

MAHATMA GANDHI  
AND  
C. F. ANDREWS

A STUDY IN HINDU—CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

K. L. SESHAGIRI RAO



PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

Price Rs. 7.50

G  
291  
R18M



***INDIAN INSTITUTE OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
LIBRARY SHIMLA***

105 - 65 = 40

$$\begin{array}{r} 105 \\ - 65 \\ \hline 40 \end{array}$$

**DATA ENTERED**



*Li library*

MAHATMA GANDHI  
AND  
C. F. ANDREWS

A STUDY IN HINDU—CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

K. L. SESHAGIRI RAO



PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

©

PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA



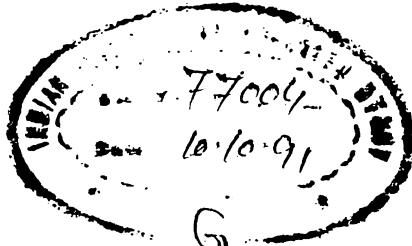
Library IAS, Shimla



00077004

2200 Copies

September, 1969



G

291

R18M

Published by Sh. Amrik Singh, M.A., Registrar, Punjabi University, Patiala and  
Printed by J. Roy Mangla, M.A., Proprietor, Phulkian Press,  
Phulkian Marg, Patiala.

*“There are a few things perhaps more difficult to accomplish than to put oneself in sympathetic touch with a religion which is not one’s own by birth-inheritance. The effort that has to be made is far more sustained than that of understanding a poem in a foreign tongue. There is a strangeness about every mood and tone of worship, as well as in the words of the sacred texts of Scripture and the revealed doctrines held to be orthodox.”*

●— C. F. Andrews





## Preface

A special interest of this book derives from the fact that it is written, not only from a Hindu standpoint, but from the standpoint of a *younger* Hindu scholar of the present generation who shares the aspirations and faces the problems of the India of today. Others have written of the remarkable friendship between Mahatma Gandhi and Charles Freer Andrews—the English Scholar and Christian missionary. But for the most part such writers have been older men, contemporaries of Gandhi and Andrews, belonging to the generation which witnessed their friendship.

K. L. Seshagiri Rao, however, was still a schoolboy when the movement led by Gandhi for India's independence was reaching its climax and still a student at college when Gandhi was assassinated. He never met Gandhi personally although he recalls standing in the crowd as a boy when Gandhi was speaking. Nor did he know C. F. Andrews. "But we all knew about him, of course; knew him from a distance," he says, referring to his college friends: "we knew him as the great friend of India, not only as Mahatma Gandhi's friend, but as the friend of the poor, loved and revered throughout India."

I once travelled with C.F. Andrews aboard ship and observed myself the sincerity of this reverence, especially on the part of Indian students like Mr Rao and his friends. Quietly and shyly, the students would approach the tall, slender figure, with the long white beard, noble forehead and kindly eyes, and, making the Indian gesture of homage, bend low before him and touch his feet. This was over thirty years ago. Mr Rao's chapters continue this same homage, as they also reflect his homage for Andrews' great friend, Mahatma Gandhi, whose life and teaching have profoundly influenced Mr. Rao's own life and

thought. He writes in the knowledge that the friendship between these two devoted men is not forgotten in India today, and in the conviction that it should not be forgotten, neither in India nor in the West.

But his chapters amount to something more than homage. He sees this friendship as deeply significant. He regards it as particularly relevant to what has been called "the coming dialogue" between the great religions of mankind. He presents Andrews and Gandhi as pioneers of such dialogue, dialogue which was *the* more fruitful because each remained loyal to his own tradition, each strengthened and confirmed in his own faith by what he learned from the other.

Mr Rao asks not only what in particular each learned from the other, but how and why they came by such learning. Each, he emphasizes, *lived* his faith, seeking to put it into practice, and this was the ground of their mutual respect. While noting that Gandhi had become interested in Christian thought and Andrews in Hindu thought, before they came together. Mr Rao observes how their deepening friendship as they worked together in a common cause, contributed to new understanding, and he concludes that such friendship between men of different religious traditions is not only possible but a condition of more fruitful "dialogue." He concludes by observing how growing respect for each other's religion encouraged what Gandhi called "reverence for all religions," a subject of which Mr Rao has made a special study.

His treatment of the great friendship is informed by this same study. It is also informed by a study of Christian thought, and Western readers will be interested to know how he came to make this study of Christianity. It was not the result of any Christian missionary propaganda. It was the result of Gandhi's example. The son of devout Hindu parents, Brahmins by caste, Mr Rao never attended any Christian mission school, as in the case of a good many other Hindus who have shown a similar interest in Christian thought. Nor was he approached

by any Christian missionary. He made his own approach, influenced by Gandhi's teaching. He tells how he and some of his college friends, observing Gandhi's frequent quotation of the New Testament, met together to make their own study of the Christian Gospels. They discussed the Gospels among themselves and drew their own conclusions. As Mr Rao might put it, they found their own way to Christ. Or perhaps he might say that Christ found his own way to them, for out of this study came a reverence for Christ which Mr Rao is never slow to affirm today. As we picture this group of Hindu students reading the New Testament together, inspired by Gandhi's example, we may conjecture how many others in the India of today may be similarly, on their own initiative and by their own devices, finding their way to Christ.

Yet Mr Rao remains a Hindu, and, in the sense in which Gandhi used the term, an orthodox Hindu. Since college days he has sought out Christian scholars—Catholic and Protestant—and discussed his position, but he has not been persuaded by their argument that full loyalty to Christ involves Church membership. The fact that he finds no difficulty in relating Christ's teaching to his own Hindu premises may be partly due to the fact that he belongs to a sect or school, not so well known in the West as some other Hindu sects, whose beliefs invite comparison with Christian beliefs. He is a follower of Madhva, a great South Indian teacher, who, in the thirteenth century, presented a definitely theistic version of the Hindu faith, conceiving the Absolute Brahman in terms of a Personal God, the Lord of all beings, manifest in successive incarnations, enabling his worshippers by His Divine grace, and only by this grace, to attain salvation as they turn to Him in full devotion and pure love of the Lord.

It was in Delhi that I first met Mr Rao. After graduating from Mysore University, where he studied social Philosophy, Indian philosophy and Sanskrit literature and was awarded his Master's degree with distinction, he was lecturer at Chattisgarh

College, Saugor University, in central India, for some nine years. He resigned this position to accept a Fellowship awarded by the Gandhi Peace Foundation. When I saw him in Delhi he was completing his dissertation for the Foundation on "Gandhi's Concept of Reverence for all Religions."

Among the Christian scholars he consulted in preparing his dissertation was the late Dr Paul Devanandan, Director of Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, established in Bangalore, South India. Dr Devanandan encouraged Mr Rao to apply for admission to the newly formed Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, and he was further encouraged by Dr Radhakrishnan, at that time Vice-President of India, who made a special visit to America to give the Inaugural Lecture when the Center was opened.

As Director of the Center, it was my joy to welcome Mr Rao when he arrived from India and observe how quickly he won the esteem and friendship of our other residents, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and Christians as well as those who shared his own Hindu Faith, from various parts of the world. Soon after his arrival, and at very short notice, he was asked to take the place of a distinguished scholar who was unable, at the last moment, to address the annual conference of the alumni of the Harvard Divinity School, and the expectations aroused by the address\* which Mr Rao gave on that occasion, deeply sincere, searching and stimulating, have not been disappointed. It was indeed a further joy to me to see him complete his studies in our World Religions programme, receive his Harvard doctoral degree in Religious Studies and proceed to appointment at the University of California and the University of Virginia before returning to his homeland, the India he loves so deeply and seeks to serve so devotedly, to take up his present appointment at the Punjabi University.

24th March, 1969

Robert H. Lawson Slater  
Emeritus Professor of World Religions,  
Harvard University, Ecumenical  
Institute of Canada, Toronto

---

\*See Appendix I

## *Author's Note*

The idea of this book originated in my discussions with Professor R. H. L. Slater during my stay as a fellow at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., and a major portion of the manuscript was written there.

The second chapter of this study was used as material for a lecture that I gave under the auspices of the South Asia Committee, Charlottesville, Va. 'A Hindu View of Jesus Christ' which is appended to this book was published in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, April 1964.

The Punjabi University, Patiala, under the auspices of the Gandhi Centenary Committee, has kindly sponsored the publication of this book. The cost of publication is met out of a special grant from the University Grants Commission. I am thankful to Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, Vice-Chancellor of the Punjabi University, for his kind interest in my work and for encouraging me to complete it.

I shall feel amply rewarded if this book helps even to some extent, to bring the contributions of two great men for inter-religious understanding to the notice of the reading public in India and abroad. I also hope that it may help Hindus and Christians understand the greatness of each other's religious tradition to some degree.

I take the opportunity of recording my sincere thanks to Professor Slater for his guidance and advice, to Dr Kishan Singh Bedi, formerly Joint Director of Agriculture, Punjab, and to my, esteemed friends Dr. K. R. Sundararajan, Dr. L. M. Joshi, and Dr. Christianand and Dr. Mushir-ul-Haq for going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

In due course, I propose to bring out a companion volume entitled 'A Study in Hindu-Islamic Dialogue.'

Deptt. of Religious Studies,  
Punjabi University,  
Patiala  
July, 1969

K. L. Seshagiri Rao



## *Contents*

Preface	...	i
Author's Note	...	v
CHAPTER I		
Introduction		1
CHAPTER II		
A Great Friendship	...	8
CHAPTER III		
The Creative Encounter	...	24
CHAPTER IV		
The Constructive Response		42
CHAPTER V		
Reverence for the Faith of Other Men		56
CHAPTER VI		
Conclusion		69
APPENDIX I		
A Hindu View of Jesus Christ ...		96
APPENDIX II		
Hindu Orientations to Other Religions		92





## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the life of modern man, religion, in its traditional forms, is receding to the background. A secular outlook in all matters of cultural concern is establishing itself. The need for religion is often seriously doubted. Bosanquet, the British philosopher, poses this question in his little book, *What Religion Is* and proceeds to answer that the modern mind is averse to receiving religion presented to him in the traditional form; not that the need for religion is not felt but that conventional religion fails to satisfy his deepest spiritual hunger. Jawaharlal Nehru has given a challenging description of the present religious situation in his *Autobiography* :

The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organised religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests. And yet I know well that there was something else in it; something which supplied a deep inner craving of human beings. How else could it have been the tremendous power it has been and brought peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls? Was that peace merely the shelter of blind belief and absence of questioning, the calm that comes from being safe in harbour, protected from the storms of the open sea, or was it something more.<sup>1</sup>

Like nationalism, religion has become, unfortunately, one of the institutions militating against human unity, despite the profession by each religious tradition that the welfare of all

humanity is its ideal. It has been employed, very often, in a worldly manner for political and selfish ends. Most religions, in practice and in theology, separate their adherents from those of every other religion. In the name of uniqueness or exclusiveness, walls of separation have been raised between man and man. Consequently, people very easily become fanatical about some specific doctrines and outer forms of religion and tend to discard the inner core.

It is very difficult to believe that different religions which preach the ideals of love, human brotherhood, and of peace should give rise to strifes and conflicts generating hatred in their relationship with other religious communities. But in the name of religion, the worst of human passions have been roused in history spelling disaster and degradation. A. N. Whitehead observes: "Religion is by no means necessarily good. It may be very evil. History to the present day is a melancholy record of the horrors which can attend religion."<sup>2</sup>

Communal troubles in the recent history of India culminating the large-scale massacres of the followers of the three major religious communities during and after the partition of the country, and the supreme tragedy of the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic in the cause of the 'defense of Hinduism' focus our attention again on the magnitude of the evil. Still worse, these tragedies have left their scars on the minds of men in the form of psychological complexes and defence mechanisms of intolerance, exclusiveness and so forth. They have challenged the foundation of morality and of elementary democratic practices in the country.

Whenever an occasion arises, causing irritation between different religious communities, these complexes which usually lie dormant in the subconscious come suddenly to the surface and let loose fierce emotions which take the form of vilification, mob fury and hatred against a religious group other than one's own; and the other group too becomes equally furious for the same reasons. The result is, of course, disaster for all and a blot on

the history of humanity, and disgrace to all religions.

The modern man is losing the sense of religious values. In his revolt against petrified creeds, priestly depravities and religious riots, he runs the risk of throwing out the baby along with the bathwater. In his suspicion of religion, he is apt to ignore what religion essentially means and stands for. Hence the necessity not to get confused. Religion has played a dominating part all over the world; and it is doubtful if the world will ever be able to do without religion in one form or other. The report of the University Education Commission states that "We must not be carried away by sentiments. What is responsible for the communal excesses is not religion as must be the ignorance, bigotry and selfishness with which religion gets mixed up. Selfish people in an attitude of cynical opportunism use religion for their sinister ends."<sup>3</sup> According to Mahatma Gandhi, "To try to root out religion itself from society is a wild-goose chase. And were such an attempt to succeed, it would mean the destruction of society. Superstitions, evil customs, and other imperfections creep in from age to age, and mar religion for the time being. They come and go but religion itself remains."<sup>4</sup>

It is not, therefore, the reality of religion but often its form and formalities which constitute grave threat to religious harmony. If the votaries of one religion spread misunderstanding and contempt for other religions then much evil and suffering will follow. To Gandhi, the employment of violence and hatred in the name of religion was unthinkable; his concern was to point out that religion was not intended to create hatred, but positive love in all mutual relations between man and man everywhere and at all times. He sacrificed his life to teach this to the Hindus and the Muslims. He died a martyr in this attempt.

What is, therefore, urgently needed is a fresh understanding of the concept of religion and its function in life and society, with a view to discriminating what is fundamental and enduring from what is transitory and incidental to it. Every historical religion has the tribal, the national and the universal elements in it.

The tribal and the national elements are conditioned by the local, historical, geographical and cultural factors. They are useful in their own place and time. But it is misleading and wrong to overemphasize them against the universal elements. The universal moral and spiritual values embedded in these religions are eternal in the sense that they transcend the limitations of race, geography, history, etc; they are applicable to all men. It is these universal spiritual values contained in different religions that are to be understood, appreciated and practised in the day-to-day life of man.

Religions, as practised by the majority of the respective followers, have, by and large, emphasized the regional, local and parochial elements to the detriment of those which are universal and everlasting. Religious organizations have often developed and stressed sectarian trends and loyalties. But in the present-day world, anything that is parochial will not satisfy mankind as a whole. We must look at things in the larger context with a wider point of view. Only if the universal elements in all religions are released from their regional and narrow settings can religion itself become a progressive force in the world today.

A genuine religion aims at raising humanity to a higher ethical and spiritual plane. It activates some of the noble instincts in man, elevates and refines them. Gandhi wrote as early as 1917: "Religion is very dear to me and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious. Here I am not thinking of Hindu, Mohammedan or Zoroastrian religion but of that religion which underlies all religions. We are turning away from God."<sup>5</sup> Further he adds "..... Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and other religions teach that we should remain passive, about worldly pursuits and active about godly pursuits, that we should set a limit to our worldly ambition and that our religious ambition should be illimitable. Our activity should be directed in the latter channel."<sup>6</sup> Gandhi was not blind to the abuse of religion or to religious superstitions. He wrote, "I am not pleading for a continuance of religious superstition. We shall certainly fight them tooth and nail, but

we never do so by disregarding religion. We can do only by appreciating and conserving religion."7

Religion is the unique possession of man. The potentiality for the highest intellectual and spiritual development that is inherent in man is absent in animals. This superior faculty of intelligence that distinguishes man from animals makes him dissatisfied with a mere vegetative life. It stimulates him for serious and earnest pursuit of the highest truth available to him. It is not a mere intellectual attempt to comprehend Reality, but a way of life aimed at the realization of the highest values of life. The lives of Mahatma Gandhi and C. F. Andrews bear testimony to and illustrate this fact. They lived and loved, suffered and served, returned kindness for cruelty and have left the uplifting message of their lives to mankind.

Gandhi and Andrews endeavoured to show in their lives, each in his own way, how religion could function in a creative way and lead man as an individual to a higher state and collectively to a higher and a more humane society, a new society adequate to the challenges and needs of today. They attempted to meet a way of thinking which bred intolerance and created barriers between large sections of humanity. They tried to diagnose the malady and to discover a priceless core lying inside their respective religious traditions and in their fountains of inspiration.

This actually led them to ask themselves how they could learn to benefit from the great insights, discoveries and potentialities of all great religions so that they could more fully realize the role of the divine in the individual and society. In short, the urgent problem that they faced was how to bring the different religions together in active co-operation and fellowship with one another in realization what Whitehead refers to as 'the beauty of holiness'. They believed that only a united effort on the part of different religions could rehabilitate the shattered and confused life of mankind and rekindle the true religious spirit. They were further interested in saving the future generations from the repetitions of the consequences of religious bigotry and conflicts. This

necessitated a new spiritual approach to each other's religious traditions and of a new inner relation between them. The crucial issue that absorbed their attention was: how to generate and maintain mutual reverence, practical neighbourliness and genuine good-will and harmony among the followers of the great religions of the world.

Mahatma Gandhi and C. F. Andrews in their active lives were constantly faced with this problem in all its severity. And they worked for a solution of the problem all through their lives. They attempted to shatter the narrow walls of separation and to reach wider and wider horizons. They tried to bring the followers of different religious communities together by understanding and harmony. They felt that each religion at its deepest and best constituted a precious part of the religious heritage of humanity.

The time is ripe for a reorientation of the religious outlook on a world scale. Modern scientific achievements have annihilated distances and brought peoples and religions of the world nearer to one another than ever before. Truthful and unreserved intercourse with other great cultures and religions has become an urgent necessity in the context of the modern world order. Therefore while religions confront one another on a world-wide front, if they do not co-operate and meet in friendly fellowship, it would only lead to a general decay of the religious spirit. The future of religions lies in their mutual understanding and co-operation. It is on this fact that Gandhi and Andrews focussed our attention. They emphatically declared that religious harmony cannot be brought about by worldly competition. They adopted a constructive approach to harmony and co-operation among the great religions of the world. An attempt is made, in the following pages, to spell out the salient features of their approach.

## INTRODUCTION

7

### NOTES

1. Jawaharlal Nehru : *Autobiography* p. 374
2. Whitehead, A. N. : *Religion in the Making* p. 17
3. *The Report of University Education Commission, Vol. I* p. 294
4. Mahatma Gandhi : *Young India*, August 25, 1920
5. Mahatma Gandhi : *Indian Home Rule Edition* 1956 p. 30
6. *Ibid.* p. 31
7. *Ibid.* p. 31

•

## CHAPTER II

### A GREAT FRIENDSHIP

In September 1924, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of modern India and the architect of her freedom, undertook a 'great fast'. The particular purpose of the fast was to stop rioting between the Hindus and the Muslims and to promote unity between the two communities. Blood had been shed in these riots and Gandhi had taken upon himself the sins of the people. It was a solemn occasion for the whole of India. Among the little band of close friends who gathered around him during the fast were religious leaders belonging to different religions—Maulana Mohamed Ali, Swami Shraddhananda, Vinoba Bhave, the Ali brothers, Dr Ansari and, last but not least, Charles Freer Andrews, Gandhi's devoted English companion.

Andrews was by his side from the second day of the fast which lasted for twenty-one days, standing by Gandhi in resolute friendship as he had done many times before and as he was to stand many times again during the great struggle for India's freedom. Andrews, the Christian, no less than Gandhi, the Hindu, deplored the Hindu-Muslim riots and believed that men of different religious traditions could, and should, work together for the common good.

The subject of this present book is the remarkable friendship which existed between these two men from the day that Andrews met Gandhi in South Africa some nine years after the former's arrival in India in 1904 as a Christian missionary. Their friendship is a superb example of the meeting of two different religious traditions—the Hindu and the Christian. It provides an illuminating instance of the 'dialogue' between men of different faiths, which is engaging the attention of an increasing number of



people today. While each of them was exposed to the wholesome influences of the other and was also challenged by the other to respond constructively, the commitment of each to his own faith became more and more pronounced, for this very reason, as the days passed by.

Mahatma Gandhi is chiefly known abroad for his political activity, as the leader of the national movement for the independence of India. He is also known for the political strategy by which he achieved this purpose, the method of non-violent resistance (*Satyagraha*), a method which has since been adopted by others, including some of the negro leaders in America today, in their struggle for civil rights. But Gandhi's political activity was essentially an extension of his religious concern. He was, first and last, a deeply religious man and, as such, he is revered throughout India today. As a religious and social reformer, he has had a profound influence on the modern Hindu thought and practice.

Among his most notable religious conceptions was his conception of 'Reverence for all religions' (*sarvadharmasamabhava*), which followed from his close contacts with devout men of different religions. It is with this conception in mind that we propose to consider his friendship with C. F. Andrews, a friendship which is the more illuminating because, as we have observed, Gandhi remained essentially a Hindu and Andrews remained a Christian. In effect, their friendship was a 'dialogue'. Each reached out to the other from his own tradition and background. Andrews wrote of Gandhi :

The more we study of Mahatma Gandhi's own life and teachings the more certain it becomes that the Hindu religion has been the greatest of all influences in shaping his ideas and actions. ... His mother's influence as a devout and gentle Hindu saint, perpetually returns to his mind and conscience, making the fragrance of ancient Hindu texts so sweet that nothing else in the world can compare with them, to his own imagination, in beauty and truth and sweetness.<sup>1</sup>

As to Andrews, the source of his inspiration and the spring from which his dynamic activity issued was Jesus Christ, as he emphasized in his best-known work *What I Owe to Christ*. Behind the friendship of these two men, then, was a difference of religious loyalty and yet their faithfulness to each other was due to the faithfulness of their respective loyalties.

It was not a friendship which meant agreement in all respects. To give one example, Andrews was strongly opposed to Gandhi's 'fasts unto death' in 1932 and 1939. Andrews described them as 'morally repulsive'. Yet such disagreements did not break the bonds between them. Regarding Andrews, Gandhi wrote : "Whenever he feels hurt over anything I have done, he deluges me with letters without waiting for an answer. For it is love speaking to love and not arguing."<sup>2</sup>

It was, indeed, a remarkable friendship in many ways. One was an Indian and the other an Englishman; one was a Hindu and the other a Christian; one belonged to the people in rebellion against the colonial rule; the other belonged to the people who exercised that rule. It is not surprising that their friendship aroused widespread comment in their own day, both in India itself and outside India. While the whole Indian nation hailed their friendship, in administrative and missionary circles, it was frequently viewed with disfavour.

It was in South Africa, in the year 1913, that the two men had their first meeting. Gandhi at that time was a young lawyer who was becoming known in India for his efforts on behalf of the Indian settlers in South Africa; while Andrews, the Christian missionary, who had then been in India for nine years, had already won the regard of Indian leaders by his efforts to bring Hindus and Christians together and his evident interest in Indian conditions, social and political.

Most of the Indians in South Africa had been brought from India to work on the farms or in the mines under a system of indenture. The terms of the contract reduced them to a condition of semi-slavery for five years after which they became free workers.

The Indians—free workers or indentured servants or merchants or farmers—were all contemptuously called ‘coolies’ and were ill-treated as inferior race fit only for servitude. They were subjected to a series of discriminatory, humiliating and repressive measures, notoriously known as the ‘Black Laws’; Gandhi believed that the Indian settlers had a right of equality with other groups in South Africa. He, therefore, initiated a campaign for securing the right of equality and repealing the ‘Black Laws’. The struggle had gone on for years. Matters had reached a crisis when Gopala Krishna Gokhale, the outstanding national leader at that time in India, invited Andrews to go to South Africa “in order to help the Indian community which was suffering from intolerable wrongs.”<sup>3</sup> Andrews at once consented and proceeded to Natal where Gandhi was waiting for him.

Of that first meeting in South Africa, Andrews afterwards wrote :

Our hearts met the first moment we saw one another and they have been united by the strongest ties ever since. To be with him was an inspiration that awakened all that was best in me and gave me a high courage, enkindled and enlightened by his own.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi, on his part, claimed to be Andrew’s closest friend. After Andrew’s death in 1940, Gandhi wrote of him in the *Harijan* newspaper :

Nobody, probably, knew Charlie Andrews as well as I did. When we met in South Africa we simply met as brothers and remained as such to the end. It was not a friendship between an Englishman and an Indian. It was an unbreakable bond between two seekers and servants.<sup>5</sup>

The friendship of these two men is all the more remarkable when we consider their very different backgrounds. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbunder on the West Coast of India. He came from a modest Hindu family. His family, which belonged to the “merchant caste” (*vaisya*), was very devout and pious, though not known for learning and scholar-

ship. His father was a chief counsellor (*diwan*) in a small principality; he was truthful, brave and cared little for material wealth. Mohandas's mother was a deeply religious woman who went to the temple daily, never took a meal without prayer and frequently undertook fast which she kept faithfully. The child Gandhi used to accompany his mother to the temple. When he grew a little older, he read popular religious epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He was especially impressed by the Indian play *Harishchandra*, in which the hero had a profound passion for honesty and truth and had to suffer many ordeals for maintaining his integrity. The young Gandhi wanted to be like this hero. Gandhi never received any Vedic, theological or philosophical training. He seems to have received a bent of mind towards personal piety and honesty from his parents. And the roots of his emotional and intellectual activity seem to have remained in the popular Hindu literature and devotional hymns.

Among his father's friends were a good many Muslims, Parsis, Jains and others besides Hindus, and the young Gandhi listened to their discourses on religion. This experience tended to make him tolerant, liberal and unsectarian in outlook.

At school, the young Gandhi was shy and kept himself aloof from his class-mates. After he had graduated from the local high school, he wanted to pursue his studies further in some British university. He was advised to take to the study of Law as that would enable him to become a diwan and keep the family tradition. Accordingly, he left for England to qualify himself as a barrister. Before sailing, he took a solemn oath before his mother that while abroad, he would be faithful to his wife, and abstain from alcoholic drinks and meat.

Because of his journey to a foreign land, people of his own caste excommunicated him. Even though he afterwards performed purificatory rites, orthodox prejudice kept him out of the caste-fold. While he did not resent that attitude of the people of his caste, he began to have vague ideas that much was wrong with the Hindu practice which needed to be set right. His experi-

ence and reflection in later years confirmed that view.

After his return from England as a Barrister-at-law in 1891, Gandhi had his first personal conflict with the British Government in India. He went to a British official to ask a favour for his brother. The official refused to listen. When Gandhi insisted on stating the case, the officer had him pushed out of his office by his servants. This insult stung Gandhi sharply and proved a turning-point in his life. It rudely opened his eyes to the arrogance of the foreign rulers. Later on, he was to realize further what the British occupation of India had done to the people of India. Economically, they were exploited, so that the foreigner could live in luxury. Politically, they were considered unfit to govern themselves. These factors, later, led Gandhi to initiate a campaign to secure justice, self-respect and freedom to the people of India.

In 1893, Gandhi left for South Africa to work as a lawyer for a Muslim firm. There again, he had to encounter a series of personal humiliations. He became involved in racial and colour conflicts. On one occasion, although he had paid for a first-class ticket for his railway journey, the conductor insisted that he should make way for a European passenger. When Gandhi declined to do so, he was removed from the train and his luggage was dumped on the platform. On a journey in a stage-coach from the railway station to Johannesburg, the white leader of the coach refused to allow Gandhi a seat inside, forcing him to sit beside the driver. Later, when the same man wanted to sit outside in order to have fresh air, he demanded that Gandhi relinquish the seat and sit on a sack as a servant. Gandhi objected and hung on to the brass railings while the man pounded his hands. Only the intervention of other passengers saved him from further insult. In Pretoria, he could get hotel accommodation only upon his promise to take his meals in his own room. In court, he was not allowed to wear his turban during the performance of his professional duties and was classed as a 'collie barrister'.

It was here in South Africa that Gandhi developed the purpose of his life and his method of realizing it. In the face of all these humiliations, he pondered within himself: should he go back to India or stay in South Africa? He decided to stay and to fight for the equal rights of Indians in South Africa. The method he chose to adopt in his fight was that of insistence on truth without violence—*satyagraha*—a method inspired by Tolstoy's writings, by the New Testament and by Thoreau's Essay on Civil Disobedience. This, then, was the man that Andrews met in South Africa.

Charles Freer Andrews was a middle-class Englishman of a devout Christian family. He was born at Newcastle-on-Tyne on February 12, 1871. His father was a minister of the small sect known as the Catholic Apostolic Church. The boyhood of Charles Andrews was spent in a family atmosphere of "close prayerful fellowship and mystical aspiration". He had a deep reverence for the devout lives of his parents, especially for his mother who left a permanent mark on his life. Given a typical middle-class English education, Andrews proved himself a particularly bright student and his school career was crowned by this election to a scholarship at Cambridge.

Before he was twenty years of age, he passed through a spiritual crisis which brought a "deep inner change". A strong conviction of sin and impurity oppressed him with such overpowering strength that "every shred of false convention was torn aside and I knew myself as I really was."<sup>6</sup> It was agonizing, alarming, unexpected and almost broke him down. He knelt before God in anguish of spirit and groping for light; the struggle went on long into the night. But when the day dawned "a new and wonderful sense of peace and forgiveness came stealing into my life at its very centre and bringing infinite relief...I knew at that time without any doubt that Christ was my Saviour and Redeemer and that his love had won my heart for ever."<sup>7</sup> This experience had a profound effect on his whole outlook and life. Henceforth, the example of Christ began to mould and constrain

Andrews' character. Referring later to this experience, he wrote :

There was no need for me to formulate this in a creed. It was spiritual consciousness that had come to me, not an intellectual definition; and whenever I have gone aside from that spiritual basis in order to define in metaphysical terms what I believe, it has seemed to me to bring weakness instead of strength, uncertainty instead of truth. I can well understand the need of expressing in human words as far as possible that which is intimately experienced; but the words remain after all, symbols of the truth rather than truth 'itself'.<sup>8</sup>

Andrews entered Pembroke College, Cambridge, in October 1890, where, among other things, he had a sound theological education. His critical faculties were aroused. 'Old and naive beliefs' were passing away and his life was being reoriented. His mind became exercised by many religious searchings.

When he finished his studies in Cambridge, he had resolved that his sphere of work was among the poor. His apprenticeship for this service began in the Pembroke College Mission in London. After that period, he was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England. He had, however, many doubts and hesitations concerning some of the 'articles of religion', which he was required to sign as a clergyman. He was also troubled in his mind regarding such things as the 'cursing psalms.' But in the opportunity to work among the poor, he saw "higher marks of ordination than any man-made articles of subscription."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, his misgivings were not overcome. Therefore, when an offer came to him to return to Cambridge as a Fellow of his College, he gave up the college mission work, welcoming the opportunity for further thought and study.

During his Cambridge days, Andrews had many intimate conversations with Bishop Westcott of Durham. The Bishop's interpretation of the Gospel of St John confirmed Andrews in a love of this Gospel which inspired him throughout his life. The Bishop often spoke about India, where his four sons were missionaries. When one of those sons, Basil, died of cholera in Delhi,

Andrews' own thoughts began to turn to the missionary field as a means of further surrender to Christ. The tragic news of his friend's death came to him as a personal challenge. He felt that he had to take his friend's place in India. On March 20, 1904, he set foot on the Indian soil, and began that new life in the East, which he considered his second birth.

He had entered an unfamiliar world of life and thought, bewildering and yet fascinating. It was, indeed, a new environment. Joining the staff of St Stephen's College, Delhi, he became more and more eager to discover the heritage of India, to understand its genius and appreciate its aspirations. He developed an intimate friendship with Sushil Rudra, the Indian principal of the college. Their joint efforts largely transformed the college by divesting it of its foreignness and making it a truly Indian possession, rooted in the soil of the land. Separate hostels for the Indian Christian students of the college were abolished. Andrews protested along with Rudra against the imposition of thirty-nine articles and the Athanasian Creed on the young Indian Church. He fought against sectarian narrowness and, in consequence, came into collision with his bishop. Andrews was responsible for inviting a Baptist missionary to teach at this Anglican College. He saw the College as a place of friendship "transcending creed and race, a place where life is not broken by narrow domestic walls."<sup>10</sup>

It was during those years that Andrews began to face the challenge of other religions. He studied the Hindu thought with his keen and critical mind and observed the Hindu life from close quarters, while his human sympathies led him, more and more, to identify himself with India and the Indian people. In all these things, he was inspired by his Christian commitment and motivated by his Christian conscience. The Johannine Gospel, into the beauties of which Bishop Westcott of Durham had initiated him, guided him in his adventure of the spirit. It was his faithfulness to Christ which led him to dedicate himself to India and her people.

The differences in their backgrounds—which are too obvious



to be missed by any outside observer—did not divide Andrews and Gandhi, for those differences were only on the surface. There were deep elements of agreement in their attitude to life and its duties. “Springing from a common concern for the poor and the downtrodden and the common faith in the ultimate power and reality of love, it (our friendship) had stood the test of much vehement disagreement over particular methods and policies and the long separation had only drawn closer the bonds of confidence and trust.”<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi’s twin principles of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and insistence on truth (*satyagraha*) were accepted by Andrews with enthusiasm. The spirit that guided Gandhi in his struggle appeared to Andrews to be, in the main, the same as that which guided himself. As he looked at what Gandhi did in South Africa, he could say without hesitation:

He put us Christians to shame; and his example had ever since set me seriously thinking. What he called *satyagraha* or Truth force was absolute Christian...<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Gandhi’s compassion for the poor bound Andrews to him. They both held strongly that God was to be found among the lowliest children of the soil. The essential harmony between them seems to have been due to their agreement on these “practical religious ideals.” As Gandhi said, each was essentially a “seeker and servant.”

Each was a servant—a servant of humanity. It was in South Africa that Gandhi first developed a passion for serving the poor. He wrote:

I had made the religion of service my own as I felt that God could be realized only through service...I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawar intrigues and for gaining livelihood. But as I have said I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.<sup>13</sup>

When the Boer War began in 1899, Gandhi raised an Indian

Ambulance Corps and offered its services to the authorities. In 1904, when plague broke out in Johannesburg, he closed his office and devoted himself to sanitary work and the nursing of the victims. In 1906, when there was the Zulu rebellion in Natal, he raised a stretcher-bearer company from among the Indian community and offered its services to the government, which accepted it with Gandhi as its Sergeant Major.

During that time, Gandhi read John Ruskin's *Unto this Last* which captured his imagination and transformed his whole life. A passion for simplicity and service took hold of him. He gave up his career as a successful lawyer in order to become an Indian peasant. He volunteered to become a compounder and a nurse in a charitable hospital and gave two hours of his time in the morning for this work. And because of his desire to help the oppressed Indian labourers, he stayed on in South Africa even after his legal assignment with the Muslim firm was over.

It was this concern for the poor and the forlorn that attracted Andrews to Gandhi, for Andrews's own aptitude for service and his concern for the lowliest and the lost dated from his college days. His work in the slums of industrial workers in London and his studies in the Social Gospel had decided for him his sphere of work. Wherever he saw the deepest destitution and misery, there he saw Christ identified with them in their need. It was his passionate desire to help the Indian labourers who were oppressed under the indenture system that took him to South Africa.

In the following years, Andrews was to visit other colonies where Indians had settled. He visited British Guiana and British Columbia, Kenya and the Fiji Islands. As he journeyed from colony to colony, he was an ambassador of inter-racial friendship. Wherever he went, he tried to remedy injustice. His errands of mercy were frequently called for by an earthquake or a flood or a famine. He never shut his ears to such calls. He was truly as Gandhi called him *dinabandhu* (friend of the poor). He stood before the Indian mind as a true representative of the Christian

way of life. His love of Christ expressed itself in his willingness to do the most commonplace actions of service on behalf of the needy.

Gandhi and Andrews were not only "servants" of humanity, they were "seekers" of God. Each had keen struggles within himself regarding the momentous issues of religious faith. For each the best life was the life of good deeds issuing forth from the love of God. Faith and reason, the spiritual and the ethical had so blended in them that they were able to steer clear of both the religious 'right' and the 'left'. Though they opened their minds to the powerful movements of modern thought currents, they never gave up their roots in their respective faiths and held on to them valiantly in their life-long pilgrimage towards the realization of Truth. They focussed their attention on the necessity of *living* religiously. Their religious consciousness was both mystical and prophetic. They insisted on truth and non-violence (love) in every sphere of life.

Gandhi's religious quest was estmulated by his Christian associations in England and South Africa. In London, he spent a large part of his time in religious discussion. He read widely. The literature of the Theosophists introduced him to the movement for the unity of religions. Edwin Arnold's English version of the *Bhagavad-Gita (The Song Celestial)* stirred him so deeply that for the rest of his life it became his constant guide. He was excited by the teachings of the New Testament and specially the Sermon on the Mount. The verses "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" went straight to his heart. Possibly, the most decisive influence on his mind at the time was Tolstoy's *Kingdom of God is Within You* with its teaching that the Sermon on the Mount was a sufficient guide to life; its condemnation of war, conscription, injustice and oppression fascinated him. He gained more and more knowledge of different religious traditions. "Truth", he wrote; "became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude everyday and my definition of it has

been ever widening.’<sup>14</sup>

Even when Gandhi appeared to be engaged in struggles which were not purely religious in character or in the movements of social reform and social justice, his dominant motive was always religious:

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by the service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I could find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately; but I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Working with Gandhi in South Africa, Andrews noted two things. First, regarding Gandhi's character: "Even when I was trying to help Mahatma Gandhi at the height of the strain of conflict, I was subconsciously occupied in thinking out the meaning of his personality—so entirely 'Hindu' and yet so 'supremely Christian'". Second, Andrews was sad to observe how so many who professed themselves to be Christians and represented the Christian Church condemned Gandhi because he did not belong to the white race. Andrews could not tolerate 'colour-ridden Christianity'. Like Paul, he made up his mind to resist those "who would bring racialism within the Christian Church."<sup>16</sup>

In India, Andrews discovered new dimensions of the Christian message. He found a congenial atmosphere in this country 'to know Christ's presence in the retirement of inner life'. His own emphasis on religious experience enabled him to take a sympathetic attitude to the Hindu view which gives much importance to the religious consciousness and the development of

inner life. It also enabled him to appreciate "the spiritual beauty which underlies Indian life, keeping it sweet through all ages in spite of cruelties and wrongs which have gone unredressed."<sup>17</sup> The simplicity of the Indian village life fascinated him:

What ever the West may say concerning the unpractical character of Christ's teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, in India this is not felt to be true. Obedience out there seems possible. When Jesus rejoiced in Spirit and thanked His heavenly Father for revealing truth unto babes, rather than to the wise and prudent, He was clearly referring to those country-people who had flocked to hear Him. So in India, there are those in villages who literally 'take not anxious thought for the morrow' and pay no heed to food and raiment. They know from a long tradition the pathway of renunciation, and delight in following that road, especially when life is drawing to its close.<sup>18</sup>

On his return from South Africa, Andrews resigned his work at St Stephen's College and gave away his life's savings. He joined *Santiniketan*, where Rabindranath Tagore had just founded a great centre of Indian culture, which was later developed into an international educational centre. In the serene and beautiful atmosphere of Santiniketan (The Abode of Peace), Andrews sat each morning long before the break of the day in quiet meditation.

Andrews worked shoulder to shoulder with Gandhi in the struggle for India's political emancipation. He was concerned, as much as Gandhi, to see that the independence movement was maintained at a consistently high moral level. He supported Gandhi's programme for national regeneration: the redemption of the outcaste, the brotherhood of the Hindus and the Muslims, the emancipation of women, freedom from drinks and drugs, basic education, cottage industries, and so on. In giving support to that programme, Andrews believed that 'vital religious principles' were at stake in it. "Independence, complete and perfect independence for India", he said, "is a religious principle with me because I am a Christian."<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi and Andrews devoted much of their time and energy to the promotion of cordial relations between the Hindus and the Muslims. As we have observed, Gandhi once fasted for three weeks for the sake of the Hindu-Muslim unity. They wanted harmony and peace not merely between the Hindus and the Muslims, but among the adherents of all the great religions of world. "Hindu-Muslim unity means" says Gandhi, "not only unity between Hindus and Mussalmans but between all those who believe India to be their home, no matter to what they may belong."<sup>20</sup>

In India, the land of many religions, the problem of proper relationship between the followers of different religious traditions has always engaged the attention of thinking men. Both Andrews and Gandhi deplored communal factions and learnt from their own experience that men of different faiths could and should co-operate. Their own friendship was a living example of the kind of 'dialogue' which they envisioned between different religious traditions. Both of them were deeply convinced that the employment of divisive tactics in the name of religion was inconsistent with a truly religious life. They believed that spreading misunderstanding and contempt for religious traditions other than one's own would result in evil for all the great traditions. Their concern was to point out that religion was not intended to create hatred but to create positive love in all mutual relations between man and man. They exemplified this teaching by their lives. They showed how good relations could be established between men of different faiths; they demonstrated in concrete life the implications of their respective religious commitments in terms of the oneness of humanity and religious harmony.

In the India of their day, the relations between the followers of different religious traditions were strained. Religious riots were frequent. Hatred and suspicion spoiled the atmosphere. In the midst of pervasive darkness, the friendship of these two great men served as a beacon light. They were often mistaken and misunderstood. A misguided Hindu, in the end,

shot Gandhi, believing that the latter was disloyal to Hinduism. Some Christians accused Andrews of betraying Christianity. But to many today the story of their friendship is full of challenge and inspiration. It has a message for all those who are interested in finding a way out from the actual and potential conflicts among the great religious traditions of the world. In the following pages, an attempt will be made to understand some aspects of this message.

## NOTES

1. C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, Macmillan Co., New York, 1930, p. 60
2. From *Young India* (the newspaper edited by Mahatma Gandhi) 1921, quoted by Nicol Macnicol in *Modern Christian Revolutionaries*, p. 258
3. From G. K. Gokhale's speech to the Imperial Legislative Council of India
4. C. F. Andrews, *What I Owe To Christ*, the Abingdon Press, 1932, p. 223
5. *Harijan* (Newspaper edited by Mahatma Gandhi) April 19, 1940
6. *What I Owe to Christ* (Op. cit.,) p. 80
7. *Ibid.*, p. 80
8. *Ibid.*, p. 91
9. *Ibid.*, p. 127
10. *The Stephanian* (Magazine of St. Stephen's College) June 1940, p. 36
11. B. Chaturvedi and Marjory Sykes, *C. F. Andrews*, p. 199
12. C.F. Andrews, *What I Owe To Christ*, p. 250
13. Gandhi's Autobiography, Op. cit., pp. 197-8
14. *Ibid.*, p. 51
15. *Harijan*, August 29, 1936
16. C. F. Andrews, *What I Owe To Christ*, p. 228
17. *Ibid.*, p. 233
18. C. F. Andrews, *The Inner Life*, Hadder and Stoughton, 1939, pp. 29-30
19. Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C. F. Andrews*, p. 166
20. *Young India*, April 16, 1931

## CHAPTER III

### THE CREATIVE ENCOUNTER

We have described the friendship of Gandhi and Andrews as one which promoted what amounted to Hindu-Christian dialogue in which each learnt much from the other. In each case, however, the dialogue took place against the background of a wider acquaintance. Gandhi had other Christian friends besides Andrews. Similarly, Andrews had other Hindu friends. Each had made a considerable study and had a sensitive awareness of the other's religious tradition before they became friends. What their friendship did to each of them (i) to deepen this awareness into respect, (ii) to lead each other to seek a deeper and richer knowledge of the other's tradition and (iii) to promote a progressive reinterpretation of their own religious lives in the light of new thought and experience. Inasmuch as each remained, as we have seen, loyal to his own faith, their friendship continued to be a 'dialogue' throughout their lives.

We shall see, as we go on, in what sense their views of each other's religion underwent change; what aspect of life or teaching in each other's religious tradition impressed them, and how each related them to his own need and experience. We shall also see how their friendship affected their views on the problem of inter-religious relations in general. It may be noted, incidentally, that there was in each case a realization of a growing sense of the diversity to be found in each other's religious tradition. They did not judge a religious tradition on the basis of a single sect or movement; they saw numerous elements and tendencies. They were just as critical of some aspects of the tradition as they were appreciative of the others. We have to bear this in mind if we are to understand and rightly estimate their treatment of religi-



ous thought and practice.

Gandhi's friendship with Andrews followed a period of growing familiarity with the Christian life and thought. His first reaction to Christianity in early boyhood was one of resentment because Christian missionaries "used to stand in a corner near the High School and hold forth pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods." However, this earlier resentment was largely overcome when he later on met worthy and noble Christians and studied the New Testament.

His serious conversations with the Christians began during his stay in London. He had opportunities to meet some worthy and noble Christians and study the New Testament. It was from that time that his earlier resentment gave place to positive appreciation and admiration. A good Christian from Manchester sold him a copy of the Bible and persuaded him to read it. Gandhi found the Old Testament uninspiring, but he was fascinated by the refreshing teaching of the New Testament, and was impressed by the life and character of Jesus Christ. There was, indeed, a time when Gandhi was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity.

A good deal of efforts was made to convert Gandhi to Christianity. It was thought that he was too good not to be a Christian. A fellow lawyer in South Africa, A. W. Baker, led Gandhi to his own private prayer meeting where the latter joined a group of devout Christians in prayer. A prayer was made for Gandhi's welfare: "Lord, show the path to the new brother, who has come amongst us. May the Lord Jesus who has saved us save him too. We ask all this in the name of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Another lawyer in South Africa, Mr Coates, a Quaker gave Gandhi selected books on Christianity and took evening walks with him in the hope that the latter would see the light through his discourses. Gandhi read those books and faithfully kept a diary of what he read and what impressions his readings and conversations made on him. Once Coates noticed around Gandhi's neck a *Vaishnava*<sup>3</sup> necklace of tulsi-beads. He thought that it was an evidence of Hindu superstition and he was pained.

"This superstition does not become you," he said, "Come, let me break the necklace."

"No ... It is a sacred gift from my mother."

"But you believe in it?"

"I do not know its mysterious significance; I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it. But I cannot without sufficient reason give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love ... When with the passage of time, it wears away, I shall have no desire to get a new one. But this necklace cannot be broken."<sup>4</sup>

Coates believed that Gandhi could not be saved until he embraced Christianity. His sins could not be washed away except by the intervention of Jesus. Mere good works were useless. So Coates continued his efforts and introduced Gandhi to a family of Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect. One of them took him by surprise by saying: "It appears you must be brooding over your transgressions every moment of your life, always mending them and atoning for them. How can this ceaseless cycle of action bring you redemption? You can never have peace ... How can we bear the burden of sin? We can but throw it on Jesus." To this Gandhi replied: "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall content to be restless."<sup>5</sup> The Plymouth Brother insisted that man must sin, that it was impossible in the world to live sinless, and it was for this that Jesus suffered and made atonement. Gandhi remarks: "the brother proved as good as his word. He voluntarily committed transgressions and showed me that he was undisturbed by thought of them."<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi, of course, knew that all Christians did not believe in such a theory of atonement. Mr Coates himself, for instance, believed in the possibility of self-purification. Therefore, the particular view of the Plymouth Brother did not prejudice Gandhi against Christianity.

Mr Baker once took him to a revival meeting which lasted

three days and three nights. Devout Protestant Christians had assembled at that meeting and Mr Baker hoped that their earnestness and enthusiasm would lead Gandhi to embrace christianity. Gandhi was impressed by their faith and he liked some of their hymns. He was also aware that many were praying for him. However, he saw no reason for changing his religion. "It was impossible for me to believe," he said, "that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian."<sup>7</sup>

On his return to India from South Africa. Gandhi went to a highly respected Indian Christian, Kali Charan Banerjee, a convert from Hinduism. This was in fulfilment of a promise which Gandhi had made to a missionary friend in South Africa "not to leave any stone unturned" in trying to convince himself of the truth of Christianity. A sincere and open-hearted discussion followed. But Gandhi came out unconvinced. He felt that for himself the path of salvation lay in Hinduism; and his faith in Hinduism grew deeper.

Thus Gandhi took a different path from what his early Christian friend had intended for him. But he remained "for ever indebted" to them for the religious quest that they had awakened in him. They had whetted an appetite for knowledge "which had almost become insatiable." "I shall always cherish the memory of their contact" he wrote, "The years that followed had more, not less of sweet contacts for me."<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi was, however, critical of certain features of Christianity as practised in the West, which he thought, were departures from the simple teachings of Jesus. In medieval Europe, he saw the domineering sway of the Church and not the human, gentle and godlike way of Jesus. It was the conviction of Gandhi that an undogmatic Christianity, true to the spirit of Jesus, could yet discover and establish links with the noble elements in all religions. "The Cross undoubtedly makes a universal appeal," he maintained, "the moment you give it an universal meaning in the place of the narrow one that is often heard at the ordinary meetings."<sup>9</sup>

He could not subscribe to the view that Christianity was the *only* true religion or that the Bible was the *only* true revelation. In fact, he found in Hinduism and Christianity many points of similarity. In its religious ideals of renunciation, other worldliness and inner perfection, Christianity did not appear to him to be different from other religious traditions. He firmly held that the false contrast between Christianity as the one true religion and others as inadequate religions cannot be sustained. He believed that Christians *alone* could never be the only chosen people of God, nor the Christian Church the *only* Church of God. To say so, he thought, was to deny God Himself to be the Father and the Redeemer of all.

I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice and a Divine teacher and not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of other faiths had failed to give me. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard among Christians. Philosophically, there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. For the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

Gandhi enjoyed the close friendship of many Christian missionaries; he was their constructive critic as well. He commended their humanitarian work. Their insistence on the service to society as well as their preference for the poor and the humbe made a strong appeal to him. But he was against their work of proselytization. He did not like their attempts to change man's religious affiliations without realizing the enormous influence of the cultural environment on the individual. He thought that there was no point in tearing a man away from the natural surroundings of his own religious heritage. He deprecated

the offering of material advantages like money, educational facilities and medical service to secure religious conversion. He held that such conversions could be degrading and unhealthy. "Conversion and service go ill together," he said.

Gandhi felt that all people should remain in their respective religious traditions and purify them from within wherever and whenever necessary. He could no more think of asking a Christian or a Muslim to change his religion than he could think of changing his own.

Here is Miraben. I would have her find all the spiritual comfort she needs from Christianity and I would not dream of converting her to Hinduism, even if she wanted to do so. .... Take the case of Khan Saheb's daughter entrusted to my care by her father. I should jealously educate her in her own faith and should strive my utmost against her being lured away from it, even if she was so inclined. I have had the privilege of having children of grown-up persons of other faiths with me. I was thankful to find them better Christians, Muslims, Parsis or Jews by their contact with me... Let my missionary friends remember that it was none but the most Christ-like of all Christians, Albert Schweitzer, who gave Christianity a unique interpretation when he himself resolved 'not to preach any more, not to lecture any more,' but to bury himself in equatorial Africa simply with a view to fulfil somewhat the debt that Europe owes to Africa."

Religious faith, Gandhi thought, was the strongest force by which many people were sustained in the conduct of their life; and anything that tended to weaken that faith would be a disservice to religion itself. He, therefore, maintained that no one should be induced to reject his own tradition outright. Just as a man cannot renounce his own body, his family and his kin, so also he thought, one cannot renounce his cultural and religious heritage into which he is born. Gandhi did not appreciate the conversion of Harijans, who in many cases, became apathetic, and morally lost ground after having lost their 'gods'.

However, Gandhi maintained that conversion, in the sense of self-purification and self-realization, was vital for every religious community. An inner change of heart was the birth of true religion in men. But such real conversion was very rare. It occurred when men became aware of a higher truth or a deeper spiritual value resulting in a moral crisis in life. Then the mind would become self-critical and the inner life of man would become more prominent. There would be a quickening of the spirit, a stronger attachment to God and a new discipline to strengthen this life. It would be a rebirth in spirit. Conversion meant for Gandhi a "greater surrender to God and greater self-purification." Real conversion he said "springs from the heart and at the prompting of God, not at that of a stranger. The voice of God can always be distinguished from the voice of a stranger." Gandhi pleaded that the missionaries should aim at changing the lives of persons and not their religious labels. For the inner transformation of life, he believed, it was not necessary to discard one's own religious tradition, although one might benefit by the insights of the entire religious heritage of humanity.

Gandhi, nevertheless, tried to understand the urge behind the Christian missionary motive. He welcomed the sharing of one's experience of truth with others. But he pointed out that this could not be in one direction only. It necessitated the acceptance of the variety of religious experience. He also believed that a religion could best be propagated by the noble lives led by its followers. A life of service and simplicity was the best preaching. No other propaganda could match it. "To live the Gospel", wrote Gandhi, "is the most effective way...most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end...A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. The fragrance of religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose."<sup>12</sup>

Although Gandhi remained critical of certain features of Christianity, he had a deep reverence for Jesus Christ. He saw Jesus Christ without the appendages of theology, dogma and

doctrine. He believed that Christianity could become still better and purer, if attention were given to the life of Jesus and his teachings of love and forgiveness. In the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, Gandhi saw an unfailing source of inspiration for mankind. The Sermon on the Mount impressed his mind and became a dominant factor which moulded his life. He advised his followers to immerse themselves in the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount especially those which dealt with the blessings of the poor. "By all means drink deep of the fountains that are given to you in the Sermon on the Mount. But then you will have to take sack-clothes and ashes. The teachings of the Sermon were meant for each and every one of us. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. While Christian theology did not attract him, Christ's life and example reached the depths of his heart. He was impressed by Christianity as a way of life, not as an ecclesiastical creed. He understood that the cross was not something to be believed in and subscribed to as a dogma but as something to be lived and borne in life and experience.

Gandhi was also profoundly impressed by the New Testament symbol of the Kingdom of God both in its individual and social aspects. On the one hand, it revealed to him the inner truth of the Christian message in its moral aspect; in the Sermon on the Mount he saw Christian life at its highest point fully exemplified by Jesus Christ. He was impressed by those earliest disciples of Christ who gave up everything in order to realize the 'Kingdom of God'. He was deeply moved as he read that the 'Kingdom' belonged to the humble and the poor; that the 'persecuted and the meek' are its citizens; that the 'pure in heart' see it; that to love one's enemies is to be perfect; and that the 'Kingdom of God is within you.' Gandhi noted that Jesus Christ would not accept from the powers of evil all the kingdoms of the world, and thus lower his moral standard. "The kingdom of Heaven", he believed, "is not meat and drink but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy spirit."<sup>13</sup> in this sense, Gandhi took the exhortation seriously: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and

His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”<sup>14</sup> “I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth,” wrote Gandhi, “I am striving for the kingdom of heaven which is spiritual deliverance. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and humanity.”

On the social side, the Kingdom of God meant to Gandhi the ideal society in which justice is done ‘unto the last’, and in which institutions are geared to encourage the best in men and women. He believed that those institutions which permitted injustice, inequity and exploitation of man by man were evil and that they needed to be changed. The Kingdom of God involved the establishment of right relationships between institutions and communities. Gandhi was not satisfied with ‘partial solutions’, with encouraging charity instead of securing justice or with saving the individual while leaving the environment unredeemed.

He shared the view of Jesus regarding the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He believed that the good life is one that is lived for the sake of others. He, therefore, sought out dark places where the healing work of love and compassion had to be carried out. He believed that spirituality did not consist in turning away from poverty, misery and ignorance but in fully facing and fighting them. He did not divorce spiritual life from practical life. Hence, he attempted to reform and transform existing customs and institutions and make them true vehicles of love.

In the Cross of Christ, Gandhi found the supreme example of *satyagraha*: Christ was the ‘Prince of satyagrahis’. “It was the New Testament”, wrote Gandhi, “which really awakenend me to the value of passive resistance. When I read in the Sermon on the Mount such passages as ‘Resist not him that is evil : he who smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also, and love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven’, I was overjoyed.”<sup>15</sup>

Violence, Gandhi believed, impeded the manifestation of the



moral self of the individual. He accepted Jesus's declaration: 'It profited nothing, if a man gained the whole world and lost his soul.' Following Jesus, he maintained that force in any shape was obstructive and oppressive. It degraded both the agent and the victim. The doctrine of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth had been abrogated by Jesus, because it was a justification of immorality. Any crime committed on one's fellow-beings was an infringement of the Law of Love; and all evil came from selfishness and violence.

*Satyagraha* was the specific religious method of overcoming evil and righting wrongs. It sought to win over the opponent by patient self-suffering. It did not seek to exterminate the oppressor but to effect in him a change of heart. Therefore it could be offered only in a righteous cause; it would succeed only in so far as its votaries sincerely observed righteousness and truth. Gandhi believed that the values of religion and society could be conserved only by bearing patiently the worst that hatred and tyranny could inflict. "Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense of the term," said Gandhi, "the example of Jesus's suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions—worldly or temporal. And I know there are hundreds of Christians who believe likewise. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love."<sup>16</sup> Gandhi put this law of love into practice and demonstrated the potency and practicability of the method of the Cross. He proved that *satyagraha* can become a political social instrument of almost irresistible quality; and even the most unscrupulous statesmen had to reckon with it as a great force.

Gandhi's understanding and practice of the Cross brought out fresh aspects of Jesus's life and character which the West had not so clearly perceived. He familiarized India and the world with the thought that Christ was the supreme example of *satyagraha*. He demonstrated how the soul force fights and overcomes evil only with the weapons of truth and love. Although *satyagraha* was

used by Gandhi, a Hindu, against Christian Governments (whether in India or in South Africa), many Christians all over the world recognized that his movements were in truth Christian, a reviving and re-interpretation of the Cross. In this, they perceived new depths of truth. "Never in human history has so much light been shed on the Cross as has been shed through this one man," wrote Dr. Stanely Jones, "and that man not even called Christian. Had not our Christianity been so vitiated and overlain by our identification with unchristian attitudes and policies in public and private life, we would have seen at once the kinship between Gandhi's method and the Cross. Non-Christians saw it instinctively."<sup>17</sup>

But Gandhi also related Christian teaching to his own Hindu premises. He saw in the Cross an explication of the Hindu concept of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa*, he said, meant not merely non-violence but more: it meant love and charity. So in *satyagraha*, one had not only to refrain from doing harm to the opponent but should refrain from illwill and bitter thought. Yet his movement was aggressive and dynamic. It was the exercise of the soul force in opposition to evil, and exercise which would not rest till the evil was overcome.

In his deeply interesting and significant book, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi has given the name *dharmayuddha* (righteous war) to *satyagraha*. This is not the holy war that the West is familiar with; it is rather a war fought according to the universal principles of truth and love. "It is not so much the holy war as a war for holiness." It is, above all, a struggle in the spiritual realm as Gandhi endeavoured to make clear in his *Commentary on the Bhagavada-Gita*. Although the *Gita* was apparently written to encourage *Arjuna* to wage war, the war which it really advocated was according to Gandhi, a war in the spiritual realm. It encouraged war for holiness within oneself that is *ahimsa* or non-violence. This interpretation of the *Gita* surprised a good many Hindus. But when seen in the light of Gandhi's study of the Bible, it is understandable.

But Gandhi's interest was not confined to Christianity. He studied other religions, too, and believed that the discovery of their merits and of the points of agreement among them, would contribute greatly to the enrichment of the religious life and to the revival of the neglected aspects of one's own religious thought and practice. He accepted everything that harmonized with truth. He gave Hinduism a new dimension of spirit by continually relating it to the progressive discoveries of truth. He welcomed whatever was beautiful and good in every tradition and related it to his own. He assimilated the dynamism of the West and openly acknowledged his indebtedness to Christian ethics. He related the implications of the Cross and the Kingdom of God to the need for reform which he saw in his own tradition. And he did so just because he was a Hindu.

Gandhi corrected two errors consciously or unconsciously held in the minds of the masses of India. First, the dangerous passivity brought about by the misunderstanding of the law of *karma* 'that everyone has to suffer the consequences of his deeds and there is no need to change things.' This belief had led to an unhealthy tolerance of the many economic and social evils, taking away the initiative of the individual and dynamism of the society. The other error he saw was that meditation was considered higher than work which made it possible for the able-bodied to eat without work. Both these errors had reduced the masses of India to poverty and helplessness. Gandhi taught the dignity of work by his own example. Gandhi's non-violence was against giving a free meal to an able-bodied beggar. Gandhi made the 'bread labour' part of his religion and changed the passive non-violence into an active and constructive non-violence. 'God is continuously active,' said Gandhi, "if we would serve Him, our activity must be as unwearied as His." Work changes society; idleness degenerates it. We must, therefore, work and work in a spirit of service.

Gandhi knew only too well the corruption and the degradation that had crept into Hinduism in practice. He knew the

elements in it that had become obsolete and had lost their value in the context of new times. The Hinduism that was dear to Gandhi was purified Hinduism, purified and sanctified in the crucible of his life and experience. "What we see to day," he said, "is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it." He was, however, aware of the basic vitality of Hinduism which has successfully survived the vicissitudes of history for over three thousand years. He saw in it the elements of the highest quality which had kept it alive. Hinduism, he believed, had made "marvellous discoveries in the things of religion, of spirit, of the soul."<sup>19</sup>

In his conception of Hinduism, Gandhi had no place for untouchability. He joined the Christian missionaries in their denunciation of untouchability as a travesty of religion and a blot on Hinduism. "I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always disregarded it as an excrescence,"<sup>20</sup> he wrote. Within a lifetime Gandhi, by his teachings, personal example and reforming zeal transformed the untouchables into a fearless, progressive and vital element of the Indian nation. In the history of Hinduism, at no other time was there a man who stacked his all for the uplift of the depressed and the suppressed castes of India. And in so far as this reformation was in relation to the so-called lowest strata in the Hindu community, its effect touched every strata of the Hindu society, thus setting into motion one of the most powerful liberalizing forces in human religious history.

Untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity and love... And I should be content to be torn into pieces rather than to disown the suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom, nor get it, if they allow this noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying a fifth of our race the right of association on equal footing.<sup>21</sup>

Although Gandhi was in favour of *Varnashrama dharma* (the fourfold division of society) he was against the caste-system as he found it in the India of his day. Originally, the caste-system reflected the division of labour in society, an economic and pragmatic arrangement. The four social groups were instituted by the *Smritis*: the priestly class devoted to studies and religious pursuits, the ruling and the soldier class, the commercial and wealth-producing class, and the serving class (*Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya* and *Sudra*). These social groups were of a flexible nature and were in consonance with the aptitudes and abilities of the people. But later, the whole system fell into abuse and became watertight compartments holding the free life of men to static ransom. During the age of *dharmashastras* and later, there developed a number of sub-divisions within the four castes and today there are hundreds of castes and sub-castes within the Hindu society. In practice, the rigid divisions of caste have often led to cruel injustice and discrimination.

Gandhi was foremost to reorganize the justice of the criticism of the Christian missionaries in this regard. He was aware of the terrible abuses that had crept into the caste system, and waged relentless battle against them. His very insistence on truth led him to focus its revealing light on the cruelties of the prevalent caste-system. The caste-system was, he believed, opposed to the basic concept of love. Therefore he sought to break loose from the shackles of the past, retaining all that was good and disregarding the rest. He declared that unless Hinduism washed away the dirt of the distinction between the high and the low, it could not survive. He however, emphasized the need to distinguish between the caste-system and *Varnasharamdharmam*. He considered the former as a mere caricature of the latter.

But in all this zeal for reform, as well as in his deep reverence for Christ, which in part inspired his zeal, he remained convinced of the basic truths of his own tradition. When an American correspondent asked Gandhi the reason for his loyalty to Hinduism, he answered: "Believing as I do in the influence of

heredity, being born in a Hindu family I have remained a Hindu. I should reject it, if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination, I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much as it gives to the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables followers of that faith not merely to respect other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths.”<sup>22</sup>

Gandhi, indeed, called himself not merely a Hindu but claimed to be a *Sanatani Hindu* (orthodox) on his own terms. The so-called orthodox Hindus disputed his claims, but obviously his *Sanatani* Hinduism was different from the conventional Hinduism; or else, he could not have been the revolutionary champion of the depressed and the oppressed classes of India. Still less could he have developed his spiritual affinities with the Buddha, the Christ and Mohammed. “I call myself a *Sar:atani Hindu*,” he wrote, “because (i) I believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upnishads*, the *Puranas* and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures; (ii) I believe in the *Varnasharmadharm*, in a sense in my opinion, strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense; (iii) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular; (iv) I do not disbelieve in idol worship.”<sup>23</sup>

In Hinduism, Gandhi saw a variety of creeds, theologies, customs and beliefs that have come down from ancient times; even animistic cults have flourished along with monotheistic and monistic religion. He saw in Hinduism almost every stage of the evolution of man’s search for God. Every form of worship has been regarded as a useful stepping-stone to a higher form and, hence, each form is tolerated with a kindly eye and a deep understanding, as suitable at some stage of spiritual growth. Hinduism does not insist on uniformity of thought or belief. Gandhi saw Hinduism as a “living organism liable to growth and decay.”<sup>24</sup>

The freedom of choice and action allowed to a Hindu at every stage appealed to Gandhi. A Hindu could draw inspiration from any source in his spiritual quest; he is not restricted to a single book or a single prophet. The approach is broad-based on the progressive discoveries of the ever-expanding vision and experience of the Divine. Even belief in the Vedas is considered secondary to direct experience. The different creeds and ideologies within the Hindu tradition are considered to be different interpretations of the experience of the Divine, or different visions of Truth. The varying features that are displayed by different creeds are considered to be local and relative to the circumstances of place and time.

The idea of spiritual unity and fundamental oneness of all things in Hinduism made a profound appeal to Gandhi. In it he saw an outlook and a way of life where the individual is enabled to exist in tune with the Infinite. It gave him the philosophical root of tolerance. It taught him that each person was important to all other persons and living beings. This meant that each must rise above his own selfish interests and do his duty to others regardless of consequences. The enlightened person gains release by the surrender of the little self and its vanities by the purity of life and devotion to God. As the *Bhagwad-Gita* puts it; "When one sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, I am never lost to him and he is never lost to Me."<sup>25</sup> "The chief value of Hinduism," says Gandhi, "lies in holding the actual belief that all life (not only human beings but all sentient beings) is one. i.e. all life coming from one universal source call it Allah, God or Parameshvara .. This unity of life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not only to human beings alone, but says that it is possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible save through the human form; but that does not make man the Lord of creation. It makes him the servant of God's creation."<sup>26</sup>

Among the great religious traditions which claim to lead man to the Highest, Gandhi considered it wrong to make any invidious

comparison. He believed that God gracefully communicated Himself in different times and climes to satisfy man's longing for Him. Consequently, the world has witnessed various ways of approach to God. Following the Hindu view, Gandhi held that all the great religions which have helped the spiritual development of humanity were true and necessary. No religion, he maintained was complete in itself; and all need the help of such ingredients from others to make them richer, fuller and more satisfying. However, Gandhi believed that the satisfaction of a particular people is to be found chiefly in its own tradition; for it provides the cultural rootage to the individual as well as the direction and meaning to their lives.

Following the Hindu view, Gandhi's teaching to everyone was to pursue salvation by the light of his or her own faith and experience. As Hinduism has room for the worship of all the prophets of the world and tells everyone to worship God according to his or her faith, it lives at peace and friendliness with all religions.

#### NOTES

1. See *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 49
2. *Ibid.*, p. 153
3. Referring to the theistic sect in India worshipping *Vishnu*
4. *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 154
5. *Ibid.*, p. 156
6. *Ibid.*, p. 156
7. *Ibid.*, p. 170
8. *Ibid.*, p. 172
9. M. K. Gandhi, *My Dear Child*, p. 86
10. *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 171
11. *Harijan* : January 25, 1935
12. *Harijan* : September 25, 1937
13. *Harijan* : March 29, 1935
14. See C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, pp. 253—4
15. *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 92
16. S.K. George, *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*, p. 26
17. Stanely Jones, *Gandhi : An Interpretation*, p. 105
18. *Young India* : November 24, 1927



19. *Ibid.*
20. *Harijan* : January 30, 1937
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid*
23. *Young India* : October 6, 1937
24. *Young India* : April 8, 1926
25. *Bhagavad Gita* : vi. 30
26. *Harijan* : December 26, 1936

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE

Andrews' interest in Hinduism began in Delhi several years before he met Gandhi. He tried to understand and feel what it meant to be a Hindu. He learnt the widely spoken Indian language—Hindi. He observed the religious life of the Hindus from close quarters. He attempted to go beyond knowledge to insight. He achieved an intimate acquaintance with many forms of Hinduism and his exposition of the same was not unacceptable to the Hindus themselves. But in this process, his own Christian loyalty was never compromised. He developed a capacity for getting into the spirit of the Hindu tradition and for appreciating the Hindu practices. He wrote a book entitled *The True India* defending Hinduism against unjust and malicious criticisms of some foreign authors. He looked at Hinduism from the background of his own convictions—in the light of Christ. His critical ability to discern the differences between his own faith and those of others never diminished. It may be said that Andrews, in practice, refuted the theory held in certain circles that conscious commitment to one religion will not yield fruitful results in the investigation of religions other than one's own.

It was not an academic theory as to the difference between the East and West, stated in general terms, which drove me as a Christian seeker after truth to face the new religious atmosphere, as it came streaming in on every side. Much rather, it was the hard concrete reality of everyday life in Delhi compelling me to face practical issues and to look carefully at each step of the way as I went forward, lest by any means I should fail to follow closely my Master along these new unfamiliar paths. With his guidance, after

prayerful communion, I took one step after another, finding Him indeed to be the Way, the Truth and the Life.<sup>1</sup>

The main point of interest for Andrews was not the palatability or unpalatability of Hinduism to the Western mind, but the fact of its position of profound influence in the East. He was eager to discover the spiritual insights which quickened the Hindus down the ages. "As we wish the East to appreciate us," he wrote, "so ought we to seek with all our hearts to appreciate the East. Surely this is the Golden Rule..."<sup>2</sup>

Andrews considered that it was his Christian duty to recognize the noble elements in Hinduism. In the sacred books of the Hindus, he found an amazing wealth of religious ideas and a vast storehouse of religious experience. He noticed that every Hindu admitted the experience of one God, *Parameshwara*, or the Supreme Spirit, *Paramatma*, who was symbolized in various forms and worshipped. Even in the simple villager, this idea was dominant although his 'crude idol worship' appeared to deny it. "The word God," he wrote "without any further connotation—is well known in every Indian language and is constantly on every Hindu's lips. The name of God is written on every Hindu's heart, and when he thinks of God he thinks of Him as One and Supreme. In all my intimate talks on religion with Mahatma Gandhi, amid many divergencies and shades of contrast, I have never felt that there was any difference between us with regard to this ultimate belief. Here, we are on common ground. In this sense, Mr Gandhi is a theist and so am I; to both of us this belief in God is as certain and immediate as our own personal existence."<sup>3</sup> "My own personal experience has been," he wrote elsewhere, "that in every part of the problem of existence, the final mystery of God, the inner discipline of the soul have a larger place in the thoughts of living men and women than anywhere else in the world. There is also a greater readiness on the part of some at least to abandon everything that man holds dear in search of the inner truth, when the voice within commands. Religion reigns supreme."<sup>4</sup>

While he recognized the sublime elements in the Hindu tradition, he did not ignore or condone the glaring evils that had crept into it. He was fully aware of the many religious and social evils that infected Hinduism. However, he wanted them to be presented in their proper perspective. He did not appreciate those foreigners who after 'a cold-weather visit, to India went back to the West 'to exaggerate in glaring colours these evils before the world with no sense of proportion and with no presentation of the other side of the picture.'<sup>5</sup> He was deeply pained by the harm and injustice done to India and her people by sensational publications like Miss Mayo's *Mother India* and Patricia Kendall's *India and the British: A Quest for Truth*. Commenting on the latter book in which the author represents Hinduism as a disease, Andrews observed :

Those of us who have lived among the Hindus and have witnessed the deep sincerity of their religious life, especially that of the women in the household, can do nothing but writhe at the insults which she pours upon the Hindu faith as though it were one of the most obscene things on earth. Her object seems to be to exalt the special virtues of the British. She tries to do this in such a way as to afford to a certain type of Englishman or woman a secret satisfaction at the contrast with his own ideals and make him say within himself, like the Pharisee of the old: 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as the other men are, or even as this Hindu,'<sup>6</sup>

Andrews pointed out that every religion had its periods of growth and decline. His study of the History of the Church had made him aware that even Christianity had its periods of stagnation as well as regeneration. "The Christendom of Pope Alexander VI and Caesar Borgia," he wrote, "was wicked beyond all human belief and countenanced such utterly revolting customs as the burning alive of innocent people and the hideous tortures of the Inquisition. But just as the Christian Church underwent a reformation, so Hinduism today, owing to its great powers of revival is reforming itself from within. It is, therefore, cruel

beyond words to fasten upon it, just in this period of revival and reform all crudities of a bygone age.”<sup>7</sup>

He had no doubt that every religious tradition needed purging of old abuses. He, therefore, welcomed Hindu movements of reform. He observed with satisfaction the transformation of the Hindu social structure and the setting up of new moral standards which changed the lives of millions of people. He discovered “a deep spring of spiritual energy ready to burst forth with cleansing and purifying streams, as soon as even the debris accumulated from the past has been removed.”<sup>8</sup>

Andrews actually involved himself in the remedying of social evils in Hinduism by his constructive suggestions and active co-operation. He was always ready to help whenever a call came from the Hindus in their fight against evils, for instance, the *devadasi*† system. “Though myself a Christian and not a Hindu,” wrote Andrews, “I have been again and again asked to preside when this subject was being discussed in open conference and my fellowship has been earnestly sought in helping to bring this gross evil to an end.”<sup>9</sup>

He also enthusiastically supported all the efforts put forth by Gandhi and his followers for the removal of untouchability. He worked strenuously in the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, a country-wide organization created to work for the upliftment of these people. He rejoiced in the success of the Harijan temple-entry movement. He was encouraged when he saw that the seats allotted to the Harijans in the provincial councils doubled with the consent of the caste-Hindus themselves. Andrews identified himself with all this work because he found a deeper meaning in it: he saw Christ in the suffering untouchables.

He unstintingly commended the efforts of Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and other reform movements in the direction of the eradication of longstanding evils. In these movements of regeneration and reform within Hinduism, he saw the spirit of God working within India. In

† Dancing-girls dedicated to temples.

them he saw purging and approximation to the standard of Christ achieved from *within* the Hindu tradition. He appreciated the fact that the Hindus themselves unreservedly exposed the evils in their social and religious organizations. He recognized their deep religious fervour which was combined with acts of service and compassion.

When Andrews came out to India as a missionary, the attitude frequently adopted by Christian missionaries in relation to Hinduism was to dismiss it as religion of superstition and crass idolatry. They did not think it worth taking seriously. They had an implicit belief that the Western nations possessed a superior religion and culture. They went out to give and not to receive; their objective was to spread Christianity. The technique often adopted was to exaggerate the so-called vulnerable points in Hindu thought and practice with little appreciation of the good elements in them. The works of philanthropy, social uplift, medical aid or educational services were often used as means for winning converts.

Andrews knew how easy it was for the earlier Protestant missionaries who came to India to be offended by certain externals of Hinduism and to fail to take note of the underlying deep inner spirit. Those missionaries had a genuine hatred for all forms of idol-worship. They were perplexed with and became contemptuous of certain aspects of Hindu practice. Consequently they regarded Hinduism, on account of certain rituals and practices, as altogether vicious and immoral since they were nurtured in the reformed faith and were too eager to pass harsh judgment on the older forms of religion—Christian or Hindu. Andrews, as an Anglican was more sympathetic to the natural love of ceremony in Hinduism; he could also appreciate the strong element of conservatism in Hinduism as in the Greek and Roman Churches. He found in Hinduism a readiness to retain the ancient animistic cults, to find their setting under new names within the higher religion. These factors led him to the conviction that a person needed keen and sympathetic observation

to appreciate the abundant spiritual heritage of the Hindus.

As to the effect of Hindu tradition on his own religious life, Andrews became convinced, more than ever before, of the primacy of religious experience. His own religious life sprang not from intellectual curiosity, but from a spiritual experience. To him religion was more than a creed or an ideology, he could not detach it from actual living. He was a practical mystic for whom religion was the inseparable constituent of spiritual existence. "To be a Christian," he wrote, "means not the expression of an outward creed but the living of an inward life."<sup>10</sup> It is significant that Andrews dwelt much on practical aspects of religion and little on dogmas and creeds. He did not mistake traditional forms of religious expression for inward faith.

Andrews readily agreed with the Hindu contention that the significance and meaning of religious faith could not be adequately summed up in doctrines and propositional statements. As he was himself rooted in religious experience, he could catch glimpses of familiar landscape within the Hindu religious tradition. He could feel the experience of the Divine underlying the Hindu sacred writings. In Hindu art and architecture, music and poetry, sculpture and painting, he could see the attempts to give expression to the deepest religious insights. They were hints at the unspeakable spiritual experience, the Supreme Mystery, which is unfathomable.

When I went deep into the heart of India, I found the whole emphasis to be laid on the realization of God inwardly and spiritually within the soul. There was no less awe than in the West, but it was of a more inward character. This, when fully grasped, brought me nearer to St. John's Gospel than the ordinary Western teaching. It meant that not only Christ could say "I and my Father are One," but that we, as God's children, in all reverence, could say this also.<sup>11</sup>

The East regards the Eternal Divine Spirit *Paramatman*—moving within the soul of man as spaceless and timeless, yet He ever uses 'time' and 'space' as a garment of self-reveal-

ment. He is unmanifest, yet He is mirrored by the pure in heart in the depth of the human spirit. He is invisible, yet He is visible in great human souls. He is formless, yet He takes form in man. St. John, the Cambridge Platonists, the German mystics, George Fox and the Society of Friends—all these have found their joy in this inner light. But the West generally has believed in a transcendent rather than immanent God.<sup>12</sup>

Since I have learnt to know Christ afresh in this Eastern setting, it has been easy for me to point out the weakness of the portraiture, when his character has been depicted with only Western ideals to draw from as though these comprehended the "fulness of Christ;" for in such pictures the true proportion has not been kept. Some of the marked traits of his character have not appeared at all. Much has been lost.<sup>13</sup> With all these influences, his loyalty to and understanding of Christ did not become less but grew deeper and more enlightened:

...Christ has been not less central but more central and universal; not less divine to me, but more so, because more universally human. I can see Him as the pattern of all that is best in Asia as well as in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Andrews realized by his contact with the Hindu thought how much more richness was hidden in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. He believed that both environments of human thought—Eastern and Western—were needed to complete the portrait of Jesus Christ. Further, his contact with the East gave him a slightly different conception regarding the nature of religious life; the emphasis here was on the interiority of spiritual life and on constant application of religious injunctions.

His friendship with Gandhi and Tagore as well as his reverent study of Hindu Life and thought led Andrews to make a critical study of his own religion. He re-examined the Christian premises to spell out the true Christian attitude towards other religions. He found that the prevalent attitude was against the



best traditions of Christianity. In the past, the Christian Church, he knew, had made free use of Greek philosophical ideas in building its own edifice of doctrine; the tenets of neo-Platonism were carried over into Christian mysticism. The works of Aristotle were employed almost with sacred reverence by Schoolmen. Andrews believed that God had left Himself nowhere 'without witness' and that the truth revealed to Hindus should be precious to Christians. He believed with St. John that the Divine Logos 'lighteth every man.' Justin Martyr had declared:

Christ is the reason of whom every race of men partakes; and those who live according to reason are really 'Christians,' even though they may be 'atheists.' Such were Socrates and Heraclitus among Greeks and others like them; and among Barbarians (i.e. non-Greeks) Abraham, Blijah, etc...So whatever has been spoken well by any man, really belongs to Christians.

So Andrews believed that Christ would be reinterpreted and more deeply understood by studying the way in which 'in diverse parts and manners' that Logos illuminated the sages of India.

Andrews was one of the earliest exponents of the view in relation to other religious systems and their adherents, that the truly Christian approach is one which goes straight *not* to the worst but to the best in other religious traditions. He believed that by thus seeking for and striving to reach the 'Witness of God' in the non-Christian traditions, the good is automatically raised up and the evil beaten down.

My own ardent Christian faith is well known, and I long to share the joy of it with others. At the same time, in Christ's own teaching and in that of St. Paul I find it repeatedly written that the true Christian must pay tender regard to all that is pure and noble and lovely and of good report, wherever it may be found so that the God of peace may be with him (Phill IV, 8-9). It is in the light of this teaching from my own scriptures that I have felt the inner compulsion to bear witness on behalf of what is true in

Hinduism.....<sup>15</sup>

Andrews believed that there was good in every religious tradition and that if the good elements were emphasized, the adherents of the system would gradually become ashamed of what is low and impure in their way of life and thought, and would themselves seek to remove them. His personal devotion to Christ gave Andrews an unshakable belief in *all* men, however wicked and downtrodden. He was confident that somewhere in them there was an element, intensely worth-while and precious which must be reached and called into activity in such a manner that it would control their lives. He did this by his friendly and unostentatious actions of ordinary service.

Andrews employed this new method even in respect of Arya Samaj which stood for revived Hinduism and aggressive nationalism. He proceeded to *Gurukula*, the training centre of Arya Samaj workers and identified himself with those whom he came to serve; he ate Indian food and adopted Indian customs. Above all, he gave evidence of his humble desire to learn from them and to understand their view-points. He had intimate conversations with the head of the centre, the leader of aggressive Hinduism—Mahatma Munshi Ram. He admired the latter's energy, humour and simplicity of life. In their mutual discussions, Andrews listened patiently and took pains to underscore and bring out what was of enduring value, ignoring the rest; he used to reach out and emphasize the nobler part of the Arya Samaj leader. A distinguished Christian friend, who was a witness of these discussions observes: "C. F. Andrews would sit back and listen most of the time, now and then throwing a suggestion or asking a question which strengthened truth in his friend. In this way, 'truth' was vindicated and established, not Indian 'truth' or British 'truth'; not Hindu 'truth' or dogmatic Christian 'truth' but a new universal truth. The impact of his personality would set in motion the purging of evils and the elevation of good practices in indigenous systems. This was the method of reformation from within that Andrews advocated. So he was

prepared to sit quietly at the feet of the leaders of India, and to learn from them in such a fashion that whilst learning he would also teach, and teach not ostentatiously, but merely by the spirit in which he learned."<sup>16</sup>

Andrews's method of approach and his views were not received favourably in the beginning by some in Christian circles. He had to face a storm of opposition and had to suffer resentment, and obloquy from a section of his own people. Some of the fellow missionaries frowned upon his intimacy with their formidable opponents in Arya Samaj. He was misunderstood and misinterpreted. His advocacy of encouragement of reform movements within Hinduism was not appreciated. The friendly contacts between the Christian students and the Arya Samaj boys that Andrews encouraged, were looked upon with disfavour. Once at an all-India meeting of the Christian students, some Christian boys questioned his Christian 'credentials.' "Are you a Christian?" they asked. "If these boys cannot see in my face that I am a Christian," commented Andrews sadly, "what is the use of telling them that I am a Christian?" But Andrews went ahead and practised his new technique. Gradually, his method began to make headway and win increasing recognition in missionary circles. The old method of directing the attention on the disreputable aspects in other religions became itself discredited.

How, then, should the Christian duty of evangelism be conceived in relation to non-Christian communities? Andrews mind was very much exercised on this problem. "If Christianity is to succeed," wrote Andrews, "it must not come forward as an antagonist and a rival to the great religious strivings of the past, it must come as a helper and a fulfiller. There must no longer be the desire to capture converts from Hinduism, but to come to her aid in the time of need and trouble, and to help her in the fulfilment of duties she has long neglected."<sup>17</sup> There was a good deal of controversy going on throughout the length and breadth of India at this time about whether and in what

circumstances a man is justified in changing his outward religious affiliation. Andrews did not believe in conversion programmes—in horizontal or mass conversions. To him, conversion was a moral and spiritual experience. He disapproved of any kind of material inducement to effect religious conversion. He was not interested in increasing the number of Christian converts in India; conversion for him was not a game of statistics. His view of conversion was spiritual and not formal.

Not by any mere outward organization, or outward form or organized activity, however successfully managed, shall we find that our chief end of reaching the heart of our people is best fulfilled...if organizing takes up the major portion of our time, then the deeper spiritual experience of intimate friendship is likely to suffer. The work which we may be seeking to perform may have indeed an outward appearance of success, but it will have little inward depth.

Andrews wrote a paper in which he discussed the missionary motive. He quoted St Peter; 'There is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, but only in the name of Christ,' and asked what is to be made of that text in the light of the indubitable *experience* of the presence of the spirit of God among men who are not Christians.

These very questionings drove me back to Christ Himself; the result was revolutionary. The scales fell from my eyes, and I saw with a thrill of joy how all outer names and titles—all man-made institutions—were superseded in the light of one supreme test, love of God and love of man. This was the Gospel, the good tidings—a gospel from God worth bringing down from heaven. This is the vision of Him which impels His followers to go out to distant lands across the sea. He got out, not merely to quicken those who are dead in trespasses, but also to welcome with joy His radiant presence in those who have seen from afar His glory.<sup>18</sup>

Andrews believed that the Christian missionary, in particular

should lead a Christ-like life. For by his life he may enforce the message, or neutralize it or make it a jest and a reproach. A missionary's first duty, he thought, is not to preach, or to teach, or to heal in the name of Christ but to live in His spirit; failure here means failure all along the line. "The love of Christ must constrain us," he wrote, "in such a manner that even speech is hardly needed. In our faces, our eyes, as we go about our ordinary work of the day, those who meet us will easily recognize that we love Christ more than all the world besides, and that we are, therefore, impelled by an inner compulsion to bear witness to him." From the beginning of apostolic preaching, the thing which lent the Gospel most force was the evident faith and the transformed characters of the preachers. It was the kind of life that the Christians lived which led many men to inquire regarding Christian belief and persuaded them to accept it. It was a call to moral and spiritual change. The meaning, the possibility and the beauty of that change were illustrated and demonstrated by the *lives* and not by the *words* of Christians. It was Christian character, love and service that gave weight to the Gospel. Andrews followed the method of the Apostles:

I have longed above all else to make known what Christ Himself has made known to me. But that is rather through sharing with one another the joy of a religious experience than by imposing on anyone a religious dogma... Is not the ultimate thing needed for sharing any precious truth with another person just this—to keep the inner light in one's own soul so pure that the truth shines through with its own radiance? No truth worth knowing can ever be taught; it can only be lived.<sup>19</sup>

And yet Andrews approved of conversion under certain conditions; he believed that it was legitimate to complete by an outward sacrament an inward spiritual experience, if the person concerned seeks and longs for such confirmation. On this question, he did not see eye to eye with Gandhi. Of course, Andrews exercised the most scrupulous care lest the influence of his own

personality should lead any young man to become a Christian from any other motive than that of genuine religious experience and conviction. On the other hand, where such genuine experience existed, he would not and did not deny the person the right to do so; and men who learnt of Christ from him did from time to time, with his knowledge and support, seek baptism in the Christian Church. After a long discussion with Gandhi once on this subject, Andrews expressed his differences as follows:

Your talk on religion yesterday distressed me, for its formula *All religions are equal*, did not seem to correspond with history or my own experience. Your declaration that a man should always remain in the faith in which he was born appeared to me not in consonance with such a dynamic subject as religion.

Of course, if conversion meant a denial of any living truth in one's own religion, then we must have nothing to do with it. But it is rather the discovery of a new and glorious truth for which one would sacrifice one's whole life. It does mean also, very often, passing from one fellowship to another, and this should never be done lightly. But if the new fellowship embodies the glorious new truth in such a way as to make it more living and cogent than the old outworn truth, then I should say to the individual: "Go Forward."

Christ is to me the unique way whereby I have come to God, and have found God, and I cannot help telling others about it whenever I can do so without any compulsion or undue influence. I honour Paul the apostle when he says, "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." I feel that the message which came into the world to proclaim is the most complete and the most inspiring that was ever given to man. That is why I am a Christian. At the same time, I fully expect my friend Abdul Ghaffar Khan to make known the message of the Prophet, which is to him a living truth which he cannot

keep to himself.

I don't think it follows that we shall always be fighting as to whose 'Gospel' is superior. There are clear-cut distinctions between Christians, Hindus and Muslims which cannot be today overpassed. But there is a precious element of goodness which we can all hold in common. St. Paul says: "Whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report...think on these things and the God of peace shall be with you." That seems to me to be a fine way towards peace in religion, without any compromise, syncretism or toning down of vital distinctions.<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

1. *What I Owe To Christ*, pp. 140-1
2. C. F. Andrews, *The True India*, p. 23
3. *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 34
4. *The True India*, p. 69
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30
7. *Ibid.*, p. 26
8. *Ibid.*, p. 189
9. *Ibid.*, p. 75
10. Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C. F. Andrews*, p. 102
11. *What I Owe To Christ*, p. 139
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40
13. *Ibid.*, p. 137
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-7
15. *The True India*, p. 192
16. See J. S. Hoyland, *C. F. Andrews, Minister of Reconciliation*.
17. Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C. F. Andrews*, p. 63
18. *Ibid.*, p. 311
19. *Ibid.*, p. 310
20. *Ibid.*, p. 310

## CHAPTER V

### REVERENCE FOR THE FAITH OF OTHER MEN

#### I

In the course of his sincere and creative search for truth, Mahatma Gandhi arrived at an important concept—'reverence for all religions.' He was led to this concept by the study and practice of *ahimsa*; he discovered in actual experience that reverence for the religious faiths of others was a necessary corollary of non-violence in action. He believed that the spirit with which truth was pursued was no less important than truth itself. Because of his concern for truth, he was inwardly receptive to currents of truth coming from different sources. He became convinced that 'reverence for all religions' is good-in-itself. He thought that it was the proper religious attitude towards other religions and their followers.

While Gandhi was in South Africa, he was engaged in fighting the government with the weapon of *satyagraha* against injustice to which the Indian community had been subjected there. There were Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis in his non-violent army. He could not have conducted the movement in a disciplined manner if he had differentiated among them on the basis of religion. The success of the movement there was, in no mean degree, due to the fact that the entire Indian community consisting of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and so on stood solidly behind him and acted together as one man. Gandhi realized then the practical importance and necessity of reverence for all religions.

In the world where millions of followers of the great religions are living side by side, Gandhi maintained that goodwill and reverence for one another's religion is important as a concrete



measure in achieving harmony and peace. The absence of such an attitude has often thrown societies and nations into a state of anarchy damaging not merely political and social life of individuals and communities but also their spiritual life. Gandhi witnessed this phenomenon in his own lifetime in the history of his own country. "Mutual respect for one another's religion," says Gandhi, "is inherent in a peaceful society. Free impact of ideas is impossible on any other condition." He thought that the office of religion was to tame the savage nature of man and not to let it loose.

By his concept of 'reverence for all religions' Gandhi did *not* mean that all religions were of equal value to every man, nor did he mean that a synthesis could be achieved by adding together the best elements of the different religious traditions. On the contrary, he maintained that the principal religions of the world had their respective characteristics issuing forth from specific historical, geographical and cultural milieu. He believed that the spirit of a people expressed itself in unique forms which differed from those of others. These unique characteristics are reflected in the religious experiences of individuals as well as in those of communities. Different peoples, therefore, prefer different forms of worship. Gandhi was of the opinion that in the cultural and the religious fields, there was a great scope for differences in the methods of approach. He held that the uniqueness of a particular religious system was to be desired and kept up. He did not see the need to steam-roll cultural and credal differences. What he did emphasize was the need to establish harmonious relations between different cultural and religious traditions. This was to be achieved, according to him, not in uniformity but in harmony.

Gandhi did not look upon eclecticism or indifferentism with favour. He advocated firmness of faith. He stressed the need for discrimination between right and wrong, good and bad, true and false in one's own tradition as well as in those of others. An eclectic, according to Gandhi, does not go deep into any religion and, as such, lacks depth; he fails to grasp the distinctive message

of any religion. "To call a man eclectic," wrote Gandhi, "is to say that he has no faith; but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians—not even a Plymouth Brother, not even the most fanatic Mussalman. It is a faith based on broadest toleration."<sup>1</sup> Gandhi did not stand for a new eclectic religion. He was firmly rooted in his own religious tradition, but desired a fellowship, a co-operation of diverse faiths—each retaining its special fragrance but entering into a respectful and fruitful intercourse with one another.

But mere co-existence or toleration of others' faith, according to Gandhi, did not go far enough. He believed that there ought not to be any tinge of malice or hatred towards the religious traditions other than one's own. However, tolerance of the other religious traditions did not mean to Gandhi indifference to his own faith or that of any other person; but it meant "a more intelligent and purer love for it." It sprang from his concern for Truth; he, therefore, welcomed the enlightenment that may come from listening to another's view-point. It also implied for him the freedom of thought and worship, and most of all, a will to lead a life of mutual understanding and friendship in the midst of cultural and religious diversities. Gandhi was convinced that such an attitude brought about a truer understanding of one's own religious tradition. The word that Gandhi used to describe this attitude was *samabhava*. In the Sanskrit language, this word means equal outlook; and in Gujarati—Gandhi's mother-tongue—it means sympathy. He evidently used the word in the latter sense and encouraged harmony and co-operation among the followers of different religious traditions.

Gandhi believed that there would, perhaps, always be different religious traditions in the world answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. He did not feel the need to lament or deplore the existence of a diversity of religious sects and traditions. He held that all true values which ennoble and uplift life are from God and must be respected and taken seriously. To ignore any of them, he felt, was to belittle God's infinite richness and impoverish mankind spiritually. The religions of

the world, he maintained, ought to live together and enrich one another with mutual understanding. "I do not aim at fusion," wrote Gandhi, "Each religion has its contribution to make to human evolution."<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi held that a man's religion was like his own mother, who nourished and cherished his life and, therefore, was entitled to his highest reverence. Similarly, he recognized that the religious faiths of other men were precious and, therefore, worthy of reverence. His sense of loyalty to the loyalties of other peoples was responsible for disapproving any attempt to make invidious comparisons between different religious traditions. He thought that just as one's own country was the best for oneself, similarly each religion was very often the most adequate and the best for its respective adherents. Therefore, Gandhi detected no inconsistency in declaring that he could "without in any way impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal respect to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism."<sup>3</sup> God is concerned with every person, Gandhi said, whether he is a Hindu or Muslim or Christian and so on; He is the one God of all working in the midst of His peoples. In this sense, Gandhi believed that the principal religions of the world proceed from the same God and that they supply "a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity."<sup>4</sup>

He was aware that the great religions of mankind—each in its own way—had through the ages sustained the hearts and minds of millions of people in the world. He saw in them the expression of the love of God for mankind. He saw in each of them an individuality and a message. He knew that all of them supplied answers to the persisting questions of the mysteries of life and death according to the needs of the respective communities. They enlightened men on the path of conduct and gave solace in the face of suffering and death. Reverence for others' religions is the acknowledgement of the fact that truth and spiritual value are embeded in those traditions and are expressed in accordance with the needs and the genius of the respective peoples. Gandhi recognized that a person usually preferred that particular

tradition in which he was born, lived and acted; but such a preference did not mean to Gandhi that other religions were false or inadequate. The attitude that 'one's religion alone is true and other religions are false' was incompatible with the concept of reverence for all religions; it was not acceptable to him for two reasons. First, it disabled men from comprehending the growing fullness of the Truth; and second, he clearly saw that controversies over the dogmas and doctrines of different religions could never be settled. Each religion considered its own dogmas and doctrines to be orthodox, whereas it condemned others as heretical and erroneous. Gandhi adopted the maxim: 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.' In the heat and dust of dogmatic controversies, he saw the danger of the denial of religion itself. Hence, he maintained that it is a "travesty of true religion to consider one's own religion as superior and others' as inferior."<sup>5</sup>

Conscious reverence is the result of 'understanding.' Unless one understands one's own religion at its best and understands other religious traditions too in a similar fashion, there can be neither appreciation nor reverence. "I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man," wrote Gandhi, "to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others's religions as we would have them respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty." He considered it as an essential part of the spiritual pilgrimage of every man in a deeper search for truth. He made it clear that the understanding and appreciation of alien beliefs and practices required broadmindedness, humility, imagination and willingness to recognize truth wherever it was found. If the scriptures of other religions were to be read with mental reservations or ulterior motives, the very purpose of such a study would be defeated and truth would be the first casualty.

When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my own purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these

texts, I can say I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of these religions simply because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence and found the fundamental morality in each. Somethings I did not understand even then, and do not understand now, but experience has taught me that it is a mistake hastily to imagine that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Somethings which I do not understand at first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and courtesy which have no sting behind them.<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi believed that one had to befriend others to earn the title to criticize. And the title to criticize can be earned only by showing reverence to the good and noble elements in other religions and by one's friendly disposition towards their followers. He realized that mere external criticism of the defects in practices and popular beliefs of the religious faiths of others would not help. Destructive criticism from outside more often stiffened such practices than eliminating them. Gandhi's own mind in early life had revolted against Christianity because Charistian missionaries poured abuses on Hinduism. It made it difficult for him to appreciate Christianity. It was only after he came into contact with good and godly Christians and studied the New Testament that he could overcome the effects of the earlier distaste given by the missionaries. The task of purging a religion of evils, thought Gandhi, would be more effectively carried if a person remained firm in his own faith and reformed it from within. Condemnation from the outside does not bring about the desired effect. When a *Mussalman* friend pointed out some inequitous injunctions and curruptions that were present in Islam and questioned Gandhi why he should not denounce them, the latter answered:

I have nowhere said that I believe in every word of the

Quran, or for that matter, of that of any scriptures in the world; but it is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other faiths, or to point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practice the truths that there may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticize or condemn things in the Quran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand. But I welcome every opportunity to express my admiration for each aspect of his life as I have been able to appreciate and understand. As for things that present difficulties, I am content to see them through the eyes of devout Muslim friends, while I try to understand them with the help of writings of eminent Muslim expounders of Islam...But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in order to purify it and keep it pure. But where non-Hindu critics set about criticizing Hinduism and cataloguing its faults they blazon their own ignorance of Hinduism and their incapacity to regard it from the Hindu view-point. It distorts their vision and vitiates their judgement. Thus my own experience of the non-Hindu critics of Hinduism brings home to me my limitations and teaches to be wary of launching on a criticism of Islam or Christianity and their founders.<sup>7</sup>

If freedom is cherished in the sphere of religion as in other spheres, then reverence for others' religions becomes essential. For freedom here means freedom consistent with similar freedom of worship for others; it necessarily implies tolerance and respect. Only in freedom can men advance morally and spiritually; and only in freedom can religions flourish. Otherwise humanity will be landed in a dangerous predicament. While a man should be true to his faith, nothing should prevent him from appreciating a similar firmness of Faith by others to their respective traditions. While one ought to be true to oneself and his convictions, he cannot and ought not to impose his convictions on others, if freedom is to have any meaning. "The Golden Rule of

conduct," says Gandhi, "is mutual toleration seeing that we will never think alike and we shall see Truth in fragments from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct on all will be an insufferable interference with everybody's freedom of conscience."<sup>8</sup>

His advocacy of and attitude of mutual reverence among the principal religions of the world and their followers did not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. In fact, his painful protest against the modern man is that he is "turning away from God".

We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was irreligion. If we follow the Law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him and, therefore, either we shall bring him to see the error or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the Law of Love, he may be violent to us. If however, we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish if only we observe the golden rule that we must not be impertinent with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi strongly believed that the world religions ought to take up unitedly the challenge of the materialistic view of man and the world. He felt that they ought to defeat the mistaken view prevalent in certain quarters that human history was the history of man's economic struggles and that man like animals fought to satisfy his hunger. The world religions should recognize their mutual potentialities and act in co-operation with one another to defeat scepticism and materialism and show that man does not live by bread

alone. They should contribute to the rehabilitation of mankind by giving life meaning, purpose and value. They should help to bring out the latent treasures of each religious tradition. They should also help in the establishment of peace in the world. Where politics have failed, religions may succeed. But much depends on the mutual good will and co-operation among the religions of the world. Either they stand together or fall separately. The future of religion lies in the mutual understanding and co-operation of the religions of the world.

Gandhi maintained that violence and intolerance in inter-religious affairs negated Truth and that the greatest power on earth was the power of love-in-action. He also held that voluntary self-suffering could change the minds and hearts of the most hostile persons and defeat the blatant irreligious systems.

## II

Andrews saw the key to the solution of the problem of inter-religious relations in the Gospel of St John. He found that both the language used and the thoughts expressed therein were truly universal. He also witnessed how those far beyond the boundaries of Christendom, especially in India, nurtured in other religions found their kinship with St John. The deep mystical note in this Gospel appealed to him, like many Eastern minds as an intimation of that divine beauty which is behind the veil of sense. It was fascinating for Andrews to observe that this Gospel spoke to many Indians in their own religious language making them Christian *bhaktas*.

“The world’s great religious literature,” wrote Andrews, “has now been opened up to our gaze, and we find that this inner vision and these supreme moments of exaltation are not confined within the boundaries of Christendom. It is impossible, for instance, to read the vital spiritual experiences told by men and women in India, especially the religious folk-songs of the peasant mystics, without coming to that conclusion. There is also in clear evidence a practical life of pure devotion and



sacrifice which accompanies these religious poems; they come from the heart. Kabir's personality, to take an example, has the mark of highest moral greatness plainly written upon it, and the same may be affirmed concerning Guru Nanak and others." In the 'many mansions' of the Father's house, Andrews saw ample room for all such noble lives. St. John's idea of the true light shining everywhere among the sons of man appealed to Andrews greatly. In the Indian atmosphere, he realized that the Father's house was far wider and more spacious and had enough room for all His children.

The father's love for his children, Andrews insisted, is 'broader than the measure of man's mind' and that His heart is more wonderfully kind than men could ever imagine. Did not Christ say: "They shall come from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South and sit down in the Kingdom of God." Man in the 'littleness of his heart and obliquity of his vision' has continually tried to confine God's mercy and loving kindness within the boundries of his own devising. He has wished to narrow down the limits of His house of many mansions. In the words of Faber, a Roman Catholic poet :

But we make His love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify His strictness  
With a zeal He will not own.

Andrews appeals to make our love 'more simple' and 'trust bravely His vast tenderness to us;' for it extends 'far beyond our dreams.'

Not only in St. John, but in the earlier Gospels too, Andrews found the same universal note. He was convinced that "in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." It was in this way, he thought, that Peter had learnt this greater truth when he said: "What was I that I could withstand God?" Similarly, Andrews felt that persistent efforts are to be made on behalf of the Church to keep her

ears attuned to the music of the Gospels. Andrews believed: that, "We have to recognize the same larger truth in our own day, in those deeply Eastern religious lands where the Father has been seeking His true worshippers all down the centuries. We must not limit our thoughts as though we ourselves alone were the objects of the love of the Universal Father of mankind."

The Spirit of the living God, Andrews realized, is at work in all ages and in all places changing the hearts of men—far beyond the bounds of any human agency or the direct ministry of the Christian Church. He found a great volume of testimony in India to prove this; and he rejoiced at the vast transcendence and the immeasurable fullness of the love of God; He exclaimed with the Apostle Paul: "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His ways, past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His Counsellor?" Andrews came to realize that the Christian West had but learnt a 'fraction hitherto of the immeasurable riches of Christ's love.'

In the Gospel of St. John, Andrews found not merely the note of universality but of variety as well; indeed, the fact of variety made the Father's house so universal. "God who rejoices in the praise of 'everything that hath breath' never intended us to be uniform in our higher spiritual things," he wrote. "Can we dream for a moment," he asked, "that our Heavenly Father, who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air would wish His children to praise Him according to a uniform plan and pattern when they seek to 'worship Him in spirit and truth?'" "God is a spirit", said Jesus to the women of Samaria, "and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth. For the Father seeketh such to Worship Him." The very essence of the life of the spirit is that it should not be bound down too closely by any symbols of time and place which would make it static or local or uniform or monotonous. "The wind bloweth whither it listeth.. so is every one that is born of spirit."

And if the words "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," appears, at first, to be exclusive, says Andrews, we ought to remember how Jesus looked round on the multitude and cried, "Who is My mother and My brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, My sister and My Mother." For not by mere profession of God's name shall man find acceptance, but rather by living in His Spirit. And He will welcome, at the last, those who never knew Him at all and never called Him 'Lord' but were ready humbly to do the will of God and to serve the least of his brethren. For in that day, 'many that are first shall be last, and the last first.' Andrews found His presence among the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. He knew that God's house of many mansions had to be entered in lowly guise, by the same royal road—the royal road of the Cross. It is the straight and the narrow way that leads to life and peace.

Andrews regarded it a self-delusion to take to a sentimental acceptance of the formal duties of life without fulfilling the higher moral principles which God has commanded and which alone bring men together and nearer God. The test was: 'By their fruits ye shall be known.'

Jesus has many lovers of His Kingdom but few bearers of His Cross. All are disposed to rejoice with Him, but few to suffer sorrow for His sake. Many follow Him to the breaking of the bread, but few to the drinking of His bitter cup... Drink freely of the Lord's bitter cup, if thou desirest to manifest thy friendship to Him.

Andrews was in full agreement with Gandhi in maintaining that a truly religious life did not divide mankind but unified it.

#### NOTES

1. *Young India*: December 22, 1927
2. *Havijan*: January 28, 1938
3. *Havijan*: November 30, 1947

4. *Harijan*: April 6, 1939
5. *Young India*: February 20, 1930
6. Gandhi : *From Yaravada Mandir*, (Navajivan Publishing House, 3rd edition) pp. 42-43
7. *Harijan*: March 13, 1937
8. *Young India*: September 23, 1926
9. Gandhi: *From Yaravada Mandir* (Navajivan Publishing House, 3rd edition) pp. 43-44

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The spirit with which the religious dialogue was carried on between Gandhi and Andrews needs special consideration. It throws light on some of the valuable elements and fundamental conditions touching the religious life of mankind. Both Gandhi and Andrews were fundamentally religious men; religion was a vital element in their lives. Their religious affiliations were, of course, different. But both could say—'I believe in God;' and this was vitally important for each of them. It is this belief which cemented their friendship. Both of them were gifted with the quality of 'conciliatoriness' while each stood firmly on his own ground. They possessed intellectual understanding of each other's position despite their many differences. They attempted and appreciated the interpretation of the spiritual insights of each other's tradition. Their ethical enthusiasm was solid and enduring. Their principles of behaviour and conduct were altruistic. Their faith in humanity was optimistic. Love for men was characteristic of them; friendliness was the atmosphere of their lives, and they were endowed with friendship across the frontiers of different religious traditions.

The knowledge of a sectarian theology was not sufficient to them; the outer forms of worship did not satisfy them. They knew that rituals and even learning were useful only as aids to religious life. They saw that the very observance of rites and ceremonies could result in vanity and self-righteousness in the absence of a spirit of humility and reverence. They strove for the constant awareness of the presence of God within, and for true human fellowship and service outside.

Gandhi and Andrews came to realize that much of the

unfriendly attitude mutual abhorrence among certain religious sections were due to a sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity. They saw this evidenced by the fact that the words like heathen, idolatrous, *kafir* (infidel) and *mlechha* (barbarian) were often used in derision with reference to the faith and practices of other men. But with familiarity and understanding, such attitudes gave place to sympathy and appreciation.

They also came to realize that persons belonging to different religious traditions, although living as neighbours, might still live in their separate worlds; they knew that a genuine friendship was possible only when points of contact appeared in the deeper levels of religious and cultural life. Unless attempts were made to understand others in their habits of thought, emotions and patterns of cultural life, one remained a stranger at heart.

• The richness of the personalities of Gandhi and Andrews was due to the influence of difference of cultural currents which were reinterpreted by each and integrated into his own tradition. In other words, Gandhi's personality was shaped by the teachings of Christianity, Islam, etc., even while his roots were in the Hindu tradition. In this regard, both Gandhi and Andrews considered that the meeting of different religious traditions was in itself a blessing; it reminded them of the forgotten or neglected dimensions of their respective traditions. It also challenged them to revive the undeveloped resources and to discover new spiritual horizons. They interpreted the religious insights of their own tradition in the light of the teachings of other religions; and that enabled them to become richer and progressive. In short, the lives of Gandhi and Andrews show that when the followers of different religions meet one another in the deeper levels of the spirit, wholesome results are bound to follow in the long run. The interaction between different religious traditions is good for all.

• Gandhi and Andrews were convinced that a mere intellectual or doctrinaire approach to religions did not lend itself to a genuine dialogue. The creative and fruitful dialogue between different religious traditions can take place only when the

approach to religion is rooted in the quality of the inner life of man. According to Gandhi, what man *does* is important and not what he *preaches*. Hence if a dialogue is to be achieved without any compromise, the only feasible way they saw was to approach religion from the direction of the inner religious life and not through external forms and formalities.

How should a truly religious man (of any religious tradition) conduct himself in respect of a follower of another religious tradition, his ceremonies, practices, scriptures, etc.? The answer of both Gandhi and Andrews was: 'with understanding, sympathy and a spirit of reverence.' This answer was the necessary corollary of their deference to Truth and their appreciation of genuine religious living (genuine and holy by any standard) and the consequent regard for such pure lives and the traditions that made them possible. The spirit of such appreciation and reverence cut across conventional religious boundaries.

The office of the religions of the world, as understood by Gandhi and Andrews, was to vitalize the inner life of man and to direct it to the love of God and to the service of man. The agencies of organized religions were helpful only so long as they nourished and fertilized man's inner spiritual life. Should the religious life be hampered by them, they believed (as had frequently happened in history), that the very purpose of religious life would be defeated, giving rise to the necessity of reformation of religious institutions. Both Gandhi and Andrews had to fight for progressive changes in the established procedures and institutions to make them true vehicles of God's love. They reinterpreted the tenets of their own religions in profound and universal terms and helped the inner life of man to grow in freedom without the conventional, cramping limits.

The great religions of the world, Gandhi and Andrews thought, had a responsibility to promote good life for all and to fight evil in individual and social realms. In this, they saw a challenge for all religions. They were convinced that the salvation of the world could be achieved only through the

resurgence of moral and spiritual values. To this end, they co-operate in the various movements of religious and social reform and social reconstruction. They also did a great service to humanity by stressing the importance of the purity of means even where the ends were noble. They believed that all work done selflessly for the common good, for uplifting the oppressed and the downtrodden spoke of the glory of God. They regarded such work as worship. Social service schemes to which they devoted themselves—schemes like the Harijan welfare, village reconstruction, basic education, the emancipation of women and even the movement for the independence of India—were seen by them in that light.

They were at one in holding that the root of evil was the want of a living faith in God. They realized that the resources of all great religions were needed to fight the evils of selfishness, materialism and atheism. They believed that it was the task of all religions to bring up and activate in man the forces of love, sacrifice, service, self-control and, above all, devotion to Truth and righteousness. They saw clearly the necessity of common endeavour by the great religions to achieve a just and peaceful social order; they actually put this into practice by working together with many religious-minded people belonging to various traditions for a better condition of human society.

They knew only too well that religions frequently had been misused and abused in history, and that they had been employed in a worldly manner for selfish ends. They were aware that there was not only indifference to but also prejudice against religion in certain quarters and that a secular outlook in matters of cultural concern had become fashionable. However, they attributed this attitude to several misconceptions: first, religion was often mistakenly identified with fundamentalism, and ritualism; second, the widening gulf between belief and practice had undermined the foundations of all religions; and third, religious strifes and conflicts had generated a sort of aversion to religion itself.

On all these counts, Gandhi and Andrews demonstrated that



those were onesided and mistaken views. They proved in and by their lives that religion, properly understood and practised, could undoubtedly become a progressive force in the world and that all the subjective impediments that stood in the way of progress could be eliminated in the process of spiritual discipline. They also showed that a mere sentimental acceptance of a religion without the willingness to pay the price in the form of self-discipline was to miss the real point of religion. If a Hindu or a Christian did not practise love, charity, self-control, truth and righteousness, and considered himself a devout Hindu or a Christian by merely subscribing to certain propositions, then perhaps, each had missed the deepest and the best in his own religious tradition and possibly, of every religion. Lastly, while Gandhi and Andrews noted that religious strifes and conflicts had done considerable harm to mankind, they recognized that what really had been responsible for those excesses was ignorance, bigotry and selfishness with which religion got mixed up. They came to realize that the modern man had been running the risk of throwing out the baby along with the bath water. For it was not the reality of religion but often its forms and formalities which constituted the grave limitations from which it came to suffer. Superstitions, evil customs and other imperfections crept in from age to age in every religious tradition; and they needed to be rooted out.

Gandhi and Andrews were concerned with pointing out that the misuse of religion and its exploitation for wrong ends should be prevented and exposed. They considered that the employment of violence and hatred in the name of religion was wrong. Their concern was to point out that religions were intended to create love and goodwill in all mutual relations between man and man. Their lives have demonstrated that the great religions could become the most effective instruments of activating some of the deepest aspirations of man. No religion worth the name ever confined itself to mere economic well-being of man. The great religions have profound significance in the moral, cultural and spiritual realms.

They stimulate men for serious and earnest pursuit of truth. They bring out the virtues of love, service, mercy, etc., and guide man in the realization of the highest values of life. In short, they aim at raising humanity to a higher ethical and spiritual plane.

A religious life is a life of humility and long suffering. It is a life of all-embracing love. The lives of Gandhi and Andrews bear testimony to and illustrate this fact. They also show that moral and spiritual values are neither Eastern nor Western; they are universal. The spiritual treasures of all religious traditions constitute the common heritage of mankind. They cannot be circumscribed by any particular geographical area or by a certain group of people. Every human being has a birth-right to these spiritual treasures; they are there to be understood, appreciated and assimilated. The prophets of different religious traditions have transmitted their messages for the benefit of mankind; they have a universal appeal. The recognition of spiritual truths in every religious tradition, the role that they have played in the spiritual evolution of humanity, and the awareness that they can enrich and elevate our lives, fill our lives with love, reverence and hope.

## II

The study of the dialogue between Gandhi and Andrews draws our attention to certain points of agreement which are set forth hereunder. It is hoped that they will provide a basis for further dialogue:

1. Religious persecutions, disputes and wars are abuses of religions; an appeal to the lower passions of human nature is responsible for them. Such abuses could and ought to be prevented. The leaders of different religious traditions should assume the responsibility for preventing the abuse of their respective traditions. No religious tradition should present its message in a way that may lead to conflict and violence.

2. God's grace comes in His inscrutable way to all mankind. It is desirable to go deep into one's own religious tradition adhering firmly to it, while keeping a receptive mind regarding

the truth that may be available in other traditions.

3. Religion is both a faith and a quest, There is an innate longing for God among all people; and God in His own way is fulfilling these spiritual needs of mankind.

4. Historically, the dialogue of religions has broadened and deepened religious insights. Active co-operation among the great religions of the world will bring in greater light and deeper understanding. It may lead to reinterpretation of scriptures and traditions of the world in deeper and wider terms.

5. Inasmuch as God is one, the world is one and humanity is one, there are bound to be agreements on many points among different religions. Hence it must be possible for the different religious traditions to meet and co-operate at these vantage points and reinforce the religious life of mankind.

6. Broadly speaking the Eastern as well as the Western religious traditions, in different degrees, contain elements of immanences as well as transcendence; further communication between the two might result in a richer and fuller comprehension of the Truth.

7. Religious concepts should be studied in their historical perspective. Scientific, logical and philosophical methods should be employed for a re-examination of the traditional forms of religious expression. And a higher and healthy criticism of the scriptures should be undertaken to express the spirit of the texts and to relate it to the contemporary needs.

## APPENDIX I

### A HINDU VIEW OF JESUS CHRIST

*(Address delivered at the Annual conference (1964) of the Alumni of the Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University)*

My first acquaintance with the *Bible* was in the late forties, when under the influence of Gandhi, the students in the Indian colleges considered it a fashion to possess a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, one of the highly esteemed sacred writings of the Hindus, and a copy of the *Bible*. Gandhi never called himself a Christian. But by his life and outlook and methods, he has been the medium through which a great deal of interest in Christianity has been aroused among Hindus. He put the Cross into politics. Many of us did not understand the meaning of the Cross until we saw it in Gandhi. The Cross burst into meaning through him. Similarly, he popularized the *Gita*. Most of my fellow-students could not read the *Gita* in the original. So whether it was the *Gita* or the *Bible*, those who read them, read them in the English language. It had its own advantages as well as disadvantages. I must confess that I had a slight advantage over some of my friends because of my knowledge of Sanskrit. That made me a small leader of a small discussion group interested in these mysterious books. We used to meet late in the evenings for a sort of group study and exchange of views. We were attracted by the parables of Jesus and the simple grandeur of the Sermon on the Mount. Some of my friends committed the whole of the Sermon to memory and used to recite it as they did with the Sanskrit *slokas* of the *Gita*. One point about these early experiences I would like to emphasize: our attempts to understand Jesus Christ were our own, unaided, and on the basis of our limited knowledge and readings.

This discussion group continued until 1948, when I moved to another bigger city. Gandhi was also assassinated that very year by a Hindu fanatic. That incident created in me a sort of revulsion against religion.

After about twelve years, in the beginning of 1960, I accepted a Fellowship from the Gandhi Peace Foundation to work on a specific project: 'Gandhi's Concept of *Sarvadharma sambhava*' (Reverence for all religions). In that connection, during my field work I had the opportunities to meet leading religious personalities in India. I shall occasionally refer to my meetings with several leaders of different Christian denominations. In this context, I must say, I was very fortunate because I had the opportunity to meet the best of Christians: I met men like Reverend R. R. Keithahn, Father Pombede Griffiths, Dr Devanandan, Dr Albert Cutat, to mention only a few.

In the course of my field work, I once went into a Christian colony of a South Indian village. I met the members and their families one evening. On investigation, I came to know that they belonged to seven different churches. The members of each denomination were making some unfavourable comments about others. That made me wonder whether what had been communicated to these people was Jesus Christ or a lot of legalism, the history of which they scarcely knew. While they did not know what or where Rome was, they were Roman Catholics; while they did not know where England was, they were Anglicans and so forth. Similarly, they professed adherence to Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Congregational Churches. Then I went to a Catholic Bishop and shared with him what I had seen and felt. I also asked him whether it was possible for anybody to be a simple Christian. For instance, if one did not want to associate himself with the histories of these several churches because of their associations with crusades, inquisitions, and persecutions and so forth, if he did not want to be a Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.

and if he wanted to be a simple follower of Jesus Christ, what was the way? His answer was that one could be a Christian only by belonging to one of these bodies and not otherwise. I was not satisfied.

I then began to wonder if all was right with the ecclesiastical understanding of Jesus Christ. It surprised me to note that the confident tone of the Christian missionary disappeared when one asked him in earnestness, "What is Jesus Christ?" I quote the late Richard Niebuhr from his *Christ and Culture* (p. 14): "As soon, of course, as we undertake to define the essence of Jesus Christ who is one and the same, or to say what it is that gives him his various kinds of authority, we enter into the continuous debate of the Christian community. We encounter two difficulties in particular. The first is the impossibility of stating adequately by means of concepts and propositions a principle which presents itself in the form of a person, the second is the impossibility of saying anything about this person which is not also relative to the particular standpoint in church, history, and culture of one who undertakes to describe him. Hence, one is tempted to speak redundantly, 'Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ', or to accept the method of Biblical positivism, pointing to the New Testament and foregoing all interpretation." I was eager to know Jesus Christ as he is and not as he has been presented or misrepresented. Well, I am yet in the process of my learning and understanding. But history had taught me one thing, viz. that the different churches came into existence in Europe and America for good historical reasons. They stood for certain definite principles. But how these divisions were useful in the understanding of Jesus Christ in the Indian context was the question that troubled me. I thought that these conflicts of traditions and narrow ideologies hindered the vision of Christ and focussed attention on extraneous factors.

A word about the Indian context: India has always been the scene of the harmonious flourishing of the great world religions. Even after the partition of the country, India has

55 millions of Muslims, about twelve millions of Christians, seven millions of Sikhs, one million of Buddhists, 3/4 of million of Parsis or Zoroastrians. Whereas the Hindus form the bulk of the Indian population, Hinduism is not the official religion of India. And religious freedom is constitutionally protected,

Hinduism is an evolutionary religion. In its long history of over 4,000 years, it has developed almost every shade and shape of religious expression in man's longing for God, from the most primitive to the most philosophical and spiritual. The Hindu, thinking that each type of religious form may be suitable for the spiritual development of a particular temperament, allows all these to grow side by side without obliterating any of them.

Hinduism does not pin its faith on a single book or a single prophet. It has no official creed connected with any particular teacher. It has, no doubt, produced a number of prophets and incarnations, but they are not its founders. They are only the demonstrators of some of the eternal truths which are the bases of Hinduism. If the historical character of Rama or Krishna is disproved, it will not affect Hinduism. Similarly, it has no single book, though there are hundreds of books that go by the name of *sastras* (sacred writings). Nor is there one canon. Actually, the natural instinct of the Hindus is not to close the canon, but to leave it open. They do not feel the need of unanimity in such matters. In fact, they have always recognized that the holiest and the most jealously preserved scriptures could exist in various recensions. The Saivaites have their own scriptures; and the Vaishnavaites have their own; so have the Saktas; there are innumerable *smritis* and *puranas*, all of which try to trace their origin and authority to the Vedas. Even belief in Vedas is considered secondary to direct experience. Further, there is no central authority which can demand the allegiance of all the Hindus. They have no idea of belonging to an organized church as is understood in the West. Hindus have the freedom of choice and action at every stage and are at liberty to draw inspiration from any source in their spiritual quest. The Hindu

need not remind himself that he is a Hindu when he goes and receives spiritual help from any quarter. He is not landed in moral conflicts in such situations.

The people in the West have not always realized how much the different schools and sects of Hinduism vary from one another. They have a tendency to equate Hinduism with a sort of pantheism, thinking that all Hindus follow Sankara, the founder of Advaitavada or non-dualism. It is very misleading indeed, for pantheism has a certain import in the West and it cannot rightly be applied even to the philosophy of Sankara. Besides, there are other sects in the fold of Hinduism equally important, if not more so, which maintain God as the Supreme Person. The basic belief in the Absolute Brahman of the *Upanishads* is interpreted variously. Sankara interprets it in impersonal terms. Ramanuja, the founder of *Visistadvaita*, and Madhva, the founder of *Dvaita*, interpret in personal terms. Madhva is very pronounced in his monotheistic exposition of *Vedanta*. Let me take my own example. I come from a family which adheres to the Madhva school of thought. This school believes in a personal God as the Creator of the universe, including man. The relation between the Creator and the created is eternal and it is not undone even in salvation. God is *svatantra*, independent, and the soul is *paratantra*, dependent, and this is an everlasting relation. Faith in a personal God is necessary to the majority of the Hindus, as it is for myself.

It is this complexity and heterogeneity within his own tradition that makes the Hindu look for and emphasize the essential conditions of a larger unity. He finds that underneath all the differences of sects and ideologies, there are certain common assumptions, viz. that the ultimate Reality is the supreme spirit; that there is a sense of unity running through all things; that there is justice in the heart of the universe; that spiritual life is worth all costs; the salvation is the ultimate end of all human efforts, and so forth. In other words, all recognize the significance of *samsara*, *karma*, and *moksa*, though the interpretations of these concepts vary. Therefore a Hindu declares :



Truth is one, but the ideas of Truth and its working are not uniform. He recognizes the individuality of the different systems and creeds which clearly marks off one from another and sees each system as a respectable tradition. His approach to Truth is broad-based on progressive discoveries of the ever-expanding vision and experience of the Divine. It is this aspect of Hinduism within itself that makes the Hindu adopt an attitude of reverence for different religious teachers. He extends this very attitude beyond the limits of his own religion. He accepts, therefore, that all great religions, inasmuch as they help the spiritual development of mankind in different times and climes, are true and necessary and worthy of reverence. The *Bhagavad-Gita* upholds this reverential attitude to various ways of life, thought-systems, and religious paths. The following verses are typical of this sentiment :

“Whatever form one desires to worship in faith and devotion, in that very form I make that faith of his secure.”  
(VII. 21)

“In whatever way men resort to Me, even so do I render to them. In every way oh ! Partha, the path men follow is Mine.” (IX. 23)

The Hindu approach to religion is experimental. Religion to a Hindu is more than a creed, a dogma, rite, or a ceremony. It is realization. It is a method and an outlook which calls upon him to organize his individual and social life in a particular way. He has a capacity for self-examination and he is willing to re-think his religious life in the light of other faiths and cultures. He cannot accept anything that he cannot understand or experience.

A Hindu is not interested in the victory of one religious tradition over another. He is after the realization of God and spiritual freedom. It may be possible that one religious system may conquer another, and yet the essential religious values remain untouched. In the words of an Indian thinker,\*

\* Swamy Nikhil'ananda : The *Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada's Karika*, P. XXXV,

“Nothing wonderful will happen to the world if the entire mankind be converted to Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam or to any other religion. But assuredly, something marvellous will happen if a dozen men and women pierce the thick walls of the Church, the Temple, the synagogue and realize the Truth,” In order to discover what is delicate and fine in religion, there must be an attitude of spiritual openness and a willingness to be led by spiritual facts.

A Hindu is profoundly moved by the implications of the Cross and the Kingdom of God. He understands the teaching of Jesus by his example. Jesus provides to him an ideal character. In the majesty of pure living, in the breadth of sympathy, in the unselfish and sacrificial outlook of his life, and in pure disinterested love, he was supreme. What strikes a Hindu, above all, is his complete obedience to the will of God. The more he emptied himself, the more he discovered God. That is why his words have so much authority. To the Hindu, who loves simplicity, Jesus the simple, the spiritual, and the celibate holds up these ideals and exemplifies them.

Christianity, as an organized religion, functions at a different level when compared with the life, activities, and experiences of its founder. The revelation of the founder filtered through the minds of the followers and each follower understood the Master according to his capacity and experience, and considered the other to be mistaken in their opinions. Whereas Christianity originated as a gentle and self-suffering creed, it was transformed by about the fourth century into an aggressive religion in which even war was sanctioned and encouraged by the Church. The Middle Ages in Europe witnessed the domineering sway of the Christian Church, not the gentle, human, and godlike way of Jesus. Perhaps, a discovery of the simple and sublime religion of Jesus is to be made in the course of a truthful and rational inquiry into the Gospels. “Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God and what came out was the Church.” The

Church is a very human institution and has not been free from the temptations of self-perpetuation and self-glorification. Arnold Toynbee\* calls its 'self-centeredness' the symbol of original sin. This aspect is universal and perhaps applies to all organized religions. Because of it, each believes that it alone has received the revelation, that the truth revealed to it is the whole truth, that its followers are the chosen people and the rest of humanity groping in the darkness. But such absolute claims, made in one sense or another by every religion, do not take us very far.

Man's understanding and formulations of God's revelation or self-communication are not perfect. The hand of man is visible in every denomination, creed and religious tradition that has come in down to us. Such elements are fallible and not always harmless. It may be that one has to rise above man-made formulations in order to discern the Truth. The Christian claim that the Truth is in the Christ may be valid; but who has grasped all that Truth? One wonders whether the whole truth could be found in the compounds of human artificialities. The freedom of God, it may be argued has to do with all peoples and cultures. The depth and scope of this infinite dealing with all peoples and cultures of different ages is a profound mystery and supersedes all theological formulations.

Christianity seems to have got mixed up with the habits of thought of the Old Testament and has not been successful in extricating itself from them. It still thinks in terms of the chosen people, favoritism of God, ritualism, and so on. It is puzzling to note how the Church in its organization rapidly took over most of these attitudes of the Scribes that Jesus so fiercely condemned, instead of discriminating and rejecting the factors that were incompatible with the new teaching. No doubt the new teaching could not be fully explained by itself. It had to draw from the current conceptions of the Jewish world. But

---

\*A.J. Toynbee, *A Historian's Approach to Religion*, Ch. XVIII. P. 282

in this process, it took for granted most of the Jewish views on the nature of the world, man, and God and even inherited the current dogmas. So the Christianity which we see is not merely the kernel of New Testament, but the actual system with all that it assimilated from the thought and conditions of the Jewish society. It might be worth our while to ascertain what were those factors in Judaism that Jesus found inadequate or erroneous in opposition to which his teaching made such a powerful appeal; what it was that was unique in the background of Judaism ?

The New Testament goes beyond the restricted limits of nations and cultures and portrays the feeling and aspirations common to humanity and demonstrates the essential universality of man. It strikes at the root of exclusivism. It is historical and national in one sense ; and yet transcends history and nationality and inspires a distinctive way of life. It is all-inclusive in its vision.

But much of what is thought to be fundamental in Christianity is not derived from the Gospels, but from the later history. This mass statement of doctrines and creeds and dogmas contains elements of eternal significance but it also reflects the peculiar needs and habits of thought of different generations. In many cases, those factors are dispensable. The rituals and the doctrinal formulations that were meaningful for the first few centuries after Christ may not be wholly appropriate to the people of the modern world. The discovery of Hinduism and Buddhism in the East by the people of the West is an important factor needing theological recognition. This was not a problem in the early centuries of the Christian era because of the lack of contact and means of communication. But the setting of the modern world is different. In the light of his own age and circumstances, it is necessary for the theologian of today to refocus his attention on the essential truths and to eliminate the non-essential and the accidental. He also has to reconstruct his attitude

towards other religions. In this, the church has not always allowed the necessary freedom to the theologian. But if the theologian is not only to follow, but to lead the Church, this freedom is essential. Very often, the Scriptures, the Spirit and the theologian become the prisoners of the Church. There is not always sufficient freedom within the Church to safeguard the freedom of Spirit.

A word about the Canon. The Canon answers the question : Where is Revelation ? The canonical decision of the third Council at Carthage A. D. 397 is perfectly valid so far as Christian theology is concerned. That decision, however, does not exhaust God's self-communication in all lands and ages. It is true and applicable only in the Jewish-Christian tradition, or perhaps only in the Christian tradition. The decision of the said Council does not take into account the fact of revelation or God's self-communication in other climes and ages. Nor was it expected to do so, because that was not the task of the Council. So the scriptures of other religions are not governed by the Christian Canon, as Christian scriptures cannot be governed by the canonical decisions of other religions. But mutual communication may help one another in the understanding of the issues involved in the relationship of man and God So the question: Where is the revelation ? It is answered by different religions differently. But if it is maintained that the canonical decision of any one religion governs the rest of the religions, I submit it may not be acceptable to anybody, and least of all to you.

Dr Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University, Montreal, writing in the *Occasional Paper* (Published by the Department of Missionary Studies, London, No. 5, April 1960) considers that it is unchristian to think that Christianity is the only true religion and the others are false or insufficient. He fervently appeals, "...May I plead that we abandon, as utterly unworthy the traditional notion that if Christianity is true, then it must follow that other faiths are false—or at least inadequate...For the

moment, let me point out some ways in which such a position gets tied up in unchristian knots. For example, there is the danger of the converse proposition: that if anyone else's faith turns out to be valid or adequate, then it would follow that Christianity must be false—a form of logic that has, in fact, driven many from their own faiths and indeed from any faith at all. If one's chances of getting to Heaven—or to use today's more acceptable metaphor of coming into God's presence—are dependent on other peoples' not getting there, then one become walled up within the quite intolerable position that the Christian has a vested interest in other man's damnation. It is shocking to admit it, but this actually takes place. When an observer comes back after studying Asian religious traditions and reports that contrary to the accepted theory, some Hindus and Buddhists and some Muslims lead a pious and moral life and seem very near to God by any possible standard, so that as one can see in these particular cases at least, faith is as adequate as Christian faith, then presumably a Christian should be overjoyed, enthusiastically hopeful that this be true, even though he may be permitted a fear lest it be not so. Instead, I have sometimes witnessed just the opposite: an emotional resistance to the news, one hoping firmly that it is not so, though perhaps with a covert fear that it might be. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation theoretically, I submit that practically this is just not Christian, and indeed not tolerable. It will not do to have a faith that can be undermined by God's saving one's neighbour; to be afraid lest other men turn out to be closer to God than one has been led to suppose !'

A word about conversion. In Hinduism, conversions occur; they are not made. A Hindu believes in a conversion of the vertical type. It is brought about by some experience which results in a sudden reinterpretation of the entire meaning and purpose of life. It is an actual overtuning of the inner life. It opens up a new vision and a positive attitude to righteousness and God. It inculcates a new discipline. He is dismayed by

mass conversions. He thinks that baptism as it is found today in some countries, needs to be baptized and brought to the New Testament level. In Paul's time, the question was acute whether circumcision was essential to being a Christian. Paul said: "Neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." If a ritual, viz. baptism, were to be made, the deciding factor whether a person is in the Kingdom of God or not, and, if Paul were to be in our midst, perhaps he would have again said that spiritual character and not external ritual was the deciding factor.

It seems that there is a need for a fresh understanding of the concept of the Church. There are plenty of people, both inside and outside the phenomenological church, who are ready for a more complete obedience to the will of God. Christ breaks out beyond the borders of the Church. Those who have not the spirit of Jesus are not his, no matter what external symbols they possess. Conversely, those who have the spirit of Jesus are his, no matter what outward symbols they lack. Statistics and classifications are not Jesus's concern. We are, therefore, yet to discover the great potential body of the faithful. The purpose of the church is to know God and do His works. It is this obedience to the will of God, as I think, that is the nucleus of the teaching of Jesus. But the churches that we see are threatened by the same danger as other philanthropic agencies, viz. the danger of formality and ideology. Jesus wanted profound faith and inward sincerity. Organizations and formalities, legalities, and outward show were not his concern. The Pharisees had all those things. Jesus would have none of them. Jesus was interested in God's Kingdom and righteousness. Jesus taught the ushering in of the Kingdom of God; and we are yet to discover it. And that is possible only with the reconstruction of the concept of Church in a radical manner.

The teachings of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God are profoundly significant. There is the typical instance of the Pharisees demanding Jesus to state when the Kingdom of God

would come. Jesus answered, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, 'Lo here, Lo there, for behold the Kingdom of God is within you.'" The Hindu does not think that the Kingdom could be spread by rigid organization. He would rather think that the ideas spread by the catching of fire from life to life, thus silently leaving the whole.

In his spiritual quest, the Hindu looks up to Jesus Christ for guidance and solace and gets the same. He has a deep interest in and profound reverence for him. He sees him through his own cultural and religious background and more relevantly to his own needs and circumstances of life. It may be true that he has not understood Jesus fully. But then the question is: Who can claim a full understanding of Jesus Christ? In any case, I should think any attempt to keep him within the compounds of the Church is futile. Those who cannot imagine him working outside the Church ignore the operations of the Holy Spirit.

A Hindu, like Justin Martyr, is able to see that Christ stands for the Divine concern of the whole world. It is not doing justice to the Love of God to restrict His love or make it conditional on a particular ritual. The fact is that He is the Father of all. As such, He is concerned with each human being whether a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian. The entire humanity relies on His power and grace. It is to Him that all men address their prayers. Justin held the belief that whatever good has been spoken by any man is Christian. He recognized Christ wherever he saw wisdom and righteousness. He saw Jesus in the heart of all men by virtue of his being the Word of reason.

The Hindu is impressed by Jesus who broke the fetters of both Hebrew and Greek orthodoxy. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus pointed out that Elijah went not to a Hebrew widow, but to a widow in Sidon (Lk. 4:25-6); that Elisha did not heal a Hebrew leper, but Naman of Syria (Lk. 4:27). Jesus was almost thrown over a cliff for this larger concept of God (Lk. 4:30). It might also be remembered that the Holy Spirit had already worked in the Cornelius family even before Peter



got there. It is such a broad conception of faith that a Hindu likes to cherish.

The Cross makes a tremendous appeal the moment we give it a universal meaning. The symbol and centre of true Christianity is the Cross. In the interpretation of Jesus's life, the Hindu pays the highest regard to the quality of his life. Christ's work, he thinks, is to be interpreted not in an exclusive way but in a comprehensive way. That is the way, as he sees it, to credit Jesus with full humanity and universality. Further, everyone should employ his own profound insight and deepest need in the interpretation of the Cross.

The unique message of Jesus is set forth in the New Testament. It deals with the inwardness of morals and rituals and clearly indicates the departure from the Old Testament in the emphatic words in refrain: "Ye have heard that, it was said by them of old time...but I say unto you." The ethical demands of the New Testament are far more exacting than those of the Jews. He said: "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, Ye shall in no case enter the Kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20). Further, he exhorted: "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48). He then concluded the Sermon emphasizing the need for the practice of the teaching, and not merely the hearing of it or believing its truth:

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth*\* them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Here

---

\*Italics mine.

is a refreshing statement of the scope and goal of the New Testament religion. The emphasis is on practice.

God's grace strengthens the moral effort of man. Salvation is the meeting point of man's longing for God and God's descending to lift man up in His grace. It is possible that man's longing for God itself is due to the grace of God. Actually, religious activity is a continuous activity at every point of which is visible both God's activity and man's response. Man obtains the vision of God through His grace. Though His grace makes no distinction between the saint and the sinner, yet it is the pure in heart who feel it. The heart free from anger, lust, greed, and egotism sees God through His grace.

There is no warrant for holding that Jesus himself ever asserted that human moral effort was irrelevant or unnecessary. On the contrary, he explicitly told Nicodemus that the individual could only be saved by means of self-purification, or regeneration by being reborn of water (total purification) and of the Spirit (Divine Knowledge). Salvation could only be obtained by the self-perfectioning of the individual. Jesus declared, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21). And further, we should worship God perhaps, not as Hindus, or Muslims, or Methodists, or Baptists; but, "The hour is coming, when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." (John 4:21). "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." (John 4:25).

All men face a common problem when they try to worship the one God. The fundamental question that faces all men is the nature of relationship between man and God. I venture to suggest that both the Hindus and the Christians believe that the origin and explanation of nature and man is God Himself. It might be, therefore, advantageous if all sincere seekers of Truth co-operated and communicated in the deeper levels of the spirit. The Hindu is not impressed by those system-builders and

system-lovers who like to stretch the point that all religions are different systems and that, therefore, no help can be available to the follower of one from another, and that no comparisons can be made. That might be true so long as they refer to different cultural, social and customary aspects of religions. But with reference to the basic, spiritual message, it is not true. Jesus speaks to man as man, whatever his place and time. His teachings transcend these circumstances. They are universal. Systems are outgrown but not this basic message. Therefore a Hindu with his open mind draws inspiration from Jesus Christ. Further, he finds that our common humanity asserts itself over all other differences. It cuts across all differentiations. Consequently, it is desirable that interpretation of Jesus Christ and His activities should be big enough as to include Him in every religion wherever truth, goodness, and love operate. A Hindu seeks the universal and living Christ. His view of Jesus Christ might take us away from some of the narrow interpretations and make us worshippers of the eternal, the true, and the living Christ.

## APPENDIX II

### HINDU ORIENTATIONS TO OTHER RELIGIONS

*(A talk given to the residents of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, in one of their weekly-colloquiums)*

I know that I could be easily challenged if the subject of my talk this evening is captioned 'The Hindu Orientation to Other Religious Traditions'. Owing to the enormous variety within the fold of Hindu tradition, no one, perhaps, can speak justifiably as *the* representative of the different Hindu sects, systems and groups. It might even be argued that there are as many attitudes, as there are individual Hindus; and that each person's attitude depends on his measure of knowledge and faith, his historical position and his position in society. However, let me hasten to make it clear that I do not hold that everything is relative and that nothing can be said about Hindu attitudes. On the contrary, I am going to discuss the matter in some detail and I have no hesitation in labelling my subject as 'Hindu Orientations to Other Religious Traditions'. I do so because, first, my presentation will be based on the sacred literature of the Hindus—generally regarded as such—and the theologies that have been built upon it; and second, it will trace historically how the Hindus have approached other religious traditions.

Sometime about the middle of the second millennium B. C. and from somewhere near Central Asia came the Vedic Aryans through the north-western passes and gradually settled in the Indus Valley. They met the local inhabitants consisting, perhaps, of Dravidian and other racial stocks who were probably scattered throughout the country. The latter opposed the Aryans at every

stage of their expansion. However, the Aryans ultimately subdued them and overcame their opposition. The only record that we have to study their religious attitudes is the *Rigveda*. The defeated people are described in it as *dasas* (slaves) and are called *anasas* (noseless), which is obviously a reference to their racial type. The *Rigveda* refers with disapproval to the form of worship practised by the *Dasas*. They are called the worshippers of *Phallus-sinsnadevah*. They were also called 'prayerless' 'priestless' and 'worshippers of mad gods.'

However, very early in their history, the idea became popular with the Aryans that God, with different names in different places is not, in fact, different. They were convinced that differences in names and forms did not mean that the reality they stood for, was different. A verse in the first *Mandala* of the *Rigveda* declares that "Truth is one and sages call it by different names,' like *Agni*, *Yama* and *Materisvan*. In the tenth *Mandala* of the *Rigveda*, we have another verse which says that 'priests and poets with words make into many the hidden reality which is one.' The one is spoken ('vadanti') in different ways.

From the time of the *Atharvaveda*, a process of cultural synthesis started in the Indian history as a result of which Dravidian gods and beliefs crept into the Aryan form of worship and vice versa. The idea of one reality manifesting in many forms helped towards the recognition of the Dravidian gods. Not only did the Dravidian gods win acceptance but in course of time they became supreme. Competent authorities have shown that Siva-Rudra and Visnu as well as the Mother goddess are all Dravidian in origin and were later absorbed into Vedic mythology.

The *Upanisads* accord recognition to alternative ways of conceiving the Supreme Being. *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chandogya* conceive the highest reality as impersonal, whereas *Katha*, *Mundaka* and *Svetasvatara* conceive the Supreme Being as personal. The rest of the *Upanisads* henceforth, accept both conceptions as valid. This is an important breakthrough. Henceforth, a Hindu could be at home with those traditions which conceived the Highest as

the personal god as well as with those traditions which conceived the Highest as transcendent and super-personal, which can be described only negatively. The *Svetasvatara Upanisad* says: He who is one who dispenses the inherent needs of all people at all times who is the beginning and the end of all things, may He unite us with the bonds of truth, of common fellowship and of righteousness.

We see the rise of different religious sects and philosophical schools during the period of the epics and later in the age of systems. All these sects and schools flourished together. Worship was offered to the Supreme Being under different names. Six orthodox schools of philosophy came into prominence; all of them were accepted by each of them as orthodox. The *Bhagavad-Gita* gives the classic expression to this attitude, which has been the guiding star for the community ever since.

Whatever form one desires to worship in faith and devotion, in that very form I make that faith of his secure.

Even those who are devoted to other gods, worship them in full faith, even they, O Kaunteya, worship none but Me.

In whatever way men resort to Me, even so do I render to them; In every way Oh, Partha, the path followed is Mine.

The later history continues the same tradition. In the *Panchavatana Puja*, Siva, Visnu, Sakti, Surya and Ganapati are worshipped together. According to the *Puranas*, the Supreme which is one, assumed the form of *Brahma* at the time of the Creation, of *Visnu* while maintaining it and of *Siva* at the time of dissolution. All of them are worshipped together under the symbol of Harihara; and it is held that reverence to the one depends on the reverence to the other as well. The *Siva Mahimna stotra* says:

Different are the paths laid down in the Veda—*Sankhya*, Yoga, Saiva and Vaisnava and so on; of these some people take to one some to another as the best. Devotees follow these diverse paths, straight or crooked, according to their different tendencies. Yet, Oh Lord, thou alone art the ultimate goal of men, as is the

ocean of all the rivers. The same spirit is revealed in a *śasana* of the *Keśava Temple* at Belur, in South India: "Him whom the Saiva worship as Siva, the *vedantins* as Brahman, the Buddhists as the Buddha, *Naiyayikas* skilled in proof as *Karta*, the followers of *Jina* as *Arhat*, the Mimamsakas as *Karma*—may He, Kesava, fulfil our heart's desire."

It is frequently maintained that even Advaita, Viśiṣṭadvaita and the Dvaita are not contradictory to one another but present different standpoints with reference to the ultimate Reality.

*Dehabuddhyatu dasoham Jivabudhyatvadamsakah*

*Atmabudhya tvamevāham iti me niscita matih*

"Ancient Roman civilization," says Gibbon, "was bound to reject Christianity just because Rome was tolerant." Tolerance is not a good-in-itself. It depends on what is tolerated. Anyway this is not the spirit that we observe in the Hindu tradition. It is neither condescension nor is it a matter of indifference. But it springs from a concern for truth and value wherever it may be found. It is the appreciation of the various forms of worship and a willingness to learn from other traditions that is the keynote of India's attitude.

Throughout her history, India has shown a spirit of understanding and assimilation towards other religious traditions as it has shown to its own different sects. It has displayed a spirit of friendliness and accommodation to the followers of other religions who sought shelter in India from time to time, to escape being prosecuted in their own homelands. After the second destruction of Jerusalem, Jews came to India and were received warmly; they were given lands and homes and were allowed to practise their faith and tradition in their own way. Similarly, within a century of the crucifixion of Christ (according to a local tradition) the Syrian Church of Christianity could find a place and establish itself and carry on its activities freely in South India. In Kerala, it is still a flourishing and one of the most respected communities in that part of the country.

When the Muslims invaded Persia, the remnants of the

Zoroastrian community left their homes and came to India. They were provided with the necessary facilities enabling them to establish their own modes of religious worship. They are still one of the most important and wealthy communities in India.

India met the Muslim traders with hospitality and friendliness long before actual military invasions by the Muslim rulers. It might be interesting to quote from the records of an ambassador from the court of Persia. Abdul Razak writes about the people of Callicot, South India. (I have taken the quotation from Murraya's *Discoveries and Travels in Asia* : Vol. 2) "People of Callicot are infidels; consequently, I consider myself in an enemy's country, as the Muhammedans consider everyone who has not received the Koran. Yet I admit that I met with perfect toleration, and even favour; we have two mosques and are allowed to pray in public."

In respect of Buddhism, it is observed by some historians of religion, that Brahmanism drove away Buddhism from India. This does not historically make sense nor is the description accurate. Buddhism flourished along with Brahmanism in a dialectical relationship for over 1000 years since the time of the Buddha for the benefit of both. Indian logic, philosophy and culture have suffered since Buddhism ceased to be a living force in India. A Chinese traveller named Huin Tsang visited India in the seventh century of the Christian era, when *Harshavardhana* was the emperor in northern India. On his authority, we know that *Siva* and *Visnu* received equal honours with the Buddha. *Harsha* himself led an assembly of learned people which was attended by the Jains, Buddhists and Brahmins as well as by scholars of different schools of philosophy. They were all presented with gifts. However, when the centres of Buddhist learning like Nalanda as well as the centre of Buddhist holy life—the monasteries—were destroyed and their libraries were burnt and the Buddhist monks were massacred by the foreign invaders, the few remaining monks fled to Nepal and Tibet. The Sangha, the Buddhist monastic order was no more there to guide and edify the laity, and



the Buddhist tradition was snapped. Thanks to the efforts of the Rev. Dhammapala in the twentieth century, and the establishment of the Mahabodhi society, the influence of Buddhism is again growing in India. And it is welcomed in all quarters.

Throughout the vicissitudes of India's history, she has tried to give expression to an ecumenical spirit in religious matters. The conception of unity behind diversity has been a fundamental factor in India's religious consciousness; I will just give one more instance in recent history. In 1961, India offered shelter and hospitality to the Dalai Lama and his 80,000 followers who came from Tibet. Not only was there no advantage to India in this action, but she was also aware of the consequences that might ensue *vis-a-vis* the Communist China. Yet, I remember the argument of Dr S. Radhakrishnan: "We cannot go against our history and heritage." And that argument seems to have settled the question.

It is not my intention to heap up all evidence on one side of the question. I like to draw your attention to a movement which points to another side. It is a recent movement in India called *Arya Samaj*, started by Dayananda Saraswati. It is a vigorous organization which reacted sharply against the missionary activities of the Muslims and the Christians. But curiously enough, it imitated their very methods in counteracting them. It instituted a type of conversion movement known as the 'suddhi samskara' or a rite of sanctification by which those once converted to Islam or Christianity are taken back again into the Hindu community. This *samaj* which had its headquarters in Lahore lost all its wealth and property after the partition of the country into India and Pakistan in 1947. It also lost most of its workers in the riots that broke out during the partition, in which they themselves had taken no part. Even today, it is still active in the Punjab State of northern India. needless to say, its attitude is resented by some other traditions—especially the Muslim and the Christian.

Reverence for other religions is not a matter of policy, but

a fundamental principle of Hindu spiritual vision. It is based on the idea that faith is a matter of personal realization. And a religious tradition with its symbols and creeds is only an aid to the growth of the spirit. It is meant to provide guidance and opportunities for the flowering of the spiritual life of its adherents. In other words, a religious tradition is meant for the salvation of the individual men and women, and not the individuals for the salvation of a tradition. A tradition is not an end in itself. A tradition is modified and adapted to the needs of the individuals. A tradition is *marga* (path); and the goal is communion with the Supreme Being—God.

So each Hindu is encouraged to follow a form of religious worship and a set of beliefs suited to his moral and mental competency or *adhikara-bheda*. In the context of the diversity of human needs, all the great religions are considered not only relevant but also necessary. They are seen as supplying a need in the progress of humanity. Sankara is said to have established six orthodox traditions; he is known as the *shanmatasthapana-carya*. In our own day, Gandhi has made his attitude clear in his concept of *Sarvadharmā Samabhava* (reverence for all religions). According to some Western scholars, *Sankara* would be either hypocritical, believing in nothing or lacking in the concern for truth. But they fail to realize that it is his concern for truth that makes him recognize it, even when it is found in a tradition other than his own. The same accusation is made in the academic circles against Radhakrishnan. How can he speak about the validity of all the great religions of the world? He must be insincere. But those who indulge in such criticisms do not realize that this line of thought does not hold good with Eastern traditions. For example, in China, person, usually, is both a Confucianist, a Taoist and a Buddhist. In Japan, a person may be both a Shintoist and a Buddhist. In India, a member of the same household sometimes worship different gods.

Dr Alport, in his book, *Individual and His Religion*, complains

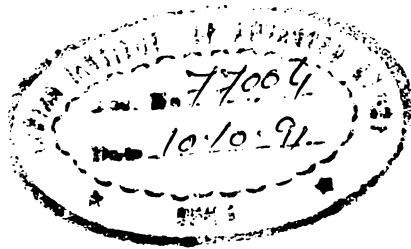
that 'the roots of religion that lie in the temperament are but poorly understood, and he observes: "Some men always live close to the region of pain and melancholy. They are bound to emphasise the grimmer aspects of what they encounter and to stain their religious sentiment with their sense of forlornness. Others have started their lives with sparklets and bells; even in their moment of despondence they are inclined to take a sanguine view of the operations of Providence. Both the gloomy and the gay may be concerned with the wrongness of life and may seek a religious mode of righting it. But their paths will be separate. Their theological and ritualistic preferences will differ according to emotional thresholds, according to the quality of their prevailing mood and according to their tendency to express or inhibit feeling. Moreover, they are sharply biased in favour of these preferences." This disposition in human nature is taken care of by the doctrine of *Istadevata*, the desired form of God. Some are affectionate and emotional, whereas others are cold and intellectual. "A young person with an unusually affectionate nature will seek in god the complement of his love; hence the name 'beloved' may be assigned to him by his guru or spiritual teacher. A theoretical-minded youth may be advised to select 'soham'—a name that affirms the unity of all existence." This element in Hinduism is, in some quarters, described as the attempt to be "all things to all men" or "indiscriminate comprehensiveness," whereas the fact is that the tradition tried to provide one specific and concrete element from its heritage best suited to a person's needs and capacities. It means only one thing existentially to him. Some scholars call the Hindu attitude as relativistic. It is true that it considers all the historical expressions of truth to be relative. But it is one thing to say that expressions of truth are relative and another to say that truth is relative. No sect or school has held that the Ultimate Reality or the Supreme Being is relative.

Sometimes, the Hindu attitude is called eclectic in the sense

that it culls out the flower of the teaching of each religious tradition and makes a bouquet of such flowers. The eclectic is not rooted in any culture or tradition; but in the Hindu view to be rooted in a tradition is important; it does not advocate a new religion devoid of any historical roots. What it does advocate is mutual respect and recognitions of the great religious traditions of the world.

How can then we summarize Hindu orientations towards other religious traditions? I may do it from a quotation from Raja Gopalachari's book *Hinduism*.

"The tradition in Hinduism is that it is not open to any Hindu, whatever be the name and mental image of the Supreme Being he uses for his devotional exercises, to deny the existence of the God that the others worship. He can raise the name of choice to that of the highest, but he cannot deny the divinity or the truth of the god of other sects or traditions. The fervour of his own piety just gives predominance to the name and form he keeps for his own worship and contemplation, and he treats the other gods as deriving the divinity therefrom. This reduces all controversy to a devotional technique of concentration on a particular name and mental form or concrete symbol as representing the Supreme Being. It makes no difference so far as the Supreme Being is concerned."







Library IAS, Shimla



00077004