution to the building up of the *Larger Bible* of the world, to the growing recognition of the elements of worth in all the scriptures of mankind.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii



Elsewhere, when he refers to the contribution of students of 'Higher' and 'Lower' criticism to the modern understanding of the Bible, he expresses the same hope. He says:

. . . Their work is something that has to be undertaken with all the scriptures of the world. Then alone will the way be prepared for a compilation of the *Larger Bible of Mankind*, setting forth the full revelation of God to man by diverse portions and in diverse manners.<sup>1</sup>

This indeed is the theme of the first chapter of the book where George deals with his own understanding of the significance of the Bible. It is 'a wonderful record of a progressive revelation of God to man through a particular channel.'<sup>2</sup> It is unique, but it is not 'the unique, the only authentic word of God to man.'<sup>3</sup>

Every sacred book, every religion, is in a sense unique. It is the result of a double process, of human search and of divine self-giving. The latter is rightly regarded by every religious soul as the more primal activity. The initiative is God's though human response thereto is indispensable. The starting point in every revelation is *shruti*, that which is heard. . . But the communication is in every case conditioned by the receptivity of the listener. Hence the distinctiveness, the uniqueness, as well as the limitations, of the different revelations in the various scriptures of each race.<sup>4</sup>

What is unique about the Bible is 'the vision of the God' which it embodies. This vision developed, slowly and strenuously, through long and event-filled centuries, till it found its consum-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, 6.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 f.

mation and fulfilment in 'Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man and Son of God' who is 'the unique treasure the Bible mediates to man.'<sup>1</sup> But even in this respect its uniqueness is not absolute, for God's revelation of Himself is not confined to a particular people or a selected period.

Having thus sketched the general framework of his approach, George goes on to relate the story of the Old and the New Testaments. The *Story* itself need not detain us. It is told with sensitiveness and discriminating reverence. Explaining the biblical account of Creation, for instance, George says,

. . . . (The biblical narratives) do not give scientific answers to the questions as to the *how* and *when* of creation; their purpose is to provide the far more significant religious answers to questions as to the *why* and *wherefore*, the meaning and purpose of creation, questions on which science has so far little authentic to say. Truth in the Bible is not scientific, but poetic and religious.<sup>2</sup>

Equally perceptive is George's comment on the apocalyptic vision with which the Bible concludes:

. . . . The Book of Revelation is thus a fitting conclusion to the Bible, which began with a description of the creation of the universe and a setting forth of the divine purpose, and ends with a glorious picture of the ultimate realisation of that purpose, when the tabernacle of God is established on earth and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, 5.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 202 f.

Here George does full justice to the Christian hope, though elsewhere he reduces Christian eschatology to political independence and social amelioration.

### Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity

The ten essays included in the book were written between the years 1930 and 1939. The title, together with the Dedication—'To Mahatma Gandhi who made Jesus and his message real to me'—introduces us straight to the theme of the book. In the Preface that George wrote for the Indian edition of the book we have his two related propositions, expressed in startlingly simple terms. These are: (i) that a true Christian in India must necessarily be a Gandhiite,<sup>1</sup> and (ii) that a true Gandhiite is essentially a Christian.<sup>2</sup> There is no sustained development of this single thesis in these essays, but nevertheless the book does possess an overall coherence. George's conviction, on the one hand, that the cross of Jesus Christ is the way for man, and his belief, on the other, that Gandhiji has demonstrated its applicability and proved its efficacy, illuminate almost everything that he has written.

In the very first essay George states his case in an unambiguous manner. While 'Christ is a stupendous fact in the story of human evolution',<sup>3</sup> he is not the only fact in the spiritual history of mankind. There were others, like Buddha and Socrates, who too are 'stupendous facts' in the history of human development. Mahatma Gandhi in our own day is such a fact. At a time when the Christian church has given up the absolute claims of Christ as impracticable and idealistic, 'Gandhi is an inconvenient and

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity* (Hereafter called *Gandhi's Challenge*), x.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

embarrassing challenge to Christian orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> What constitutes the challenge is not just Gandhi's individual commitment to the way of life that Christ demonstrated; it is also the fact that he has perfected, in the method of satyagraha, a technique of corporate action by which love can resist and conquer injustice.

The implications of the method of non-violent resistance are examined in the second essay. Behind the method lies Gandhiji's conviction that 'the Universe is based on the bedrock of truth'<sup>2</sup> and therefore 'the fight for truth must triumph, however great the odds against it and however few its advocates, for it is the Universe that fights for it'.<sup>3</sup> Behind the technique of satyagraha is the further conviction that there is an essential humanity about man who partakes of the nature of the Universe itself.

It is to this latent core of humanity in the hearts of men and nations that Gandhi's method makes its appeal, in the sure confidence that the suffering of the innocent victim will convince the wrong-doer of the enormity of his wickedness and will work a change in his heart.<sup>4</sup>

In the next essay George tries to answer the question: Is satyagraha Christian? There are those who claim that Jesus 'gave his life and did not take it',<sup>5</sup> and that the Gandhian method savours of suicide on the one hand and involves an element of coercion on the other. George contends that a reading of the biblical accounts reveals that there was the element of deliberate design in Christ's sacrifice as well. While he concedes that the method of satyagraha can be grossly abused—wrongly employed and also employed for wrong ends—he affirms that basically it is 'not a method of coercion but of conversion'.<sup>6</sup> It is not to

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

be undertaken unless one clearly hears God's call which, ultimately, is the guarantee that it will not be misused.

In *The Cost of Christianity*, the fourth essay in the book, George accuses Christians of converting Christianity into a tame and painless religion. When it first made its impact on the world it was an explosive and revolutionary movement. Through centuries of compromising and formulization Christianity has been 'made safe for the world, . . . with the result that its custodians and interpreters are today among the safest men on earth and the best safeguards for the things that be'.<sup>1</sup> Here too Gandhiji challenges Christians; his rediscovery of the significance of suffering may well prove to be of more lasting value than his political achievements.

We have a vivid account of George's vision of the Christianity that is to be in the two essays that follow. The first of these, on *Christian Missions in India*, is included in full in our Selections. Much of what is said here is not new to us today, but that is precisely due to the courageous and pioneering ventures of a few people like S. K. George. At a time when unbending orthodoxy was the order of the day it did take a good deal of courage to think such daring thoughts and share them with others. It may, however, be remarked that, even in the more liberal theological climate of our day, George's plea for 'the real assimilation of the Christian Gospel into the religious life of India'<sup>2</sup> will find few advocates among Christians. The idea is further developed and clarified in the following essay which is specifically on this theme and is entitled *A Vision of the Future*.

. . . . A Christianity naturalized in India will have to discover itself in that larger setting. Wandering about in Hindu temples with their overwhelming massiveness,

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

the realization came to me that nothing will be able to replace those giant structures or the faith they express in granite. The Christian churches I had seen in India seemed ephemeral in comparison. It was only in England that I felt the same about Christianity. Standing under the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, in London, it occurred to me that here was the same phenomenon of a religion going down to the depths of a nation's being and expressing itself in a vastness symbolic of the depth. Christianity can never hope to replace Hinduism in India, just as nothing can replace Christianity in England.

Nor should the attempt be made. Any new light, any new emphasis that another religion may bring, must be added to the ancient faith, rather than seek to blot out the ancient light. Some time after I had that experience in the Hindu temple, I happened to see a Christian church built in Hindu style, as some Christian churches are coming to be built in India; and I was reminded of some of the smaller shrines adjoining the central structure in Hindu temple yards, and I seemed to see a vision of the future of Christianity in India, existing by the side of, never seeking to displace, the giant structure of Hinduism; but keeping the light of its own ethical knowledge of God bright and clear, that it may not be overlooked whatever else the worshipper may find inside the great temple to satisfy the myriad needs of his whole self, which perhaps only a religion that has entered into the marrow of the life and culture of a people can wholly satisfy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, 48 f.

The remaining essays in the book add little to our understanding of George's thought. There is one on *Inter-religious Co-operation*, which looks forward to 'a vaster and wider fellowship (than that of individual religions) comprehending all man's diverse apprehensions of the Divine, none seeking to destroy the other, but each helping its neighbour to fulfil itself, by being faithful to its own inner light.'<sup>1</sup>

In *Christianity and the New Social Order* George reverts to an earlier theme. 'The Christian way of changing the world through changing the individual'<sup>2</sup> has not met with conspicuous success. Individual regeneration does not go deep enough and far enough to effect world regeneration. 'The religious way of achieving world regeneration' is the way to which Christ pointed and which Gandhiji practises. It is the satyagraha movement which is based on the realization of the need for collective action and inspired by the power of the spirit, the power of love. In another essay George describes it as 'a technique of religious mass action.'<sup>3</sup>

Here is how George summarises the achievement of Gandhiji in the very last essay of the book, which was written specially for the Indian edition:

What Gandhiji has done is to fill this concept of God's Kingdom on earth, or Rama Raj, to give it the Indian equivalent he uses, with a modern content and to demonstrate the ways of its realization. The glorious hope of God's sovereignty on earth in all its varied expressions, in Hindu, Christian, Islamic or other hopes, had become dim and had given place to the hope of a brave new world fashioned by science on the one hand, or, on the other hand, a falsely spiritual escape from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

realities of life in a heaven beyond or a mysticism within. But the hope of it has become a flowing reality in Gandhi and a challenge to all men of goodwill to grasp it and embody it on earth. He has had the courage to work out the implications of it in terms of modern life, to specify the politics and the economics of the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, 75.



## EVALUATION

Evaluation is too ambitious a word for the very limited purpose we have before us. For one thing, a general evaluation of S. K. George's approach to questions of theology and nationalism is implicit in the descriptive account we have already given of his writings. For another, George never claimed to be a theologian. At an impressionable period of his life he came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. He was challenged, by the example of Gandhiji, to take a fresh look at his own Christian heritage. He found, at the very centre of it, the message of the cross; but he could not find it exemplified in the life or the structures of Christian churches. On the other hand he found Gandhiji living the truth which the Christians professed. Satyagraha, it now appeared to him, was, more than anything else, the cross in action.

Since then, for good or ill, George cast his lot with Gandhiji, believing implicitly that a 'true Christian in India must necessarily be a Gandhian',<sup>1</sup> and hoping that his 'fellow-believers, in India at least, will face up to the challenge of Gandhiji's witness to essential Christianity.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, x.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

It may be of interest to recall what George himself wrote of his first encounter with Gandhi:

To that time I was merely the child of good parents, myself a good boy, which meant mainly a harmless boy, though I had, unsuspected by others, my own inner stormy life. Mahatma Gandhi's life and message gripped me at that time, and they have remained as an abiding influence, deepening and vitalising as the years go by. Above all else they helped me to realise Christ and his message more than anything else.<sup>1</sup>

This indeed is George's personal testimony, and it is little wonder that it reads like the account of a conversion experience. It was his conversion to what he would later describe as 'essential Christianity'.

What did George mean by 'essential Christianity'?

In one of his essays Chenchiah refers to the 'two views of the task of theology in India—one broad and the other narrow.'

The broad view holds that the only fixed immovable absolute centre in Christianity is the fact of Christ and places Christian experience and faith in the relative sphere and sets theology the task of renewing direct experience of Jesus. Believing that God's training to different nations in different ways enables them to see new features and appropriate new powers in Jesus not hitherto appropriated by others, this view assigns to theology the function of building with new experiences and powers, new structures of faith. The other view, working with three absolutes of unchangeable core, unalterable faith and essential deposit, allots to theology the limited function

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<sup>1</sup> 'A Personal Conviction' in *Souvenir*, 3.

of translating the fixed faith into a variety of languages, seeking proper ideas and words to express the three absolutes.<sup>1</sup>

The Church in India as elsewhere has been traditionally committed to the narrow view. Ecumenical theology today is moving towards the acceptance of Christo-centrism as the sole criterion. So is the emerging dialogue theology, especially in India. It may not be difficult to rehabilitate S. K. George among modern interpreters of the Christian faith and to identify in his writings and activities elements that have contributed to the dialogic climate of our day. His thinking was largely Christ-centred. His quarrel with orthodoxy was that it had, instead of following the living Christ of the Gospels into the world of men and movements, chosen to commemorate a mummified God through creeds and ceremonies. Many of his concerns, which alienated him from Christian circles in his day, have been accepted today as the legitimate concerns of the Church. He stood for the Church's participation in the total life of the nation. He argued against exclusiveness. He was committed to inter-religious understanding and co-operation. He fought for social justice, and espoused the cause of the oppressed and the under-privileged. He conceived the Church as a creative fellowship and its role as that of spending itself in order that it might live more meaningfully as an inclusive human fellowship. He wanted the Indian Church to become truly and meaningfully Indian, theologically and culturally integrated with what is genuinely indigenous. All these are fast becoming commonplaces of Christian thought, and at this level George is sufficiently vindicated.

But this is only of academic interest, and our purpose here is not to score an academic point. Christ-centredness is an ambi-

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Thangasamy, *The Theology of Chenchiah*, 57.

guous concept. At the heart of it there can be, and there often is, a Christological void. Expressions like the Lordship of Christ and the Centrality of Christ can mean everything—or nothing. Christ-centredness becomes an adequate affirmation of faith only if we have adequately answered a more primary question whose answer is, often glibly, taken for granted. That is the question, 'Who is Jesus Christ?', a question as old as Christianity and as new today as it ever has been.

A. G. Hogg has called our attention to one aspect of this choice that eternally confronts us:

Either Jesus was a finite personality, in which case the world will some day sufficiently understand Him and turn its attention to other issues, and Christianity as a religion will die or become unrecognizably transformed; or else Jesus is an infinite personality, in which case the world will ever find in Him a religious problem of baffling but transcendent interest. If this latter alternative is the true one, then Christianity must differ from other revelations in being at once final and progressive. It must be final, because the point of view attained by the man who recognises in Jesus 'God manifest in the flesh' will, on this supposition, be absolutely true. It must also be progressive, because with the advance of society, of scientific knowledge and philosophic reflection, the unexhausted problem of this infinite personality will ever be opening out into new aspects and fresh perplexities.<sup>1</sup>

It is precisely on these terms that most people have accepted or rejected Jesus Christ. Those who accepted him affirmed, as Chakkarai did, that 'He who sits on the throne of the universe

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption*, C.L.S. (1909), 75.

has the human face divine of Jesus.'<sup>1</sup> Chakkarai has spelt out this affirmation of Christ-centredness in another context, and it is worth quoting it in full, at least for purposes of contrast. He writes, in words of impassioned eloquence:

. . . . What is the centre of this *Civitas Dei*, four square, but the Lamb of God, the supreme *yajña* and *puruṣa*, the Lord in his sacrificial, intercessory and mediatorial glory? It is this principle of evolution, this emergence of 'deity' that the Cross embodies and exemplifies; the new world-order which, amidst the pain and joy of the world and man, will transform and transmute creation itself. . . .

. . . . The Cross stretches into the eternities of the past and the present; it gathers up into itself and focuses the myriad rays of pain and joy, of man's sins and God's grace, and flashes them across the dark waters of the future. Its foot reaches into the realm of Hades, and its height is lost in the immensity of Heaven. When we stand under it, we become one with the heart of things, and we all are 'more than conquerors through Him that loved us,' as his great bhakta triumphantly exclaimed.<sup>2</sup>

This is Christ-centredness. It affirms that 'God continues to deal with us precisely in and through the historical work of the man Jesus. God has no further saving offer or revelation distinct from or additional to Jesus.'<sup>3</sup>

There is another type of Christ-centredness, however, which does not accept what Bishop Newbigin calls 'the finality of

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<sup>1</sup> V. Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, C.L.S. (1930), 228.

<sup>2</sup> V. Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, C.L.S. (1932), 284.

<sup>3</sup> R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, Collins—Fontana (1969), 257.

Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is basically a species of theological evasion. It accepts the precepts of Christ and affirms their universal validity. But it rejects the Person of Christ. It refuses to answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?', because it believes that that is the wrong question to ask. What matters is not who he is, not even whether he *is* or *was* in any historical sense; what matters is what he taught. This was largely the position that Gandhiji adopted, though he did not go on to claim any centrality for Christ. For him it was immaterial who Jesus was; it was immaterial whether he even had historical existence. He once confessed:

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true to me.<sup>2</sup>

A few of the Christians who became close followers of Gandhiji seem to have subscribed to this understanding of Christ. J. C. Kumarappa, for example. His book *Practice and Precepts of Jesus* is an attempt to present the teachings of Jesus shorn of all doctrinal accretions. For him the Person is important, but the precepts have priority over the Person. And he does not fight shy of the logical consequences of such an understanding. He says, for instance:

As the word 'Christian' itself had lost all association with the life and example set by Jesus I have advisedly styled in

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, S.C.M. (1969).

<sup>2</sup> M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, C.I.S.R.S.-C.L.S. (1970), 205 (quoted). Mr Thomas deals at length with Gandhi's understanding of Jesus in the chapter entitled 'Mahatma Gandhi: Jesus the Supreme Satyagrahi'.

this pamphlet all those who follow precepts such as the ones Jesus taught, 'Followers of Jesus', be they Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists or perchance, even 'Christians', irrespective of their own religious affiliations.<sup>1</sup>

S. K. George expressed similar sentiments on several occasions. In the Preface to the second edition of *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity* he wrote:

An Indian Christianity, true alike to its Christian and its Indian heritage, will, I trust, open its doors wide to welcome and include all those who seek to worship God in spirit and in truth and to walk the way of Jesus in all humility.<sup>2</sup>

George accepts Christ as a historical person, a stupendous *fact* in the history of human evolution. But he is a human fact, not a divine one—or, a divine fact only through being, first and last, a human one. In fact George believes that Gandhiji himself is a fact like Jesus. That does not mean, he would hasten to add, that he attributes any mystic claims for Gandhiji. But then he is 'far indeed from affirming or denying any of the claims made for Jesus himself'.<sup>3</sup>

Thus to the question, 'Who is Jesus?', George would answer, He is a man among other men; greater and wiser than others, and that precisely to the extent he spent himself for others; and, therefore a man with a perennial message for mankind. He said:

The story of God's revelation to man, as recorded in the Bible, reaches its culmination in Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Progress in religion is achieved through an ever-deepening and growing discrimination between the

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Kumarappa, *Practice and Precepts of Jesus*, Navajivan Publishing House (1946), ix.   <sup>2</sup> *Gandhi's Challenge*, xii f.   <sup>3</sup> *Life*, xiii.

essentials and non-essentials in man's apprehension of, and response to, the Divine. . . . In Jesus of Nazareth, especially in his death on the cross, this development (in Jewish religion) reached a simplification and an intensity which justifies the ecstatic utterance of a modern poet :

In the Cross of Christ I glory,  
 Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
 All the light of sacred story  
 Gathers round its head sublime.<sup>1</sup>

The cross is all-important in George's thinking. It was what prepared him for Gandhian satyagraha, which he understood primarily in terms of the cross. All other events in the life of Jesus are, for him, only of secondary importance. The signs and miracles, the claims that Jesus made for himself, the resurrection, and the claims that Jesus' followers made for him, are all inessential. The Cross, in George's thinking, overshadows the Christ.

And the Cross itself is understood primarily as an example and a symbol, and not as an event. In George's understanding it stands for the supreme exemplification of the concept of vicarious suffering. It proves that the ideals enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount can be put into practice, and this is its sole significance. George does not attach any unique saving virtue to the cross of Christ.

George's understanding of the resurrection is particularly interesting. In a passage like the following what we have is a cautious exercise in demythologization :

The accounts differ as to the details of these (resurrection) appearances; but they, as well as the rest of the New

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, 154 f.



Testament literature and the consistent witness of the church that has been founded on this resurrection faith, agree in their testimony to the triumph over death, undoubtedly achieved by Jesus. Whatever be the scientific explanation of the nature and significance of these phenomena, death for Jesus proved to be the gateway to fuller life, and through it he has entered into the heart of mankind and lives there for ever as an energizing influence.<sup>1</sup>

The most telling comment on this is provided by contrasting it with a passage like the following, which represents the traditional as well as the Neo-orthodox approach to resurrection faith:

Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God. . . . A Christian faith that is not resurrection faith can therefore be called neither Christian nor faith. It is the knowledge of the risen Lord and the confession to him who raised him that form the basis on which the memory of the life, work, sufferings and death of Jesus is kept alive and presented in the gospels. It is the remembrance of his resurrection that is the ground of the inclusive hope in the universal future of Christ. . . . The fact, the witness and the eschatological hope belong together in the Easter Kerygma.<sup>2</sup>

Among the 'essential truths' that Christianity has mediated to mankind are, according to George, 'the moral holiness of God and his demand for righteousness from man' and 'the linking up of love to God with love to one's fellowmen'. George admits

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, S.C.M. (1967), 165 f.

that 'the living essence' of Christianity, for most Christians, is the belief that Jesus is the Incarnation of God and 'the experience of the living Christ in the heart of the believer'.<sup>1</sup> George has no quarrel with this. It means, he says, that Jesus, for Christians, is the *Ishtadevata*; and no Hindu will object to Christ being worshipped as an *Ishtadevata*, or question the genuineness of the claim of his presence. But the Christian should be prepared to reciprocate in the same spirit of religious courtesy. He should not deny 'other mediators between God and man, other experiences of the presence of God in the human heart. Such denials lie outside the positive experience of the Christian and therefore have no validity.'<sup>2</sup>

From this follows George's dream of Christianity finding its place on the religious map of India by becoming *one* of India's religions, preserving what is unique in it, and using this unique treasure to reconcile the conflicts between religions and races, and to initiate and foster a fellowship of faiths. It was this dream that made him a 'valiant pioneer of the most significant inter-religious fellowship in India or outside. . .'.<sup>3</sup> It also explains the key role he played in the Quaker-inspired Fellowship of Friends of Truth.

George did not really come to grips with the possibility of a Christ-centred catholicity. He opted for the catholicity of Hindu Dharma, understanding the exclusive claims of Christianity purely as an expression of narrow communalism. Today such claims are made not for Christianity but for Christ, and we are being led towards a rediscovery of the truly comprehensive catholicity which underlies the all-inclusive exclusiveness of the Pauline affirmation that in Christ 'all things hold together.'<sup>4</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> 'Christianity in Independent India', *Aryan Path*, March 1953.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Gandhi Marg*, IV:3.

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 1:17.

vision was not for George. He could only visualise Christianity surviving as an influence, a kind of disembodied didactics.

He looked forward to the day when Christianity would be 'an influence permeating and controlling the vital forces of life in the nation, instead of seeking to strengthen itself at the cost of the ancient religions of the land and to set up a community that will rival the other communities in the land.'<sup>1</sup> But such a life could only follow a death. Christianity had to die 'in order to find a larger and fuller life in Indian Dharma.'<sup>2</sup> It should find its place within the framework of Indian religion; then, and then alone, will it 'enter the bloodstream of the nation's life'.

All these ideas of course, bristle with theological and other difficulties. It is easy to pick theological holes in George's thinking. It is also rather pointless. He belongs to the company of those who effectively confessed Christ in India. All confessions are incomplete; George's, perhaps, more so than most. But the very incompleteness of his confession added to its effectiveness. Such paradoxes are plentiful in the history of Christian witness.

And, in any case, it was as a man, and not as a thinker, that George was accepted by his large circle of friends. Personal integrity, thank God, is not dependent on theological orthodoxy. George was a man of transparent honesty. C. P. Ramaswamy Ayyar once testified that S. K. George had shown him the true Christian way of life more than any other Christian.<sup>3</sup> It may well be questioned whether this was meant to compliment George or condemn Christians, but it cannot be denied that George

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Indian Christian Nationalist' in *The Guardian*, June 30, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> 'Relation of Christianity with other Religions' in *FFT Quarterly*, V. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Gandhi Marg*, IV:3, 196 (quoted).

mediated Christ to a large section of people who were untouched by the orthodox gospel presented by persevering missionaries and re-presented, with meticulous if mechanical accuracy, by generations of Indian Christians.

One of the finest tributes to S. K. George is to be found in the pages of a Malayalam novel.<sup>1</sup> It is a penetrating study of an affluent section of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Their involvement in the plantation industry of the State is the background of the novel. One of the characters in the novel is clearly a life-size study of S. K. George. He is not one of the central characters, but his influence is deep and decisive. In a world of intrigues and self-aggrandizement the values of integrity and service which he represents appear incongruous. But in the end they are vindicated, over the affluent, the glamorous and the sordid. The optimism of such a conclusion may be unrealistic, but as a tribute to S. K. George it is as handsome as it is deserved.

An editorial note in *Gandhi Marg*<sup>2</sup> said :

S. K. George broke away from the boundaries of the organised Christian Church and stretched out his hands in unreserved fellowship to devotees of God in every religion. He quickly became the noblest and purest exponent of the Gandhian teaching of equal reverence for all the religious traditions of the world.

This too was confessing Christ in India.

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Kovoov, *Kaadu*, N.B.S.

<sup>2</sup> *Gandhi Marg*, IV : 1.

# SELECTIONS

FROM THE WRITINGS OF S. K. GEORGE



# I. Missionary Work in Independent India

## THE INDIAN CHURCH AND MISSIONARY WORK

It was my privilege to visit recently two fields of mission work, one inside and the other outside Travancore, where the ancient Syrian Church is trying to cast off the slur of her age-long inactivity by devoted service in spreading the light of the Gospel where it has not already penetrated. It augurs well for a Church which can send forth such men as one found at these stations to suffer and to serve their fellow countrymen. I take it that the Church in other parts of the country also is beginning to bear her part in the evangelization of the land. The Indian Church is wide awake to the fact that the responsibility for the christianizing of the country rests mainly on her shoulders. In infusing that spirit into her and in equipping her in part at least for it, Western Missionary enterprise in India can be said to have found its best fruition.

This debt the Church in India must freely acknowledge to the Church in the West. We in Travancore cannot be too grateful to Western missionary activity in this land for awaking our ancient Church to its missionary responsibility. And the Church in the rest of India, itself the fruit of missionary labours, will be untrue to its origins and genius if it disobeys its own missionary vocation. But the sense of responsibility and the desire to

evangelize are not all; the message in terms of the needs of the people and the demands of the times has to be clearly and definitely grasped and the best methods of presenting it have to be carefully thought out before the witness can be effective and the service welcomed and accepted.

Whatever may have been true of western methods of Christian work in the early days of missionary enterprise in India, however much they may have been justified by the results obtained thereby, it cannot be denied that those methods have ceased to be effective and have come to be resented. Missionary propaganda arouses in many quarters an opposition which is not always on a spiritual plane, which is provoked not by the spirituality of its message, but by the methods and motives adopted to propagate it, an opposition which a religious man would wish were avoided. The situation we have in India is that Christianity as such is not resented, nay is welcomed and sought after, but the Christian propagandist is often resented, his motives questioned and his methods opposed. Western missionaries have on the whole failed to understand the subtle distinction involved in this and have been baffled by it. Here is the opportunity and the challenge to the Indian Church to rethink its message and readjust its methods.

First to the message. We, both the missionary in India and the Indian Christian, have paid but lip service to the words of our Lord that He has come that we may have life and have it more abundantly. It is only now being realized that this abundant life means fulness of life in all levels and aspects of it. The terms 'whole man' and 'wholeness of life' are being used with a new emphasis by prophetic minds in the West. We in India have got to catch that emphasis and live it out in our Christian life and in our missionary work. Life in India has for many generations now for the vast masses of her people been on the



meagre subsistence level. Now, as everyone knows, there is a mass awakening and the demand for better standards of life. This is a legitimate demand of the poor, half-starved millions of India and Christianity with its belief in the value of the individual soul, the worthwhileness of this life, the wholeness of human personality, ought to welcome, stimulate and meet this demand. And in this she will find that she is at one with the new State coming into being in India. A self-governing India will devote her attention and her resources foremost to the betterment of the life of her semi-starved children. The Christian Church, if it vibrates to the pulses of the new Indian nation, will lend her men and her money to the building up of the national muscle and morale. Of course she will have a message higher and nobler than mere material advancement but that message must be built on the basis of the general well-being of the citizen. Christianity has already too many counts against her in having sided with the capitalist and the imperialist to risk a final estrangement from young India by keeping aloof from the new fervour for social uplift. The field is wide open before her. If the Christian Church can produce young men and women with a passion for unselfish service and a burning love for humanity, let her send them forth to feed and to clothe and to teach those famishing all around them, unloved and uncared for. The salvation that she has to offer must involve that. If it means more she is welcome to add the fragrance of an heavenly life and bring to it all the inspiration of an unearthly love. But let it be added to the common human love that we owe to our brethren because of our common humanity. It is this common human love that is obscured and often vitiated by the desire to convert. Are we not accused, not entirely without grounds, of loving and serving men not as men but as prospective Christians? Our proselytizing zeal in the past has given ample cause for our

motives to be questioned even where now our love is pure and disinterested. We have need therefore to dispel the odium of proselytization by positively discouraging conversions where once we encouraged them, by the utmost scrupulousness in our motives and our methods. We must also show our common human love by our appreciation of all good men and movements and by our readiness to combine with others in all good causes. Let not our humanitarian service be the thin end of the wedge of our evangelism, but be fully recognised to be an integral part of that evangel. We seek to improve the health, wealth and culture of our people because these things are good in themselves and our religion demands that we share these with the poorest and lowliest of our brethren. If we serve them in these things, anything higher and holier that we may have to give will be sought after and assimilated, though not accepted wholesale. It is by sharing the fulness of our life with our people that we can lead them to those levels of life.

That brings us to the methods of our evangelization. The secret of it all is in that one word 'share'; sharing to the full and the uttermost. If we would, with all reverence and gratitude, lodge a criticism against the European missionary in India, it is that after all his great sacrifices, he has stopped short of the last step, of complete identification with the people whom he has come out to serve. Having left home and country and living under trying conditions, he has in the last resort kept aloof from the land and people of his adoption, living among them with eyes turned to his homeland. A lamentable and avoidable gulf has existed in most cases between the missionary and his Indian brethren, preventing the full impress of his personality falling upon the latter. The Christian doctrine of incarnation enshrines the only true principle of real redemptive spiritual service, viz., that of unreserved self-giving. Having loved His own that were

in the world He loved them unto the end, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. It is this principle of complete identification with the people whom we serve that we wish to be practised in the missionary work of the Indian Church. It is pathetic to see the Indian missionary with infinitely smaller resources than the European and with no justification whatever for it, adopting a style of living that cuts him away from the people whom he goes out to serve. It cannot be too emphatically asserted that such aloofness spoils their testimony and fails to vitalize and uplift the life of the people. For what the people need is the witness of a higher way of life seen at work under the same limitation to which they themselves are subject. It is that alone which will awaken them from their apathy and hopelessness and give them a vision of the possibilities of life. Living side by side with them, sharing in their manual labours, accepting their limitations as far as they are God-ordained, these are essential to the life-giving work of the Christian missionary in India. Is it too much to hope that in this land of the Sanyasin and the Bhikshu, the Christian Church will be able to produce many who in following in the footsteps of the lowly carpenter of Nazareth are willing to be made the off-scouring of society in order to save the outcaste and the downtrodden? The success of Christian missionary work in India depends on the rise of many such.

—*The Guardian*, August 4, 1932

## NEW DIMENSIONS OF MISSIONARY WORK\*

Dr Hogg confesses that in spite of his best efforts and his previous specialised training for it, he has failed in his search for the best manner of approach to the Hindu mind; failed in his attempt 'to formulate the Christian verities in a manner that would be relevant, arresting and convincing to the Hindu mind'. Perhaps no foreigner will be able to do that. Perhaps it is not in the wisdom either of the West or of the East that Christ will manifest Himself to India. It may be through a simple life that is lived, a Cross that is endured, still a folly to the West and an enigma to the East, that He will make His entry into the very heart of this nation and win its homage. It may be that in recent years India has made a far closer approach to the heart of the Gospel through the practical cross-bearing of some of her devoted children, Hindu though they may be, than through years of missionary propaganda. But whether it be through sanctified intellects or consecrated lives, they will have both to be Indian, and missionaries recognising this fact can devote themselves to nothing nobler than the task of training the Indian Christian to fulfil his noble destiny. They would thus be realising their ultimate objective of the real Christianisation of India

\* Original title: *Christian Colleges and Missionary Work*. This was a response to an article on 'The Function of the Christian College' by Dr A. G. Hogg, originally published in the *International Review of Missions* and republished in *The Guardian*, March 22, 1934.

far more effectively than by any continued direct attack of their own upon the citadels of other faiths. And that would lift them above the charge of proselytism that is still flung at them, in spite of their best efforts to reform their methods. It would also resolve for them the conflict between their ultimate and their proximate objectives. The missionary motive will be open and confessed and there will be no charge of ulterior motives vitiating their work.

But for those who come without the definite missionary motive there will be work enough and to spare, in an India in the throes of a rebirth. There is a great need for emissaries of education, health, economic uplift, etc., who will not use service along these lines as a means of getting, as a *quid pro quo*, an audience for extraneous religious ideas; but who believe that in providing these they are revealing God, a God who manifests Himself in faithfulness to duty and excellence of performance in all fields of life, and who is denied where duty is shirked or slurred over, to find occasions even if it be for preaching in His name. For missionaries of this latter kind, if the term applies to them—and why should it not, for a suffering humanity calls and a loving Father sends them out, with an equal if not greater sense of vocation than the missionaries so called—there will be no ultimate, no ulterior motive and they will come not so much to teach and to give as to guide and to share in a common search after truth and reality, whether it be in philosophy or in religion, in science or in political organisation. They will come out to share and to serve a common humanity, not to impose convictions upon others, however sacred and helpful to themselves they may be. For such there is a great need and there awaits a great welcome as is evidenced by the experience of the few such ministering angels that have come to us.

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XII, No. 18

## CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

The story of the missionary enterprise of Western Christendom in the East is a record of heroic adventure on the part of the men and women who went forth on it, and of equally heroic self-giving on the part of its supporters in the home churches. The widow's mite, we are told, has contributed no inconsiderable part of the enormous budget of Christian missions; while for the early missionaries at least it meant real adventure and a passion for souls to go out into strange and distant lands and face unknown dangers.

If the missionary enterprise of the Western Church synchronized with or followed in the wake of the commercial and military expansion of the Western nations, it only shows how all human activities are linked together and stimulate, if they also corrupt, each other. Thus 'the Catholic missionary orders of the sixteenth century accompanied the explorer-conqueror or preceded him. The Protestant missionary of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed in the wake of trade.'<sup>1</sup> If this association with the explorer-conqueror and the exploiting trader has been rather unfortunate for Christian missions, it has to be remembered that the association was almost inevitable and that missions represent the better, the redeeming, side of the impact of the West upon the East.

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. Hocking, *Rethinking Missions*.

It is interesting to note that the mere trader and conqueror often objected to the incoming of the missionary as a disturbing factor in his process of exploitation. Thus William Carey, the great English pioneer missionary, had to find refuge in what was then the Danish settlement of Serampore to elude the prohibitions to missionary work in India maintained by the East India Company. The directors of that trading, and soon conquering, corporation, showed real insight into the implications of Christianity when they regarded its dissemination as dangerous to their continued domination in the country. Christian missions have undoubtedly contributed their share to the new awakening in India of which a heightened national consciousness is but one expression. The rapprochement that has since come about between the missionary and the British Government in India, by which missions act under the aegis of the Government and the missionary is bound to acquiesce in all the acts of the Government, is really more inimical to the objective of the missions than their one-time antagonism. But on the whole there is no denying the fact, as the Laymen's Enquiry Commission put it in their report, that the missions represent an expression of goodwill, willingness to serve and give of one's very best, and there ought to be no time when such expressions of goodwill should cease; perhaps they are more needed at this time than ever before, when nations are so much thrown together and yet seem to be in danger of devouring one another for lack of that very goodwill and understanding. The great question is how that goodwill should find expression under the changed conditions that exist in the mission field at the present time, changes to which missions themselves have contributed their share.

Christian missions as originally conceived and undertaken had an openly avowed objective and clear-cut programme. The one objective was to impart the saving knowledge of the one

and only revelation of God to the millions who were believed to be perishing for lack of that knowledge. Preaching the word, disseminating the knowledge of the Scriptures, baptizing those who believed and gathering them into the fold of the Church, away from the contagion of their heathen surroundings—those were as clearly defined items in the programmes of the early missionaries as was the scheme of salvation they believed in. Works of philanthropy, social uplift, medical aid or educational service, were all undertaken with the sole object of furthering the one end of saving the souls of the people to whom such services were offered. The scruples that perplex the sensitive modern missionary, in the face of non-Christian criticism of his methods, as to whether it is right to use these philanthropic services to one's fellowmen as baits to attract them to one's religious fold, did not so much as occur to his predecessors. Every item of missionary enterprise was meant to subserve the supreme end of evangelism, and was expected to yield tangible result in conversions. Even the task of higher education in India, to which missions have devoted a very great deal of resources in men and money, was undertaken with the evangelistic end in view. Western education, it was hoped, would prove a preparation for the Gospel—a hope that has to a great extent been falsified and been largely abandoned. Since the recent report of the Lindsay Commission, missionary education is directed to serve the less ambitious end of equipping Indian Christians rather than that of evangelizing India through the education of her youth. The increasing assumption by the Government of the task of education, in all its stages, and the restrictions imposed on the use of education as a means of evangelization, have deprived missions of their lead in educational service and an important avenue of missionary effort.

The same is true of most other lines of missionary service,



which were entered upon in all good faith as means of evangelization. It was the love of Christ that constrained the missionary to come out to the foreign field and give himself in service to the brother for whom Christ died; and what more natural than that he should seek to use every means, every approach, to make that brother share in the saving grace of that sacrificial death! The love of man as man, and the duty to serve him as such—not as a prospective convert to any sect—and the belief that this life has a value in itself, other than as a preparation for a realm of future rewards and punishments, are modern conceptions, and the pioneers of missionary work are not to be condemned for not sharing that outlook or for adopting the means that seemed justified by their noble objective.

But not so their present-day successors. They are faced with a changed outlook and a different situation. The modern mind sees that health and sanitation, education and social uplift are good in themselves and are the undeniable rights of every individual, and that these ought to be provided as good in themselves and their provision not used as means to realize other ends. Further, the modern conception of the State makes the provision of these a charge upon Government and the prevention of their exploitation a duty of the State. This not only deprives the missionary of fruitful avenues for the spreading of his message, but presents him with a testing and a rethinking of his motives. Is his love of his fellowman but a cover for his selfish devotion to his own creed? Ought he to engage in much-needed service when such service may not lead to acquisitions to his church or sect? Can he rejoice in removal of injustices and provision of services, even when these are not accomplished by himself and may even retard his objective of gathering people into his fold?

Such a crucial testing was presented to the Christian missionary in India by the recent achievements in the removal of age-

old injustices to the untouchables of India. It was from this so-called Submerged Sixth of India that Christian missions had in the main been drawing their converts. But as the result of the leavening influences of Christianity the Hindu conscience has been awakened towards this crying evil and great efforts are being made to have it removed. Mahatmā Gandhi's devotion to this cause is prior to, and more intense than, that to any other of the innumerable causes with which he is connected. His Harijan Sevak Sangh, organized after his great fast on behalf of the untouchables, has branches all over India and is vitally affecting the life of these people, who are now collectively known by the beautiful name he has given them of Harijan—the people of God. As an earnest of their all-India emancipation the young Maharaja of Travancore has given the untouchables of his State the right of entry into all Hindu temples on equal terms with all other Hindus. These efforts mark the beginning of an awakening in Hinduism that is bound to go far and deep.

But how have the Christian Churches and Missions met this awakening? Instead of rejoicing at the removal of an injustice—an injustice that had infected Christian communities as well, for caste distinctions are not unknown among Christians too in India—and the purification of a sister religion, Christians have shown a tendency to pick flaws in and impute motives to it, for the obvious reason that it would stop the flow of converts to the Christian churches. Missionaries, e.g., have on the whole been inclined to accept and magnify the claim of Dr Ambedkar to represent the depressed classes over against Gandhi, because the former threatened to lead an exodus of his people from Hinduism to what they fondly hoped would be the Christian Church, though the Doctor himself was expressly undecided as to which his promised land was to be, the only thing he looked for being the securing of highest political advantages for his people. In

spite of all wooing and bolstering up, Dr Ambedkar still remains undecided and with as little appeal as ever to those in whose name he claims to speak, while the whole Harijan population is fast being assimilated into the general Hindu community.

Much has been said and written about methods of missionary approach to non-Christians, as to what constitutes proselytism and what is implied in the genuine right of conversion. I do not think there is real divergence of opinion on these things. I trust Gandhiji's dictum on the matter will be universally accepted: that religious missions must, like Caesar's wife, be above suspicion. The religious worker can never be too scrupulous as to the motives and methods that he employs. If his object is conversion, if he believes, with Dr Kraemer, that the only attitude the Church can take towards India's outcastes is to do its utmost to bring them under the dominion of Christ, then he ought not to hedge about that objective or veil it under cover of helping them to fulfil natural aspirations, for there is no indication that left to themselves they would lift their eyes in the direction of the Church, as the learned Doctor assumes. That is where the Indian appreciates the candour alike of the early missionary and of his fundamentalist successor, who make no secret of their motives and are prepared to face opposition and forego aid and protection from 'heathen governments'. But the type of missionary who bewails the changed conditions and finds in them obstructions to his objectives is one who is unwilling or unable to press home his call to conversion. The blunt appeal to 'come out and be separate', he finds, will call forth no response, and in fact he is often unable to sound it because increased knowledge and contact with other religions have taught him that they are not wholly evil, nor altogether to be scrapped. He therefore uses specious words like 'sharing' and 'co-operation' with other faiths while what he really means is 'giving' and 'conversion'. It is the dis-

ingenuousness that is often involved in this position that causes the misunderstanding and the heartburning that exist wherever the missionary approach is made in India today.

For what an awakened Hinduism resents is not so much the methods of Christian Missions—methods are but an expression of the faith—but the content of the message itself. Dr Kraemer in his book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* shows real insight when he stresses the distinction between the essentially mystical and non-dualistic background of all Hindu thinking and the transcendentalist and salvationist conception of Christianity which has stereotyped itself in Christian orthodoxy and which is sought to be revived in what he calls the school of Biblical realism<sup>1</sup> of today. He therefore does not set much store by the efforts so far made by Indian Christian scholars like Dr A. J. Appasamy merely to clothe the orthodox Christian doctrines in terms borrowed from Indian heritage. He rightly points out that no amount of Indian terminology will bridge the gulf between the Hindu conception of God's continuous incoming into the world-order, 'moving a man among men, when righteousness declines and wickedness is strong, succouring the good and thrusting evil back,'<sup>2</sup> and the one and only incarnation of the transcendent God in the Jesus of history. But he forgets that this position of Biblical realism is riddled through and through with difficulties, historical and metaphysical; and is the one

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<sup>1</sup> 'Biblical realism' regards the Bible as a unique revelation of God, a revelation not through the enlightened mind or conscience of man; but as the record of God's breaking into human history in certain revelatory acts. It demands not understanding but faith on the part of man, unquestioning acceptance of these as acts of God. This sets up an unreal conflict between faith and reason. But faith need not run counter to reason, though it may go beyond it—'Faith is reason grown courageous'. No revelation can take the place of thought.

<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, iv, 7-8.

position that a Christianity that would come to terms with thinking, instead of seeking, as Dr Schweitzer puts it, 'to take the place of thought', has ever been in difficulties in maintaining. He does not face, e.g., the undoubted apocalyptic element in the Gospels, which is so bound up with the divine claims of Jesus and so invalidates those claims.

In his chapter on Islam Dr Kraemer admits that this claim of unique revelation, seeking no sanctions from thought but imposing itself on the human mind as the expression of Divine Will, stands confronted with the similar but contradicting claim of Islam. Against that impregnable rock he can only counsel patience; but no amount of patience can wear down the opposition between systems of implicit belief, each claiming infallible authority. And, as Professor Radhakrishnan points out, orthodox Islam is not the only rival to such claims of Christian orthodoxy. National Socialism in Germany today, with its supra-rational belief in and demand for unquestioning obedience to its inspired leader, presents a kindred though contradictory phenomenon.

Dr Kraemer advises Christian missionaries to harbour no illusions about the easy breakdown of the tenacity and the resistance of Islam to the Christian approach. It were good if Christian Missions realized also that in Hinduism they have to face a religious outlook that is even more tenacious than the stolid orthodoxy of Islam. The flabbiness and nebulousness of Hinduism has given it an impression of vulnerability. But it is really an expression of an elasticity and comprehensiveness that is sure of its strength and therefore only seems to offer no resistance. Even Islam, in spite of the inroad and conquests it has made in the field of Hinduism, has mellowed and deepened under the impact of the older religion till there has developed, even within its strait and narrow system, a movement that is universal and vitally spiritual. Dr Kraemer regards this mystical development

in Islam as an alien growth and would not look to it for the establishment of any rapprochement between Christianity and Islam. Mysticism is to him a dangerous product of naturalistic monism. If that is true then a very great deal in the religious heritage of Christendom must also be written down as dangerous aberrations, and this bleak and barren creed of Biblical realism with its supra-rational doctrine of a unique revelation must fight its way till it batters down all opposition and establishes world dominion, much as the Nazi Fuehrer would do if he could. To picture or present Jesus to the world as a religious Fuehrer is the worst disservice that can be done to him or to religion.

But tendencies other than Biblical realism in Christian thinking, and the genius of Hinduism, as it has expressed itself in its contacts with other religions, give ground for a different hope from the meeting of the two religions on Indian soil. In the early formative centuries of Christian thinking various elements entered into its development and modified the original core of its message. Unfortunately the process was once for all officially halted and the syncretist achievement of the early centuries was codified in creeds and handed down as a fixed deposit of the faith. But in spite of this, Christian thinking has constantly been enriched by other systems and there have all along been spirits who went beyond the bounds permitted by Church and creed and realized experiences that transcended all definitions. Further, the hard crust of doctrine, jealously guarded by the churches, with threats of excommunication and eternal damnation, has crumbled under the expansive influences of increasing human knowledge. Today this battered Christian creed is thrown into the melting-pot of religions and civilizations, which is what the world is at the present time. Particularly in India it comes into the closest contact with Hindu thinking. The Hindu world-view is something that has maintained itself for centuries and

is finding new life today. Is reconciliation possible between that and Christian thought? Is there a place in it for the personality and ethic of Jesus, for the cult and devotion centring round him? The Hindu will not say no. Hinduism is no closed, no credal system. It has certainly a place for Jesus among the many leaders and teachers it reverences as revealers of God to man, nay, as incarnations of God in His aspect as the Lover and Redeemer of man. Its conception of a Favourite God, *Ishtha Devata*, would sanction even an exclusive worship of him to those who find in such adoration the way to God-realization. But it would definitely place him in its own setting among the diverse modes and ways in which the Unfathomable and the Eternal manifests itself to mortal minds. Who can say that this is not the setting in which he will find his permanent place in the religious heritage of the race, at any rate in India?

It is an adventure of the spirit, as well as a daring exercise of the consecrated intellect, to which the Indian Christian and the discerning missionary is challenged by the religious situation in India. But if the Christian thinker in India might well tremble at the immensity of his task and the uncertainty of the goal it might lead him to, he has great examples in the history of Christian thought to encourage him to go forward. Christianity has rooted itself in the West, not by displacing the great intellectual and cultural traditions of Europe, but by incorporating them into its own systems of thought. The great creative periods in Western Christian history are those when the Platonic and Aristotelian systems of thought were wedded to the original Semitic strand in the Christian heritage. If to Clement of Alexandria and Origen the Greek philosophers were schoolmasters leading them to Christ; if St Augustine could interpret Christianity in Neo-Platonist terms; if the synthesis between Christian and Aristotelian thought worked out by St Thomas Aquinas

could become the basis of Roman Christian orthodoxy; if in modern days a leading Christian scholar like Dean Inge can describe himself as both a Platonist and a Christian, why should not the attempt be made to incorporate Hindu thought, which is far more pronouncedly religious than Greek thought ever was, with the Christian? It is to such an interaction between Christian and Hindu thought that discerning minds in the West are looking for a new flowering of human culture. 'A.E.', e.g., says, 'If Europe is to have a renaissance comparable with that which came from the wedding of Christianity with Greek and Latin culture, it must, I think, come from a second wedding of Christianity with the culture of the East'. The world yet awaits the real assimilation of the Christian Gospel into the religious heritage of India.

—*Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*, 30-41

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<sup>1</sup> *The Living Torch*, Edited by Mark Gibbon. (Macmillan)



## II. Christianity in Relation to other Religions

### CHRISTIANITY IN A REVOLUTIONARY WORLD

The age in which we are living is not a revolutionary age, but a post-revolutionary one. Our generation has seen revolutions play themselves out and leave the world much as they found it or even worse. There has been a series of revolutions in the modern West, each hailed in its hey-day as ushering in a new heaven and a new earth, and each in turn failing to fulfil its promise. First came the Religious Revolution, the Reformation, promising salvation through change of church. But it only split up the unity of Christendom and set up rival autocracies in Europe. Then came the Political Revolution, the great French Revolution, with its watch-words of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. But political freedom for the masses often meant only freedom to starve. So, in quite recent times, came the Economic Revolution or Salvation through Economics. Keen and forward-looking minds in many countries hailed it as the dawn of a new civilization. But wherever it has succeeded it has resulted in a new tyranny. The Communist State, instead of withering away, is entrenching itself more deeply and shows no tendency to ease its iron-grip of the masses. It is no wonder, therefore, that many one-time ardent believers in the new apocalypse have lost their illusions and are sorely disappointed.

## The Prevailing Mood

I have recently read two books which tell the sad tale of ardent self-committal to this new Messiah and of subsequent bitter disillusionment. One is *The Lost Illusion* by Freda Utley, a gifted British author and journalist, who joined the British Communist Party and lived for over ten years in Soviet Russia. Those years in the Communist heaven completely cured her of her Communism. She states her conclusion in the words with which her friend, Bertrand Russell, had warned her in the days of her infatuation, that Russia is not building up a society of the equal and the free, certainly not of the free, whatever claims to equality they may make. The other book has the arresting title: *The God that Failed*. Men like Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, and Richard Wright had eagerly joined the Party, finding a sense of release and exaltation in surrendering themselves to its demands and dictates, but found its service an unbearably hard yoke crushing all that was vital and sublime in them. Others like Andre Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender were worshippers from afar, but they too found the service of the new God meant far from freedom. So they unitedly bear testimony to their disappointment and disillusionment. That undoubtedly is the prevailing mood of the modern man. There is little that he can look forward to. There seem to be no more revolutions in the bag.

The modern Indian outlook is not very different. I know from personal experience the sense of exaltation we Indians felt in the hope of achieving Swaraj. How much of suffering and privation were gladly endured for that hope! But now Swaraj has come, but there is no exaltation or exultation. The glory seems to have departed from the world and there seems to be little worth living for. It looks as if things shall ever be as they were in the beginning.

## Revolution that Religion Advocates

It may be that this mood of disappointment provides just the climate for the kind of revolution that essential religion has always advocated, revolution not through change of environment, but through change of the human material that has to live and work through that environment. The purpose of the world, according to the teaching of Religion, is not the establishment of a physical Utopia, though it is quite likely (it is certainly only so possible) that an economic paradise could be the by-product of a new humanity. Even the hedonists admit that happiness is not to be achieved by a direct pursuit of it, but is the by-product of noble living. Even so a physical Utopia may never be achieved by directly aiming at it. Those who have attempted it have found it necessary to go on liquidating an increasing number of men and women who will not fit into their plans. All the wonderful physical powers which were to raise humanity above the floods of accident to a humanist heaven have only confronted man with the grim possibility of destroying himself thereby. Through this failure of hope, almost failure of nerve, the modern man may now be willing to admit that we need a fulcrum outside Time to change anything in Time. Otherwise revolutions simply revolve, like a child trying to cross a creek in a barrel, and the more we change things the more they are the same. We have to be transcendental if we are ever to be practical.

Is not that the message of vital religion? That there is a force working within Time, a Love that will not let man go, a Hound of Heaven following the footsteps of man

With unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

till man surrenders himself to it, a willing captive to it to find fullness of life and true freedom in that bondage. Is not this the testimony of the men and women of the Spirit in all religions and in all ages? And do they not point the way to lasting peace and unfailing happiness not only for the individual, but for the race? An earthly Utopia may only result from our seeking the unearthly ends of growth and fullness of life for all mankind, from our seeking to be the children of God.

### **The Problem of Religious Relationships**

And yet this is no other-worldly goal or endeavour. This fullness of growth, this status of God's children, is to be attained on this earth, under the conditions of Time and Space. The Christian message when it first came was conceived in terms of other-worldliness. The Kingdom of God expected to appear was a supernatural Kingdom, the New Jerusalem descending from heaven all ready adorned like a bride. This other-worldliness, this supernaturalism involved in that apocalyptic hope, has been falsified by history. The mould into which the Christian ethic of love was originally cast has burst. But the abiding element in it, the Ethic of Love, the fundamental faith that Love is the Law of Life embedded in it has to be expressed in terms of the modern belief in this world. The Kingdom is come on earth. The world is in desperate need of such a transformation; and the only alchemy that will work that transformation is the principle of love. It is here that the testimony of Mahatma Gandhi comes as a challenge to Christianity. His was an attempt to take love as a working principle and apply it to effect a transformation in human lives and relationships. That to me constitutes the primary challenge of the modern world to Religion, to bring the light of the Eternal to bear on the problems of life in Time, to make Religion this-worldly.

This involves, in the first place, a frank facing of the problem of religious relationships. Does not Gandhiji's example, as well as the lives of many outside the bounds of the historic Church who have manifested the fruits of the Spirit, compel us to admit that God is no respecter of persons, that the sacraments and ordinances of religion, the creeds and rituals, do not bind God and that His Spirit enlightens and empowers all who respond to its impulses. That I believe is another of the challenges to Christianity in the modern world, the challenge to accept unreservedly the fact of variety in man's understanding of the Divine and the willingness to grasp the hand of kindred spirits in all religions or of none, who are striving for the values of the Kingdom of God. This is not to advocate a syncretism of faiths or a tactful and tactical compromise between rival faiths on grounds of expediency. It is a coming together on the deeper levels of life and a growing together to heights yet unattained. As Gerald Heard says in his *Preface to Prayer*: 'The union of all who pray and who by prayer grow in love and understanding may yet prove to be the basis of that universal church which is mankind's hope'.

Further, any religion that can appeal to the disillusioned modern man in this post-revolutionary epoch must be a world-transforming faith, expressed in terms of modern realities and modern needs. It must speak to the condition of the modern man. In other words it must provide a real alternative to Communism. The transcendental status it confers on man, that of a Child of God, must find its justification and fulfilment in effecting peacemaking on this earth. That is man's sorest need at the present time—making peace in a world in dread of another war. And yet how feeble, how ineffective our efforts are! We meet in peace conferences at great cost and effort, with a great deal of fanfare, but what are the results we can show? All ideals

that cannot be reduced to practice are spurious, said a great English statesman, Edmund Burke. Are we standing that test? Here again Gandhi's programme of *Sarvodaya* comes as a challenge. It has to be admitted that that too remains an unfulfilled ideal. But it is a blue-print that can be implemented. Recently some of us listened to a programme of action suggested by an ardent follower of Gandhiji, Mira Behn, a plea for an immediate implementation of the Gandhian programme in India. In an article entitled 'Straight from the Heart', she advocates the immediate scrapping of the Indian Constitution, the disbandment of the Indian Army, Navy and Air-force and the re-organization of the State on non-violent lines. One's first reaction to it was that it is an expression of impatience, an impracticable outburst. Yes, it is incapable of immediate implementation. The way to it has to be prepared and can be prepared by carrying forward the creative revolution which that great practical idealist has initiated and chalked out. The items of that creative revolution are far from being worked out in a revolutionary spirit by those in charge of it. It is no wonder that individuals are getting impatient and many are turning cynical. But the working out of such a revolutionary programme with a sense of urgency and a spirit of devotion is what is demanded by the times. Basic education, decentralization of economy, etc., are items in it that really point the way to and provide the means whereby a more satisfying world order can be surely built. The working out of such a positive programme is to me another challenge of the age in which we live.

### **Gandhian Outlook Not Wholly Satisfying**

It may be that the Gandhian outlook is not wholly satisfying, that it does not make for fullness of life, as many people understand it, does not show sufficient awareness of the realities of a

unified world, does not utilize all the resources available to man at the present time, constructive and auspicious of happiness. It may not be satisfying, for example, on the questions of the family and of the relations between the sexes. . . .

. . . We shall be offending against the spirit of Him who said: 'He that is not against me is for me', if we shut out the co-operation of any because 'he followeth us not', because they do not belong to our particular group or fellowship. In the world in which we live we must welcome the comradeship of all those who are striving for the fundamental values of life. One of the writers of the book I referred to, *The God that Failed*, ends his testimony by drawing attention to a distinction between theories and values. 'I have repeatedly expressed my opinion', says Ignazio Silone, 'on the relations between the Socialist Movement and the theories of Socialism: these relations are by no means rigid or immutable. With the development of new studies the theories may go out of fashion or be discarded, but the movement goes on. I do not conceive Socialist policy as tied to any particular theory, but to a faith. The more socialist theories claim to be "scientific", the more transitory they are; but the Socialist values are permanent. The distinction between theories and values is not sufficiently recognized, but it is fundamental. On a group of theories one can found a school; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together among men.'

The Kingdom of God, as Jesus conceived and practised it, was not an organization but a contagion. We must not identify it with any of our little systems.

Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be;  
But Thou, O Lord, are greater than they.

The leaven of the Kingdom, working in and through us, till it leavens the whole lump, is the Christian answer to the challenge of the modern age.

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XXX, Nos. 20, 21



## CHRISTIANITY IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

In spite of the unequivocal declaration in the Indian Constitution that India is a Secular State, it still seems necessary to assert the right of non-Hindu religions to exist in this predominantly Hindu country. That is because there are still groups and parties in the land which seem determined to force the Hindu culture and way of life upon the nation as a whole. The efforts now being made by certain interested parties to ban by legislation cow-slaughter in the country are an indication of the threat to the essential secularism of our State. It ought to be realized beyond question that India is a land, not of one religion, but of diverse religions, and that the State does not sponsor or foster any one religion at the expense of the others.

This is really in keeping with the genius of India, which through the ages has followed the path, not of mere tolerance, but of acceptance of diversities of creed and practice. Acceptance means assimilation. An unkind Christian critic of the Hindu way once remarked that Hinduism had swallowed every religion it had come across; it would fain swallow Christianity, only Christianity sticks in its throat and refuses to go down! Hinduism has not only swallowed but digested most of the faiths it came across. Indian Christianity too, if it is to fructify in this land, must be willing not only to go down the throat of Hinduism but to get digested within it so as to enter the blood-stream of

the nation's life. In doing this it will only be fulfilling the dictum of its Founder that it must die in order to live, like a grain of wheat which, except it 'fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'

Of course this process of assimilation has to go on continuously as the constituent faiths grow and develop. There have been periods when Hinduism has been mainly on the defensive, building up walls, mostly caste regulations, to protect itself from the inroads of other faiths. But there have also been glorious periods, or periods when at least creative individuals have cast aside protecting shells and entered into faithful intercourse with other faiths, resulting in significant mutations and advances in the nation's culture and progress. . . .

But the effort at assimilation has to be continually made at fresh levels. A decadent India under foreign domination failed to work out a creative synthesis under modern conditions and has paid dearly for that failure. The vivisection of India on the basis of religion has been a sad consequence of our failure to embody the peculiar genius of our country in terms of modern thoughts and needs. But partition has not, as we know, solved our problems or removed the challenge of rival faiths co-existing in this country. India continues to be a land of many religions, perhaps the only country where all the living religions of the world confront one another. It may be that in the Divine Providence the reconciliation of conflicts in religion is the special task assigned to India and in working this out she will be equipped the better to play her part as peace-maker to the world at large.

Among the many religions that have met on Indian soil and have contributed to the tension in the country is Christianity. It is often not realized that Christianity is no newcomer to this land, did not come as the insidious vanguard of a conquering

foreign power, a specious instrument for denationalizing and subjugating the country. It is not so widely known as it ought to be that Christianity found its foothold in India as early as the first century A.D. and has maintained and strengthened that foothold all through the twenty centuries of that religion's existence. The Syrian Christians of Kerala are not the products of recent Western missionary activity, or the tools of a foreign power for subjugation of the country.

This ancient and respected community on the West Coast of India had centuries ago worked out a rapprochement with its sister communities in the land, and flourished under non-Christian rulers. But the reconciliation achieved between Christianity and Hinduism was not on a very high or spiritual level. Neither of the two religions was very much alive and active during their long association. So the members of the Christian community in Kerala were content to settle down as almost another caste within the Hindu society around them, although worshipping in their own churches and maintaining their caste or communal regulations regarding food, marriage, inheritance, etc.

But a reconciliation achieved on anything less than the highest conscious levels breaks down when subjected to new tensions. Such a test came when this isolated Christian community was discovered by the militant Christian churches of the West in the 16th and subsequent centuries. The Syrian Church became infected with the virus of proselytism and has receded from its attitude of amity towards its Hindu neighbours. Mass conversions, mainly from low-caste Hindus and outcastes, have strengthened communal consciousness and fomented rivalry with other communities. Communalism became virulent with the developing of political consciousness as power speeded down to the people under modern democracy. Consequently we find increasing communal tension between the Hindu and Christian

communities in Travancore-Cochin, vitiating the politics of that progressive corner of India.

Reconciliation between religions and between cultures is possible on many levels and many bases. It is possible, e.g., on a basis of equal disregard of all religions. The indifferent Hindu and the indifferent Christian, people who are lukewarm or sceptical about all religions, can come together and feel kinship for a time. But that camaraderie is easily shaken and the indifferent religionist can turn into a rabid communalist when communalism has its political rewards and prizes. That is what happened in larger India with regard to Hindu and Muslim. The transformation of the late M. A. Jinnah, once an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity on the basis of equal indifference to both faiths, into a virulent advocate of Muslim communalism is a case in point. Only conscious reconciliation on the basis of equal respect for different religions and cultures will stand the strain of the divisive tendencies in the modern world. . . .

What is this basic faith underlying the various historical religions and needing to be kept alive and respected in all its manifestations? It is, as Dean Inge has said, 'that raw material of all religion, perhaps of all philosophy and art as well, that dim consciousness of the Beyond which is part of our nature as human beings'. It is this very consciousness that modern materialism seeks to deny. 'Modern sensate culture is based on the premise that only the things that we see, hear, smell, touch and otherwise perceive through our sense organs are real and have value. Hence fullness and richness of life is measured by the maximum of sensory reality-values, appropriated, possessed, enjoyed and used by an individual or group'.<sup>1</sup> This is fundamentally opposed to the teaching of religion, of all religions, that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things

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<sup>1</sup> Pitirim Sorokin, *The Reconstruction of Humanity*.

he possesses. Jesus characterized a rich man who put his trust in the abundance of his possessions as a rich fool, for 'what', he asked, 'is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

There have been in the course of human evolution a few outstanding individuals to whom the Unseen and the Eternal have been intensely real. They are the Master Minds of humanity, the founders of religions. The recapturing and embodying of their insights in terms of modern thought and life is the supreme task before humanity in this generation. These great Master Minds of the past, the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Sri Ramakrishna and others are the Pioneers and Great Companions of mankind in its upward march. The expressions and interpretations they gave to their basic faith were conditioned by the age in which each lived, by the traditions and outlook which each inherited and in part transcended. Hence the varieties of religious experiences and cults. But it is essential, vital, to realize the basic oneness that underlies the variations and to emphasize and bear witness to that. Such a witness to the abiding realities of life, to life's fundamental meaning and value, is the supreme need of the hour. In bearing this witness the great religions of the world can and must come together. But to do that they have each to discover the cardinal, essential truths they stand for.

That leads me to speak of what I regard as fundamental in Christianity, its peculiar flavour and emphasis. These factors to my mind are two:

(1) The moral holiness of God and His demand of righteousness from man. The idea of the holy was not at first, and is not yet entirely, associated with the moral and the good. The association of morality and righteousness with the concept of the Holy and the Divine is one of the achievements of the religious consciousness, and in this the Hebrew Prophets were the

leaders of mankind. 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted his soul unto vanity', said a Hebrew psalmist. And the essence of the Hebrew and the Christian religions is seen in another great saying of an early Hebrew prophet: 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? . . . shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Christianity carries on and completes this realization of God's moral holiness and this demand for righteous conduct from man.

(2) The linking up of love to God with love to one's fellowman. In his summing up of the Jewish Law Jesus coupled these two commandments together as of equal importance. And Jesus extended the bounds of neighbourliness to all mankind. The question, 'Who is my neighbour?' he answered with an inimitable parable: that everyone who is in need, be he high or low, stranger or compatriot, is our neighbour, to whom selfless love is due. If Christianity had emphasized these two commandments, even to the exclusion of everything else, the world would have come nearer to the Kingdom of God!

But there is much else in Christianity which many Christians hold as belonging to the essentials of the religion, and which therefore continues to divide its adherents into rival, warring camps. There are, e.g., the Messianic claims and the expectation of Jesus' imminent return as the judge of all mankind. But that whole conception belongs to the world-view of first century Judaism and has been wholly disproved by the course of history.

There is further the belief in Jesus as a mediator between God and man, as the one and only Incarnation of God. This

linked up with the belief in Jesus' rising again from the dead and living in the hearts of his devotees as an energizing presence. This to most Christians is the living essence of Christianity, the experience of the Living Christ in the heart of the believer. The Christian who experiences this, who identifies Jesus with God, must have the right to do so. Only he must not deny other mediators between God and man, other experiences of God's presence in the human heart. Such denials lie outside the positive experience of the Christian and therefore have no validity. If to many, perhaps most, Christians Jesus is an *Ishtadevata*, the devout Hindu will not quarrel with or question that; only the Indian Christian must not go outside the realm of genuine religious experience and deny the validity of other *Ishtadevatas*.

Wandering about the precincts of a magnificent South Indian Hindu temple, and seeing a small shrine there somewhat like a Christian chapel, the vision came to me of a Christianity that finds its place and keeps its distinctive flavour and fragrance within the framework of Indian religion. Christianity in an Independent India might yet find its rightful place within Indian religion, might yet become truly Indian without ceasing to be Christian.

But the vision that really enthralled me is beyond the walls of Churches and Temples. It is of people coming out of the stifling atmospheres of the so-called houses of God and meeting Him face to face in the broad open spaces of the world, amid the toils and sufferings of a humanity that is striving to realize the Kingdom of God on earth. Hindu, Muslim and Christian, indeed men and women of good-will of all religions and of no religion, can unite to achieve and maintain peace and justice on earth. That to me will be the fulfilling of Christianity, of Religion, in India and the world at large.

—*Aryan Path*, March 1953

## THE CHRISTIAN ROLE IN A SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM\*

'Hinduism has swallowed every religion it has come across. It would fain swallow Christianity too; but Christianity refuses to go down and sticks in its throat.' So said an ardent advocate of exclusive, orthodox Christianity. This unfriendly aspersion draws pointed attention to what is an essential feature of Hinduism or, more correctly, the *Sanatana Dharma* of India—for Hinduism is a term of foreign coinage and is not really expressive of the genius of a religion that claims no single founder and enforces no single creed or cult upon its votaries. That genius is one of genuine synthesis, of active assimilation, of the diverse elements that have gone into the making of Indian Dharma. And the spirit of militancy implied in that remark, of pitting one religion against another, as if Truth establishes its sway by its partial realizations demolishing or swallowing, instead of fulfilling and completing, each other, is untrue also to the spirit of the Founder of Christianity. 'Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit', said he, showing what manner of fulfilment he expected his message to have. Christianity may indeed have to go down the throat of Hinduism and get digested

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\* Original title: *Relation of Christianity with other Religions*



within, so that it may be thoroughly assimilated into the life-blood of Hindu Dharma, in order to produce the fruits of the spirit that its Master intended it to produce in all mankind.

Christianity has so far been viewed in India as a foreign religion, brought in the wake of foreign conquest and exploitation by the dominant races of the Christian West. This is in spite of the fact, not as widely known as it ought to be, of there having been a community of Christians on the South-West coast of India almost from the beginning of the Christian era, and flourishing there under Hindu rulers. But the Syrian Christians of Kerala were not a proselytizing church, and were content to exist alongside of their Hindu neighbours, forming almost a caste within Hindu Society, and steadily prospering materially, if not spiritually. It was only with the advent of the missionaries, first the Roman Catholics and then the varied brands of the Protestant West, that Christianity became a militant religion in India, making inroads on Hinduism and bidding for the soul of India. Its association with the marauding bands from the West and later with the imperial power that established its political sway over the land gave it a questionable prestige and a distinctly bad odour. This last was not wholly dispelled even by the great and devoted services it rendered to the country in pioneering educational activities, in providing much-needed and highly-appreciated medical aid and more notably in seeking and saving the poorest and the lost in the land. It gathered its converts mainly from the so-called submerged sixth of India and its signal successes in uplifting these stirred the conscience of India with regard to the great crime of untouchability. The Christian Church had strengthened itself in India mainly by large accessions from these neglected children of Hinduism; and it was inevitable that such converts should look to their Western saviours for guidance in all things. Even the smaller number of converts

from the upper castes were very much under the dominance of their Western teachers in their thinking and their ways of life. That was why Indian Christians as a body, with a few shining exceptions, were apathetic and even hostile towards the national upsurge in India. But the Christian community has taken less time than other minorities to fall in line with the rest of India and has given the lead to other minor communities in unreservedly trusting the majority and in not obstructing the growth of healthy democratic traditions in a free India. This is not merely due to worldly wisdom, but as much to the sanction the religion itself gives to the demands for freedom and social justice.

Yet Christianity in an Independent India, with a renascent Hinduism, faces an unprecedented crisis. India is awake after the sleep of centuries and her religions are on the defensive against the onslaughts of other militant faiths. The submerged millions are being integrated into Indian society and the blight of untouchability has been removed. The Harijan need no longer look for social uplift in folds other than Hinduism. The ancient culture of India which found its flowering in Vedanta is not only reasserting its appeal to all thinking minds in the country but is carrying its light to countries in the West and kindling seeking souls there. Above all, in Mahatma Gandhi, with his roots deep down in Indian soil and culture, but giving a practical demonstration of the workability of the ethics of Jesus, which forms the kernel of Christianity, India has thrown a stupendous challenge to that religion which it dare not pass by unheeded. Indian Christianity, if it is at all alive to the situation, at all sensitive to the signs of the times, has to rethink itself, reorient itself, to the new India, rediscover its basic substance and interpret that in terms acceptable to the Indian mind and genius.

But though unprecedented for Christianity in India, the

religion itself has met and weathered such crises in its long history, especially in its early days. It faced such a situation when it was confronted for the first time with the philosophy of ancient Greece, in the second century of its era. Daring thinkers there were in those days, particularly in the church of Alexandria, who were bold enough to appropriate the culture of Greece and to claim its greatest protagonists, Socrates and Plato, as 'Christians before Christ.' But that strain in Christian thought did not predominate, and gave way to the legalism and the sacerdotalism of the Church of Rome. In the teachings of the Vedanta and in the person of Gandhiji Indian Christianity meets a greater challenge, a challenge alike to its spirituality and its ethics. Will it produce thinkers like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who will do far more for Indian Christianity in the 20th century than what these thinkers attempted to do for the Church in second century Alexandria?

The fact is that there is little of spirituality that Christianity has, or needs, to teach to religion in India. India has a long record of spiritual quest and realization. The pathways of the spirit, the disciplines or *sadhanas* for self-realization, have been mapped and marked out by the *yogis* and *rishis* of India with a thoroughness and elaboration unequalled in any other religion. Christianity may indeed have much to learn from this search and realization. What it needs is to find its own place among the systems or *margas* recognised by a religion that is far more truly catholic than any form of Christianity. Christianity, as it has been developed in most of the churches that practise it, is essentially a *Bhakti Marga*, with Jesus Christ as its *Ishtadevata*. That is a conception and a status that Hinduism will readily grant. Of course, Christianity has its own distinctive emphasis, which it has maintained with a clarity that is often lost in the welter of *margas* and rituals that go to make up Hinduism.

And that is its emphasis on the ethics of Jesus, on his revelation of God as love, and its ringing demand that he who professes to love God must necessarily love and serve his fellowmen. 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen', says a New Testament writer, rightly expounding the moral demand of Jesus.

And there is in Christianity an element that it has inherited from its own Semitic ancestry in the religion of the Hebrews. This is its demand for social righteousness. Though heavily overlaid in orthodox, organised Christianity by its accumulated vested interests, it is something that makes essential Christianity a revolutionary force wherever it is earnestly practised. This is summed up in those profound utterances of Christ, so glibly repeated and so often taken for granted by Christians, the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, which a modern student of religions has rightly called the Code of Christ.<sup>1</sup> What Gandhi, the Hindu, has preeminently demonstrated is the practicability of this code or way of life, which may after all be the only way out for a world which has seen revolutions play themselves out and cancel each other, the violence of Communism provoking the counter-violence of Fascism, bringing the world to the brink of catastrophe. Indian Christianity, if it is alive to the challenge of this great non-Christian, living the Christian life, but outside the pale of its churches, will rise and meet this challenge and integrate itself with Indian religion at its best in an effort to realise its own ideal of the Kingdom of God on earth, or to achieve *Sarvodaya*, to give its equivalent in present Indian setting and context.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Heard, *The Code of Christ: An Interpretation of the Beatitudes*, Cassell & Co.

With Islam Christianity has much more in common than with Hinduism. Monotheistic and non-idolatrous, Islam sprang from the same roots as Christianity. Both revere the same Hebrew prophets, and Islam holds Jesus, the son of Mary, in reverence less only to that it gives to its own prophet. In fact, Islam arose and still stands as a rebuke to the tritheism and sacerdotalism developed in certain sects of Christianity. It has the same concept of God as the Creator, Ruler and Judge of all mankind; only Christianity goes deeper and fuller into these fundamental concepts and sees in God not only an almighty, though merciful, Judge, but also a loving father, who so loved the world that His unique son and revealer was willing to die in his work of seeking and saving lost humanity. In its doctrines of incarnation and redemptive vicarious suffering, and of the mystical union of believers with God in Christ, Christianity establishes its link with many aspects of Hinduism. If ever there was a religion called upon to play the part of a bridge-builder between Hinduism and Islam it was Christianity in India. If that work of reconciliation has not been attempted and achieved, it is as much due to the failure of Indian Christianity to understand its opportunities and rise equal to its tasks as to the loss of nerve and initiative of a decadent Hinduism. A Hinduism, largely dormant during two centuries of political subjection, could not carry on and complete the process of assimilating this virile religion that had been initiated by some daring religious geniuses in North India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. And Christianity in India has been too much concerned with adding to its numbers and strengthening itself as a community against other religious communities to attempt any work of religious reconciliation. But the challenge and duty still remain. There are still forty millions of Muslims in India who have yet to be integrated into Indian society, so that

they may resist the temptation to separatism which the militant character of their religion and the lure of Pan-Islamism outside present to them. A renascent Hinduism and a vitalized Christianity truly Indian ought to rise equal to this great opportunity and challenge to reconcile Islam to India, to assimilate the elements of strength and truth in it and to accord to that dynamic religion a place in the scheme of Indian thought and life.

The religion of Zarathustra too has many elements in common with Christianity. Zarathustra stands undoubtedly in the line of the great prophets of mankind, the bringers of Light to the darkness of the world. He can rightly be regarded as a forerunner of Christ, quite as much as any of the Hebrew prophets accepted in that role by Christianity. Its dualism, the conflict between Light and Darkness, and the final triumph of the Good is very closely akin to the dominant strain in Christian thought, and Zarathustra's Philosophy of the Good Life<sup>1</sup> finds its fulfilment in Christ's ideal of the Kingdom of God. A revival of this ancient faith among its Indian votaries is devoutly to be wished for, and a genuine Christianity will do all it can to stimulate it on the principle that the flourishing of any religion does not depend on the languishing of others, but on the devotees of all religions practising what is best in every one of them.

In Buddhism and its sister faith of Jainism, Christianity has a faith very close to its own religion of love. Jesus the Christ would undoubtedly have recognised in Gautama the Buddha a kindred spirit, perhaps an elder brother. The systems of Cosmology and Soteriology developed in these Indian religions of redemption are vaster than those of the later Semitic faith. But the spirit that informs them is remarkably akin to that of

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of Bishop Gore's very sympathetic study of Zoroastrianism; *Everyman's Library*: No. 924.

him who went about doing good out of compassion for the multitude and who calls to all mankind: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' 'Your Christ appears to me to be a great Bodhisattwa', said a Chinese Buddhist monk to a Christian scholar. That appraisal, truly characteristic of the Buddhist attitude towards Christ, is a hand held out in fellowship and goodwill towards a kindred faith. Will Christianity hold back dissatisfied at the response to what it holds to be unique about its Founder? Is it not more in keeping with his spirit to accept the hand of fellowship and walk in company with these people, who certainly are 'not far from the Kingdom', in a common quest after truth and the Good Life?

What religions today are called upon, at this time when the world has become one, when adherents of different faiths jostle each other in offices and universities, in market places and in running trains, is to an adventure of faith, a full sharing of the deepest and the best within them, without a thought of any religion battenning itself on the spoils from others, in a joint endeavour to achieve a just and peaceful world order, which seems to be the very condition of human survival at all on this planet which has considerably shrunk in its dimensions in relation to the human mind. This coming together is not to be on a basis of indifference to what is distinctive in the different faiths. Nor is it to be in the interests of an artificial mixture of all religions, a working out of the Lowest Common Measure of all faiths which may not offend any one but will satisfy no one but the speculative theorist. The Fellowship of Faith that is here advocated is, in the words of Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, 'no easy indulgence of error and weakness or lazy indifference to

the issues involved. It is not the intellectual's taste for moderation or the highbrow's dislike of dogma. It is not the politician's love for compromise or being all things to all men; nor is it simply a negative freedom from antipathies. It is an understanding insight, full trust in the basic Reality which feeds all faiths and its power to lead us to Truth. It believes in the deeper religion of the Spirit, which will be adequate for all people, vital enough to strike deep roots, powerful to unify each individual in himself and bind us all together by the realization of our common condition and our common goal.'

An adventure on this deeper and dynamic level of inter-religious fellowship is being attempted in a new movement under Christian auspices in India—the Fellowship of Friends of Truth. Walking through the fields of Noakhali, East Bengal, with Gandhiji one day in January 1947, Mr Horace Alexander, the well-known English Quaker friend of India, put it to him thus: 'It seems to me that what the world, especially India, needs above all today is some religious fellowship which can be and will be joined by adherents of all the chief religions. I am not now thinking of a "syncretistic" movement, like Theosophy, which deliberately tries to take the best from each faith and joins them together. I am thinking of a union of hearts, a fellowship in which men of each faith, Hindu, Buddhist, Parsi, Jew, Muslim, Christian, all find themselves at one, because they are seeking together to practise the truth of God in the world. And I have wondered whether the Society of Friends, the "Quakers" so called, could help to provide such a meeting ground. Of course, if you could show me that in fact some other group, such as the Brahmo Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission, is better fitted to provide such a fellowship, then I ought to consider joining such a group. What do you say?' Gandhi did not answer without first giving some time for thought. Then he said: 'No, of the



societies that I know, I do not think any other would be better or even so good. I think the Quakers are the best. But only on one condition: Are they prepared to recognise that it is as natural for a Hindu to grow into a Friend as it is for a Christian to grow into one?' To this Horace Alexander replied: 'Some would agree to that condition and some would not. I for one am one of those who would readily accept that position, not only for Hindus but for Muslims and others.'

It is on the basis of this full acceptance of the naturalness of people of all faiths growing into a unity of spirit in the bond of peace that a few Quakers in India, as members of a historic Christian community, have given the lead in such a Fellowship of Faiths. To me it seems to contain the germ of a genuine fellowship of religions which is needed in India and in all the world, which will organise the forces of good fostered by all the religions of the world for the overthrow of entrenched evil both in the individual heart and in society. To me as an Indian Christian, this seems to be the beginning of Christianity's answer to the challenge of Gandhi. It may be that in meeting it Christianity will have to allow itself to be swallowed by the religion of India, to die in order to find a larger and fuller life in Indian Dharma. But that would be in the spirit of its Master, in the spirit expressed in that truly Christian hymn, as applied not merely to the individual but to institutional Christianity as well:

O Love that will not let me go,  
 I rest my weary soul in Thee,  
 I give Thee back the life I owe,  
 That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
 May richer, fuller be.

—*The FFT Quarterly*, Vol. V, No. 1

### III. Religion and Politics

#### A LETTER TO THE METROPOLITAN\*

My Lord Bishop,

While thanking your Lordship for your kind reply to my letter I beg permission to write once again as I felt I must not leave certain statements in your letter unanswered. Forgive me for seeming to argue with your Lordship, but I only write because of the intensity of my feelings and the depth of my convictions on the subject.

Your Lordship can only approve of a constitutional agitation and insists on the necessity of the Indian politician accepting the basis of established authority in the land on the analogy of the scientist accepting the unalterable laws of Nature in his experimental researches upon them. In arguing thus you miss the *raison d'etre* of the whole nationalist movement in its present phase, for it questions the very basis of the British Government in India. Time was when even the extremist of Indian nationalists was willing to accept the fact of the British Government and seek for reforms within it. But the persistence of the

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\* This is the text of the letter George wrote to Metropolitan Foss Westcott in May, 1930.

Government in its policy of exploitation, its callousness to the sufferings of the people, its breaches of promise and the indignities it has heaped upon the nation have led the sincerest of one-time friends of Britain to regard the British connection as an evil and a thing to be done away with at the earliest possible moment. In the face of such a conviction honestly and strongly held—and that represents the mentality of thinking India now under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi—it is off the mark to chide at the means adopted to end that Government on the score that they are not constitutional. Any means, the most drastic, is justified in getting rid of a disease. That is how the nations of the world have argued and they have not scrupled to use the most violent of means to rid themselves of systems and authorities that had foisted themselves upon them, very often seeking shelter under pleas of Divine sanction.

But fortunately for India and for the world there has appeared one who is also scrupulous as to the means and who has decreed that they shall be in strict accordance with the teachings of the wisest and greatest teachers of mankind. He has dared to introduce religion and morality into politics, ending the disastrous separation that Western civilisation had brought about between them. You say that our Lord kept out of politics, but are we not to bring Him into our politics if He is to be the Lord of all life? Ought not the relations between nations to be guided and controlled by His principles? Granted that relations in a particular case may be immoral and unjust, is not a follower of Jesus Christ free, nay bound, to adopt means to bring an end to that relation, provided those means are in accordance with the teachings of the Master? And I challenge anyone to say that in principle the war of non-violent disobedience to an unjust law is against the teaching of Christ.

You say that you see nothing wrong in the Government

meeting a non-violent movement with force. As the *Calcutta Statesman* put it once the Government is not pledged to non-violence. Neither is the Church, nor her Christian Bishops, who can in all conscience bless battles and armaments. Believe me, Christianity in India is being judged and heathen India is rising up in judgement against her.

You refuse to believe the charges of violence and misrepresentation on the part of the Government under its Christian Viceroy. But the nation knows whom to believe, Mahatma Gandhi, who is the soul of Truth . . . or a Viceroy who in spite of his Christian profession cannot rise above a vicious and soulless system.

Believe me, the soul of India responds to the voice of Mahatma Gandhi as she cannot and will not respond to the sweetest tongued voice of strangers (cf. St John 10). Britishers in India, missionaries and Government servants have tried to ignore that fact, to carry on as if Gandhiji didn't exist and to serve India in spite of him as it were. That is the Englishman's folly in India at the present time and it may cost him dear after all. The claim that the British missionary or politician makes to love India more than her own sons or even than Gandhiji himself appears to us sheer presumption. Yours at best is a double devotion, and when the material interests of the two countries clash—as they do most decidedly at the present time—God alone knows which way your sympathies swing. Instances are too rare for us to believe too easily the claim of any British missionary that he sets loyalty to truth and justice higher than loyalty to his nation. Christianity in India is languishing for lack of such exhibitions of real Christianity and true internationalism and the cause of both will be mightily served by such instances now.

One more word and that about your Lordship's reply to my

allusion to Moses. You say that you have always understood that the Israelites went with the full consent of Pharaoh. But you deliberately forget how that consent was won. It was forced out of Pharaoh with a mighty hand. To those of us who see in the present non-violent campaign under the spiritual leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the hand of God guiding India, it is a certainty that the same God is going to work India's deliverance, and we trust that it will be with the consent of Great Britain that India is to attain her freedom. For the issue is going to be decided finally in a conference to which the real representatives of India's millions can come honourably. To expedite that, and to lessen the suffering that must precede it, will be the contribution that you missionaries can make, if you are alive to the call of duty in this hour of India's tribulation.

I remain,

Yours obediently,

(*sd.*) S. K. GEORGE

—*Souvenir*, 8 ff.

days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely and this is His name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness'. Yes, He is our righteousness, but are we putting Him in the centre of our lives, in the centre of our world? . . . We Christians cannot keep aloof from all this struggle, however tumultuous it be. We cannot stand on the brink if we want to direct the current of it to the feet of our Master. Rather we ought to be in the midst of it all. But we can only plunge in and succeed if we take Him along with us, if we can feel the presence of the Fourth with us. It is only that unseen but intimately real presence that will arm us with courage and dismay our enemies. What is needed is that we should take that presence which is so real to us in our worship and in our sacrament, into our everyday life. Our urgent need is to constrain Him to abide with us—not as a passing guest but through storm and stress to abide with us.

—*The Guardian*, January, 1932

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND POLITICS

It is found that in the history of human thought and progress certain great truths lay hold of particular ages and seek to express themselves in the thoughts and actions of their representative men and women. Such truths take a pre-eminence in those particular ages over other aspects of truth. They are therefore the truths or aspects of truth that the Divine Spirit of Life guiding the evolutionary process of life wants to be expressed and lived out in those ages. In the history of Christian thought, we see particular aspects of Christian faith and experience being emphasised rather than others at certain times. The doctrine of the Incarnation or that of the Church or the Atonement have gripped men's minds at different periods of Christian history and controlled their actions. I believe that in these days one cardinal, central belief of the Christian religion, *viz.*, the hope of the Kingdom of God, is coming back in power to mould the thoughts and actions of men. This hope which I believe is central in the teachings of Christ and of the Old Testament prophets is entering upon a stage of plenary power compelling and controlling the actions of men in our day as never before.

The Kingdom of God in Christ's teaching has a double aspect, the individual and the universal. The Church even in its darkest days has been faithful more or less to the individual

aspect of it—its function as the agent of salvation, whether it was conceived of as sending individual souls to heaven or saving them for fullness of life here and hereafter. This personal, individual aspect of the Kingdom is all-important; without it the external realization of the Kingdom can never take place. The Kingdom of God of which the New Testament teaches us is no merely political organization, no order in which the states of the world are banded together in the pursuit of the fleeting values of this life. It is a state in which God comes to His own in His world, when in the Old Hebrew prophet's phrase 'the earth is filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.' No one who has not got the inner experience of the Kingdom of God, of being a child of God, can be a worker of this Kingdom to help to bring it in. But the aspects we are conscious of having recaptured in these days is that once a man is a member of the Kingdom he is committed to the responsibility of seeking to bring it in not only in other individuals but in the world at large, to bring the world order as such under the control of his God. This second half of the Christian hope has not always been recognised. There have been times when the Christian has been content with an individual salvation, despairing of the world as a hopeless muddle and cherishing a purely other-worldly hope of salvation. Is not that the state of Christianity in our country? Do not we have many pious Christians, and they are really sincere, who feel no concern about the state of the society in which they live, who have no sense of responsibility for the conditions of life all around them, the grinding poverty, the sickness and illiteracy of their people; who, if they are rich, feel no compunction in enjoying their riches themselves and feel no urge to share it in part or whole with their less fortunate brethren? They are earnest about their own salvation and of the salvation of these others, but they fail of the larger



hope that the world order as such can be redeemed, that 'the Kingdoms of this world can become the Kingdom of God and of His Lamb'.

It is this larger hope of the Kingdom of God as a present possibility in this world of God's creation which has come to us in this generation with a new compulsion. God's voice always speaks to the needs of men, answers the demands of the times. The signs of the times today call for a message of hope. The complications and conflicts of the present world order seem to challenge Christ and Christianity to give it a direction that will lead it out of futile policies and self-consuming rivalries. Do we have a message for the times? I believe we have and that is the message of the Kingdom of God in terms of world politics, of world reorganization. The recent appeal by Mr Lansbury to the Churches to intervene in the unseemly Anglo-Irish economic war is a case in point. A Christian Statesman despairing of an agreement between the politicians turned to the leaders of the Churches, to ask if they could exert any effective control over their followers. We need not blame the heads of the Churches for not intervening at that particular time—they may be watching their opportunity. But that they have a responsibility even in such political matters is unquestionable and is fortunately admitted by Christian leaders in the West. It is only in our own unhappy country, that politics is taboo to the Christian. The attitude of our missionary leaders—and they alone are still our leaders after a century of Christianity in the land—has been that the work of the Church in the land ought not to be interfered with by any interest in such mundane things as politics. It is an impossible position. India is in travail and is sure to bring forth something vitally significant; but in that mighty process of life, those who claim to speak for God, to possess the oracles of God, are to have no part because there is politics

involved in it. There are far larger issues than mere politics, than the relation of England and India, involved in it—issues which will decide humanly speaking the fate of the Kingdom of God in this generation in India and elsewhere. To seek to stand out of the current of Indian life at this time because there is politics involved in it is to deny our Christian responsibility, to refuse Christ his opportunity to mould the life of young India, now in process of generation. And that at a time when the spirit of God is moving mightily through the politics of this world to serve the ends of the Kingdom in this generation. Is not the ever patient, eternally hopeful spirit of God brooding over the deliberations of the League of Nations, the Disarmament conference and such like bodies, however tardy their processes may be?

And we know that Politics was not taboo to those ancient men of God, the Old Testament prophets. They were men who passionately loved their country and spoke straight to the needs of their generation their message from God. They were interested in the lives of their people and it was through that interest they were commissioned with messages, sometimes of stern rebuke, sometimes of wise counsel to the kings of their day. And it was these stern realists, who dared to look at the hard facts of life, the corruption of the rich, the injustice of Israel's foreign relations—it was these men who in spite of their knowledge of the depths of human depravity, of the faithlessness even of God's chosen people, who dared to paint for us those glowing pictures of the reign of God upon Earth. . . .

But one might say all that is Old Testament, what has Christ to say to it all? And here we get conflicting answers. But one thing can be safely asserted at the outset—Christ did not deny anything in the best prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. He came, and claimed to come, in the line of the prophets. He

quoted as his authorities the most spiritual passages of the prophets—passages which speak of mercy and truth and righteousness as the prime demands of God upon man. 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach deliverance to the captives'. A single saying of Christ like 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's', intentionally cryptic and non-committal to avoid giving a handle to his enemies, cannot be quoted as deciding the question of Christ's attitude towards politics. And if he himself, in fulfilling his appointed destiny, his particular mission in life did not take part in politics—that is no argument why his followers should not interest themselves in it and seek to carry his principles into it. If not, Western Christians would have had no sanctions for many Christian things in their civilization of which they are proud.

Politics is a prime interest in the life of man today. It comes home even to the man at the plough in the lowered prices of his produce or the straitened condition or otherwise of his life in general. The farmer and the labourer today is forced to take an interest in it and is becoming more and more conscious of his own power and responsibility in directing the policies of his country and the world at large. For the consequences of misguided politics in any country of the world are felt the world over. The imposition of tariffs by a single nation may affect the trade of the whole world and lead to a world conflict. A petty quarrel between states in a far corner of the world, if not made up in time, is bound to drag in the whole world in course of time. These things make the task of world reorganization, of settling the international relations of states, a matter of paramount and pressing importance. The dangers to civilization inherent in the animosities and rivalries of individual states, still organized on the basis of militant nationalisms, are so real that the task is one of great urgency and utmost difficulty.

. . . . Especially is it given to us Christians in this generation to see the vision of that most satisfying of all ideals that has been given to the heart of man to conceive, the vision of the Kingdom of God and to give ourselves in unquestioning obedience to the demands made by it in its divine urge to realise itself in our own day.

—*The Guardian*, September 22, 1932

## THE RELIGIOUS TRENDS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

The title of a recent book of Edward Shillito, 'Nationalism, Man's Other Religion', draws attention to a danger that is present all over the world—the danger of Nationalism itself becoming man's religion. The danger has happened in Italy and Germany and it is present in India today. A nation groaning under what it considers a humiliating foreign domination may any day rise in a frenzy of national feeling and commit excesses, provided it can find a person to rally round. Such persons may not be lacking in the India of today and, having attained their immediate objective, *viz.*, national liberation, there is the danger of this national deification being perpetuated. Such is the trend of the world's way at the present time. This danger is as yet discernible in India today only as a cloud as big as a man's hand rising on the Western horizon, but it may brew a mighty storm that might overshadow the Indian sky.

But there is another trend of Indian opinion that calls forth a response more akin to religion, though it seeks to organize itself in distinct hostility to all forms of traditional religion. And that is the spirit of Communism. This has its appeal to the more thinking and devoted of the country's youth. A caste-ridden and class-ridden country would turn with religious fervour to

the ideal of a state of equality and justice once it is presented to it as a practicable ideal. It is an ideal that has captured the imagination and controls the life of a consecrated soul like Pandit Jawaharlal, and there are multitudes to follow if he gives an organized lead.

But neither of these two trends are religious. In fact though they approach religion in their appeal and the fervour they generate, they are positively set against religion, especially against the religions of India, with their accumulated debris of ancient customs and regulations. The biggest factor that stands between the country and irreligion is the personality of Mahatma Gandhi. Wherever he goes on his tours, he has to defend himself against the attacks of godless youth—Communists or Self-Respectors or Rationalists—who call upon him to disown God and Religion, which are to them the curse of India—and right stoutly does he defend both. His political influence is quiescent just as we write at the beginning of 1934; but he is far from being a spent force politically or religiously. It may be that his gradual dissociation from practical politics will make his religious appeal the stronger and clearer. His active work for Harijan uplift is, as he repeatedly asserts, a distinctly religious effort. It is a clarion call to Hinduism to set its house in order. Mahatmaji is positive that unless Hinduism can eradicate even at this late hour this evil which has disfigured its fair face, it cannot hope to survive in a world that is outgrowing distinctions of class and caste. He himself would be obliged in that event to stand outside its fold, in spite of an indissoluble bond he has confessed to exist between her and himself. But he believes that caste Hindus will yet respond to the call of humanity and do justice to their submerged and depressed brethren; that they will take them within the fold of their religion, admit them into their temples and remove all their disabilities. He himself is satisfied with the response his whirlwind

campaign has evoked. The ardour and magnitude of the welcome he received everywhere during his recent tour in South India, the stronghold of caste and orthodoxy, equalled if not surpassed similar manifestations during the great days of the Non-Co-operation movement. A sum of over three lakhs of rupees has been collected for the purpose, and the strong central organization formed for the cause will see to the effective utilization of this fund. Public attention has been focused on this evil as never before, and the worst evils of the system, which had already been yielding to the spread of education and the growth of democratic institutions, will not survive this determined attack. If the caste Hindus will make the voluntary act of purification which Gandhiji appeals to them to make, and which he believes they will make, it will be nothing less than a revolution in Hinduism. And this will have its reactions upon the other faiths in India, notably upon such missionary faiths as Christianity and Islam, which have been making inroads upon the Hindu fold and luring converts mainly from the neglected, submerged classes. But Gandhiji claims that it will have consequences beyond the limits of India and Hinduism. To him it symbolises the liberation of all submerged humanity, wherever they suffer inequality and injustice.

But it is in his political activities, laid aside for the present at the dictation of a delicate conscience—which leads him to regard himself as a prisoner till the expiry of the period for which he was sentenced for political offences—that we see the full significance of his personality and the full force of the religious awakening that he has brought to India. His philosophy of action is a practical application of the Gita and the Sermon on the Mount—two texts of ancient Scripture which have most deeply influenced him. He resists what he considers to be evil with the determination of the disinterested *yogin* and

with the passion of a believer in a God of Justice and Truth. And his weapon of political action, *satyagraha*, which he has studied and perfected, reduces to a system applicable to the problems of everyday life, the Divine principle of suffering love overcoming evil, taught by the greatest religious teachers of the world and supremely illustrated in the Cross of Christ. It is a method of action beyond the range of most of his followers; but its potency is recognized by all who have seen it really at work; and it is a method of action that is capable of solving any problem and meeting any situation. Whether it succeeds or not on the mass scale in the fight for Indian freedom, it is a line of action that has come to stay; and my own conviction is that Christians will come sooner or later to realize that it is essentially Christian, the only Christian way of dealing with human intransigence, and thus the one way of fighting the battles of the Kingdom of God and establishing and maintaining the reign of righteousness and truth on earth.

—*Young Men of India*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1



## THE DANGER OF OTHER-WORLDLINESS\*

. . . Now I would say that the one enemy of a realistic, determined effort on the part of religion to capture the world, especially in Travancore, is the attitude of other-worldliness dominant in our Christianity. It is an attitude that would deny reality to this world, that teaches that this world is but a preparation for another, that the inequalities and injustices of this present order are the necessary conditions for the realization of the supreme good, the salvation of the individual soul. Many of our hymns express this attitude. Now I don't deny that there is a sense in which all this is true, but when that sense is stressed too much it becomes mischievous nonsense. For whatever the life to come may or may not be this life is something very real to us, its joys and sorrows. The possibility of relieving its sorrows and deepening its joys is open to us; and the duty of sharing these with all mankind is clearly laid upon us. To neglect that duty by the real or professed belief that these things do not matter, to seek to comfort those who bear the burden and the injustices of this life by holding out to them the hope of a hereafter, is to be untrue to the spirit of true religion and to

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\* Originally an address given at the Annual Mar Thoma Teachers' Conference, it was later published under the title *Religion and the New Social Order*.

merit the modern indictment of religion as the opium of the people and to deserve the slashing attacks upon it.

I would refer pointedly to the Christian belief in the speedy end of the world, so prominent in Travancore. To me it is a pernicious belief where it is real. I suspect it is unreal in most cases, that it is only a pose and that those who profess it do not really believe it. Otherwise they would not have been so busy with their banking and their business, their litigations and job-huntings, their givings and takings in marriage.

There is an interesting story of a Scotsman who was traveling in a night train and was observed buying tickets at every station. When asked the reason why, he explained that someone had predicted the end of the world to happen that night and that therefore he was risking nothing in buying a long-distance ticket.

But even where it is real and earnest, where it is true to what they would claim is the New Testament hope, I would still say it is a pernicious belief. For it directs attention away from this world in which we are set, with the duties and responsibilities that are laid on us, to the expectation of an order that is distinct and apart from the present. While not denying the possibility of divine intervention in ways beyond human control or prediction, it is pernicious not to realize and accept our responsibilities for the present and to play our part in changing and transforming it. What this false belief in the speedy end of the world means in effect is the acceptance and the acquiescence in the present order of things. 'Let him that is a slave remain a slave, for the Lord is at hand.' I need not say that this attitude has been used to bolster up grave injustices. I submit that real, vital Christianity can only function as a challenge to the existing order of things, it can only fulfil itself as an instrument of change, to realize the new order of things, wherein God's will is done

on earth as it is in heaven. I believe there is a wrong emphasis in popular Travancore Christianity on supernatural intervention, a looking forward to a catastrophic end of the world, with a half-conscious yet real delight in the confusions of the world, for they are held to be the signs of a redemption that draweth nigh. I think it is up to you, teachers, if you accept the argument that I am adducing, to correct that false belief and to direct attention to the human side of this consummation, the need of strenuous human effort in bringing in the kingdom of God on earth.

. . . The new factor in the situation is that the dispossessed of all countries have become or are speedily becoming aware of their plight and of their power. That was behind the clarion call of Marx and Engels 'Workers of the World unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains'. Their organization may be delayed, their efforts may be thwarted and groups of them may be misled but they are bound to assert themselves and achieve their demand. If religion does not provide them with the sanctions for the realization of this, they will evolve other sanctions and achieve their ends. But to me the most interesting and challenging thing is that religion does provide these sanctions, that religion is entirely at one with the communists and the secularists in their demand for elemental justice on this earth. Listen to some of the greatest of the luminaries of religion, men who have carried the race onward in its knowledge of the ways of God: 'Is not this the fast I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out of thy house, when thou seest the naked that thou cover him and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh'. 'He hath shown thee, O man what is good; and what doth the Lord require

of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God.' Or this of Amos: 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of the viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.'

I believe that our Lord stands definitely in the line of these prophets, endorsing and fulfilling their demand and making the same relentless demand of his followers. Is not that the meaning of his marvellous parable of the final judgment when men are judged not by what they professed but what they had done to their fellow men?

But religion goes beyond communism or secularism in believing that this demand for justice, this belief in its realization is rooted and grounded in the very constitution of the Universe, that in striving for justice and truth man is fighting no lost or lone battle but that he is upheld and sustained by a power that is itself working for righteousness, that as the Psalmist put it, the Lord has laid the foundation of the Universe in truth and justice. This conviction has given to the religious soul an assurance and a determination to work for truth and justice that is seldom found elsewhere.

But this assurance and conviction of the great masters in religion has to be recaptured by us and applied with courage and determination to the solving of our problems. It is no use claiming that religion has taught all this, includes all this. But the great question is, 'Is religion doing these things now?' What started the present attack on religion was Karl Marx's searching dictum: 'Let us turn from ideas to reality. Let us look not at people's theories but at their action.' And Jesus the great realist also agrees. 'Not by their professions but by their fruits' said he. Dare we face that test? . . .

—*The Guardian*, November 18 and 25, 1937

## IV. Gandhian Satyagraha

### TOWARDS CHRISTIAN SATYAGRAHA\*

Satyagraha seems to reduce to a system the art of grappling with evil, the science of aggressive love attacking evil in its strongholds and dragging it out into the open for a life and death struggle. The Cross of Christ is the supreme, perfect historic example of such assault and victory of love over evil. But alas, Christianity has made of it a creed, a doctrine, belief in which is to secure a heaven of comfort and security. It was necessary to bring it back from the realm of creed and dogma and set it up again as a working principle of life, still mighty to overthrow entrenched evil and applicable to the practical problems of everyday life. That is what has been achieved by one who does not profess himself a Christian but in whom the central Christian principle of the Cross has again incarnated itself. The Christian preaching of forgiveness through the blood of Christ though it calls forth here and there an emotional response on a mass-scale and in individual cases does produce real transformation of character has not yet relieved the strangle-hold of sin and vice on civilization. Think for example of the growth of the habit of

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\* Original title: *Mahatma Gandhi's Fast.*

intemperance or immorality even among the Christian populations of our growing cities and towns. And what has been the attitude of the clergy? Even where they have felt the burden of it they have behaved as if helpless in the presence of it. And they have been going on as if there is nothing beyond the preaching of the word and rescuing a lost one here and there. But is there not the way of the cross to be tried—the way of closing with the evil in a death clasp and sacrificing life and limb in an attempt to root it out from society in general? Is not Gandhiji's Satyagraha showing us the way to do that? Take for instance the question of intemperance. Is there nothing to be done for it beyond preaching sermons against it in churches, if at all such sermons are preached there, and praying for individuals among its victims? Cannot there be a Christian Satyagraha against this evil? Cannot there be a Christian picketing of toddy shops, undertaken with all Christian love and forbearance? What is it that prevents the Christian minister from setting an example of perfect non-violent Satyagraha? Surely it is not the fear of broken bones or the outbreak of violence on the part of his Christian Satyagrahis. In this and in many other instances of growing moral corruption among us, Christian forms of Satyagraha can be developed. The Cross of Christ will then come back to us as a working principle of conquering love overcoming evil everywhere.

Of course Satyagraha is open to gross abuse. It might be resorted to for silly and unjust causes. But is not every other good principle and method liable to similar misuse? And surely the remedy is not to discard it altogether. The best safeguard of the sanctity of Satyagraha lies in the increasing number of pure offerings of it, whereby its essential principles will be grasped by the people at large and false manifestations of it will cease to coerce individual or public opinion. For Satyagraha in its

essence is not a method of coercion but of conversion. Its appeal is to the conscience of the evil doer and its strength lies in the justice of the cause it espouses. Where its cause is not just and its methods are not pure it ought not, and will not when the method is widely practised, move the conscience of the people. For its fundamental principle that truth is dearer than life itself will be turned against false expressions of it and people will refuse to be coerced into giving up the right out of any sentimental regard for the life of the false Satyagrahi. As for true Satyagraha it is a practical application of the teaching of Christ that he that loseth his life shall find it, that one realizes one's true and larger life in the pursuit of the eternal values, even though the way to it may be a cross.

Another element of safety in the practice of Satyagraha is its demand of the inner guiding voice of God. Satyagraha is only to be undertaken at the call of God. He it is 'who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men' and who alone can therefore make the suffering of the innocent change the heart of the indifferent. If self-chosen unmerited suffering on behalf of the sinner be Christian, is not the inspiration and the guidance to it peculiarly so? Are we not the pentecostal people, claiming to live under the direct control and guidance of the Spirit of God? If we accept the cross as a working principle for the everyday work of redemption, can we at least not rely on the Spirit of God to guard us from false choices and to make our offerings touch the hearts of the people for whom it is made? Surely Satyagraha can be and ought to be used as a Christian weapon in the fight for truth and justice in society and in the individual to which the Christian is committed by his profession. Christians ought therefore to be profoundly thankful to the Mahatma for his demonstration of the potency and practicability of the method of the cross and to ponder over the

significance of his latest offering of love which has compelled the attention of the world, 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends'.

—*The Guardian*, October 20, 1932



## SATYAGRAHA AS MILITANT PACIFISM

. . . The technique of action that Gandhi evolved, *Satyagraha*, can best be described as *militant pacifism*, paradoxical as the combination may seem. It is a technique that can be and has to be applied to every aspect of life and it affects the whole of it. Satyagraha cannot be applied piece-meal or concern itself with one aspect of individual or national life to the exclusion of everything else. In this Gandhiji has shown himself a greater realist than the Western Pacifist, who would isolate the question of war and tackle it by itself. But war is only a consequence, an inevitable consequence, of the way in which modern life is organised. It is folly to fight only the symptom while the root of the disease is untouched. Western Pacifism which acquiesces in the greed and exploitation of their highly industrialized and aggressive nations, shows itself less realistic than Gandhiji who found the cause of the disease in the basic violence of modern acquisitive society. Hence his insistence on *Swadeshi* and decentralized economy, not only for India but for all the world. Nations, organized as they are for economic, if not political aggression, must necessarily clash with each other, bringing an increasingly unified world under greater danger of total collapse and wholesale disaster. Perhaps the only way to rid the world of this continuing menace that threatens to engulf

the whole of mankind, is the way of Gandhi, the way not of campaigning against war as such, but the way of Satyagraha for individuals and nations, the way of direct action against injustice wherever it rears its ugly and hydra head, but action inspired and informed at every stage by the spirit of ahimsa, which is another name for love in action.

From 'Pacifism or Satyagraha', *The Guardian*,

Vol. XXVI, No. 41

## SATYAGRAHA MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE OXFORD GROUP MOVEMENT\*

I had the privilege a few weeks ago of hearing Principal A. M. Varkey of Alwaye, the representative of ancient Kerala Christianity on the Mission of Fellowship to the churches of the British Isles, give his impressions of his tour. The thing that struck him most, he said, as full of hope for the future of Christianity in those countries and in the rest of the world was the revival there of New Testament Christianity as the result of the growth of what is commonly known as the Oxford Group Movement. I was a little sceptical about it then and still am to some extent, being inclined to think that we have in India today something deeper, more significant than any movement within the churches. Of that I shall speak later. I had heard something of Bishop Hensley Henson's very damaging criticism of the 'Groups' and agreed with some of it at least. I had seen Buchman years ago at Kottayam when he was 'the man behind the scenes' as it were, during the great revival meetings of Dr Eddy; and more recently I had seen him and his group at work in a Calcutta College. I was not much impressed by their methods or their results. But I have since read with great interest

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\* Original title: *India and the Oxford Group Movement.*

the story of the movement told with a good deal of gusto by Mr Russell in his book *For Sinners Only*. That is an intriguing title. While at Christa Seva Sangh, Poona, I heard a brother who had bagged an early copy of the book for his own reading reluctantly handing it over to another more importunate, saying 'Thy need is greater than mine'.

Having established by this anecdote what 'F.B.' would call my point of contact with the reader, may I share with him some of the thoughts stirred in me by the reading of the book?

One of the most challenging things in the book is the claim of the Groups to live and act under the immediate impulsion of the Holy Spirit. Their methods of getting guidance—sitting down with 'Guidance book' and pencil in hand—may seem too crude and to reduce the whisperings of 'the still small voice' to too precise a code for the Indian mind; but the claim itself is challenging and if true ought to bring in a new power and direction to Christian living. And why should it not be true? The claim and the experience are nothing new in Christianity. The pages of the New Testament are full of the records of the promise and fulfilment of the Spirit coming as an abiding presence to guide and control the believer. Jesus promised to send the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, to abide with his followers and to guide them into all truth. And we see that un failing guidance at work in the lives of the apostles, moving their hearts to make right decisions, directing their choice in big undertakings, preventing them in their ways and sustaining them in all their labours. The Church at large has lost the sense of the Spirit's presence, the dynamic of His control, and that is the main reason for her powerlessness and ineffectiveness in changing human lives. Living in the Pentecostal age we are strangers to the Pentecostal experience and power. The Oxford Group Movement with its insistence on the Spirit's guidance is a revival

of this central element in the Christian religion and as such deserves well of all the Churches.

And their claim is borne out by the results. They are guided and empowered by the Spirit to change human lives. 'Life-changing'—that is the great mission of the Groups as it ought to be the supreme mission of every Christian. Like their Master they go after the lost, to seek and to save them. Particularly do they specialise in the 'down and outs', the interesting sinner, the merry undergraduate who has no use for religion. And they have had remarkable successes, showing that Christ and His Gospel are still able to win souls, especially the young and the vigorous. True American that he is, 'F.B.' has developed a detailed technique for it: the establishment of contact, the house-party methods, the principle of sharing, etc. But whatever be the methods adopted, the church has to devote its attention primarily to this task of changing lives. Its ministers and its workers must tackle the individual sinner, must go after the wandering and the lost, particularly the youth among us, who are now so easily condemned and so lightly abandoned.

But I referred to a more significant thing than even the Groups that is taking place in India today. I have long felt, and I put it to the Missioner after his addresses, that Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha is a truer and more literal lifting up of the Cross than any other movement in the world today. Mahatmaji's claim to hear and obey the voice of God seems to me a ringing challenge to us Christians who claim to be the Spirit-guided people. Questioned by the whole world, doubted even by his intimate associates, he stood almost as one against the world on the need and the justification of his recent fast, taking his stand on his assurance of the Spirit's guidance. 'My claim to hear the voice of God' he said on the eve of his fast, 'is no new claim. . . . I have been a willing slave to this most exacting Master for more

than half a century. His voice has been increasingly audible as the years have rolled by. He has never forsaken me, even in my darkest hour. He has saved me often against myself and has left me not a vestige of independence. The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy'. The Christian can only meet this challenge by a greater confidence and a fuller obedience.

The Oxford Group Movement is changing individual lives. The church has always attempted that and achieved successes in it. But my fear, at least what I have yet to see, is whether the change in individual lives goes far enough to change the world, to make these life-changers and their products men who turn the world upside down. I heard the Missioner say that an Oxford Group team was received in audience and greatly commended by Mr Bennett, the Canadian Premier—But was their impact on Mr Bennett powerful enough to affect his foreign and economic policy? I recall another interview, when 'a half-naked fakir' was for a few hours closetted with another representative of the King. The result was an agreement which the joint authors attributed to the application of the Sermon on the Mount. That is the sort of change that the gospel of Christ ought to be working in the hearts of men and in the world at large. An Indian Christian, in this hour of his nation's travail and his Lord's opportunity, would wistfully ask, 'Will the Oxford Groups be powerful enough to change the heart of Sir Samuel Hoare to apply the principles of the Sermon on the Mount to the settlement of the Indian question?' That would be proof incontestable of the power of the Christ-Spirit to control the doctrines of the world and it would go far, very far, in setting up His Kingdom in this and every land.

—*The Guardian*, August 1933

## A LETTER TO GANDHIJI

The Ashram  
Sabarmati  
Oct. 5, 1932

My Dear Bapu,

I wonder whether my short note of September received your notice at all. As I said in that I have been striving to follow you for the last ten years, seeing in you God's chosen agent for bringing in His Kingdom on earth in this generation. Your life and your devotion to your ideal of Rama Raj made Christ and his Kingdom more real to me and I felt that in standing behind you I was helping to bring in Christ's Kingdom. It was this conviction of mine that brought me into conflict with the authorities of the Church in India and led to my resignation from Bishop's College, Calcutta, where I was a tutor. But having taken that step and having come to the Ashram for fuller identification with your cause, I find myself still perplexed as to my Christian duty. Before leaving the Ashram (I am going for a short stay at the Christa Seva Sangh, Poona) may I use my privilege as an ashramite of sharing my perplexities with you?

It is your ideal of Rama Raj that has won my allegiance. But my growing misgiving is whether it is possible to build up

any Kingdom of God with people who have not seen the vision of it and do not accept its ideals as life-principles. The Congress does not share your ideal and is not working out your methods—for non-violence as a principle is poles apart from non-violence as a policy. I do not blame the Congress for it. It is a political organisation, working for a political goal, and for the realization of that it has adopted non-violence as the best policy—non-violence in the sense of avoidance of violence—so as not to give a handle to its enemy, against whose organized violence it would otherwise have no chance. That, I believe, is all the non-violence that is in practice in the Congress campaign, though individuals may be found who carry it further. Undoubtedly even as a policy it is superior to violence and the only workable one in India; and I hope and pray that India will stick to it. But you will admit that non-violence as a policy cannot bring in the Kingdom of God. A worker for that Kingdom seeks no immediate and tangible success. He is content to wait till God's good time for its coming; indeed its coming means the perfecting of its methods and its workers. The goal of Indian Swaraj obviously cannot wait for such perfection. It is a political goal and it cannot long be delayed without disaster to the country, without making unrest habitual and driving impatient spirits among the youth to reckless acts of violence. The distinction therefore between the two ideals and the methods of their attainment ought, I think, to be made far more clear than at present. You, as a worker for the Kingdom of God, ought, in my humble opinion, to stand aside from the struggle for mere political power without hampering the swift acquisition of the latter by your insistence on methods which really pertain to the former and which you cannot get practised by a mass of workers who are in the main moved by the lesser ideal.

Take the case of your recent fast. I quite see that to you



it was a religious issue and consequently far more important than the political question, and therefore you were prepared to lay down your life for it. But, as the leader of the Congress, you are fighting the political battle and thousands have followed you to prison expecting a speedy settlement of that. In turning aside from that main issue to fight untouchability, I humbly submit that you were betraying the cause of the Congress. In taking up the untouchability question in the manner you did, you were really being true to yourself, but that as a worker for Rama Raj and not for Indian independence. India can get independence with separate electorates and with many imperfections which may not be tolerable in the Kingdom of God: only it would not be the independence of your conception; it would not be Rama Raj. But the issue has not been cleared as to whether the masses, and even the leaders, who stand behind you would prefer political independence in the immediate future or be content to wait and suffer for the Kingdom of God 'which comes not with observation' and which cannot be forced upon men. I believe the majority of those who work under you, especially the leaders, would be willing to let go the distant and glorious ideal for the more tangible and immediate goal. Unless that issue is cleared in your favour you should stand aside and let the Congress fight its battle for its own legitimate, though lesser goal, while you should come out as a worker for God's Kingdom, challenging the allegiance of all who work and pray for it throughout the world.

Having ventured to say so much, may I go on to make a further criticism? That relates to your fast. The time and circumstances at which you elected to fast on the issue were such, it seemed to me, as to throw part of the odium of it on the Government. This would be more clear if we think of the eventuality of your death. It would have irrevocably embittered

the country against the Government, while you would really have died at the hands of the people. For however much the Government may be to blame for exploiting our unhappy differences, this issue is peculiarly one of our own creation and maintenance, and one who felt, as you do, the enormity of our guilt in the matter would have exonerated the Government altogether and directed the fast solely against the people. What I mean is that this issue had better been fought with the Government left out. A deeper sense of your Hindu responsibility for the crime would have led you not to embarrass the Government even to the extent that the decision did and was meant to. I know I am treading on sacred ground when I question what you claim to be your divinely guided choice of time and say that the issue had better been tackled when the independence question was settled and you, from the height of your power, could have hurled your life as a challenge against this long-standing injustice. . . .

Your humble follower,

(*sd.*) S. K. GEORGE

—*Souvenir*, 45 ff.

## V. The Message of the Jewish Prophets for Modern Times

### AMOS—THE PROPHET OF SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

In his delightful account 'A Pilgrimage to Palestine' Dr H. E. Fosdick describes an impressively suggestive scene that he came across during a visit to the homes of the Jewish Prophets. Near about the traditional site of Naboth's vineyard in Jazreel is a newly established Communist Colony of Jews. In their assembly hall hangs a solitary picture, that of Karl Marx, their patron saint. To Fosdick, as to every discerning student of the Bible, here is a strange coincidence. Karl Marx looking down on the site of Naboth's vineyard! He seems to be brooding over the ancient but still unsolved problem of social justice which Elijah met there. From Elijah to Karl Marx, so runs the prophetic succession of intrepid fighters for social justice, the architects of that city which hath foundations, whose real builder and maker is God.

Social justice, the insight that what God primarily demands is mercy and righteousness, that is the keynote of all Jewish prophecy, from Elijah, through Amos, Micah, Isaiah and John

the Baptist, down to Jesus of Nazareth. They represent an insight into the character of God, into the secret of the divine governance of the universe, which the world, Christian and non-Christian alike, has not yet understood or lived up to. When President Eliot of Harvard was asked to choose a description of true religion to be put upon the walls of the Library of the United States Congress at Washington, he chose the words of the Prophet Micah uttered over 2,500 years ago: 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?' No, we have not yet come up to the vision of these great Servants of God.

But before dealing with the content of their social message, I wish to point out a common element in their consciousness, an element which is so weak in modern religion. This is their sense of God, their overwhelming conviction of His existence and of their being commissioned by Him. It is this very thing that we moderns are lacking in. As a modern writer has put it, 'Churches are empty not because sermons are bad and church politics too right-wing, but because they are offering wares in the real existence of which the majority of people have ceased to believe.' But to the Old Testament Prophets God was a tremendous reality. Listen to Amos declaring his sense of God's commission when opposed by the high-priests of his people's religion: 'I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me: Go, prophesy unto my people Israel' (Amos 7:14). Elsewhere he makes the stupendous claim that the Lord 'will do nothing but he revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets' (3:7). 'The Lion hath roared, who will not fear; the Lord hath spoken, who will not prophesy?'

The supreme need these days is of people who have heard the voice of the Lord speaking to them, whether it be as the roar

of the lion or as the still, small voice, but clear and compelling, and who will, therefore go forth with the same sense of vocation and the same assurance of speaking in the name of God as these prophets of old.

The irresistible, inescapable nature of God's voice within man cannot be better illustrated than by the experience of the prophet Jeremiah. Obedience to the divine impulsion meant to him suffering and contempt, the defaming of many, terror on every side. Yet he could not keep quiet. He was often tempted to give up speaking in God's name; but the word of the Lord was like fire shut up within his heart (Jer. 20:9). We need such a compelling sense of God's voice within us, such a sure conviction of being privileged to know the secret of God's purposes, the God who is working mightily in the world today. 'God', said Pandit Nehru, in a retort half-witty, 'is asleep', voicing the sentiment of many a modern man. But God, says Amos, is roaring like a lion. 'Shall evil befall the world and the Lord not have done it?' 'Surely the Lord God doeth nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the Prophets' (Amos 3:7). Dare we who claim to speak in His name make such a claim, to know the purposes of God as they are working themselves out in these terrible days?

But I want mainly to dwell on the content of the prophetic message. That content is primarily a demand for social righteousness, for the ending of all exploitation, the breaking of every yoke. Nothing in modern Communist literature can exceed the vigour and the vehemence of the prophets' denunciation of the idle rich and the oppressors of the poor. In the name of the God of all mankind they demanded justice between man and man. Religion, much of what passes for religion, has been rightly denounced by the Marxists as the opium of the people. But if religion is what these Old Testament prophets advocated it to

be, then many a Marxist may confess himself to be a camp-follower of the noble army of the religious souls. For nothing can surpass the force and the sweep of their denunciations or the clarity of their demands. Listen to what Amos said: 'I hate, I despise your feasts; and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs. But let judgment roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream' (Amos 5:21). Or this of Micah: 'Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?'

That is the positive religious teaching of the prophets. Unlike the Marxists they did not identify all religion with false religion. They knew from inner experience that there was another religion than the offering of bulls and rams in sacrifice, or the singing of psalms or the partaking of sacraments, or subscription to creeds; or the compassing of sea and land to make one proselyte. There is the living out of the faith in God's Fatherhood and in man's Brotherhood. There is a service acceptable to God, which is 'to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world' (James 1:27). There is a fast which is well pleasing unto God, which is 'to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke and to let the oppressed go free and that ye break every yoke' (Isaiah 58:6).

Breaking every yoke, removing the putting forth of the finger and speaking wickedly, these are the demands of the prophets in every age. Further, those who stand for these things are the true servants of God, even though through wrong upbringing or false associations they may have come to deny His name and deem themselves His enemies. Canon Raven gives

an interesting testimony regarding a Communist friend of his.<sup>1</sup> 'Few men of my acquaintance', he says, 'are so Christ-like, so marked by suffering, so patient, so free from bitterness, so generous towards those who for five years have persecuted him. His only crime is that he cannot endure in silence the oppression and wastage, the demoralising insecurity and the soul-destroying squalor in which his fellows have to live'. That is a crime of which the Old Testament Prophets would have pleaded guilty. If we today are less concerned about the injustices, social, political and economic, all around us, it is not because we are more Christian than they, but because our conscience is less Christian.

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XXII, No. 5

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<sup>1</sup> C. E. Raven: *A Wanderer's Way*.

## ISAIAH—THE PROPHET AS POLITICIAN

The Jewish Prophets had the clear conviction that the whole of life, the byways as well as the highways, ought to be occupied by God and for God. It was they who led the world to the knowledge of the one God of the whole universe, who has ordained all things in righteousness. Isaiah, the 8th century (B.C.) prophet, is the clearest exponent of this idea. His are those superb visions of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, which revive the drooping spirit every time they are read. He had seen the vision of a time when the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

The disastrous separation that has come about in Christian countries between religion and politics was something that was unknown to the Old Testament Prophets, something they would have sternly condemned. They would have agreed with Gandhiji today that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics know nothing either of religion or of politics. There is a conversation recorded between Gandhiji and the famous Bombay Editor, Mr B. G. Horniman. 'I have no religion', said Mr Horniman once to Gandhiji: 'Politics is my religion.' Swift came Gandhiji's retort: 'Religion is my politics.' The Old Testament Prophets would have said the same. Their religion inevitably led them into politics and into that they introduced the lofty morality and the wide vision of religion.



The question whether it is the duty of a Christian to interest himself in the politics of one's country is still occasionally debated in missionary and student circles. Two attitudes are common among those who seek to evade the challenge of reality in this matter. One is the otherworldliness of much of Christian piety. It holds that our citizenship is in Heaven; hence it looks for the Lord to descend to lift His elect out of the stress of this life. This traditional attitude is revived in the respectable garb of modern scholarship in Barthianism today. But it is really a negation of the distinctive genius and contribution of Christianity to world religion, itself derived from Semitic sources, which consist in the fact that it sees God in history and serves Him in and through changing reality. The second is a less ingenuous attitude. It evades taking an intelligent interest and playing a valiant part in the politics of one's country or that of one's adoption by accepting the existing order or things as the will of God. It is a cowardly and often a culpable acquiescence in things as they are, in order to avoid trouble and to enjoy the benefits of such acquiescence. It is the attitude of the proverbial Vicar of Bray—'Whatever King may rule I shall be the Vicar of Bray'. Is it unjust to see a parallel to this in the Missionary Pledge in India? The established churches in countries like Britain have too often taken up this attitude. As Mr Middleton Murray has recently put it: 'The Church knows its place, which is that of a good wife. Like a good wife it never criticises, never argues, and, when there is a row, always takes the side of the husband. She only insists on one thing, if she may, that the husband shall keep out of the kitchen.'<sup>1</sup>

This attitude of acquiescence, even of subservience, is adopted unquestioningly in times of war. It is regarded as treason to

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<sup>1</sup> M. Murray: *The Betrayal of Christ by the Churches*.

call in question the policies of those in authority, to point out the failures in one's own nation and to insist on the brotherliness due to the people of other nations. To suggest as the Old Testament Prophets so constantly did in the crises of their nation's history that God was using other nations as instruments of His justice against their own, and to call their nation to repentance, would be cried down as defeatism and treason in these days. But prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah never for a moment truckled to that kind of truculence. Listen to what Jeremiah said when he was accused of prophesying against Jerusalem saying the 'God will make this city a curse to all nations of the earth. The Lord sent me to prophesy against the city and this house. Therefore now amend your ways. But as for me, behold I am in your hand; do with me as is good and right in your eyes' (Jer. 26:12-15). That is the sort of courage that religion ought to and does inspire, the courage to face a world of opposition with truth and justice on one's side—to say 'Here I stand: I can do no other: so help me God.'

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, is the clearest example in the Old Testament of a man of God taking an intelligent and life-long interest in the politics of his country. He was called to the prophetic office as a very young man at the time of national crisis, in the year that King Uzziah died, about 738 B.C., when Isaiah's earliest recorded utterances were against the social evils rampant in Judah, similar to those in Israel which Amos had so sternly condemned. But his characteristic political utterances start from the crisis of 735 B.C. when King Ahaz was jeopardising the nation's freedom by seeking the protection of Assyria. Assyria was the dominant power at that time. But the subject kings of Syria and Israel, Rezin and Pekah, both ambitious adventurers, wanted to throw off the yoke of Assyria. In this enterprise they wanted the support of Judah and even threatened

to force an alliance on her. Judah was comparatively remote and secure in her mountain strongholds. So Isaiah with his sanctified commonsense knew that Assyria would swiftly deal with the rebel kings and that Judah would be left unmolested. 'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength' was his oft-repeated advice to his feeble-minded king and people. On the other hand, he told them, 'If ye will not hold fast verily ye shall not stand fast.' Ahaz was not the person to hold fast. Even before the prophet appeared with his advice he had sent to the Assyrian Emperor beseeching his help. That was why he refused to ask for the sign that Isaiah offered to grant him from God, as an assurance of God's protecting care. He pretended to cover his unwillingness to be convinced of the right under the cloak of a refusal to put Jehovah to the test. It was then that Isaiah volunteered the song of the birth of the child Immanuel, the sign which has been grossly misunderstood and misinterpreted in Christian doctrine. . . .

But the child was born and bore the name, not Immanuel, but Mather-shalal-hash-baz. 'Swift booty, speedy prey', which was the fate that was to overtake Judah because of her failure to trust Jehovah. The giving of this strange name is but one instance of the symbolism that the prophets so constantly used to enforce their message. So convinced were they of the rightness of their message from God that to arrest their people's attention they were prepared to resort to the strangest object lessons in their own personal behaviour and appearance. When about 711 B.C. Judah joined in the conspiracy of Egypt and the Philistine cities to throw off Assyrian domination Isaiah cast away his mantle and sandals and went about barefoot for three years in the garb of a captive, to drive home the lesson that if Judah rebelled she would be led away captive. Jeremiah in like manner appeared in front of his king with a yoke round his

neck, to symbolise the fate of Judah if she rebelled against Babylon. Gandhiji today in loin cloth representing the half-clad millions of India, is using the familiar symbolism of these ancient men of God.

A further rebellion against Assyria was provoked about 703 B.C. by Merodach-Baladan of Babylon. But the time for Babylon had not come. The foolish kings of Judah were ever willing to be entangled in such conspiracies. Hezekiah received the messengers of Babylon and showed them all the treasures in the Temple and in the King's house. For this he was severely rebuked by Isaiah. This time too Isaiah stood unflinchingly alone in his condemnation of the foreign policy of his king and country. But his stand was vindicated when Sennacherib of Assyria defeated both Babylon and Egypt. Of Hezekiah, King of Judah, the proud conqueror has recorded that he shut him up like a bird in a cage.

But Assyria whom God had so signally used as an instrument of his wrath became conceited at her victories and imagined herself to be not the instrument but the dispenser of justice. It was, in the words of the prophet, as if the axe should vaunt itself over him who heweth therewith. Today the prophet, if there were one in Israel, would say that Hitler is used by God as a scourge to the nations . . . and that he would himself in turn be discarded and punished for his crimes against humanity. Ten years after his successful siege of Jerusalem Sennacherib returned again to his attack on Egypt. Judah was not directly involved in this and had not provoked him, but he could not leave such a powerful fortress as Jerusalem unconquered behind him. Therefore he turned on it. This time the aged prophet whose counsel was sought by the repentant king gave a message of hope and confidence. As a matter of fact his messages were always those of confidence in Jehovah as the true protector of

Israël. Jerusalem, he assured the king, would not be taken. There was a miraculous deliverance according to the biblical narrative, which is confirmed by the historian Herodotus, who tells of the sudden flight of the besieging army, probably due to an attack of plague.

Visions like those of Isaiah are needed in these days to interpret God's ways to man and to point out the right politics for man and nations to follow in times of crises like the present. Dare we listen to God's voice like the young Isaiah of old and dedicate ourselves to His service, whatever the tasks to which He may appoint us in these difficult days?

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XXII, No. 6

## JEREMIAH AND THE RELIGION OF THE SPIRIT

. . . Jewish religion is a type, the clearest on record, both as to the development and purification of the idea of God in it and of the abiding conflict between the priestly and the prophetic elements in it. We see in the Bible how God revealed His truths to mankind gradually as men were able to take them in. It was always line upon line, precept upon precept. There is also revealed in Jewish history in the clearest manner the eternal conflict between priest and prophet, the one extolling outward ceremonial and the other inner spirituality. All the prophets stand on one side in this, emphasising the religion of the heart and condemning external rites devoid of inner reality. And Jesus stands definitely on the side of the prophets. 'Go and learn what this meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' he said, inaugurating the new covenant, the true religion of the spirit.

In this as in many other things too Jeremiah was His clearest prototype and fore-runner. In fact the very name 'New Covenant' or New Testament, which Jesus used and which has come to signify the new dispensation of the spirit he inaugurated, was first used by Jeremiah. 'Behold the days come when I shall establish a new covenant with the house of Israel' (Jer. 31:31), said Jehovah through Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was led to this by his own experience. In his early

days there prevailed the tradition of the inviolability of Jerusalem, handed down from the time of Isaiah when God worked a miraculous deliverance for the city. People were muttering the words 'the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord' (Jer. 7:4 and 11), trusting that the words will deliver them, even while they were making it a den of thieves. With true prophetic insight Jeremiah had realised that what God demands is truth in the inward parts, a broken and a contrite heart, and not sacrifices and ritual. 'Trust ye not in lying words, but amend your ways', he told them. That as we have seen was the burden of the prophetic message of all times.

But Jeremiah went beyond all the other prophets in visualising a time when all externals in religion shall be done away with and the God who is spirit shall be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Listen to his amazing prophecy. Speaking of Israel's restoration he pictures a time when they shall no more say 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord, neither shall it come to mind, neither shall they remember it, neither shall they visit it.' The ark was one of the most sacred symbols of Jewish worship. It contained the tablets of stone and other visible emblems of God's visitation of His people in the days of old. It was also the seat of the Shekinah, symbol of the Almighty's presence. It was this very sacrament of the Divine presence that Jeremiah was declaring to be null and void. It is as if a Christian prophet were to declare that in the days to come the Eucharist shall no more be celebrated, for the people shall no more need it.

For this is what Jeremiah says about the new covenant. In the new and fuller religion of the spirit that he said was coming, there will be no priests and no sacrifices. There will not even be teachers of religion. The inner light will be a true and sufficient guide—'for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest, saith the Lord' (Jer. 31:31-39).

It is as if the Quakers are right about Christianity, the religion of the spirit, and that there need not be any priests or catechists or sacraments in Christianity.

And Jeremiah seems to give us yet further lead. He seems to look forward to a time when the distinction between religions also shall be transcended, when all nations shall bless themselves in the God of Truth. Listen to these two sayings culled from Jeremiah and the second Isaiah: 'He shall call His servants by a new name so that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth' (Is. 65:15). 'And thou shalt swear: As the Lord liveth, in truth, in judgement and in righteousness: and the nations shall bless himself in Him and in Him shall they glory' (Jer. 4:2). That seems to be the message of the universalistic faith that is coming, when all our divergent systems shall be seen to be but many-coloured fragments of the white radiance of eternity. One is reminded of the profound truth of Gandhiji's confession of faith, 'Truth is God.'

In this vision of religion, free from the trammels of doctrine and ritual, open to the four winds of heaven carrying the breath of God as it flows where it listeth, Jeremiah was far ahead of his times and of our own even, two thousand years after Jesus had ratified Jeremiah's vision. Christianity has allowed itself to be tied up by the weak and beggarly elements of the law and priestcraft from which Jesus had once for all delivered it. That freedom with which Christ has set us free, for which St Paul so valiantly fought, has constantly been denied to the believer by church and chapel, by priest and presbyter, by creed and sacrament, and has to be won afresh in every generation and by every individual. Let us stand fast in that freedom and not be entangled in the yoke of bondage. But men and institutions are mortally afraid of freedom and like to herd themselves like driven kine in supposed citadels of safety, which however are



not walled in these days. The Reformation, as we know, was a great movement of emancipation, but its work was only half-accomplished. It delivered Western Christendom from bondage to Pope and priest only to deliver it to bondage to the Bible and the creeds, perhaps a worse bondage, for unlike the Pope and the Church, the Bible and the creeds are not alive and growing. Like Luther himself, frightened by the forces of democracy that he had helped to unloose, the Reformation was frightened of the glorious liberty of the children of the Living God.

In two things the Christian Church and especially the Church in India can benefit by the insight of Jeremiah. First as to freedom from ritual and ceremonial. The need and the helpfulness of external aids to worship is a matter of temperament and of spiritual evolution. There are people to whom the altar and the crucifix, the lights and the sounds, the incense and the intonations of worship mean a great deal, who feel uplifted by them all. And they ought not to be denied these aids to God-realisation. But there are others to whom these are distractions, who do not need such aids. And they ought not to be compelled to the discipline of submitting to them, as if such things are indispensable. In this Christianity has a great lesson to learn from Hinduism. No religion is richer in external rites and ceremonies than Hinduism and yet it recognises that there are souls who are not to be bound by such externalities. In fact, like Jeremiah it teaches that you should aim at freeing yourself from such necessities, from the Ark and the Temple the written law and the sacraments, out to the freedom of the children of God.

Secondly, the Church in India should rise to a genuine catholicity of spirit, a full and unreserved acceptance of varieties of religious experience. Following him who said that God is spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth it should

recognise as acceptable to God and therefore worthy of the right hand of fellowship all genuine search after truth, scientific as well as religious, in the wide variety of its manifestations and apprehensions—which are but broken lights of Him who is the Truth—and that He is greater than them all. The spirit of exclusiveness, of mutual condemnation, so characteristic of Christianity, is against the spirit of its Master. The Church claims to be the body of Christ; but what a marred, disfigured and lacerated body it is! As in the parable of St Paul its members are all fighting against each other, one member telling another that it does not belong to the body. A Christianity that is true to the spirit of its founder will welcome all honest search after truth, all striving after goodness, all creations of beauty, even when due to accidents of birth or the faults of upbringing these do not acknowledge his name. It would give the right hand of fellowship to such a critic of false religion but such a sturdy fighter for righteousness as Pundit Jawaharlal, who says that if religion is 'a fearless search for truth at all costs with single-minded sincerity prepared for any sacrifice then I am prepared to be a camp-follower of the grand army of the religious soul' (*Autobiography*). 'If the church has the spirit of Jesus', says Schweitzer, 'there is room in her for every form of Christian piety, even for that which claims unrestricted liberty' (*Life and Thought*). 'The Church of the spirit, the religion of the spirit, is as little concerned to deny the particularities of the faith of others as to define its own', says Basil de Selincourt. And the hope of this, the demand for this, rests on the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, who foretold the better religion coming.

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XXII, No. 7

## THE SECOND ISAIAH—THE PROPHET OF SATYAGRAHA

It is now admitted by all critical students of the Bible that chapters 40-55 of the Book of Isaiah are by a later hand than that of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, the 8th century prophet. The name of this unknown prophet may also have been Isaiah, which might account for his work being incorporated with that of the earlier prophet. Anyway he is known to biblical scholarship as *Deutero Isaiah*. Most probably he lived towards the end of the Babylonian exile, just before the permission granted by the Persian Emperor Cyrus to the Jews to return to Palestine about 538 B.C. His prophecies therefore were messages of hope and comfort to his nation and foretold the restoration of Israel and the fulfilment of God's purposes in and through his people. It is his insight into these divine purposes that make him to my mind the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

His utterances are remarkable for two things: First, his sense of the transcendence of God and the grandeur of his expressions of that sense. The starry heavens above were to him, as to Immanuel Kant, evidence of the glory and greatness of God. 'Lift up your eyes and see: who hath created these?' (Is. 40:26). So strong is his monotheism, so great his sense of the transcendent majesty of God that he scorches with his sarcasm those who would liken God to graven or molten images. We

who concur with him in his condemnation of images of wood and stone should remember that there are other images, images of the eternal God. Too often do we fashion God according to our thoughts, and we should lay to heart the magnificent words in which this unknown prophet reminds us, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord' (Is. 55:8). As a modern version of the Ten Commandments puts it: 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any mental image of thine own imagination'—for the Eternal God is beyond the measure of man's mind; there is no searching of his understanding.

Even more significant to my mind is his insight into the fact of redemptive suffering, divine and human. It was a penetrating vision into the ways of God, the meaning and purpose of suffering, a vital clue to the problem of evil. Like all great truths of human understanding, whether of Science or of Religion, it came to the sanctified vision of the prophet through the facts of observation and experience. Himself an exile in a foreign land, along with his people, who believed themselves to be chosen of God, he must have pondered long and deep over the ways of God. Earlier prophets had all looked forward to a restoration of the nation to divine favour and earthly prosperity. The first Isaiah had slightly modified this hope and thought that a faithful remnant would survive and spring forth again like a stump of which the stem had been cut off. But even this remnant seemed to be desolate, smitten of God and afflicted. Also the prophet must have had in mind the experiences of individual prophets who had gone before him, speaking in the name of God. Jeremiah was the most outstanding and the most symbolic of all these. He had lived a life of rare consecration, but it was his lot to be despised and rejected, to be numbered with transgressors. Who had believed his report and to whom had the arm of the Lord been revealed? The iniquity of his

people seemed to be laid upon him. As the prophet pondered over these dark problems, there dawned upon him the great secret of all such unmerited suffering, that they are redemptive, that it is God's way of appealing to sinful man—that these sufferings are for the healing of the nations. It was a profound discovery and the prophet has embodied it in his four sketches of the Ideal Servant of God (Is. 42:1-7, 49:1-9, 50:4-10, 52:13, 53:12).

It has been keenly debated as to who the prophet had in mind in painting these portraits. It seems to be beyond doubt that originally the prophet had in view the faithful remnant of the Jewish nation, suffering exile and persecution, but faithful to God and by its knowledge of God justifying many. Israel is the chosen servant of God, chosen not as earlier prophets and poets had thought to exercise sovereignty over other nations, but to bring light to them. Israel's election was not to glory but to service and suffering, or rather to glory through suffering. But the picture is so concrete that the question has been asked whether some individual was not meant. Jeremiah's experiences, as we have seen, may have served as the original. But the prophet was not depicting a realised ideal, but a type, a model for all true servants of God. Christian theology has rightly seen in these portraits a foreshadowing of Christ's experiences. Jesus was undoubtedly familiar with these passages and they must have contributed to the shaping of his own conception of the suffering Messiah which was the element of newness in his Messiahship. These songs of victory through suffering, echoed in some of the later Psalms also, were ringing through his mind as he hung upon the cross, being numbered with transgressors, bearing the sin of many and making intercession for transgressors.

But Christian theology is mistaken if it sees in this glorious picture of the ideal servant of God a sole prophecy of Jesus and

his vicarious death. That was certainly one notable fulfilment or realisation of this vision. But the poems embody an ideal, a principle that is true for all time. They reveal a fundamental aspect of God's dealings with men, which is being fulfilled in different ways and varied measures in all cases of unmerited suffering, voluntarily and purposively borne. The ideal remains a challenge to all those who would bear a part at least of the dread burden of human sin that God is bearing all the time. It embodies the eternal principle of the Cross, or of Satyagraha to give it its modern Indian equivalent. Isaiah's ideal servant of God is one who will bring forth judgement to the nations, who will use methods of peace and persuasion to establish his righteousness, who above all will suffer instead of inflicting suffering in order to change the unlovely into loveableness. In a word he is the true satyagrahi.

To me it is no idle fancy to see many of the features of the ideal Servant of Yahweh reproduced in the Apostle of Satyagraha in India today. But even if that be fanciful, the right understanding of this great word of prophecy is to live it out in our lives, somewhat in the manner in which Gandhiji is living out his principle. For these poems enshrine a great principle, the fundamental way of God's dealing with sin: and it challenges all those who claim to be God's remembrancers to put it into action. As the Buddha taught in India, about the same time as Isaiah was speaking in Palestine, 'Never does hatred cease by hatred; hatred ceases by love.' And love can overcome hatred—love not passive and quiescent, but active and aggressive—love going out to withstand evil, like Jeremiah challenging the foolish counsellors of his nation or Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem. Such determined resistance to evil is demanded of us in these days if we would stand for God. It would mean that we are prepared to pour out our lives in the service of the

causes we live for. A satyagrahi, fasting unto death for the removal of the curse of untouchability, received a wire from a prominent Indian social reformer who did not approve of such aggressive methods. 'Your life is not yours to throw away', he told the satyagrahi. To that came the answer of the other without a moment's hesitation; 'My life is not mine to cling to'. The satyagrahi's life, the Christian's life, the life of any true servant of God, is not his to cling to but to pour it out as an offering to God. A great modern teacher of Christianity takes up the question that Mr H. G. Wells has posed in a small book of his: 'What shall we do with our lives?' To this he gives the answer: 'Give them away. Make a generous gift of them to mankind. Find the thing that is worth dying for as well as worth living for. Die for it daily, not in a spectacular way, but in a silent way. Make it a secret, if you will, between yourself and your God. Spread your dying out over the weeks, the months and the years. Let our life be consumed in service. Consume yourself valiantly, cheerfully, skilfully. Put all your intelligence into your self-consumption; put all your skill into it; put all your courage into it. Waste no thought on asking whether you are happy as you have a right to be. Ask for no guarantees' (L. P. Jacks: *Elemental Religion*).

That is the ideal and the challenge that this great unknown prophet of Israel has set before us. We in India have seen something of the winsomeness and the effectiveness of this ideal in the life and work of Deenabandhu C. F. Andrews. If Christianity is fundamentally a fellowship of those who bear the badge of suffering for the redemption of the world, then the way is clear, not only to Christian unity, but the acceptance of its witness by India at large. But realising the sternness of its demands well might we cry out: who is sufficient for these things? It is God alone who can help us, the God who alone can order the

unruly wills and affections of sinful men, who can make the suffering of the innocent touch the heart of the unjust. 'It is He', the prophet tells us 'who giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength' (Is. 40:29). 'No word from Him shall fruitless fall, but shall accomplish His will' (Is. 55:11). And His will, as we know, is pardon and peace for ourselves as individuals and for our distracted world.

—*The Guardian*, Vol. XXII, No. 8



# APPENDICES



(1) THE AIM AND BASIS OF THE ALL-KERALA  
INTER-RELIGIOUS STUDENT FELLOWSHIP

We believe that the religious attitude is a thing of permanent value to mankind, individually and collectively; and consider it, wherever it is found, deserving of reverent recognition. Amidst the conflicting claims made on behalf of different religions, all of which have sprung from this common attitude, we believe there is an urgent need for a full and free exchange of our differing religious experiences, in a spirit of mutual respect, appreciation and sympathy. We consider that for such mutual respect, and sympathy to be real it is absolutely necessary that no member of the Fellowship should claim for his religion any exclusive and final possession of truth.

We believe that such an interchange of experiences will lead to:

- (a) An enrichment of one another's religious life;
- (b) Mutual respect, understanding and tolerance; and
- (c) Co-operation in purifying and strengthening the religious attitude of mind as against the irreligious or materialistic

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\* These are included here because they shed light on the nature of George's inter-religious convictions and involvement.

attitude, as the one attitude from which our personal, social, national and international problems have to be tackled.

In order that each may bring into this Fellowship the very best that he can, we desire to explore fully the value of our religious traditions and disciplines and present them for the benefit of all. But we do not desire to persuade any within the Fellowship to our own religious belief and practice.

We realise that any attempt to weaken the hold of the truth of any religion upon mankind is to weaken religion itself. Therefore we strive not to weaken but to strengthen each other by mutual respect, trust and co-operation.

We seek to help one another more fully to understand and to live up to the best in all religions.

## (2) THE BASIS OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF FRIENDS OF TRUTH

The Fellowship of Friends of Truth is alive to the urgent need in the world today of bringing together people of different faiths in a common endeavour to realize the good life for all through the way of truth and love. It attempts to do this on the basis

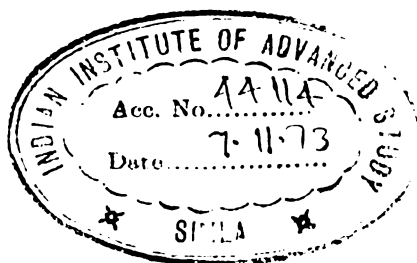
(1) of reverence for all religions, implying thereby a frank acceptance of the fact of variety in man's growing apprehension of truth,

(2) of silent worship, and

(3) of united brotherly action on non-violent lines.

The fellowship invites people of all faiths to share through this Fellowship the richness of their various religious traditions and experiences in this adventure of the spirit.

Those who join the Fellowship will be expected to support one another in the struggle for world peace and social justice, identifying themselves as closely as they are able with the oppressed and the disinherited, and treating all men as brothers. Members of the Fellowship will also unite with other groups and individuals who are working for these ends.



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